AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF


Abstract approved:  

This ethnography describes a learning context where transformational learning routinely creates an emancipatory experience.

It identifies those elements that increase understanding of transformative process—describing how the context that contains and supports this learning is constructed and a perspective transformation is sparked by group synergy. It names three transformational learning outcomes: greater self-awareness, ownership, and deeper relationships. By identifying the elements that shape a transformational experience, the study uncovers the power to invigorate learning in a well-designed personal growth seminar.

The findings are: (1) Transformational learning inspires a significant emancipatory perspective shift, opens an array of expanded choices, and supports learners’ increased freedom of movement; (2) A set of characteristics distinguish transformational learning from other adult learning: A high level of interpersonal trust is established early between learners and with facilitators; Learners are held in positive regard—facilitators see learners’ potential as unbounded; Learners actively create meaning and their full attention is engaged in meaning-making processes; Their comfort zones are stretched—they are challenged and sometimes uncomfortable with the content, learning activities, and group process; Many feelings are elicited and disclosed in the seminars; Non-cognitive awareness is encouraged and validated. The following terms emerge from this study to form a language describing transformational learning: trust, positive regard, fully present, holding vessel, aliveness/deep awareness, anchoring, and source. (3) Transformational learning depends upon the creation of a rich context of facilitation, structure, content, and
learning activities. (4) Synergy supports the perspective shift essential to transformative learning through heightened attention and focus, group process, and relationship building. (5) Accepting and acting from ownership marks transformative learning, providing evidence of a perspective shift. (6) Reflection, feedback, and systemic, self-assessment contribute to integration of new behavior. (7) Transformational learning is about content as process and has application in many disciplines.

The characteristics and elements of transformative learning found in these seminars are transferable to other learning contexts, though implementation in a public post-secondary institution of higher education will require faculty preparation. The study closes with recommendations for public institutions of higher learning wanting to incorporate more transformative learning opportunities.
Transformational Learning: A Deep Description of an Emancipatory Experience

by
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I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

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April L. Retherford, Author
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Qualitative research by its very nature is a joint undertaking as researcher and subjects relate through observation and dialogue. I am profoundly grateful to all those who entrusted me with their stories that I might better understand the learning to which I was a witness. I especially thank Kris King and acknowledge the abiding trust shown by her organization when it opened its doors and allowed me to so freely explore. For her patient understanding and staunch support I thank Trish Geringer. She gifted me with the time and space to do this work at no small cost and she tirelessly plugged the dike when my own energy and resources were insufficient to span the dual roles of administrator and researcher.

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matters so much, I say thank you from the bottom of my heart. To my siblings, Ken and Sue, and to my trailblazing sister Debbie—who once said, "I'll pay half" and in so doing opened the door—I say could you ever have imagined it would come to this? With a labor of love they have all inspired, supported, and sacrificed that I might reach this goal. Together we have woven another twist into the weave of our family story.
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Dedicated to
A. Ellen Reid who said, "Know the Truth"
and to Kenneth R. Reid who showed
me how to live the truth.
CHAPTER ONE – INTENT OF THE STUDY

Introduction

The purpose of this ethnographic study is to describe transformational learning and to develop a coherent language for the application of transformational learning within public post-secondary institutions of higher education. Transformational learning is an emerging field of study, somewhat lacking in clarity and definition. Where definitions have been postulated, they are often narrow and fail to encompass all the attributes of transformational experiences. The terminology in the field is as yet unformed, with many concepts overlapping one another.

The term transformational learning is widely applied in today’s educational literature, but it can be difficult to identify what aspects of learning are being referenced by the concept. Often the implication is that transformational learning refers to any learning that promotes change in the learner. To better describe and expand upon this concept, I will explore the ways in which transformational learning experiences affect a learner’s freedom of movement and capacity to be an effective lifelong learner. In undertaking this study my aim is to add depth, texture, and detail to the concept of transformational learning.

Framing questions

From this purpose many questions were quickly generated. If transformational learning appeared to make more effective learners, then
how could transformational learning be recognized—what were its primary characteristics? Was transformational learning context bound? Was transformational learning facilitated by group process? If so, why? Could the strategies used to create transformational learning be applied to diverse groups of learners? How was it distinct from other theories of learning? What roles did emotion and direct experiential process play in creating a transformative context? How might transformation be assessed in a learner? These were a few of the threads with which I began as I opened this qualitative research question.

At the next level, below these first broad questions, were concepts that related to the facilitation of transformational learning in a group process, e.g., the development of trust in a learning process; the interplay of risk and tension for stimulating new learning; the use of narrative to build connection and relationship; and the value of various reflective and experiential processes to deepen self-awareness and ground the learning through practice.

I used a research strategy based upon the framework of grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Therefore, I was reluctant to narrow the scope of my research question further in the early stages of the investigative process. My intent, by beginning with the broad end of the conceptual funnel, was to assure that I captured a transformational learning context within the scope of the study. I then filtered to those questions that persisted as the data collected and began to distill into patterns. Had I started with a tighter focus at the beginning, such as whether personal story was an effective instrument in creating transformational learning, I would have risked missing other (perhaps more meaning-filled) concepts relating to transformational learning because the concepts did not share an apparent link to the narrative form. While the initial question was broad, I intended to look at one learning context with which I had a great familiarity and to examine it in detail, rather than to compare and contrast multiple examples. The purpose of this qualitative research was to generate new hypotheses and not to prove or disprove a particular statement. Therefore, I intended to
add to the literature of adult learning through a research study of a learning phenomenon that currently occurred outside the traditional and sanctioned boundaries of higher education. It was not critical to control, but to discover variables. Strauss and Corbin argue that in grounded theory the researcher must, "Remember that our primary purpose is discovery. We do not know which variables are important, what their properties are, or how these vary dimensionally" (1998, p. 280).

For the purposes of this project, I wanted to closely examine a particular case of transformational learning. By gathering data through a variety of techniques, I developed a language for speaking about this phenomenon that might aid educational leaders in supporting a wider application of transformational learning in formal learning environments, particularly in the context where the greatest number of adult learners experience higher education—the community college. Where earlier studies emphasized the definition of transformational learning and the crisp delineation of transformational learning from other forms of learning, my own focus was upon description. Through the collection of descriptive qualitative data I sought to expand our understanding of this relatively new educational concept. In this approach I was also influenced by John Seely Brown’s understanding of a learning context developed through story: "For powerful learning to occur, you had to look to both the cognitive and the social dimensions.... Basically, we created a multi-person storytelling process" (Brown, 2000, p. 16).

Importance of the study

The concept of transformational learning—learning which has a profound impact on the learner such that the learner is able to recognize and overcome barriers—has fueled a mountain of self-help literature, given rise to an army of proselytizing consultants, and consumed enormous training resources in business, industry and governmental agencies. Why? Why are employers willing to pay for such training? Why
do individuals seek out these learning experiences? Presumably they believe transformational learning provides some value to be gained in increased effectiveness, personal growth, improved focus, communication skill, conflict resolution and capacity to achieve.

If a select group of adult learners are seeking such profound transformational learning experiences, often after considerable formal education, might it be that we are failing to address a critical learning outcome within institutions of higher education? Looking at participation patterns in transformational workshops, I observed participant demographics to be skewed toward the middle-class professional with little participation by people of color. This type of learning experience is accorded a privileged group in the workplace. The possible reasons for this are many. The content of transformational learning workshops may contain bias that limits their application or relevance to a larger and more diverse population. Employers may associate this learning experience with leadership and limit the access of employees that are not perceived to be on a leadership track. Workshop costs may create a substantial access barrier for individuals without employee-sponsored educational benefits. A 1999 Council of Adult Experiential Learning (CAEL) study suggests that only 3% of working adults in higher education have employer educational benefits. If we acknowledge that there is significant value in transformational learning, then I argue that community college leaders are obligated to concern themselves with how these learning experiences could be more equitably dispersed across the community of adult learners.

If we examine the growing body of literature around outcomes in higher education, looking particularly at the social outcomes being developed in community colleges, we quickly find that in the development of outcomes broad enough to encompass the curricula of an entire college, rather than a single specific discipline, colleges create outcome statements not unlike those of a transformational learning workshop. It seems, whether we are comfortable acknowledging it or not, higher education is also in the business of teaching self-improvement. Compare,
for example, the following two statements—one from a community college and the second from a company in the business of offering personal effectiveness workshops. Aerie is a pseudonym used throughout the study, as are the two workshop names Entrée and TurnOver.

*Tacoma Community College's Living and Working Cooperatively Outcome Statement:* Understanding of the uniqueness of self and others, demonstrate an openness toward diverse points of views, and draw upon knowledge and experience of others to function as a team member, in a multicultural world. (From a draft paper of the Institutional Effectiveness Team, 1998).

*Aerie Vision Statement:* Aerie is dedicated to offering exceptional seminars that give participants the tools they need to: walk in the world with honesty, integrity, courage and spontaneity; create new possibilities in their thoughts, experiences and actions; transform their relationship with themselves, in turn acknowledge themselves as powerful contributors to humanity, and act accordingly. (From the company website, 1999)

While these two statements reflect the differing positions of a state institution and an entrepreneurial private company, it seems that their basic goals are similar. It is interesting to note that the small company aspires to instigate greater change in four days than the college aspires to undertake in two years. Perhaps, as educators of adult learners, we might learn from this application of transformational learning how to better assist students in meeting our own outcomes within higher education. In doing so, we might also address the issue of equity and bring more powerful learning experiences into the lives of adult learners who would otherwise have little likelihood of experiencing transformational learning via unsubsidized and expensive seminars.

How can we help adult learners integrate knowledge in ways that assist them in crossing barriers and increase their freedom of movement? A teacher friend speaks of students who have been “sparked” by experiences in her Coordinated Studies class. She refers to those students who radiate a special energy in their evident appetite for knowledge about some topic or discipline. Working with displaced homemakers returning to education, I have seen a similar spark ignite in many women during a four-week non-credit personal development class
taught to women entering a vocational program. While serving on a fellowship with the Boeing company exploring prior learning assessment models, I observed the enthusiasm employees expressed for Boeing's Learning Together education assistance program and Boeing's evident commitment to continuous learning. As a participant and facilitator in certain small group experiential exercises, the level of trust engendered in these transformational learning environments often surprised me. All these experiences led me on a journey into the research of several different disciplines. My own interest, once sparked, led me to questions about the transformational learning process and its power to bridge differences and build relationships that support a learner's freedom and expansion to move through difficulties and across barriers he or she encounters in the world.

As I examined the growing but still small body of research literature on the topic of transformational learning, I first found that much of it dated from the 1970's and early 80's and was focused in the field of psychology. However, since Mezirow published his theoretical work in 1991, a new and more education-focused collection has begun to develop. Nevertheless, it was apparent in my literature review that academia has shied away from research in this area and from giving credence to the work of practitioners in the self-help field. Why? Perhaps for fear of being tainted by the sins of some less than savory practitioners in the field—those who for reasons of personal ego-gratification or financial profit created learning experiences that, while containing the excitement of emotionally-charged and dynamic activities, failed in the area of grounded purpose, authenticity, and integrity. Or perhaps because the field was perceived as superficial and insubstantial, lacking in a theoretical foundation—or maybe, for the simple reason that we did not know where to place such learning experiences within the silos of our content-bound disciplines. These reasons were insufficient and I would argue that the potential benefit of transformational learning for our students demands a closer examination of its place in the context of adult education.
Definitions

Before I can define transformational learning, I must first put the concept of learning itself upon the table. I asked a teacher for her definition of learning and her instant response was to say that it's when you can see a change in behavior. Can it be so simple? Other definitions are more complex. For a moment let me venture into the somewhat treacherous ground of philosophy and share Karl Popper's philosophy of learning. Popper says, "The process of learning consists largely in such corrections [of our expectations that have been upset]" (Berkson and Wettersten, 1984, p. 8). In the first example of the teacher, we see a practitioner's definition of learning through assessment—she knows learning has happened when she sees its evidence in behavior. The philosopher's approach takes us a step deeper and it is towards this territory that I move with my own concept of transformational learning.

Berkson and Wettersten (1984) contrast Popper's ideas with those of earlier philosophies of learning when learning was described mechanistically as the process of using trial and error to fill in missing puzzle pieces. They describe Popper's philosophy of learning as more like the painter of a landscape, "who discovers, while finishing a landscape, that he has omitted an element essential to the effect he is striving toward. He has not only to paint in the missing element, but to retouch or even completely repaint the picture" (p. 10). It is toward this more encompassing perspective that I intend to direct this study, for it within this shift that I believe we may discover transformational learning.

For the purpose of this initial discussion, I will begin with the following definition of transformational learning. Transformational learning is learning which brings about a significant perspective shift on the part of the learner, empowering the learner to make choices from a broader and more holistic perspective. The following features at a minimum, characterize transformational learning contexts:

- a focus upon changing systems of self-limiting beliefs in a context of trust;
constructed of risk-taking exercises that build connections to others and greater capacity to act in service to self and others; and

built upon holistic and sometimes emotionally charged processes that deepen learning.

Figure 1.1 offers a simple model of transformative learning based upon the Entée seminar (ET). The ET seminar is a 4-day intensive workshop designed to provide participants with educational content through lectures, large and small group discussions, and experiential exercises. The seminar is aimed at creating a transformational learning process that will increase participants' effectiveness at learning and their freedom to operate in a more expansive context, presumably making more effective choices in their lives. The diagram illustrates the process focus of this definition. I begin with a focus upon the limiting personal story, then observe and collect information about how participants experience process, and finally look for evidence of change (if any) that can be attributed to the process, structure, and content participants experience in the workshop.

Figure 1.1 A model for transformative learning
The participant, an adult learner, enters the workshop presumably with some readiness to learn, though from past observation many participants appear to enter the workshop with considerable ambivalence about the value they may expect to accrue from the experience; many attend because a significant other (spouse, boss, parent, close friend) strongly encouraged attendance. Learners enter with all the complexity of their own personal journey, having developed particular strengths, habits of character, and uncertainties—all embodied in a personal “story.” This story then is the learner’s personally defining sense of being in the world including his or her sense of self-esteem and efficacy (a further discussion of this topic is developed in the next chapter). But, regardless of how limiting the personal story may be, the learner does not enter the workshop incomplete. The transformative aspects are not additive. Like alchemy the ET seminar works significant change upon the “story” of the participant, i.e. he begins to transform or re-frame the victim elements of his story.

Discovering the “how” of this alchemy takes us to the next three terms critical to our understanding: context, content, and process. Context also defines the transformational aspect of learning. It is made up of the facilitation, structure, content and learning activities (process) that define the learning experience. Context forms a vessel of containment for the learning. Together the distinct elements of context create the framework of a system.

Content fills the system. Content in the ET workshop consists of a small number of key concepts which, when learned, are expected to be transformative for some learners. The content is focused on such central ideas as (1) an individual is “at choice” in the way in which they carry themselves in the world (not a victim); (2) an individual can learn to be more mindful of behaviors that are self-defeating (see discussion of Langer (1997) in chapter 2); (3) there are multiple ways of knowing; (4) a learner can increase awareness of the perspective of others, becoming more outfocussed; (5) a learner can apply this awareness of others to be more in service to his or her community.
Process in the ET workshop encompasses the many different activities in which learners engage. Some processes are relational, such as the small group and dyad work. Others are experiential including movement activities (bodywork), risk/trust ventures such as group sharing, and simulation games. And some processes are singular and reflective in their focus. These include closed-eye visualizations and writing in journals.

Another key term in the study will be the concept of adult learner. For many years this term has been applied to the broad category of learners in higher education who are 24 years or older (Council of Adult Experiential Learning, 1999). This term replaced an older term, once popular in four-year institutions, the term non-traditional student. This definition with its age-based criteria no longer seems adequate. In a community college with learners of all ages, from 16 year-old dual credit high school students to 65 year-old seniors, age seems of little value in identifying readiness for transformational learning. By adult learner, I mean to capture that aspect of learning that speaks to a particular non-dependent identity—the adult learner who perceives that he or she has crossed the threshold between childhood and adulthood. This learner accepts self-control over what and how they learn in a manner distinct from the learner who depends upon an authority to direct all aspects of his or her learning. Granted, many adult learners are not adept in this self-directed aspect of learning, but such learners are distinct from non-adult learners in that they are choosing to participate in an educational experience as opposed to the learner mandated to attend school by a parent or some communal authority. In this respect the 16 year-old students who come to the community college to extend their learning beyond the high school’s offerings may be every bit as adult as the 35 year-old students retraining for a new skill. Likewise, the 25 year-olds who marginally participate in their college education because their parents insist that they stay in school if they are to live at home would not meet my test for adult learner. While the impulse to move from child to adult is biologically compelled, there are many ways in which it may be accelerated or slowed. For purposes of this study my concern is with
learners who have crossed this threshold and who exhibit the autonomy we associate with adulthood. When I explore adult development as it relates to learning, I am focused on the development that occurs from this point forward, not the transition into adult learner. When I speak of lifelong learner I reference this same process, emphasizing its continual aspect over a lifetime. I prefer this term, because it avoids the implication of stage development toward some more complete or terminal definition of adult learner.

I use the terms emancipatory and freedom of movement to describe a perspective shift that widens the array of choices a learner perceives in any given moment. It is not the role of transformational learning to create a particular vision or perspective on the world, but to assist the learner in recognizing and discarding previously unexamined beliefs—beliefs that often act as self-imposed limitations and barriers. A transformative learning process that leads to an emancipatory change is one that moves the locus of control in a learner's life from outside to within the learner in order that the learner may freely choose the direction he will take from this point forward.

Conceptual Framework

The following figure may assist the reader in quickly absorbing the focus of my research. It provides a preliminary sketch of the research frame, showing the broad categories with which I began the study.
Table 1.1 A conceptual framework for study of transformational learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection Questions</th>
<th>Methods &amp; Sources</th>
<th>Verification Strategies</th>
<th>Research Findings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pattern:</strong> What adult development metapatterns are evident?</td>
<td>Constant comparative method testing patterns with adult learning literature.</td>
<td>Discussion with facilitators, committee members and other researchers.</td>
<td>Application of transformational learning to lifelong learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learner:</strong> Who are and what do learners bring to the process?</td>
<td>Participants' stories in sharing. Biographical intake form.</td>
<td>Researcher observation, interns &amp; facilitator interviews.</td>
<td>Definition of transformational learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Facilitation:</strong> Are the facilitation techniques having some positive and managed impact?</td>
<td>Focus group interviews and participants' journals of process.</td>
<td>Involvement with learning demonstrated in writings &amp; focus group sessions.</td>
<td>Identification of instructional strategies and developing a coherent language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Context:</strong> How are facilitation, structure, content &amp; process managed?</td>
<td>Observation, review of logs. Researcher's process experience.</td>
<td>Intern &amp; facilitator interviews, comparison to previous work.</td>
<td>Description of essential characteristics of processes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Synergy:</strong> How dynamic and interactive is the seminar? What is the group climate like?</td>
<td>Participant relationships during informal &amp; formal learning periods.</td>
<td>Behavior changes of risk, interdependence, caring, outfocus &amp; support observed.</td>
<td>Assessment &amp; evidence that transformational learning is created.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Delimitations and limitations

A qualitative study must be bounded within a framework of what is necessary to establish a sound research design, what is possible within the constraints of time and available resources, and what is likely to be generative of a new and deeper understanding in the field. In this study I restricted the focus of my research to the affects of the Entrée (ET) and TurnOver (TO) workshops. I did not include all aspects of the company’s educational program within the scope of this study.
I selected one company's work from a field of many companies and independent consultants. Aerie offers workshops recognized in the training and development profession as being of a high caliber. The ET and TO workshops have been offered for almost twenty years to thousands of individuals and many organizations across the country including employees in school districts, colleges, government agencies, Fortune 500 companies, and small businesses. The workshop design and content have remained very stable for many years. The nature of my research design depended upon access to and the trust of a large number of individuals. My long time involvement with the Aerie program helped to make me a known entity within the organization and assisted me in gaining the trust of individuals I hoped to interview.

I began with an open sampling technique of subjects willing to participate in the study and moved toward a relational and variational sampling strategy. I initially planned to limit the scope of the study to close analysis of data from only 6 to 10 participants. I ended with a somewhat larger pool of 15 participants, nine of whom I interviewed more than once. I selected this sampling approach to assure sufficient breadth in the research to uncover key themes and patterns. Subjects were selected from five different workshops to spread the data collection over a wider time frame and reduce the number of detailed observations undertaken in the frame of a single workshop. By spreading the research time frame over a four-month window and multiple workshops, I increased the likelihood that some participants would continue to the second level workshop. While my focus was first on the occurrence of transformational learning in the ET workshop, I anticipated that a follow-up interview after the second-level workshop (the TurnOver seminar) with some participants would enrich the data on reflective process beyond that gathered during the ET workshop. The intensive nature of the ET workshop leaves participants little time to digest and process some of the workshop content through reflection.

I focused the study upon the learner's experience and not the facilitator's instructional strategies, though I observed many strategies
affecting learning, and these observations became an important part of the deep description. Only two facilitator interviews were included in the study. My intent was to study the workshop from a systemic vantagepoint and to focus on the interaction of learner with the workshop process, structure, and content rather than to focus upon the teaching techniques of particular facilitators. By zooming back from the instructional strategies to observe the strategies' interplay with the participants, I sought to discover more about the nature of adult learning as a transformative process.

Limitations of this study included the fact that it was a qualitative and not quantitative study and, therefore, generalizations from the data were not possible. The small number of participants in the study and the fact that participants could choose to leave the study at any point in the research process meant that I, as researcher, risked ending up with too small a pool of subjects from which to discern any meaningful patterns. But this did not turn out to be the case.

I did not use a random process to select participants and research bias was a concern in the selection process. Objective evaluation of the data collected was possible to only a limited degree. In order to counteract this tendency toward researcher bias, I triangulated the data by interviewing both interns and backup team members. A thorough review of the literature provided an additional measure of balance in the study. The facilitators, interns, back-up team members, and even many participants had a material investment in the process and an expectation of a positive, transformational outcome for the work done in the context of the workshop—i.e., there were no neutral observers (including myself as the researcher and participant-observer).

I came to the study with an extensive background in higher education as both an adult learner and administrator. Having spent twenty years in the field of student services at both the community college and baccalaureate level, I am passionate in my belief that formal education is a powerful force for change in our society and that it changes many of our students' lives for the better. That said, I am also passionate and biased
in my belief that there is much we could do better in our institutions of higher learning if we benchmarked against a higher standard than only our own past performance. Further, I hold the biased perspective that we needlessly inflict harm on too many learners through a careless disrespect for their personhood, especially toward those who fail to fit neatly within the mold of our preferred student. From this posture, then, I have undertaken a study focused not upon determining whether there is transformational learning, but upon identifying those elements of transformational learning that might help us do less harm and more good within the institutions to which I am dedicated.

There is as of yet little research in the field of transformational learning against which to compare the findings from this study. Also, this study encompasses literature in many distinct academic disciplines, each using its own vocabulary specific to the field; this makes agreement upon terms difficult. I will strive to identify common terms with meaning in the field of education whenever possible.

The words "content" and "process" were used interchangeably in the workshop, though in the literature of education the terms are usually distinguished from one another. However, to some degree this distinction is artificial. Content is process and process content—one whole (Costa & Liebmann, 1997). While our rational minds break and divide these concepts for purposes of analysis, at some point we must conjoin the parts to understand their function within a living system. This need to zoom from micro to macro perspectives in this qualitative study makes the scope of the study challenging and it was difficult to establish boundaries around the research scope. The terms "process" and "learning activity" are used interchangeably throughout the study.

The workshops were populated by predominantly white, middle-class, middle-aged professionals. This limited the voices of people of color and of people with less economic means in this study. Even so, adult learners came to the workshop with vastly different experiences, levels of competence with the material, and readiness to explore new ideas; this individual variation impacted some subjects' ability to communicate about
the experiences in which they were engaged. However, since qualitative research is not intended to be generalized, this should not be viewed as a threat to the study's validity.

Another difficulty was that, as only one researcher and not a team of researchers, I could not provide continuous observational data on multiple-participants. By reducing the number of subjects observed within a single workshop and using other data gathering techniques besides direct observation, I was able to offset this limitation to some degree.

Finally, I was initially concerned that because the workshop content was proprietary, the company could have chosen to restrict access to or sharing of certain details of the workshop experience in the study. However, this was not the case. The only restrictions placed by the company were the same restrictions placed on all participants—I was not to talk about a participant's experience in the seminar with anyone else without the explicit permission of the participant concerned. I was free to write of my own experience in the seminar and, through the consent process of the interviews, I was also free to share the experiences of interview subjects.

Assumptions

In formulating the study's framework I made a number of assumptions. First, that there was something that could be named transformational learning and that this model of learning was distinct from other conceptual models of adult learning and development. I assumed that the ET and TO experiences were transformational for some adults based upon my subjective belief, but also due to my long experience with this learning context (more than ten years). I trusted that learners could articulate, and would be willing to share, meaningful information about different aspects of their experience in ways that would increase our understanding of the complex phenomenon called
transformational learning. I made the further assumption that adult learners have some common responses to these processes; as different as learners are upon arrival, I assumed that through the facilitation, structure, content, and process embedded in the workshops there were common learning patterns to be described. And finally, I assumed that it was possible to assess whether transformational learning had occurred through observation, interviews, and other extrinsic means. Based on my own direct experience, the testimonial evidence of past ET and TO participants, and the literature on adult learning, I expected this study to lead to a more encompassing description of transformational learning, one which illustrated its emancipating characteristics and intrinsic value to adult learners.
CHAPTER TWO - LITERATURE REVIEW

It is a journey of truth that has deepened my understanding of how my actions and beliefs are a part of, and are linked with students in, an educational ecological system. (Schmier, 1997)

Introduction

As I moved through the field of literature on transformational learning, three paths opened for me as a learner and researcher. The first—epistemology—led me into a maze of definition and belief where I looked for the names and labels that have been applied to this kind of learning and that described the transformational process. Choices in ways of knowing abounded and the challenge was to sift from the background of literature in psychology, education, and organizational systems those areas with relevance to the teaching/learning process, and to find those parts—like the concept of trust—essential to building a theoretical frame for my own research.

The second path was one of integrating education and work to support lifelong learning. Through my own educational experiences I was challenged to find the meaningful linkages between my educational experiences in the classroom, the dialogue within my learning cohort, and my work experience within a university, a community college, and a large manufacturing company. I have learned to take these experiences back into the workplace, supporting and observing adult learners as they grow and “spark” within my own college. Following this path has meant collecting data, watching trends, listening to the voices from government, business, and industry to better understand their demand that we become more effective in our teaching/learning processes.

The third path took me through the wilderness of research towards the heart of learning. What does it mean to transform and to be
transformed in a teaching/learning process? How do mindfulness, cooperative group process, and experiential engagement support transformation? And even, what is process? This forest of literature led me into the role of story and narrative in transformational learning. It is here that learners do the interior work of breaking down barriers, boundaries of the self, to expand and re-story themselves. They create new frames of transformation by connecting to the story of a particular teacher, and they learn through reflection as they “tell” themselves into a new awareness. Much of the work in this area has focused on the transformation of teachers through narrative experience within the profession. It is time to move the focus from teacher as teacher to teacher as one example of adult learner, and to recognize the importance of story in overcoming barriers.

Part I: Epistemology

Self-efficacy & self-esteem

Self-efficacy studies often begin with an acknowledgment of Bandura’s (1977) contribution to the field. With the publication of his first study on self-efficacy the term quickly took hold and over the past two decades has developed into a defining concept within educational literature. It is often contrasted with an older term, self-esteem, which is defined as a personal trait, related to belief in one’s worthiness. Self-efficacy, in contrast, is defined less as a trait than as a specific response about one’s ability to succeed at a task under a particular set of circumstances (Gardner, 1998). Gardner’s study separates the theoretical threads of these two terms, providing a model of how both concepts operate in an organizational setting. They establish that both factors are critical in workplaces moving toward organic, systems-based operation, but that different managerial actions support development of the two
concepts. Researchers often neglect this issue of context, confining themselves to academic settings and stopping short of applying the theory in a work-based context (Eppler, 1997; Santiago, 1998).

Research has also shown that the relationship between variables in the study of self-efficacy, self-esteem, motivation, and even commitment are complex and that theoretical constructs remain in a state of flux (Santiago, 1998). A study of teacher efficacy beliefs demonstrated this complexity—showing that gains in self-efficacy do not change in a linear manner as new teaching strategies are introduced—but rather rise and fall and rise again as teachers first encounter, apply, and master new teaching methods (Tschannen-Moran, 1998). These researchers also found efficacy a mixed blessing, such as when teachers assume they understand a new methodology before they have actually acquired mastery. A trainer at Boeing, speaking of the use of complex three-dimensional modeling software, described to me the difficulty he encountered training new employees. He found experienced employees would teach new employees shortcuts, which had been advantageous when using a previous implementation of the software, but that were now obsolete in the new implementation.

Different ways of knowing

Epistemological beliefs about efficacy’s affect upon teaching/learning processes must also be viewed from the larger window of how we know in differing contexts. Gardner (1999), who earlier introduced educators to the theory of multiple intelligences, argues his theory is too often used to invoke trivial examples. His work draws our attention to the need to create enriched learning contexts that support a diversity of learners, but also that engage individual learners on a diversity of levels. Paulsen and Wells (1998) explored the domain differences of student belief systems along the two dimensions of soft-hard academic disciplines and pure-applied disciplines. A particular strength in this work was the
researchers’ winnowing of factors to those with the strongest evidence of variance to better assure research validity. They found a clear dichotomy of beliefs consistent with the soft-hard and pure-applied dimensions, illustrating how within our academic community there are diverse ways of knowing which appear to affect how students disperse among disciplines. In a Grinnell College study on obstacles to open discussion a similar pattern appears; students move towards what aligns with their own beliefs and close off that which conflicts with their preferred ways of knowing (Trosset, 1998). Students in this study relied upon personal experience as the most legitimate way of knowing sensitive issues. Those students holding strong, well-defined beliefs were more interested in discussion; those with weakly held beliefs generally felt a discussion would make them uncomfortable and should be avoided. Interestingly, students with strong beliefs participated in discussion, not because they wanted to hear an opposing viewpoint, but because it afforded an opportunity to state their own beliefs.

A considerable body of work has developed around feminist epistemology and gender-based differences in perceiving the world. Most relevant to the current research question of how adult learners cross barriers was a study written on the issue of women applying for experiential credit. Women often encounter barriers to acceptance of their ways of knowing, an issue central to assessment of prior learning practices which require a portfolio (Michelson, 1996). Michelson points out that women when compiling autobiographical materials—particularly if they belong to the working-class—tend to portray their experiences in a context of others and membership in a group. With such an approach to self-knowledge they are less likely to see their experiences as a consolidated whole, but rather as discontinuous and tentative. Eisler (1995) speaks, in her work on partnership models, of a paradigm shift she believes we are moving through in this generation. Michelson and Eisler both emphasize the idea of relationship as an undervalued way of knowing in the world.
Thayer-Bacon speaks of a relational epistemology pointing out that,

Knowledge is not created in isolation....The relational epistemology presented here depends on an educated, equally respected, interactive community of thinkers/feelers actively participating and making contributions to knowing. (1997, p. 258)

The goal of such efforts is the creation of knowledge that is worthy of trust.

Trust: Psychological foundation

Trust is a much-used term of late, cropping up in the writings of many prominent management writers (Block, 1993; Handy, 1998; Heifetz, 1994). As one researcher, advocating for the concept of emotional intelligence in the workplace put the term:

More than a good idea or attitude; its actionable emotional strength—something we must feel and act upon. When we trust ourselves, extend trust to others, and receive it in return, it becomes the glue that holds relationships together. It also frees up honest dialogue. (Cooper, 1997, p. 21)

There is little agreement in the literature regarding the construct of trust, but one definition in a study on the subject defines it as, “the state of readiness for unguarded interaction with someone or something” (Tway, 1994, p.8). Tway’s work suggests that trust has a direct bearing on the successful outcomes of group process. He further argues that while self-disclosure, a significant activity in the seminars, does not necessarily build trust, it can be an indicator of the degree of trust established. However, Tway’s definition of trust falls short of capturing all of the dimensions of trust. Tway fails to include the key dimension of self-trust in his construction.

As I looked at the issue of experiential learning and the power of its impact in education, I found research that suggested self-trust was a significant factor in determining whether a learner moved through a perceptual barrier or was blocked by the barrier.
Only a small amount of theoretical work done around the subject of trust and its role in the psychology of learning exists. Brothers (1995) sheds light on why so little work has been done in this area. She explains the inherent conflict between Freud's dominating field theory based upon a self-serving pleasure principle, and her own theory of the role trust plays in human development. Her theory implies the primacy of relationship with rather than power over others. Most helpful in Brothers' work is the identification of four distinct aspects of trust:

Trust-in-others involves a tendency to view others as trustworthy providers of selfobject experiences [experiences essential to maintaining a sense of self]; trust-in-self involves a tendency to view oneself as capable of eliciting selfobject experiences from others; self-as-trustworthy involves a tendency to view oneself as a trustworthy provider of selfobject experiences for others; and others-as-self-trusting involves a tendency to view others as trusting of their capacities to obtain and provide selfobject experiences. (p. 35)

This construct is thoughtfully and painstakingly developed with a literature review, an analysis of major figures in the history of psychology, and four illustrative case studies from the author's practice. While the study's emphasis on the relationship between trust and trauma may be of less relevance in an educational setting than other works reviewed, it provides a frame against which some aspects of relationship in the classroom can be tested for levels of depth and appropriate disclosure. To better understand Brothers' construct of trust development I laid the information out in four quadrants (see Figure 2.1). To further clarify the model I added the vectors of "self" to "other" and "giving trust" to being "trustworthy".
Figure 2.1 A four-quadrant construct of Trust

![Four-quadrant construct of Trust diagram]

**SELF**

**Trust-in-Self**
- We have trust in our capacity to maintain our own sense of self.

**Self-as-Trustworthy**
- We are worthy of the trust others place in us to help in maintaining their sense of self.

**GIVING TRUST**

**Trust-in-Others**
- Others provide experiences that help us maintain our sense of self.

**OTHER**

**Others-as-Self-Trustining**
- Others are worthy of our trust and are capable of maintaining their own sense of self.

*Based on ideas expressed in Brothers (1995) *Falling Backwards: An Exploration of Trust and Self-Experience*

Mindell (1995), Heifetz (1994) and Baldwin (1995) each propose models for leadership (teaching being but one form of leadership) in which leaders and teachers create a “holding environment”, a space in which relationships cook and conflicts can be healed. Among the most critical aspects of this holding environment is the capacity to contain multi-ethnic differences in a context of respect and openness. Hooks (1994) provides a challenging discourse on the difficulty of creating such contexts for a new and emancipating pedagogy as she describes the challenge facing White feminists when they are asked to accept Women of Color into the dialogue as equals. Working in a circle to create community and bring about change is hard, uncomfortable, and sometimes painful work. Learners must learn to listen, stay present
through conflicts, and to fight fair in conditions that may feel strange and
discomfiting, if they are to forge new and freer communities. However,
that we can intentionally build such new communities is made clear by
the examples in Common Fire: Leading lives of commitment in a complex
world (Parks Daloz, Keen, Keen, and Daloz Parks, 1996); these
researchers illustrate through many stories that the common thread
among the men and women leading lives focused on making better
communities was that their education incorporated some significant
opportunity to learn what it felt like to be the other.

Trust & cultural differences

In addition to the psychological components of trust, some research
points to a significant cultural component in the role trust plays in
relationships, whether educational or economic (Fukuyama, 1995;
Tjosvold, 1998). One study, in the development of commitment in
corporate organizations across cultures, demonstrated through a series of
carefully constructed interviews, that cooperation (interdependence)
correlated with openness to others. Openness in turn correlated with
productivity, and finally with commitment (Tjosvold, 1998). In other
words, employees working towards cooperative goals—rather than
competitive or independent goals—who also felt free to discuss opposing
options, tended to be more productive. The productive work environment
was associated with higher levels of employee commitment.

Fukuyama (1995) contrasts several European and Asian economic
systems at both extremes of the trust spectrum with the United States.
He argues the United States blends aspects of high and low trust social
structures. He categorizes cultures based on a simple coding schema in
which high trust cultures exhibit properties such as having many
association linkages beyond the family and an openness toward adopting
non-family individuals into relationships both at home and in business.
Low trust cultures exhibit little trust of outsiders and go to great lengths
to keep all business within the family, though "family" definitions might vary from one culture to another. He shows how the presence or lack of trust has an impact on transaction costs:

> Each of these transactions is made easier if the parties believe in each other's basic honesty: there is no need to spell things out in lengthy contracts; less need to hedge against unexpected contingencies; fewer disputes, and need to litigate if disputes arise. (p. 151)

The United States with its high pattern of association and its history of early and thriving corporate development operates with a high level of trust. But Fukuyama argues we are currently undergoing a shift from a high to a low trust culture. He suggests that as we become increasingly diverse, we risk becoming a country with nothing but a legal system in common—no shared language or values for forming a foundation of trust. While I would not agree that there is a causal relationship between diversity and this perceived shift toward lower trust, I would concur with his projection of increasing transaction costs if we continue to move toward the low end of the trust spectrum.

Fukuyama describes work in Germany, and contrasts German work patterns with work in France. He notes the value of training and the role training and certification have had in developing employee loyalty. He points out, too, that German workers are entrusted with much greater autonomy than their counterparts in the low-trust cultures of France and Southern Italy. An interesting question might be to ask to what extent workplace loyalty patterns parallel commitment to learning patterns found in classrooms.

As I pursued research into factors that increase learner freedom of movement, I realized the research was spread both across many disciplines and under many similar, but distinct terms—efficacy, trust, and commitment being but a sampling. The scope of the terms vary from the highly personalized work of Brothers (1995) in psychology to the broad global perspective of Fukuyama (1995) and Handy (1998), who both talk about trust differences based on culture. Fukuyama’s study in trust ranges over economic and anthropological research to identify the critical
elements of social capital that he expects to define our future. Handy's theory of trust pertains to leadership in business management.

Part II: Lifelong learning and work

Institutional effectiveness

The creation of social capital has long been the domain of the education sector in America. Schools are expected to provide the trained workforce that employers need for successful enterprises both here and abroad. As we move toward a global economy the permeability of boundaries—and an individual's capacity to move across boundaries—becomes increasingly at issue. In contrast to the educational models employed in countries like Germany, in the United States we avoid tracking students into clearly defined work roles at an early age, preferring instead to allow students a great freedom to move across the curriculum with less regard to their preparedness for the workplace upon high school graduation. In one study on educational effectiveness, researchers examined the consequences of this unbridled freedom to select a college preparatory curriculum irregardless of one's ability to succeed in this endeavor (Gray, 1995). The study presented interesting data regarding educational outcomes for students completing the college preparatory core. The study profiled those students who take such a curriculum (92% of the high school students in the seven suburban schools studied) and where they go with this learning (56% go directly from high school to college). Of the 56% that went onto college, half did not earn sophomore standing at the end of a year and most took remedial courses in math and English. The 20% who went into the workplace upon high school graduation had annual earnings of $14,700/yr., and were primarily employed in the service industries. This study suggests that in our existing educational structure we are experiencing serious
difficulty negotiating the boundary between education and work. I heard this concern echoed by employees while I was a community college fellow working in the Boeing Company, and also from high school Tech Prep educators.

