TRANSFORMATIONAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES:
CHANGING RELATIONSHIPS AND COMFORT ZONES

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By

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Kelly Christie Ziegler, candidate for the degree of Master of Adult Education, has presented a thesis titled, *Transformational Learning Experiences: Changing Relationships and Comfort Zones*, in an oral examination held on December 12, 2018. The following committee members have found the thesis acceptable in form and content, and that the candidate demonstrated satisfactory knowledge of the subject material.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore how social and familial relationships are challenged, altered, or sustained following a transformational learning experience. In particular, I explored how students in a university graduate education course that used a transformational approach, experienced changes. The course, Participatory Methodologies and Approaches to Research, Facilitation, and Community Engagement, was offered at the University of Regina in the Summer of 2015. The study focused on the ways three students, as study participants, navigated their way through new and existing social networks and how the transformational experience altered pre-conceived ideas and perceptions.

The qualitative study used transformational learning theories. I conducted semi-structured interviews with two participants, who underwent a transformational learning experience as a result of taking the course and I used data from my own journals to reflect on the course. In the findings, I incorporate reflexive writing to illustrate my own transformational learning experience from previously taking the course. The study participants graduated with an undergraduate degree from the University of Regina, lived in the area, and are native English speakers. The participants were working on their Master’s degree in Adult Education; however, they were at different places in the program, and had different aspirations as to how they were going to use their degree and why they had joined the program.

After transcribing the interviews, I used a thematic analysis to confirm the findings. Four themes surfaced, which were: 1) excitement for learning builds confidence to challenge relationships; 2) everyday social interactions and belonging; 3)
stepping outside of comfort zones; and 4) challenging perspectives and avoiding confrontations.

The participants noted there was a need to meet again as a group with the other adults from the course to discuss their experiences and reflections, as well as to have an opportunity to be able to interact in a dialogue they felt they were unable to have within their existing social and familial relationships and networks.
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Thank-you to the study participants who took time away from their extremely busy lives, to share and reflect on their thoughts and stories with me. Your willingness to be vulnerable through sharing your stories does not go unnoticed. I hope through sharing your stories and perspectives, you have found some comfort in knowing you are not alone in your transformational learning journey.

A special thanks to Heather Griffith for reviewing my work throughout the preliminary stages and for the conversations we had about adult learning and transformational learning. Thank you to Regina Public Schools for supporting me through my journey and to the many coworkers who have believed in my abilities and supported me along the way.
DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to students who have undergone a transformational learning experience in a post-secondary education setting, and who may have struggled to navigate and understand their place(s) within their pre-existing social and familial relationships.

I dedicate this study to all my family and friends, who have challenged and supported me throughout my educational journeys, especially to my partner Sean, for being very patient with me while researching and writing my thesis and to my late grandmother, for supporting me and encouraging me to pursue my dreams and to never let the excuse of being a woman get into the way of those dreams.

Thanks to my parents for supporting me through all of my academic adventures. Even though you do not always understand why I do what I do, I appreciate your support and your willingness to accept my passion for learning. Thanks to my siblings, Ronnie and Logan, for constantly challenging me and sharing perspectives different from my own, and for finally accepting that my thirst for learning is unwavering.

Thank you to all of my friends who supported me, doubted me, and helped me along the way. Heartfelt thanks to all of those who were interested in learning about my topic, and their willingness to learn more about transformational learning.

To Mr. Bill Ochitwa, I cannot thank you enough for supporting my need to question and support my fight for gender equality at a young age. You were one of the first teachers to believe in me and you truly made an impact on who I am today.
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CHAPTER 1: Introduction to the Study

Transformative learning in adult, higher, and continuing education has been discussed in the literature for over thirty years, and according to scholars in the field, continues to be the most researched and discussed theory in Adult Education (Brookfield, 1987; Cranton, 2002, Liito, Kalli & Tynjala, 2012; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007; Mezirow, 1978; Taylor, 2007). There is, however, a dearth of literature regarding how social and familial relationships are sustained or altered after experiencing a transformational learning experience. This study aims to make a contribution to that literature and to the comprehension of that experience.

Through the study, I analyzed how a transformational learning experience challenged and changed individual’s lives, in particular, their relationships with others. The research questions I investigated were informed by my own transformational learning story. Based on my experience and the one I studied, as a result of an adult education course offered at the University of Regina, this study took place. The course, Participatory Methodologies and Approaches to Research, Facilitation, and Community Engagement (henceforth referred to as Participatory Methodologies), theoretically and methodologically engaged with ideas of social and personal change as a result of the pedagogies used and that fit within transformational learning; the type of learning central to the study.

Cranton (2002) examined transformative learning according to Mezirow’s (2000, 2003) definition as follows, “a process in which previously uncritically assimilated assumptions, beliefs, values and, perspectives are questioned and thereby become more
open, permeable, and better validated” (p. 63). Transformational learning differs from informational learning in the sense that informational learning expands cognitive capacities, whereas transformative learning changes perspectives about what a person knows, and therefore, alters their worldviews. In the context of adult education, transformational learning is associated with work toward social justice and an expansion on how we see the world. Baumgartner (2001) adds, “Transformational learning theory has expanded our understanding of adult learning by explicating the meaning-making process. It is not what we know, but how we know that is important” (p. 22). A transformational learning experience then creates a different way of seeing the world thus challenging how we relate with each other in the world. In such learning, the process, that is, for example participatory methodologies are central.

Clark (1993) suggests a transformational learning event may produce a significant influence or change in perspective; thereby affecting a learner’s subsequent encounters. However, understanding a personal transformative learning experience and how it relates to a person’s everyday life can be challenging to process. Transformational learning encompasses a wide variety of abstract ideologies that guide future learning and action cycles. These cycles incorporate interpretations of prior learning with new learning and stories (Merriam & Heuer, 1996).

What concerned me, as the researcher, was how ideologies and perspectives continually changed and evolved with new learning and experiences, and how a person’s social and familial relationships were subsequently sustained or altered. In my study, I explored how the ideologies (beliefs, values and, perspectives) that resulted from new
transformative learning experiences, were then integrated into the learner’s social relationships. As mentioned, the findings address a current gap in the literature.

It was my own transformational learning experience after the participatory methodologies course (which I took in 2013) that provoked me to explore how other students navigated their social and familial relationships post-learning. To undertake the study, I joined the course in 2015 as a participant and an observer. In this role I had the opportunity to hear participants’ stories first hand, including their challenges and triumphs. On a more personal level, I hoped the research would provide me with a better comprehension of my own experiences during and after the transformative learning journey.

I explored my own position and assumptions using a reflexive journaling process in order to analyze my own transformational learning. This approach to researching and writing sought to systematically examine personal stories in order to better understand a lived experience, while being a part of both the process and the product (Ellis, 2004). For purposes of this research, using a reflexive approach meant I responded to the same series of questions I delivered to the research participants. I made regular use of reflective journaling (Brookfield, 2006) to guide my interview process and reflect on new learnings or challenging ideas. These study methods are discussed more in Chapter Three.

**Significance of the Study**

The potential value of this study was to explore how transformational learning experiences influence a person’s social and familial relationships, and how those relationships were sustained or challenged after transformational learning experiences.
This study may generate further conversation about the discomfort around pre-existing social and familial relationships following a transformational learning experience. For example, following the course I felt very isolated in the realization that I suddenly had a difficult time navigating my own relationships, and I had a difficult time finding literature that could help me better understand what was happening to me. My hope is that this research is significant to the area of adult education and transformational learning theory because it provides a starting point for navigating the changes in relationships, as well as opening up opportunities for further research, dialogue and opportunities for social justice.

**Definition of Key Terms**

**Critical Reflection** occurs when learners deconstruct and analyze their assumptions and then challenges the credibility and appropriateness of knowledge and understanding (Mezirow, 1990). Brookfield (1990) explained the three phases of critical reflection: (a) identify the assumptions that drive our thoughts and actions, (b) assess the credibility of assumptions and how they relate to everyday experiences, and (c) transform these assumptions to become more inclusive and integrative, while using newly framed knowledge to more appropriately inform future actions.

**Reflexivity:** Hanson (2013) notes that although critical reflection and reflexivity are interrelated, “reflexivity more specifically addresses the position of the [researcher] in relation to place, power, and representation” (p. 72). Ripamonti, Galuppo, Gorli, Scaratti and Cunliffe (2016) continue, “Reflexivity acknowledges that we shape and make meaning about our world from within, while reflection is about taking ourselves outside of a social world that is external to us to analyze it from an objective stance” (p. 57).
Reflexivity encourages the reader to engage in dialogue with the researcher’s stories and interpretations to assess the value it contributes to the research (Lichterman, 2017). Additionally, Lichterman (2017) suggests, “Reflexivity communicates to the readers our recognition that knowledge claims are conditioned as partial…being reflexive means exploring the question of how our social positions may influence our knowledge claims” (p. 36). Reflexivity effectively differs from critical reflection, because the latter is a process wherein the learner challenges or reinforces their belief systems during and following a learning event.

**Familial Relationships:** According to Mayntz (2015), familial relationships include relationships with a group of individuals who share the same genetic (directly related through bloodlines, such as a parent, sibling, cousin, grandparent, or extended family), or are legally bonded (i.e. through marriage, adoptions, guardianships, or any legal contract). Familial relationships can be quite complicated as they may include nuclear, extended, complex, step, blended, adopted and foster families. In the thesis, relationships refers to both familial and social relations.

**Social Relationships:** According to the Australia Institute of Social Relations (2015), social relationships are defined by how a person constructs cultural practices, gender, social class, social/political systems, sexuality geographic location, and physical and mental abilities, with people from the community, workplace, school, or a past time in one’s life.

**Transformational Learning Experience (TL):** According to Mezirow (1996), transformational learning experience is “Learning understood as a process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s
experience to guide future action” (p. 162). Transformational learning is uniquely adult (Mezirow, 1991), and encompasses a “deep structural shift in the basic premise of thoughts, feelings and, actions,” (O’Sullivan, Morrell & O’Connor, 2002, p. xvii).

Transformational learning creates a shift of consciousness on the way a person sees the world and the interlocking power structures of race, class and, gender. Mezirow (1996) discusses transformative education as teaching and learning which affects a change in a person’s perspective and frame of reference. Transformational learning experiences are discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

**Theoretical Perspective**

Taylor (2007) discusses transformational learning (TL) as a theory of learning that is uniquely adult and grounded in the nature of human communication (i.e., paralanguage, kinesics, tone and voice character, cultural use of space, time, clothing, etc.). Merriam et al. (2007) explain transformative learning as “change – dramatic, fundamental change in the way that we see ourselves and the world in which we live in” (p. 130). According to Merriam et al., transformative learning is “composed of the mental construction of the experience, and three main components: the creation of an inner meaning (psychoanalytical), critical reflection (psychocritical), and development (psycho-developmental)” (p. 130). While the literature on transformative learning theories is vast (Boyd, 1989; Cranton, 2002; Daloz, 1986; Freire, 1970; Mezirow 1975: 1991; 2001), this study focused on Mezirow’s (1996, 2009) psycho-critical approach to transformational learning theory.

Mezirow’s transformational learning approach is composed of four main components: experience, critical reflection, reflective discourse, and action (1975; 1991;
2001). The process begins with the learner’s reflections and stories, wherein the learner critically self-examines the beliefs and assumptions they hold onto in order to better understand how such experiences were shaped and interpreted. The revision of these beliefs, values and perspectives, sets in motion an adjustment of “specific assumptions of oneself and others until the very structure of assumptions [begins to be transformed]” (Mezirow, 1981, p. 8). To better understand a perspective transformation, a learner must begin to challenge their previous beliefs, values and perspectives to evaluate the authenticity of new meanings, while utilizing the discourse as a “dialogue devoted to searching for a common understanding and assessment of the justification of an interpretation of belief” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 10). Perspective transformation was a key concept used in this study.

Action is the final component Mezirow defines in the TL process. Learners may take immediate or delayed response, depending on their readiness for change. Action can range from making an informed decision, a change in opinion, or a radical protest (Merriam et al., 2007). In short, Mezirow’s theory of transformational learning begins when the learner critically reflects on an experience, converses with others about their worldviews for improved understanding, and then acts upon this new perspective.

Mezirow (1978) first introduced a theory of adult learning that helped to explain how adults change the way they interpret the world. Transformative learning theory is considered uniquely adult and grounded in communication, “where learning is understood as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience to guide future action” (Mezirow,
Transformational learning challenges preconceived notions and learnings, and allows a learner to reflect and analyze experiences in a more critical way.

Transformational learning theory draws on a constructivist perspective where the learner selects information and constructs hypotheses. After constructing an hypotheses, a learner then makes cognitive decisions using schema and mental models (Bruner, 1996), to allow him or her to understand how some people may make meanings of their stories (Fisher-Yoshida, Geller and Schapiro, 2009.) Locating and understanding the experience of relationship changes and challenges and making sense of them within TL theory was a key goal of the study.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore how study participants’ social and familial relationships were altered or challenged following a TL experience. The perspective changes in relationships were focused on two adult learners after they underwent a transformational learning experience, that is, what happened after they completed the graduate course, *Participatory Methodologies* course, EAHR825. I sought to understand how their experiences related to my own. The course itself was designed to be transformative in content and design.

Reflecting on Mezirow’s idea of the interplay of psychological and social factors explains how and why changes occur in adults during TL experience. Appropriately then I used a narrative approach because the study centered on individual’s experiences and stories of TL (Bruner, 1986, 1996; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2009;)

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1The course name and number changed during the research process (from EAHR870AB to EAHR825). The course name and number used in this thesis reflect the changes in order to make access to course materials in the future easier to carry out.
Minichiello et al., 1995; Patton, 2002). My own reflections on relationships illustrated how changes were particularly evident during the last few years of my graduate education, and the intensive ten-day long master’s class (EAHR825). I began to understand how the concept of transformational learning as it applied to the narrative I was living. Conversations with classmates further confirmed this finding. The more I questioned what was going on around me regarding my new learning and how new knowledge fits into the world I lived in, the more I felt that my social relationships were getting harder to maintain. It was difficult because my new ways of thinking and changes in my worldviews were at odds with those of long-time friends and family. Ledwith and Springette (2010) noted, “The way we see the world is directly related to the way we act in the world…we become inspired by hope that change for a better world is possible” (p. 175). However, I felt as if having hope for change was difficult when my closest friendships would not even entertain the idea of listening to alternative perspectives. Often times I felt at a loss regarding how to manoeuvre in difficult conversations. At this point I realized I had experienced a perspective transformation.

Even though a wide variety of Adult Education scholars (Boyd, 1991; Brookfield, 1987; Cranton, 2002; Mezirow, 1991; Taylor, 2007) have researched about transformative learning, none of their works addressed the personal challenges and narratives encountered following transformative learning experiences, in regard to sustaining or changing prior social and familial relationships. Despite knowing that transformative learning is highly individual (including my own), it is important to understand how the transformational learning experience influences the learner after the learning event has transpired. By investigating the changes in social and familial
relationships resulting from the transformational learning experienced in the course. I hope to create an understanding of how discomfort and challenges to prior relationships might be mitigated or at least be more understood.

**Background to EAHR825: The Participatory Methodologies Course**

The EAHR825 *Participatory Methodologies Course* was unlike other courses I took at university. The course material was delivered by an experienced professor who began the course with theories of participation and facilitation, and supported these theories with the use of storytelling often based on her own experiences. Participatory practices within the course aimed to “provide concrete models and suggestions to practitioners and participants in a wide variety of Adult Education settings who want to increase the participatory nature of their activities” (Campbell & Burnaby, 2001, p. vii). The course primarily focused on participatory methodologies as grounded in the critical theories of educators such as Freire (1970). Such methodologies are grounded and supported with a goal of change of transformation and are discussed further in Chapter Three. Participatory education encourages participants to identify and share experiences from their everyday lives while continually reflecting individually, and as a group. A course grounded in participatory methodologies is unique as educators or facilitators act as equal participants in the learning process, therefore, relinquishing some of the traditional power structures that exist in many university courses (Campbell & Burnaby, 2001). The *Participatory Methodologies* course description stated, “The approaches will demonstrate links between participation, social inclusion, societal transformation, and participatory decision-making” (Hanson, 2015, p. 1). Participatory approaches center on the belief that the central focus of education is to empower people to analyze the social
factors that have influenced their perspectives and then to take action that addresses oppression in the ways those social realities are experienced (Campbell & Burnaby, 2011). As mentioned in the syllabus (Appendix G), the course centered around six objectives:

1. Enhance ability to use participatory methods of facilitation,
2. Understand the links between participation and power,
3. Develop capacity to design and deliver participatory methodologies,
4. Articulate the links between participatory methodologies and democratic citizenship,
5. Understand the theory and practice of participatory methodologies/participation, and,
6. Provide examples of how participatory methodologies have been used in a variety of learning and research contexts. (Hanson, 2015, p. 1)

The course was an intensive course taught over the period of one week. Each day “was a blend of theory and practice; individual and group work; and lecture and hands-on activities” (Hanson, p. 1). The participants were required to complete one assignment, and several readings before the course began to build the participant’s prior learning and understanding, therefore, enabling participants to engage in dialogue with each other about theory and practice from the first day. Dialogue, as explained by Freire, (1970) was central to the vision of the course. His critical, emancipatory pedagogies that use theory to build on the student’s experiences in the world in order to change and reconstruct the world were frequently iterated. Participants engaged in the discussions
and hands-on activities as per course expectations, as it is part of a participatory facilitation model (Hanson, p. 1). In my experience, both as a graduate student in the course and as a researcher in the 2015 study, the objectives and intentions of the course were empowering and transformative. Thus, the actual contents of the course and my own transformed perspectives motivated me to complete this study.