**Corporate trends, training & return on investment (ROI)**

Today's corporate sector is investing increasingly large sums in workforce training and education. Private sector spending on direct and indirect employee training was estimated at $52.3 billion in 1995 (Benson, 1996). In another report over 70% of employees surveyed ranked training and education supports as among the top attributes making a job more attractive (National Alliance of Business, 1998). Currently industry is attempting to calculate the Return On this Investment (ROI), as evidenced by an alliance of businesses working on benchmarking human resource data to calculate ROI (Phillips, 1996). Some large manufacturers, Boeing, Data Instruments, Ford Electronics, Motorola, to name a few, have gone so far as to investigate informal learning—a concept encompassing virtually all learning that happens outside the structure of classroom (Center for Workforce Development Education Development Center, 1998). Clearly, many large corporations have been persuaded of the economic value of lifelong learning and made a commitment to its practice in all of its various forms.

**Lifelong learning theory**

The University Continuing Education Association conducts annual surveys and compiles government data reflecting trends in lifelong learning. Their data suggests that dramatic demographic changes will bring about increased need for lifelong learning opportunities in the next decade (University Continuing Education Association, 1998). While this
data might reflect research bias, since the higher education institutions sponsoring the research stand to benefit, nevertheless, the charts and tables of this study make compelling reading. Unfortunately, the report fails to provide methodology for the surveys, and it is difficult to place the many tables into a context that would allow assessment of their validity.

Botkin (1999) addresses the growing movement in business toward building knowledge communities. He speaks of the critical need for learners in the business world who can move beyond the stage Senge calls adaptive learning, toward something Botkin calls innovative learning, a type of learning he suggests is better suited to turbulent and even chaotic markets. This approach to learning:

brings renewal, problem reformation, and transformation.
Innovative learning is the process of preparing groups of people to act together in new, possibly unprecedented situations. (p. 134)

Business is not just asking for lifelong learners but for learners who will learn and work together in entirely new and innovative ways.

Researchers hold contrasting theories about lifelong learning—its articulation and transfer. Hatton (1997) articulated a theory based upon economics, and anticipates the demise of our current learning structures in an increasingly competitive global market. Kintzer (1997) proposed a model for strengthening our current system based upon the experience of assessment of prior experiential learning (APEL) in other countries, including the extensively developed APEL systems in Canada, Hungary, and even New Hampshire.

Cross (1991) contrasts American and European models of lifelong learning, exploring the growing divide between a learning elite and the poor—a divide which she argues must be addressed at the earliest levels of education first. Learning resides in the student and our efforts must be directed at why so many learners opt out of our existing systems of learning, before we will understand how to instill a lifelong commitment to learning.

Terry O'Banion (1997) brings the issue to the context of community colleges. Emphasizing the need to put learners in control of setting their
educational goals and helping them become more responsible for accomplishing the goals, O'Banion attacks college bureaucracy. He calls on faculty and staff to lead change from the middle and to create more learning-centered communities. Like Hatton (1997), he appreciates the fact that colleges are being overtaken by institutions more willing to provide customer-conscious lifelong learning opportunities. In brief case studies, which lacked sufficient deep description for a full evaluation, he presents examples of change. He identifies a framework of key challenges and presents a force field analysis of conditions that would support or impede change.

Part III: Transformational learning

Each author of a new book relating to learning or knowledge seems compelled to coin a new term for learning, leaving us with a “stew” of synonyms: adaptive, innovative, generative, mindful, cooperative, and learning communities offer us a few examples. As educators we are challenged to make sense of these differing terms, and to relate them to the adult learners we encounter in our college classrooms in a manner that is useful. I began this review of the literature with a look at the epistemological framework which supports a theory of transformational learning and I explored some of the literature relating to the role of transformational learning in lifelong learning and work, but to gain a useful understanding of transformational learning we must step in closer and study the instructional space where transformation is initiated.

Mindfulness

If the value of lifelong learning has been established, our understanding of what happens within the confines of the learning space has not. As I reviewed various teaching/learning process studies, I found
they ranged from straightforward descriptions of how to provide educational programs to corporate clients, to a much more esoteric analysis of the importance of mindfulness in learning (Kantor, 1995; Langer, 1997; Tilney, 1994). Langer's work on mindfulness dispels many myths and provides a new theoretical framework that may offer better explanatory value, though the research underlying the work was addressed in only very general terms.

Cooperative/learning communities

Key to any research in transforming our learning environments is the concept of creating learning communities. Learning communities come in many forms and are called by many different names: coordinated study groups, linked classes, cohorts, cooperative learning groups, dyads, skill groups, and experiential encounter groups. Researchers (Knapp, 1978; Davies, 1996) once lamented the lack of research into what constitutes experiential learning. But research into the value and proven effectiveness of cooperative and collaborative learning practices and the value of learning in community has been building steadily for decades; in fact, since the 1920's according to one study (Johnson, 1998). Johnson points out that "while [he] supports wholeheartedly the development of the individual talents, isolation is not the best path for nurturing them" (p. 27). Like the work of Thayer-Bacon (1997) on the need for a relational epistemology, these researchers, too, recognize the nurturing value a cooperative context provides to learning.

Finally, I found research close to the center of my interests, research related to transformational learning through experiential exercises. The first was a descriptive study in a corporate setting which presented exercises designed to link personal values with team values (Jaffe, 1998). A second study explored how self-disclosure predicts perceived closeness within a group of counseling graduate students in a class on group counseling techniques (Bunch, 1983). This study was flawed by poor
methodology, but of interest because of its literature review, which suggested that the variables of trust and self-disclosure were linked and "interdependent—one influencing and enhancing the other" (p. 60).

Some research turned up in unexpected places. Two studies of central interest in my research were in a publication with a most unpromising title: Simulation and Gaming. One was a study in the application of an experiential exercise called the 'Dynamic Circles Exercise' (DCE) (Kacen, 1998). DCE is a type of fishbowl activity in which a group is split into two parts with one sub-group active and the other circled around the first in an observer role; the research provided several interesting case studies in the use of this exercise with distinctly different populations for the purpose of bridging conflict. The second study was concerned with the assessment of transformational learning affects (Raynolds, 1997). Raynolds designed a new way of measuring whether certain kinds of learning had occurred by measuring intuitive responses with a pictorial non-verbal instrument. The study provided an interesting contrast to the Kacen study because of its persistent use of a quantitative approach, even though the subject of study may have been more amenable to a qualitative approach.

Rose (1996) suggests that the actual value of group learning has yet to be carefully assessed and that its value may lie in supporting only affective learning not cognitive learning. I am less certain this separation of one form of being from another serves the educator. Cranton (1996) breaks group learning down into three distinct forms each with its own purpose: cooperative group learning, a highly structured process particularly useful in helping a group develop instrumental knowledge (i.e. cause and effect); collaborative group learning, a process of knowledge building through inquiry in which a group constructs knowledge (social issues are addressed); and transformative learning in which a group revises its individual and shared assumptions and perspectives in response to a significant event in the group context. Drennon and Foucar-Szocki (1996) explain the transformative value of this type of community: "A group becomes community as the whole
becomes greater than the sum of parts and as each member relies on others in ways previously unimagined" (p. 77).

**Process work**

Process, as Morgan (1998) defines the term, is a way of unfolding meaning. Her study's treatment of process is distinguished from other methodologies in psychological case study through its emphasis on the inherent intelligence, which lies within individuals. Again, we see the issue of learner-centered control.

Mindell (1995) expands on this definition of process further. He addresses the matter of relationship in process work, particularly relationships defined by conflict. He argues the expression of conflict is critical to process work and transformational learning. His definition of "rank" is akin to the term privilege as it is used in the literature of feminists, post-modernists, and the oppressed. Mindell defines two forms of rank seldom acknowledged in debates about oppression: psychological rank—characterized by the survival of suffering; and spiritual rank—derived from a sense of spiritual centered-ness (or source). In doing so he makes it clear that possession of rank itself is not the issue. He argues that rank is not the root of conflict—rather it is the misuse of rank that creates tension—a double signal, to use his term. When rank differences exist, but are not acknowledged, an oppressive manipulation is allowed into interactions. The holder of rank is able to protect the status quo without having to admit to his or her privileged or advantaged position in the interaction. Imel and Tisdell (1996), too, argue for a greater exploration of how power relationships must be addressed in group process.

Mindell (1995), like Heifetz (1994), seeks to use process work to create a holding environment, with sufficient strength to contain and sufficient tension to generate, a transformational learning context. Mindell says the western world is, "addicted to peace and harmony" (p. 165). Rank and
privilege are used as a means to avoid conflict. For example, while the media will pick out speakers who represent both sides in the conflict, the overall social system acts to prevent large groups from working things out en masse in preference of a civil—but superficial—harmony. The deep stories by which cultures are created and sustained are not shared when there exists no context of trust to contain the tension.

**Story and transformation**

While the study of story and narrative has a long cross-disciplinary history, its application in educational research is relatively new. The language of this field remains fluid, though agreement is forming around certain of the most basic terms. Connelly & Clandinin (1990) argue that story is the phenomenon of a participant’s storied life and narrative is the researcher’s inquiring description of that life. Other researchers take the definition of narrative further and do not separate it from story so firmly as Connelly and Clandinin. Narrative is action with causal relation and temporal sequence (Bruner, 1996; Carter, 1993). Abrahamson (1995) argues that story provides the concrete example instead of generalization and that this fact gives stories their profound impact. But where Abrahamson downplays the significance of emotion, I suggest his emphasis on concrete form underestimates the role of emotional content in the impact of story. Gudmundsdottir (1991a; 1991b) captures the whole of story and narrative as she contends that narrative is the means of translating knowing into content that can be shared and absorbed by another in the teaching/learning process. She goes on to describe a specific kind of story useful in academic instruction which she calls the curriculum story.
Narrative methodologies

Methodologies for applying story and narrative to learning vary widely. They ranged from Huberman’s (1995) well established life-history narratives of teachers to the less linear and structured methods of several more recent researchers (Abrahamson, 1995; Carter, 1993; Clandinin & Connelly, 1989; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Kesson, 1995; Yamagishi, Houtekamer, Goodstriker, & Chambers, 1995). Certain researchers, particularly Connelly, Clandinin, and Gudmundsdottir, provided specific strategies for using narrative effectively in research. For example, Connelly and Clandinin suggested that different data collection methods have certain temporal implications and that narrative mapping can help identify teachable moments with the greatest leverage. Gudmundsdottir provided a useful visual image of the way in which curriculum stories give teachers a horizontal axis along which to thread individual events and illustrations across an entire school year.

Meaning: mindfulness and content

Research into understanding process leads inevitably to narrative and the stories participants and researchers construct to find meaning. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) found the sharing of story in collaborative process led to new meaning for both parties to the narrative process—creating connected knowing. In contrast Huberman (1995) used a highly structured process to reduce the entanglement of subject and researcher. Curiously, he experienced difficulty in collecting meaningful data from some subjects, subjects he came to define as “mindless” in regards to their life-history. At first I was intrigued with the idea that his method turned up a large subgroup of subjects that seemed particularly unreflective about their own life-history. However, as I compare Huberman’s study to the work of Connelly and Clandinin, I wonder to
what extent his deliberate attempt to restrict connected knowing in his study produced the artifact of mindless subjects.

The finding of meaning in qualitative research seems at least partly a reflection of an individual researcher’s willingness to trust the narrative process to take him where he needs to go. Among the researchers on story and narrative studied, many exhibited comfort in trusting the process (Carter, 1993; Gudmundsdottir, 1991b). The work of Connelly and Clandinin (1990) fell in the middle range of the continuum. Huberman (1995) and Abrahamson (1995) reside closer to the conservative—less trusting, end of the spectrum—almost straddling the gap between qualitative and quantitative research. This is especially clear when they discuss the generalizations of their findings. In contrast, Gudmundsdottir (1991b) explores meaning as content carried through a storied process into a relationship with the learner. She does not concern herself with generalizing the data. Instead she considers only how two individual history teachers construct narrative in the form of a curriculum story. Differences and similarities between their use of narrative are explored, but the reader is allowed to draw the connections, enriching their own awareness of one of the most powerful tools in a teacher’s kit, the ability to frame the curriculum within a story of their own making.

Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning

As a practitioner in the field of adult learning I cannot lay claim to a comprehensive grasp of the theoretical foundation for transformational learning. I have made its acquaintance and become fascinated, but I remain a lay person in my understanding. What I bring to the study of the literature in this complex field are questions regarding the theory’s relevance to the specific instance in which I conducted my fieldwork and in turn the links between this specialized form of learning and the more common form of a college classroom.
In all the literature one work stands out as the most comprehensive construct of a theory of transformational learning for adults, one that encompasses key elements of the teaching/learning process. Mezirow (1991) addresses the concept of creating new meaning perspectives arguing that “perspective transformation can be regarded as the central process in adult development” (p. 151). He also introduces a few more terms for learning as he explains the distinctions between instrumental learning and communicative learning, drawing on philosophical terms from Habermas (1971). Mezirow identifies the factors that lead to perspective transformation and provide evidence of transformative learning. Cranton (1994), taking an applied approach, has helped make Mezirow’s theory more accessible to adult educators.

However, rich as Mezirow’s (1991) work may be in the development of a theory for transformative learning, it fails in one particular regard. Mezirow never gives full treatment to the role of emotion in learning experiences. By walling off the non-rational aspects of learning, such as in his dismissive handling of Jungian theory with its heavy reliance on shadow aspects of self, archetypal story, and myth, Mezirow needlessly limits the opportunity for transformative perspective change. He goes so far as to relegate emotional development to the realm of medicine, referring to emotion-driven behavior by a student as a neurosis (see his example of a student named Roberta) (p. 166). He fails to recognize emotion as a valuable component to the process of transformational learning. In this failure, Mezirow makes an error repeated by many of the cognitivists; they often fail to recognize emotional learning as amenable to group process and to the classroom setting. But in focusing only on the fiction of a rational mind that can be taught without acknowledging the sometimes-murky depths of emotion, the researchers miss a key tool in the experiential process of learning.

Damasio (1999), a neurologist with a growing body of work focused on the role of emotion in the development of consciousness, is changing our general understanding of what we had described until recently as the “rational mind.” He explains how interwoven our emotions are in the
entire construct of mind. Recent work in neurology is pointing to the fact that our sense of self—our conscious sense of who we are in relation to our environment and others—is centered in a small constellation of regions close to the brain stem (Damasio, 1999). These "old brain" structures also lie in close proximity to areas that appear to control our capacity to feel many emotions and physical sensations. These same regions appear to be significantly involved in managing our wakefulness and our capacity to be attentive, basic requirements for learning. Damasio suggests that attention, emotion, and learning are surprisingly close and interrelated brain functions.

With this recent research into consciousness (Fishback, 1998; Rose, 1998; & Reardon, 1998) it becomes increasingly difficult to conceive of the level of separation between consciousness and rational mind that Mezirow, Bruner, and other cognitivists would have us hold. I hope in my own research to extend Mezirow's theoretical frame to better accommodate experiential and emotional aspects of transformational learning.

Kitchener and King (1990) propose a developmental process in their theory of meaning and perspective transformation, presenting us with a very linear stage theory in which reason reigns supreme, at the pinnacle of a set of increasingly refined steps. Unfortunately, this linear and hierarchical model constricts our vision and reflects an elitist strain running through transformative learning theory. Mezirow says, "transformative theory is not a stage theory, but it emphasizes the importance of the movement toward reflectivity in adulthood" (1991, p. 161). Cranton (1996), too, places reflection at the center of her theoretical frame, in distinct contrast with the action-oriented theory of Friere and Habermas. Kitchener and King would have us believe that achievement of the apex of this reasoning-based construct is such a rarity that only an elite few graduate students ever demonstrate the highest level of transformational achievement (p. 166). Mezirow must be acknowledged for his collection and synthesis of a large body of literature to develop the
first theory of adult transformative learning, but it is a theory ready to be re-cast in a less rigid set of presumptions.

Daloz (1999) uses a wonderful quote from William Perry to open a chapter on the subject of transformation and how adults change during their educational journey. Perry says, “In order to understand anything well, you need at least three good theories” (p. 43). Perry probably did not intend three as a limit, but rather that a researcher needs more than two theoretical perspectives to begin seeing the multiple dimensions of transformational learning. In his book on mentoring adult learners Daloz (1999) demonstrates the usefulness of having an assortment of theoretical templates at hand to apply in the mentoring of different learners. With the application of each theoretical template a new dimension of learning is brought to the foreground and cast into relief. Where one theory might explain a specific aspect of the learning, some theoretical frames will create higher relief and contrast on the map than other, perhaps equally valid, frames of reference. As I have approached this review of the literature, I intentionally cast my net very wide into the murky depths of current theory in the hope of better preparing myself as an instrument for further research.

Discussion

This review of the literature provides clarification of certain key terms in the research of education, yet suggests that much remains to be learned about concepts relating to our understanding of transformational learning environments. Self-efficacy, while evidently more malleable and context dependent than self-esteem, still seems an insufficient construct to explain why one learner succeeds and another fails in what appears to be the same context. In fact much of the research suggests that researchers are still working with incomplete constructs. As we cast about for new models with greater explanatory power, we may need to learn from the work of those outside the pale of educational research,
including researchers in psychology, business, and women's studies; each holds an important key to the creation of a more complete construct. Feminist epistemology and theory based on relationship provides a wider angle of vision on the teaching/learning process, taking in both teacher and learner and exploring what lies between rather than just within each player. Through these diverse ways of knowing we might better grasp the design of mindful learning processes, like those studied by Langer (1997).

The literature suggests further research into the role of narrative in the teaching/learning process is needed. Learning more of the application of story in teaching—what experienced teachers know at an intuitive level—may unlock the mechanism that constrains the movement of adult learners. Story and narrative are at once among our most elemental instructional strategies and most magically endowed. Whether applied by the kindergarten teacher to enchant children with the wondrous possibilities of life or by the teacher of freshman English to spark a learning community of reluctant writers, story creates a web of relationship. Working to understand the power of this web of story, both in formal education and the much less studied context of unsanctioned learning environments, presents an interesting venue for further research.

As demonstrated in the studies concerned with lifelong learning and the growing corporate concern for developing employees into continuous learners, it seems that educators within the traditional bounds of higher education can ill afford further delay. The pressure to adopt a new learning paradigm in higher education is increasing (O'Banion, 1997). The business and corporate world appear convinced of the need for lifelong learning and will find opportunities to satisfy this need with or without the help of traditional institutions of higher learning. We rest upon a boundary between what is and what will be. This research suggests that one way forward requires we understand how powerful learning environments, capable of transforming adults into effective lifelong learners, might be created using trust, mindful process, and perhaps even a good story.
CHAPTER THREE - METHODOLOGY

A vision without a task is but a dream.  
A task without vision is but drudgery.  A vision and task is the hope of the world.  (A church in Surry, England)

Introduction

For an educator with a long-standing interest in social anthropology, the choice to use a qualitative and ethnographic approach in this research was natural. I set out to describe and analyze a pattern of story, process, and relationship capable of generating a high degree of transformational learning. My first boundary-orienting idea was learning, to use a conceptualizing term from Huberman and Miles (1994). Very few researchers have looked for cases of transformational learning in a workshop setting, and the little research that does exist was generally done from either a psychological perspective in which the researcher set out to explore how a participant's sense of self was affected by group process, or was done from an organizational perspective to better understand how group process supports organizational change. No one has formally studied how personal growth workshops affect learning. As a participant-observer I was uniquely prepared to define and delineate the concept of transformational learning and its role in shaping adult development through this study.

Before I delineate the methods used in this study, I must first divulge the source from which my fascination with transformational learning springs. Ten years ago I experienced a dramatic perspective shift in the course of a personal growth workshop. The workshop experience is difficult to describe, as words with their linear structure fail to convey the feeling of immersion in an intensive multi-sensory experience. But even an incomplete verbal picture may help the reader unfamiliar with this special learning context.
A typical personal growth workshop begins formally with the routine process of laying down precise, rigid ground rules concerning prompt start times, the importance of honoring confidential processes, use of the facilities, and so forth. Participants are asked to commit to the rules after a lengthy discussion of each rule’s necessity. The day proceeds into a series of lectures on topics relating to personal effectiveness interspersed with breaks and experiential exercises intended to demonstrate certain aspects of the lecture content or to increase participant interaction. Small groups are formed to support sharing by participants less comfortable talking in the large group (Aerie seminars typically range from 25 to 75 participants). Each day the ratio of lecture to exercise and activity shifts so that the sessions become increasingly interactive. Sessions begin with a period in which participants are given an opportunity to share reflections about their experiences in the exercises or learning gleaned from periods of introspection and reflection that are sprinkled through the day. The tempo of activities develops so that with each passing day there is an increasing level of tension and/or excitement expressed by facilitator, team, and participants.

In my own Entrée (ET) experience I observed that several exercises had a profound affect on the group dynamics and led to an unusually heightened level of interconnection, trust, and respect between participants. The ET workshop ends with a challenging group performance activity, with personalized roles for each participant. My own experiences in ET, particularly on the last day were transformative and emancipating, and I can comfortably say, from the perspective of a decade of additional growth and change, that I am grateful for the perspective change I gained in the course of that first workshop. These experiences shaped my educational values, made me a better administrator, and inspired me to be an educational leader.

I have had other transformative learning experiences since, some in workshops and others in different contexts, and I have spoken and read of many others who have also identified similar learning experiences that they attributed to such workshops. I have watched individuals as young
as 14 and as old as 75 be deeply touched by certain workshop experiences. And so, in the years since my first experience, I have wanted to better understand why this particular learning format seems to have such a significant impact on so many different learners.

Having declared this background and revealed a conviction that there is something of value to be learned about learning from organizations like Aerie, whose mission I introduced at the beginning of this proposal, I would fail any test of objectivity required for a good quantitative study. But I can make the opposite case, that I am particularly well suited to do a qualitative study of the phenomenon of transformational learning exhibited in a workshop with which I am so intimately familiar. In addition to my experience as a participant, I have observed the same workshop from the vantage point of a supportive member on many backup teams. I have seen the same material delivered to different groups, by different facilitators, and in different physical locations. This experience has helped me separate core and consistent elements of the workshop from incidental elements of less importance.

Some organizations that offer personal growth workshops like ET have been accused of serious wrongdoing. Negative labels haunt these organizations; words and phrases like cult marketing strategies, guru facilitation, abusive facilitation, guilt tripping, brain-washing and other manipulative excesses are common accusations. However, I have not observed such abuses and it is my conviction that Aerie consciously avoids these pitfalls and operates with exceptional integrity. The staff consistently strives to keep the best interests of their clients foremost and they maintain a high standard while delivering a quality educational product.

Study design

Using a combination of document review (researcher notes, participant journals, and workshop logs), interview, and observation
methods, I studied the process interactions in the workshop learning environment aimed at transforming individual effectiveness in overcoming barriers. Patterns observed were explored with former program participants (now interns and backup team members) through interviews and informal dialogue. Written participant journals and seminar logs were studied for additional depth and to triangulate data with other observers. Subjects were asked to review transcripts to check for alignment of observations about the seminars’ impact. The study’s focus was on the transformational learning process, trust development, and other factors, such as the telling of personal stories that contribute to the dynamic movement of participants within this context. The analysis was based upon emergent data and as such changed and transformed as the research proceeded. Interview transcripts and observation fieldnotes were collected and coded with the support of a qualitative analysis software package called WinMax, which facilitated category formation, coding, and re-coding of the data as patterns emerged from the background.

As a participant/observer, with previous experience as a participant over an extended period of time, I was able to identify a transformative learning model. I was challenged to collect the distinct and various viewpoints of other participants without confusing the epistemology of others with my own beliefs. To balance this aspect of the study, I triangulated my observations with those of other observers through several steps.

Two groups in particular afforded an opportunity to check my own observations against the perceptions of others. The company offers an internship experience to individuals who have completed the core series of workshops and who volunteer to commit a year of service to support the delivery of an advanced workshop called Touchstone. These individuals provided a base of engaged observers with sufficient commitment to the workshop process to provide a rich bed of additional data and an in-depth perspective on the work of the organization. My experience in the past with interns was that from their insider’s viewpoint they held diverse views of the organization’s work ranging from absolute commitment and
endorsement of the organization's work to somewhat disillusioned perspectives that focused on the organization's flaws as evident from behind the scenes.

The second group of observers were those serving as backup team members for the same workshops in which I observed. These individuals were present in the seminar room, but were not necessarily engaged in activities with the participants throughout the day. They participated to a limited degree by serving as small group facilitators throughout the workshop, but were, for the most part, standing on the perimeter of the group process. They provided support to participants and facilitator by handling the details of greeting, mail, room setup, housekeeping, music, lighting, log keeping, and numerous background details that enhanced the workshop environment. Whereas the first group offered some reflective depth because of their long engagement with the workshop process, the second group offered a more immediate check to my specific observations. As I processed and analyzed my interview transcripts and fieldnotes during the study I also contrasted my findings with those in the literature on experiential learning and group process as another means of balancing my own bias.

Method of data analysis

Throughout the study I used the constant comparative method to analyze interview and observational data in the context of grounded theory appropriate to a qualitative study. Concepts were tested for congruence with the two groups of observers, the interns and backup team members. And finally, intersections between the concepts and the theory that developed in observations were contrasted with the literature on adult learners in more formal transformational learning contexts.

A further review of the literature was undertaken to identify consistent patterns and characteristics associated with transformational learning theory. The analysis of data from this study was compared with
literature relating to other recent studies of transformational learning practices in academia. This portion of the research was focused on identifying whether colleges might effectively offer more transformational learning experiences, and if so, where might we expect to find successful examples of transformational learning on which to build. Recent studies included examples from a physical education challenge course program, an Upward Bound program, a vocal course, and a journal writing workshop (McCormick, 1995; O'Hara, 1992; Whitney, 1994).

Population

Prior to the workshops I visited with the seminar facilitators to discuss the purpose of the study, obtain their consent to do the research in the workshop, and to review how participant confidentiality would be protected. I asked the facilitator to read and sign a facilitator informed consent form. I also met with the backup team during their pre-seminar training and again obtained written consent from the members willing to participate in the study. I corresponded with the interns prior to the two intern focus group interviews and shared my research proposal and written questions in advance of the interviews to encourage reflection.

As a participant-observer I attended three Entrée (ET) seminars and two TurnOver (TO) seminars. I originally sought to gather a pool of 6-10 participants willing to participate in the study and I succeeded in recruiting 15. From this pool I used a sampling technique to select a sub-group of 6 participants to follow more closely. This sub-group was selected based on their ability to communicate orally or in writing about the nature of their transformational experiences (if any) during the course of the workshops, their willingness to participate in more than one interview, and their having gone on to a second seminar. Their willingness to articulate, express, and share both intellectual, emotional and sensing content served as my guide in selecting members of the subgroup. This subgroup was selected using a discriminate sampling
discriminate sampling is defined by an intention to saturate categories by selecting subjects on the basis of their variation from one another (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

In the first seminar I had three participants volunteer to join the study and come to the first focus group interview. All were women. I was able to conduct a post-ET interview with two of the three participants. The third was unavailable due to time constraints. None of these three persisted to a second seminar. Concerned about having no men in the study group, I contacted two male participants and asked if they would agree to a follow-up interview after ET. One agreed to a phone interview, but did not keep his appointment. I did interview the second individual.

In the second ET I recruited five participants to the focus group interview, three women and two men. I was able to schedule follow-up interviews with four of these five participants. One additional participant agreed to a follow-up interview, though she did not participate in the focus group. For the third ET I had two volunteers for the focus group, both women. I was able to do follow-up interviews with both these individuals and one additional male participant.

I had asked participants interviewed in ET if they would be willing to do an interview after attending the TurnOver seminar. I had not originally intended to observe the TO seminars, but after conducting one interview with a participant fresh from the second seminar I realized that my understanding of his material was hampered by my limited recollection of this seminar. Though I had participated on many backup teams for ET, I had not personally been in a TO seminar since my own experience as a participant 10 years earlier. I asked the facilitators if I could refresh my memory and participate on two TO teams, one in September and one in October. This change in my study design greatly enriched my data collection as I came to appreciate how one seminar built upon the lessons of the other. Also, by doubling the hours of observation for individuals who persisted through two seminars and lengthening our interactions by at least a month, I was able to observe more of their transformational
process than would have been possible had I relied only on the ET observations.

While none of the participants from my first focus group persisted to a second seminar within the time frame of the study, most of the participants from the second and third seminar did continue. I was able to interview four participants from the second ET seminar and two from the third ET seminar after they had completed a TO seminar. I also added two additional male participants from the second TO seminar that had not participated in an ET interview.

Table 3.1 Study population pseudonym chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post-ET 1</th>
<th>Post-ET 2</th>
<th>Post-ET 3</th>
<th>Post-TO 1</th>
<th>Post-TO 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>Shawna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robin</td>
<td>Trudy</td>
<td>Ellen</td>
<td>Trudy</td>
<td>Karen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tammy*</td>
<td>David</td>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>David</td>
<td>Miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob**</td>
<td>Martha**</td>
<td>Shawna</td>
<td>Martha</td>
<td>Bill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shawna</td>
<td>Katie</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entrée Facilitators</th>
<th>TurnOver Facilitators</th>
<th>Backup Team</th>
<th>Nov. Intern Focus Group</th>
<th>Dec. Intern Focus Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Candace</td>
<td>Mary†</td>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>4 interns‡</td>
<td>5 interns‡</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Janice‡</td>
<td>Larry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Focus group interview only. **Did not participate in focus group.
† Observed, but did not interview. ‡ No names used in the text.

I intentionally worked with small numbers in each workshop in order to allow time to collect more data from individual subjects and increase my ability to saturate the categories. This approach, based upon a theoretical sampling model recommended by Strauss and Corbin, assisted me in building a sturdier conceptual model for transformational learning.

At the beginning of each ET seminar I shared an informational letter (Appendix A) about the study and extended an invitation to participate in the study. I used a script for this introduction to assure that all
participants receive complete information regarding their right to participate or not participate in the study. Participants were offered an opportunity for questions. I met with interested participants on the first break and provided them a release form to read and sign. I asked participants to complete an abbreviated biographical data sheet similar to one they had done for Aerie.

Because the seminars are based upon a presumption of confidentiality, I took special care to assure all seminar participants, whether they choose to participate in the study or not, that no personally revealing information would be shared outside the seminar room without the consent of the participant. To assure this agreement was met and to establish trust with all involved in the workshop, my notes were subject to review by the seminar facilitator or his or her designee on the participating backup team. One facilitator did review my notes the first day of the first ET seminar. Tapes of interviews were erased at the end of the study.

In addition to this review subjects were given an opportunity to review transcripts of their own interviews to make corrections or to clarify meanings. They could elect to have specific information removed from the transcript. Very few corrections were made and all were minor points of clarification. Subjects were told they could leave the study at any point and they could ask to have all material relating to them as a subject expunged from the study. One individual asked that I not include a particular interview. The interview transcription was incomplete and contained some inaccurate information due to a misunderstanding on my part and to my not having tape-recorded this particular interview.

Data collection methods

I used a multi-case sampling approach that was theory-based, selected for intensity, and was purposeful. I gathered data by the following methods:
(A) **Observation.** I conducted over 300 hours of direct observation in the seminar as a member of the backup team (one of a group of support volunteers who assist the facilitator in preparing the room, conducting small group activities, and other seminar housekeeping tasks as requested). One function of the backup team included keeping a log of the workshop as it progressed. This log was an additional artifact in the study and sitting with the log keeper allowed me to work discretely in the background taking notes for my observations.

(B) **Focus Groups.** (1) I held a participant focus group meeting with volunteer subjects on the morning of the third day of the seminar, before the opening of the seminar room. Subjects were invited to share, in an informal manner, experiences from the workshop that seemed especially significant to them. I asked follow-up questions regarding why they selected the particular example(s) and in what way (if any) they felt changed by the experience, story, event, relationship or content. The focus group interviews were tape-recorded. (2) I also held a focus group with the interns after a substantial amount of data was collected and coded for the purpose of validating and triangulating concept formations emerging from the data. I grouped data into categories and shared concept schema with the interns to test the strength of the concepts in explaining patterns that I had observed in the workshop. Questions for this focus group were developed in response to the data.

(C) **Interviews.** (1) I conducted two one-hour facilitator interviews after completing my seminar observations. Framing questions were derived from my observations of the sessions and focused upon the facilitators’ perception of the workshop dynamic and the mechanisms of transformational change. I was particularly looking for congruence of my own observations with facilitator’s intentions. These interviews were tape-recorded. (2) I interviewed members of the backup team informally throughout the seminars primarily as a member check on the data observed in the seminar room. (3) I interviewed a sample of
participants following the workshop using one of two methods, depending upon the participant’s proximity and comfort with the medium: email correspondence, or in-person interview. The timeframe of the workshop, which often extended late into the evening, did not facilitate interviewing on site at the time of the seminar and many participants traveled substantial distances to attend. Flexible approaches to gathering this interview data increased my opportunities for rich, deep descriptive data. (4) Some participants continued to the second seminar in the core seminar series during the June-October, 2000 period and these I contacted for an additional follow-up one hour interview after the second workshop. This interview was arranged in person at a place of mutual convenience to the subject and myself, or conducted by email correspondence. If possible these interviews were taped.

(D) Indirect Data. (1) As mentioned above, subjects were asked to complete a biographical form for purposes of the study. As the study progressed I found these were not particularly useful and I stopped collecting them after the second seminar. (2) Study subjects were asked to keep a journal during the workshop, something that many participants already did in the normal course of attending these seminars. On the afternoon of the last day these journals were collected, copied and returned to the participants before the closing celebration. All personally identifiable information was excised from the copies. Only four participants provided journal information, but some of this information was very helpful in considering the subjects’ reflective process.

Framing interview questions

Interview questions were designed to elicit information from subjects relating to what they had learned from the workshop and were aimed at establishing the depth of that learning. I looked for the level of significant
change experienced by the subjects (if any) and sought out the participants' perceptions of why or how a particular activity, event, exercise, or story affected them. Key questions were:

(A) Facilitator (relating to motives, strategies, assessment of learning)

- When you began a seminar, how did you approach getting to know participants?
- What were the strategies you used to teach in ET?
- How did you know someone 'got it'? What did you look for?

(B) Participants (relating to motives, experience, feelings, thinking, evidence of change)

- What were some of your expectations coming into ET?
- What feelings were you particularly aware of this week?
- What did you learn?
- How important or significant were these ideas or experiences to you personally?
- Which activities or ideas stood out and why?

(C) Interns & Backup Teams (relating to triangulation and discovering what I otherwise would have missed). These questions emerged as I formulated categories, developed diagrams, and analyzed the data. My focus in these interviews was on developing and verifying patterns observed in the data.

Additional questions were developed out of the process of naturalistic inquiry, but these examples show the direction and focus developed in my research.

Design revision approach

As would be expected in any qualitative research study using an ethnographic approach, mid-course corrections and adjustments to the research procedures were necessary. I discovered unanticipated
directions and data collection methods for the probing necessary to get at key meanings with relevance to the original question. As design changes became necessary the study methodology was appropriately revised. The following design revisions were made from the original study design:

- I did not pursue biographical intake forms for participants in later workshops.
- I only collected a few journals. Most subjects did not keep ongoing journals during ET. But some subjects did share homework writing assignments completed after the Red/Black exercise, an exercise based on Deutsch’s classic Prisoner’s Dilemma game (Tway, 1994).
- I collected copies of the seminar logs, which were helpful in constructing tables outlining the seminar structure, content and learning activities. They were particularly good for tracking time length of lectures and activities.
- I expanded observations to include two TO seminars. This enriched data relating to the seven participants I observed in two seminars over a two to three month period.

Analysis

I began my analysis with the first set of observations, as I struggled to sort and separate meaningful data from background “noise.” I had to consider what to record and where to focus my attention. As I transcribed interviews, my on-going analysis helped me to refine my questions for the next set of interviews. In October I began coding the transcripts. I used WinMax to support my analysis process of coding and writing memos. The memos included code definitions, notations regarding observations, and early insights into the data. After about half the transcripts were coded in my original scheme based on my preliminary conceptual framework (Figure 1.2) I began to reconsider my initial coding scheme. Several new codes developed and others collapsed into new groups or were discarded for lack of data. By early November I had identified three broad categories of significance for discussion with my first intern focus
group. The categories that seemed essential to creating transformational learning were:

- **Discovery of personal patterns** (ownership, it’s about me, creating my experience, source and dependency, integrity, choice)
- **Connection to others** (forming community, seeing others in new ways, caring about others, feelings of safety with and trust in others, communicating in new ways)
- **Intense experience** (emotional engagement, a change in the way I experience time, attention and focus, being fully present, in the moment, spiritual connection to a larger source)

The interns validated these categories and helped me extend my coding further. They were bothered by the term holistic, which I had used in my definition of transformational learning, and felt it carried some medical connotations that were confusing. They indicated connection to self was even more important than connection to others. Awareness, ownership, flow, freedom of movement, and connection were all meaningful terms and ones that they used as they described some of their own transformative experiences.

As I returned to transcription and coding of the remaining interviews, including the two facilitator interviews, I began to discern a larger pattern in the study. At this point I began seriously constructing models with sufficient breadth and scope to capture what I was learning in the study.

**Evolution of a model**

My daughter asked me about a problem that she was trying to resolve when writing a story of her own the other day. A device she had watched used in a movie struck her and she wanted to know how to replicate the function of this device on paper. The movie had begun in one century and then, after a short scene, jumped to the present. A flashback, I told her, giving her a name for the device. We talked a little about the movie and she soon went off satisfied. Her next story contained a leap back in
time of her own devising. As I struggle with my writing, I see a parallel with her dilemma in how to go about describing the experiences of this study. So I too will begin with a step back in time.

I had been curious about the work of Aerie for a long time, dating back even before my first direct experience of a seminar. I was puzzled and a little alarmed when my middle sister first called me in an excited and what then seemed a somewhat confused state about this unusual experience she had just come from (an ET seminar). As she proceeded to spend more time and money on the seminars, I became concerned that she was caught up in a suspect organization. Then I learned that she had persuaded both my older brother and father to attend a seminar, two of the most hardheaded rationalists that I knew. After seeing a rather dramatic shift in both my brother and father and especially a new openness in my father’s behavior, I thought I would explore this experience first hand. After doing ET I was even more curious. How did it work? Why did I feel that a week of seminar was at least as valuable to my education as four years of college? How could I reconcile this new awareness with my chosen profession in higher education? Clearly, there was something unusual about the learning context created in these seminars. But beyond knowing that the facilitation was especially skillful, I still did not understand how the seminars worked their “magic.”

People appeared to enter the seminars with a limited view of what was possible in their lives. They then listened to lectures and engaged in various learning activities and often experienced a sudden perspective shift during or immediately after one of the processes—an “Aha!” they would call it. Most then came out of the seminar with a significantly expanded view of what was possible. Curiosity led me to create the model I called my Magic Box & the Aha model. That it ‘worked’ I had no doubt, because it had had a profound impact on my own learning. But the question remained—what in the box made it work? I wanted to understand the tricks behind the magic. “How do they do that?” the wide-eyed child asks the parent. With this focus on the magician’s sleight of hand, a second, more complex, model began to evolve.
I called this second model my *Black Smith* or *Facilitator as god* model (Figure 3.1). By the point I arrived at this model, I was immersed in the seminar medium and had completed my observations. In this model the outermost layer represented the broad field in which this type of learning rests, including such fields as training and development, mental health, and of course the human potential movement which grew out of the Sixties. The second circle enclosed the specific context of an Aerie seminar, including its facilitation, structure, content, and learning activities. The innermost figure represented the system's synergy—the place where the learning activities and experiences began to transform the learner's perspective of what was possible.
As I conducted the interviews of participants and analyzed what they shared about their experiences in the seminars, it became obvious that it was at this synergistic level that the most significant learning happened, when it happened. The context is critical to the support of the work done at this level and not all participants engaged in the learning at this synergistic transformative level. However, when participants did engage fully with the material, their interview accounts and the descriptions they shared of their experiences clustered in the areas identified in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 The learning dynamic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SYNERGY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attention/focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection with others/witnessing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flow/energy/time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intense emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical sensations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective thinking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As I worked with this model, I began to recognize a significant weakness in it. While the emphasis on fire and transformation seemed to work on one conceptual level, the model relied too much upon a passive learner being re-shaped by an active facilitator forging change through a well-designed set of processes and procedures. As I listened to participants talk about being reminded of what they had once known, and as I watched how much freedom was left to each learner to pick their own path through the material, I felt further adjustments to the model were required.