**Research Questions**

The essential goal of my study is to understand critical elements or experiences in transformational learning that might foster or challenge existing social and familial relationships. The following questions guided the research:

1. How does a transformative learning experience alter a learner’s ability to maintain existing social and familial relationships?
2. How do transformed learners experience new and existing social networks?
3. How do learners position themselves to critically analyze and evaluate pre-conceived notions and assumptions?

**Researcher Position**

Pursuing post-secondary education has always been a path I desired, though many people in my extended family have not considered the value of additional schooling necessary. I found my transformational learning experiences often resulted in heated verbal disagreements with my friends and family who have not attended a post-secondary institution, thus making it difficult to reinforce and reflect on my new learning and experiences. It was difficult to separate my new learning from my pre-existing relationships, as my friends often reminded me that I was *not* in a university classroom
during our conversations. It was also challenging to merge all of my friend groups, I presume it was also a challenge for my friends to relate to me or find common ground during a conversation, and I needed to leave my schooling at the school like many people keep their work at their place of employment. I recall having conversations about how I believed men and women should be paid equally in Canada, and was shocked when a friend of mine told me to “let it go,” or discuss it during my university course, not during our friendly discussions. Other conversations surrounding major current events and systems of oppression in Canada were halted immediately by my friends, or else approached with such anger that the discussions would quickly end. I felt trapped, and through conversation with my course classmates, I realized many of them felt the same way. I began to research transformational learning experiences and how other learners adapted or sustained their pre-transformational learning relationships, although I found little available information to assist me as you’ve noted.

Although holding different groups of friends was beneficial to my understanding of multiple perspectives, I found it difficult to merge these relationships, as it seemed I was always negotiating positions between parties. Cranton (2016) discussed transformative learning as making meaning out of a person’s experiences while questioning prior assumptions that are based on experiences and beliefs. I struggled to understand how I could stay true to my transformative learning experiences as others challenged my new learnings, and reminded me that everyday life was not a university class that involved their participation. This inability to validate personal meaning through discursive interactions created difficulties.
The Researcher’s Background

I am the youngest of three children: I have a sister who is three years older, and a brother who is a year older than I am. My dad grew up in Regina, Saskatchewan, and was the second eldest of six children. My dad always had a thirst for knowledge and he was drawn to accounting from reading a textbook he had found in his uncle’s basement. It took longer to obtain his degree than he expected (due to fiscal constraints and employment obligations), but he earned his Bachelor of Business degree from the University of Regina, shortly after my brother was born in 1987. My father was the only one of his six siblings to attend a post-secondary institution. When I was growing up, he mainly used his degree to work internationally on regular assignments abroad, being reassigned to different places every three months. Because he travelled internationally and there was limited communication (the internet was in its infancy, phone calls were expensive, letters took months), we seldom had the opportunity to engage in meaningful conversation.

My mother was born and raised in Yorkton, Saskatchewan, and lived with her parents and older sister in their grandmother’s house. Making ends meet was difficult, and an emphasis was not placed on academic education, rather on vocational training, as the common trend in her small town for women was to get married, begin a family and become a homemaker. My mother was somewhat rebellious, and left Yorkton for Calgary, Alberta, following her high school graduation. She aimed to expand her horizons. After moving to the city, she married at a young age, and divorced soon after. My mother was a feminist, believing women had an equal place in the workforce, and
she worked full-time throughout our childhood. My mother spent most of her time with us, as my dad was usually away on business. Looking back on it, my mother raised three children (all born within a three-year span) mostly on her own.

Both of my parents put a strong emphasis on the importance of schooling. My sister found learning difficult in high school and often needed extra tutoring to reinforce concepts, and therefore she took a few years off before entering university. She later graduated with a Bachelor of Business degree from the University of Regina. My brother also had a difficult learning career, but he attended university in Saskatchewan and British Columbia. He only completed a few classes before he entered the trades. On the other hand, I enjoyed school and did well. Therefore, the pressure to succeed was put on me by my parents. After high school, I entered university and worked on my Bachelor of Education degree for four years. However, I felt I was not quite ready to leave university, and so I continued to take courses to earn the University of Regina’s Certificate in Adult Education and Training. It was by taking that certificate program that I initially had profound learning experiences. I enjoyed the Adult Education program and the foundations it was built upon, so I applied and was accepted into the Masters of Adult Education program.

My experience in the course Participatory Methodologies was pivotal in transforming my learning, my perspectives and my relationships in ways I never imagined. The course changed my views on the world, and introduced me to worldviews that differed from that of my own. Often times throughout the course the facilitator would share a story or pose a question that would make my mind race endlessly, like a
hamster running on a wheel. The participants in the course challenged my ways of thinking as well, and the more they shared about their lives, and their stories, it changed what I thought I had known, valued or believed. I felt as if I was breathing fresh air for the first time in years. I was emotionally provoked to create social change in the world, starting with the way that I viewed the world around me, and how I interacted with others. A flood of emotions hit me like brick wall, I was unsure of whom to turn to and was confused about what was happening to me. This study was personally a quest to understand this change.

**Structure of the Thesis**

The structure of my thesis is comprised of five chapters. The first chapter is the introduction to the study. This chapter has outlined the statement of the problem, researcher position, the purpose of the study, and the central research questions.

The second chapter focuses on the literature review, with an emphasis on transformational learning, the role of critical reflection, and the influence of the transformational learning experience on one’s worldviews. The chapter also outlines the background literature that informed the research questions, as well as the reasons why this research was important and presents some discussion on social and familial relationships.

The third chapter concentrates on the research design: methodology of the research study, highlighting the research design, ethical considerations, and the role of the researcher and the research methods employed. The research design discusses participant recruitment, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, as well as the
strategies for establishing data authenticity of the findings of the study. The fourth chapter consists of a presentation of the research findings and my own critical reflections. The discussion in the findings is divided into main themes from the data gathered. The final chapter discusses the research findings and provides some recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction

Chapter Two outlines transformative learning theory by reviewing the works of notable theorists in this area. It begins with Freire’s (1970) ideas on change and transformational learning. Following Freire, the chapter focuses predominantly on Mezirow’s (1991) four main components of transformational learning: experience, critical reflection, reflective discourse, and action. I discuss how adult learners make meaning from those experiences, as well as how adults “know.” Then I discuss how adults create a sense of belonging for themselves and how that may better foster transformative learning opportunities. Finally, I examine the role critical self-reflection, discourse, and dialogue play in transformative learning experiences.

Transformational Learning Theory and Paulo Freire

Paulo Freire and Jack Mezirow are two of the most known transformational learning theorists in the field of Adult Education (Brookfield, 1987, 1990, 2006; Cranton 2002; Creswell, 2007, 2009; Hanson, 2013; Ledwith and Spingette, 2010; Taylor, 2000, 2007). Although Freire and Mezirow studied and developed transformational learning theories, Freire’s primary focus is on social or group transformational learning experiences, whereas, Mezirow’s principal focus is on the individual or personal transformational learning experiences (Freire, 1970; Mezirow, 1991). Freire, a Brazilian educator and theorist of critical pedagogy, (1994) wanted people to develop an “ontological vocation” (p.12) that allowed them to continually reflect while acting upon transformations of their world. He ultimately saw their actions aimed towards creating a more just and equitable world for all to live. Freire (1970) worked with illiterate adults in
Latin America from lower socio-economic communities, who not only learned to read and write after working with him, but also came to critically view the world with a new awareness of how to read the world. According to Shaull (2014):

[Freire’s] early sharing of the life of the poor also led him to the discovery of what he describes as the “culture of silence” of the dispossessed. He came to realize that their ignorance and lethargy were the direct product of the whole situation of economic, social, and political domination—and of the paternalism—of which they were victims. Rather than being encouraged and equipped to know and respond to the concrete realities of their world, they were kept “submerged” in a situation in which such critical awareness and response were practically impossible. In addition, it became clear to him that the whole educational system was one of the major instruments for the maintenance of this culture of silence. (p. 30)

Freire (1970) recognized illiteracy rates were a result of more than the participants being unwilling to learn how to read, and he identified that there were other lived, oppressive realities that obstructed learners’ ability to learn how to read. Like Freire, Gramsci (1971) was also concerned with oppression and how it was structured through processes of hegemony. He realised that when there is an awareness of hegemony, learners can work to change or challenge dominant power structures. When however, learners are not aware of hegemony or what Freire would call a “critical consciousness,” then learners are often complicit in maintaining hegemony or inequality. Thus, the educational system preserved the oppressive practices, which in turn, maintained the “culture of silence” (Freire).

Freire used the term conscientization to describe the process in which learners “achieve a deepening awareness of both the sociocultural reality which shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality through action upon it” (Freire, 1970, p. 27). Conscientization is how students learn “to perceive social, political, and economic
contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (Freire, 1994, p. 17). As Hanson (2013) interpreted the application of Freire as outlined here:

Freire was concerned about how individuals internalize oppression, how they arrive at critical consciousness or awareness about that oppression, and then, how they act, ostensibly through praxis, to transform inequitable power relations. His discussion of the co-intentionality of practice by facilitators and learners assumes an interactive engagement, where reflection, in a dialectical relationship with theory and action, is an essential component of praxis in the world. (p.73)

Similar to Hanson (2013), Ledwith and Springett (2010) reflect on Freire’s work. They acknowledge that building critical consciousness is taxing but also necessary for work in social justice because when we:

Question everyday experience, critical connections are made which expose the contractions and injustices in social life. This is an empowering process that leads to collective action for change. In the process of conscientization, Freire identified three interlinking levels: magical consciousness (people are passive and unquestioning about the injustices in their lives); naïve consciousness (people individualise their problems and often blame themselves; and critical consciousness (connections are made with the structural nature of discrimination. These should be seen as partial, fluid and incomplete; we are never at one level or another, but always in a process of struggling to make sense of an ever-changing world. The process of conscientization calls for us to transcend the forces of individualism, so powerfully embedded in western culture, and to see a world that is inextricably connected to an interacting whole. (p. 172-3)

Both Hanson, as well as Ledwith and Springett, ponder the applications of Freire’s work toward building critical consciousness. With a particular interest in the political nature of education, Freire believed education is never neutral. It can be either liberating, as it teaches people to be critical, autonomous thinkers, or domesticating, as it allows people to undisputedly accept information given to them, therefore reinforcing the status quo (Ledwith & Springett, 2010). Freire believed praxis (a unity of theory and practice) is fundamental to understanding and transforming the feelings generated by critical
consciousness. He identified four types of “culturally conditioned” levels of consciousness as follows:

1. Lowest level: intransitive consciousness—where people are concerned about their basic needs and are unaware of issues other than biological ones,
2. Second level: “semi-intransitivity” or magical consciousness—found mostly in societies ruled by dictators and in many emerging third world countries,
3. Third level: naïve or semi-intransitive consciousness—where people begin to engage in questioning their lives; however, they are very vulnerable to manipulation, and finally,
4. Fourth level: conscientization, where learners reach the highest level and are able to participate in dialogue that questions social norms, cultural expectations, and ideologies that foster oppressive norms, values, and ideologies (Freire, 1970).

Freire’s (1970) “culturally conditioned” levels of consciousness identified that there are different starting points for every learner. Thus, when learners are at the most basic level or the first level they are concerned about their own needs and wants; in the fourth level, learners have reached the highest level where they are able to engage in dialogue that questions the world around them. Therefore, Freire’s literature on critical consciousness and praxis actually provides some foundational understanding for Mezirow’s theory of transformational learning.

**Transformational Learning Theory and Jack Mezirow**

Mezirow’s theory of transformational learning allows a person to recognize, reassess, and modify the structures of our beliefs and assumptions that influence our preconceived notions, assumptions, beliefs, values, attitudes, and actions (Mezirow et al.,
His transformational learning theory begins to “explain how adult learners make sense or meaning of their experiences, the nature of the structures that influence the way they construe experience, the dynamics involved in modifying meanings, and the way the structures of meaning themselves undergo changes when learners find them to be dysfunctional” (Mezirow, 1991, p. xii).

Transformational learning theory is about change: a dramatic and fundamental change in an individual, in how they see the world in which they live, and what role they maintain within that world (Cafarella & Merriam, 2000). Marmon (2018) adds, “Adults encounter something new… then they reflect and talk with others about the accuracy and adequacy of their assumptions being challenged. Insights often reveal the need for changing those assumptions and the attitudes, behaviours, and beliefs that accompany them” (p. 425). Transformational learning can therefore be described as:

Involving a simple transformation of belief or opinion or a radical transformation involving one’s total perspective; learning may occur abruptly or incrementally. Education should liberate students from passive, mindless, and uncritical acceptance of experience and how experience shapes knowledge. Learning to re-evaluate and re-story prior learning experience can lead adults to make sense of their experience and find a new sense of identity. (Foote, 2015, p. 84)

Similarly, O’Sullivan, Morrell and O’Connor (2002) discuss transformational learning as:

… a structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and irreversibly alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race and gender; our body-awareness, our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy. (p. 18)
As a structural shift, transformational learning cannot be reversed or unlearned. It is a drastic shift in one’s perspective altering the way a person understands their experiences, and how they view the world. Transformational learning can be powerful as it challenges learners’ beliefs and values as previously shaped by the world around them.

Originally, Mezirow (1978) designed a study to “identify factors that characteristically impede or facilitate the progress of [women’s] re-entry programs [at community colleges]” (p. 1). These specifically designed programs allowed women to resume their education, or gain a vocational education. Mezirow and his research team surveyed eighty-three women from four two-year colleges, and from the data, they discovered the participants had undergone a shift in their “personal paradigm for understanding themselves and their relationships” (Cranton & Taylor, 2012, p. 101). Thus, Mezirow discovered the women had experienced a shift in their perspectives, thereby undergoing a transformational learning experience where they began to look at their lived experiences and relationships in a more critical way.

Mezirow (1978) also outlined a ten-phase process of personal perspective transformation included ten phases as follows:

1) Experiencing a disorienting dilemma;
2) Undergoing self-examination of feelings (guilt or shame);
3) Conducting a critical assessment of internalized assumptions and feeling a sense of alienation;
4) Recognizing that the problem is shared;
5) Exploring new ways of acting, building competence and self-confidence;
6) Planning a course of action;
7) Acquiring the applicable knowledge and skills to aid in the implementation process;
8) Trying out new roles and assessing them;
9) Rebuilding pre-existing relationships, and forming new ones, and;
10) Reintegrating into society with a new perspective. (pp. 100-109)

**Perspective Transformation**

Perspective transformation is a term Mezirow (1975) created to explain the process by which learners begin to challenge the status quo through asking critical questions that evaluate the authenticity of new meanings. In this way, utilizing the discourse as a “dialogue devoted to searching for a common understanding and assessment of the justification of an interpretation of belief” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 10). Meaning perspectives challenge “sets of related expectations governing cause-effect relationship, roles, social action, values, and making connections between feelings and action [that] guide the way in which we experience, feel, understand, judge and act upon our situation” (Mezirow, 1985, p. 22). Furthermore, Mezirow (2000) recognized adults needed opportunities to challenge their perspectives in a safe environment where they analyze the source of their beliefs and how their frame of reference shapes the decisions, they make. Transformational learning thus changes the ways in which adults understand the world around them, and the way they interact with others. In terms of this study, perspective transformation was important, as it offered an explanation of what the learners and I endured after undergoing a transformational learning experience in terms of analyzing our emotions while challenging or reinforcing our viewpoints.
Other Approaches to Transformational Learning

Later, Mezirow condensed his framework of transformational learning to encompass a psycho-critical approach to transformational learning theory, which is composed of four main components: experience, critical reflection, reflective discourse and action (as cited in Cranton, 2016). The process begins with the learner’s experiences, where the learner critically self-examines their held beliefs and assumptions to better understand how their experience is shaped and interpreted. As Cranton (2006) explained:

Throughout their lifetime, people make meaning out of their experiences. They build a way of seeing the world, a way of interpreting what happens to them, and accompanying values, beliefs, and assumptions that determine their behaviour. Much of this framework is uncritically absorbed from family, community, and culture. People do not stop to question everything that happens to them or everything they see and hear—they generally believe their friends, accept media interpretations of events, and follow the principles that have guided them so far. People have a set of expectations about the world that are based on formative childhood experiences, and those expectations continue to act as a filter for understanding life. (p. 19)

Therefore, adults have a plethora of stories and events they acquire in their everyday lives that create a frame of reference that encompasses their values, feelings, and beliefs, which in turn, may also limit their willingness and ability to accept ideas or beliefs that differ from their value systems. Transformative learning focuses on making meaning out of a person’s prior experiences, beliefs and assumptions, and challenging expectations that have been developed based on those pre-existing ideologies (Cranton, 2016).

Learners can move towards a more self-reflective and critical-self frame of reference through transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997). Kitchenham (2008) further explained the two key elements of transformational learning “are critical reflection, or critical self-reflection, on assumptions and critical discourse, where the learner validates the best
judgment . . . or the process an individual evokes to monitor the epistemic nature of problems and the truth value of alternative solutions” (p. 105). Action is the final component of the transformative learning process; however, the person may take immediate or delayed action depending on their readiness for change and their ability to understand what is happening to and around them.

Not as well known, but supplementary to Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning, is Daloz’s (1986) psycho-developmental perspective and Boyd’s (1986) psychoanalytical approach to transformative learning. Daloz (1986) speaks to adults returning to school as often being in a period of transition in their lives, and the importance of creating opportunities to allow these learners to make meaning from their experiences. “Education is a transformational journey that should promote development,” states Daloz (p.16). Under this assertion, Daloz discusses the importance of the educator acting as a mentor or guide to challenge and support the learner through their transformational journey. Daloz uses a more holistic approach, where the emphasis is on stories from the educator and the way learners change and expand their worldviews. Daloz (1991) loosely offers three “maps” of adult development, yet he does not specify a specific endpoint to the transformational learning journey. Daloz (1991) acknowledges the importance of the process of growth and cognitive growth in the learner. Having a facilitator who engages their participants through stories and activities is vital to transformational learning, as it encourages the participants to challenge or reinforce their perspectives while critically self-reflecting on their lived experiences. Facilitators who believe in teaching using participatory practices engage their students in activities that promote transformational learning and critical self-reflection. One
The role of dialogue in doing this cannot be overlooked.

The Role of Dialogue

For transformational learning experiences to challenge and reinforce one’s perspectives, dialogue is central to the process. Dialogue is not only about speaking it is also about listening: “dialogue is like an ecosystem, and it is listening, not speaking, that creates the ecosystem” (Janz, 2018, p. 127). Participation in dialogue is a starting point when trying to understand one’s transformational learning experience. Engaging in dialogue is a participatory practice that allows participants to share and listen to differing perspectives (Ledwith & Springett, 2010). Dialogue encourages participants to analyze information, creating a more in-depth understanding that there are many different truths, and ways of experiencing and making sense of those new learnings. Ledwith and Springett emphasize when creating conditions that foster dialogue, “you are also creating structures and conditions for collective learning, learning that connects people across difference to share a world in common” (p. 127). Therefore, by engaging in dialogical interaction, it is possible for participants to become more aware of every day and hidden thoughts, due to the mutual questioning of their preconceived notions, assumptions, and values.

Dialogue is a respectful conversation that aims to allow participants to speak and listen, as well as to agree and disagree to increase one’s understanding of acceptance and difference in hopes of creating a mutual understanding, and eventually, action. Dialogue is “an interactive process of learning together whereby mutual value is enhanced through
the process of meaning making…that is a relational exchange process that allows interplay between people as whole beings, in a trusting and respectful way, to explore new understandings openly through the language of feelings, ideas, facts, dissent, opinions, and plans” (Ledwith & Springett, 2010, p.128). Dialogue allows participants to recognize there are many different truths and ways of experiencing, based on one’s stories and alternative perspectives, creating avenues for common understanding and meaning making. Dialogue and emancipatory learning provide opportunities to make learners aware of the societal structures and disadvantages that are present and the factors that influence or contribute to inequity and oppression. Dialogue emerges from interactions where participants are reflecting, altering or reinforcing beliefs, questioning their assumptions, and then reflecting once again (Belenky et al., 1986). Dialogue is not stagnant, it is a continuous process, “purposefully motivated, [with] open exchange that provides participants the space in which, together, to reflect, critique, affirm, challenge, act, and ultimately transform [their] collective understanding of the world” (Darder, 2000, p.82). While engaging in dialogue, participants are reflecting upon and sharing their own stories and viewpoints, and listening to the other participant’s stories; therefore, continuously challenging or reinforcing their own perspectives.

Rose-Redwood et al. (2018) suggested that dialogue “does not take place in a vacuum but within specific and continually changing contexts which raise questions about the terms and terrain upon which dialogue takes place and is conducted” (p. 112). In well-facilitated dialogue, people become observers of their thoughts, and are more open to new ideas that bring with them new possibilities. Mezirow (1991) suggests that
discourse is pivotal to transformational learning, and defines discourse as dialogue involving a participant assessing their beliefs, feelings, and values. Under ideal conditions, he identified participants in discourse will:

1. Have accurate and complete information,
2. Be free from coercion and distorting self-perception,
3. Be able to weigh evidence and analyze arguments objectively,
4. Be open to alternative perspectives,
5. Be able to reflect critically on presuppositions and their consequences,
6. Have equal opportunity to participate, and,
7. Be able to accept an informed, objective consensus as valid (p. 78).

Dialogue is in “juxtaposition to what commonly happens in meeting spaces and conversations where meaning is filtered through a web of entrenched ideas uncritically, and old positions are defended” (Ledwith & Springett, 2010, p.128). While participating in good dialogue, participants can critically reflect on their truths and ways of knowing, and in turn, their ideas may be challenged or reinforced. As a result, this process can bring forth hidden and embedded discourses, and begin to challenge already established truths and ways of knowing, which begins to expose power relations and systems of oppression (Ledwith & Springett, 2010). Opportunities for dialogue and support are fundamental aspects when helping individuals create and maintain a comfortable sense of self, during a time that may be uncomfortable for them, due to constant questioning and reflecting upon their beliefs (Cranton, 2006, p. 66). Dialogue allows learners to communicate with their peers and allows them to relate their experiences and perspectives to the world around them, with their peers, and with their purpose,
emotions, and feelings. Thus, “dialogue in any of these areas involves either implicit or explicit claims regarding the justification or validity of what is said, implied, or presupposed” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 65). Research by Blalock and Akehi (2018) stated, “The process of dialogue, whether it be social, spur of the moment, or intentional, can be a way for people to connect. Sharing stories, particularly when stories contain shared experiences, can further connect individuals around a commonality” (p. 90). Therefore, providing ample time for participants to engage in dialogue is key when reflecting on life experiences, stories, emotions and new learning. When participants engage in dialogue, they have to reflect on their stories and emotions, while challenging or reinforcing their worldviews.

The role of dialogue within the Participatory Methodologies course was intentional. The course allowed the participants the opportunity to discuss alternative perspectives and worldviews that may have challenged or reinforced those of their own. Although several participants felt challenged by the opposing worldviews, the opportunity for dialogue within the course, helped participants engage and find new ways of constructing meaning. Dialogue also helped support participants to help make sense of their transformational learning experiences, as it would be unethical for educators to foster transformational learning environments if they were unwilling to support the learners as they go through it (Mezirow, 1991).

Relationships and Dialogue in Transformational Learning

Arends (2014) suggests, “The practice of dialogue has the capacity to promote not only relationships but also equity, a common goal of transformative learning” (p. 363). In
addition to Mezirow, Boyd (1989, 1991) grounds his work in psychology, therefore seeing the transformation as a “fundamental change in one’s personality involving conjoinitly the resolution of a personal dilemma and the expansion of consciousness resulting in greater personality integration” (1991, p. 459). Boyd highlights the importance of dialogue to the transformational learning process and believes the integration between the emotional and spiritual components of learning can only happen when the learners begin to make sense of their psyche by understanding images, symbols, and new information. Further, Ledwith and Springett (2010) explain the essential role of dialogue in transformational learning:

Participation involves a dialogical relationship with the world, both human and physical. Therefore, while story can be seen as an essential starting point on the journey to transformation, dialogue lies at the heart of engaging in participatory practice. It is integral to Paulo Freire’s approach to popular education, and is a key component of almost any effective approach to community health. Its crucial role in the development of trust is most clear when absent. Absence of dialogue reinforces a world of conflict, of ‘other’, of fear. Dialogue is about respectful communication and deliberation. A dialogical approach to change and transformation is as much about listening as talking, and as much about dissent as about consensus; the outcome is always increased understanding and acceptance of difference, and in the best cases leads to mutual action. Thus, dialogue is both a process of knowledge production and creation, and a basis of appropriate social action. It is about meaning making and mutual meaning making. (p. 127)

Dialogue plays an important role in the transformational learning process, as it is a participatory approach to learning where participants are in control of their own critical self-reflections and sharing. Trott (2012) explains dialogue as a process that constructs a shared meaning through a collaborative process, where people are continually reconstructing their worldviews. The presence of dialogue allows participants to respectfufly communicate their emotions, stories and reflections, while listening to other
participant’s stories. Dialogue is a fine balance between sharing and listening, where the outcome is geared towards understandings and accepting differing beliefs and lived narratives.

Understanding more about transformational learning experiences and the effects on social and familial relationships was of special interest to me, because of the transformational learning experience I had during the participatory methodologies course and it subsequently affected how I navigated my social relationships. Trott (2012) expressed it beautifully, “dialogue is unity and difference in the same instant: metaphorically speaking, like dancing butterflies symbolic of love in Chinese culture” (p. 476). In my case, I held an unwavering need to understand my story, as well as to compare it to those of other students who felt as if their socio-familial relationships had changed because of the transformative learning experience. Conducting this research enabled me to compare my experiences with others, as well as to analyze and make meaning of my own story – that is, how it affected my relationships and in turn, my understanding of how adults learn.

**Adult Learning Experiences**

Often, adult learning is described to be a voluntary action, in which individuals choose to become involved in formal and informal learning to enrich their knowledge and skill sets to develop on a personal or vocational level (Cranton, 2006). Similarly, Brookfield (1986) further identifies adult learning as usually self-directed learning through a process by which people identify their needs, begin to set goals, discover new learning avenues, and locate resources and materials to help them achieve their goals. Brookfield (1995) suggests “self-directed learning focuses on the process by which
adults take control of their learning, in particular how they set their own learning goals, locate appropriate resources, decide on which learning methods to use and evaluate their progress” (p. 1). Walsh (2017) stated that self-directed learning is a process where individuals take initiative to understand their learning needs, with or without help from others all the while creating goals and planning what resources and supports they needed to be successful. Cranton (2006) discusses the importance of learning and “learning in some form is an aspect of virtually every person’s life” (p. 2). Fenwick (2000) agrees that the learner continues to reflect on lived experiences, while interpreting and generalizing their experiences, which in turn creates structures of knowledge within, are “stored in memory as concepts that can be represented, expressed, and transferred to new situations” (p. 248). These stored memories create explanations for one’s perspectives and the ways people understand, interpret, and categorize their experiences while challenging or reinforcing their knowledge or meaning perspectives. As explained earlier by Ledwith and Springett (2010), stories become a process of meaning making, where critical reflection guides learners to challenge or reinforce their beliefs.

Throughout the literature, there are three main concepts in transformational learning: experience, critical reflection, and development. Knowles (1968) discusses how the experiences adults acquire over their lifetime can be used as a resource for their learning, and can be experienced and constructed in a multitude of ways. Not all experiences trigger a transformational learning moment for all adults, as some may not be able to respond to a new experience in the same way as another. “Critical reflection involves a critique of the presuppositions on which our beliefs have been built and the process of making a new or revised interpretation of an experience, guides subsequent
understandings, appreciation and action” (Mezirow, 1990, p. 1). Brookfield (1995) makes a similar point in explaining how a person’s experiences are constructed, and how meaning is formulated:

First, experience should not be thought of as an objectively neutral phenomenon, a river of thoughts, perceptions and sensations into which we decide, occasionally, to dip our toes. Rather, our experience is culturally framed and shaped. How we experience events and the readings we make of these are problematic; that is, they change according to the language and categories of analysis we use, and according to the cultural, moral and ideological vantage points from which they are viewed. In a very important sense, we construct our experience: how we sense and interpret what happens to us and to the world around us is a function of structures of understanding and perceptual filters that are so culturally embedded that we are scarcely aware of their existence or operation. Second, the quantity or length of experience is not necessarily connected to its richness or intensity. For example, in an Adult Education career spanning 30 years the same, one-year experience can, in effect, be repeated thirty times. Indeed, one's “experience” over these 30 years can be interpreted using uncritically assimilated cultural filters in such a way as to prove to oneself that students from certain ethnic groups are lazy or that fear is always the best stimulus to critical thinking. Because of the habitual ways we draw meaning from our experiences, these experiences can become evidence for the self-fulfilling prophecies that stand in the way of critical insight. Uncritically affirming people's histories, stories and experiences risks idealizing and romanticizing them. Experiences are neither innocent nor free from the cultural contradictions that inform them. (p. 3)

Brookfield’s examination of how experience and meaning are constructed provide a foundation for critical reflection. Fraser (2015) further contributes the idea that “critical reflection and transformative learning are at the heart of a move toward innovation and change” (p. 141). Critical reflection brings a better understanding of an experience that an adult cannot accommodate or make sense of in their current life structures (Merriam et al., 2007). It can be assumed then, that critical reflection eliminates affirming, idealizing and romanticizing people’s truths and provides
opportunities to question or critique lived experiences and when appropriate use those experience to create change.

Brookfield (1995) identified critical reflection as three interrelated processes: 1) the process of replacing or reframing assumptions, where adults begin to question perspectives that up until this point have been accepted as common sense, or uncritically accepted; 2) the process where adults begin to adopt alternative worldviews, including ideas, forms of reasoning, actions and ideologies; and 3) the process where adults begin to recognize aspects of hegemonic systemic dominant cultural values, while trying to understand how one plays a role within those structures and how those systems do not give a representations of minorities (p. 2). Reflection is a process that examines underlying beliefs, values, and assumptions that affect our sense of an experience or situation. Brookfield (1995) provided a rationale for the importance of trigger events, which in turn, provide the groundwork for transformational learning to occur.

**Ways in Which Adults ‘Know’**

Adult learners engage in learning to acquire new knowledge, skills, or values, through formal or informal activities and learning. While engaged in learning, adults begin to elaborate on their existing knowledge base, skills and values, and/or they begin to change the way they have previously viewed some aspects of themselves and the world they live in, by questioning their preconceived notions and assumptions. The process of adult learning is continual, whether it is to increase knowledge within a specific module at work, learning a skill to make home improvements, or joining a group to make connections surrounding a similar topic (Cranton, 2006). Therefore, “finding
new and useful tools to incorporate into adult learning is of great importance to help meet adult learners’ diverse learning styles” (Mancuso, Chlup, & McWorter, 2010, p. 683). The incorporation of adult learning in collaborative and ongoing ways occurs in formal, informal and nonformal forms.

In his study of Teaching with Developmental Intention, Taylor (2000) offers ways in which an adult learner knows in developmental terms: a dialogical process, how to construct and reconstruct knowledge, move toward a dialogical relationship with oneself, move towards being continuous learners, move towards self-agency and authorship and finally recognize their responsibility for their action, choices, and values for the decisions they may make based on their values, and finally, making connections with others. Another aspect of adult learning goes further than the focus on knowledge, attitudes and beliefs. It also revolves around the learner being able to self-direct and cultivate their own learning within, while seeking the knowledge they need rather than from an external source telling them what to learn (White & Nitkin, 2014, p. 3).

Adults carry with them a variety of rich experiences and resources (Knowles, 1980) that guides their learning and sharing. When adults share their experiences and worldviews with others it creates new learning and understandings for them. Embodied learning is an education method that involves the whole body as a learning tool, which includes the body, senses and mind (Wilcox, 2009). Adults embody their learning using body movement, gestures and vocalizations (Lawrence, 2012), and can transform their stories through embodied learning by building a deeper understanding of their stories and the feelings surrounding their experiences.
When adults are critically conscious, the learning experience helps them to gain a deeper understanding of how social structures shape and influence their perspectives, as well as how they think about themselves and the world (Dirkx, 1998). Brookfield (1995) contends it is more important to understand learning how to learn, rather than learning patterns typically identified through a cognitive style inventory. Moreover, adults are self-consciously aware of how they have formed their knowledge base and can recognize assumptions that justify whether something is perceived as accurate or true.

A deep understanding of how adults learn and ‘know,’ is important for my research, as it loosely explains how a learner might construct knowledge and then choose an action based on values, ideas, and worldviews. How the participants’ transformational learning experience altered their relationships will be of interest to me as I compare my experiences with theirs.