The third model, a variation on the second, I called the Reduction Firing/Restoration model. There is an ancient manner of making pots in a pit fire, fueled with a certain organic matter, in which a rarified, oxygen-
free (hence reduction) environment is briefly created. The result of such primitive firings were pots with a simple beauty quite unlike any other. There was a sense in which the immersion in the learning activities of the seminar, particularly the emotional processes, were akin to such a firing. People were buried in their "stuff," the fire was kept very hot for a time, and they came out of the process with a deep glow—all the dross of accumulated adulthood woes, the baggage of a lifetime, burned away. In this model the focus shifted from a context controlled by the facilitator, to focus upon the material of which the learner was made. The results at the end of such firings are often astonishing, as the potter sifts through the cooling embers and as that which was hidden is brought to light.

Still, the inorganic aspect of these models bothered me. As I reflected further on what I was hearing in the research, one point became clear—the learning was supported by group interactions. Nothing in my earlier models captured the importance of this interaction between participants. I began to see that what I really needed was a living system for a model, one in which the learners, not the facilitator or context, drove the system. This led me to what I called my Lily Pond—an organic living system model. I pictured a Monet painting with its interplay of light and shadow and considered how the different parts of such a natural system might instruct the construction of a more comprehensive model. Light radiating down became "content," the fuel for growth in the system. Rain and wind became "learning activities" moving the environment's organic and inorganic materials about into new and ever-changing patterns, making them accessible like nutrients dissolved in a watery medium. Lily roots represented the learner's identity, values, and beliefs anchoring and balancing his growth. The pad or leaves of the plant collected and transformed the system's energy as the learner collected the content and then personalized the learning through reflective thinking. The bud, of course, represented the learner's unfolding experience, moving from closed to open. Through the synergy of this opening the learner became connected with other members of the larger group. The facilitator became the gardener. And so the model was extended. The point of the model, its
special value in understanding this research, was that it accounted for the importance of relationship better than the earlier models. Lilies on the pond became a blanket of color and movement creating a carpet that changed the environment by both its mass and the beauty of each singular entity. Together they quieted the water’s surface, creating a protective environment. Together they gave us the graceful multitude of subjects that so fascinated Monet.

Were my artistic and multimedia talents sufficient, I would demonstrate this shift from mechanistic to organic system. Since they are not, I ask that you create the image in your own mind. Picture the two circles of Figure 3.1 turning to become discs in a third dimension. The larger disc becomes the pond, the second smaller disc the lily pad; the synergistic fire becomes the blossom. Peel away the labels, add roots, and reflected light on water. Then multiply fifty-fold and you begin get a picture of this new organic model. I ask that you hold both models in mind as we proceed through the description of the seminars.
CHAPTER FOUR – CREATING A CONTEXT

It is possible for one’s whole life to be changed by a story told at a crucial time by someone whom we respect and trust. For the effect of the tale rests not only with its content, but also in the timing of the telling, and abides above all within the relationship between teller and listener. (Gersie & King, 1990)

Introduction

Transformational learning begins in the act of creating a context sufficient to contain and support the synergy of a transforming process. I use the term context not simply to describe a static structure, but to describe a collection of elements (facilitation, structure, content, and learning activities) that must be intentionally brought together to work in concert with one another. Together they support the continuous renewal of context required for this dynamic process-oriented form of learning.

The field

In the literature review I described certain aspects of the field in which transformational learning rests. Dating back a few decades, there was a body of literature that described the origins of group process work starting with the first T-Groups of Kurt Lewin in the 1950’s, and then the encounter, gestalt, and EST movements of the 1960’s and 1970’s. These movements eventually evolved into the organizations like Aerie and a number of other similar entities.

Over the intervening years Aerie improved and modified its curriculum in response to the changing needs of its learners. Revisions were made through continuous observation and evaluation of what did and did not work in relation to the written purposes (outcomes) of the seminars.
While many of the specific learning activities that remain in the current Entrée (ET) and TurnOver (TO) seminars were the same or very similar to activities used twenty years ago, the context in which they were used has undergone a significant shift towards a more respectful and less controlling format.

**Entering learner**

Who were the learners? I interviewed fifteen recent ET and TO participants (nine women and six men) who spanned a wide range of ages, educational levels, and professions. Among the participants were a college student, a judge, a line supervisor from a small manufacturing plant, two nurses, a high school teacher, an attorney, one employed administrator and another unemployed administrator, three different kinds of counselors, a sales coordinator, a federal forest service supervisor, and a nuclear engineer. Several participants attended the seminar with a partner or spouse. They ranged in age from early 20’s to late 50’s. All the interviewees were white, though a number of ethnic groups were represented in the larger population of participants, team members, and interns. I identify participants, facilitators, and team members with pseudonyms (interns were not individually named) in the chapters that follow. Excerpts from the interview material, if not otherwise noted, were participant comments.

The learners came to the seminar with a unique collection of personal stories. One had a parent who facilitated similar seminars, another had recently survived a debilitating illness and came on a counselor’s recommendation, two were required to attend by an employer, but most came on the recommendation of a friend or family member. Recruitment for the seminars has traditionally been by word of mouth through a network of family and friends. Some participants came particularly because of a professional interest—they thought they might learn something they could use in their own work. Others initially came for
professional reasons, but found once in the seminar that their motivations for engaging in the learning were actually of a more personal nature such as learning how to better manage a difficult relationship with a spouse or parent. Seven of the participants continued to engage in additional seminars after the ET seminar. This persistence rate from ET to TO during the study was a little higher than typical for such a short window, about 40% typically continue from ET to TO in a six-month period. This might be in part due to some special pricing that the company was running in the fall as an enrollment incentive. The study sample was neither random nor statistically representative of the larger group. Most participants voluntarily approached me about being in the study after my introduction. But to assure that I had a diversity of perspectives and to increase the number of men in the study, I also sought out some individuals and asked them if they would consider participating. In addition to the participant interviews, I interviewed two individuals from the backup teams. Both of these individuals specifically volunteered to help with the study and expressed an interest in sharing their own perspectives about the work that Aerie does. As members of two different ethnic groups, they added a small measure of additional diversity to the study. The nine interns participating in the two focus groups were particularly helpful in giving a longer-term perspective to the study. Most had been working with the Aerie material for several years and through their volunteer efforts as interns had made a substantial personal commitment to understanding the work of the organization.
The learning context

Facilitation

Facilitation encompassed the experience, role, and strategies used to create a holding context for transformational learning. These included the credentials and experience with which the facilitator began:

- methods of establishing authority;
- challenging participants to grow;
- accommodating learning styles;
- repetition and the use of anchoring devices in the learning material;
- skillful observation and intuition; and
- fostering the immediate application and practice of new learning.

Experience / Expertise / Credentials. Words of praise abound in the transcripts when it came to describing the quality of the facilitation: adroit, masterful, refined, expert, awesome, skillful, amazing, powerful, ground-breaking, foundational, outstanding etc. Yet none of these facilitators came to their work with any evidence of formal educational preparation. In fact, their backgrounds were quite diverse. The common thread in their preparation was an informal apprenticeship with another facilitator and a gradual induction into the seminar process, first through volunteer work on teams and service as an intern, then teaming with an experienced facilitator as a co-facilitator, and finally facilitating alone after a year or more of co-facilitating.

There was little concern expressed regarding credentials or lack thereof, by participants, including those coming from professions that might be viewed as competing entities—such as professional counselors. A number of participants talked of the lack of credentials as being inconsequential. Ellen, a counselor in a psychiatric unit, put it well when she said,
Certainly I have worked with a lot of different people doing that sort of thing and no one who I thought is more highly skilled than [Candace] is. So, I pretty much believe anyway that it's not only the credentials that a person brings, especially to a field such as counseling personal growth, it has a lot to do with a person's own inner characteristics.

The facilitators stressed that it was important that anyone facilitating had "done their own work" and had accepted accountability for their own experience. Another way in which they modeled the learning was by sharing themselves with the participants, letting their "real" selves be seen as vulnerable, as fallible, and as learners. Candace shared short pieces of her personal story (relating to family, health and other challenges). Sam talked about parenting and small, but pivotal, decisions regarding his family, and showed how even small incidents led to significant learning. These stories helped to create a "three-dimensional facilitator." As they did so facilitators illustrated a language of ownership rather than blame, acceptance rather than victim-ness. Sam said that by sharing their own stories they brought the material into real life and out of the realm of theory.

One of the first tasks facing both the facilitator and learners in a new learning context was the defining of the governing relationships. Who held the power and how were relationships of power exercised in this context? Frequently, in the opening exercise defining the world in which participants want to live, there was an exchange that illustrated one approach to establishing authority.

Establishing authority/challenging to grow. Candace talked in her interview of how learners with a fundamentalist's perspective came in with certain issues around the meaning of the word "Source" as it was used in the seminars. She tackled this challenge head on the first day, proclaiming the seminar content was in alignment with all the major religious teachings in the world. This frontal approach would seem to beg a dispute, but surprisingly no one stepped forward in most seminars. Candace accommodated a "fundamentalist learning style" that Perry (1968) described as dualistic or pre-legitimate stage thinking. By making
a clear declaration that this was the way it was, she dispensed with the need to struggle over belief systems, and participants seemed to visibly relax as this point of authority was established. She had clearly given some thought to understanding what motivated the fundamentalist learner.

When I created the code “challenging to grow,” the code appeared to have two distinct aspects: the planning/design aspect in which the seminar structure was shaped to be challenging and to fully engage most participants; and the specific challenge of working individually with the facilitator during sharing. A few participants were clearly overwhelmed by the level of challenge presented. One left while incapacitated by alcohol, and a second attempted suicide between attending the first and second seminar. This latter individual had a history of depression and was working with a counselor who had recommended the seminars. Both participants had been screened and were felt to be sufficiently well to proceed, yet each found him or herself overwhelmed and took what appeared to be a familiar path of retreat from stress. One was able to complete the TO seminar and appeared to make significant strides towards understanding a life-long pattern of depression. In both of these instances the individual came in with a history of difficulties that may have been exacerbated by the seminars, but certainly not induced by the seminars. One of these individuals appeared to benefit to some degree from the seminar experiences. Crisis examples like these are sometimes held up as the measure against which to judge transformational learning contexts. But I raise these examples not because I believe these organizations are negligent in their screening or excessively risk-taking in their instructional strategies. Deep learning—learning that reaches into fundamental belief structures and issues of core identity—are necessarily challenging. And learners will likely exhibit the full spectrum of human responses to such challenges.

Enough about the extremes. Looking at more typical interview responses, I found that several participants noted a challenge to grow occurred during sharing in the large group when the facilitator worked
with a single individual. There were numerous examples of a participant standing to share some experience or insight and then planning to sit down, only to find that the facilitator countered with a question about the participant’s current state of being. This was where the real challenge to grow began as the participant was brought current, to the present moment, and asked to let go or release the story which may have served as a prop or support to the participant for many years. The learner was asked to respond with the feeling, the physical perception, of this current moment. Facilitators accomplished this probing differently. Sam used his experience with Hakomi training. He asked a participant to locate a specific body part that was troubling and to describe a color associated with the part, and finally for associated meanings with this color. “What is it trying to say to you?” he asked. Candace seemed to read the participant’s body language, sometimes offering a name for an experience or feeling. Janice and Mary, facilitators in TO, pushed harder in the TO seminar by singling out participants who they judged to be participating at less than a 100%. This was done once at about the mid-point of the TO seminar. Shawna offered an exaggerated description of feeling like she was being punched in the stomach as a response to this type of challenge. The actual comment from the facilitator was a moderate, almost neutral statement, “I don’t think you are playing at 100%.” While the comment was blunt, there was no raised voice or drama to the comment, but Shawna supplied her own. Another participant described how she was challenged by a comment tossed off by one of the facilitators as almost an aside. The facilitator asked, “And respect?” In the heightened atmosphere of the seminar any comment directed at a single participant seemed to take on special significance. The participants granted facilitators exceptional credibility. This special credence, built upon a

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1 Hakomi is a technique for using bodily tensions, feelings, and sensations to trace unconscious beliefs and attitudes driving a particular behavior.
foundation of respect and trust, was also noted by Llewellyn (1998) in her own observations regarding transformative pedagogy:

There may be many reasons why Ann said she had the feeling of being “clobbered” and Agnes expressed her experience as being “yelled” at. It caused me to seriously reflect on the ways that supposedly liberal discourse can create a new hegemony that is just as oppressive as whatever construct is being critiqued. It also made me recall the very natural struggles that occur when issues related to gender, race and class are discussed and how important respect and trust are in classrooms where these discussions are being shaped. (p. 65)

One learner in my study described her struggle with a particular concept. The facilitator had explained that an event is just an event and that people assign their own meaning to the event—“all events are simply neutral.” The facilitator said we view the world through the lens of our beliefs. But for this learner the absolute statement, “all events are neutral” was too much in conflict with her personal beliefs, beliefs stemming from a childhood marred by violence and also by her work with abused foster children. The facilitator, in an effort to meet the learner at a point where the learner was prepared to work, clarified the apparent conflict, offering that, “Yes, at the extremes there are events that may not be neutral.” This is similar to the way that the facilitator described meeting fundamentalists on the issue that each one of us was the source of our own experience. In another context, with a more advanced student, the facilitator might have said that the original statement was true, but her need as facilitator to be right was weighed against the participant’s need to understand. The facilitators consistently tried to meet participants on middle ground, rather than allow participants to fall out of the challenging experience in frustration.
This approach was consistent with the content of the lecture on comfort zones in which the facilitators shared the following model.

Figure 4.3 Comfort zone & the area of learning

Skilled facilitators learned to recognize when a learner was in the area of learning and to assist those who had over-reached themselves. This facilitative method aligned with the content in a way that was not always the case in the early days of these seminars, when there was much less empathy for the learner's comfort. In contrast, then they tended to "bludgeon the learner" as one facilitator said when talking about how they used to establish agreements.

Candace described using body language, like the set of the jaw, to determine whether to push an individual further or not. All the facilitators waited for some initiative on the part of the learner. The learner had to stand up and claim attention as a first step. Then the facilitator assessed to what extent this individual was willing and/or prepared to work. Sam spoke of how requiring participants to stand when they speak helped the facilitator read the body language of a particular individual. He also spoke of the participants' readiness to do the work
themselves. Shawna provided an example of this as she referred to her conversation with the facilitators about not wanting to explore her "withhold" in the group. She said she was clear about it and they did not push her further in the large group.

When a participant attempted to provoke a response, the facilitators were well schooled in responding from a non-defensive posture. Some participants said they expected more confrontation than they experienced (Peter). While others, like Shawna, David, and Larry remarked on the confrontational style of the second seminar. Descriptions of confrontation by those who were the target of the facilitator's attention tended to be full of strong words about feeling kicked or punched, while other participants either did not remark on confrontation or used less strong language like "seemed a little too flip, a little too harsh." Participants used these physical terms metaphorically to describe their own emotional response to the sudden new awareness, not the reality of the actual interaction. I never observed facilitators using offensive, abusive, or demeaning language towards a participant.

In the literature on similar seminars there were accusations of abusive treatment by facilitators, however as I read the actual descriptions I was not confident that these accusations were always well founded. Facilitators sometimes mock themselves and described the way their own fear of ridicule had kept them from taking risks that might have made them look foolish. In the Aerie seminars these lessons were delivered with satire and considerable humor. Taken out of context these stories and the exercises designed to encourage participants to lighten up and take themselves less seriously could easily be misconstrued. Humor clearly played a part in establishing the climate of the room and opening

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2 Shawna, noticing that I was withdrawn during a break, said that she was reflecting on a personal issue, which she was intentionally choosing not to share in the context of the large group. I was feeling a similar impulse to withhold an issue of my own at that point and I could empathize with the discomfort of having a "withhold" or secret in a context where so much was being shared.
participants up to ideas they might otherwise resist. Candace spoke of how the stories helped people acknowledge their own victim-ness by making the learning more palatable. Humor was a key tool in learning to take oneself lightly. It was in renewing our capacity to be joyful that we became more able to right the boat after a knockdown. Being able to laugh something off and move again rather than wallowing in regret and remorse was one of the learnings.

The facilitators oftentimes struggled with the issue of control of a learning context. Practical concerns about how close they were to a breakthrough, how attentive the group was, and how far off schedule they might have been were all factors at play. Weighing the needs of the individual against the needs of the group as a whole was important. Several times I watched Candace persist in working with an individual, foregoing the schedule. Both Candace and Sam described having less patience with participants as the seminar progressed. They expected participants to progress with the learning and if one participant had been up repeatedly and was not showing change the facilitators would begin to cut the person off more quickly or refuse to acknowledge the person. Facilitator attention was the major mechanism of control in large group sharing. Sam spoke with a little less assurance on this point than Candace and shared that he had difficulty giving up control over the answer, the need to be right. Sam said,

The most trouble I’ve ever got in the room was when I thought I had the answer for somebody else, you know, if I could just get them to listen to me, usually I get in trouble when I do that...The biggest thing was to, learn to be curious instead of thinking I had an answer. So, if I asked a question, not being attached to the answer that I’m going to get, because if I let them tell me which direction to take, its much more effective.

Participants had their own issues around control. Trudy talked about a time when her things were moved in the room in a way she had not expected and how this shook up her trust in the process for a time as she tried to puzzle out why we did something different than we said we would do. There was an undercurrent of power in the room to which everyone
was attuned in subtle ways. Conflict and confrontation, if handled poorly, could erupt and change the movement of a process, but when handled well everyone knew their own position and role in the process. The tension inherent in power dynamics then supported the learning. Trudy learned to look at her assumptions and how they sometimes set her up for anger and resentment.

**Accommodating learning styles.** “We address all three modalities, you know, visual, auditory, and kinesthetic,” said Sam. The later kinesthetic modality along with the auditory modality (through the use of music) sets these seminars apart most dramatically from traditional classrooms. Facilitation became orchestration. Participants (Jennifer, Robin, Peter) also remarked on how well the facilitators address different learning styles. But even in using the most traditional of visual aides, the wall chart, the facilitators went to extra lengths to make it effective. They used color with intention. They added graphics and they involved participants. Support staff members were invited in to write charts when it was important for the facilitator to be watching the participants. Charts were hung on walls to keep certain messages in the forefront. Signs were jazzed up by the team during the breaks to keep the charts fresh and visually interesting. Participants were encouraged to use the charts as reference points as the seminar continued. Learners could visually see the progress made from day to day. The environment became richer and richer as each day passed. Material could be reviewed, re-processed, and sorted in the learner’s mind, as particular points became relevant. Several participants (Robin, Trudy, Shawna) mentioned studying earlier charts while assimilating a new idea. The charts became a pathway or map through the new material.

Participants talked of being supported by hearing things multiple times. They used expressions like “reinforced” and “time to sink in,” terms that suggested a difference between a superficial learning held for a short time and deeper learning capable of making life more meaningful. Learning was anchored by alternating between lecture and practice. Stories also acted as anchors. For example, Kathy told how the salmon
story quickly brought back memories about the learning around the idea of resistance.

Robin explained how the handouts gave her a vocabulary to describe her emotions. It was like acquiring a new language—all of a sudden better communication became possible around emotionally charged issues. Communication with others was not the only change. Internal awareness increased when they could accurately name an experience. It moved material from an unconscious to a conscious and, therefore, accessible level of awareness.

Sara, an individual with a learning disability, expressed her frustration with a juggling exercise. But she also described how the frustration supported her in developing some important self-awareness regarding her practice of denying feelings and emotions. She described crying while doing the activity, but responding to a facilitator query about her well being by exclaiming, “Fine!” even as tears rolled down her face. This example illustrated the connection made between the emotional self and learning. The movement processes were unfamiliar territory for most learners and brought up many unconscious issues. Peter struggled with movement in his contract dance. His comments echoed the common playground anxiety—everyone else seemed to know the rules and he did not get it. His learning came in the discovery that, perhaps, everybody else did not necessarily know the rules, and they were just more willing to fake it until they made it. Movement activities encouraged the learners to act with spontaneity and to risk looking foolish. Through these processes learners experienced the connection between taking risks and feeling more alive. Once having moved and gotten past the initial fear and reluctance, it then became possible to feel other changes happening. The learners began to recognize skills, and abilities previously undiscovered, to test new patterns, and to experience wider, more expansive, movement. Showtime—the last discovery process—became the ultimate demonstration of this new knowledge.

**Anchoring and repetition.** Anchoring was a facilitation technique of foreshadowing and repetition; it laid the groundwork for learning that
might not be otherwise accepted. For example, the mingle on the first day prepared participants for a longer and more emotionally charged process on the second evening. Just as a sea anchor acts as a stabilizing force when a boat encounters rough seas, so does the recollection of having successfully weathered one difficult exercise assist participants as they enter the choppy waters of the next challenge. Robin described the effect of such an anchor when she explained that the learning was like the step-by-step process of walking into cold water. She was able to build her courage, first through the facilitator’s explanation, and then through the small group exercises, so that when she got to a dyad she felt conditioned to handle a deeper dive into her own family of origin material.

Trudy expressed the way her learning progressed when repetition in the lectures anchored her learning. She and Robin described instances in which they had time to first confront new material with resistance, sit with it for a while, and then let go of the resistance. An important aspect of the facilitation was to not back people into corners to where they had to take a stand over their beliefs, but instead to rub persistently at the edges of the old belief system and to bounce back and forth between lectures and demonstrations of the new belief system until the learner chose to move in the new direction. Martha described her movement from lecture to small group as a process, in which emotional material got scrubbed loose in large group and then flushed away in small group, showing the inter-dependence of the lectures and learning activities. It was in this interplay that the synergism that supported “deep learning” was created.

The opportunity to report out during sharing became a motivation for learning. This approach was a distinctly different approach than the tradition in lecturing of telling the learner what you are going to do, doing it, and then telling the learner what you just did. Throughout the seminars the lecture material was followed by learning activities and then sharing, but the links between one and the other were subtle and made by the participants as they processed their individual experience. I came to appreciate the relationship between lecture and learning activity much more as I unraveled the separate parts from the combination of
observation notes and logs. This subtlety had evolved over time in the seminars. For example, ten years ago facilitators spent 3-4 hours negotiating the agreements with participants on the first night of the seminar. Then, when the lecture on integrity was completed on the third day, they held a long session in which the participants initially stood up until an agreement was read and they realized that they had violated the agreement. This process was followed by another lecture on how we give integrity away in these small ways and erode our sense of self in the process. While the content of the integrity lecture is still delivered in ET today, it is couched in softer terms, and much less time is spent in confronting the learner with his or her violations of code. This softer approach left the learners responsible for extracting the lessons and internalizing them in relation to their own behavioral patterns.

When Sam asked me during my first day of observation in ET if I had noticed his use of anchors I did not have any idea what he was talking about. And I felt too insecure in my new role as researcher to admit to my confusion. He and I talked again about the concept of anchors in our interview, though at this point his focus was on the more specific example of musical anchors (see p. 88). As a metaphor for describing the mechanism of linking one discrete packet of information to another, one direct experience to a history of earlier experiences, I found that the image of an anchor was a useful construct. An anchor hooks that which floats on the surface to that grounded in a bed of earlier understanding.

Observation and intuition. Five of the participants commented on the facilitator’s high level of skill at reading a participant. Ellen said,

I was really amazed just to see people sharing about things that were really pretty devastating in their lives and then to watch the transformation and then just to observe how skillful [Candace] is in terms of eliciting more information, pushing pretty hard but not so hard that she doesn’t keep that rapport with folks. You know she’s pretty amazing. So I think by just watching her and her skill was helpful for me.

This segment illustrated the skill facilitators exhibited in probing for more without overwhelming the participant. Sam described how when he was working with a participant in the front of the room he would watch
other participants with similar issues and look for clues from these participants in the background, as much as the person directly in front of him. He said some participants would never step to the front of the room in sharing, but would actively engage in the learning by watching other more outspoken participants wrestle with similar issues. Frequently, during an interaction with a participant a facilitator looked across at another participant and said, “Are you getting any of this?” By facilitating for both the person on the spot and the figure in the background, pressure on the person up in front was diffused. This participant knew that he was not alone, while the participants in the wings were gently drawn into the learning area. Participants, when singled out from the background, snapped into focus from both the mirroring of their own experience occurring in the front of the room and their recognition that the facilitator saw them in spite of their efforts to hang back.

Facilitators in both seminars declared a faith in the participant’s magnificence early on and demonstrated a non-judgmental acceptance of all learners. This strategy diffused the resistant behaviors you might expect from a diverse group of participants. Candace said, “I encourage them to be who they are instead of deciding ahead of time who they are.” Jennifer declared,

Oh yeah, there’s been lots of new learning but that’s because in the first day, or even the first couple of hours [Sam] created a learning environment where it was okay to learn stuff, you know, and you can learn at your own pace. He made it safe to learn and to show your weaknesses and vulnerabilities.

With simple words and conviction the facilitators cut through the deflective barriers some participants use to fend off positive feedback. The love and respect of facilitators was highly valued. Some participants talked about times when they doubted whether the facilitator liked them or not. The language of approval became very potent in this highly charged context.

Robin mentioned wanting to turn and talk only to the facilitator, and not the entire group. Throughout both seminars, facilitators regularly
reminded participants to speak to the group. Why was this hard for participants to do? When I was in this position I struggled with the same impulse to put my back to the other learners. Was it that I felt trust in the facilitator, but I lacked the same level of trust in my fellow participants? Perhaps it was simply hard to split my focus, spreading it across many people. It may have simply been a mechanism for coping with the fear of being in front of a group. The facilitators worked at broadening participant focus, fostering a group identity, and diffusing transference. In 1991, after my first ET, I wrote a letter to the facilitators and provided the following feedback:

One aspect of your program that worked especially well for me was the distance maintained by the facilitators and backup team from the group of participants...your support was either anonymous [from] the team or else public as in the one-on-one feedback in front of the large group. This approach allowed me for virtually the first time in my life, to become focused on who I was to the group of my peers, instead of who I was to the teacher.

The facilitators stretched learners out of their social comfort zone. This was the first step in taking new community-making skills out of the seminar and back into the real world. Robin spoke of how declaring something out loud to the group made it more real, more of an obligation or commitment. To speak only as pupil to teacher lacked the force of a declaration made before one’s peers.

Practice and application of the learning. Sam expressed the way practicing the learning distinguishes Aerie seminars from a normal classroom. He said, “I think the most unique part of it is that you give somebody some information and you give them a place to try it.” In a typical college classroom there is little time spent practicing newly acquired knowledge. Sam goes on to explain that the results of practice will vary with each application and in the seminar the learner begins to grasp that there is no one right answer, but many possible solutions. Facilitation of this practice is more art than science as David, a participant, expressed when he said, “the lectures in general and then the sharing afterwards, its helpful when [the facilitator]... talks to an
individual, because then it kind of puts the academic in perspective.” The theoretical becomes real.

Having multiple exposures to the material through lectures, sharing, group processes, and reflective writing all reinforced the learning. Robin explained that the combination of hearing the content in a lecture, seeing a chart developed listing a set of concepts, and then moving into a small group or dyad to practice the concept helped her to organize material that before had been inaccessible and “jumbled” in her mind.

Structure

“ET is one of the most finely choreographed seminars on the planet,” began the facilitator in the opening lecture of the second seminar. The structure of the ET seminar shaped the participant experience and learning more subtly than the facilitation. In fact, most participants were unaware of the extent to which members of the team were managing their environment unobtrusively in the background. Yet it was a critical component of learning context. The logistics of room size, climate control, lighting, acoustics, seating, management of breaks, wall charts, and music were orchestrated to a much greater degree than would be typical in the institutional setting of a college classroom. Every aspect of the learning space was designed to reduce susceptibility to distraction. The structure of these seminars supported input from multiple senses. Add participant movement to the equation and the learning began to resemble a virtual reality experience in which the entire person was engaged.

If there were a single aspect of structure that stands out above others, it might be the extent to which the seminar design created a distraction-free environment; nothing was allowed to detract from the central focus of the seminar. From the point of check-in on the first day to the closing celebration participants were encouraged to be immersed in the material. The days were long, generally about 12 hours. Breaks were extensions of the seminar process and participants had most meals together. The
The seminar room was windowless. Cell phones were banned from the room and discouraged on the breaks. Participants went home at night tired and with writing assignments yet to complete. Together these structural features supported an immersion experience not unlike what a college student might experience in the first week of a study-abroad trip or upon entry into an intensive language study course. In a focus group interview, one intern pointed out a relationship between transformational learning and the cultural student immersion experience she sees when teaching ESL students.

Some researchers have misconstrued this characteristic of separating learners from outside distraction, viewing it as a way of isolating participants from external supports. The practice is often linked to the common practices within cult groups of encouraging new recruits to sever old loyalties and form new bonds within the group. Isolating techniques can be mis-used to serve such an end. However, my own observations suggest a more benign intent behind the practices within the Aerie seminars. Reducing distraction enhanced focus on the specific content to be learned. Furthermore, participants were taught and encouraged to apply the content learned in the seminar, and to enhance and deepen existing primary relationships within their families and among their friends. The somewhat temporal relationships created in the seminar context were a place to practice the new learning and were not intended to substitute for or replace existing relationships. Continued interaction between participants after the seminar tended to be short in duration with a flurry of email and cards that dissipated over a few weeks, though certainly some lasting friendships were sustained. The team training materials laid down strict prohibitions against using the seminar context to launch new relationships with participants. Participants were asked not to make changes in their primary relationships for a period of three months following each seminar. They were also asked not to engage in building new intimate relationships with fellow participants during this same time frame. Training materials for team members were clear, and
specified consequences for violating the agreements, including loss of the opportunity to be on future teams.

The attention to structure went beyond reducing distraction. Structural elements like lighting, music, timing of breaks, and large wall charts with quotes and strong, simple messages were all manipulated to further stimulate engagement of multiple senses with the content and learning activities. Participants may have spent their break anxiously struggling over whether to share some new awareness. Bright lights, loud music with a dance beat, and smiling team members dancing as the doors opened after the break, all helped participants decide that their fears were unfounded. Dim lights, candles, softer, more reflective music, and team members sitting quietly in their chairs waiting for their small group to arrive, helped learners transition from the excited chatter of the breakroom to an emotional study in how they used their personal story.

Careful pacing of lecture, processes, breaks, and sharing sustained the learning during periods when alertness faded (i.e., after a meal), or energy declined as participants tired at the end of a long day. But pacing did more than keep the group moving in unison. It also supported the facilitation of a rhythm of moods, so that learners were stretched, even made uncomfortable for a time, by a process or concept that seemed new, foreign, or contrary to their accustomed patterns. Too much stretching and the participants would have reached a point where resistance to further change would have overwhelmed them. Too little stretching and participants would have avoided learning by staying safely within their comfort zone.

On day one of ET participants entered to two inspirational quotes on the wall. The first day unfolded slowly with lectures filling the first half of the day. By mid-afternoon, when tolerance for lecture was usually at a low point, participants selected their small groups and less time was spent sitting in rows. After the evening dinner break, participants came back to the first discovery process of the seminar, the Red/Black game. The day ended with a story called “The Weight of Nothing” by Dr. Seuss. Everything about the day’s structure aligned with the theme of ownership
and how the choices we make support winning or losing. By the end of
the day participants were beginning to recognize that their individual
choices to act or not act mattered. Participants left at the end of the first
day in a somber and introspective mood. For some there was deep
learning around the choice to disassociate during the last process of the
day. Others learned that they exercised too much or too little personal
power. Some learned in this activity, and in a related exercise in TO, that
there may be many right answers and that having a loser is not requisite
to winning.

The second day focused on vulnerability. Relationships between
participants both broadened and deepened as the day’s structure was set
up to encourage mixing in the group through different kinds of group
interactions (small group, dyads, resistance dinner group, large group
discovery process). The day ended with the second discovery process,
Stop-Look-Choose, which built trust, empathy, and appreciation for one
another through a lengthy sharing process. Most participants felt more
relaxed with one another at the end of the second day, as evidenced by
the close huddle of participants on the floor during at the day’s closing
activity. Blissful expressions on their faces as they left for the night
offered further evidence. But there were exceptions to this usual
response. Different learners struggled with different parts of the seminar
material.

The days moved in what could be described as a roller coaster
fashion, building tension, releasing tension, and arriving at increasingly
higher levels of connection as participants shared more experiences. The
third day took a dip on the roller coaster as the issue of integrity was
explored. Participants were confronted with the ways in which they give
up their personal integrity. Honesty in communication, mindtraps
(various ways we learn to manipulate others in our close relationships),
forgiveness, and risk were all explored. The day ended with the most
challenging assignment of the seminar. Participants prepared for a
performance on the last day. Participants left scared, edgy, and excited as
they resourced with one another for support.
The fourth day, with its culminating activity—the third and last discovery process—was challenging to capture on paper. Participants stretched to meet the day's theme of spontaneity and the results were amazing to witness. On this day, more than any other, participants learned what it meant to be fully present with one another and fully alive. They each witnessed their fellow participants taking emotional risks, and others witnessed them in turn in their own exhilarating growth. The structures of the days supported the basic purposes of the seminar.

**Progression of learning.** The seminar process began when a learner signed up for a seminar and continued between the seminars. For some it was difficult to sustain their initial enthusiasm (euphoria) from the first seminar through the gap between ET and TO. For Bob the time between ET and TO was a confusing period, "The valleys were deeper. I had the awareness to know I was in one, but it was frustrating to still be there. I felt so helpless, hopeless." Bill, too, found this a difficult period. He said: "I thought I'd opened up everything in all the cans, all the cans of worms, addressed all the issues, but I hadn't. So TO was effective in the fact that we addressed the rest of the issues."

At the culmination of ET participants were encouraged to quickly sign up for TO, (40% moved on to TO within six months). From a business perspective this success in obtaining the next sale was critical to the company's survival, but there was another element to be considered. The two seminars were by design part of a larger whole³, and the learning was clearly incomplete without the second seminar. When I began this study, I did not fully appreciate the inter-relationship between the two seminars until I began to listen to participants before, between, and after

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³ There was a third seminar identified as part of the core series. It took place on four weekends spread a month apart. Time limitations prevented the inclusion of this seminar in the study, though the longitudinal data might have been helpful.
completing both seminars. From an educator's perspective this breaking of the learning into two separate seminars would be a design flaw necessitated by the market place, but a flaw nevertheless. Too many participants finished with only half the content, lacking the tools to effectively apply the learning in their lives. This was parallel to the retention issues we struggle with in community colleges when we consider the drop-out rates between first and second quarters. These learners leave school and enter the job market with little educational advantage.

David explained how the two seminars had different points of focus:

Yeah, ET was [pause] felt, I came away from ET thinking I am a loving person. Kind of outward. And this [TO] is inward. What's in my core to myself, how do I act towards myself. ET seemed like how do I act toward others? How do I, how do other people feel when they're around me and how do people see me on the outside?

He continued to describe his feelings when he realized that TO was not going to be like ET in key respects, saying he was angry at the beginning when he found that instead of loving interactions with others, TO was focused inward upon self-reflection. Where my own initial response at the start of TO had been “why are we going backwards?” I later saw that what seemed like a step back was actually movement along a spiral. I was working with the same material but at a new level. Miles said:

I think you know ET was definitely much more of a broad brush, exposure to a lot of stuff. I thought it was a very good experience, I mean I have to be perfectly honest about it. It was a real charge coming out of ET. But certainly TO was much more focused on where I was at....Yeah that was really important. I definitely came out of TO feeling like I learned a lot more about myself, instead of feeling good and what not, I learned a lot more about myself.

Peter pointed to a feeling of fear coming out of the TO experience that he had not felt after ET: “For me personally the impact is, it's more somber than ET was...You come out of ET in kind of a rush and a high and you come out of TO more serious and actually a little afraid...I'm not going to be able to do it.”
Most participants remarked on the high, upbeat, exhilarated feelings they experienced at the end of ET, and interestingly, several attributed the feelings to being supported, not to having something external pumped into them. The support enabled them to jump higher, expand further. Whatever happened, they were clear that the energy came from within them. Bill and Shawna both described the layers being peeled away to reveal something more and that the work continued into TO. Bill said:

I look at it now as the peeling of an onion, because I didn't peel off all the layers in ET, which I thought I did. That was very interesting, when I did some introspective thinking about that, because when I got back from ET I was totally drained and mentally exhausted. But I was high; I was high from the support that I got.

Bob, too, described how the change came from within:

I'm making some big changes in my life and to someone from the outside it will look like this new direction was caused by our attending ET and then TO, you know, 'he went off to these seminars and then bam! He is making all these changes!' But really my mind was already made up about these things before doing ET. The seminars just speeded up, changed the timing of my plans.

I asked backup team members why they volunteered for seminars. Most described the renewed love and well being they felt with each team experience. Some expressed a strong preference for which of the seminar teams they did, and many only did one kind of team. I suspected that this had to do with the lessons in their own learning on which they were currently working. Sara said, "Well, I just love the—I love the love that I get when I'm there, excluding TO." She had not yet done a TO team. But regardless of the differences between the seminars, the act of being in service on a team, was described as hugely rewarding by all the team members. To witness the growth in the participants, to see the unfolding that occurred in seminar after seminar, restored our belief in what was possible, and removed all the tarnish accumulated since the last seminar experience.
Safety. Safety came in many forms in the seminars. It began before the seminar with screening on the part of the Aerie enrollment coordinators. Candace stressed the importance of this screening and I suspect it was an important institutional protection from litigation. Participants were asked about medication and treatment and advised that the seminar would be quite demanding. Those currently undergoing treatment by a counselor were asked to acquire permission from their counselor. Candace said with confidence in her voice that, “whoever is in the room is healthy, as healthy as a normal human being is!” While the two individuals described earlier would seem to indicate the screening was less than perfect, even these individuals were functioning at a level that appeared normal to me as an outside observer—they arrived on time, appeared alert, behaved in an appropriate manner in public, and gave evidence of understanding directions and seminar content. (I often see far less “normal” functioning among the student body on my campus). Candace also talked of ways in which seminar content and structure were adapted to different employment contexts to assure participant safety in superior/subordinate employment relationship. Material likely to evoke tears might be deleted, and training might be delivered to different organizational levels separately.

Safety was built into the seminar design in a number of ways. Candace's instructions to the team about being meticulous in their support roles was intended to help free the participants from normal worries and concerns, letting them be less vigilant about their surroundings and more attentive to their own interior space. The formal agreements made by the team and by participants, particularly the rule regarding third-party talk, created another kind of safety. The lack of

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4 Third-party talk was a term used to describe a conversation in which someone shared another person's experience without the expressed permission of that person. Gossip would fall within this definition.
judgement on the part of the facilitators and the owning of judgements (all judgement is self-judgement) further helped make the space feel safe to be fully present in. Some participants developed feelings of security as they watched one participant after another risk in the group sharing periods. Participants who risked early in the sharing became models for those who came after. Safety was created through forecasting what was to come and keeping commitments. It was also created through honesty on the part of facilitators when they admitted they did not know the answer and when they accurately named things that are usually kept hidden and rarely addressed in our culture. It was created when facilitators were real and expressed who they really were in the moment. Ellen addressed this aspect of safety when she talked about the freedom participants had to choose the material they wanted to deal with in various processes.

Assignments were made with sufficient breadth so that individuals could choose to take their learning to a level that stretched their comfort zone, but was not so frightening as to send them into panic. Robin referred to being able to choose partners for different processes and feeling more comfortable with another woman when working through one particular process. She also described the relief she felt in hearing personal revelations by others without any expectation to do something about the other person’s problems. She did not have to have the answers. This was an interesting aspect of the safety provided by the no third-party talk rule. The rule allowed for greater honesty and removed the need to second-guess the speaker’s motives in sharing. Sharing became “just information,” not an obligation to act (i.e., rescue someone).

Physical facility. There was little mention of the physical setting in the interviews. I suspect that it was generally unobtrusive. The creation of this neutral space was actually the result of considerable effort. The seminar room was designed carefully with a partially enclosed corner known as the bunker, behind which logs, music, and lights were managed. The lighting in the room was sophisticated, with a combination of incandescent, florescent, and spotlight cans, and even a set of black lights used on occasion. All could be combined to create a variety of
theatrical effects. The temperature control units were set to thermostats that handled a wide range of activity in the room and kept an even, cool climate throughout the seminar. The room was also set up with a sound system capable of handling multiple microphones, excellent speakers, and mixing of different outputs.

Interestingly, with all this sophistication, there was no multi-media support. This appeared to be intentional, having to do in part with keeping systems simple enough that an ever-changing volunteer staff could manage the systems unobtrusively in the background. Facilitators avoided cold media, like PowerPoint projections and video, perhaps because this technology would have gotten between the participant and the facilitator.

Another aspect of the physical set-up was the variation in group size both within seminars and between the different seminars. I have been in seminars with as many as seventy people and as few as twenty-one. I was surprised at how little difference the size of the group seemed to make in the overall experience. With larger groups the days tended to run longer, especially on those days that included more individually focused experiences. But the structure of the seminar was highly elastic. When there were more participants there were also more backup team members and more small groups. The small groups stayed at about the same number in size. When the group was especially large the breaks got a little shorter and there was less likelihood of starting a session later in the morning or getting out early. When a group of participants was particularly small the backup team interacted more in the sharing and in processes that required the energy of more people. These adjustments were all managed adroitly by the facilitator and team manager.

Even individuals with hearing impairments seemed able to manage well by selecting their seats for the position that most suited their particular need. The management of special needs was handled with care. Chairs were left in the room for those participants who might need them during processes where most participants were seated on the floor. One member of the back-up team was assigned responsibility for
managing accommodation requests. The facilitator stayed removed from these services and left it to participants to ask to have their needs met. It appeared at times that the facilitator intentionally withheld attention from individuals with health related behaviors such as migraines and back problems.

On occasion, a participant might leave the room suddenly in response to some emotionally charged activity. When this happened a backup team member followed the participant out and worked with the participant to provide emotional support; and in most cases, both re-entered the room after a short period, perhaps sitting against the back wall for a time. As a general practice, someone from the team always went out of the room when a participant left, even for a bathroom break. The team member waited by the entry door until the participant was ready to return. If a participant indicated she planned to leave the seminar, the team member encouraged her to first speak with the facilitator on the next break. This type of interaction was not uncommon in the ET. But in TO, while some participants talked about having formed an intention to leave the seminar when they were feeling frustrated, they did not seem to feel as strong a need to act on the impulse. By the second seminar participants started to recognize that a desire to leave was often an indication that they were doing difficult but valuable work. In fact, some participants described a personal breakthrough in their learning following such low points.

Music. Few aspects of the seminar structure stood out more from other kinds of learning environments than the deliberate use of music to shape the tone and emotional tenor of the learning context from segment to segment. As an observer in the room I watched as participants' faces changed in response to the music, which began with a dramatic flair as the doors opened for each session. They sometimes shifted from an anxious inward focus to an outward, excited-looking focus in a flash as the music was queued up. At other times the animated chatter outside the room quieted to a hush, especially when participants were entering the room for one of the dimly-lit dyads with low lights, candles, and soft
music. Few participants commented on the use of music in the seminars. I suspect that while the music may have a powerful impact on many if not most participants, it worked below the surface with their non-verbal awareness and it was difficult for them to describe the influence with words. This was similar to our response to the use of music in movies. We know it is there, and we may like or dislike the music at times, but most of the time we respond to it in only semi-conscious ways, such as tensing as the music and visuals build to a climax. That the music mattered to participants more than they said in the interviews was reflected in the enthusiasm that they expressed when they heard that a music play list was included in their packets at the end of the seminar. Bob said, “The music was very good at opening you up. The whole process of ET was very much refined and masterful.” The music played an even more central role in the processes of TO where particular songs were played in a closed eye transition period at the beginning of every session and the lyrics were selected to resonate with the current content themes in the seminar. Like story, music bypasses our cynical sensors and connects to our emotional self, eliciting a response before our analytical mind can intervene.

Sam described musical anchors:

Musical anchors, if I use a piece of music for Mom-Dad, say I use Angel Love, I would never use that for Stop-look-choose because it would be a contaminated anchor. And also, see I wouldn’t use a piece of music, let us take Bobby McFerrin’s, oh what’s the name of it? ‘Common Threads,’ yeah thank you. See I wouldn’t use that in a process like Mom-Dad or Forgiveness, because I know that in TurnOver it’s got a different thing. And if they’ve already got that piece of music anchored inside someplace I wouldn’t contaminate it, or if I know its coming later, I wouldn’t contaminate it....When you think about using a piece of music in the seminar and let us say it came from a movie soundtrack, and there’s some great music in Titanic, the problem is they die in the end. So if people have a piece of music anchored to a death in the end, I don’t think that’s a good one to use.
Care was taken in selecting new music for the seminars to assure that the lyrics did not include victim language—a significant challenge with certain musical genres!

Music became associated with certain processes, thoughts and feelings. I can hardly listen to Bobby McFerren's music, "Common Threads," without remembering my contract experience in TO. My sister wrote of a similar phenomenon ten years ago:

I'm sitting here listening to Vangelis by a wood stove—winter, bleak kind of night—letting my thoughts swirl. The music "L'Enfant" is the score they played in ET when the doors opened. Whenever I hear it, my heart skips a beat, I stand taller and the part of me that is love and peace and warmth glows brighter. It is, I guess, my Touchstone with Aerie and all I gained there.

**Visuals.** While participants did not talk much about the music they did speak of the visual tools used in the seminars. They often referenced the content by naming the graphic that was associated with the content. David, Shawna, and Robin each commented on the way visual wall charts supported their assimilation of the content. Tammy talked of the cumulative affect of the charts and how she would use them as a reference map at other times in the seminar.

Participants commented on the symmetry of the cornerstone chart. Peter described it as mandala like: "It is succinct, pragmatic, and practical, and something that can be held in the mind and recalled for reference, sort of a left brain mandala." The cornerstone chart was a visual that carried over into TO and kept evolving into a more complex pattern. It became an important link between the two seminars.

**Content**

Defining content, separating it from facilitation, structure, and process, was important in understanding what these seminars have to teach us about learning. Early in this study my focus on how the process of transformational learning worked in the seminars led me to think the
specific content of the seminars would be less central to this study than other aspects of context. But as I watched and reflected on the delivery of the content, I became convinced that the content was directly relevant to creating a transformed perspective that has meaning and application to the learner. This content, stripped down to its core lessons about ownership, was essential to creating a healthy learning community.

Entrée (ET) could be summarized most succinctly as a curriculum focused upon bringing about a perspective shift in the learner that led to increased personal accountability, healthier relationships with self and with others, and a heightened awareness and vitality. The second seminar, TurnOver, extended this learning with a particular focus on identifying the personal patterns that interfere with a learner’s application of the new perspective.

The content was structured around two major models, the Dependency/Source model and the Cornerstone model. The first model was an elegant model for describing what educators refer to as “locus of control.” A dependent learner perceived the world in terms of an external locus of control while the learner operating as the source of his own experience sees the world from a perspective of internal control. The Cornerstone model grew out of a combination of older personal growth material and concepts from “The Four-Fold Way” (Arrien, 1993). The model had undergone many changes and was now distinctly different from the model I first encountered eleven years ago. It was presented in stages over the course of the two seminars. The Cornerstone model identified four cornerstones for a healthy life: ownership, integrity, vulnerability and spontaneity. The basic precept behind the model was that while participants needed a balance of all four characteristics, most learners tended to be stronger in some areas and to have one area in which they were weaker. The presentation of the model included work on how to become more aware of personal strengths and weaknesses, to recognize our own behavioral patterns, and to develop the tools to change patterns relating to a particular cornerstone. As I reflected on the meaning of this model, which is used heavily in both ET and TO, I saw a
strong similarity between this model and the figure I developed to illustrate Brothers’ model of trust development in early childhood (Figure 2.1). Adding this trust model to our analysis, the link between the Dependency/Source model and the Cornerstone model becomes more obvious—trust development in all four dimensions is critical to developing an internal locus of control.

Table 4.1 Cornerstones in relation to type of trust

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trust-in-Self</th>
<th>Self-as-Trustworthy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ownership</td>
<td>Integrity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome: Right use of my personal power</td>
<td>Outcome: Vision and simplicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barrier: Fear of being rejected</td>
<td>Barrier: Fear of being trapped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust-in-Others</td>
<td>Others-as-Self-Trusting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulnerability</td>
<td>Spontaneity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome: Intimacy</td>
<td>Outcome: Aliveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barrier: Fear of being out of control</td>
<td>Barrier: Fear of looking foolish</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Brothers’ theory of trust and “Cornerstones of a balanced life”.

Encouraging students to develop an internal locus of control is of course one of the central foci of student development theory. One of the learnings from this study was the extent to which an identification of and reorientation to trust can help a learner overcome barriers.

Another concept from psychology was helpful for understanding the Source model: the concept of “differentiating” in relationships that are enmeshed in a triangle of victim, perpetrator, and rescuer. Again the way out of such tangles is through taking ownership and giving up ineffective blaming, disassociation, and rescuing strategies.

Candace, when speaking of the purposes, said, “If I looked at the prime [purpose] it’s ‘to openly acknowledge and appreciate that I am the source of my beliefs, experiences, and results.’ I mean that’s bottom line,
what it's all about.” And when speaking of the most important lectures and process she said: “I'd say Dependency and Source is the lecture content and Showtime is the demonstration of moving from fear to excitement and of seeing myself as incapable to capable.” Only Martha and Katy mentioned the dependency/source lecture in their interviews. In Martha's it was in the context of her struggle with the idea that all events are neutral: “Well, one that set me off the worst, that caused me to just have an incredible reaction, was her chart where experiences were neutral. Um, I still can't buy into that.” Katy was the only participant to directly express an understanding of the dependency/source lecture and an awareness of its importance:

See the first day when we were talking about dependency and source and the triangle? It really let me put our relationships in a structure to see how they work, how our society works. Because our society works based on that triangle, in so many ways. But from the interaction between two people, to the way that we work in the political world.

Interestingly, Katy was one of the youngest participants in the seminar, but also one who had previously taken two similar seminars. Her mother had been a facilitator for Aerie for a number of years as Katy was moving through adolescence. A capable young adult, Katy had perhaps worked longer with the content material than any of the older adult participants around her in the seminar. She certainly had been exposed to the vocabulary longer.

As I scanned through all my coding around content, it was interesting to note that most of the participants never pulled the concept of ownership out as particularly significant to them. However, when I interviewed backup team members and the interns I found references to this basic concept. I think that at the point I interviewed participants, though they have been introduced to the concept of ownership as it relates to dependency and source, they had not yet practiced and accepted the concept as their own. They may have accepted that the facilitator had this viewpoint, but until they tested the concept in their own life, saw it work, and then re-examined their beliefs in light of the
new information, the concept could be too abstract and removed from their current reality. I suspected that most learners on entry into the seminar did not hold the perspective being taught in ET. And in fact they often felt strongly resistant to the concept that they were the creator of most of their own experience, whether they openly expressed their resistance as Martha did, or not. When they completed the first seminar participants had already begun to explore this new perspective, but were generally still far from adopting this expanded sense of personal accountability. At this point the lectures, charts, music, stories, and various learning activities had just begun to help the learner shift from an essentially dependent perspective to a perspective empowered by choice.

When the perspective shift happened for an individual learner three areas of learning exploration opened up. The learner discovered what it meant to be personally accountable for the way their life proceeded from that point forward. The learner experienced a deeper quality of relationship both with the self, especially those aspects of the self previously unacknowledged, and in their connection to others, including those both like and unlike themselves. And, last, the learner experienced what it felt like to live more fully, enjoying the moment, noticing and being aware of the rich context in which they lived.

Four important elements contributed to the successful delivery of the content: (a) it was presented in a rich medium. As described in the discussion on structure, the seminar format was multi-sensory and engaging. The content itself was delivered in many ways—through illustrative and colorful charts, well-organized handouts, entertaining and touching stories, moving song lyrics, and of course through interactive lecture and discussion. (b) Delivery of the content was chunked into manageable units with some lectures lasting only a few minutes and none more than 50 minutes. Between one piece of content (chunk) and the next there were opportunities to practice and apply the new learning or to test the new skill. (c) The content design created a loose framework with room for discovery on the part of the learner. The learner had to engage cognitively with the material and draw the links to his own life
experiences. The learner was provided with the tools, not the answers. Care was taken by the facilitators and team members not to speak for the learner and not to label or second guess the learner's experience. (d) The content was delivered in the context of positive regard for the learner without attachment of right or wrong/good or bad labels. Judgement was just awareness, a neutral entity.

The content was rich and many faceted. Learners in all different shapes and sizes found a point of contact that fit their personal needs; like proteins binding to receptors that recognize them on a cell membrane, each learner responded differently to the individual bits of content, binding to some pieces and sloughing off others. There was enough material for the experienced traveler, while the content was flexible enough to accommodate the novice learner too. Content delivery in the seminars began with an introductory brochure and a statement of the purposes of the seminars. These were repeated throughout the seminars once each day. There was a transition throughout the seminar as first the facilitator, then the team, and finally the participants themselves were asked to share what the purposes meant to them. Not only were the purposes clearly and consistently presented, but also participants were encouraged to actively engage with and claim the purposes as their own. It was within this framework that the lectures and content of the seminar were delivered.

A number of participants spoke of there being so much information that even weeks after the seminar they were still trying to sort it in their mind. Martha shared:

Yeah, there's still an awful lot of stuff I haven't processed. I mean there is so much that went on. I'm glad I didn't do Crossover this week. Because there's still so much from the ET program that I have not downloaded. Not because I'm resistant, just because there's this, this incredible volume there.

But regardless of the quantity most participants seemed to stay engaged during the lectures and to see the larger pattern into which they fit.
The content was delivered in chunks. Interviewees talked about the way in which content lectures are interwoven with sharing and participant interaction. David said, “The lectures in general and then the sharing afterwards, it's helpful when [Candace] or somebody talks to an individual, because then it kind of puts the academic in perspective.”

Lectures were delivered with a mix of interaction through questions from the facilitator and responses from participants. Charts were constructed jointly by facilitator and participants and in this way the participants were encouraged to feel engaged in the material. Participants asked questions as the lecture developed and the facilitator responded with examples—and sometimes a story—from his or her own life, which illustrated the point being made. When a particular concept was fully presented and the related chart completed, there was usually a transition directly into an activity in which the same concepts were further explored, though on the first day of ET there was more likely to be a short break followed by more lecture. The seminar content was front-loaded on the first day and as it proceeded, more time was spent in processes. Sharing increased and lectures decreased.

Stories delivered content in several different forms, each serving a different end. There were facilitator parable stories—simple stories of someone’s experience that illustrated an idea. For example, there was one story told early in each seminar of a participant who asked for his money back at the end of the seminar. Three years later he experienced a sudden enlightenment while driving down the highway, enough to stop and write a letter saying he had suddenly “got it!” and he returned payment for the seminar. The message or moral of the story was that people learn in different ways and at different rates. The subtext of the message was that hardly anyone fails to find the seminars valuable; some are just too stubborn to admit it for a while. Another parable story is Dr. Seuss’ tale of the snowflake that weighed almost nothing, yet brought down the pile of snow. The story of the cellist playing on a street corner in Sarajevo, further conveyed the difference just one person can make—the idea of “What if?”
Humorous stories delivered the learning content that was less easy to accept, less emotionally palatable. “Just a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down” is the subtext behind some of the humor in the seminar. Stories of a dead salmon and the retold version of the Wizard of Oz both brought the house down with the delight of a good story well told and they delivered an important message about how we often play victim ourselves. The seminars were peppered with humor used in service of the learning, but often highly entertaining as well. One facilitator shared, “stories just ride right over the data that tells us we can’t do something!”

Then there were the personal stories told often in short snippets by the facilitator, a phrase like “when I was diagnosed with ...” or “after my divorce...” that even in their shortness told a story sufficient to create connection through common experience with the participants’ own tragedies and challenges. The facilitators modeled a special use of personal story. It was short, it reflected the experience of something difficult, it reflected ownership, and it demonstrated the choice on the facilitator’s part to reframe the experience. Participant stories were told with less finesse, but over the course of the two seminars most began to shorten. The participants’ stories, though less artful, still served an end similar to the facilitators’ stories. They increased connection in the group. As Miles said, he felt closer to those who got up and shared early. The facilitation that followed a story from a participant—the individual work done by the facilitator with the participant in the front of the room—was often about re-framing the story, moving from a victim perspective to a more empowered, forward-looking, perspective of “what now” or “what next?” Often just a few stories told in the early part of a seminar became themes that were returned to and re-shaped by both the facilitator and different participants throughout the remaining days. In this way stories became the fuel for a great part of the work in the seminars.

The content creates a frame. Trudy described how for her assembling the seminar content was like putting together a puzzle:

Most everything always started out with [Candace] beginning some piece of the lecture and then for me, uh, I’m a puzzle
piecer, not so much actually with the physical puzzles, but with people puzzles and idea puzzles. I love putting things together and looking at it in different objective ways and subjective ways to put things together. So for me the Red/Black exercise was a done deal before it started. I knew we had to go win/win.

This description demonstrated the connections Trudy drew between the lecture content and the process exercises. The charts, lectures, and handouts helped build a language upon which the new learning could hang. This was done first by naming the awareness, and then by claiming the awareness as their own—thus learners began the shift towards ownership, commitment and change. In academia faculty struggle to make the link between content and process meaningful to students who often view lectures (content) and labs (learning processes) as unrelated activities (Leamnson, 2000). Costa and Liebmann (1997) argue that in reality process is content and that our division of one from the other is artificial and does not serve the learner.

Another organizing framework employed in the content is the use of typologies. Typologies are systems of classification used to type people in accordance with their patterns of preference, motivation, and behavior (i.e., Myers-Briggs Temperament Instrument, enneagrams, etc.).

Typologies were broached indirectly in the early seminars using the Cornerstone model. A process focused on identifying cornerstones by body posture offered one way to type behaviors. The lectures on mindtraps provided another typing tool that helped learners name behaviors that commonly crop up in family relationships. Typologies assisted the participants in sorting out their own behaviors as they saw them mirrored back by others. Miles shared how he worked with the lecture content around identifying cornerstones. He moved between identifying first, vulnerability, and then, spontaneity, as his cornerstone over the course of the two seminars. David and I also struggled to identify our cornerstones and changed our choices between ET and TO. In fact, at one time or another I managed to claim all four of the cornerstones, before finally recognizing that ownership was where I struggled the most. The
seminars afforded this type of experimentation and practice in applying the content.

**Positive regard for the learner.** The lecture content offered a neutral face with little sense of judgment or labeling of right and wrong. As Candace explained, the seminar content was like a flashlight being shined in dark corners. But learners were left to evaluate and judge what had application to their own life. For some, the connections came during the lectures. Katy shared her experience of seeing the personal application of the mindtrap lecture:

> The 15 mindtraps were big one for me, because they put them right out here for me to look at and they weren't a part of me. They were something that I do. And it let me really look at them. And I was listening, when I thought "oh my gosh, I don't do that! Do I really do that?" And then, to look at them and say, "yes I do," but not judge them, like just say, "okay."

With Katy's description we saw her struggling to bring the learning home to herself and finding that she could do so because to do so did not make her a bad person. She distinguished her identity, her "self-hood," from her behavior. She understood that to recognize a behavior in herself that she did not like, did not equate with her becoming a bad person. The care with which this distinction was made in the seminar content was one key to the growth that became possible. One of the challenges with content delivery became how to help learners look at their own behavior with a critical awareness, while not building up a bow wave of resistance in learners to the new perspective. With a build-up of resistance the learner becomes afraid of being shown to be wrong. The fear overwhelms their forward momentum through the learning. By firmly holding to the separation between self and behavior the learner was more able to accept the importance of modifying the behavior—and the understanding that to do so was not to negate the self. When I think of the number of times I have had students in my office share how they have felt personally attacked or diminished in someway by a faculty or staff member, I think this may be one of the central differences between content delivery in an
Aerie seminar and content delivery in some academic institutions. Peter commented on this aspect:

For myself, the inclusion of vulnerability was novel. That could be problematic for those that may interpret vulnerability as “let yourself be hurt,” or “put yourself at risk,” but for me it means, “let yourself feel.” And I saw [Candace] and the gang do that, feel deep and painful feelings, as well as joyful feelings; concern and seriousness as well as playfulness. And saw them let the feelings arise and subside without denial or augmentation. Was that new? Perhaps not so much intellectually, but I wouldn’t have thought of it as a cornerstone.

Processes/learning activities

Learning activities were processes in which participants were assigned or directed to engage with the learning content. They encouraged the learner to take an active role. They were structured to facilitate progressive movement, a succession of experiences that built toward a new awareness or skill. They helped the learner absorb the seminar content. The learning activities took the learner beyond a purely cognitive process and assisted the learner to move from abstraction to application of the new content.

The particular value of learning activities included the more obvious function of skill development through practice and application, an important and valuable attribute of process. The learning activities were also a catalyst; they stimulated the learner physically and they opened the learner’s emotional learning pathways. They were alchemical, in that they held the potential to transmute content into practice. The pressure to change created in the learning activities compressed the learner into the point of the comfort zone wedge in the (see model p. 68), so that reactions to the content happened more quickly and with more force. The learner’s energy was compressed like a spring by the activities and as a result the learner leapt farther than they would have with content delivery.
alone. This was the value in bringing all of the learner present and engaging them on many systemic levels—cognitive, emotive, and sensory.

The elegance of the seminar structure lay in the close relationship between content and learning activities—the activities were in the service of the content, and both aligned with the stated purposes (outcomes). The learning activities were uncommon learning experiences in a number of respects. They:

- Contained an element of surprise (they were fresh experiences for most participants);
- Supported trust development through attention to integrity and alignment of values;
- Built efficacy through a succession of days toward increased risk. The learner’s progress became visible to themselves and to others;
- Provoked emotional expression in learners unaccustomed to sharing their emotions;
- Fostered sharing within the group; learners felt more equal to one another and less resistant to those who were different;
- Permitted multiple interpretations of meanings, and the seminar’s open design fostered meaning formation that recognized there was no one right way.

The activities provided the trail to transformational learning itself. There were more than 60 distinct activities in the ET seminar. Some activities were as short as two to three minutes while others lasted as long as two hours. Participants in the interviews were four times more likely to talk about a learning activity than a specific lecture. There were learning activities suited for virtually every kind of learning style.

The activities fell into four broad categories. There were large group activities in which the entire group, typically including team members, interacted with one another in a single activity. In ET these included such activities as an ice breaker mingle, large circle feedback, and the three “discovery processes.” The second type consisted of small group activities where typically three to six participants and team members interacted, such as in periodic small group meetings, dinner groups, and
communication triads. The third type was constructed of paired activities. These included activities done with a learning partner, dyads, and some sharing in front of the group in which one individual worked for an extended time with the facilitator. In this situation, where the learning dynamic was focused between two individuals, the rest of the group experienced a large group process, while the learner on the spot tuned out the group and was entirely focused on the interaction with the facilitator. The last category was one of individual activities. These activities included numerous writing assignments during seminar sessions, on breaks, and evening homework assignments. They also included a number of solitary exercises such as closed-eye visualizations, breathing processes, and movement processes.

The element of surprise. Considering the fact that Aerie was 15 years old and that many of its core learning activities trace back to Mind Dynamics, founded in 1968, it was surprising that their processes have not become stale. In part, this was due to the respect learners had for a request that they not share specific descriptions of the learning activities with people who have not been to the seminar. Over the years Aerie has reduced the scope of this request to cover just the three processes they identify as "discovery processes." The learning in these three processes would be impacted by a lack of surprise. The participants' descriptions of how these experiences assisted their learning helped convey the significance of the discovery learning activities. There was a succession through ET, with the first discovery process helping the learners become more aware of who was present in the group, who wanted to lead, who was outspoken, who was distant and remote. A variety of individual roles were invoked as the group was confronted with a competition that engaged some, frustrated others, and bored still others. Candace identified this process as one in which the group storms (as in the Norm-Storm-Form-Perform model for group process). The learning from this single exercise was significant for most participants. Most of the new awareness drawn from the activity happened after the exercise itself though the lecture, reflection, writing, and sharing. It became an activity
that individuals kept mining for additional meaning throughout the seminar. Participants came back the second day appearing more engaged; some looked tense and anxious. The overall tenor of the group seemed more focused, as if they did not want to repeat the mistakes made the day before.

The second discovery process marked the end of day two, a day focused on vulnerability. Most participants left blissful and happy at the end of the day. They appeared less judgmental of one another, having been through a day in which many stories were shared and tears evoked. There was a different sense of acceptance, empathy, and potential in the group at this point. The edges and boundaries melted and reformed further out, as the group became more inclusive. Participants returned the third morning looking physically more relaxed, appearing excited, and seeming to be more linked up with one another, as if they had discovered one another and, in turn themselves.

The third day focused on integrity. It did not have a discovery process of its own, but shared one that overlapped with the fourth day. In this activity the group truly performed as a group.

For many participants the learning activities were surprisingly challenging and different from anything they had experienced before. This seemed as true for individuals like Tammy, who had never done a workshop with a personal growth focus before, as for the counselors, who might be expected to have done some of this type of work in preparing for their profession.

**Developing trust and integrity.** Interestingly, trust development in the group began with the breaking of an implied, unstated trust in an exercise known as the mingle. Participants were asked to write about a difficult event in their life. Then they were asked to stand in a cluster and begin exchanging their sheets of paper in pairs, to read each other's forms in silence, and move to another person. This process continued for a time with the facilitator directing the group at different points to pause and notice how they selected whom to share with, and whether they preferred to choose or be chosen. Then the facilitator suggested they try the
opposite approach. And he asked that they notice whether they were concerned about issues like spelling, handwriting, or doing it right. When the process ended and participants returned to their seats, some participants expressed anger at having been tricked into sharing more than they would have if they had known they were going to share their writing. This discussion set the parameters for trust throughout the rest of the seminar. The facilitators consistently conveyed two messages at this point. One was about taking risks. “Would you have risked as much if you had known exactly what lay ahead?” the facilitators asked. In this request they were asking participants to invest them with the authority of the experienced river guide, the one who knows the best route through the challenges ahead. By demonstration of the mingle they have already shown that they know how to manage the group through a difficult process. Their approach, after all, took the group farther than it would have risked had each individual used his or her own judgement about what was safe to risk or share. Then, after the basis of their authority had been acknowledged, the facilitators made a commitment to always let participants know if writing was to be shared in advance from that point forward. In this action they established safety for the journal writing encouraged throughout the seminar, and they asked that in exchange for this agreement their leadership be accepted. With these boundaries established the group began to relax. They had been told that they were always at choice, they had been asked to trust their leader, and they had safely negotiated the first challenge in the course and found that it was not so terrible an ordeal.

Shawna related how the sharing itself in the mingle was not “a big deal to me,” but that the feeling of being accepted by others who read her story was “cool.” She made a similar comment when speaking of the acceptance she felt in the second discovery exercise. Bob commented about the mingle using sports terminology. He referred to it being like the “cut” when forming varsity and B-squad teams. He said, “it starts to break down the walls.” While in this case no one was actually cut from
the team, they did begin to establish the group norms after this first activity.

A few participants never entirely invested their trust in the processes of the seminar. Karen shared how even in TO she was still expecting to be tricked. She said, “I was pretty sure [a facilitator] had told him to stand out there too!” describing a situation in an activity where one participant had figured out a solution and was trying to communicate it to the group non-verbally. But this level of suspicion seemed to be atypical and the willingness to trust the process in the group increased noticeably after this first learning activity.

**Challenges and progress.** The growth and expansion of some participants was a tangible, visible process of unfolding as remarkable in its speed and beauty as the budding of an amaryllis bulb in January. From the mingle on day one through the closing ceremony on day four, ET was designed to build a pressure sufficient to keep participants immersed in the learning. Every moment was preciously applied to assist participants in diving deeper into the exploration of who they were and how they wanted to be in the world. At the same time, they were encouraged to stretch out of their self-imposed limitations. Stretch and compress. There was an alternating rhythm to the learning activities that supported learners in taking risks (stretching) and in going inward to examine their own behaviors and past actions (compressing). The use of the term compression may seem an odd word choice in this context. I chose it for its connotation of building pressure like the energy of a compressed spring, the pressure cooker as in Heiftz’s concept of a containment vessel, or the weights used by a deep sea diver to overcome buoyancy, allowing him to sink more deeply into the material. Care was required in handling the build-up and release of the pressure in a manner that assisted growth and progress through the learning material. Evoking painful memories and creating stressful challenges did not in themselves lead to growth or new learning. It was the processing that followed such experiences that supported and directed the learning. Difficult learning activities were preceded by and followed by reflective periods in which
participants wrote about their learning, shared new insights gained from the experience, or simply sat in reflective silence listening to music or the facilitator summarizing the content. Silent breaks were occasionally used to prepare for activity and homework assignments. Participants were asked to write how the learning activity paralleled their own lives. These activities further shaped and focused the emotional and physical experience elicited by particular activities such as dyads and the discovery process. Ellen said, “It pushes pretty hard.” She says, comparing it to counseling,

Counseling has had to do with the cognitive piece. And it doesn’t bring about the same sort of change, or it can over time, but certainly not in the space of time that was allotted for this.

Again you see the argument that the learning had been compressed. In developing learning material for adult learners, I suspect we often lose our audience more quickly by failing to sufficiently challenge the learners than by not compressing enough material of substance to engage the learners’ whole attention. John Seely Brown, in “Growing up digital” wrote about the extent to which younger adult learners are accustomed to multi-tasking in a rich context (2000). Martha, a participant, spoke of the challenge presented by many of the learning activities. She said, “every single one I would have skipped.” This is where the role of the backup team members became particularly important. Team members acted like seed crystals in the learning processes. By demonstrating full participation in the learning activities they seeded a deeper engagement first within their small groups, and then within the larger group.

Provokes emotion. One of the clearest examples of how engaging with the learning activities emotionally supported the learning came from an intern who shared his experience with a judgement exercise. Participants were asked to share their judgements of one another by taking turns addressing each fellow participant around a circle saying, “When I look at you I see [a negative judgement] that reminds me of me.” Many participants pointed to this as among the hardest activities in the seminar. At the end of the exercise learners were given a card with their
own comments written on the card and the facilitator drew the connection back to how our judgements of others are actually self-judgements. Nevertheless, some participants heard information about how they were perceived by others that was difficult to accept, and once acknowledged led to significant learning as illustrated in this excerpt:

For me there's a process ... people share with you what their experience of you is, judgement? “My judgement of you is... dah dah dah.” And I was able to shrug off the first time someone told me that I was [pause] pompous, isn't the right word, but it was something along that line. But after about the third person said it, I realized that that's what they were getting and there was a reason for that. And I, I was, it really upset me. I got very upset, I was hurt, I was confused, and I laid in my motel bed that night all night long, couldn't sleep, and I kept thinking, that's not who I am, that's not how I want to be perceived and I want to do it differently. And for me, that was the transformative, of all my work with Aerie really, was that one night after that one process in Crossover. Crossover to me was hugely, had a huge impact and I just, man I came in, I came out the other end so differently than I was doing it when I walked in and it was the biggest transformation in my life. And it was to that one process that I attribute the whole thing.

The emotional processes were more than just cathartic experiences for some learners, though catharsis may have been valuable in and of itself, as Martha suggested when she shared the relief she felt after ET. Karen, too, expressed a similar feeling of relief of a burden, saying it was “uncomfortable, but once over....” Every participant experienced the various learning activities from the perspective of their own life story. Most struggled with emotions like trust and fear at some point, some struggled with openly expressing both positive and negative emotions like being vulnerable, sad, angry, joyful, confident, or powerful. Sometimes they recognized their own emotions when they were reflected back from another participant sharing a similar experience or acting out a behavior that the first participant recognized in their own actions. This came up in the sharing around alcohol and addictions in one seminar. It was clear watching the group as a whole that many participants were seeing connections to emotional hot buttons in their own lives as they watched a
participant confronting the role addiction was playing in her life. Large
group sharing presented many such emotional learning opportunities.
One participant said, “I really saw her fear...I could relate to her fear and I
really felt a loss at her not participating.”

A discussion about emotion in the seminars would be incomplete
without looking at anger. Just as some individuals reacted to the
pressure created in the learning activities with fear and disassociation at
certain points, others moved into anger. But again the emotion was
funneled to serve the learning. When the feeling of anger came up,
participants were encouraged to process it in the room. The facilitator
helped clarify to whom the anger was directed, what feelings might lay
underneath the anger, if any, and, finally, what results the person with
the anger wanted to bring about. This type of interaction was more likely
to come up in TO than in ET. Also, because this structured way of
approaching anger management was unfamiliar to most participants,
some participants worked through their feelings of anger alone, through
the writing and reflection processes without ever bringing it up directly in
the room. The emphasis placed on self-examination, looking at personal
patterns, particularly in the second seminar, helped participants examine
the way angry feelings play out in other areas of their lives. Generally,
participants who described feeling angry at certain points in the seminar
did not express these feelings directly during the sharing. The anger was
expressed in a variety of other ways, typically as a shutting down,
disassociating behavior, and sometimes in a very closed body language.

At one point, I became suddenly very angry during a participant’s sharing
about a suicide attempt. In response, I found myself pulling away from
the group physically (I had been standing behind the back row of
participants with other team members and across from the facilitators). I
moved to the wall behind the facilitators to cool off. Then I thought about
my choice of position, both separated from the group and out of the line of
sight of the facilitators, and I realized I wanted to avoid the possibility of
having to “process” my anger in front of the group. Feeling a strong
emotional response in a place where I had been specifically instructed to
watch for and notice personal patterns, created a rare learning laboratory in which I could first notice one feeling (anger) as it was evoked and then observe my behavioral response to the feeling shift as my anger with the participant transformed into a second emotion—fear of being facilitated in front of the large group.

**Balancing interaction as equals.** Participants came to the seminars with differing senses of self-worth and personal power. Yet participants often spoke of the sense of finding themselves equal as they proceeded through certain learning activities. The small group process, in particular, was effective in balancing power across the group by assuring that each participant was given an equal share of time. In the large group a few individuals typically spoke and shared more than others. Another group of participants spoke out during sharing a few times, and a few participants never spoke out, unless specifically asked to in the context of an all-group activity. Two days into ET, Tammy said, “I’ve learned a lot from...someone that you wouldn’t think would have a lot to offer you because your lives are so different.” Ellen explained how different this type of learning from peers was from the learning of a therapeutic relationship, where the relationship between therapist and client is inherently unequal. David, Peter, and others said they found it hard to speak in the large group because they felt they might be imposing themselves on group time or repeating themselves. Robin spoke of how the effort made to balance the genders in small group was also important. In TO the learning partner pairs were another opportunity to practice interacting within level relationships, though the degree to which pairs succeed in addressing power differentials varied; the learning partners were perhaps less successful than small groups in this regard, because these interactions were not facilitated. Most of the time spent in these pairs happened outside the seminar room over breaks. I saw some relationships in which the power appeared imbalanced. But Peter spoke of how his relationship with his learning partner was one of equals, even though it was uncomfortable for him to drop the authority granted him by default through his age and gender.
The learning activities provided a variety of ways to balance power relationships in groups. Participants were asked, especially in TO, to "try something different." If they felt a natural inclination to lead, they were told they should follow, and if they were generally more comfortable observing rather than participating, they were told to participate first, to be the first one up to speak, or to try speaking before they knew what they wanted to say. As each learner stretched to use an unaccustomed style they became equal—beginners acting outside their comfort zones. If the first week of every quarter in our colleges was spent teaching students to do this with their cohort classmates, just imagine how rich the dialogue might be during the rest of the quarter!

No one right way. Another feature of the various learning activities was that they were open-ended in their design, and flexible in accommodating many types of learners. As can be expected, some learners responded more to particular exercises than to others. And even in those exercises in which I expected a universal response, I was sometimes surprised to learn that a particular participant had a sharply contrasting experience. Karen's experience with the second discovery process was one such example. Phrases voiced by others like: "that was pretty powerful," "one of the most wonderful processes I've ever done in my life;" "when I left I was on such a high I couldn't sleep for two hours! I was truly joyful;" contrasted sharply with Karen's comment, "I left feeling crappy and in pain."

Some participants were more open to certain processes than others. For example, there was a breathing process in TO that led some participants to have deep emotional experiences. However, I noticed that certain of the participants I interviewed who held rigid or strongly religious world views would simply sleep or relax during these activities, remarking that they had not found them particularly significant.

Another way this concept of "no right way" played out in the learning was that it freed the learner to risk and explore. Miles described coming to this awareness. Finding right answers had been a governing pattern in his life, and learning to act without first having assessed all the possible
ramifications was opening up new opportunities for him to connect more meaningfully with other people.

But not everyone reached this awareness. When a participant held to a rigid concept of what should happen—that there was a “right way” in a particular activity—they often expressed that the learning activity was less effective for them. When I asked Trudy about the types of things she had learned in her small group, Trudy indicated, “no, I didn’t learn anything.” As I listened to her description I was struck by the fact that she mentioned having had a different small group originally. This was not actually the case, in that once participants formed a small group they normally stayed with the same small group throughout the seminar. However, two factors may have contributed to her feeling that her actual small group was not the “right” small group. During the group formation process, where participants picked their small group leader and stood by their choice, there was often an imbalance between the groups either in size, gender, or when two related individuals end up in the same group. When this happened the facilitator pointed out the problem, but the participants themselves worked out who stayed or moved to another group. Trudy’s comments suggested that in such a situation she chose to move, but a part of her resisted that choice, making it a “wrong” choice, and in turn subtly influencing her experience and satisfaction with the small group process.

Summary

The field of transformational learning, the individual learners, and the context all come together to form a rich medium for growth and learning. Facilitation, structure, content and process generate a wave-like motion that unlocks potential in the learner. Skilled facilitation stimulates a visioning of something larger than what has been previously imagined by the learner. Structure provides the holding vessel in which the learner may safely explore membership in a relational system. Content gives
learners the tools to apply in bringing about change in their personal reality. Process (made up of learning activities) gives the learner an opportunity to test and practice their newly acquired skills before taking them out into the more difficult terrain of existing relationships at home, work, or school. No one element of the four will suffice, but taken together they support the synergy of transformational learning.
CHAPTER FIVE – SYNERGY

Meaning is in its origins, a physical activity (grasping, seeing), a social activity (it requires another), a survival activity (in doing it, we live). Meaning, understood in this way, is the primary human motion, irreducible... Meaning depends on someone who recognizes you. Not meaning, by definition, is utterly lonely. (Kegan, 1982)

Introduction

Synergy is that process—set up by a well designed context—by which a perspective shift is ignited in the learner. As a group of learners begins to form a learning community there is an energy that spirals out from the newly formed web of relationships. Synergy encourages a deeper level of learning than can be achieved when each learner works in isolation. In a synergistic environment the attention and focus of the learner shifts outward to encompass a broader perspective, while at the same time this attention drives the learner inward to explore deeper aspects of the self. As connections to self and to others increase, learners are motivated to engage their attention even more. And so synergy spirals in a transformative context, creating a flow, intensity, and opportunity to reflect uncommon in more traditional educational contexts.