**Challenging and Creating a Transformational Learning Environment**

Cranton (2006) states that “when an educator’s goal is to set up an environment and learning context in which people critically question their habits of mind in order to become open to alternatives, it is emancipatory learning that he or she is fostering” (p. 106). Emancipatory learning occurs when learners begin to deconstruct power structures and ways of knowing in their societies, while questioning their own values and beliefs and how those ways of knowing were developed and maintained (Freire, 1970). Educators who embrace and foster this type of learning may also play additional roles such as trying to challenge, stimulate and provoke each participant’s critical thinking and reflection (Cranton, 2006). In many ways, emancipatory or transformational learning
moves learners outside of comfort zones, as it forces them to critically examine and question their values and beliefs, while reflecting on their own stories.

Stead (2015) states, “Thinking about belonging evokes questions of what it is to fit in or to feel out of place, to be an insider or to be excluded, to feel accepted or to feel marginalized” (p. 61). Creating an environment which fosters the sense of belonging is important for adult learners, as May (2017) adds “belonging is a fundamentally temporal experience that is anchored not only in place but also time” (p. 401). There are many implications for adult educators whom experienced transformational learning moments. According to Sargent and Schlossberg (1988), belonging is necessary for transformation. They explain, “A sense of belonging is that calm and positive feeling you have when you feel part of things, when you know the ropes and what is expected of you” (p. 59). When adult learners feel a sense of belonging, they are more open to engage in a dialogue, and are more inclined to critically question their values and beliefs.

Slavick and Zimbardo (2012) further pose that transformational teaching involves more than creating lesson plans for adult learners, as it needs to bridge dynamic relationships between the teachers and adult learners, creating a shared knowledge base that promotes adult learning and growth. Utilizing this perspective, instructors are able to “accomplish these goals by establishing a shared vision for a course, providing modeling and mastery experiences, challenging and encouraging students, personalizing attention and feedback, creating experiential lessons that transcend the boundaries of the classroom” (Slavick and Zimbardo, 2012, p. 571), while creating and promoting opportunities for learners to critically reflect on their learning and experiences.
Offering adult learners the opportunity to share their stories with a group of learners is important, as it creates the feeling of being able to share in a group, creating a sense of belonging connecting the individual to the social (May, 2011). In other words, creating a sense of community. This sensation may empower adult learners and reduce the fear some participants hold towards learning and change. Lakey (2010) realized individuals learn in group situations learn by using different learning styles: “some learn chiefly through their ears (auditory), others through their eyes (visual), some learn mainly through their bodies in motion (kinesthetic), and others learn by making a gut-level connection with the information and the group (emotional)” (p. 2). Although learners tend to focus more intently on one of these learning styles, some learners prefer to use a combination. Constructing engaging environments for participants that foster multiple learning styles is important to create a sense of community for all of the participants in the group.

White and Nitkin (2014) pointed out, “in addition to active student engagement, another key feature of transformational learning is transformational teaching. For students’ role to change, the role and responsibility of [facilitators] must change as well” (p. 2). Implementing the foundational groundwork to help create a “catalyst for transformation” (Cranton, 2002, p. 66) may help expose participants to viewpoints that may differ from their own, or to challenge their pre-existing assumptions, values, and beliefs. Providing unusual or controversial beliefs may allow adult learners to experience alternative perspectives. Brookfield (2006) suggests scaffolding participation in discussion by structuring conversation with the participants through different
instructional approaches, such as but not limited to: circle of voices (p. 143-152) (where each participant contributes to the discussion before a person can share again), controversial roles (participants assume different roles and must investigate an alternative perspective), quotes to affirm or challenge worldviews (participants are given an issue and are presented with quotes from different stakeholders to learn more about each perspective), and snowballing (participants respond to different issues individually, in small groups, and in larger groups). These instructional approaches allow learners to discuss their ideas in such a way that they are non-threatening and it guides learners to see the situation from a different perspective than their own. Critical reflection is key to this process.

**The Role of Critical Reflection**

Liitos, Kallio, and Tynjala (2012) discussed the importance of providing opportunities to critically reflect on experiences in adult education work related situations. Critical reflection allows an adult learner to question and challenge their preconceived notions, beliefs, values, and reactions to a situation. According to Dirkx (1998), “critical consciousness refers to a process in which learners develop the ability to analyze, pose questions, and take action on the social, political, cultural, and economic context that influence and shape their lives” (p. 3). Radd and Kramer’s (2016) research adds that we use critical consciousness, “to denote the willingness and ability to see how power and privilege are at work to systematically advantage some while simultaneously disadvantaging others” (as cited in Radd & Grosland, 2018, p.414). Without critical reflection critical consciousness cannot occur.
Closs and Antonello (2011) explains the difference between critical reflection and other reflection, as critical reflection “implies an evaluation of what is being reflected upon. Critical reflection can be implicit (unexamined choices based on assimilated values) or explicit (making the choice process conscious so as to examine and evaluate the reason for choice)” (p. 71). The ability to critically reflect upon one’s own assumptions, and the world around them, while taking into consideration their own thoughts, feelings, perceptions and actions, is central in the process of challenging, altering or reinforcing the complexities associated with adult life and learning (Taylor, Cranton & Associates, 2012, p. 323). “Critical reflection, a distinguishing characteristic of adult learning, refers to questioning the integrity of deeply held assumptions and beliefs based on prior experience” (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009, p. 7). As Ledwith and Springett (2010) pointed out:

Through story and dialogue, we can start to open up spaces for critical engagement. However, to be truly transformative, reflection is an essential component of the process of change, and as such, it needs to be interwoven with the process of action, alongside story and dialogue. It is the continual cycling of action and reflection through critical questioning that forms the basis of transformation and praxis. This interweaving produces a fabric of critical knowledge and thoughtful action. Reflection cannot be an added extra; it has to be integral to all we do. (Ledwith & Springett, 2010, p. 151)

Mezirow (2000) further discusses that critical reflection usually occurs as a response to different thoughts, feelings, and actions that may lead to a perspective transformation. There are three forms of reflection in transformation meaning perspectives (Mezirow & Taylor, 2006): content, process, and premise.

According to Mezirow and Taylor, content reflection refers to when learners challenge why they perceive, think, feel or act, while premise reflection refers to the
learner’s awareness of how they perform the content reflections. The least common of the three forms of reflection is the premise reflection, which is the basis for critical reflection. Premise reflection refers to the process of examining our preconceived notions and assumptions that underlie a learner’s knowledge of the world around them. Recent studies found that premise reflection “has been purported as a form of reflection needing to be engaged earlier and more frequently, particularly among those who have greater experience” (Mezirow & Taylor, 2006, p. 8). Therefore, critical self-reflection plays an important role in transformational learning experiences, as it validates the emotions the participant is feeling and it allows the participant to analyze and challenge their life experiences, beliefs and values.

Ledwith and Springett (2010) outline the importance of critical reflection and engagement in transformational learning. There ideas are also similar to Cranton’s. As Cranton (2002) explains, “there are no special methods that guarantee transformation, although transformation is always one of our goals […] in every strategy we use, we need to provide an ever-changing balance of challenge, support, and learner empowerment” (p.71). Transformational learning is a continuous spiral-like process, rather than a linear process with a beginning and an end (Cranton, 2002). Closs and Antonello (2017) further explains, “Transformative learning aims at changing the individual’s frame of reference, consciously, through critical reflection about assumptions built non-critically” (p. 70). Adult learners are unable to critically reflect on their preconceived notions and assumptions until they are made aware of them because

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adult learners need to engage in discourse to challenge their ideologies. One way learners become conscientious is through critical reflective journals (Cranton, 2002).

**Critically Reflective Writing**

Cranton (2002) suggests critically reflective journals provide students with a format to remain conscious of the conditions of discourse. Written reflection strengthens the experience by creating records of the ideas that a learner was thinking and/or feeling at a given time, as well as creating artefacts that a participant can review and reflect on as needed (Ziegler, Paulus, & Woodside, 2006). Critical reflective journals encourage illustrating and writing, which often helps a learner to make sense of their reflections and new learning, in a way that challenges a learner to “recall from memory and verbally articulate reflective moments during their teaching practice, particularly about a phenomenon (teaching) that often operates at a tacit level” (Mezirow & Taylor, 2006, p. 9). Lindroth (2015) suggested that critical reflective writing “can create cognitive awareness in considering previous actions and it builds confidence by placing value on student thought” (p. 67). Finally, critical reflective journals allow a learner to record thoughts, feelings or questions instantaneously. Then they can refer back to their experience and share it with others, or continue to reflect upon it when it is most relevant. The study used critically reflective journals as part of the data collection process discussed in the next chapter.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter has provided an overview of transformational learning theories, using the works of multiple theorists, such as Freire (2000), Mezirow (1991), and Daloz (1991). Based on the work of Mezirow (2000), Boyd (1991), and Daloz (1991), outline the
foundations of transformational learning, highlighting the components of transformational learning and the empowerment explained by adult learners under these conditions. I briefly discussed Freierian pedagogy, and the term conscientization which is used to describe the process in which learners achieve a deepening awareness of what was happening in the world around them, and how they played a role within it (Freire, 1970) or conversely how they contribute to maintaining oppression and hegemony without it.

I explored Mezirow’s theory of transformational learning as his focus on individual or personal transformation and relates closely to my research interests in particular perspective transformation. I also discussed scholars such as Cranton (2002), Brookfield (2006), Taylor (2007) Ledwith and Springette (2010), who all explore transformational learning and adult learning. Mezirow (1975) identified four main components of transformational learning: experience, critical reflection, reflective discourse and finally, action.

Finally, in the chapter, I discussed the relevance of the literature to my study, outlining that I was interested in how the participants’ transformational learning experiences were related to my own learning experiences. Such research gives participants a voice, where they can sort out discourses they have experienced in a critical and constructive way while making meaning from those experiences through the ways in which adults “know.” Dialogue is an interactive process that allows participants to recognize that there are many truths of how people experience similar situations, based on experiences and alternative beliefs, creating more opportunities for common understanding and meaning making.
Finally, I conclude the chapter by discussing critical self-reflection, and the role that it plays in transformational learning experiences. Critical reflection is not an easy process for participants’ that have never experienced this kind of learning before.

The next chapter explores the research methodology and methods that I used to inquire into the ways in which adult learners experience transformation.
CHAPTER 3: Research Methodology and Data Collection

Introduction

This chapter discusses how my research was situated within transformative learning theories and the methodology I employed. Directly following the discussion on methodology, I explain the design of the study, including the recruitment of participants, ethical considerations, the researcher position, data collection methods, data analysis and interpretation.

Situating the Researcher

The purpose of the study was to understand how a transformational learning experience could affect a person’s social and familial relationships. I wanted to know how the transformational experience of other students compared with my own. Although the course focused on participatory methodologies, the philosophy the instructor used was grounded in transformational learning because she believed that participatory methodologies could challenge or change the way people interacted with each other, with communities and with the world around them. The course focused on participatory learning methodologies that were grounded in ideas of social change as explained by Freire (1970) since critical pedagogy has transformational learning at its roots.

Critical reflection is one of the fundamental concepts in understanding a transformational learning experience, as it allows a person to deconstruct their new learnings in order to better understand their shift in a worldview and how that shift affects them socially, emotionally and physically. I used critical reflection to describe my own learning and experience of transformation.
Research Methodology

The study used qualitative research methodology. There were components of the methodology that borrowed from narrative inquiry however I was guided by transformational learning theory. A narrative approach to research focuses on lived stories “to provide a greater understanding of phenomena in the context of people’s accounts of their personal development and histories” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2013, p. 17). According to Jones (2016), narrative inquiry is “a tool that privileges experience as an epistemology and valuable data about how individuals interact with the world around them…that emphasizes the importance of lived experiences in research across a number of academic disciplines” (p. 479). It is a method to systematically gather, analyze, and interpret participants’ stories, through “collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieu” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). To the extent that my qualitative methodology borrowed from narrative approaches, I followed certain guiding ideas over the two months that I focused my work with the participants.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) identify “three commonplaces of narrative inquiry - temporality, sociality and, place - which specify dimensions of an inquiry space” (p. 479). These three dimensions are the foundations that make up our experiences. Other key characteristics of narrative inquiry, as loosely outlined by Creswell (2009) include, flexibility and continual change based on participants’ lived experiences. The data collection process for the research study focused on gathering participant stories through interviews thereby encouraging participants to share their experiences in their own words and understandings of those experiences. The stories
provided a way of understanding the way that we express our thoughts and feelings. It was necessary therefore, in using this methodology that I listened deeply to the stories and descriptions of events by the study participants. Qualitative methodologies like narrative inquiry acknowledge the power of experiences because it gives participants an opportunity to tell their stories in their own way, therefore giving voice to their individuality and uniqueness (Jones, 2016). As the researcher then, it was my role to listen and to use dialogue to fully understand their experiences.

Examining the stories of the study participants allowed me, as the researcher, to construct an understanding of how the participants experienced transformation, including a shift in their relations with others. I realized that our stories of transformational learning experience needed a voice, and an avenue for validation. Our experiences and stories are not always gift-wrapped and perfect, they can often be silenced, complicated, bring feelings of shame, or still need time to be processed. Personal stories allowed the research participants to have an opportunity to give a voice to their experiences, as well as time to reflect on their stories. As the researcher, it allowed me to grasp the meaning of the transformational experiences and to reflect on my own.

**Rationale for the Choice of Research Methodology**

To gain a better understanding of the transformational learning experience of the participants and the subsequent influence on their coexisting worldviews, I used qualitative methodologies that constructed an understanding of events leading up to and following the transformational learning experience. This research methodology was
valuable, as it provided detailed testimony of the transformational learning experiences.

It followed Freire’s (1971) theories of emancipatory or transformational learning:

To be a good [researcher] means above all to have faith in people; to believe in the possibility that they can create and change things. It is also necessary to love…education, is toward the liberation of people, never their “domestication”. This liberation begins to the extent that men [and women] reflect on themselves and their condition in the world—the world in which and with which they find themselves. To the extent that they are more conscientized, they will insert themselves as subjects into their own history (p. 62).

Conversations guided by ideas from narrative inquiry also gave me, the opportunity to converse with participants about the learning experience and the subsequent interpretation of that experience. This step contributed to the credibility of the findings of the study (Creswell, 2007), as well as giving me insights into the participants’ experiences and reflections.

**Data Collection Methods**

According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), qualitative researchers usually use the following four primary methods for gathering data: “(a) participating in the study, (b) observing directly, (c) interviewing in depth, and (d) analyzing documents” (p. 97).

Due to the nature of transformative learning experiences, it was difficult to directly observe the influence of the experience on the perspectives and worldviews of the participants (Creswell, 2009). Therefore, semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted in person. During the interviews, recording equipment was used to record the conversations, and the researcher transcribed these. Davies (2007) suggests that audiotaped interviews are common in qualitative research because they allow the interviewer to focus on facilitating the line of questioning while noting the non-verbal behavior of the participants. The audiotape ensures the complete collection of all the
information participants have volunteered, eliminating potential inaccuracies incurred from relying solely on notes or memories. Some literature states that putting time restraints on interviews may constrict a smooth flow of discussion (Creswell, 2009); however, I decided to allot a period of up to two hours for interviewing the participants.

Using a qualitative methodology approach, the study used both the interviews and journal entries as research methods. The study participants were asked to journal during and for at least two weeks after taking the course in order to keep the experiences authentic, to observe their own changes in perspectives, and to better understand how their social and familial relationships changed after the course, including whether that change was a direct result of taking the course. Participants’ journals were not used as data in the data collection phase, although, participants were asked to review their journals before the interviews to reflect on their experiences. However, this oversight is examined further in the discussion. Patton (2002) as well as Minichiello et al. (1995) explain that semi-structured interviews rely on the spontaneous generation of questions that follow a logical and natural flow of human interaction without predetermined question or answer categories, making the interview feel more like a conversation than a formal interview. Narratives that are composed more interactively between researchers and participants, where interpretations are developed by various narrators, provide an insightful analysis for understanding narratives (Chase, 2005). In addition to the interviews with the two study participants from the course, I was also interviewed by a colleague who was also completing her Master’s degree. A discussion of this interview follows. I report my interview responses in the findings as part of my critical reflection.
**Researcher interview.** A professional colleague, who also happened to be enrolled as a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Regina, interviewed me using the same set of questions I had asked my participants. I had asked this professional colleague to interview me, as I believe it allowed me to critically reflect on my own understandings of my experience. This was a similar method used by Hanson (2007) during her doctoral research. During the research period and in the development of interviews, I anticipated the incorporation of additional questions to guide and refine the study. Adapting the original questions allowed the process to more closely follow a conversation or dialogue.