Attention/focus

Attention is the gateway through which content becomes transformational learning. This category explores how readily information flows within the learner (i.e., from the physical senses and the internal systems Damasio (1999) calls the “internal milieu” to the brain or mind of the learner) as well between the participant and his or her physical and social environment. Attention and focus form a dynamic, and are the
precursor to energy. Though action may occur without focus, the energy will soon dissipate without some force binding it. Like Capra's concept of strange attractors, the category of attention serves as a centering focus. There is an implication of stillness about the concept that makes it difficult to place within a larger category of action, but this is where the concept belongs. When describing the characteristics of those weak in the spontaneity cornerstone, one of the facilitators said, "Individuals weak in this cornerstone will often stand very still, but there is much going on in their minds unseen by those around them." While a dream can be full of riotous action, to the observer, the dreamer appears relaxed and still.

There were descriptions of this attention and focus in the interviews. Miles described it in TurnOver (TO) as a back and forth movement between noticing a personal pattern and wondering why he exhibited the pattern. Jennifer expressed a similar curiosity directed outward toward another participant. Trudy talked about learning to split her focus between her client and her awareness of herself. But she described this feeling as being one hundred percent in the moment with both herself and the other person. The split focus, then, was not so much a divided focus as it was a conjoining of two focal points; it was as if one had zoomed out until both entities filled the field, instead of alternating between two subjects. Trudy explained that this shift in awareness was mutual, with the client getting to see all of the counselor as well. This ran counter to her professional training, since to work this way presented a danger of counter-transference. But she said having made this shift, she felt a great peacefulness. Ellen, another counselor, also talked of how she recognized she was not being fully present with her clients when she was mentally juggling several other tasks during client discharge meetings. By not being fully present, in the moment, she felt she was violating her professional integrity. She was not "meeting the client's most basic needs." When she changed her practice in this regard she noticed an immediate reduction in her level of stress, and she was still accomplishing the same workload.
Katy zeroed in on another aspect of attention and where we place it. She referred to the “being/doing” lecture and how it helpful her to see that she was a “being” first—that her identity was not truly in the “doing” or the things done. Later she talked about the experience of shifting a habitual response to receiving, rather than giving, after Candace had asked the group to shift their attention to whichever one they had not been doing. Robin talked of learning how her attention on the past affected her experience of the present. Karen spoke of how the writing on the boards held her attention better than if something were “canned,” as in a PowerPoint presentation. She described the way she was engaged in the chart writing process, because it was literally created in front of her eyes, in the present moment.

When participants came back into the seminar room from a break, some were mentally preparing to share in the large group, rehearsing their lines with their focus turned inward. As the seminars proceeded, especially in TO, several participants talked about getting up to share without knowing what they were going to say. David, Miles and Peter all described doing this. It was interesting that they were all men with issues around spontaneity. They were following the dictate to do something different; they were each trying to speak from the present moment, and these moments appeared to be significant turning points for these individuals. As an observer, I watched emotions that suggested strong feelings play across their faces. The word that most comes to mind for me as I recollect these instants was that they were moments of surrender, moments in which the controlling aspect of the cognitive mind gave way to the unfamiliar territory of the emotional mind. From this point forward in the seminar these individuals seemed more open and approachable by others, as if a friendlier and more trusting part of themselves had been released and allowed to come to play in the seminar.

Martha talked about how a tip from another participant at a point near the end of ET when she was feeling highly stressed, helped her shift her focus from worry about the event ahead to being in the present moment. She described this shift when she said, “For the first time I felt
it, it wasn't just all in my head, I felt it.” And she went on to say that it was a big shift for her and, while she still felt anxious, she was able to think more clearly, and was no longer just spinning inside her head. Then, when the dreaded event actually began, she was so totally engaged in the experience of others that she felt energized and no longer scared.

A term that came up often in the interviews was being “checked-out.” Facilitators would use the term when engaging with a participant, they would ask, “Are you here or checked-out?” I struggled to understand what people were doing when they checked out in the seminar. I puzzled over why anyone would want to check-out from a process I found so personally fascinating! For some participants it appeared to be a shield that went up between themselves and a perceived danger (such as a facilitator probing too close to the bone for information that threatened to expose the lie in a cherished belief). For some it was a tactic developed to deflect demands of others (spouses, bosses, etc.) by communicating a message of “don’t rely on me, I might not be up to it.” Since an important part of the seminar content was centered on noticing personal patterns, checking out was a pattern that had to be recognized and named before it could be changed.

When Bill was sharing in front of the room I sometimes watched a shift in his eyes and posture that suggested he was no longer present with the facilitator or group. The change was subtle and I would not have been able to recognize it if the facilitators had not been actively teaching Bill to notice this pattern. He talked about learning to notice how he checked-out when certain feelings came up. He gave an interesting example of how he was applying his new awareness in volunteer work at a nursing home where many of the patients had age or disease related impairments to their attention and memory. Bill read to patients and he found that the more he attended to his own awareness, and avoided checking out, the better his audience did. This seemed to be a good environment for him to practice the new skill and to see the difference it made in his ability to connect with others. Having recently recovered from a serious illness
himself, and a long enforced isolation for health reasons, he had been struggling to build closer connections with other people.

There were several participants among my interviewees who referred to their own learning about this disassociating behavior. David talked about wondering whether his choice to hold back in the Powerline process was a deliberate choice or a variation on checking out. He said, “Like I don’t want to get in the middle of this, let somebody else do all the work.” Evident in his remark was the self-examination of attention as he considered his response to an uncomfortable process in which participants were asked to publicly rank themselves in relation to one another. He was noticing and considering the possibility that he checked-out as a means of avoiding the work, instead of it being a deliberate choice to do something different (his first argument).

Shawna described how having a withhold or secret from the group kept her from feeling present and led to the comment from the facilitators that she was not playing 100%; at least a part of her attention was checked-out. I noticed that one day when I had a withhold with the facilitators, I had difficulty focusing on even very simple tasks. A part of my awareness was wrestling with how I was going to address my concern and my attention was not fully available in the present moment. Martha talked about how when she struggled with the concept that “all events are neutral” she lost it (her focus in the room) for hours and hours. This was visible in how she pulled back physically from the group, retreated against a back wall and avoided others on breaks.

In summary, these examples of attention and focus illustrate how readily information flowed both within the participant (connecting mind, body, and heart) and between the participant and others in the environment. Attention was lost when participants checked-out. On the one hand, as a teacher it might seem that you want to keep most of your audience’s attention all the time (i.e. Candace referred to noticing when more than one or two people are checked-out and calling a break at that point). But reading participants’ comments closely revealed that people often checked out during moments of stress, and that when they became
aware of this behavioral pattern it had powerful implications for them, such as for the counselors, who changed their practice with clients in response to this noticing. Attention and focus are dynamic not static. When attention stops, a person is likely either asleep or in a suspended state. An important part of the learning around self-awareness was noticing the state of attention, and with practice exerting more control over this state.

Connection to and witnessing others

Connection to others and the role of witnessing and being witnessed by others appeared to be essential factors in the formation of a transformative learning community. The category came up early in the coding and was the most prevalent coding category with over 50 separate passages—double the number of entries of most other large categories. On the first day of ET participants formed as a group when they interacted in the room, on breaks, and as they selected their small groups. The freshly formed group stormed in the last process of the day, the Red/Black exercise (a variation on the prisoner’s dilemma simulation). Candace said the group really began to work as a group when they returned the next morning, and I would concur based on my observations. Certainly participant willingness to share with one another was much higher at this point and the depth of the issues increased.

Sam talked about how the establishment of agreements created community. He said,

There were 15 [agreements] when I was in the seminar.... And I think simplifying them...it does two things. One of them is create safety for people to say what they want in the room and they relax into it as it plays out more and more and notice that we don't third-party talk. And so that's a big piece. One of them, "I'll be here. That's okay, I've got it, so we're all in this together." So it creates community. "I'll participate fully, I'll follow the instructions. I'll stay away from drugs and alcohol. And I won't talk about other people's experiences." Pretty simple to say, "Okay, if everybody does this,
it's safe." Now, I think that they on some level wait to see if all of that's true or not.

Sam also shared that he thought participants came in looking for ways to create a greater sense of community in their lives. The number of participant comments on this topic suggested this was true for many. Clearly, the facilitators recognized the importance of forming a community in the seminar space, though they did not particularly emphasize connection and community in their interviews. However, the participants certainly did. While I never asked a specific question about community and connection to others, except for a question about the impact of there being couples in the seminar, the topic came up in nearly every interview as participants shared their learning experiences.

Most participants came to the seminar alone, though in every seminar there were a few couples or family members. The majority of the participants walked into a room full of strangers the first day. In several instances backup team members were related to a participant (i.e., my youngest sister was a participant in one seminar). Early in the first day, the facilitator suggested that those who did know each other sit apart and pick different small groups. This instruction offered participants an opportunity to practice new skills in new and uncontaminated relationships.

Many participants expressed amazement and pleasure at the connection that they felt with new people. Tammy, a federal judge, remarked on how surprised she was,

You look at all these faces and they're... and everybody's so different and there's young people and older like me [laugh]. But I remember looking at one young man and thinking "Oh, what am I going to have in common with him?" and I've just bonded so much with him and it's just a total surprise to me how I can just, you know, feel such love for someone I didn't even know and that's so different than me and it's just a, it's wonderful. I'm really enjoying that.

Her expectations of the seminar were for something a little more mundane, perhaps more like a typical management training experience,
For me it has been a little different than what I expected. I knew that it would be some personal growth things but somehow I was just thinking we'd each be growing in our own little space. And I didn't know there would be as much interaction. And I just, I have, I have just been amazed and very happy about the relationships that you develop here.

When there is more than one person present, there is potential for a synergy. When a collection of connections between different persons is formed a new entity, the “relationship,” springs into being. In physics, when we move from packets to waves, everything connects: string theory, the universe, the web of a living system. This then is why I placed “connection to others” under the heading of synergy. While there is a skill to be learned, there is also a special kind of energy created by the formation and work of a group that impacts learning deeply. Peter described how group process created such a special dynamic:

Well, I had an “aha” also. I think it was, I've been trying to think when exactly did that happen? And I think it was yesterday morning at some point, and of course, well it's one of those things when I look at it it's like well, Duh! You know, only when I ask my wife she said “of course” you know but I didn't get it. And um, I'm trying to think, well why now? What was the impetus for this, what generated that? But I think it’s the environment. I mean, it’s the sharing actually. There’s an energy that’s created by a number of people coming together, doing a creative and inner work. I mean [chuckle] that’s why people join religions after all, because there is an energy to that.

For the quiet participants, some of the more introverted temperaments, the experience of connection in the seminar seemed to be profound. But even those individuals who identified themselves as outgoing extroverts felt the connection to others in the seminar was something to remark upon. When asked about the feelings that she was most aware of by the end of the second day of ET, Jennifer said it was the tenderness and love that they had created out of a group of strangers that stood out for her. Another participant, Bill, described his experience of connection to others as life changing:

ET helped me get out of that and regain life, regain my love for life...Through touch and seeing that people, each individual was a living, breathing human being, just not an entity occupying space
with me. That's the way it's been for many years, especially during my illness and recovery, that people around me even my close ones, are just entities in space in reality. And the whole sense of presence, of being present, didn't seem like it was real. It seemed like it was transitional. People around me were just entities coming and going. But the hug line brought me back. That was amazing. Really amazing, and I found that's when my feelings, the affection, of, came back, the hugging and looking. I just, just turned external. It was kind of weird. There were a couple of those gals in there, and other women and a couple of the men that I um really got close to for a short time in that process. It was, it was kind, you would go to each, I would go to each person in the hug line and re-establish, establish contact with a human being.

Karen's experience of the Stop-Look-Choose process was significantly different than all the others. It was so different that I was startled with her first comment about it. It was a good awareness check for me to notice my half-conscious assumption that others experienced processes much the same as I do. Karen said,

In the hug thing, a whole lot of stress. I did not enjoy it. I left feeling crappy and in pain. But, and I felt really bad, and I started to cry at the end when I realized that instead of being vulnerable to the point of allowing people to give me a hug or me giving somebody else a hug, I would rather create great pain in my body [referring to pain in her back and shoulders].

In this case we saw an individual with strong inhibitions about touching other people struggle with an activity that was outside her comfort-zone. By the time I interviewed her after TO she had increased her comfort with hugging to the point of exclaiming she was now having 30 second hugs with her husband daily! She described a second exercise from TO, that involved being touched and had a similar theme to Stop-Look-Choose, very differently:

And also the other thing which impacted me, which I liked was the touch, the loving respectful touch, because I was very nervous about that, you know even though I had been working on this intimacy thing, that still was an issue with me, especially trust, because I was a peeper the whole time, you know. I was. I knew somebody was going to hit me in the head, I don't know what, it was just a feeling I always have when my eyes are closed. But I said you know what, it was trust the process and I closed my eyes and I didn't peek. There were a couple of times when I wanted to, but I thought, no don't, you know. You need to, to get over this.
And I really did like that. It was very respectful and I felt that’s how it was being given, you know so it was very nice to be able to enjoy that and say this was all right, I like this, you know. So I was giving myself permission to let that down and enjoy that. That was really cool.”

Learning partners, buddies, were another source for connection. Several people commented about how they found aspects of their real life partner in their learning partner and they used the learning partner as a sounding board for issues they were exploring in their primary relationships. Shawna mentioned how she felt she was standing in for her learning partner’s husband.

Shawna also mentioned that she made few connections in TO, compared to ET, and that this was her choice. She attributed the difference partly to the withhold that she mentioned earlier. By design TO was a much more introspective seminar than ET, and personal relationships with others were emphasized much less. On the other hand the concept of a functioning team was emphasized more in TO.

Jennifer, in contrast, went looking for connection during ET even when meeting with resistance and walls. She found that where as in the past she might have avoided someone who seemed remote that it might be worth her while to “go brush up against a wall and see if it gives a little.” She seemed to have learned not to take the perception of defensive behavior at face value, but to probe gently for the chance to connect.

I expected participants to talk about feeling connected with their small groups, but interestingly comments about small groups and their significance were subdued. Ellen’s description of her small group, when asked about its impact on her learning, was typical:

I really connected with the small group leader, I really, really liked [leader] a lot. And one of the other group members I think I felt a pretty strong connection with. A couple of others not quite so much and one was a man who was probably not working at the same level of depth and then the other, just a young girl, who too was where she needed to be, but just the maturational differences I mean you know what’s a factor in her life and her own level of insight which is usually less in young people that age, not always, but I think it probably meant that some of the small group work was not as powerful.
I facilitated a small group in two seminars and in one the sense of cohesiveness seemed much stronger than in the other. Perhaps the uneven response in the small groups reflected uneven levels of sharing. When one person in a group of five to six people shared deeply, and another did not, it was possible that the imbalance affected the development of trust.

People found many different ways to connect in the seminars. In addition to learning partners and small groups, there were the resistance dinner groups, partners in different dyads, and Showtime groups. But sharing in large group, whether through one of the discovery processes or large group sharing, stood out as the way in which connection with large numbers of participants happened most quickly. Miles explained the impact of sharing in the large group:

Well, you've finally exposed yourself and it's hard to really relate closely with people who you don't know, who haven't exposed themselves. You get some of that, I mean, I related most quickly with people who got up early in the seminar and struggled in front of the big group because you felt for them and it was easy then to feel closer to them. Of course the people who were quiet, or sit back, you don't really get to know so it's hard to feel close to them.

In Miles' comment there was a theme of feeling exposed, vulnerable, and then experiencing a release through the sharing experience. The worst was behind the participant after sharing. Bill talked of how strange it felt, "I found it really new sharing my feelings and um, uh basically my life with strangers." Bob described the peculiar feeling of being intimate, sharing feelings about his relationship with his wife, in a large group:

B: The sharing in large group, being vulnerable, was very valuable for me.
A: Was this a new experience, being vulnerable in this way?
B: No, I'm used to public speaking you know. But it was new to talk about such intimate ideas this way in front of a group.

Shawna also described this vulnerability when she spoke about the experience of sharing her sexual orientation near the end of ET. The act of sharing at an intimate level felt new to those who did so in the
seminars and it changed their interaction with the rest of the group from that point forward.

The sharing brought about a closer feeling of connection with others both on the part of the one who shared and for those who heard the sharing. Robin said:

I definitely, I would say that I felt more connected with people, having put myself out there and I felt more confident in walking up to people and saying, "Hi, how's it going? What do you think so far? What do you do in real life?" You know, just initiating conversation.

Miles talked about how his TO group struggled to re-create the earlier closeness from ET.

The group wanted to be closer together. I think we all felt we were missing that. Something that we must have really enjoyed out of ET that we weren't getting out of TO. Everyone was pretty much aligned to it pretty quickly. And I think we all kind of looked at each other in the eyes and said I really mean it. I really do want that, we all really want that. And I think we all kind of realized that if we want that we were going to have to all act like we want it.

In TO the group of participants took on more responsibility for creating the experience of connection, while in ET the structure made it almost impossible to resist connection. This provided a good example of progression in the learning activities as the learners developed efficacy and became more accountable for creating their own experiences. Shawna spoke of making a choice not to be as connected in TO as she was in ET. Either way, the learners were expected to take ownership for the level of connection they experienced as they moved into TO. In contrast, in ET many learners expressed awe and amazement at the connections they experienced, but did not convey that they felt they had created these experiences themselves.

Efforts at sustaining the connections created in the seminars varied considerably. After most seminars there was a flurry of email directed towards the whole group of participants. Within a few weeks or a month most of this activity died away. Many of the participants attended connection groups in their communities or started a group, if one did not
exist. I attended one such meeting with participants after the August ET in Grants Pass. Generally, it seems that efforts to hold the large group together after a seminar quickly failed as people returned to their routines. But this said, it was clear that some lasting friendships were formed in these seminars. I certainly have retained a number of friendships and there was evidence in several interviews of on-going email, phone, and written correspondence between participants who felt a particular affinity for one another. Participants struggled with how to continue working in groups outside the structure of the seminars and were not always successful at sustaining the energy it took to keep a group going for very long. The Aerie organization encouraged and supported these groups in forming, but the groups were independent entities; there was no imposed structure or curriculum. From my vantage point of having been involved briefly with such a group in the Seattle area, I think they were a useful bridge that helped participants practice some of the new learnings gained in the seminar in a safe and supportive context during the period when the learning still felt fresh and somewhat unnatural. I should note that these groups were not closed clubs or recruiting entities, but more like an informal support group. Another similar support group formed in workplaces in which a number of employees had been sent to the training. Trudy described her experience of moving from the outside to the inside of such a group:

It's totally different now...and I always wondered, you know, when they'd go off and talk or they'd say something in passing that you could just see the energy, the electricity just pass through them and wow...That's what I just got when I said that and I never, it didn't even occur to me that that was, I was on the outside before but now I'm on the inside of that group. I don't think about the others that are on the outside and probably need to be aware of that.

In the seminar there were sometimes participants who clearly did not want to be there, but were sent by an employer. I suspect that the view from the outside can look alien and even frightening to some. As I watched several participants in different ET seminars struggle with this issue, some individuals appeared to be frightened at looking inward in the
way that these seminars encouraged. If an individual had severe self-esteem deficiencies or felt inherently “bad” or unlovable, it may have been very disturbing to be asked to spend days in introspective self-examination. When these individuals felt they had been forced or entrapped into attending, some spent their energy maintaining a defensive, rebellious posture and when that failed they retreated, either literally by leaving, or by only engaging their intellect, but disconnecting from the emotional content of the seminar.

One of my questions pertained directly to doing the seminar as part of a couple or watching others in the seminar that came as a couple. These couples were important models in the groups. Some of them did a lot of relationship work in front of the group, where one or another of the partners would get up and talk about their own issues with the relationship, their ambivalence or challenges. The facilitator explored first with one, and then the partner, the messages that lay hidden below the surface of their communication. The facilitator modeled the language of ownership and respect, and allowed whoever was talking to say what they were feeling without interruption or a counter response. The partner could listen without planning their next defensive or offensive posture.

Many of the participants interviewed were participating in the seminars as part of a couple (David, Shawna, Peter, Martha, Kathy, and Bob). Participants talked about times in which having a partner present was helpful and others when it was not. Shawna liked having a shared experience in which they learned the same vocabulary, though at times she felt constrained with her partner present. Peter talked about being in synch with his partner, “simpatico,” to the extent that their ups and downs in the seminar seemed to synchronize. Ellen mentioned the only real drawback. She said that because she was there as part of a couple she did not make quite as many connections with others in the group as she would have if she had gone by herself. Because the issues of being in a close relationship were so universal, everyone learned from the couples in the various seminars. Whether a participant saw her own relationship, that of her parents, or perhaps the dynamic of an ex-relationship, there
was great learning to be had as she watched skillful facilitation take place at the front of the room.

The most significant connections developed when one person stepped forward to share intimately in the large group and others were witness, sometimes, to a "critical incident." In those moments we seemed to be privy to a glimpse into another's soul. Sam called the seminars a mirror to life. They mirrored both the good and the bad. Karen talked about seeing people as separate from their past and included herself in the description:

Part I think that was really good for me is that I knew I was not that person anymore. I had left that person behind who did a lot of those things, you know, a lot of the horrible things, or the things that I judged as horrible. I left her six years ago. And so when I heard other people saying the things that they said, I didn't judge them in any way. And for the most part just took them as the person that I had gotten to know them as. And I had thrown my own perception back on them saying that's how they're seeing me, which you know may or may not be true. But that gave me a great level of comfort to go, you know what? Not everybody's that person any more, you know? Why am I holding myself to a standard higher than I would hold anybody else, look what I've done to myself?

Seeing one's self reflected back in others and learning to judge the self less harshly for having seen this reflection was an important aspect of the sharing experience. Peter called this learning "vicarious learning."

Some participants spoke of witnessing the courage and determination exhibited by others and feeling inspired to work at a higher level themselves. In one seminar there was an individual coping with a substance abuse problem. While it was difficult to feel she was learning or moving through the learning, it was easy to see that many others in the group were learning from her. Many had either coped with alcoholism themselves or within their family structure. These participants learned to look at co-dependent relationships differently as they witnessed this one individual's struggle to understand what the facilitator and the process were calling for. Martha tells of the impact on her:

When she stood up there in front that last confrontational time, [the facilitator] being so reasonable and [the other participant]
being so unreasonable and my seeing that yeah, I do that with my own stuff. I wanted to do that about Showtime. I wasn’t going to do Showtime, I wasn’t going to do that, I couldn’t do that. And I could see her standing up there you know just sticking to her stuff and I could see me sticking to my stuff, being just as obstinate as she had been. And without her example I’m not sure I could have done Showtime. And seeing [her] fear mirroring my own fear about how much I would miss if I gave in to those fears. And how sad that would be.

Robin shared a similar insight about her interactions with her father. By witnessing another participant share a story similar to hers she learned to see beneath her father’s expressed behavior to his motivations and his primary intention.

Martha talked about witnessing the work of other participants in the front of the room without judging them:

I spent so many years as a missionary and with all these people, but they were out to save the world you know. And they had this mission and that was different and what I found was, one of the things that turned me off so much about organized religion, is that there’s this huge, huge judgmental, a “we” and “them” side to it...They [Wing’s facilitators] let people be themselves.”

We are so accustomed to responding to people’s images that we often make assumptions about our own worth in relation to the polished images of those around us. Robin described seeing this pattern:

I think safe for me was understanding and hearing that we all had common goals and common fears and that I wasn’t isolated in my self-doubt even though these two women, I picture them to be incredibly self-confident and capable women and that they have self-doubt and so I guess commonality was what created safeness for me.

Then there was Ben, who broke down in tears while witnessing another participant’s transformation during one of the last processes in ET. He and the other participant were both large individuals with an outwardly tough appearance. When the other participant showed her vulnerability to the group it was as if Ben’s gruff exterior melted away for a moment and he too appeared vulnerable. In the interview Ben indicated this was one of the few experiences that really affected him. Watching the two of
them I saw one reflected in the other and I think Ben’s learning came from recognizing that he was not as alone as he may have thought.

The last special case of witnessing in the seminars was that done by a partner or family member through a dyad process or through the large group sharing. Many opportunities were designed to encourage people who came to the seminar together to work apart, and thereby allow each person to have their own experience. But there was also a place for being witnessed by someone who knew what it took for you to reach this point in your life. David, Shawna, Bob, and Peter all spoke of this form of witnessing. I found that going through a series of seminars with participants, many of whom I had gotten to know well through our interviews, enriched my own experience as I witnessed their personal growth.

**Energy, time & flow**

One inescapable aspect of the seminars, especially ET, was that they did not respect body clocks set to the rhythms of a business day. The seminars were structured to start late in the week, typically on Thursday, and run through the weekend ending on Sunday. Literature sent out in advance encouraged participants to schedule a vacation day on the Monday following the seminar. Each seminar day ran from about 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., totaling about 12 hours in the seminar room. For most participants these hours were a stretch, with “night owls” having a little easier time than “morning doves.” Years ago organizations, like Aerie ran their seminars even later into the night in an effort to wear down participant resistance. Today, the reason for these long hours seems to be related more to a desire to cover the content with sufficient time to include meaningful experiential learning activities for every kind of learner. In addition, the long days supported a single-focused immersion in the learning that would be lost if participants felt they had time to split their day between the seminar and other life roles. The long days gave
participants permission to let go of everything else and focus inward on themselves.

A by-product of this structure was that many participants felt exhausted by the end of the seminars. Participants spoke of feeling drained and overwhelmed at certain points. Interestingly, these did not necessarily coincide with the longest days, but with the days in which they were most stressed emotionally, and felt most conflicted. In my observations there was little to indicate that people became overly tired. I did not see participants dozing in lectures, though during some closed-eye processes, where participants were laying on the floor, I did hear snores a few times (team members were usually the culprits). Nor were participants showing other signs of fatigue, such as unusual clumsiness or irritation.

I suspect that in education we often confuse boredom with exhaustion. Our challenge is to develop more processes that sufficiently engage learners. Learners often tend to underestimate their capacity to work harder for a longer interval until they are actually presented with the challenge.

Throughout the seminars facilitators measured the energy level in the room. The instrument of measure was the facilitator's observation of participant body language, responsiveness to queries, attention to the front of the room, restlessness, and distraction. Once aware that the learning edge was gone or dulled by tiredness, hunger or a long interaction with one participant, the facilitators usually called a break. Music for re-entry after the break was selected to pick up the pace. The facilitators made a point of ending the sharing periods, which occurred after major breaks, before the energy ran out; they were also skilled at launching from the last piece of sharing directly into a lecture in a segue that appeared to be a natural extension of the sharing.

The facilitators tightly controlled the timing of activities in both ET and TO. A member of the team timed breaks with a stopwatch, and doors were opened with precision at the end of each break. Even in small groups, when the facilitator relinquished control to a team member, the
team manager used a stopwatch so that each participant had an equal
share of the allotted time. Small group facilitators (team members) were
firmly instructed to stay on time. This control over the clock was an
interesting driver in the seminar. Attention to timing kept the pace brisk.
It kept people deeply engaged by making every minute precious and
something to be used well. One lesson the seminar had as a focus was
the value of living in the precious present, being in the moment. In the
small groups and dyads attention to time management balanced the
sharing so no one participant dominated an interaction in the group. At
other points in the seminar it felt as if time had been suspended.
Because someone else had taken responsibility for managing time, and
the exercises were so highly engaging, participants were free to enter a
state of flow in which normal time seemed suspended.

Tammy said, "But I just can't believe how time flies. Usually my worst
time of the day is 1:30 to 3:30 [laughter] and I don't even notice it." Robin
echoed her sentiments:

I was really apprehensive about how long the days would be
because I really lately have always felt tired which I couldn't figure
out if that was physical or mental, so I was really apprehensive
about the long days and being able to stay focused and into it, and
I think not wearing a watch [is] certainly key and I've been able to
stay focused and haven't felt excessively tired.

Several other participants talked about how they felt concerned about
the long days on entering, but it had not turned out to be a problem.
Martha mentioned that because the sessions ran so late into the evenings
she was operating on nervous energy after dinner. A couple of
participants, Karen and Shawna, mentioned wanting things to go faster,
to move along when they felt certain participants were getting an
excessive amount of attention. No one mentioned being bored with any of
the lectures or group processes, not even slightly! Trudy said, "Normally
I'll have a slump and I'll feel so tired that I'll have to lay down in the
afternoon if I'm doing my regular routine... and when I left and walked
home at night I was still energized. And so I liked that."
Martha compared her stress-induced exhaustion from the seminar to another point of stress in her life. She said,

Exhausted, but also you know I was just coming off, having had three weeks of her being on a bat [reference to a problem at home] and that was a negative exhaustion. I don't know if I can keep going—angry, bad exhaustion. The experience up there at Aerie was a cleansing exhaustion, it was just like I'd really been physic'd, like I'd been reamed out and re-tooled. And I feel like, indeed like I've been through some huge cosmic carwash! [Laughter] With all these brushes going around and around, bzzz, bzzz, squirt, squirt, squirt, foam, foam, foam. But it's just beginning; it's like now I'm clean.

Participants found that they were generally able to function outside their accustomed patterns better than they had expected.

Ellen and Shawna remarked on how they would have liked to have had more down time to themselves during the seminar. Much of the large volume of material presented in the seminars was done while in the big group, especially in ET where more of the content was delivered through lectures, charts, and handouts. TO allowed more time for introspection and for processing the concepts. Some of the difference between the seminars could be attributed to the highly orchestrated design of ET, where a brisk pace was kept in order to build the energy level required for the culminating learning activity. Both seminars fluctuated from moderate energy levels, to low energy levels as fear and anxiety set in, and then back to higher energy as exhilaration and excitement replaced the fear. This wave-like action mirrored the lesson in the “curve of addition” lecture. In this lecture, participants learned that it was better to consciously choose the dip, confront whatever difficulty presented itself, and then climb the curve back to a higher state of being. Miles said about TO that, “I can’t remember everything that happened on the second day, but by the end of the second day I was at an all-time low, you know the dip, they talk about going down the dip before you come back up on the other side.” The seminars were structured to demonstrate the new pattern participants were being encouraged to emulate. Bill said, “When I got back from ET I was totally drained and mentally exhausted, but I was high. I was high from the support that I got.” The level of pushing served
a purpose and was done in a manner that respected the learner’s sense of self. Miles explained the way the flow of the seminars worked for him:

I think it flows really well...I really didn’t feel like we spent too long on anything. You almost don’t really notice the transitions, they go so, seem so smooth. There are times during the five days man when those doors open sometimes your heart goes 'ahhh' groan, you know [laugh]. And sometimes you want to flow right in and get in there for the good stuff, I mean it goes both ways. But they definitely establish an atmosphere of you know, you don’t just go in there half into it, I mean, you’re, at least I was, definitely into it one way or the other. So it’s a full force sort of thing, full strength.

The entire person was brought present by the facilitation and structure. Shawna described one process in which she and another individual were engaged in front of the large group, and how their awareness became so focused that they were oblivious to everything outside of their focus on one another. The larger group of participants, too, became especially focused on the small drama unfolding in their midst:

Just moments into it when we started acknowledging the directions and doing that, I saw faces. And I was comfortable with that, I had no fear, I saw faces and they were so present. And you know I kind of got chill bumps and I knew that something bigger then me was happening here and when we sat down, [she] and I facing each other, it was like, whoa and I never thought about it again. We just did what we said we would do and let it be. And to see, maybe even more to feel, what the energy was like in that room was huge!....It was intense.

One process in the TO seminar involved a breathing exercise that lasted almost two hours. Participants expressed surprise and disbelief afterwards when they were told how much time had passed.

In all these types of experiences participants were learning what it felt like to be “present.” They were reminded of (or taught) the feeling of living with passion and a greater degree of intensity in the current moment. This single-minded focus and immersion in the seminar experience contributed to the sensation of flow.
Intense emotion

Several interns talked about the importance of the emotional challenge that was created by the seminar structure and how the facilitation pushed them to learn in ways that the content alone could not. In response to my query about whether creating intense emotions was important in the seminar, Sam said,

Yeah. I think it's more about not feeling in a long time. You know I mean kids feel stuff passionately, and totally and completely. And five minutes later they feel something totally different passionately and completely. And I think that as adults we've just learned to, you know, just put a lid on those kinds of things.

He indicated that the seminar structure and facilitation did not create the intense emotions; the emotions were there all the time waiting to be uncovered. This was consistent with Peter's description of his experience during one process:

I recognized the possible. I got in touch with something that I had not been in touch with for a long time and it was a sense of just 'is-ness' with a sense of just upwelling, just joy, it wasn't happiness, though I was happy, I wasn't happy like I was happy about something, it was just a not focused total state of [delight? I said] Yeah, it was just really good to see that again.

Tammy conveyed how the excitement of feeling connected to others rippled out from the seminar into her interactions with friends:

I just had this overwhelming love for everybody in the group I mean I just felt so close to them and I care about them...last night when we were supposed to give the emotion that we would want to feel when we left and I gave joyful, and when I left I was on such a high I couldn't sleep for two hours! [Laughter] I was truly joyful. I actually had to call some friends and pump them up. As [another participant] would say, "Stoked!"

Robin, described the impact of one of the dyads and said,
I didn't expect it at all to be as powerful as it was. I was kind of doubtful in the beginning, thought it was, you know, a little silly. But, yeah, I
experienced a lot of emotions, somewhere that I didn't expect at all, so it's surprising.

Karen spoke of her struggle with sadness at one point in the seminar:

> There was some pain yesterday at the family thing, which really surprised me. I had a very good childhood. But there was this one issue. And one incident and that was it. One incident that happened one evening that still haunts me. And I really had thought, you know, that I had just pushed aside. Ignore it, it will go away.

Martha spoke of the impact on her own feelings when other participants chose not to participate in actives: “I was amazed at the loss I felt over those who chose not to participate.” David described how he finally came to the idea of being whole as a concept for his contract after he felt intense emotion:

> I started out struggling with how do I get out of my head. And I think I even said something in the big group or had some little conversation with [the facilitators] about this. And then I remember [Larry] saying something to me. I said, “I am, whole is a foreign concept to me, I'll never be whole because I'll always have something to learn.” And [Larry] said to me, “Maybe it's pain that's in the way.” And then I felt emotion, strong emotion. Then I brought that to the group. So I sat down that night and I'm writing and fitting it all together.

Again and again the participants described how they experienced an emotional crisis and then were able to resolve the difficulty or impasse. The human mind loves narrative. Narrative builds tension through plots and crisis, which must be weathered and resolved into satisfyingly endings. There was an ancient wisdom in the design of these seminars. Emotions were engaged; fear, anger, love, hurt, all served the aim of creating tension (a plunge through confusion), and then enabled the learner to make his or her way to the other side. Without the trial, there would be no significance connected to the learning, and less memory laid down in the learner's mind. Emotion created the adventure in learning that made it memorable.

Every participant interviewed described experiences of intense emotion at some point in the seminars. Different participants responded
to different material, though a few learning activities seemed to have more impact than others did. The emotions evoked by the same activity could vary greatly from one participant to another.

Given this diversity of response I asked: What can be the point of eliciting these strong responses in the seminars? Was it merely a cynical marketing ploy as some have suggested and in this regard little different than the many emotional pitches to which we are exposed daily by television and newspapers? Or does the cathartic experience create a craving for more? Both of these reasons, while they may contain an element of truth, seemed insufficient explanation.

At their most elemental level our emotions tell us we are alive. Bill said the emotional high from ET helped him regain his “love for life.” Peter described how he shut down in one process and felt numb. To feel numb, deadened, is to not feel connected with the sense of self emotionally and physically. And so to feel intense emotion becomes life affirming.

To tap into intense emotion is also to connect with our power to act. Our brains are in fact wired by design to facilitate this relationship to power (fight/flight). As Damasio’s (1999) study indicates, our sense of self seems to be centered in “old brain” structures that also appear to control our capacity to feel many emotions and physical sensations. Attention, emotion, and learning are all surprisingly closely related brain functions, according to Damasio. This research offers a hint at why the inducement of strong emotions in the seminars has persisted in these programs for years. The participants’ evaluations suggested that they worked, they served the learning, even when the reason why remained obscure to the learner.

Evoking emotions also assisted learners in remembering their experiences. Studies have shown for example that more detail is recalled from a story with strong emotional content than a comparable story without the emotional content (Damasio, 1999).

At a higher level of understanding, the expression of emotion makes us more recognizable to one another in our common humanity. We
generally feel more warmth towards those who share emotions that we can identify with—we are attracted, not to the mask but to the man who comes out from behind the mask. When we see ourselves in others we become more accepting of ourselves. These reflected emotions, even when unpleasant, may penetrate our self-awareness when a more direct assault on the emotion and associated behavior would be fended off or denied. The experience of strong emotions sent learners looking for ways to escape the discomfort of a negative experience or increase opportunities for the positive experience. This emotional response became a motivator for new behaviors and led participants to either move towards or away from the feelings experienced. In this way they reinforced change.

Finally, most participants entered the seminars with an uneven development of skill in deploying emotions. By creating structures in which the management of emotions (such as fear, acceptance, anger, empathy, vulnerability and joy) were safely felt and practiced, intense emotions served the learner deeply and well.

One particularly useful tool in learning to manage emotions, or more accurately the behaviors associated with strong emotions, was provided in a lecture called the Home Chart. At the center of the chart (Home) was the place where participant felt loved and respected, whole and capable. In the next ring were the feelings of self-doubt and fear. In each successive ring the emotion was more extreme until in the outermost ring were feelings like rage, blame, hate, and severe depression. Participants were asked to notice the particular pathways they habitually followed away from “home”. For me a common path was fear-embarrassment-shame-blame. For another individual it was self-doubt to hurt to frustration, then anger and, finally, to rage. After the lecture participants spent time identifying and writing down their own preferred path, then moved into small groups where they shared their learning, including what the consequences of following this path had been in their lives. But in addition to asking participants to heighten their awareness and notice these patterns, the facilitators also introduced a tool for interrupting or changing the pattern. Participants were instructed that the way back
"home" was through acceptance of the feeling—it's just a feeling—and then through gratitude for the awareness, because only with awareness does re-choosing become possible. Intense emotions evoked at different points in the seminar presented opportunities to build skill with this process, to demonstrate that it did work. In an interesting twist, participants were told that when they formed intention statements each day with a structure of "I am letting go of [something of their choice] and creating [something else] today" they were not to let go of the feelings of either fear or self-doubt. The facilitators identified these two most basic feelings, as "friends" that helped awareness and that were important to the learner's safety.

Before leaving the topic of emotion, I want to address the role of various physical processes throughout the seminars. Damasio (1999) talked of how our brain takes in sensory information from the perceived environment around us, but also from what he terms our "internal milieue" or "visceral information," information about the state of our internal systems. This information is intimately related to our emotional state. It is this information we describe when referring to our feelings through statements like "my gut hurt," "my heart hurt," "my head was pounding." These sensations often give us evidence of different feeling states—fear, anxiety, confusion, longing. For many participants, especially those who worked in fields emphasizing cognitive processes, the physical aspects of movement, of dance, deep breathing, lying on the floor, sitting or standing in very close proximity to another person were pathways to becoming aware of certain feelings that were generally inaccessible to their conscious mind. By doing something different, something outside their physical comfort zone, they found they could not negotiate the experience with an autopilot response.

Emotions and the physical sensations, by which they were recognized, were often points of confusion. Many participants experienced difficulty naming a feeling even when in the midst of a strong emotional response. Several years ago I had an experience in a seminar that illustrated this problem. While participating in a learning activity during which I was
afraid, I panicked. My panic response led to injury of another participant. One of the key learnings for me in this process was that when I am afraid I have a pattern of shutting down communication between my body and my conscious mind, so much so that in this instance I was very startled by my reflexive response in the exercise—I did not know it was coming.