**Participant interviews.** For this study, two research participants were interviewed individually. Participants were interviewed in a mutually agreed upon place, where both the researcher and participant felt comfortable. The interviews were audio-recorded using two different media (two different audio recorders), after which they were transcribed by the researcher, and then analyzed to identify important themes. The data was organized and sorted into themes. The study participants were also invited to review the transcripts of their interview and change the data in them if needed. The participants declined to do this as they wanted to review the data analysis chapter instead.

As stories can provide insight into one’s learning, I aimed to create a comfortable physical and emotional environment that allowed the participants to share their transformational learning experiences comfortably through casual conversation. Open-ended questions were administered, and participants were reminded they were not forced to answer any of the questions, and the conversation would flow as naturally as possible.
I paid close attention to making sure I spoke slowly and clearly, using terms the participants would be familiar with to possibly help them feel more comfortable and at ease.

Due to the nature of the semi-structured interview process, participants might have added or omitted details in their accounts of their transformational learning experiences, thinking that specific details might not have been of value to the research, or avoid certain information for personal reasons. Therefore, it was acknowledged that information was filtered through the participants’ views of the questions posed. Because participants used their memories or impressions of their experiences, there may be bias in responses – that is, some elements of social desirability or responding to please the researcher. I tried to mitigate bias through the process of asking participants to journal (either written or taped) throughout their one-week course and for two weeks after the course.

**Participant Journal Writing.** Participants were asked to write their reflections in a journal during and after the course. Although, journal reflections were not used in the data collection of the research study, participants were asked to review their journals prior to the interview to support their memories and to remind them of specific events from the course. I did not interview the participants until two weeks after the course, and chose not to use their journal reflections in the data analysis. This choice is discussed in Chapter Five, the discussion chapter.

**Researcher Journal Writing.** Journal writing helped me to construct meaning using the new feelings and understandings I had gained through my own experiences and
the experiences of my participants. Reflective journaling was a valuable tool during the interviewing process, as it allowed me to critically question my own ideas and feelings about similar experiences to those of the participants. I analyzed my own transformational learning experience in hopes of finding meaningful synergies with the interviewees in the ways we processed our transformative learning experiences. The methodological focus of my research is therefore, a combination of both critical reflection and to some degree, autobiography.

**Participant Recruitment**

Participants were recruited at the beginning of the *Participatory Methodologies* course offered during the Summer of 2015. They were recruited by word of mouth, after I gave a short presentation at the beginning of a class, which explained the research study and the participants’ role in the research study. Throughout the course, I observed and participated in the class activities, presentations, and simulations with the participants. I also provided the course participants with transformational learning literature and reference lists for their review. I was careful to point out that it was possible not all students in the course would experience transformation and that I was only interested in working with those who did.

Because participants in the study provided their own transformational learning experiences, semi-structured interviews felt most suitable for this research study as they allowed me, as the researcher, to guide the interview questions using the participant responses, without invading their personal space (Punch, 2005). Semi-structured interviews also allowed the participants and the researcher to engage in dialogue,
creating what I perceived as a safe space to question beliefs and values, as well as to listen to alternative perspectives and create mutual understandings.

Four course participants volunteered to participate in my study and I selected two using the pre-select screening questions (Appendix C). These two participants also received a one-time honorarium in the form of a gift card for their participation in the research study, as indicated in the ethics application. I also considered myself a participant in the study due to my transformational experience as a result of taking the course. My experience is discussed separately in the researcher position section of the thesis and in the study findings as recorded in Chapter Four.

**Study Participant Backgrounds**

The two study participants held Bachelor of Education degrees and had continued to work as educators in some capacity or another over the years. They were geographically located in Regina and were native English speakers. One participant moved from place to place over a ten year time period, trying to find a good job and a comfortable place to live prior to working in formal education. Both were working on a Master’s of Education degree and had varying degrees of adult education experience.

The participants grew up in middle-class homes, and spoke of having at least one parent that was not overly “accepting of the times.” One participant was raised in a rural community and the other was raised in an urban center, and their ages ranged from their late twenties to early fifties. One participant was male, the other was female, and both were Caucasian. The participants were heterosexual and had children. They were at different points in their master’s degree programs, although they shared a common goal,
which was to complete the program. They also had very different aspirations for the application of their degrees and why they had enrolled in the program.

**Ethical Considerations**

Creswell (2009) asserts that a researcher must anticipate possible ethical issues that may arise during the qualitative research process. The researcher must protect the participants, ensuring their needs, rights, wishes, and values are respected. Creswell explained that researchers to develop a certain level of trust to ensure the integrity of the research, guard participants from misconduct or harm, and help them cope with new challenges that may arise.

To ensure participants were protected, the following guidelines were established for this research:

1. The research objectives were outlined in writing and verbalized to the participants before the commencement of the fieldwork research. If changes were implemented, the participants were notified immediately.

2. The research participants were advised in writing that their participation was voluntary, and their consent was obtained in writing using a written consent form.

3. The participants were notified of all the data collection methods and activities in writing, before the commencement of the research.

4. Participants were reminded that at any point in the interview, they had the right to decline to answer any questions that might have made them feel uncomfortable.

5. Participants were contacted when the transcriptions and interpretations of the data were available, so participants would be able to remove any information they did not want presented in the research.
6. When choices were being made regarding what information was included in the thesis, participants’ interests, wishes and rights were considered first, and they had the final decision regarding their privacy.

7. An application to the University of Regina Ethics Review Committee was submitted, and the interviews did not commence until the application was approved.

**Data Analysis and Interpretation**

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), “Data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing the data for analysis; then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes; and finally representing the data” (p. 190). Using the audio-recorded interviews, I transcribed the data. After the data was transcribed, I began to read the transcriptions looking for common ideas or repetitive ideas (Merriam, 1998), a process Creswell and Poth (2018) discuss as coding – which “is central to qualitative research and involves making sense of the text collected from interviews” (p. 190). Furthermore, coding involves organizing the text into groups of information, “and then assigning a label to the code” (p. 190, Creswell & Poth, 2018). The label in this case, eventually became the theme. Initially, I wrote notes in the margins of the transcriptions of any connections my own experience had with those of the participants. When a common idea arose, I highlighted the idea with a coloured highlighter. After identifying the main codes, substantial statements that directly related to the research were extracted from each transcript and categorized first into sub-themes and then into themes, to make meanings from the statements. Patton (2015) described the
interpretation of the data as a creative and critical process whereby the researcher carefully analyzes what information is meaningful in the themes or pattern.

Following the sorting of the data, I wrote an extensive description of the participants’ experiences after participating in the *Participatory Methodologies* course. To confirm the data collected was accurate, the following strategies were employed:

1. There was an ongoing dialogue with the participants to discuss my interpretations of the participants’ meanings and experiences to ensure the credibility of the voice of the participants.

2. Repeated questioning - some questions had resurfaced several times during the interview, to better understand the thoughts, feelings, emotions, and experiences that the participant has underwent during their transformational learning experience.

3. The study participants were involved in the data collection. The study participants were invited to read the transcript of preliminary results within the predetermined timelines and invited to clarify or make any changes.

**Chapter Summary**

Using participants from a specific graduate course, the study focused primarily on the participants’ transformational learning experiences, and the effects on their social and familial relationships. I used a qualitative methodology, borrowing from narrative inquiry to probe deeply into understanding participants’ experiences and stories as told by the participants themselves. Creswell (2009) outlines that narrative inquiry research needs to be flexible, as it is continually changing based on participants lived experiences
and new learnings. In addition to using a qualitative methodology with the participants, I used critically reflective writing to incorporate my lived experiences with that of the participants.

I used a semi-structured interview process, where participants were audio recorded while interviewed for transcription purposes. In addition to my reflective journaling, participants were also encouraged to keep a journal to help them critically reflect on their experiences during and after taking the Participatory Methodologies course. Barkhuizen (2016) acknowledges, “Stories preserve our memories, prompt our reflections, connect us to our past and present, and assist us to envision our future” (p. 28). Therefore, reflective journals gave participants an opportunity to reflect on their stories and memories, which was useful for reflections during the interview process.

The chapter concluded by explaining how the researcher situated herself in the research, the participant recruitment process, and the study design. It also identified and laid out the data collection methods. The findings of the study are presented in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 4: Data Analysis and Findings

Introduction

This chapter begins with a description of the study participants. Their unique backgrounds and lived experiences shaped their worldviews, perspectives and ways of knowing. For example, participants noticed attention to global issues, to perspectives of non-European or non-western ways of thinking, and to how they interacted with groups of people. The participants’ reflections on the course enhanced their transformational leaning experiences, and demonstrated their willingness to learn new information and apply it to their lived lives. Following the introductions, I present the findings from the data analysis, categorized into the four main themes obtained through the data collected: 1) excitement for learning builds confidence to challenge relationships; 2) everyday social interactions and belonging; 3) stepping outside of comfort zones; and 4) challenging perspectives and avoiding confrontations.

The cumulative data described how each participant made sense of how their relationships were altered or changed, to sustain their pre-transformational learning experience. The chapter is includes the participant reflections, as well as my own. The chapter concludes with an additional finding from the data: the need for regrouping.

Transcribing the Interview Data

After the interviews were audiotaped, I personally transcribed the data as I saw merit in the process of transcribing the data myself in order to gain a deeper understanding of the participant’s answers to my questions. Turner (2016) suggests there are many benefits to transcribing your own data, such as recalling stories or words that
may have been hard to understand in the recording or recollecting how the participants responded to the questions with body language and gestures. Transcribing the data gave me the opportunity to listen carefully to the research participants’ experiences, emotions, and answers to the research questions, and it gave me the opportunity to reflect on the data and my own experience after taking the Participatory Methodologies course. Overall, I found transcribing the data beneficial.

Interpretations and Authentication

To maintain confidentiality, the participants received a pseudonym name, which was used to protect their identities. I describe the findings here as a narrator, using a third person point of view. When I interpreted the findings, and how the participants made meaning from their experiences, I interpreted their thoughts, feelings, emotions, challenges, triumphs and reflections. Both participants read the findings and my narrative descriptions of their emotions, thoughts, and etcetera, to ensure that my interpretations of their stories were accurate. The findings presented here include interview and my journal data; quotes from this data are identified in parenthesis following the quote.

The Study Participants

Christopher

As Christopher and I sat down at the restaurant, I could tell among many things; he was excited, uncomfortable, and outwardly nervous. Christopher had never participated in anything like this before; yet he was eager to engage in conversation and he acknowledged that he was sharing things he never shared before with anyone other
than his family members. Christopher identified himself as a person that has a form of Asperger’s Syndrome, and tends to be nervous around groups of people and social situations. Christopher also acknowledged that he does not have any best friends or a large group of friends, but he is a part of a few groups of people he would identify as being his friends. Before I began asking him questions, we talked about his life, both past and present.

Christopher, a Caucasian male, was born in Saskatoon, where he attended both elementary and secondary school, and was one of twenty students in his graduating class. After graduating, Christopher wanted to experience post-secondary education, and enrolled in University. Although he was unsure about university, he was swayed to enroll by his parents for the sole reason that they agreed to pay his tuition. Christopher felt a sense of culture shock upon entering the buildings of the University of Saskatchewan, as he had never experienced a school so large with so many students. Christopher took one semester at the University of Saskatchewan, and did not attend university again until he moved to Regina, where he eventually graduated with a Bachelor of Education degree in the early 1990s.

After Christopher earned his degree in education, he taught elementary school for a while. He really enjoyed the first school he worked in--the students were great, the town was small, and there was an overall good feeling at the school. However, he found rural life slow, and he questioned why many of his students did not appear to have the drive to leave their rural town. He soon grew tired of the pace, and decided to transfer to a remote school on a First Nation reserve. After transferring, he realized the school was much different from the last, but viewed the job as a worthwhile challenge. A few years
later, he began to feel the pressures of managing the students, supplementing the lack of resources, and the stressors of the job on his overall health. Christopher then decided the locations of the schools and the job itself was not suited to him, he wanted a change. A job opportunity had emerged at a crown corporation. At the time of the interview, he had worked as a teacher for over thirteen years.

Christopher is in his early 50s now, has been married for over twenty years, and has two children. After recently changing careers, he decided he needed to have a dual-degree or a master’s degree to stay current while teaching adults. Due to the demands of work, and having a family, he chose to begin a course-based master’s degree program, as he did not think he would have the time, or the patience to work on a thesis. At the time of the interview, Christopher had completed his second of ten courses for the Master of Adult Education program at the University of Regina.

**Elizabeth**

Elizabeth is an easy going and passionate person, who enjoyed telling stories and engaging in good dialogue. Elizabeth has a variety of friend groups and loves to socialize. Our conversation quickly began with issues happening in the world that we had just heard on the radio or watched on television, overwhelming stories from the classroom, or events that happened in the days and weeks leading up to the interview. Elizabeth was quite comfortable and at ease; she was excited to be a part of the research, although she was eager to analyze and reflect on her experience in a way she previously had been unable to.

Elizabeth, a Caucasian female, grew up in Regina, where she attended both a public elementary school, as well as a private secondary school. After graduating,
Elizabeth was eager to attend university, as she had an overwhelming passion to learn new and different things, as well as to meet new people and expand her social networking groups. Upon entering the University of Regina, Elizabeth was instantly in love with the idea of being enrolled in university and felt an overwhelming sense of belonging. Elizabeth enjoyed university immensely and during her undergraduate degree, she had already become a research assistant. This research opportunity opened her eyes to a lot of new information, and continued to fulfil her desire to learn new things. She graduated from the University of Regina, with a Bachelor’s Degree in Education, and soon after was hired as a teacher for one of the local school boards, where she has continued to teach for over 8 years.

Elizabeth is in her 30s, is married, and has one child. She has always been close to her family, and spends a great deal of time with her father, after the loss of her mother over seven years ago. Elizabeth often shares stories from her past about the dialogue that she shared with her mother and father, and has been inspired by the stories they shared with her. She has a passion for social justice and teaching, and has high expectations of her friends, family and the students in her classroom and school. Elizabeth often felt the challenges of balancing the demands of teaching at a community school, university, family, friends, and being an active mother.

Elizabeth was excited that she was doing her master’s program, and had just finished her third course, at the time of the interview. She felt like she made the right choice when she chose an Adult Education program, as she enjoyed learning the content of the courses, and the depth of learning she was experiencing. Like Christopher, she
chose to do a course-based master’s program, although, after taking several courses, she contemplated a change from a course-based program to a thesis program.

**Thematic Analysis of the Data**

Before transcribing the data, I had envisioned interweaving the data from the participants together. However, when I began to transcribe the data I realized although there were many similarities between the participants’ experiences, the ways in which they were processing and critically reflecting upon their stories were different. When reviewing the transcriptions I found myself relating the experiences of my participants to my own, and realized how I originally intended to present the data had shifted.

My participants both lived very different lives, and while their stories echoed one another, other times it seemed as if their stories diverged in terms of their feelings and expectations of social and familial relationships. The stories and the reflections of the participants were not intended to encompass experiences from all of the course participants. Though the research study incorporated a small sample of participants, their experiences from the *Participatory Methodologies* course gave insight into how relationships were affected after their transformational learning experience.

In addition to the participant’s reflections, the chapter aimed to share the participants’ experiences during and after taking the course. I begin with the participant’s confidence to challenge relationships, every day interactions, day-to-day challenges, and finally avoiding confrontations. I include narrative interpretations of the themes before introducing the voices of the participants. Creswell (2014) explained that “Qualitative data is interpretive research…the inquirer is typically involved in a sustained and
Theme One:

Excitement for Learning Builds Confidence to Challenge Relationships

Participants were very aware their perspectives had changed after taking the Participatory Methodologies course, and they were eager to challenge their pre-existing social and familial relationships on key issues described. The new learning the participants experienced after taking the course ignited a sense of passion and determination in them to share their new learning and beliefs, as well as to take the time to actively listen to alternative worldviews than their own, while allowing their own beliefs to be challenged or reinforced with the new information being processed. For example, Christopher felt like he gained compassion with his willingness to listen to others, and Elizabeth reflected on her drive to take action on social justice and political issues. This section outlines the ways in which the participants challenged their relationships.

Christopher

After taking the course, Christopher had a new sense of confidence, and he was prepared to challenge his social and familial relationships. More specifically, he was not opposed to challenging his social relationships with his friends in the gardening club to which he belonged. Christopher described his fellow gardening club members as often
being closed minded and unwilling to see the world from different viewpoints.

Christopher was eager to address how the gardening club members unconsciously interacted with one another, “Because really, the world does not work the way that they sometimes believe it does, and I wish that they could meet people from the course who have lived experiences that are much different than that of their own.” Christopher shared his belief that in order for his gardening club members to better understand mindsets other than their own, they needed to find a way to interact with people who belonged to minority groups in Canada, rather than to ground their beliefs based on preconceptions and what they had learned about those groups from the media.

Christopher explained:

Not even in a confrontational way, just to sit down and have coffee with them. Because I think that 100% of them I would say or at least the guys that I know, do not know any foreign students or anyone foreign for that matter. However, if they do know foreigners then they are from Europe, Northern Europe, or Germany. I do not think that [the gardening club members] have ever really sat down and had a conversation with anyone from Africa, or Palestine or even anywhere from the Middle East. They are so narrow or linear in their way of thinking. Speaking for myself, I think that is one of the biggest changes that I have experienced, is to be able to strip some of those isolated ways of thinking.

(Interview)

The above quote outlined that Christopher was excited to engage in dialogue with his fellow gardening club members, and was eager to discuss new topics with them. Later on in the interview, with a smile, Christopher pointed out that “It is okay to hold opposing views to that of what I grew up with,” and he revealed that prior to taking the course, he would have never shared or even thought about challenging his mainstream views. When he introduced his fellow gardening club members to his new ways of thinking and his
changed views, he thought most of them listened and responded quite positively, regardless of whether they agreed with him or not.

Christopher believed that most of the gardening club members were quite receptive to what he was saying, although, he did mention that there was one member that would be so opposed to his new ways of thinking, that he “probably would end up losing him as a friend or even as an acquaintance, because this one guy is so rigid in his ways of thinking, that I believe, it mostly stems from a fear and a lack of education.”

Christopher also identified that prior to taking the course, he was very fearful of the unknown as well, and a lot of his decisions and closed-mindedness stemmed from fear. He explained:

The way [the gardening club members] look at the world, is not the way that world actually works...they will listen and take the information in, and if they do not, then I do not really care about our relationship because I cannot change another person’s perspective or ways of thinking. Only you can change your ways of thinking, and if you do not want to, then that is your problem, and our relationship will not exist. (Interview)

Christopher felt as if he was quite relaxed about challenging his social relationships with his fellow gardening club members. He wanted to use the confidence he felt towards challenging his friends to engage in dialogue with his program head at his current job. He wanted his adult students as well as the instructors to have more input into how the courses were structured, and the supports were designed to ensure that both the students and faculty were being supported. Christopher believed it was important to “work on behalf of [his] students as opposed to telling them what they need to do, therefore, giving students more of a voice.” The course introduced Christopher to a lot of new learning, and inspired him to respectfully challenge his pre-existing social and familial
relationships. The course provided him the motivation to restructure the way he taught to help empower his students to learn in a more constructive and passionate way.

At the time of the interview, Christopher did not feel he needed to challenge any of his familial relationships. He felt that prior to taking the course, he own viewpoints were one of the main contributors to tensions he experienced with his family relationships, especially with his wife and children. He believed the course helped him challenge his own ways of thinking, allowing him to experience a shift in his perspectives, which in turn enriched his family relations because he became more open to new ideas and experiences.

**Elizabeth**

Elizabeth was always confident in her ability to engage in dialogue, and express her opinions and perspectives in ways that people did not feel threatened. Elizabeth always identified herself as a social justice activist and would often respectfully disagree or challenge perspectives that differed from her own, as well as beliefs she believed were oppressive. When I arrived at our meeting location, Elizabeth was visibly flushed and agitated, and explained that her sister-in-law had just dropped by. Elizabeth’s son was wearing leggings, and her sister-in-law was confused as to why her son would be wearing leggings, as leggings she believed, were only for girls! While telling the story, Elizabeth was enraged at the gender stereotypes her sister-in-law so casually talked about. Elizabeth questioned, “How do you talk to someone, who is an educated person, and outwardly oppressive, about the social construction of gender?” Later on in the story, Elizabeth shared how she challenged her sister-in-law, stating that leggings were
not gender specific, and imposing that on a toddler was unjust and inappropriate. She stated:

I might be more offended more easily now. Is that a bad thing or a good thing? I don’t know. Normally, I probably wouldn’t have been as offended, but tonight I was pretty offended by what my sister-in-law said. Like I told her, he is going to be gender fluid today, and she had no idea what the hell I was talking about. (Interview)

Elizabeth also felt the more that she had learned, the more passion she felt in terms of challenging not only other’s views, but her own perspectives as well. Elizabeth was close to her family members, especially her father, and often held heated dialogues about what was happening in the world and the injustices in society. In the interview, Elizabeth mentioned her father several times, as they often challenged each other’s beliefs and opinions. Elizabeth explained:

We got into a really heated debate about something so small. It was something about politics I guess. Something I really disagreed with. I had quite a passionate response that he kind of just shut up. It wasn’t like him to not have something to say. It was, coincidentally, the drive up to the cabin after the course ended. I was reading a book on critical pedagogy, and when I was sharing my opinions with my dad, he got annoyed, and so my dad was like just be quiet and go back to your reading. Here I thinking, wow, I observe more, and I am listening more. I am trying to think of myself in different settings and how I perform essentially, and yet I have become more opinionated… I have always idolized my dad in so many ways. I grew up travelling with him for work. This sounds really awful, but I feel like he’s got an extremely narrowed lens. Way more than I ever thought he ever did. You know when you look up to your parents and you think that they are these incredible people, and they are. If my mom was around she would be right in with this kind of dialogue. I could dialogue with my mom like this no problem, guaranteed. But my dad, I’ve realized how narrowed his lens still is. The other day he shut me up. He told me to be quiet and go back to reading basically. He is defensive more than accepting. But I think it was more to be right. (Interview)

Elizabeth challenged her father to consider additional perspectives than his own, in hopes he might think of something in a way he had not been previously able to.

Although Elizabeth was often silenced by her father, he would take a few moments to
absorb everything Elizabeth shared, and then he would begin to process and articulate the new information at his own pace. Elizabeth felt an obligation to challenge her relationships in a constructive way, in hopes her relationships would be more open to hearing an alternative perspective or to engaging in critical dialogue. By challenging her familial relationships, and engaging in dialogue, Elizabeth built knowledge about differing worldviews, and in turn, was able to question her own ways of thinking.

In addition to her familial relationships, Elizabeth felt a compelling need to begin to question her social relationships within the workplace. Elizabeth did not challenge her workplace social relationships as easily as her familial ones, however, she often peacefully protested to promote and create some level of change. Elizabeth has been working at the same place for several years now, and she was excited to bring new ideas to her colleagues, the school and in her own classroom. Elizabeth was ready to challenge:

The pragmatics of business and education, and the emphasis on skills as opposed to teaching life skills and critical thinking, and to try to break out of the parameters of only focusing on making good spread sheets and tools for assessment.

Because of the high demands of having an active toddler, at the time of the interview, Elizabeth did not have a lot of time to spend with some of her friends who had opposing perspectives. “I look forward to an opportunity to create change, small or large, or at least a chance for people to hear a perspective that may alter their own, or differ from their own.” Elizabeth was excited to embrace her transformational learning experience, and she was motivated to not only challenge viewpoints differing from those of her own, but to listen to new perspectives and critically examine her own assumptions.
My Critical Reflections: Navigating Relationships

Towards the end of the course, I knew something had changed in me. I no longer viewed the world as I did before, and I was having trouble understanding my shift in perspectives. I was eager to share my new learning with people, although I was not exactly sure how to do it within my current social and familial relationships. In my personal interview, I recalled a time where I had shared my new transformational learning experience with a friend and then was taken aback by her response to my experience:

I am not sure, why you care so much about this, you learn new things every day, my friend said. I needed to find an analogy to explain transformational learning. Like maybe, I was not explaining it well enough, or maybe they had a difficult time understanding because of context, etc. I needed to find something that they could relate to. Therefore, I brought up the movie *Philadelphia* (1993). I said, remember when Tom Hanks went to the lawyer for the first time to talk about being fired for having HIV, and wanting to pursue a case against his employer? At the end of the conversation, they shook hands, and instantly when Tom Hanks left, the lawyer got onto the phone and made a doctor’s appointment because he thought he had HIV. That scene is where he is learning, but that is not transformative learning. The part when he educated himself about HIV, took on the case, made friends with Tom Hanks and then became an advocate for HIV… that is the transformation. Using this analogy helped my friend understand what transformational learning was, even though it was not the best way to explain it, it was something that they could relate to. However, I still find it so hard to have deeper level conversations with people who are not open to it. (Interview)

My research was near and dear to my heart, and I found it easy to share with people who were willing to listen. Confronted with questions about transformational learning however made me anxious, as I did not feel as if I was anywhere close to being an expert. By embracing my shortfalls, I realized that not knowing the answers was perfectly acceptable. I explained it thus in my journal:
There are certain times when people ask me questions now, and I know that it is okay to not say anything. To be silent. For example, when I am doing a presentation, it is okay to tell a person that I do not have an answer, but I could either find the answer and share it later, or speculate based on my knowledge. However, I still know at the end of the day that it is okay that I do not know the answer. It is okay if I take a day or so to digest something and then to come back with an answer. I have never been okay with that, until recently. Because in my past frame of mind, not knowing the answers would show vulnerability, it would show that I was inadequate. (Journal)

Understanding that vulnerabilities were not shortfalls in character was an important learning for me. When I felt the state of inadequacy lingering, I had to make a conscious effort to challenge those stressors head on.

After my transformational learning experience, I had a new confidence to challenge some of my relationships. When my friends would bring up current events, or topics I was passionate about, I did not back down from sharing my opinions. I was consciously more aware of the ratio of sharing to listening, and made an effort to ensure I comprehended what they were saying, and then reflected before I would speak again. However, sometimes with topics I was more emotionally charged towards, I spoke more than listened.

At times, I felt very frustrated about how my family and friends resisted hearing about different views. For example, I would ask if a friend was interested in reading an article or a book to clarify a viewpoint. I realized that I was assuming my relational circle would be enlightened by my shift in perspective. What I thought was helpful, was actually me unconsciously imposing my beliefs onto other people. I later realized that rather than imposing my perspectives, I needed to do a better job of engaging in dialogue and building relations that could overcome differences. I was asking too much without
consciously reflecting on what I was asking those relations to do. With more reflection, I ultimately realized I needed the confidence to critically question and engage in dialogue while ensuring the balance of speaking to listening is maintained instead of trying to convince others that my ideas were the right ones.

**Theme Two: Everyday Social Interactions and Belonging**

After the conclusion of the *Participatory Methodologies* course, the participants found themselves more aware of the everyday situations that were transpiring around them, and the role they played within those interactions. During the interviews, participants mentioned before taking the course they were often ignorant of the role that power structures and societal norms played within their social and family relationships.

Christopher explained:

> We live in some respects so unconsciously, we are so wrapped up in our own little worlds, that we do not see anyone else. If we see anyone else, we usually see them in a situation of conflict or within a very tight group of people. We do not deal with outsiders very well. (Interview)

This section looks at how participants navigated their everyday interactions, while critically reflecting and challenging perspectives that differed from those of their own.

**Christopher**

Christopher felt impacted by Hamid, another participant in the course, who made a lasting impression on Christopher. Hamid is a Canadian citizen who came to Canada as a refugee almost ten years ago. Christopher was moved by Hamid, as it was his first opportunity to sit down with an individual who belonged to or was a member of a minority group, and actually heard worldviews that were different from his own. Hamid gave Christopher the opportunity to listen to stories about living in a time of war and his
hardships of being a refugee, ways of thinking and perspectives that differed from his own. In the past, Christopher had always had a difficult time expanding his horizons and trying new things. He was enlightened by Hamid’s willingness to be vulnerable, sharing his story inspired him. After taking the course, Christopher slowly started trying to integrate new foods and activities into his daily routines. Although that might seem irrelevant, Christopher had always struggled with eating different foods, especially ones from other countries. As he explained:

Quite strangely enough, and I know that this is going to sound ludicrous, but this new learning has extended to food, because I have Asperger’s. However, it is not severe enough to interfere with some of my daily life activities, although, I have become very rigid in some of the stuff that I will eat. I don’t know if I have told you, but up until the Participatory Methodologies course, I had never tried blueberries, because I didn’t like the way that they looked…I had never even tried hummus before, but I knew that I didn’t like it, just because of the way it looked and where I thought it came from. This has been quite the shift in my world. (Interview)

Christopher did not only try new foods, but he also began to try new activities in which he used to refuse to participate in the past. As he put it:

And a course like this gets to you, and in some cases, it forces you to step outside of your comfort zone in a major way. A huge way. I am kind of a huge Mezirow fan, and I think everybody has their own little box that is their natural comfort zone, and if you step outside that comfort zone, you either destroy the box, or your rebuild it in a much more inclusive zone. For the first time, I stepped outside of my comfort zone in a really big way, and realized that it is okay that I didn’t stay inside my invisible box. I found out quickly, that by stepping outside of my box, my world wasn’t going to end. It is okay. It is okay to step outside and be nervous, unsure, and most of all, vulnerable. I think that’s the only way that we can learn new things. (Interview)

After taking the course, Christopher felt more relaxed than ever, and not only did he notice that more, but so did his wife and children. Initially, prior to taking the course, Christopher was apprehensive about the amount of group work, and being a white male
in a group predominately composed of women, and minority groups. However, he felt like the facilitator did an amazing job of building a strong container (see Lakey’s (2010) group building technique) quickly, especially because “People had a lot of different life experiences and perspectives, and with a strong container, most people felt they were able to share with the large group without feeling singled out”. The metaphor container is used to describe the sense of safety and belonging one feels within a group, to allow them to “do their best work, to feel proud of themselves, and to experience their power” (Lakey, 2010, p. 14). Christopher continued:

One of the really tough things about Asperger’s is that I have a really hard time understanding social situations. A large part of what you see here is the end result of 40-45 years of watching people and seeing how they react in situations and kind of filing that into my memory. It’s extremely refreshing to be able to feel relaxed enough to let that drop, and yah, there were some times when I had some trouble understanding and reading facial expressions unless, it is a big smile or something. It was fun to let the hyper vigilance go, and to turn it off. Even this is a big step for me. To be, well, to take part in something like this research and to be open enough to talk about my experiences is a huge step for me, and I really do credit the facilitator. Her class and the format for really bringing that out in me. I thought about that when I was writing my final reflection paper… would the class experience still be the same if there were a lot more factions within the class, like hard core factions, that we did not consider in other classes? I think it really would have, and I think that it would have been a negative and a very ugly time. We would have had to do some work to break that down. This experience was a great thing for me, because we jelled so quickly, we were able to get into some of the meat and potatoes, some of the really thoughtful underlying things that really expanded the class, instead of wasting time as a group trying to figure out where we were going. It was really nice to be more or less on the same page, listening to each other’s stories and perspectives. (Interview)

The transformation Christopher experienced strengthened him to be able to challenge perspectives and worldviews on a daily basis. Since taking the course, he has consciously been trying to integrate his new learning into his daily interactions, while
dealing with situations in a relaxed and critical way. Christopher discussed an example of how an interaction in his daily life, changed because of participating in the course:

What I have become fairly understanding of, well not fairly, but very understanding of the people you see on the street. I see them every day when I am driving to work or anywhere for that matter. If I used to see someone on the street panhandling; I would always write this little script in my head that reinforced my worldview, as opposed to accepting the idea that they have their own worldviews. Talking to Hamid, I realized that I can’t immediately jump to conclusions about the reasons why people are doing what they are doing, and instead of being reactive, I have to be more critical about what I am consciously thinking and saying. (Interview)

Later on in the interview, Christopher continued to reflect on the change in his ways of thinking and perspectives:

If you were to pick me up and drop me in the middle of Nigeria. I would be in serious trouble. The culture would be completely different from what I expected and so to think of that in terms of people coming to our country… being dropped in here, would be absolutely bewildering. Bewildering. That for me is a big enough reasons to get involved, and to stop hiding in the shadows and to stand up for people. (Interview)

Christopher shared that he never realized he had a void in his life, until after taking the course. For so many years, he would spend money just to spend money, in hopes of filling the void he unconsciously was feeling. Christopher did not even realize he was feeling a void in his life, until he was writing his reflection paper for the course.