Sara, the backup team member recently diagnosed with ADD, illustrated this kind of disconnection between her physical response and her verbal response when she shared her frustration with a juggling experience. Though the learner may not feel good about the process or event, the experience becomes a memorable, critical incident and considerable learning is generated from these emotional experiences. Just as facilitators asked participants to stand in order that they could “read” the participant’s body language, learners themselves sometimes needed to increase their own awareness of their body’s language. Not all of the learning in this area was as dramatic as the examples above. Shawna spoke of the simple pleasure in a popsicle offered to her after the long breathing process. The facilitators talked about how the popsicles were intentionally chosen for their rich color, flavor, and coldness because they helped learners notice how their physical senses had been heightened by the experience of the exercise. Facilitators in TO spent considerable time helping participants to notice patterns in their own body posture, their habitual patterns of movement, and the clues contained in these movements to underlying motivations.

As I asked facilitators and interns about how they know when somebody “gets it?” they all laughed because indeed it was often very obvious, though it was difficult for them to actually describe how they knew the information. Watching a participant suddenly become aware of their own role in creating their experience was like watching a novice sailor tack a boat across the wind. There is a point of utter confusion, where the sail flaps wildly, the boat stops moving (it is “caught in irons” to use a sailing expression), and then quite suddenly everything snaps into position—the sail fills with wind and the boat takes off on its new course.
Watching a person come about in the front of the seminar room was often sudden and dramatic.

Miles described his experience with a process that helped him shift his awareness from a focus on the cognitive to a focus that involved a more diffused awareness.

I struggled to get into it a little bit at first because I was so aware of my body sensations; you know the numb hands and numb in my face and stuff. It wasn't until near the end that I finally got off focused on how I felt physically and let my mind wander. I really like it, I really liked it. And anything I can do to kind of get over my linear logic thinking approach to life helps me. So I'm actually interested in that kind of stuff because I tend to channel my thinking and my thoughts and feelings pretty tightly into a little box that I'm comfortable with and so it helps you kind of get out of that a little bit.

This experience helped Miles see movement as a means of shifting out of his head (cognitive awareness). Interestingly, when I watched this particular participant in the closed eye breathing process, I saw that he remained still during the process in contrast to some of the other people around him; in fact he had his legs and arms crossed in a posture that prevented movement.

A number of participants had physical ailments develop in the seminar that may have been in response to certain stressful points in the seminar. Martha described her response to the "dependency/source" lecture:

But still it'd like to kill me, I mean it was back, that same old gut and stomach being so clenched that I could hardly breath until I finally, I had to talk to [Candace].

The facilitators encouraged participants to refrain from over-the-counter pain remedies, coffee, alcohol, and illegal drugs during the seminars as a way to increase the participants' awareness of the linkage between their physical sensations, emotions, and thoughts. While some struggled with these suggestions, others found that they obtained valuable information from noticing their physical responses to certain processes in the seminars. This type of noticing appeared to extend beyond the seminar as
some participants described new awareness gained after arriving back home and having had time to reflect on the seminar content.

Reflective thinking

What is reflective thinking? It is the process of digesting the material of learning; it is moving new concepts from an external abstraction to an internal understanding or application. The process of reflection rests at the membrane between what is “out there” and what is “in here.” It is in this process that research suggests the short-term memory is transmuted into long-term learning. It is also the process of moving some kinds of learning from thought in the mind to an embodied idea or skill. Candace’s phrase for this concept is, “Knowledge is just a rumor until it is in the muscle. Awareness without action is bullshit!”

There were many and varied opportunities for reflection in the seminars: short writing assignments before or after a learning activity, silent breaks, and homework assignments were peppered throughout each day. Some participants with more extroverted temperaments seemed to find that the highly social context of seminars supported their reflective thinking. Jennifer said, “I feel like things are getting clearer...a lot of reflective thinking.” Trudy also expected and found “a lot of challenging introspection.” But others (Ellen, Robin, and Martha) struggled to find the time alone they craved for reflective processes. Some came into the seminar aware that they preferred to have solitude for reflection and had even discussed their concerns about being so continuously engaged with Aerie staff ahead of time. But the introverts generally found ways to carve out their own space here and there. Martha described not going to dinner with her group and practicing her Tai Chi alone in the break room after the rest of the participants had left for their meal. Others (Robin, Bill) spoke of wanting to take time after the seminar to reflect and journal about the learning gained. But once returned to
home and work they sometimes found little opportunity to do the reflecting they had intended to do.

Many participants spoke of thinking in bed far into the night about the day’s learning. In several instances these participants described strong emotions provoking the reflection. Shawna shared how angry she was with the facilitators one night as she wrote her “next steps” homework assignment. In the midst of the writing she suddenly realized she was “at choice,” she could choose to hang on to an angry response or to make a shift.

It was in the reflective process that participants drew the connections between the content of the seminar and where they had seen the talked-about behaviors and dynamics in their own life history. When this deep level of connection between the content and the participant’s own experience occurred, the learning took on a higher level of significance to the learner, and became at once more relevant and more memorable as it connected to a larger pattern of memories. Some participants found these connections helpful because they give name to experiences that, while familiar to the learner, had probably never been spoken about before. Without a name a feeling has limited application, but with a name it became accessible to reflective thought. It could be evaluated, judged, discarded, organized, kept or responded to in the learner’s mind.

When participants described laying awake thinking, or doing stream of consciousness writing in the heat of anger or feeling numb, or overwhelmed, they were describing the way in which the content and learning activities had discomfited them. By disturbing the learners, their minds were called upon to re-examine what was already known in light of the new information. It was at this point of re-evaluation that a learner saw both the opportunity to change and the rationale for change. Some participants moved forward with the learning, while others chose not to accept the new awareness as valid or real. They were not ripe for a new perspective; or the work of changing may have seemed too hard; or perhaps the fit between the learner and their social environment would be threatened by implementation of the new perspectives, and the costs
appeared to outweigh the gains. When I interviewed participants coming out of ET and TO the basic learning was still very new. Contrasting participant responses with those of interns, the participants' responses reflected excitement and freshness in application. The participants were like new employees fresh from an introductory training course. What they knew was at this point very different from the same individual 2-3 months into a new job. It is one matter to master content and laboratory activities and a very different matter to bring the learning back into the routines of work and family.

Reflective thinking, noticing patterns, and linking content to actual experience extended beyond the seminar for many learners. Bill and Shawna both spoke of how they continued to write. Peter spoke of reaching out to connect with new people every week. Trudy described an incident with a dental appointment that brought up more new learning related to the seminar. The facilitators encouraged this continuation of the learning. Recently they began to offer personalized assignments to participants who committed to continue to the next seminar. It may be difficult to envision a learning process that had become so appealing to the learner that a homework assignment turned out to be an effective marketing tool, but such was the commitment many participants felt to the learning process in which they had engaged.

Participants usually came expecting to do some self-reflection and introspective work, particularly if they had friends or family members who encouraged them to come, but they did not usually arrive expecting to do the extent of personal work the seminars encouraged. The seminars pushed and challenged participants to do an unusually high level of introspection. Not all rose to this challenge. One interviewee, Ben, denied having felt any significant impact or challenge from the seminar, even though I watched him as he struggled to respond and do the work that was asked correctly. In trying to understand this participant's response I suspected that cognitively the material was difficult for him to grasp and that it was founded on assumptions that did not align with some of his basic beliefs about appropriate behavior in work-related
relationships (he had been sent by a supervisor). Gender attitudes towards male expression of feelings may have also hampered his engagement with the material. In response to feeling confused by his experiences in the seminar he seemed to push away the learning opportunity offered as if it were unpalatable or indigestible. Other participants, like Robin, took a lot of learning from the seminar, but were waiting for some undefined time in the future to process the learning through more reflection.

I'm starting to understand how much your past can influence your present and that it's not necessarily bad that you shouldn't recognize that it's there. And then choose to let it stay or let it go. Choose how it shows up in your life. And I'm, I feel like we've been really busy and that for myself there hasn't been, hasn't been much time for reflection by myself and I look forward to an opportunity when I'm feeling rested and not emotionally drained where I can sit and kind of think about what, what I've learned about myself and the tools that I have now, and exactly how I'm going to apply them to my life.

Robin had not fully engaged with the material at the time of our last interview, nor had she made a firm commitment to continue the learning. By keeping the reflective piece out in front of her, as something yet to do, she avoided internalizing certain aspects of the learning that might have created a pressure to act on the new learning.

Other participants described how after certain seminar experiences, they were thrown into a deep self-examination. Karen shared how stressed she felt after doing the discovery process on the second night of ET when she recognized the emotional price she was paying for holding everyone at arm's length. Three weeks later, after the TO seminar, she was still examining the learning from this early process in ET as she talked about her effort to respond differently in another, similar interactive exercise. David and Miles both talked about losing sleep after particular exercises and Shawna described the furious writing and self-reflection done while stewing about an offense taken in response to an action by one of the facilitators. Bill described how daily writing helped him to manage the "ugly" feelings that came up. The discovery processes, Red/Black, Stop-Look-Choose, and the Powerline exercise were all
particularly effective in provoking self-reflection, but for some participants the experience of being judged by others in the feedback circles was especially important.

There were several different ways in which reflection was stimulated in the seminars. After a lecture period, and prior to beginning an interactive activity such as a dyad, participants were asked to write a list of memories relating to people who had hurt them and people they had hurt. While the results from this writing exercise were not shared or used directly in the exercise, they served to prime the pump. Immediately after other learning activities participants were asked to write. Early in ET using a form called “Acknowledging my experiences” facilitated this writing. It included three question/statements: “What’s the most important thing I got in touch with this session?” “How this applies to my life right now is…” “What I am going to do about it and when is....” One facilitator used this form consistently and another did not. As the seminars progressed the form was used less and in TO not at all, but the reflective process was continual in the form of a homework assignment each night that involved writing. To encourage the actual doing of the writing, participants were asked to spend time sharing what they learned with their learning partners before the seminar began again the next morning. These assignments focused on what was learned, and on developing an intention statement for the day to come.

Another type of writing was a more imaginative writing in which learners were asked to describe a visual or sensory experience, then to remove the pronouns that distanced the object from subject and to replace the “it” with “I.” In this mirroring exercise the learner was given a glimpse of uncensored self, including desires, dreams, and values perhaps never acknowledged before. Like looking in a mirror, learners saw themselves more richly embellished by the metaphoric description, and this feedback again helped them push outward into a wider scope of possibilities.

Sharing these descriptions with others and having others recognize and validate the imagined self, further anchored the learning as having
special value. Reflective writing completed the system of transformational learning by closing the loop that permitted the system’s energy to spiral in a pattern of growth and development. During a point at which I was immersed in the process of data collection, I wrote a reflective piece that illustrated the spiraling motion of reflective feedback in my own learning process (Appendix B).

To open a window on this reflective process, I asked participants to share their writings with me if they felt comfortable doing so, and a few did. I also did the writing assignments myself as a way to watch and capture a record of my own process through the seminars. One additional approach to stimulating reflection and critical thinking was through a closed-eye review. A facilitator asked the group to sit with eyes closed while he circled behind the group reviewing the previous days lessons and reciting the seminar purposes in a slow and deliberate manner.

Participants were encouraged to engage in critical thinking about the seminar content. Trudy demonstrated how her writing supported this type of reflective process as she wrote about playing “win/lose” in a relationship:

He’s a good person, but just not for me as a significant other...he knows that I feel this way, but he “keeps hoping” I’ll change my mind. I think I need to look at this some more. According to the curve of addiction/curve of growth and learning, maybe I’m not doing this right with him. I think what it is for him is that he enjoys the dependency and when I won’t play he goes away for a while and I forget how dependent he is and I enjoy his company until it slaps me in the face again. Each time I feel angry at myself for giving in and also for allowing boundary violations.

Trudy’s struggle to examine even the most challenging areas of her life in light of the new knowledge on win/lose games demonstrated the continual linkages drawn between learning in the seminar and its application outside the seminar. After a similar experience, stemming from a different exercise, I wrote about discovering a personal pattern of self-righteousness and judgement. In this exercise a friend indicated that they thought they knew the solution. I heard what they said, but my
focus was turned inward as I was trying to figure the puzzle out for myself. In working through this activity I learned that when I am caught up in judging, and uncertain of my own self-worth, my cognitive focus tends to narrow, closing others out of my awareness and shutting me off from important information. Larry, the friend with the solution, later expressed pride in having understood the process from the beginning and stood his ground, holding out against the majority until others were able to see the solution in his actions. While the two of us completed the process very differently, one arriving at a positive course of action and the other not, we each learned more about ourselves in the process. The next day, during the debriefing for this process, the learning was extended further when the facilitators pointed out how many other possible “right” answers or solutions there could have been. Here we saw the interplay between learning activity, reflection, sharing, and then further reflection in a rhythm that continually rubbed off one layer of understanding to reveal a deeper understanding beneath.
CHAPTER SIX – LEARNER TRANSFORMED

We must be willing and able to hold all of what life gives us, to exclude nothing of ourselves or the world, to tell ourselves the truth. Wisdom will stretch us far beyond where we thought we could or wanted to go. She will show us what we cannot change or control, reveal what is hard to know about ourselves and the world, and tear at the illusions of what we think we know, until we are surrounded by the vastness of the mystery. And all the while, wisdom asks us to choose life. She does not want us to just continue, to hang on, to survive. She asks us to experience life actively, fully, every day—to show up for all of it. (Dreamer, 1999)

Awareness of Personal Patterns

Participants came to the seminar with expectations that they would learn more about themselves. Jennifer said: “Some of my expectations were around why I behave the way I did. Why at work I can be so calm and serene and seem to have all the answers and I get home I’m a basket case.” Sam, a facilitator, put the concept of identification of personal patterns into context:

Somebody that comes in with their story about how awful their life has been, we let them tell the story a little bit the first day, less the second day, we’re not too much into it the third day, and by the time they get to TurnOver, what’s the point? Because that was what happened, you know it’s like. I think changing people’s context of how they hold those critical incidents in their life is key to them developing new patterns of dealing with it.

Some participants came with a clear understanding that this was their goal as well. Peter shared: “Well, myself, one of my main interests was to explore my own patterns and get those more explicit to myself and be able to work on those.” He went on to say that just to see what the pattern was remained an important step. Tammy learned that by being aware of a pattern she could handle conflict at work differently.
I work with very mature, considerate thoughtful people already, but one thing is that, I've learned from this that I retreat when I feel like someone is trying to dominate me and I like the idea of saying that I'm going to take five minutes and go off and think about this and then I'll come back. And that is going to help me a lot at work. I can see that already. Instead of people forcing their ideas on me and just going with the flow, I'll take five.

To notice the pattern was step one. Step two was to modify the pattern with a choice.

Miles described putting himself out in front more quickly, even when uncertain about whether he knew the right answers. He also explained that learning to take himself less seriously was a part of shifting his own usual pattern:

To find that pattern or those patterns that don't work and laugh at yourself about it and say don't do that, it just doesn't work and do it light heartedly. That's kind of the trick I think for me, is to keep it light hearted when you reflected those things you're struggling with and those patterns you want to get rid of so you don't focus on them too much.

When I did ET one of my own key learnings was to recognize the impact of seemingly small discrepancies in integrity, such as arriving late to routine meetings. The agreements for the seminars, which include a requirement to be on time for each session, were challenging to meet and on one occasion my group returned late from a meal. We were required to explain our late arrival before being allowed to return to the seminar. Later in the seminar we were asked to do a check-in on who had or had not kept particular agreements. In this process we were specifically asked to notice where we had or had not kept an agreement and to notice the feelings associated with this awareness. Through this process I became much more of aware how my behavior eroded my personal power when I let agreements with myself or with others slip. I particularly became sensitive to how by not making a conscious decision to commit to an agreement, I was in effect giving myself permission in advance not to keep the agreement. The lesson in personal awareness was powerful.

Peter explained that, while he did not understand why the exercise increased his awareness the way it did, that he appreciated the affect:
I just realized that. Yeh, I think the Red/Black thing was where I got my, what caused my, the gist of it is that I use disassociation as defense, when I feel uncomfortable. And I never really saw it this way I do now. And I did that during the Red/Black thing because there was something about that mechanism that I found I was starting to become involved and then becoming very irritated and withdrawing. I didn't get up and leave the room or anything, but I just went "I'm not here mentally." And then I noticed that in spite of the fact that I thought this was bullshit and I disengaged—it worked. And so I think that exercise was a brilliant exercise. And for me it actually was successful in a way that I can't really, why did it? But somehow I got something out of that that I would never have anticipated.

Another aspect of personal patterns was the stretching or changing of patterns in the seminar. Since most participants came to the seminar as strangers to one another and were not likely to have any on-going relationships with most other participants after the seminar, there was room for participants to experiment with new patterns. In fact, they were encouraged to do so. Trudy described her experience with an activity that influenced the way she saw herself. She said:

"It's okay to be a little more out there and be a little more relaxed about who you are, and who I am—who I am, my sexuality, my piece about just being a little more out there, being a little more energetic, stand up, take the action.... I've always believed that if this is my life and I can do exactly what I want to but I didn't realize how much resistance there was to putting myself out there.

In this description her uncertainty and discomfort with the new pattern of behavior was evident. The behavior felt awkward as she tried to overcome an internal resistance to the new behavior. Bob also noticed a change in his level of awareness as he progressed through the seminars. He remarked on an initial awkwardness in using the awareness, and said:

"TO further enhanced my awareness of who and how I am. At a practical level it gave me tools, made the learning more concrete. I noticed my swings are not as extreme. The valleys, which I still have, are less deep.

Discovering personal patterns turned out to be one important way in which participants' expectations were met or exceeded. Sometimes the awareness came through a sudden turning point, an "Aha" experience.
"Aha" moments/turning points

Shawna described a sense of something clicking and her identity became more open. She described an emotional turning point in a group process:

At some point somebody touched me on the shoulder and I wasn't there. And at some point it clicked that where I need to start living is that more vulnerable place if I want that armor to not be there. And that was a pretty huge revelation for me.

Katy described her own sudden awareness in one of the focus group interviews:

Something that keeps coming back to me, a big "aha," and I'm resonating with both of you two [Peter and David] as far as the connection with the people and the 15 mindtraps were big one for me, because they put them right out here for me to look at. And they weren't a part of me, they were something that I do, and it let me really look at them. And I was listening when I thought "oh my gosh, I don't do that. Do I really do that?" And then, to look at them and say, "yes I do," but not judge them, like just say "okay."

Sometimes just noticing and accepting that a particular pattern was a part of their repertoire was an important aspect of self-awareness for participants. The feeling that something unclear had suddenly fallen into place happened while participants were alone or while in the midst of a group experience. The sharing of one participant sometimes triggered a new perspective on an issue held in common with another participant. Sometimes the "aha" became a framework or structure on which to hold new information. Karen described it as an uncovering:

What am I going to uncover? Look what just two days have uncovered, a couple things that are going to make drastic differences, not only in my own life, but in the lives of the people I care about most.

When first exposed to the seminars, I often felt that the ideas and content offered were ideas I already knew at some level. I felt this way especially when I tried to explain to a friend what the seminars had meant
to me. Most of the basic ideas were not new concepts, but felt more like forgotten concepts. The new understanding seemed like a returning to an earlier self-awareness.

The concept of noticing a pattern but not knowing how to address the pattern came up in several interviews. Robin said, "I would get angry, because I would be thinking, well how the heck did I get here in the first place, this is not who I am, you know it’s not, this isn’t, I’m not the person I was when I got out of college." Similarly, an intern described his “aha” experience even as it happened:

So for me it comes back to just being able to practice, learning, owning it, looking at it, saying “God, I don’t like that.” Owning it and moving forward. And right now, as I’m talking about it, I’m having a little shift right now.

Bob described his TO experience when an “aha” moment helped him see how consistent he was in exerting his leadership during group processes. He was used to taking control, leading and coaching teams to a win/win.

Other participants, David and Shawna, shared perspective shifts that came about through their reflective writing activities. Shawna told about an “aha” that occurred during a stream of consciousness writing assignment:

There was only a one page requirement that night and I found myself on page two about three quarters of the way down, just, ... dumping all my blame, and not owning anything ... and then being fully aware that I had a choice to remain that crazy or to stop. And my stream of consciousness writing changed at that point and I said, “I forgive, I am at peace. I forgive, I am at peace.” Over and over and over, just like writing on the blackboard or whatever. So I did that and then I did my next steps and one of them was to you know let go of resentments.

On one occasion, while I was doing one of the TO teams, I woke up at 3 AM to write about a sudden insight into an issue I was working on or “processing.” An intern expressed the ongoing and recurring nature of this “aha” experience. He learned that just when he thought he “got it” and he was feeling most alive there was usually more work to be done—another layer of the onion to be peeled. Another intern pointed out that the “aha” was not a one time experience: “Yeah, it can’t stop. It’s not like
a satori where you know all of a sudden the truth is revealed and that’s it, you never have to do any more work after that.”

**Control/Power**

Issues of power and control showed up early in the seminars and for some participants served as a persistent point of learning. For others once trust in the process and a sense of safety was established, the urge to test the power relationships seemed to dissipate. Ellen talked about her initial reaction to the seminar and that everything seemed too carefully orchestrated when she first came into ET: “bunch of people just gliding through life [said with a lah-dee-dah tone of voice]. So I was feeling, there was a lot of resistance.” Bill summed up his attitude upon entering ET: “Very strongly resistant.” Generally, most participants entered ET with reservations based on what they have heard from friends, colleagues and family members who had proceeded them. I remember thinking my sister had been taken in by a cult when she first called me to explain about the seminar. I entered ET with mixed feelings about what I was likely to encounter. When describing the seminars to others, issues like the long hours and there being some secret processes caused many of those recruited to arrive with a skeptical posture. The stage was set for issues of control to develop quickly. While most participants accepted the leadership and competence of the facilitators by the end of the first day, a few retained a questioning “show me” attitude throughout.

For some the issue of control and power came up at certain points in the seminar. David wrestled with this issue in the Powerline exercise when he explored how he associated power with relationship. He began to see how he sometimes placed “power” in a dichotomous position to “relationship,” and felt he had to choose either to be in relationship or to be powerful. Early in ET the facilitators were highly directive. As the seminar proceeded participants were encouraged to take more control of their experience, though still within defined boundaries. In TO there was
a very deliberate shift in the messages around power and control and the facilitators sent a visual message that the participants would now define the experience. Shortly into the first lecture in TO the facilitators picked up their stools and moved them behind and to one side of the semi-circle of participants, explaining that this seminar is “about you!”

But regardless of the overt messages indicating that participants were expected to exert control over their own experience, the facilitators continued to exert significant control over the learning process. Peter described his response to a suggestion that he change the wording of his contract: “Something in me balked and I kind of had my own little thing that I wanted, you know.” He went on to explain that the facilitators had asked him to remove metaphorical language from his contract and to use words that were simpler: “Well, I don’t know what it is. It feels like just resistance. And actually coming to this resistance is that I, I resist being restricted or confined.” The control exerted in this process was subtle—more prompting than controlling. The facilitators did not suggest specific substitutes for the words Peter had chosen, only that he reconsider the words in light of the facilitators’ lengthy experience with what made a contract useful over many years. They were also careful to explain their concern with metaphoric language. “It fosters too many escape clauses,” they said. But the choice of new language remained the participant’s. The facilitators set boundaries while leaving a wide range of choice to the participant. They applied the pressure necessary to keep the participant engaged in the hard, sometimes uncomfortable, work of self-examination. Peter explained their prodding as “what it comes to is what they pointed out, okay well where your resistance is shows you where you need to go. Go towards it, not away from it. So that’s where I’m at.”

Ellen spoke at one point about the way the exercises were set up with considerable latitude for participants to choose the material they would share and the extent to which they would participate. No one was ever required to participate in a particular activity or process. In one case, I observed the facilitator in ET ignore a participant who did not want to be in the seminar, but had been told by her employer that she must attend
to keep her job. The participant came to sessions intermittently, participated minimally, and sent non-verbal messages through her body language indicating her frustration with the experience. But only when her behavior threatened to disrupt the experience of other participants in a particular activity did the facilitator intervene directly and require the participant to commit to either being in the seminar or to leaving.

Working with resistance sometimes has less to do with the facilitator's prompting than with the participant's own internal struggle. Shawna struggled with the conflict arising from an intention to protect an area of personal vulnerability from public scrutiny (including the scrutiny of her partner who was also in the seminar room). But she also had an intention to be fully committed to her own personal growth. She recognized that her internal conflict, stemming from the fact that she was choosing to withhold information in the seminar, impacted her ability to fully pursue her own learning:

Part of it is I was wrestling with an integrity issue and that was really difficult for me. That was so huge for me that I had a hard time fully participating, being able to be completely open about everything and I made that choice. I'm fully aware that you know there was something I was not willing to put out there and so that really got in the way of, of just about everything else. And I finally got to a place where, okay, that's not the only thing in my life, that's not the only piece to the puzzle. Let me go ahead, and get, and do whatever I can.

She then worked with the conflict to find an alternative and focused her attention on other areas of learning.

Trudy struggled with disclosure in ET. She described the way an external conflict with a family member, happening outside the seminar, impacted her interaction with her small group:

Until I disclosed that, on the last day, in the morning of the last day, in my small group, it didn't, I hadn't made, I wasn't congruent with my group and they mentioned that. I thought that I could hold it in abeyance and not let it interfere when it was nagging at my mind. And I was resistant to thinking that it was interfering.
In both of these examples, the participants were faced with the option of surrendering their reservations and bringing themselves fully into the seminar room or not. In making this decision they became aware of how their choice impacted their opportunity to connect with other participants and the process itself. Sam addressed the value of this decision to surrender resistance when he explained that one of the biggest challenges participants face is to let go of resistance and then “the unconscious intent to really learn can go.”

Karen, still brand new to the organization and unaccustomed to trusting the processes, spoke of her ambivalence about yielding to the process as she reflected back: “Because part of me wants that, part of me goes are you insane? Oh this is just not right!” In contrast, an intern with considerable seminar experience spoke of encountering barriers and new awareness’ about herself from a much more relaxed state:

When I look back to ET, I was in such a place of fear about even noticing them. And now its like, “oh yeah, there’s another barrier, okay, cool great, I can deal with this, I know about it!”

Roles/Masks

Peter said, “There is/was a sense of image projection or preservation.”

Bill described his own identification with a role and fear of being judged by others as insufficient for the role:

There I was, along with everybody else, having to fess up. And especially being a minister, you hear so many things about ministers. People expect ministers to be holier than God, or to be like God. And so if they are, have human weakness, then they’re extremely critical.... And I thought, boy, here’s a guy, they’re going to label me! So I had to get over that. I had to take, I had to step over that.

Yet it is only when he shared this aspect of his identity in the group that some felt they could connect with him. Martha described how these stories of who people really were impacted her own learning:
We all have our own little horror stories and yet we, we put on a happy face and go to work, go out and greet people and it made me feel more one with the group, with people, with humanity, to hear their stories.... It was really special getting to know people at a deeper level. It was so interesting because here we were put together with people that we didn’t even know their names without looking at their nametag and for the most part didn’t know what professions or all the standard things that you cover in a social gathering and yet we were sharing our very innermost feelings.

In each of these descriptions I saw a layer removed, a layer of something separating the participants from both themselves and from others.

One role explored in the seminar was the part gender norms play in our most basic communication and relationship to one another. Sam spoke of how, as a result of his own seminar experience, he now found he could relate to men and women more deeply. He was grateful for what he had learned through the Stop-Look-Choose exercise, as it opened up a whole new avenue of friendship and support when he learned that he could hug another individual without a connotation of sexual intimacy. In a similar way, Peter learned that by letting go of the professional mask when working with patients around difficult health matters, such as a poor prognosis for an illness, he could just be present with the client and not feel that he had to have the answers or solution to their dilemma. Clarity about one’s role was important. Robin spoke of how over the years since being in college she had moved away from a role that she knew well and that now she was now less certain of her role:

I was confident and cocky, I was a white-water rafting guide and I was in shape and so, yeah I think a lot of my lack of self-confidence centers around the fact that I’ve always been really athletic in life. And with, I went back to school full time and worked in the evening, so I was either at school or working from nine in the morning until ten at night Monday through Friday and then this job that I had for two and a half years working on Saturdays and it was a really consuming position, and so for five years I felt like I put my athleticism and my other interests on hold.

The layer, the role or mask, was generally described by participants as something they hid behind. But it can be difficult to distinguish between a role and a core aspect of a person’s identity. In other words, the role
may have been a part of their core identity, but one that the participant felt he needed to keep hidden or protected from scrutiny by others (i.e. for Bill, his Christian identity). The role may represent a very vulnerable aspect of the self that required protection beneath many layers.

Sometimes this hiding behind a role was an attempt to hide from the self. This hiding from the self was evident in Bob's description of how he entered ET:

I was pretending to myself that it was to get clear about some things related to my work, but then when I got to ET I found it was really about working on my relationship to [partner].

Words, explanation, and language were sometimes applied in an effort to avoid self-awareness. From time to time a facilitator would share the dictum, “understanding is the booby prize.” In uncovering the self, some layers were more opaque than others. I was reminded of the layering concept in a graphics program, where the layers each have their own internal integrity and to the outside observer appear as one image. But if you peel off the top layers the image underneath changes dramatically. Some participants resisted this uncovering process, perhaps from the common and deep-seated fear that beneath the last layer there would be a blank screen. One of the transformative learnings in ET was that there might instead be this incredible hidden resource of creativity and essence.

It was to this essence that Shawna refers when she shared:

You know, I think that I, I somehow show up in a way that people can see me. And to me that seems like a miracle, you know because I don't think that, I don't think I blend in very well, you know, I mean, if I saw me on the street, I'd go “oh, dyke” you know [laugh]. I would think that and more. Other people are a little bit more, you know, more benign, and I really don't think that I blend in that well. And that's really my choice, I mean, this is where I'm comfortable and so this is how I show up.

While at one level she was talking of her social identification and her willingness to be open in her sexual orientation, at another level she was sharing about how she was perceived as a human being. When she said, “I somehow show up in a way that people can see me” I do not think she
was referring simply to her lifestyle choice, but rather to her personhood at a deeper level, and that this was what others were seeing.

For some, their insights into roles and masks were less internally focused. Jennifer took the learning about roles and masks home to her family of origin and reconsidered some assumptions she had made about her family dynamics:

I saw my mother and my father in it, and when I'm trying to explain to my kids this new pattern that I saw, it's like you know what? My dad was able to push my mother's buttons when nobody else was watching and she'd explode right in front of everybody so that it looks like she's the mean wicked person and my dad is like the little angel. Oh, you know, this really made me realize that you know what? [Laugh] He's not as perfect as he'd like us to think he is.

At another point she recognized herself as an instigator and shared how she was re-evaluating her own role in family conflicts:

I am a very passionate person and easily drift into the whirlpool of yelling and screaming and, you know, and way too emotional. So I'm really trying to take a deep breath, think about things to say, and how I want to be treated. I think that was the main part of that story, how do I want to be treated? Well, I don't want to be yelled at and I didn't need anybody screaming at me and I didn't want to be cursed at. I wanted some respect!

Karen also described herself in a victimizing role as she discovered that she too had played a role in creating the dysfunctional parts of her family relationships:

To see how I had sabotaged our relationship as far as me always doing the win/lose in an argument so that he just goes like "I won't even bring that up [laugh] and its going to be ugly. I'll just shut up and just move on" [said imitating a deep voice]. And to watch was that's really done to his own spirit, you know, which was very painful to see that I had done that to him and to myself, you know. And uh, so we have talked a little bit about that, and I have, you know, apologized and it's going to take work.

Interestingly, the participants never used the word perpetrator or instigator, and rarely used the term victim in describing their own actions, though they comfortably declared themselves in the rescuer camp. At one point Candace talked of how she had changed the
dependency/source lecture, softening the language, so that more participants would recognize that they do indeed play all these roles at different times. She found that some of the earlier methods of getting these messages across had only resulted in participants learning a set of labels to apply to friends and family. The learners often failed to bring the learning home to themselves, the one place where they could actually affect change.

A number of participants came to the seminars with an intention to further their professional role by developing facilitation skills for use in their work as counselors, trainers, and educators (Jennifer, Trudy, Ellen, and Shawna). Most who entered with this type of intention soon found their focus shifted from their professional role to a more personal engagement with the material. Trudy shared,

I noticed like the first day and a half I was sitting there taking notes of how I’m going to work with this with my clients and how I could transform this and wave that magic wand, and I have to, and I found that, that was an interference.

No matter how hard I tried to maintain a professional focus as observer during the first couple of seminars I always found myself a participant by the third day. Keeping a professional distance simply did not seem to serve my long range goal, and full engagement in the material both increased my own learning, and reduced the distance between me and my subjects. As they came to know me better, they trusted me with more of themselves in the interviews. I in turn learned more about the real drivers in the seminar structure and process.

The concept of relationship triangles constructed of perpetrator, victim and rescuer formed the core of one lecture and the subtext of several lectures. Many participants spoke of how they learned to recognize themselves in these different roles. Karen identified herself as a rescuer and explained that she liked being an enrollment coordinator for the seminars because it gave her something more meaningful to sell. As I observed Karen in the seminar, I saw a very assertive temperament. She struggled to be patient, while others worked at their own pace with the material. Her actions illustrated the lecture content well, and conveyed
the message that while individuals might hang out with one or another of these roles more often (i.e., have a preference for victim or rescuer), everyone knew and played all of the roles at different times.

David explained that he so closely identified with the rescuer role that he found it difficult to share his thoughts in the seminar without considering whether others might benefit by the sharing. In the TO seminar he struggled with the change in facilitation style: "The other hard part, sometimes it's hard, it was hard to listen to [facilitators] be so harsh. I liked the challenging stuff, but sometimes they seemed a little too flip, a little too harsh. That was hard. I wanted to rescue people."

In the Red/Black exercise a member of the backup team played a role called the “runner” that required they be neutral and unresponsive to the participants’ questions. In describing her feelings while watching this person, Jennifer displayed her rescuing tendencies:

I felt sorry for [runner]. She looked so uncomfortable, looked like she just wanted to cry. And this is what I wanted to say, "it's only the messenger." And that's what I wanted to tell her, "You're only the messenger!" [Said as if shouting across a canyon] [Laugh] "Don't worry about this, nobody will not like you because of this."

Bill, who frequently expressed a victim style in the seminars, shared how his own counselor encouraged him to experiment with another role, that of rescuer-giver rather than victim-taker:

A type of therapy that I've started that wasn't my idea, it was my counselor's idea, she wanted me to do volunteer work and so I started today just at a care center as a means of more socialization, doing something for somebody else and not expecting return, which is part of my, also part of my contract. Because when I first started TO I was telling about how I, the way I did things, and why I wanted to do things, because I wanted to be appreciated and be liked and loved and recognized. And then of course not getting that I would go into my pout and nobody loves me routine.

His words suggest he had only made a partial commitment to this new role (“it was my counselor's idea”), but his experiences in the care center seemed to be reinforced by the learning he absorbed from the seminars.

In this discussion of roles and masks we see that roles are neither good nor bad, and that learners are quite capable of choosing when to
work from within a role and when to discard or re-make the role. But this choice is dependent upon the learner becoming clearly aware of the role within which he had been operating.

Judgement

"All judgement is self-judgement" was a theme that ran throughout the second seminar. This framed how we responded to others, typed others, determined who was an “us” and who was a “them,” and shaped the communities we formed. In ET the work around community focused on the positive and on breaking open the framework of how participants related to one another so that there was an expansion in relationship possibilities. Again and again in the seminar participants surprised themselves and others with what they could do that they first thought was beyond their capability. In the final activity of one ET I watched my youngest sister inspire a roomful of participants with her assurance and light-hearted grace. And though I had known her all my life, I felt I really saw her simple beauty for the first time. As I owned that my judgements of her were a reflection of certain weaknesses we shared, I could release my projections and see her as separate and whole.

In TO the lens of judgment was focused inward and participants learned to own that they make/have both positive and negative judgements of themselves that they routinely project on to others. This was uncomfortable work for many participants and the extent to which they engaged in the work shaped the depth of the learning they took from this seminar. One participant described an experience with judgement in which he and his partner shared in the front of the room. They explored with the facilitator and other participants the hurt they experienced when they felt unfairly judged because they had not shared very much information in the large group. Some participants seem more successful in taking this step of owning their own projections than did others. The intern who spoke of struggling all night in his motel room to understand
the judgements he heard from others provided one good example of such ownership. Other participants, like Bill, continued to make judgements of others without seeming to reflect on the idea that these judgements were self-judgements:

I experienced tremendous personal growth out of TO. I saw some personal growth coming from several people....Some people didn't cross over. I know my [learning] partner had a very difficult time crossing over, as did his wife. But he did.

Bill talked openly about his judgement of others here, but at another point in the interview he explained that it was not his place to make judgments: "I'm not here to judge. The Lord will do the judging. He will judge the person as to how that person has treated his fellow human beings." In Bill's words we see the struggle between his grasp of the concept of judgement as taught in the TO and the ideas of judgement imbedded in his religious belief system. Karen, too, found making and sharing judgements easy when talking about how another participant's actions affected her experience of the exercise. But many participants felt self-conscious about stating aloud their judgements of others, particularly revealing the fact that they had negative judgements, and they attempted to avoid processes that required expressing negative judgements altogether. A dialogue with David illustrated this point:

A: Anything from ET that you recollect as being particularly hard?
D: Yeah, the, where you had to find somebody you didn't like and go to dinner with them.
A: The resistance group, yeah.
D: I copped out of that [laugh]. You know I usually, eager to get on with the processes and just make a decision and go, pick somebody and go. That's the one time I said, "I'm not doing this, I'm waiting for somebody to come to me." Yeah that was the tough one.

He responded in a similar way to the Powerline exercise, by avoiding choosing a position that required him to place himself above another person. He explained that in his view "power is a relationship," and indicated that he held a view in which openly expressed negative judgements were perceived as threatening to existing relationships. Miles also spoke of how hard the judgement processes were for him. The view
that relationships were too fragile to sustain negative judgements was a common conception among participants.

A number of processes seemed to focus on helping participants clarify their use of language to reflect more ownership of their judgements and less projection. For David the matter of judgement came back to his concern regarding his own worthiness to claim space in the group: “But I really do kind of, sometimes I’m really too polite. I wait for everybody else to be done before I take my turn and it's like claiming, it comes from feeling unworthy.” Peter described a similar response in which he set the standard very high and then inevitably fell short in his own judgement:

Yeah, I mean I always tend to compare myself to the highest and the best, I mean if we're going to run a mile then I'll compare myself to people who, you know, run in the Olympics, and if we're going to lift weights, I'll compare myself to people who can lift 500 pounds over their head. That sort of thing and pretty much, if it's spiritual something, if not God, then Christ or Buddha.

There was a basic stance that people started from in making judgements, which began with how they held themselves. Brothers' (1995) analysis of the importance of trust was reflected in this tendency to judge self and others as worthy or not. And, as Peter explained, when talking of making a medical diagnosis in his work, it was important to be able to accurately assess whether a judgement is sound, regardless of whether it was a self-judgement or a professional judgement of another’s well being.

Trust

Martha, too, entered the seminar with a vigilance that had served her in the past:

The insight that I gained was that I do tend to be over critical.... I learned when I was very small that you really watch what’s happening so that you can escape before things get really bad. I'm very aware, very, very aware of what's going on...who might be coming into the room...and tones of voices maybe in another room. And so, lots of people have that. I had never quite realized how
much I was using it still to avoid probably imagined dangers as an adult.