Christopher discovered he was longing to fill a void of emptiness inside, and while reflecting, he realized he was yearning to be close to other people outside of his family, as he had never felt that connection before. Christopher had been applying the knowledge to teaching his own students:

We are dealing with adults and we can’t treat them like empty vessels because they have their own perspectives and they are adults. Some of them have messy lives. Some of them have very messy lives, and you can’t really teach chemistry
Christopher continued:

If you really want to work on your transformation, just become more mindful of how you deal with people. It has been really difficult, because I tend to plan everything, and minute to minute. Being more mindful of what you are thinking and what other people are saying is important. I think taking meditation classes would help, actually. There is a group at the Breaded Life Church, and there are three congregations that share the same building, and they have rented out the church to have mindful meditation classes. They are a really good way to calm your brain and to tell it to shut up for a while. (Interview)

Once he identified his longing to fill an inner emptiness, Christopher began to reflect on ways he could potentially fill the void and share his feelings with some of the participants in the course. To Christopher’s surprise, there were many other people who had been feeling the same way. Before taking the course, he said he would not have opened up to a group of people, let alone share something that exposed his vulnerabilities. He explained it in this way:

I sent a text to Hamid just to set up a coffee date, because I was really stunned that he has been in Regina for over 10 years and he has no friends. Nobody to go for coffee with him. We tend to be that way as a society. We are so wrapped up with our own lives and our day to day things that we do not even realize the needs of other people. In Hamid’s culture, as he explained it, is a lot more social. I also noticed that with him there is more touching and talking, or physical closeness and he has a very relaxed personality. I think if we could, we would probably sit there for hours drinking coffee while being immersed in dialogue. I was really kind of taken a back when he shared that he felt he had no friends, because I do not have a lot of close friends either. Maybe one, two, ah, three tops, and everyone else is an acquaintance. That has been how I have been raised as a family, we as a family weren’t particularly outgoing. I don’t know, but that has been my experience with other people in the past and it has been kind of that way too. You say that you are going to get together for coffee, or this or that, but it never happens. Life interferes and the pursuit of making a living and making money and buying things, gets in the way. But I think Hamid would be different, I think that he would make a point of meeting.
The above quote outlines Christopher’s reflections on some of the stories that the course participants shared. Although Christopher felt uncomfortable at times throughout the course, he was excited with the level of engagement that he felt, and immersed himself in dialogue.

**Elizabeth**

Trying to make sense of her transformational learning experience, Elizabeth often struggled to connect with her friends and family relations, as she found it difficult to connect and engage in dialogue with people who had not experienced a similar dramatic shift in perspectives. Elizabeth related the transformational learning experience she had undergone after taking the *Participatory Methodologies* course, to her mother being diagnosed, and losing her battle to cancer. Elizabeth clarified:

When my mom was diagnosed with stage four cancer, and going through that motion of watching her die twice. Once before she actually died, and then the actual death. It felt as if no one can understand your experience. Your experience is different from mine and I get that. However, you know, I guess you realize there are only certain people out there that can understand your transformational learning experience. You are very fortunate to have both of your parents (I am assuming in good health). You cannot understand what it feels like, nor would I want you to understand. I was young, 28. It was rare to find anyone that was young and that had lost their mother that they were very close to. Right? And so, I kind of equated my transformational learning experience I felt after taking the *Participatory Methodologies* course to the death of my mom, you know? Only certain people can understand it, and a lot of the time, you feel isolated in the post event. It is hard to put my feelings about transformational learning experiences into words. That is the only way that I can describe it. It is just a feeling. It is not something that you can fully write. (Interview)

Being unable to relate to the stories of some of her former relationships, Elizabeth longed for someone with whom to share her new learning, shift in perspectives, and engage in critical dialogue. As Elizabeth put it:
There are not a lot of people that I can openly talk to about my transformational learning experience and the knowledge I took away from the *Participatory Methodologies* course. Most people would see what we were doing in the course as just an activity used to learn content, and we took it a step deeper and tried to analyze why we said or did the things that we did. It is definitely tough not being able to relate to people about such a foundational shift in a person’s worldviews, which in turn affects every aspect of a person’s life. (Interview)

Throughout the course, Elizabeth was able to make connections with other participants and engage in dialogue on a deeper level than what she was used to in the recent past. Elizabeth enjoyed being able to talk to the other participants about their shifts in perspectives, as well as how they had been handling their new knowledge in the outside world. Although she found it quite easy to engage in dialogue with the other participants in the course, she struggled to have similar conversations in her family and friends. While attempting to engage in critical questioning and dialogue with her relationships, Elizabeth echoed the yearning to have the opportunity to not only share her new knowledge with her late mother, but to also be challenged and questioned. Elizabeth explained it this way:

> This course made me miss my mom a great deal. I miss the conversations with her, and the ones that I could have had with her quite smoothly I think. She would have been engaged in this kind of discourse. However, she was a social worker, so that would make sense. Very much into anti-oppressive practices, and I think that there are things that I could have helped her learn in order to widen her lens, but she would have been able to challenge me as well. That is what I like. I want to be challenged on things again. It is not about right or wrong, I want to be challenged. Through the questions, why did you do that? Why did not you do that? What made you think that was okay? (Interview)

After taking the course, Elizabeth began to examine her every day interactions with a more critical lens. After undergoing her transformational learning experience, she became more mindful of how she fit into her social and familial relationships, as well as
how she presented herself to other people, and deliberately took time to decompose situations to challenge or reinforce her perspectives. The course led Elizabeth to question the processes and systems that were in place and reinforced by societal norms. As Elizabeth put it:

I remember I was cleaning the house the other day and I was thinking that I can be a pretty bad person sometimes, in the sense of how I am in a social environment. I think about things when I can, because I have the time and space by myself, almost as if it is my silent walk, where I can just be mindful in that time. I was thinking to myself, how am I in social settings? How do others see me? I think about teaching, how do my students view me? I know that not all of them have connected with me. Even though relationships are near and dear to my heart, I am not naive, and I realize that I have not connected to them all. I mean, you can get into many different reasons to why that can be, but I often wonder if I am doing a good enough job making people feel valued. (Interview)

The course did not only challenge Elizabeth’s perspectives, but it also challenged the way in which she critically reflected on everyday situations and interactions, and how she processed new information presented to her. According to Elizabeth:

Even just watching the news and things like that, it is just all around me. I am trying to be more than just critically aware, and asking more questions about certain things. We watch the news a lot, so I question what we are seeing, and what we are not seeing. What perspective are we not hearing at this moment? That has been a good conversation with my husband because he is a very bright person, but he thinks that I am over analytical, and maybe I am at times. (Interview)

When reflecting back on the course and analyzing her place within the course, Elizabeth realized at times her position of power and privilege overpowered those who felt marginalized, and took away opportunities for other participants to voice their experiences and perspectives. During the interview, she reflected back on the course, and realized that oftentimes she would speak when there were long silences, thinking other
participants did not want to share, not taking into consideration the systems of power, including cultural practices that were operating in the room. Elizabeth explained:

I was aware going into this class of my social positioning, where I come from and my identity and how that affects who I am and the environment as well as other structures, but never really having to put myself to task. At the beginning of the course when we were learning about power relations and how it is easy it to just slip into power imbalances, I remember being in a group, and we were doing an activity. I was with Arlene and Liz, who are quieter, and from what Jenna said to me, that is part of their culture, you are supposed to listen, and not talk. I found that I was starting to overstep the talking versus listening time. I was starting to speak too much, and I was stepping in way too often to the point where I was smothering other people’s voice from being heard. It was not until the end of the day that I was starting to think that I was maybe talking too much during that activity, or questioned why I was talking so much. I think that goes back to my social positioning and knowing my identity. I am in a position of being a more dominant role, in especially a diverse group of people that I was in, where two people are very reserved. (Interview)

At the beginning of the course, Elizabeth struggled to understand what was happening to her, and how to navigate the emotions she was feeling. She became more conscientious about her actions.

Even though Elizabeth was in a position of power and privilege, she often struggled with feelings of not belonging – wondering and questioning her own intelligence, preparedness or credentials to be successful. Elizabeth mentioned she felt like an imposter throughout the course, as well as in many aspects of her life; however, she had never admitted it to anyone before the interview out of fear of being rejected and exposing her vulnerability. Moreover, Elizabeth explained her feelings of being an imposter:

In the course, I chose to do my topic on research. I like research, and had never heard of one of the methods before. The facilitator assumed that I was further along in my masters and I had to correct her that this was only my second course and I had just started my master’s courses in January. The facilitator was
surprised, and I mentioned that this class had been intimidating for many reasons, such as, the level of diversity and my ill preparedness in how to respond to that and to be more sensitive. I do not like to use the word tolerant, as tolerant can be used as a word that implies that you can still have resistance to something. I am talking about the acceptance of the people around me who have different worldviews. I called myself the imposter during the course, because I did not feel like I actually belonged in the course. I feel like I am participating and answering questions, but did not really understand why? When are they going to bust me and say that I am a phony who should not be in the program, or she does not even know what she is talking about? (Interview)

Even though Elizabeth expressed feeling like an imposter during the course, she was always willing to force herself out of her comfort zone, in hopes of learning and engaging with people in a safe environment. At the time of the interview, Elizabeth was excited to share her experiences with her family, and she was dedicated to sharing her new experiences with her co-workers. Realizing she was beginning to make connections with the other participants in the course and their experiences, Elizabeth wondered how she could use her new learnings to engage with people in her workplace on a more critical level. As a result, Elizabeth clarified:

I really believe that we all come from a base of knowledge that can be valuable and have shared, and at times I have been a little more closed off to some ideas I suppose. I am not going to talk about other teachers, but specifically with educational assistants, and I actually work with quite a few. Some of them are very difficult to work with, but you know what, their hearts are really in the right place. They really care about these kids, and I need to listen to them a bit more, because I do think that they bring a set of knowledge that I do not have, and I do not have their lens either. I have to listen better. They have more work experience technically, than I do, but just because I have a degree, I am the one in charge, and it really means nothing as far as I am concerned. (Interview)

Even though Elizabeth found some of her work relationships difficult, she reflected upon her day-to-day dealings, and realized that she needed to put in a better effort to try to listen to the experiences of others, and to be more conscious of alternate perspectives.
My Critical Reflections: Day-to-Day Dealings

I always knew I was different from other children in elementary school. I was what I now refer to as a feminist who believed in equality for women, and openly challenged societal assumptions about men’s and women’s work. I challenged my peers and other adults by asking questions, and if there were no solutions, I would ask more questions. Although my parents were very supportive of my questioning habits, at times my mother would get frustrated with the sheer volume of questions I would direct her way. I remember a time in grade seven during my parent-student-teacher interview when my teacher brought up my habit of questioning. I instantly dropped my head and knew I was about to receive another lecture similar to the ones I had in the years before. To my surprise, my teacher was supporting me and told my mother she should not let anyone take that away from me, and nurture the fact that she had such an abstract and critical thinker at such a young age.

After that day, I never felt the need to suppress my critical thinking and questioning skills, and believed in social justice learning more than ever. In high school, I began to speak less and listen more because I was somewhat timid and shy. Starhawk’s (2011) quote, “It is in solitude and silence that our deepest insights are born” (p. 119), made me realize that as I aged, I used those silent times to critically think and question the world and my understanding of it. Only recently, I felt disheartened because of the lack of support I received while critically reflecting.

I was talking to a group of friends about the film director, Michael Moore, and his ability to make films about the politics of the United States and his focus on those that are marginalized. Quickly after sharing my opinion, one of the people in the group
made a comment that the filmmaker was biased on what he perceived to be truth, and that Moore created controversy rather than bringing issues about America forward. I took a few minutes before responding, and discussed some of the power structures that existed that prevented people from empowering themselves and that the film was being used as a medium to address deeper, structural issues about what was going on in America. I continued to speak about the obligation we have as global citizens to dig deeper into the issues and ask tough questions. Despite my enthusiasm about the issues, I looked around at blank faces, and suddenly realized I was alone in the discussion. The response I received was that the world was not always about power structures – it was only a movie. Then I began to think of all the transitions a person faces in their lives, and how I usually do not take enough time to critically reflect on those transitions to try to make meaning of my experiences:

But during all of these major transitions in your life that you kind of chalk up to not having enough time to deal with it. Moving into a house, having a partner, having a child, a death in the family, having a new job, all of these things, we do not give ourselves enough time to think about it. You’re doing it and doing it and doing it. All of these transitions are leading up to this major transition in your life, where suddenly the light bulb goes off and you begin to realize that you need to start dealing with all of those things now because you did not deal with them at the time. (Interview)

I finally understood Brookfield’s (2006) concept of ‘cultural suicide’ and what it meant. I recognized that even though it was a conversation with friends, I could not help but feel like I was marginalized. It was very apparent to me that my questioning and critical reflecting were seen as taking power away from the group and instantly creating a divide amongst friends. It was clear to me that the more educated I became, the more threatened
some people around me felt. The concept of not being able to talk to anyone about my experience surfaced again in my interview:

Sometimes, especially after the course, I felt like nobody understood me. I can’t go into my workplace, and I can’t talk to anyone in my social networks about this. If I really think of my staff friends for example, there are a few people that I say, “hey what do you think about this?” or “what did you understand about that?”, but there isn’t one person I can think of on my staff that I can sit down and have a deeper level critical conversation with and not be judged when I left the room. (Interview)

This experience pushed me to question who I was in my own story. As I looked around at the course participants, everyone else seemed to know their stories and subjectivities in those stories. After the course came to a close, a few of the participants and myself were left in the room trying to critically reflect and debrief what we had just experienced. One of the participants gave me recognition for “being brave enough to admit that you are unsure of who you are in your story, and even though you think you are alone, I bet you most people are in the exact same boat as you are.” Being afraid of the unknown in my life has lead me to think harder and longer about who I am, although the harder I look for solutions the less I find. I continue to find myself asking the question of “Now what, and how does it relate to my life?”

Theme Three: Stepping Outside of Comfort Zones

Being able to listen to the participants’ stories about life after their transformational learning experience was engaging, and opened the door to critical reflection and dialogue. Not only were they excited to gain new knowledge, they were willing to challenge their beliefs to alter or reinforce their beliefs. In this section, participants share their excitement to learn and try new things, as well as their ability to take a step back and to let others share their experiences.
Christopher

Throughout the course, Christopher’s excitement to learn was overwhelming, and as the days went on, he was more eager to not only step outside of his comfort zone and share, but he was also interested in listening to other people’s stories. Christopher was especially captivated by Hamid’s ability to share such deep feelings and beliefs that immensely differed from those of his own.

During a couple of the breaks, early on in the course, I sat with Hamid. It was really quite a new experience for me, as the classes I have taken thus far have been predominantly Caucasian centred. Actually, I can probably count on one hand the amount of foreign students I have had in my classes up until this point, and so it was quite interesting to talk to Hamid to get a different perspective on things. Hamid especially, kind of rocked me back on my heels a little bit about his experiences in the refugee camps growing up, and it really made me question my own perspectives and ideologies. It especially made me realize this after reading Starhawk, when I started to make connections to what Hamid was talking about and what other people in the course were talking about. I felt like I was missing the boat on all of this stuff for so many years now. (Interview)

Christopher was intrigued by Hamid’s stories, and the way he shared them. He said Hamid presented his stories in such a way that it did not place blame on anyone, but gave listeners an opportunity to not only empathize, but better understand how his beliefs were gained. Hamid’s ability to share such powerful experiences pushed Christopher to challenge his own beliefs and worldviews, and to consider more than one truth existed.

Christopher recognized the instructor of the course also created a feeling of safety and belonging in the group. The passion and sense of safety the facilitator put into her work allowed Christopher to be vulnerable, and share his stories and perspectives in such a way he did not feel threatened. It was also inspiring for Christopher to see the facilitator’s involvement in the learning process, activities and dialogue that were taking
place in the course. He appreciated the way she made the participants reflect on their contributions:

I had mentioned this in the course evaluation. The passion that the facilitator has to get involved in stuff and in the conversations. I only have witnessed two other instructors here at the University of Regina that share that same level of passion. I love both of those instructors because there is no power trip or line you have to toe. Our facilitator is very much that way as well. It was so much fun to defend your position, and she did it without being confrontational, although she still challenged what you said in class, and that was great! Because you can’t say things in the course, without understanding why you said them. (Interview)

The openness to be able to safely share, empowered Christopher to articulate and communicate his stories throughout the course, allowing him the opportunity to voice his views. He felt taking this course was not only beneficial for him to be able to hear perspectives that differed from that of his own, but it also allowed him to better understand more about the way he participated in group situations. Christopher related his new learning thus:

That whole realization for me that it is okay to be nervous. I don’t have to know all of the answers. After taking this course, I have really looked at my experiences in a different light. A lot of the experiences I have, as an adult and while growing up, are experiences that I have begun to question, after taking this course. That has been a major kind of breakthrough in my life, and I realize that the way I was raised and everything has made me realize that my parents were doing the best that they knew how to do. (Interview)

Christopher realized that because he no longer viewed his experiences in the same way, he was eager to make new meanings from them. The excitement to learn poured into Christopher’s teaching practices, and his excitement to learn and try new things was heightened. He attributed a lot of his enthusiasm in the course to having the buddy program in place, where participants were matched up on the first day of the course, and were given time at the end of the day to meet with their buddy to reflect on the events of
the day, as well as to ask questions for clarification. The buddy system created a strong support system for Christopher, and allowed him to feel a strong sense of being able to share without the feeling of being judged or ignored. Christopher also believes the buddy system raised his awareness of some of the injustices the world has that no one says anything about, or does anything about, and yet people in the course are faced with those inequities every day. Christopher explained the importance of the buddy system:

The buddy system for me was great, it was the first time that I used it, or had it set up in a course. And it was really, for me, something that I want to bring into my own courses, because it brings a support system into the picture, someone that students can text when they will be away or when they don’t understand something. I also want to introduce other things, like student centered discussions as opposed to me telling them what they are going to learn using PowerPoint slides, etc. There are a lot of ways that you can teach chemistry and biology. I can now see how I need to change how I structure a lot of the material, especially to bring in more choice about what they are learning. I want to move away from the teacher centered approach, and try to lessen the role that the teacher-student power dynamic traditionally plays. (Interview)

Christopher was energized with the idea of the buddy system, and was eager to introduce the concept into his own teaching. The buddy system also gave him a sense of support and safety that allowed for one-on-one reflections with another adult in a less fearful way. Christopher saw the buddy system as an avenue to move away from teacher-centered classrooms, and towards a more power sharing way.