In an earlier story Trudy spoke of the frustration she felt when on the first day, as she tried to exert control over her environment, someone moved her belongings. After the seminar she was able to look back on her anger and be amused at her indignation. Her first response sharply contrasted with how she felt when facing the culminating process on the last day:

I came in to the situation trusting Aerie and Aerie staff and then trusting myself. And trusting in having support, yeah. And it just seemed so fun. Once we sat down I didn't think about what I had to do. My headache was gone by that time. I just didn't. And I was so present for others and I was thinking it would be great to be first up, it didn't even occur to me when it would happen. But when it did, no sweat!

The matter of trust, trust in the processes of the seminar, trust in others as companions, witnesses and mentors throughout the seminar, and finally trust in oneself to be able, capable, and whole drove the learning in the seminar. It formed a resilient web of connection that supported, challenged, and rewarded the learner's progress. One young participant, with previous experience in the teen seminars, came to ET with trust in the process: “So I guess in a way I did have expectations because I trusted the process and I knew what the process was going to be like, so I wasn't apprehensive or skeptical in any way.” But most participants entered the first seminar with more uncertainty—they were distributed along a continuum of low to moderate trust. Shawna said: “I'm a lot more open to learning in this genre than if you park me in calculus.” Tammy described how her level of trust caught her by surprise: “I can't figure it out. I mean it must, all I can think of is that they just, your trust grows so slowly you don't realize it. All of a sudden you're at a point where you can open up.” For others the investment of trust stemmed from their relationship to former participants in the seminars, friends and family who encouraged them to go. Jennifer explained:

I know several people who had come in here and these are people I admire and respect and so to me the safety issue wasn't that, I
mean I figure that if they felt good about this, this must be a safe place. So coming in I already felt safe.

This was certainly true of my own experience. I trusted my younger sister's encouragement, though with an older, wiser sister's measure of doubt. But when my father and older brother both spoke of the experience highly, two individuals known for their skepticism and a "show me" attitude, I felt it must be something unusually worthy of trust. Robin explained how her trust in the safety of the seminar process grew from hearing what others shared:

I think safe for me was understanding and hearing that we all had common goals and common fears and that I wasn't isolated in my self-doubt...I picture [these two women] to be incredibly self-confident and capable women and [yet] they have self-doubt and so I guess commonality was what created safeness for me.

Trust in others came about through various processes. Karen talked about coming into the seminar having difficulty trusting others, including her partner. In ET she began to better understand the close connection between integrity and trust and to appreciate the importance of keeping integrity with herself if she wanted a more trusting relationship with her husband. But she also expressed that the new understanding was difficult to apply and share with others outside of the seminar context; the special meanings assigned to words like integrity in the seminar did not necessarily translate to those who had not shared the seminar experience. After attending TO, Karen talked of the integrity that comes from a commitment to her agreements. The clarity with which the facilitators stated the seminar agreements on the first day, and the integrity with which they demonstrate their commitment to the agreements, by the respect they showed participants and by their accountability to quality, even the details like the precise timing of breaks, began to establish the holding environment of the seminar as a safe vessel within which to work with difficult material. Jennifer described creating such an environment in her school and how students were drawn to her: "I feel like I'm the
great attractor to every odd ball kid that walks into the school, which is, which is fine, you know, and I'm glad that I let myself be that trustworthy."

For some participants it was incredibly difficult to trust the process enough to remain engaged; their willingness to stay in the process was severely tested, as Martha described:

My head hurt, my stomach hurt, I really was almost too tired to sleep every night when I'd go back. So, I'm glad I did it. To me it was like boot camp. I was dragging myself over the obstacles, just dragging myself over the obstacles.

What made an individual persist when faced with such a high level of discomfort? As I watched this individual through two seminars, I was struck by the strength of her intention to change her experiences, reshape both herself and the context in which she was living toward a healthier environment. Early in the first seminar she experienced something that "hooked" her on the value of the learning and supported her persistence. I think it had to do with seeing the possibility of living in a better context. Many individuals entered the seminars coming from work and home situations that had reached the point of being intolerable either to themselves or to some significant other (spouse, boss). In this sense, they were already "cooking" with feelings like anger or fear or hurt when they came into the seminar. Often they saw their current circumstance as beyond their ability to change, especially when they were in a stance of victim and blaming someone else for their situation. They may have felt stuck with few or untenable options. Once in the seminar, they were faced with a choice to either engage with the processes and material or to resist them. There were few consequences for the latter approach. Participants who resisted, using passive-aggressive behaviors, were generally ignored until by not getting rewarded for the behavior they

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1 See the discussion of a "holding environment" in chapter two, p.23. Further discussion of this concept of "vessel" follows in chapter seven.
yielded to the processes. The individual who entered angry and resentful, full of mistrust in the process and of others, slowly learned that the facilitators were worthy of trust. The facilitators met anger with a resilient acceptance, first identifying and acknowledging the feelings of the participant, stating their own position of love and respect for all the participants, and finally asking if the participant was willing to suspend their disbelief and go along with the facilitator for a time. They always strove to remember that the learner retained the option of changing his mind at any point. It was in this honoring of choice that they left each participant room to practice a more open posture. Force was met with yielding and turning; the facilitators were practiced in absorbing the impact of anger and resentment without reflecting back the same. Years ago I learned, when working in a shelter with abused women, the importance of keeping the door open to learning, even when the learner may not yet be ready to come through the door. Statistics had shown us that it could take as many as seven attempts for a woman to permanently leave an abusive relationship. Sam spoke of how as a facilitator one of the hardest lessons for him had been to let go of his own need to have the participant's answer: “The biggest thing was to learn to be curious instead of thinking I had an answer.”

Shawna shared that she and her partner had very different experiences in the seminar around the issue of trusting others. This came out particularly in her description of the Stop-Look-Choose exercise:

I don’t spend a lot of time getting caught up in what people think about me, as far as my lifestyle and that kind of thing? But I know there are people that have problems with that. And, it was just so cool for me that didn’t seem to be an issue for anyone in the line, I mean there wasn’t anything but 4’s [the most accepting option] for me, you know, every person that I interacted with, that was what came up. And I have to attribute that to just how I just want to open myself up and just go for it and so that was pretty powerful, pretty powerful.

Not everyone reached a high level of trust in others as they moved through the seminar. Karen, while an active and full participant in the
seminars, still expressed her reservations about trusting others as she described her frustration with a group process in TO:

That's why I like to go and take over, I don't delegate very well. I'm afraid it just won't get done. It's very interesting. A whole lot of you know, I was kind of thinking why do I have some trust issues with some people? Well, this is the pattern of behavior that is set up so that's kind of my thing.

But she had begun questioning this old pattern and was trying to understand its origin in light of the new material she had learned.

Miles described the work his team did around resolving "pinches" (disagreements that had developed among participants) in order to strengthen the feeling of connection and being a team. I asked, "Was there much work around cleaning up withholds?" And Miles responded:

There was some, yeah. Yeah, we went after that. I think that people realized that that was part of the problem keeping the group apart. And so they were going to be honest about that. We were kind of given the tools on how to do that in a non-offensive way because those judgements were reflected back on ourselves. And I think some people were pretty, pretty honest about what they said. It wasn't just a perfunctory sort of exercise. And I think we all, the group, decided to take the time to do that well.

After this exercise I observed a marked difference in the group's behavior with a noticeable increase in helping behaviors between participants. Miles explained that, "It was easier to reach out to folks after the group kind of re-established the trust amongst ourselves and stuff."

For Jennifer it was the sharing of stories that opened her trust:

Yeah, my small group was just incredibly eclectic bunch and it was really neat to get to intertwine with those people, but you know [participant] is having still a hard time with her husband, she came up and said that was really an incredible story.

By first sharing her own story, and then, being approached by other participants with similar stories, she widened her circle of connection within the group. Martha spoke of the price paid for not sharing:

I think one of the problems of not sharing is that if you don't open up, if you don't participate, that at some level you're not opening up to healing processes—maybe still holding apart from the group.
To not be known was perhaps to not be “owned” by the group. Remember, for example, Robin’s comment about how the rule that suppressed gossip in the seminars (“no third-party talk agreement”) created safety for her. She could hear other participants without feeling she was expected to somehow address their difficulties. From these different angles we see how trust in others evolved differently for each participant depending in part on the history they brought to the process. Jennifer wanted to be able to transfer the ease with which she built trust in her classroom to home and to create healthier interactions within her family. Martha wanted to heal an open angry wound in her family relationships. Robin, who earlier had shared how third-party talk was injurious to her in the workplace, wanted to be able to entrust others with who she really was without fearing hurtful consequences later. Bob shares a more masculine analogy as he talked about forming a team after I asked him, “Why do you think this level of intimacy was possible in ET? Was it important to your own learning?” He responded:

I don’t know exactly. [He pauses, looking reflective for a moment.] Group sharing allows us to get into it. And like teams [sports teams], which I used to be on, and am still on, it takes time to bond. You have to go through something together, an event.

In the end it came down to learning to trust oneself. Trudy summed this idea up when she said,

Trusting myself, trusting myself I think that’s the biggest piece. That I, I will not put myself in an unsafe spot and if I’m there and it feels fearful, what is it? And can I re-frame this and work with this?

Trust was established in numerous ways throughout both seminars. Concern for the development of trust was built into the design of the context, but it was also developed through the consistent alignment of facilitator and team agreements with their actual behavior. Participants learned of the relationship between keeping agreements, integrity, and trust in a relationship. Trust also grew out of coming to know and understand one another without the expectation of entanglement in dependency.
Accountability/ownership

Defining ownership

To own the self, to belong to one's self, captures the essence of this term used so frequently in the seminar. It was identified as one of the four cornerstones to a healthy life. Ownership has many meanings. It connotes a sense of intense possession and implies the individual is the sole agent, acting with full responsibility for the self. It also carries the connotation of staking a claim, feeling worthy of ownership, and the freedom associated historically with the rights to ownership. Ownership as taught in the Aerie seminars could best be described as personal accountability in which the individual becomes differentiated from both family of origin, and others with whom he or she is in close relationship. An individual operating with ownership had established an internal locus of control. He or she exhibited integrity and an internal alignment of values and action, accepting both positive and negative (light and shadow) aspects of the self. And the individual with ownership recognized his or her capacity to make choices guided by a sense of purpose. Facilitators identified accountability and ownership as the central transformative lesson of the seminars. Sam said,

The purpose that I think makes the biggest shift in people, is to openly acknowledge and appreciate that they're the ones that are the source of their beliefs, their experiences, and the results, because that's all about accountability. And getting that I can't blame somebody else for what I think, I can't blame somebody else for how I feel, I think that's the biggest place for the freedom to show up.

David and Robin both identified the ownership cornerstone as their area of weakness, but coming to this conclusion was difficult. David explained,

That was the one I did not consider, because I feel like I take responsibility for myself very well, so I don't have a problem with
ownership. But when you think of ownership in terms of really self-worth, entitlement, I hate people who feel entitled, then that's my biggest one.

Robin had similar second thoughts. After feeling anxious about looking foolish after being one of the first participants to share on the microphone in large group, she came to realize by the end of the seminar the prices she had paid in her life, particularly in her work, by not speaking out. In the following passage she claimed the worth of her opinions, recognizing then that many times she had known something that could help a group, but let fear of being wrong stop her from sharing her insights. When asked about the most important learning from ET she said,

Yeah, I would say, being confident in my own opinions about things and sharing them as opposed to thinking "oh, well, they're not really that important." Or, because, often times, after the fact, or not often, but sometimes after the fact we'll come to a conclusion without any of my contribution, that a thought that I was thinking was actually the right thing to do or the right way to go on something and I chose not to share it.

As I watched Robin in the Red/Black exercise I saw this pattern unfold. Early in the exercise Robin seemed to have figured out the win/win solution to the puzzle and she shared this with her teammates. But her sharing was brief and she did not exude confidence as she shared her idea. The idea floated for a moment and disappeared as others spoke out with more certainty. The group veered away in another direction.

To be differentiated from others was to no longer be dependent on another individual for a sense of self. This idea of different, but connected, raised an interesting dynamic. While the processes and content often seemed focused on increasing connection, the participants’ own reflective process seemed to bring about an increased sense of each person’s unique value as a separate individual. An increased appreciation of diversity developed within the group, as each person became both more autonomous and more interesting to others. Participants began to listen more deeply to one another without feeling in danger of becoming entangled in the others’ dilemma. The term differentiated was not used in the early seminars, but the underlying concept was present in the work
done around dependency. The three distinct roles in a dependent triangle were explained through lectures. Many participants described ways in which they were beginning to apply these lessons in their personal lives. Trudy, Jennifer, and Karen each shared specific examples of how they were making different choices in certain troubled or challenging family relationships based on their new understanding of the roles of victim, rescuer, and perpetrator. They described gaining a new awareness of how their behavior had been shaped by patterns learned years earlier. The couples in the seminars provided a model for others in the group when aspects of dependency and triangulating systems were explored during sharing periods. One learner shared,

In the eight, almost nine years we've been together I've been trying to tell her I don't want your life. I don't want all this power you give me. I don't want, I've been trying to tell her all these things and she heard all that, she heard all that, and she saw me differently. She gets it.

Another participant described her application of the learning in a relationship with her daughter. The participant had been caught up in the role of rescuer and had been unable to differentiate her boundaries from those of her daughter.

It has been different. I've depleted my savings account, run up my plastic for her, crossed my boundaries and allowed her to cross my boundaries and therefore how was she to know where my boundaries were? And how was she to know how to set her own boundaries if I was not going to role model that? And I was getting there, but I'm not sure I would have gotten there as quickly without ET. I think I would have not gotten there with this much positive energy, is what I believe. Because ET enhanced some tools that I had.

The participant, Karen, described her own experience comprehending ownership: “There’s a lot of things I don’t like and to think heaven forbid, I could choose another outcome? I could choose to feel another way about this? You know, that was very liberating.” Developing a clear internal locus of control was an important part of establishing ownership. At one point I asked a group of interns how they knew when somebody “got it?” They all laughed because it was often quite obvious when it
happened. Sometimes I would literally watch a wave of understanding roll across a participant's face as he suddenly saw the control was his own and that he was the only one holding the barrier in place. When participants saw that they were at choice, it was like watching the proverbial light bulb switch on above their heads. The interns explained that the external became internal, and, while they did not use the educational term "locus of control," this was the phenomenon they seemed to be describing. Once a learner had established this locus of control, much more became possible.

Self-acceptance and a willingness to share those aspects of the self that were the hardest to own, and usually hidden from others, reflected another milestone towards ownership. Katy, Peter, and Sara each shared their insights about this concept and their stories of ownership illustrate its many variations. Katy gave her example of first thinking, "I don't do that" and then through humor, realizing that she did indeed do that behavior some of the time. Peter's awareness was that part of self-acceptance was accepting his gender identity as a male even when there were aspects of the traditional male role that he rejected. And Sara described how coming to ET gave her a healthier understanding of self-acceptance:

That diagnosis [a learning disability diagnosed shortly before attending ET] was helpful to me and then going to Aerie and learning a lot about it being okay to be me, and wanting to be me, and thinking that my quirks and idiosyncrasies in most settings are good, has been a big change for me.

Another aspect of self-acceptance was presented through the cornerstone work. While the lecture content presented the four cornerstones, as if they were four equal parts on a quadrant, a different relationship between the four came out in my interviews with both participants and facilitators. The facilitators each identified the second ET purpose statement as the most important. It reads "Openly acknowledge and appreciate that you are the source of your beliefs, experiences and results." With this concept of ownership in place, the learner was motivated to take the risks associated with strengthening
their spontaneity and vulnerability cornerstones. If the learner knew and accepted the self, there was less to fear in looking foolish, a possible outcome of increased spontaneity, or, in losing control, a possible outcome of expressing more vulnerability. Increased integrity also follows from ownership. It was not possible to become whole, integris, to become aligned with our values, to connect thoughts, feelings, and efficacy in concert with one another, without first having the awareness and acceptance of self that was implied by ownership.

Evidence of ownership

Ownership was a visible trait. When a participant was operating from a place of ownership their physical posture changed in subtle ways. Participants stood with feet a little more widely spaced and faced forward; their voices became stronger. They dropped the postures associated with dependency. We are all tuned to these signals more than we may realize. With ownership evident the learning begins to fall into place more quickly and easily, surging forward like a boat underway. This was the feeling Shawna described when she shared,

I mean prior to that what was happening is I was insisting that I wasn't unapproachable! [I said 'I am open!'] Yeah! [Laugh] And I get that, I mean that was when I got it, that oh where it's all trying to take me, and it doesn't matter what anyone else is doing. And you know I was just feeling pissy with [the facilitators]. I felt unjustly picked on and I'd have all kinds of noise going on in my head about that. But when that happened, that was when it was like “I get it! I get it.”

There may be a period of agonizing soul searching between a particular learning activity, the dawning awareness, and then finally the decision to do something different. Once the participant became aware of a cognitive dissonance between the new material presented about ownership and the manner in which he has held personal stories, he was faced with a choice. He could ignore the information as invalid, he could absorb the messages and feel badly about himself, or he could choose to
take ownership by accepting the actions that brought him to this position and then re-choose in the present moment a new course of action.

Another way ownership was evident in learners was the way the focus of their personal story shifted away from one of blame and victimization. Their personal stories were held in a different light, and became less defining and more all encompassing. Many learners entered with personal stories that had essentially defined them and then frozen them at some developmental point in their past. The facilitators first encouraged the sharing of some stories, but soon after the concept of ownership was presented, learners were asked to shorten their stories and re-examine them in light of the seminar content. The stories became just a set of facts and events from the past. The learner became less focused on and less enamoured with the drama of his past. This process of letting go of their defining story in its old form released learners from a focus on blame and contributed to the new sense of freedom participants expressed as they talked about the shifts they were making in ownership. Holding someone to blame was less necessary when a learner became more differentiated from their story and the story was recognized as being located in the past.

Relationship

As I wrote in chapter five, I had not anticipated in my original coding scheme that relationship—connection to self, others, and to source—would become such a significant aspect of the study. In the years since my own first experience with this transformational context I had made many changes in my own relating behaviors, but I had simply forgotten the role the seminar played in triggering these changes. However, as I reviewed the seminar purposes for ET and TO the significance of relationship was apparent (Appendix A).
**Relationship to self**

After I recognized relationship as an important theme, I still did not fully appreciate that participants were describing three distinctly different aspects of relationship. The intern focus group interviews were particularly helpful in drawing my attention to the concept of a transformed relationship to the self. This required a change from thinking within the constraints of a developmental model of transformation, in which the learner gradually grows into a larger sense of self. After my interview with the interns, I began to see that the change I was witnessing in the participants was not an evolving process, but a re-connecting experience in which they reconnected with a sense of self they had left behind somewhere along their path into adulthood. From this perspective, relationship to self became a theme. Karen provided a beautiful example of this rediscovery process in a story she shared about going home on the second night of ET. She tells of how her experience of wanting to feel more alive showed up in her interactions with her family when she chose a fresh response:

> It already has made a difference. I went home last night, you know, I was, my big thing on the first day I said, "you know what? When I was looking at that, the one thing that I really had missed was the joy in my life"... I want the joy, I'm tired of the drudgery of my life, with children and work and family and all that can be very mundane and drab [laugh] and I wanted the joy. And last night when I got home my kids were still up, so first, my first reaction was, "Why are they still up?" [Laugh] The older one, fine. But the three younger ones, you know ten, eight, and one, they should be in bed by 10:30. But...then I went, "it's a Friday night, so all of a sudden I saw the change, the shift in my thinking. Friday night, don't stress out about it you know, they're not going to die from this and then at one point my son turned on some music, my oldest one, on the computer and I danced with my children in the living room instead of saying "go to bed!" you know? And just for 10 minutes, we just had a good time. And I know that that is so much more important, and I got so much more out of that, than making sure they were in bed.

Sam said participants wanted “to feel alive, to get reconnected to their emotions, and also, to know they’re not alone.” These were very basic
human urges and some participants recognized that the seminar content was not new information. Bill said,

To me it wasn't anything new; it was just coming back to where I was originally as a young man.... They provided the tools to get back. So it’s not so much, it's not like new learning. It’s like re-learning the old? But I would have never done that without going [to ET].

Trudy shared her commitment to retaining her own newly regained energy. The effort to stay expressive and more alive was an on going challenge. As we talked she said:

So it felt like I took a step back, but I didn’t, but I you know, because I felt like I was going to shift and be detached and numb, but I wasn’t and I was so proud of myself. And I still felt like what [she] said last night, that she slid back, I feel like that too in some respects. But I'm never going back to where I was. I can't. That would be a total betrayal of who I am.

David explained how important it was to re-connect to his own emotional base before trying to commit in a relationship. Once reconnected with his own emotions, he could then be more connected to others. For some learners, it was first necessary to connect physically with other people through eye contact, touch, intimate listening and sharing before they could re-connect with themselves. I saw this in Bill’s experience as he described his initial frame of mind coming into ET and then his response to the Stop-Look-Choose exercise.

When I got sick the depression got worse as I went into my recovery because of the fear of dying, of the cancer coming back. And so I was really having a difficult time getting back, integrated back, into social relations with people like everyday living. I was in isolation for a long time, and my therapy, and then with my transplant, and then afterwards my outpatient status, I was isolated socially. ...Through touch and seeing that people, each individual was a living breathing human being, just not an entity occupying space with me. That's the way it’s been for many years, especially during my illness and recovery, that people around me even my close ones, are just entities in space in reality. And the whole sense of presence, of being present, didn’t seem like it was real. It seemed like it was transitional. It’s kind of hard to explain. It seemed like it was transitional, not real, very temporary. Every moment was very temporary.... Really amazing, and I found that’s when my feelings, the affection, came back, the hugging and looking. I just,
just turned external. It was kind of weird. ...I would go to each person in the hug line and re-establish, establish contact with a human being.

**Relationship to others**

For some participants, like Bill, the feeling of coming alive was palpable. I often saw individuals become more expressive and connected to others. When close connections between participants did not form as easily in CO, some participants talked about how painful the absence of connection felt; they knew what they were missing after having had the experience of a close community in ET. Miles shared that one of his turning points came at such an emotional low point:

I went home that night feeling disconnected. And it really strummed all my strings about feeling disconnected with the world. I hadn't felt that bad in a long time [laughed]. I was dead serious when I told the group the next day that I was really serious about going home, I mean I was really serious. Now that's the good news and the bad news, I guess. Because it was the next morning that I said if I'm going to do something about this I got to do it this morning. I'm just going to take the bull by the horns and get over this garbage and do it. And so that low was really the turning point in the seminar for me.

Indeed, the next morning Miles did step forward and he was instrumental in bringing the group into a more supportive community when he spoke of his concerns.

Comments about relating to others fell into three broad categories: developing clearer communication skills; having new conflict resolution tools, such as setting personal boundaries and distinguishing behavior from the personhood (doing from being); and deepening relationships with greater commitment and depth of understanding.

Developing clear communication was challenging for many participants. Karen described her own frustration in a group decision-making process and the difficulty she had in stepping outside of her perspective to view the issue from the other person’s perspective.
[Another participant] raised her hand and said, “I thought there was another option—not to be here.” And I thought whoa, a little late for that you know. So she wanted to think about whether she wanted to be here or not. And I said, “Well, you know, not whether you want to be here or not, the point is you're here now and are you going to slow the process down?” And then she wanted to know why we had to do all this stuff for, how we were going to get it done, I can’t even remember. And then finally it dawned on me, I had the “aha,” hello. She wanted the mechanism. The intention was clear. Let’s just do it and the mechanism will come about in its own way. So, it’s like all right, that was a big thing for me, I’m like “Aha!” So that’s stopped that whole, “how are we going to do, why are we ‘nenenne!’”...It doesn’t matter! The intention is to, I mean it took us like 20 minutes just to get to the point where we agreed on the rules! [Laugh] I mean it was just crazy and then so it was very interesting to watch because I know that I do this,

Stopping to consider what it was that the other party in the conversation needed to know before she went forward, was a new communication tool for Karen. And it was still awkward for Karen to apply the tool in a particular interaction. In close personal relationships negotiating and applying the communication tools taught in the seminar presented additional challenges. Sara, from the back up team, talked about how when she and her partner attempted to apply the rules for clear communication (‘I’ statements, ownership, etc.), they sometimes became like two autonomous gun slingers, each righteous in their application of the rules, and neither able to bend to reach a compromise with the other. What they were learning was that clear communication, using their self-awareness to name their current experience, was only part of the picture of resolving conflicts in relationship. The next step required that they negotiate over their identified differences, staying engaged in the communication long enough to both hear the other person and to re-examine their own position in light of the new understanding of the significance of the other’s position. Recognizing this pattern, Sara jokingly referred to it when she explained that, “Aerie [teaches] us to be rugged individualists.”

There were many instances where participants spoke of changes in their family relationships since attending the seminars. Some focused on difficult relationships with children, parents, or partners. Shawna talked
of important shifts in her relationship with her partner, as they both became better differentiated from one another and more open to one another. Trudy, like Jennifer and Shawna, was also exploring relationship boundaries as she and her daughter struggled to find healthier boundaries. And some participants spoke of deepening relationships, even with strangers, making a choice to be present for a time with someone they might have avoided any meaningful contact with in the past, as in Martha’s story:

I went outside for a walk and encountered a homeless person who was obviously quite mentally challenged, was just as crazy as a loon. He was kicking a stone wall with bare feet, ouch! And just then a group of young punks came toward him and started jeering, and I thought, oh, this could be ugly. So I walked over there and when I did the punks took off. And the young man looked up and so I started a conversation with him. I was eating some dried fruit that I had so I offered him some. I ended up having this wonderful conversation with him. I had no idea. I mean he was really off the wall and really excited about seeing the world and the processes that he had discovered. That had to do with closing up leaks in his own system. He was very happy about it and what I found was that it was a very enriching conversation even though I’m sure he didn’t understand anything I said and I didn’t understand anything he said and so far as making sense. But he was a not only harmless but sweet person. And I went away from that 20 or so minutes that I spent with him feeling very enriched. And I wonder if I would have had this space before ET? [said very slowly and thoughtfully]. To have appreciated him as much as I did.

Relationship to Source

Together the first letters of the ET purpose statements spelled out the word S-O-U-R-C-E and the last purpose of ET was “Embrace service, learning to be in service to your world and the people in it.” By introducing the concept of source, the sense of purpose in relationship is extended outward, to an idea that was more encompassing than the self, the family, or friends. The concept of source pushed the horizon for transformational learning to include community, the natural world, and
finally spirit, the source of our renewal. Candace shares with participants early in the first day the idea that:

You may notice that you’re, at the end of the seminar because of our focus on ownership, personal responsibility, on dreaming, on being supportive of other people, you may notice that you are way “big picture” on your spirituality, but then you just go practice it in whatever faith you wish to do. And most people don’t have any problem with that.

Spirituality is commonly referred to by the term “Source” in the seminar, as in the phrase “being at Source.” Candace explained her broad use of the word source in our interview when she said:

They’ll say, “Well, I am not the source of my experience, God is.” And I say, “Well, when you are, you do something, who is responsible for it? Is God responsible or are you?” And they will say, “Well, I am.” And I say, “Well, that’s what I’m talking about. I’m not saying that you are the source of yourself, like you created yourself or whatever, but once you got this body, this gift from God, what you do with it is your responsibility.” So that’s how I do that one.

The effectiveness of this diffused talk of spirituality lay in the program’s success with participants from across the full spectrum of religion. One of the reasons for this success appeared to stem from the combination of respect for all that was exhibited by the facilitators and the room they left for each participant to color the word’s meaning to fit within their own spiritual tradition. Bill shared about his experience of spirituality in the seminars:

At first, at ET, that’s one of the reasons I was very suspicious, because I am an Orthodox Christian, traditional in my faith. And when you’re a devout Christian you believe that the way to heaven is through Jesus Christ. It’s not another concept, another chosen route to who’s my God. It is the truth. He said it was the truth. It’s really the only, out of all the other religions, Hindu and all the others, Christianity’s really the only one that has the documentation, the Old Testament and the New Testament. So at first I was offended. I thought I’d be offended, because it’s all very open and they accept everybody’s belief and yah-dah, yah-dah, yah-dah. I was pretty uptight about that.

But in a relatively short time Bill seemed a full participant in the process and appeared to have overcome his reservations by the end of the second
day. As we discussed this in the interview, Bill seemed to have simply incorporated the teachings from the seminar that fit within his existing belief structure. He was not interested in delving too deeply into the discrepancies, as illustrated in the following interview excerpt. He was responding to a question about whether the content conflicted with his values:

No it was, it was ironic a lot of those things are Christian based. There was a lot of Buddhism in there, a lot of all that stuff was in there. But all those values are there and uh, Judeo-Christian values are there but well we better not talk about that today, you know.

When asked about the application for the type of teaching done in the seminars in other parts of society, Bob, another participant, named evangelical churches, fraternities, and the military. These entities, known for the rigidity of their basic structures, seemed a curious list, though I cannot help but agree in thinking that such organizations could be improved by transformational instruction.

Some participants described finding a very different spiritual focus in the seminars. Shawna shared that she experienced a strange sensation during one process, when she felt as if there were some larger-than-life spiritual "guests" present during the activity. For other participants, like Peter, the spiritual content of the seminar was absorbed with a pragmatic approach:

That we are the source of our experience, which I take to ultimately not mean "we" or "I" as personality or ego state, is consistent with many esoteric traditions and seems to me to be conducive to a deeper (not a good word, maybe holistic, unifying?) understanding of whatever one's established religious or spiritual bent may be. And one need not get all mystical to relate to it pragmatically. I could ramble on about this at some length (as you begin to fear, no doubt), but the gist of the cleverness is that it is rather easy to talk the talk, a bit more difficult to remain focused when the alligators are rising. And the ET design I found helpful in integrating this content into daily life functions.

Perhaps I have presented the lessons about source and spirituality as too complex and serious. One of my own most powerful spiritual experiences as a participant was a moment of sheer joy and delight as I
re-lived a playful childhood experience during a visualization process. Karen shared an insight from one of her children that cut to the core of transformational learning:

He asked me the Tuesday after the seminar as I was getting ready for my first day at work, “So what are you doing, Mom?” And I said, “Well, I’m getting ready to go to work.” And he goes, “Well, what do you do these days?” you know. And, I’m like he’s so cute, and I said, “[Remember] that seminar I went to help me be more happy?” And he said, “Yeah.” “Well that’s what I’m going to go do. I’m going to go get other people to go to the seminars.” He looks at me and he goes, “So you’re selling happiness!”
CHAPTER SEVEN - CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Due to the complex and idiosyncratic nature of deep learning, there is no single path for any individual...[deep learning] requires a context that is accepting, responsive, supportive, and continuous or stable—one that "holds" the individual. (Whitney, 1994)

Introduction

I began this project with the intent to develop a deep description of a specific learning context in which transformational learning happens routinely. I started with a functional, if simple, definition of transformational learning:

Transformational learning is learning which brings about a significant perspective shift on the part of the learner, empowering the learner to make choices from a broader and more holistic perspective.

Then through the course of the study I listened and watched for those descriptive elements that might increase my understanding of the transformative process. In chapter three I introduced a new model for describing transformational learning. In chapters four, five, and six I laid out a series of themes relating to the new model. In chapter four I described how the context that contained and supported transformational learning was constructed. Chapter five explored how the catalyst for a perspective transformation was sparked by the synergy of a group process. Chapter six described the significant transformational learning outcomes: greater self-awareness, ownership, and deeper relationships. By identifying and studying the different elements that shaped and contributed to a transformational experience, I hoped to have exposed the latent power to change and invigorate learning that was resident in the well-designed and purposeful context of an Aerie seminar.
Conclusions

Seven findings emerged from my original framing questions. The first finding was a more specific definition of transformational learning:

First finding

Transformational learning is a way of educating that inspires a significant emancipatory perspective shift, opens an array of expanded choices, and supports learners' increased freedom of movement; transformational learning leads learners to deeper personal awareness, increased accountability, and richer interconnection with others.

Discussion. This learner-focused definition conveyed the central role of the shift in perspective experienced by the learner. When a learner experienced such a transformative process it was as if his field of vision was suddenly expanded, and his potential range of motion increased. Like a horse let out of his winter paddock into a fresh spring pasture, he found he could run and leap where he was previously confined to a tedious walk.

The freedom found in a transformative process brought with it another gift. As learners began to move more expansively (cognitively, emotionally, and physically) they had an opportunity to experience more of themselves, to test their personal strengths and to name their weaknesses, but perhaps most important of all, to sample more meaning-filled connections to and relationships with others.
Second finding

A set of primary characteristics distinguishes transformational learning from other adult learning experiences:

- A high level of interpersonal trust is established early between the learners and with the facilitator.
- Learners are held in positive regard and respect—their potential is seen as unbounded by the facilitator.
- Learners are active participants in the creation of new knowledge. Their full attention is engaged in the meaning-making process.
- The learner’s comfort zone is stretched—the learner is challenged by and sometimes uncomfortable with the content, learning activities, and group process.
- An unusually wide range of feeling is elicited, identified, and disclosed in a transformational learning environment.
- Non-cognitive awareness (intuitive, emotive, physical/sensory) is encouraged and validated.

Discussion. The following additional terms emerged from this study and begin the formation of a language to describe transformational learning.

Trust: In both chapter two and chapter four I talked about the important role trust development played in transformational learning. It was the precursor to transformative process. To Tway’s definition of trust, “the state of readiness for unguarded interaction with someone or something” (Tway, 1994, p.8), I would now add the dimension of self-trust. I would also extend Brothers’ model to add the outcomes and barriers drawn from the Aerie Cornerstone process (see figure 4.2 Cornerstones in relation to type of trust, p. 91). With these extensions trust shifts from an abstract idea to become tangible, and learners can identify and address which dimension of trust they may need to develop if they are to overcome barriers that block their emancipation.
Tway ended his study by suggesting that "the process of openly stating visions and values consistently produces increased trust as participants' true intentions, interpersonal competence and capacity to trust are revealed for all to see" (p. 147). At Aerie, facilitators opened the seminar with an activity in which they and the participants together co-created a vision of the world in which they wanted to live, and in this first activity the groundwork for trusting relationships was established.

**Positive Regard:** Transformational learning was further supported by the unconditional acceptance of the learner. When the facilitator encouraged an expansive vision of the world, coupled with messages like, "I see each of you as a whole and magnificent human being," and when she made a clear distinction between specific behavior and the essence of the learner, learners felt inspired to risk. They brought more of themselves forward and perhaps tried entirely new behaviors. There is a considerable body of literature on the nature of the relationship between teacher and learner which indicates the positive value of caring in this relationship (Rogers, 1961; Palmer, 1983; Llewellyn, 1998), with several theorists arguing that the model of mother/child is relevant with its implication of helping and encompassing in a field of caring. Others have suggested that friendship, with its co-equal relationship of caring, is more appropriate (O'Hara, 1992). Clearly the facilitator's modeling of unconditional regard supported the respect that developed between participant and facilitator, and clearly the depth of interaction supported by this premise of respect supported transformational learning.

**Fully Present:** The mother/child model implied a dependency that was problematic when discussing ownership and personal accountability, but the friendship model did not bring forward the content expertise and responsibility of the facilitator/guide. There was another role for which I have not encountered a good term. One term that comes close, but implies religious connotations that may trouble some readers, was the term "witness." In this role the facilitator or even another learner created a frame of regard and respect for the learner which drew the learner out into a larger sense of what was possible. In this model the facilitator or
another co-learner was simply fully present with the learner, such that the learner was known in the moment. This skill in being fully present led to an intense and deep learning opportunity.

This role was not necessarily characterized by friendship. To see another in the essence of their being neither implied the continuity of friendship nor implied the dependency of an ongoing helping interaction, though both were certainly possible in some instances. It was interesting that a facilitator could develop a deep momentary relationship with the learner in which the learner felt understood and recognized to an unusual degree, and yet, removed from the context, such as in passing on the street a week later, the facilitator only recognized a familiar face. This tension between the depth of relating and its transience was a peculiar characteristic of both the facilitator/learner and learner/learner relationships. It is only now in the final analysis that I am coming to recognize its importance, and it remains a conundrum requiring further study.

Discomfort (Area of Learning): For many learners, myself included, being seen fully in the present moment was challenging. For me the fear stemmed from being seen through—what if I stepped forth in the presence of this other individual, whose opinion mattered to me, and I was found wanting? To be insubstantial, to be rejected, is one of my own root fears. For others the fear may have been of being trapped or of losing control or of looking foolish. Each of these fears reflected a different window on trust specific to a particular learner in a particular place and time. When recognized, by the facilitator even if not by the participant, these fears served the learning, creating an impetus for change. If I had an insight that I wanted to test out with someone whose competence and judgment I had come to trust, if I was sitting in a room full of other people whom I did not know very well, and if I was feeling somewhat insecure about my grasp of the new material, I would likely experience tension caused by both excitement at grasping the new knowledge and fear at sharing the new insight in such a challenging context. What if I was wrong? What if I was stating the obvious? What if I was simply not heard? This was the
challenge of the group process. It was a challenge that by discomfiting
the learner provided the learner with an opportunity to test the
boundaries of his comfort zone and perhaps begin to stretch them
outward towards the open vision held by the facilitator. One of the
special talents developed in facilitating this work was recognizing when
the tension exceeded what the individual learner or group would sustain.
It was vital that there was room for the learner to exercise choice, and to
respect the learner’s decision regarding when to stretch and when to
contract.

*Holding Vessel (Circle of Containment):* In chapter two I reviewed
literature that described the term “context” in a new light. Both Heifetz
(1994) and Baldwin (1984) have postulated that leadership (facilitation,
being but one manner of leading) required development of a skill in
creating a context that could safely “hold” volatile processes (i.e., conflict,
anger, exuberance, creativity, etc.). It was to such a model of context that
I referred when I used terms like vessel and context—a model with an
elastic form. This concept of “holding” had for some time been identified
as crucial in early childhood development when a primary caregiver must
both support attachment and support separation as an infant grows into
a toddler. In completing this study I would suggest that the need for
“holding” is never really outgrown, either in a literal sense or in the
figurative sense of a learning context that both supports the opportunity
to stretch and the need to be safely held or contained. Many different
factors must go into creating such contexts, including the thoughtful
design of facilitation, structure, content, and learning activities that are
capable of addressing these two opposing forces. Perhaps the most
important element of this circle of containment is that it has the elasticity
required to respond to what is needed by a particular learner in a
particular moment.

*Aliveness (Deep Awareness/Alignment of parts with whole):* If fear and
anxiety were the only feelings elicited by transformational learning,
workshops focused on such learning would be short-lived. While the
tension was real, it could elicit a wide range of feeling experiences, from
empathy and compassion to joy and exhilaration. Sometimes emotion was evoked through the sharing of a remembered experience, or through an inspiring learning activity. Other times a piece of music could spark a deep longing for something more satisfying than the current experience. At times a participant overcame a personal fear or barrier and felt a sense of power at her accomplishment. Throughout all the seminars there were many experiences in which participants felt deeply. Many activities and aspects of the seminar structure were carefully formed to support awareness of non-cognitive feelings and sensations.

As I reflected on how these emotions and feelings were elicited, I kept returning back to two factors that were tied to learning and feelings. Some learners had developed such a capacity to successfully “live in their heads” that they had learned to block sensors, or as Damasio (1999) said, information from their “internal milieu.” If they found the sensory/feeling information was not congruent with the cognitive information, it was simply suppressed, perhaps even to the point that the individual had difficulty naming the feeling or sensation. By creating activities that frustrate cognitive problem-oriented thought processes, the transformational learning context helped such a learner re-connect with these alternative forms of awareness.

The second factor was one of validation. Our bodies are hard-wired to take in some kinds of emotive and sensory information and simply act upon it without applying a conscious intent. But our acculturation process of exclusively developing the rational mind leads us to discount much of this information if we cannot consciously identify its source and validity. Again, transformational learning offered an opportunity to practice bringing this non-conscious data forward through the application of various learning activities.

*Anchoring:* This term, which grew out of the observations and interviews, described the process of subtly linking new content to earlier content so that learners had time to absorb and accept ideas which challenged their previously held beliefs. Small incremental steps from lecture to learning activity to reflection supported the learner moving
safely within the bounds of what was tolerable given their current beliefs. It also described a way of linking learning to more than one sensory experience, for example when music was linked to a reflective process or lighting was linked to a particular mood or feeling.

**Source:** This term, often expressed in the phrase “being at source,” was closely related to ownership. It implied the accountability of ownership, but also the connection to something beyond the self—a kind of rootedness as in the tap root of a tree or a deep well reaching down to the aquifer shared by many. Among the more curious aspects of these seminars was the degree to which the content, which often touched on topics of a spiritual nature, was still accepted by most learners regardless of their firmly held religious beliefs. There was a power evident in the seminar environment that stemmed from the certainty that there was a common “source” beneath the diverse perspectives held by any given room full of participants. Many years ago I ran across a quote from the early novelist George Eliot that goes “What do we live for if not to make the world less difficult for each other?” I think in her idea we find the shared root that supports the context of a transformative learning environment, one that operates from a sense of something larger than the self. In acting from source individuals were expected to align behaviors with intentions, recognize and relinquish dependent, counter-productive behaviors, and appreciate the common humanity embodied in a concept like “all judgements are self-judgements.”

**Third finding**

**Transformational learning is dependent upon the creation of a rich context of facilitation, structure, content, and learning activities that are intentional and continuous.**

**Discussion.** Facilitators prepared for their facilitating role through an extended, informal apprenticeship process. In this their preparation and
training was markedly different from that of typical community college faculty who largely come to teaching through one of two tracks. Either they work for an extended period in a professional or technical field and first enter teaching through an adjunct role, perhaps as a part-time faculty in a program with evening or weekend classes, or they formally prepare for a community college teaching position by completing a masters degree in a particular field and enter the community college system as a full-time faculty member. In the later case the new faculty hire may or may not have acquired any direct teaching experience as a graduate student. If he did have a teaching assistant experience, it may not have included an instructional mentor and it probably did not include a preparation component for classroom management or orientation to a facilitative style of teaching. The professional-technical faculty member often lacked even this modest level of teaching preparation.

In contrast, the person training to facilitate an Entrée (ET) or TurnOver (TO) seminar experienced an informal and mentored process spread over several years. A new facilitator had typically completed multiple seminars spread over a year or more, served on numerous backup teams, trained and served as a team manager, and then completed a voluntary, year-long internship which included serving on the backup team for sixteen seminar weekends. If they had served in this capacity well, done their own work around matters of personal accountability, and exhibited a capacity to be self-aware, aligned, and connected with others, they might have moved then into a co-facilitator role with an experienced facilitator. The facilitative role was not entrusted lightly in this scheme.

When I contrasted this slow and careful mentoring with the faculty chair desperately calling down a list of contacts to find a last minute instructor for one more in-demand section of a math or English class, the disparity between our two systems became apparent. I could not help but wonder at the level of transformational learning that might be engendered in a community college constructed of faculty who had each been
mentored in their own development for a year or more by a skilled facilitator.

The structure of the seminars studied was also much more tightly designed than a typical college course. In our colleges we have made great strides over the past few years in developing core outcomes for our courses and in clarifying how individual courses bridge to the larger curriculum and either into the workplace or to a transfer institution. But the newness of these outcomes and the incorporation of institutional assessment leave many gaps. One example that leaps to mind is the extent to which our learning contexts are constrained by inflexible and bureaucratic structures. This is true of our 100 seat lecture halls with chairs bolted to the floor, and our 50-minute periods concentrated between the prime hours of 9:00 AM and noon. In contrast, the structure of these seminars was both more fluid—it moved as learners' responsiveness to the material dictated—and was more highly structured such that every aspect of the learning environment was tested and applied to support the specific learning task at hand. When chairs were needed to support a large group sitting through a lecture or lengthy sharing period the chairs were there. When movement was better supported by open space, the chairs were whisked away. Lights, music, and breaks were all intentionally used to intensify the learning experience or support a shift in mood or atmosphere. The structure was:

- Purposeful tailored to support the learning outcomes.
- Thoughtfully designed and free of most institutionalized constraints.
- Buffered and protected from distraction so that a greater focus on the learning material might be better sustained.
- Safe and supportive of risk-taking and the testing of new awareness and meanings.
- Binding and unifying so that differing elements supported and enhanced one another.
Early in my research I wondered if a description of the seminar content was either helpful or relevant to the discussion of transformational learning. I was concerned that the content of a college course and a personal growth seminar were perhaps too far apart for the comparison of content to yield useful information. But as I began to engage with the material I soon realized that the content of a personal development process had direct bearing on the development of a lifelong learner, whether in the liberal arts or in networking computers. Learning intended to induce deep and lasting change must rest on a stout and stable foundation. From the instructor in a developmental reading program who insists on daily attendance and weekly quizzes; to the coordinator of nursing clinical experiences who checks off a hundred competencies in a student's portfolio before making a clinical placement; to the history instructor concerned about delivering a liberal core; each is intent on the process of fostering personal accountability and reflective thinking in a lifelong learner. Likewise, the facilitator, who designed a process of participant agreements, checked for compliance, and processed the consequences of compliant and non-compliant behavior through dialogue and sharing, was also supporting the growth in personal accountability and internal locus of control.

What the seminars did especially well was bring forward the subplot of our common educational mission. They set it front and center before the participant with the TurnOver claim that "it's about you." In institutionalized structures we are often guilty of burying this core content of personal accountability below the detail of our separate curricular silos, until the student walks away with a body of content mastered for a brief interval, but disembodied from their own sense of self and identity. In contrast, the content of the seminars was:

- Presented in a rich medium and with a multi-sensory format;
- Delivered in manageable chunks with and opportunity to apply the learning between one piece of content and the next;
- Created in a loose framework with room for discovery on the part of the learner. The learner had to engage cognitively with
the material and draw the links to his own life experiences. The learner was provided with the tools, not the answers.

- Offered with positive regard for the learner without attachment of right/wrong or good/bad labels. Judgement was simply an awareness, a neutral entity;
- Continuously assessed, evaluated, and updated;
- Aligned with the expressed values, beliefs and outcomes being taught;
- Relevant, it mattered and had direct application to the learners’ lives—the relevance was demonstrated in the learning activities.

Like structure, many seminar learning activities were different from those found in the college setting, especially the activities that evoked strong emotions. But there were exceptions. For example, a similar group sharing process could be found in a practice for clinical counseling or a human services program. A challenge course in a physical education program might contain trust-building activities similar to building the team intention statement in TurnOver. A business leadership program might use a variation of the Red/Black game to teach win/win values. And an interpersonal communication or student success class might explore the use of “I” statements and the language of ownership in a manner similar to a feedback circle in ET or TO.

Other learning activities, like dyads on family of origin material, would be highly unusual in a college classroom. There is a reluctance to elicit a strong emotional response in a classroom setting. It may feel unfamiliar and even a little disturbing to encounter strong emotions in a learning community the first time it is done. I am reminded here of a participant (Robin) who, upon hearing someone else share in ET, expressed relief when she realized that there was no expectation that she would have to fix, or in some manner take on, the burden expressed by the other participant.

Generally when emotions do erupt in our classrooms they are likely to result in disciplinary actions—the angry outburst where one student becomes abusive with another or with an instructor, for example. Many
faculty struggle with classroom management and control. They may or may not have the respect of and respect for their students. Where the ground rules are not clear and agreements have not been established, emotions may present themselves as unwelcome intrusions on the learning process. This is particularly true in classes where sensitive issues of gender, race, and "ism's" are topics of discussion. However, to suppress and dampen their expression in the learning environment is to mute the learning and the potential for transformation.

One college instructor captured the alien aspect of emotion in a college classroom when he shared the following dialogue that took place near the end of a class discussion:

In the middle of our give and take, a student blurted out, "Hey, Schmier. What do you feel about teaching?"
I replied with something like, "Well, I think..."
"I don't mean what you think about it" he interrupted. "How do you feel when you're in a classroom?"
"Well," I said, now a bit unsure of what he was asking, and watching my words, "I feel you are..."
"No," another student stopped me, "he doesn't want your opinion of us."
"Then I'm not sure what he's asking," I admitted.
"What emotions do you experience when you come into a classroom or just before? Something like, 'I feel...'" (Schmier, 1995, p. 195)

The history instructor came back a few days later with an answer that reflected his personal commitment to teaching to the whole person, including bringing his own emotions forward and permitting, even encouraging, the expression of emotions by his students.

When I looked at the emotional work done in the seminars through learning activities that encourage the exploration and expression of feelings, I was struck by the acceptance of emotions (i.e., feelings are just feelings), on the part of both the facilitator and the team. I had become so accustomed to this aspect of the seminars that recently in attending another seminar with someone less familiar, I was surprised at the concern they expressed when a participant became very emotional during one segment. As we talked about his response to the situation, I was also reminded of how foreign this experience feels the first time it is encountered. I was reminded of the words of Bob, a participant, when he
spoke of being used to public speaking but not on such intimate topics! The message was clear that the seminar was a safe place in which to be present with feelings and that the learner could feel deeply and continue to function; they learned their feelings were both temporal and real. Participants moved through and explored a range of feelings: anxiety, fear, grief, joy, exhilaration, empathy, affection, love, anger, resentment, and learned to accept each as a part of the whole, feeling without being “owned by” the feeling. The learning activities were:

- Engaged the whole learner and were multi-faceted.
- Provoked and evoked deep emotions, thoughts and physical sensations that led to new learning.
- Reflected deep respect and love for the learner—were purposeful and grounded.
- Built skills such as giving and receiving feedback incrementally.
- Recognized that learning was more than a cognitive process.

**Fourth finding**

**Synergy supports perspective transformation, which is essential to transformational learning through heightened attention, group process, and relationship building.**

**Discussion.** Facilitation, structure, content, and process came together in the seminars to create synergetic learning experiences that supported deeply rooted change—a paradigm shift. As this synergy developed, the facilitator, team and participants coalesced into an interrelated system. Participants saw and were seen by one another as three-dimensional fellow human beings rather than stereotypes and caricatures. As they felt themselves embedded in a nurturing and safe learning context they began to turn their focus inward and some engaged in deep self-reflection. By first attending to the details that created a
sturdy and safe vessel of containment, the facilitator essentially gave the learner the opportunity to drop his usual defenses, his vigilance, and enter fully into the flow and immersion of a deep learning experience.

Most theories of learning in adult education focus only on the cognitive aspect of learning, as if everything happens inside the mind and not the entire body of the learner, and as if each learner learns independently of every other learner. Perry’s (1968) theory of cognitive development in college students is a useful construct, but his story is incomplete. It is as if there were a one-way road between teacher (content) and learner, rather than a rich web of two-way interactions between the learner, the teacher, and every other learner. In a learning web the learner learns where he can learn, where he holds up the structure, where he can be a conduit in the community to support the learning of others and where his leadership or unique insight might be required in the system.

In contrast, it is rare that we establish the trust necessary for such synergistic learning in our college classrooms. We invite forth only that part of the learner skilled in language, and we ask that intuition, feeling, movement, spirituality, and even power be checked at the door of the teacher’s authority. Palmer (1998) writes of the need for courage in teaching, and I think he correctly identifies the quality most called for if emotion is to be introduced. It takes courage to invite the entire learner into the learning context, (both the developed and articulate, as well as the unformed and unruly learner). It also takes courage on the learner’s part to come forward and to share what has been guarded, hidden perhaps even from the self. This courage is brought forth by the synergy of transformational learning. The content is experienced (practiced) through the learning activities, and in this process it becomes tangible, rather than an abstraction. With the practice of synthesis and reflection, perceived barriers melt into greater awareness and lead to new choices.
Fifth finding

Accepting and acting from a position of ownership marks transformational learning, providing evidence that a shift in perspective has taken place.

Discussion. As I studied these seminars I came to understand that at the heart of the perspective shift was ownership, the most consistent thread through all the seminars. When a participant grasped this concept he would make a significant shift from blame to personal accountability. With this perspective shift came a freedom of movement or emancipatory effect (Freire, 1993; Mezirow, 1991; Habermas, 1976). When the locus of control was internalized, new choices became possible that were not available to a learner locked in a pattern of movement dependent on the dances other people do. Interestingly, when learners shifted out of the dependent role and into the self-directed stance of ownership, the quality of relationship with others also changed and greater connectivity (community) in the system became possible. Some learners began from a position in which they clung to another person, a person with whom they were so fused and dependent upon that they could not see the world beyond this one dominant relationship. Assumption of ownership, of personal accountability, enabled these learners to function in new interdependent relationships such as with a group of peers sitting in a consensual decision process. The later experience provided for a far richer sense of community and a far more equitable distribution of power.

Some theorists (Inglis, 1997; Michelson, 1999; Jansen & Wildemeersch, 1998) have argued that a focus on personal transformation creates an inward focus and a false sense of emancipation. They argue that what has really happened is that as everyone becomes more personally accountable they are actually becoming more conforming. Such learners fail to recognize the oppressor (I have met the enemy and it is I). They have in effect simply internalized the oppressor and they no longer feel called to action against the oppressor. I think this argument
against the transformational learning model misses the point of the transformation. As learners becomes more aware of their current position, assume ownership for their position, and recognize that they have the choice to remain in or change their position, they enjoy a new freedom of movement. If they find themselves dissatisfied with their current position, the budding awareness becomes a spur to action. And because they now work in a web of stronger and more honest relationships, it becomes possible by working in concert with others to bring about larger and more significant change in which everyone wins. The transformational learning model is not a dualistic model, unlike earlier emancipatory models.

Before freedom of movement and this communal web becomes possible, the first step in the transformative process is awareness. The learner must see, feel, hear, or in some way sense a difference in their environment that stimulates a re-evaluation of their usual assumptions and beliefs. But belief systems, the lens through which a learner views her world, are often fiercely defended. These beliefs have worked for us in the past and are not lightly discarded without some evidence that they are no longer effective or useful, or are simply wrong. One of the wonders of humanity is the gift of consciousness that lets us explicate and evaluate the worth and efficacy of our current beliefs when our environmental context changes—we are enormously adaptive once a change in our environment has impinged upon our awareness.

Sixth finding

**Reflection, feedback, and systemic, continuous self-assessment contribute to the application of the learning and integration of new behavior.**

**Discussion.** Integration makes learning portable, something the learner carries forth into the future. Through the experiences of various
learning activities the learner takes the external authority into the sense of self as knowledge that adds understanding in new situations, and as skills that can be applied to new challenges.

Occasionally I run across the term “deep learning” in the literature. It is not usually defined beyond brief references to its ecological and holistic systems connotation. But the term deep learning may be useful for understanding the nature of integration in transformational learning.

In chapter four I laid out a number of examples in which learners were set up by the structure, content, and facilitation to have a deep learning experience during or as a result of a particular learning activity. The experience of the activity provided an opportunity to connect to various emotions from within the self, to watch the self manage (or not manage) these emotions, and to see how the experience reflected back from a collection of others (an ecological relationship). Sometimes the immediate response in the moment to a learning activity was distancing—the learner might think that this particular activity was insignificant to himself or at least not as valuable as other activities. But then, through a processing of the experience afterwards, the layers underneath the first impression were revealed, nuances and other connections were uncovered and a deeper kind of learning began to take hold.

Reflective writing throughout the seminars was one avenue to this deeper learning. Sometimes it was as simple as the facilitator asking the group to write a response to questions about the activity just completed. This writing captured a particular moment for learners and encouraged them to make inferences as to the content’s relevance to their own life. The homework assignments, in which learners were asked to write in a journal or write a stream of consciousness response to the day’s theme, such as “how I play win/lose in my life,” helped learners to integrate major content themes by personalizing the learning.

Reflection was the primary mechanism of self-assessment. The learner was not externally evaluated by the facilitator—there were no grades—instead learners tested content and experience against their beliefs and self-assessed the learning for congruence with their beliefs.
Formal assessment took place at the group level as the organization evaluated the success of the seminars and of specific activities through written evaluations, follow-up interviews with participants, and verbal debriefing sessions during and after each seminar.

Seventh finding

**Transformational learning is process oriented and independent of content. It has application across many disciplines.**

*Discussion.* If all the elements have worked together and a synergistic context erupted out of the initial chaos, most learners experienced some degree of change. When the learners grasped the basic concepts of awareness, ownership and relationship they began to function with the self-replicating autopoesis of a balanced living system—becoming a community of learners. The more awareness, ownership, and relating the learners expressed, the more resilience and fluidity the system as a whole expressed.

The creation of a community of learners offers a richness to any subject matter to be taught in a group. Why, when we have gone to the trouble of collecting a group of learners into the same space and time, would we fail to take the extra step of developing a community in which every member is both the instrument of new learning and a learner? When I began digging in the recent literature of adult learning I found many examples of new pedagogy, what some are calling a “renaissance curriculum” (Costa and Liebmann, 1997), containing certain elements of transformative process. The examples came from across the curriculum and included such distinct disciplines as developmental education, English as a second language, history, theatre, and physical education. While transformational learning has obvious application in a student success course, we would do learners a disfavor to limit its application to only this arena. Even in the “hard” disciplines transformative practices
could be implemented to enrich the learning. Take for example biology 101, and consider how the addition of a reflective exercise following a group project might strengthen the recall of material, i.e. we might ask the learner to describe the relevance of the new content to their own community and then provide an opportunity for the learner to share his insight with peers in a discussion.

Many institutions of higher education have incorporated multicultural requirements into their degree requirements in recent years and students are being asked to deeply explore difficult issues of race, gender, and ethnicity that they may never have considered before. If courses, which broached these emotionally challenging and value-laden topics, were designed to first establish a trustworthy community of learners, they might meet with greater success in their objective of developing a deeper awareness and appreciation for difference.

To some degree the personal growth field lacks a theoretical foundation and it is my hope in this work to have assisted in developing what Imel (1996) references when she writes,

> With little support from research, learning in groups has been accepted as part of the woof and warp of adult education, with groups woven throughout many practice settings. As adult educators, we have undoubtedly formed theories about the use of groups and about how learning occurs in groups. Known as “theories-in-use”, they are what we tend to rely on when using groups in our practice. Whether tacit or expressed, these theories determine how we structure learning groups, as well as how we think about how learning happens in groups. Unless we take time to examine these theories, however, we probably remain unaware of how they influence our practice and whether they contain incongruities and inconsistencies. (1996, p. 91)

**Recommendations for higher education**

Many of the characteristics and elements of transformational learning found in a Aerie workshop are transferable to other learning contexts, but implementation in a public post-secondary institution of higher education
will require preparation. In order to implement more transformational learning in our colleges and universities the following preparations must be addressed:

1. In order to appreciate what is possible in a transformative context, faculty, administrators, and staff need exposure and direct experience with the concepts of transformational learning.

2. Faculty will need to “have done their own work”—become personally accountable and able to model the self-awareness, ownership, and relating skills they seek to elicit in the learner—before undertaking the facilitation of transformational learning.

3. Some faculty and staff may need support in developing an attitude of positive regard toward all learners.

4. Faculty might initially require training and support to design richer, multi-sensory, and experiential learning activities not unlike the support currently underway to assist faculty in developing online distance learning curriculum and to incorporate more effective outcome and assessment practices in their courses.

5. Post-secondary institutions need to address the myth that emotions should be left outside the classroom and recognize that emotions play a vital role in learning. A systems-thinking, ecological perspective requires we understand the learner as a whole, not as a cognitive fragment. Remember the computer instructor at Boeing who struggled to help learners keep up with increasingly frequent software implementations only to find that his problem lay not in his method of content delivery, but with a social dynamic by which experienced learners mentored inexperienced learners. The solution to his dilemma lay not in having more skill or knowledge within his content area, but in understanding and transforming the dynamic of the learning community.

6. And finally, we need to create a demand for transformational learning by offering transformative learning experiences early in the curriculum, preferably to incoming students in their first quarter. To do so will support continued student personal growth as well as
student retention by encouraging students to continue transformative work within a cohort-based learning community.

The above list provides a set of recommendations for implementation of transformational learning in public post-secondary institutions of higher education. I have described a specialized learning context very different from a typical college or university classroom, and yet have argued that this description has relevance to institutions of higher education. But the application of this learning may be subject to very real barriers and limitations.

Perhaps the hardest to address is that of finding and fostering the level of facilitation skill required to create and manage a transformational learning context. Faculty and staff lack awareness of transformational learning models and the personal experience of learning in a transformational context. Today it is still possible to go through years of formal education without ever encountering such a context. I had never encountered such a learning context before my own first exposure in ET.

A first step in creating a foundation for this vision is to expose faculty and staff to transformational learning, whether through personal growth workshops like those offered by Aerie, or any of a myriad of other transformative opportunities. We could also bring experienced facilitators to campus in both a training and a consultative role much as Rogue Community College is doing in southern Oregon.

As we seek to hire faculty and fill staff positions we need to make explicit in our search criteria the intangible qualities that support transformational learning. Does the candidate exhibit the qualities we seek to inspire in our learners? Is he or she self-aware? Does her work demonstrate ownership? Does this individual express commitment to forming community with and among learners? We may find more success initially by seeking transformational leaders among those grounded in working with the whole person (i.e. counselors, human development faculty, and advisors). Individuals already at ease with being in a caring/helping relationship with students may be more open to transformational learning on the front edge of the wave.
To sustain the momentum and change we might seek outlets for the voices of students to speak about their transformative learning experiences. Their published stories and testimonials would serve as a demonstration of the learning, and let the learners give back and support those who come after.

As numbers committed to creating transformational learning in our institutions grow, we can encourage replication and spread by fostering mentoring relationships between faculty in which a mentor assists with the incorporation of transformational learning into course outcomes. Having a colleague with whom one can explore what worked or did not work in a new process is an invaluable support when working in a challenging new context.

Institutional structures as they stand today are an impediment to transformational learning. Inflexible facilities fail to support the facilitation of a variety of learning styles. Facilities that cannot be arranged to support the learning experience—because to do so would interfere with the next scheduled class—constrain the context and interfere with faculty's ability to create a buffered and focused environment free of distraction.

As I proceeded with my research I would occasionally find myself engaged in a dialogue with a faculty member on the value of introducing emotion to the learning context. Often the instructor would express strong reservations, even fear, of eliciting and then coping with emotions in the learning context. He would express concern for faculty liability if he were to venture into this unfamiliar territory. What if he was to say or do the wrong thing in response to a learner's deep emotion? Fear of losing control, authority and power sometimes hung in the background of these conversations. But fear of emotions in the learning space is real. It is a testimony to how far into the cognitive realm educators have retreated, as well as an indicator of the extent to which educators have delegated the emotions to those "touchy-feely" types in counseling departments (as if learners expressing the normal range of human emotion required referral to a specialist.)
To some extent the concern about eliciting feelings in the classroom is warranted. If a faculty member seeking to create a transformational context has neglected to do their own work first, he will likely find himself in a morass of resentment, anger, and even fear as they embark on the roller-coaster ride of a transformative learning activity. If the facilitator cannot project the aligned values and assurance required, they may be like the dude ranch cowboy sitting on the horse movie style, while the horse waits with patience for the first opportunity to bolt and throw his inexperienced rider. All the bluff and bravado in the world will not offset the uncertainty communicated through the knees of the rider against the horse's flank. Experience comes only with time, attention to the work at hand, and a willingness to let go of expertise, in order to accept the discomfort of being a beginner again as he first embarks upon his own work.

Like the inexperienced facilitator above, learners too have little experience with transformative learning. Encountering a transformative learning process for the first time may require a leap of faith that the fear that must be overcome will be worth an investment in the process. Currently there is not a good equivalent in our college classroom structure for the modeling role that team members provide in the seminar process.

Learners in the seminars were screened for readiness and advised of the difficulty of the work that they were about to undertake. Where we have ventured into the realm of affective learning in our colleges, such as in the example of a multicultural course, we have not generally implemented either pre- or post-evaluation processes for assessing learners' readiness to proceed. This raises an interesting ethical question—is it appropriate for us to open Pandora's box without taking accountability for awareness of and support for the learner's emotional health? (See Appendix C for an example of the communication and ethical standards used at Aerie.)

Sometimes administrators must create the protective cover necessary to incubate fledgling operations from institutional and bureaucratic flak
that threaten new entities of change. The best protection is assessment—to know what works and why. Then administrators are able to discard what proves to be unfounded and to continually evaluate the feedback to see what needs developing next. Administrators will need to express faith in the possibilities of transformational learning—and they must trust that the process is sound, while attending quickly to any weaknesses that occur.

One way to foster the feedback mechanisms supporting a transformative system is to inoculate new learners quickly. This might be accomplished by creating an opportunity for new learners to enter the college through an intense immersion experience in transformative personal growth work. This would assist the learners in recognizing when learning has risen to the transformative standard and when it has not. It would give the new learners a stronger voice in the process of their own learning experience. The learner becomes one who has suddenly taken over the helm and has moved from being buffeted about by each new classroom encounter, to one who knows the mark for which she aims; she now works from a stronger and more purposeful position as she pursues her education. The learner who has known a transformative experience will not be satisfied with something less. And if she must settle for something less she will be much more likely to provide the feedback to support change. Finally, the learner will belong to a cohort sharing a common vocabulary on matters of relationship and accountability.

Recommendations for further research

At the outset of this study I said that it is the nature of qualitative research to discover variables. I said that my aim in this study was to describe a transformational learning context and to discover those aspects that contribute to its transformative quality. I have in the preceding pages offered my discovery of many different descriptive elements. But there are questions raised in the study that remain unanswered.
One question we might ask would be how we could screen for readiness to do transformative learning work. Much as colleges are currently struggling to screen for readiness in online courses, this issue presents new challenges. We have some advantage over the private company in that most of our institutions have resources to support screening and referral, but we have not applied them to such a task.

An important extension of the research would be to look for evidence that transformational learning experience positively affects retention of learners through a study of persistence rates after courses that incorporated transformative learning practices. If learners took more ownership for their educational plan, were better connected within a community of peers, and had a greater awareness of their self worth would they stay longer, and complete more work?

An interesting study would also be one in which we explored whether learners were better able to take ownership in their communication and resolve conflicts with one another more easily for having had the experience of a transformative curriculum. There could be value in conducting a longitudinal study to explore both the extent to which learners incorporated and retained experiential content and skills from these transformative learning contexts.

At one point I raised the issue of whether transformational learning, as I have developed and defined it here, has relevance across diverse communities of learners, particularly those including students of color. But this study has not adequately resolved this matter. There were too few non-white subjects in the study to provide a meaningful answer to this question, though the learners were diverse when measured along factors such as age, socio-economic, and educational background.

**Parting thoughts**

We do not make this journey alone. We must open channels for sharing ideas about transformational learning with other institutions, for
exploring transformative learning both inside the higher education system and outside with practitioners in the larger field. Public colleges and universities enjoy one distinct advantage over companies like Aerie—the learners have the opportunity to continue transformational work with a cohort in a way that is not possible for the geographically dispersed learners recruited to a seminar.

My own seminar experience highlights this advantage. I flew from Kansas to Oregon to do the seminars with a long interval of time between seminars (more than a year). I was separated both geographically and by time from my fellow learners in both ET and TO. I came home each time to a community unfamiliar with the material in which I had been immersed, and this isolation slowed my integration of the learning. In contrast, during the six-month window of my research I had the opportunity to both stay engaged with the learning material longer and to work within a cohort of fellow participants that expanded as we moved together through multiple seminars and interviews. By developing a relationship to others within a loosely knit community, I found my learning, my accountability, and my self-awareness all deepened beyond what it had been in the discrete and separate experience of earlier seminars, where I entered each seminar a stranger. I also believe that my presence as a participant-observer assisted and deepened the learning of a few participants, based on comments they made in the seminars and during our interviews. In a synergistic cycle, observer learned from observed, and observed in turn learned from observer, as we formed a relational web that further supported our individual transformations.

Transformational learning matters. There were moments in my journey through this study when I felt a profound joy in watching a participant move with the passion and power to make a difference in the world in which she lived. And there were moments when I felt the learning context become endowed with a sacred quality beyond what my words here may express. It was within such a space I first found a sense of purpose in my own life as an educator and in which I developed a vision for the world in which I want my children to learn. This is the
learning experience I want to invite into our colleges—learning that permeates every pore of the learner and in turn touches all with whom the learner interacts.
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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A – INFORMATIONAL LETTER

Introduction script

Hi, my name is April Retherford and I am here to ask your help. I am an educator who has worked in the field of higher education most of my adult life. I am also a learner, a doctoral student in Oregon State’s Community College Leadership program. As a college administrator I think we have some things to learn from Aerie.

A number of years ago my life and the lives of my closest friends and family were touched by our experiences in ET. For a long time I have wondered what made ET such a powerful learning experience. I found myself contrasting the impact of Aerie with other learning experiences and I found that four days of ET out shone any 3 or 4 months of a college class I had ever taken.

In time this led me to my research interest in transformational learning—what is it? How is it created? How can we recognize it or distinguish it from other learning? I think Aerie creates a very special learning experience in ET. And I would like to see more such powerful types of learning in our colleges, where more people might be able to access it. To do this I must first describe what transformational learning is.

Here is where you can help me. I would like a few volunteers willing to share their stories of experiencing ET. You can do this in a number of ways, such as by participating in a focus group interview on Saturday morning, by sharing notes and journal entries, by agreeing to a follow-up interview after the seminar. I will work with your schedule and will not ask you to take time out from the seminar itself.

This is the second of three seminars I will be observing. In the first, all my participants were women. I would like to enlist the help of a few skeptical men (actually any men at all would be nice!) to give my study some balance.

All your comments will be kept confidential. If you are curious and have any questions, please visit with me on the break. I will be glad to answer questions at any point in the seminar. Just let me know and we can discuss them at one of the breaks.
Consent form cover letter

Dear Participant,

I am a graduate student at Oregon State University participating in research focused on describing transformational learning. I am studying the Aerie’s Entrée seminar for the purpose of better understanding how transformational learning can be fostered and incorporated into the learning context of a community college. I would like to observe this workshop and interview some of you to learn about your experiences in the seminar. Your responses will be confidential. Interviews and other forms of data will be collected and coded in such a way as to eliminate personally identifiable responses. As a past participant in the seminar, I recognize the importance of confidentiality and am committed to conducting this research with integrity and in such a way as to assure all participants feel safe and free to participate fully in the workshop experience.

Your participation will aid our understanding of what makes learning transformational and will be helpful in bringing these types of learning experiences to learners in community colleges. If you choose to participate in the study, I will ask that you (1) complete a biographical statement; (2) be willing to participate in one focus group interview; (3) keep a journal of your responses to the workshop experience which will be collected, copied and returned before the end of the seminar; and (4) be willing to participate in 1 or 2 follow-up interviews after the seminar (not all participants will be asked to do a follow-up interview and only participants who plan to go on to a second seminar will be contacted for a 2nd interview after the TurnOver workshop). I will be participating in the seminar as a member of the backup team and will be observing the seminar. While I hope to have some participants do all the steps, every participant is free to choose to what extent they are comfortable with and willing to participate in the study.

If you agree to participate in this study, I will ask you to read and sign the attached consent form. I will be available to answer questions about the study at a table in the lobby on the next break. You may give the consent form to me at any point during the seminar. I will also leave a folder in which you can place completed forms in the participant room, since I am often busy with the team during the participant breaks. I will collect materials out of the folder immediately after each break. If you have questions about the research or consent process, I would be glad to speak with you further. My phone and email are listed above.

Respectfully yours,

April Retherford
APPENDIX B — REFLECTIONS

[This journal entry was written after the last of the three ET seminars. I had just left my father’s cabin in eastern Oregon where I had spent a rare weekend with my father, brother, and two sisters—September 17, 2000.]

Thinking about theory in transformational learning, what I am seeing, I believe, are four key components creating a transformational learning context. First, is the issue of safety as it’s created through ground rules, structure, facilitation, and the modeling of trust in the process. The safety is essentially created through structure, through the ways in which the facilitators show that the process is clean and can be relied upon.

The second concept or component I see is the creation of connection, between the participants and their small group and between the participants and the large group. This building of connection—creation of connection—is done primarily through story, the facilitator’s sharing of her own personal stories, including those dealing with intimate issues of relationship to family, and then in turn, with the team modeling of a deep level of sharing within the small groups. And finally, through the participants sharing their own stories in the large group using the microphone, and in conversation at the table with various dinner groups, like the resistance group.

The third component has to do with the creation of a sense of purpose, that our lives have purpose, that Aerie has a clear purpose, that there is a relationship between the work done in the seminar process and the entire world. It has to do with the notion that there are possibilities for creating the world we want to live in. And that it matters how we lead our lives, that we must be accountable to something larger than ourselves [actually I don’t think this is quite accurate. I don’t think they say this, but it is what they model—accountability to the greater good at the very least, though the path to this source is inward, through our hearts.]

The fourth component of the seminars is the application of the learning. This is absolutely key. And this is done through lecture, through demonstration, through small group activity, and primarily through the discovery processes that take place in the seminar. It’s in the application of the learning that participants have the opportunity to practice what they’ve heard, to watch it demonstrated by others, to see the relationship between what they’ve learned and how they are leading their own lives, and to practice doing it differently in a context that’s safe. So with these four components—safety, connection, purpose, and application—the seminar structure is built, woven back and forth between these different threads, strong enough to lift the person out of an old pattern and let them begin to create a new pattern. No single thread by itself would be enough.
On the connection, the relationship between participants, did I say that it’s about story? Yes, and it’s also about the way the individual holds himself in relation to his story. This is the piece that makes an experience transformational. The story itself is just a tape. But when we change the way we hold ourselves in relation to our story (or stories) that we have created up to this point in our lives, we are transformed. This is the piece that lets the person re-choose.

With trust, with safety, when that is created, it allows the individual participant to fully trust the process, to bring their whole selves into the process, when learners are entirely present in the learning context, they lay down memory in a different manner, their learning is connected to their emotions, to their thoughts, to their gut, and to their whole body in a way that engages, and by this engagement in the process, being fully present in the moment, more learning occurs. Eyes don’t wander or glaze over, people aren’t yawning, people want to be there.
APPENDIX C — ETHICAL STANDARDS

Our Mission is to inspire and support positive change creating an abundant, loving, and respectful world community.

AERIE COMMUNICATION STANDARD

THE INTENTIONS OF THE AERIE COMMUNICATION STANDARD ARE:

**To continually build Aerie Seminars to be a personal development center of the highest integrity and ideals, respecting each individual's growth process and privacy by insisting on honest, accountable, and compassionate communication.

**To create the safest possible environment.

**To create relationships based in integrity.

OUR COMMUNICATION STANDARD:

**Be responsible for your thoughts, feelings, wants and intentions.

**Stay current with people.

**Be aware of your impact on others and be open to feedback.

**Take your communications directly to the person or persons it involves..."Take it to the source."

**There is no discussion outside the seminar room of any participants' content or experiences.

If as a team member, you have a strong concern regarding a participant in a seminar .--please do the following:

1. Check directly with the participant about your concern.
2. Encourage the participant to inform the facilitator.
3. If they are not willing to, inform them you will inform the facilitator.

Practicing these actions will create healthy learning communications and will end thoughtless and destructive third-party talk.

We define third-party talk as ...an incomplete communication loop where two or more people talk about a third person or persons without their knowledge and/or permission, and/or with the intention to:

...Blame them...hold the other responsible for your experience.

...Vent frustrated feeling, to gather allies or support your "rightness".

...Question the other's intentions/behavior/impact without their presence.

...Support rumors, gossip or sharing confidential information about another person.
Third-party talk is not...

...Asking how somebody is.
...Acknowledging people. (Please make sure you tell them also!)
...Asking for help so that you can complete a communication with someone in a healthy and responsible manner.
...When a manager or leader asks for feedback about the impact a person has which is affecting the seminar or workplace. This information will be shared with the person concerned.

**If you have a "pinch" with someone and want assistance about how to best deal with it before you actually go to them ...you can ask for help from someone you trust to be honest with you about your own part and get their feedback and insight. Then you go to the person involved and complete your communication.

**BEING AWARE OF YOUR INTENTION IS THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF THIS PROCESS.**

I have read and understand the Aerie Communication Standards. I agree to keep this standard.

Signature____________________________________ Date________________

Thank you for your co-operation and support in making Aerie Seminars the safest environment possible for all people.

Revised 65/98
SUGGESTED STEPS FOR STAYING CURRENT:

1) Notice when you have a "pinch"...feel out of integrity about any event, action, or statement.

2) Identify the person you have a "pinch" with.

3) Let the person know you would like to talk with them and jointly pick a place and time that will allow for privacy and completion.

4) Identify, own, and communicate your intention to keep current.

5) Check to see if the other person agrees to being current. If not, ask why not. It is vital at this stage that all parties agree to move toward resolution. If agreement is not achievable, then ask someone mutually agreeable and sufficiently skilled to facilitate this communication.

6) Establish mutually agreeable ground rules---for example:
   ...The person who requested the meeting speaks first.
   ...We will communicate with accountability; using language of ownership instead of language of blame, "YOU".
   I THINK, I FEEL, I WANT.
   ...We will continue until we both feel complete.
   ...We will listen to each other in silence.
   ...We will both have a chance to share our experience.
   ...We commit to being open and receptive.
   ...Taking notes is okay, as is asking for a pause in order to take notes.
   ...We will remember that each person is separate from their behavior.

7) Identify, own, and communicate the following:
   ...Your current state of being.
   ...Your perception of the situation.
   ...The impact of the event on you.
   ...What it is that you want.

8) Check for understanding. The listener paraphrases back what they heard.

9) Check for impact.

10) Go back to step 7 and reverse roles...

11) Continue this process until the relationship feels squeaky clean.

12) Create working agreements that will facilitate improved communication.
PARTICIPANT/STRONG CONCERNS

IF AS A TEAM MEMBER YOU HAVE ANY STRONG CONCERN REGARDING A PARTICIPANT IN THE SEMINAR....

1. Directly check with the participant.

2. Encourage the participant to inform the facilitated.

3. If participant doesn't want to, you inform them that you will inform the facilitator.

The only discussion outside the seminar room of any participant's content or experience is in regard to the above.

Thank You.


cc: Facilitators, Team Managers, Team Members
AERIE ETHICAL STANDARD

PURPOSES OF AERIE ETHICAL STANDARD:
1. To create the safest environment possible for our participants.
2. To protect the integrity of existing relationships.
3. To support Aerie Seminars in being a personal development center of the highest integrity and ideals, respecting each individual's growth process and privacy.

THE ETHICAL STANDARD:
1. Each team member will hold all information regarding participants, team members and felicitators as confidential forever.
2. From the beginning of any seminar in which you are a team member until 2 months afterwards, there is no close-personal and/or intimate relationship building with any participant** in the seminar.
   ** If the participant is a minor, this standard is extended until the participant turns 18, the age of legal majority.

IMMEDIATE CONSEQUENCES** FOR BREAKING OUR ETHICAL STANDARD:
1. You will be unable to be on any assist team for a minimum of one year.
2. You will be ineligible for participation in the Aerie Intern Program.
3. You will be ineligible for any staff position at Aerie.
4. You will be ineligible to fill any role at Aerie that could be called representative of the company or of what we teach.
   ** At the end of one year, there will be a review with the Ethics Committee.

THE ETHICS COMMITTEE:
1. The Ethics Committee consists of Aerie Staff Members.
2. The purpose of the Ethics Committee is to support you in keeping your integrity and the integrity of Aerie Seminars by maintaining our ethical standard.
3. If you have any questions about the appropriateness of a relationship with a participant in any seminar for which you have been a team member, or if a participant contacts you, please call Aerie before you continue communication with the participant. This is not about permission, it is about keeping your agreement.

I have read and understand the Aerie Seminars Ethical Standard. I agree to keep this standard.
Signature_________________________________ Date__________________