Elizabeth

Prior to taking the course, Elizabeth had an unwavering thirst to learn new things and to engage in dialogue with different groups of people, which only intensified for her after taking the course. Elizabeth was excited to share her new knowledge and experiences, especially with those that she felt would engage in dialogue on a more critical level. At the time of the interview, she tried to share her new learning with one of
her past administrators, who frequently engaged in dialogue with her on a more critical level than solely discussing the ins and outs of day-to-day elementary school happenings.

As Elizabeth noted:

I am excited to talk to her, or be able to open up to her and talk to her about where I think I have gone wrong in how I have been teaching oppressively. In fact, I called her up and told her that I really needed to get together to discuss my new learning, and how that has impacted me. That is the thing I struggle with. The assignment had nothing to do with assessments or if a curriculum objective has been reached. I am talking about my own pedagogy and how I can treat people better in what I am doing professionally. (Interview)

Every day, Elizabeth was eager to share what she had learned that day with her family.

With this new learning, Elizabeth had felt catalyzed, and it enlightened her to think more critically about the interactions in her everyday life. Elizabeth often reflected on her new learning, and pondered how she could take her new learning and implement it into her own teaching practices. As Elizabeth explained:

I feel like this course has catalyzed me to be a peaceful protester in a way. I was thinking about this in the fall. At the beginning of a new school year, we have to set systematic goals that are compulsory to use and follow. I can’t stand them. I am going to go against the grain this year. I am going to format them in a way that isn’t going to be anything about assessments or graduation rates. It will probably frustrate people, but to me, I think that is okay. I am probably going to write something in my goals that has nothing to do with that. It is going to do with wanting to be more reflective in my questioning. (Interview)

Being a peaceful protester unlocked the passion Elizabeth felt on a daily basis. The course gave her an opportunity to listen to other stories and lived experiences, and to reflect on how these mindsets challenged or reinforced her own views. The course strengthened Elizabeth’s passion for learning, as well as for challenging the status quo. Talking less and listening more, was one of the most valuable lessons she learned in the
course, and she was able to immediately implement the practice into her everyday interactions and routines. Elizabeth explained it this way:

Passionate… maybe that is the word. I listen and I listen and I listen and finally when I have enough of everyone’s input, my answer is passionate. It is not angry, but I question the points being raised. I definitely think that I am more opinionated after taking the course, than I was before. I am definitely letting what people say percolate more, to absorb more. It was like what Chelsea said, it is the beauty of knowing when to step in and when to step out, and listening more, to give people a chance to say what you may have said. So I have been trying to exercise that more so that it starts to become reflexive. To find the right moment to say something, but it is extremely challenging. My husband and I, are politically charged people as it is. We are savvy news watchers and stay pretty current. As for our relationship, we are two people who get into pretty good debates. I would say that after taking the Participatory Methodologies course, I think that I have been able to expand his thinking a bit. I feel like our conversations have become more rich and critical now. (Interview)

Elizabeth’s excitement to learn had expanded beyond her classroom walls and conversations with her existing social and familial relationships, as she wanted to pursue more of an activist role in her community. The course was more than a university elective for Elizabeth, it actually changed many aspects of her daily routines and interactions. Elizabeth explained:

I think I have taken very much of what has happened in the course to heart. This is me, with an open heart, and open mind to what has happened with my experience and the reality that we are living in, or what I think my reality is. I think the one thing that has changed within me, and going back to your question, is realizing the value of not just the local knowledge, but how much knowledge everyone really has. I legitimately have been thinking about what I want to do outside of teaching now. I have strongly been thinking about where I want to go with this new learning, I feel like I am where I am supposed to be right now, but I am starting to think about where I want to go from here when I finish my master’s degree. A lot of the facilitator’s stories have inspired me, and I am not saying that I am going to be going to the places that she has, and overcome governments and dodge landmines, but her stories are fascinating to me and I feel like she only ever shared such a small amount of her lived experiences. But I want to do something more. I am not sure, maybe something locally even. I would love to do something globally. That is my dream. I am not sure if it will be a reality between now and the next 20 years, just because of being a parent, but I
often think about what I want to do after this. I have these tools and an open heart that wants to do more things that have more of a ripple effect. Outside of teaching. (Interview)

Throughout the interview process, Elizabeth brought up her new passion for activism and her excitement to learn more. Elizabeth sometimes struggled with the thought of not being able to share her learning experiences with one of her greatest supporters, her mother. Elizabeth explained further:

Teaching is a very meaningful job, it really is. These kids, particularly where I am, they look up to you. You are like their primary stable person, but I need to do more outside of the classroom too. Something community based. Again, working with local people. I need to read Pedagogy of the Oppressed, and not only read that one, but Pedagogy of Hope too. Freire has interested me. I am interested in the whole Freirian pedagogy and approach. It is very much a part of this experience, I know that. Maybe this is why this is so emotional for me too, because I think of my mom and what she did in her work, and how altruistic she was, and how she approached everything and everyone. With her as a mother, and also as a social worker, she was very much like that. So maybe that is why I gravitate to it, because I learned that from her. That’s why I am thinking bigger picture, of what I want to do with this new learning, because I feel like I have more to give. It is not about receiving or accolades, or status, it has nothing to do with those things. I genuinely mean that. I absolutely do not care about the title. I just want to do it. (Interview)

The excitement to learn which Elizabeth showcased throughout the interview was contagious, and her intense drive for activism was prominent. However, at one point in the interview she discussed how her excitement to learn was challenged by her feelings of being far from her comfort zone throughout the course. Elizabeth soon realized being forced outside of her comfort zone in an environment she felt safe in, was one of the best ways for her to reflect back on her own experiences and how her experiences have shaped some of her adult perspectives. As Elizabeth phrased it:

In the Participatory Methodologies course, I had such a very positive experience, yet, was very uncomfortable. That is the thing that is contradictory about the course, is that it was a very positive but a very uncomfortable situation. It caused
a lot of tension within myself, and even from the dynamics in the room, because we had a diversified group. I should qualify what I mean by diversify. For me, I have been in a predominately homogenous type grouping my whole educational career. My whole first degree, my second degree, all of my elementary/high school years, it has been predominately white people. European, Eurocentric world views, middle class, even upper class at Luther High School. My first degree was in psychology, in the early 2000’s, before we have had a huge change in our landscape of many new Canadians. My first degree and then working at Ranch Ehrlo Society, it has been pretty much one homogenous grouping. Yes, there is diversity within that too, but this was the first class, where I have had diversity geographically with people, professionally, educationally, linguistically, religiously, ethnicity, etc., and it left me stifled at times, where I did not know what to do or what to say. (Interview)

The challenging of her social position was associated with discomfort. This could be identified as part of her disorientating dilemma but it was also a realization that change does not come without discomfort. Even though Elizabeth experienced a variety of things, she felt exhilarated with the diversity she experienced within the Participatory Methodologies course. Due to the strength of the container (Lakey, 2010), Elizabeth felt a sense of safety that allowed her to push past her comfort zone and make herself vulnerable. Elizabeth also discussed a specific time in the course where she felt uncomfortable. Using this profound learning, Elizabeth began to reflect on how she unconsciously interacts with people. As she put it:

There was an incident that happened during one of the discussions. We were doing our closing exercise for the day, and the activity was a living web of personal reflections, ah-ha moments, and feelings. Everyone was passing this ball of yarn around and sharing, while making a web, and the last person to get it was Hamid and he was upset that he was last. He started to speak about how he has been feeling marginalized since coming to Canada, actually, he has felt marginalized his whole life. He comes from a refugee camp and then to come to Canada, he feels even more marginalized. It was as if all of these things he was feeling, were unleashed that were inside of him for so many years. I began thinking that maybe the reason why we did not pass it to him earlier, was because we wanted to keep the web looking like a specific structure, but, he felt like it was something more. Coming from a background where none of that really
existed, or maybe I was not sensitive to that either, or conscious of it, I was unaware that we had made a negative impact on him. I am sure it has happened before, because how many times have we done things unconsciously? This class challenged me to think about how I preform within social settings, where I would say there is noticeable diversity within the class. I still am bothered by how upset he was. Bothered not mad, but my heart hurt for him. That’s what bothered me. This was a really good diversified group, it was good for me, but hard.

(Interview)

In this incident, Elizabeth importantly recognizes that some of the discomfort she is experiencing may be structural. Although Elizabeth acknowledged differences in cultural experiences, she does not speak to structures of racism that shaped Hamid’s experiences, in the refugee camp and in Canada.

My Critical Reflections: Discomfort, Passion and Process

“An empowering leader holds and serves a vision broad and deep enough to inspire others and allow them to take parts of it and make it their own” (Starhawk, 2011, p. 138). The ideology of empowerment was not something new to me, although I did find the concept that one could not empower anyone until that person was ready to empower themselves thought-provoking (Hanson, 2007). I greatly appreciated the opportunity to think critically and engage in meaningful dialogue with my peers in an authentic and thought provoking way. The below quote from my interview exemplified my need to process my transformational learning experience and what was happening to me:

I suddenly found that I was doing all of the research on transformational learning to understand what was happening to me. Really, I had no one to talk to. I didn’t understand what was happening and I understood that something had changed within me and I knew that when I was talking to people, they didn’t want to talk about it. They didn’t want to talk about my change, and I found that I was going through all of these articles trying to find people’s stories. People’s experiences. Just tell me what is happening. What is going on? And I couldn’t find anything. I
wasn’t feeling “normal”. (Interview)

It was not until the second last day of the course that I realized the only pressures that I often felt were ones I placed upon myself. Finding ways to implement this course material into my teaching practice was challenging and rewarding. It created opportunities for my students to empower themselves, but without supports it is also a challenging element of my teaching practice because of institutional pressures and binding curriculums.

There is a lot I must do to find out who I am in my story, but it is not something I can force myself to do. Lakey (2010) acknowledges, “We do not need a know-it-all attitude because our authority does not rest on knowing more than” (p. 237) anyone else does. I strongly believe in critical thinking and reflection and asking questions for deeper understanding. The more knowledge I gain, the harder I search for meaningful dialogue with my peers. This course has given me the motivation to discover who I am in my story, and what impact my emotions play on my learning and understanding. The road ahead of me is long, but I look forward to using everything I learned in the course to better understand my learning and to shape my excitement for critically thinking, reflecting and questioning.

**Theme Four: Challenging Perspectives and Avoiding Confrontations**

At times, participants found it difficult to navigate through their new transformational learning experience, and clarify how their shift in perspectives influenced their everyday decisions and their relationships. In order to keep the peace, participants noticed that in some situations they were uncomfortable challenging alternative worldviews, and would reluctantly avoid confrontation to maintain the
harmony in their social and familial relationships. In this section, participants discuss situations where they felt unable to challenge perspectives or were unable to engage in critical reflection and dialogue in order to maintain their relationships.

Christopher

Throughout the duration of the Participatory Methodologies course, Christopher found it difficult to get involved in some of the dialogues as he feared his position of power and privilege in being a white middle class male would interfere with the authenticity of the ongoing dialogue, or that his ideas would be viewed unfairly. As he stated, “It is hard, very hard to step in”. However, at the beginning of the course, Christopher easily shared his beliefs about the issues being brought forth, and he was often one of the first people to speak. It was not until half-way through the course, when he had more information about the other participants that he began to wait until someone else shared, before he shared his own worldviews. There were times when he did not necessarily agree with one of the other participant’s perspectives, but felt as if he was unable to challenge them, because of his position of power and privilege.

Christopher also found it difficult to challenge colleagues and existing systems in the workplace, as he struggled to initiate conversations, and did not want to create confrontation. After taking the course, he felt more anxiety in the workplace due to his feelings of wanting to challenge the status quo. Although he found it difficult to challenge some colleagues, he worked diligently to use those feelings to motivate his own teaching practices in hopes they would become more of a routine suggestion.

Although Christopher felt pressure to avoid confrontations during the course and in the workplace, for the most part, he did not feel like he had to avoid confrontations
within his familial relationships or with the peers in his gardening club. Therefore, Christopher believed most of the pressure he was feeling was due to avoiding cultural insensitivity, imposing his views on minority groups, or creating confrontation in the workplace.

Elizabeth

To a certain extent, Elizabeth always felt as if she had suppressed some of her opinions and perspectives during social interactions due to being apprehensive that she might offend or unconsciously disrespect a person’s beliefs, cultures or traditions. Although Elizabeth recognized that authentic learning happened outside of a person’s comfort zone, she often avoided confrontation to maintain harmonious relationships, void of the pressures that tension could create. She explained:

I think there were many moments where I felt obvious discomfort and a lot of tension. It just came in the most unplanned way or the most unexpected way, and almost always without any warning signs. One of the situations from the course that continues to trouble me, is one of the stories with Hamid. I called it the hidden curriculum on learning. Things that he would question me on, that I have never been asked before. Our conversation had something to do with housing and with the markets. Throughout the conversation, I am thinking that I am privileged, however I continue to want more. Hamid was fasting at this time, it was the end of Ramadan, and he kind of pushed me and challenged me in the conversation. Hamid found what I was saying offensive, as he figured out where I lived from the conversation, and said that he lived in a townhouse in a much less desirable neighbourhood and could not afford to even get a mortgage. Hamid was upset that I had been so unaware of how fortunate I truly am. It was a series of things in which I unintentionally offended Hamid, meanwhile I thought that I was just having a casual conversation. Hamid was the one who I gravitated to the most, but the one that challenged me the most. I felt the most discomfort from him probably. (Interview)

Elizabeth recalled another time when she was unaware of how other people might have been feeling in the course, and the ways in which she tried to validate those who were feeling marginalized. She continued:
The living web activity really bothered Hamid, because he said he was the last person to speak, and was really upset because he felt that it compacted the issue of marginalization and his position within society. I remembered the facilitator saying the day before that people who show dominance or are in positions of power, are the ones that speak last. After Hamid had shared, I was feeling badly for him, so I shared with the group the importance of the last speaker, and how it could be positive. Although after taking a step back I realized that I am the one who just said the last words, and I instantly took the power from Hamid’s words, because I spoke last. (Interview)

In order to avoid confrontation, Elizabeth tended to rear away from engaging in dialogue, where participants were emotionally heated, and unwilling to listen. Deeply influenced by dialogue, Elizabeth struggled to comprehend why some of her friends and family refused to listen to alternative worldviews, as she believed listening to new information and first-hand experiences, might actually be beneficial to challenging or strengthening a person’s perspectives. In the interview, Elizabeth reflected back on her father, and how she wished he had the opportunity to listen to multiple perspectives, some of which directly opposed that of his own, as she explained here:

I am thinking about how much better my dad could have been if he had considered other worldviews. He definitely has that white man syndrome a bit. He is just not as introspective to understand his white man syndrome. You have to be willing to attach yourself and be open to that idea. I always say that it is more than architecture. Think of our classrooms, we talk about cultural responsiveness, and that it is more than an architecture, you can create that, but it has to be a philosophy. But this way of thinking is something that requires an open heart and an open mind for as far as I am concerned. That kind of upset me about my dad. It is bothering me right now actually. You hold someone in such high regard, and then there is so much ignorance. I wish I would have known what I know 20 years ago, when I was 10 years old and could have shared that wisdom with him. (Interview)

Even though Elizabeth was excited to continue to learn, during the interview she expressed concern that the passing of time without influence from people who had also experienced a transformational learning experience within the *Participatory*
Methodologies course, would result in her re-socialization of more mainstream ideas and lack of engagement in critical dialogue. Elizabeth reflected on her experience of taking the course, to feelings she had after completing her second degree:

I remember at the end of my Education degree, thinking that I was going to maintain this critical thinking lens, however after being in the profession for a while, I think you get re-socialized. And you get re-socialized into a group of people that have set their norms and values, and because you want to fit in so badly, you begin to speak that vernacular. Or the dialect, whatever you want to call it, and it is the expectation that this is what you are supposed to do. I can guarantee you that I cannot go back to work and have these conversations with anyone probably, and this is not to discredit the people who I am working with at all. It is just a knowledge base that they do not have an interest in at this point.

During the interview, Elizabeth reflected on a recent situation where she was confronted by a situation that evoked a strong visceral reaction from her. However, her failure to challenge the situation left her feeling as if she neglected her obligation to uphold the new learning she had experienced in the course. As she put it:

A person I did not know came over here the other day to buy a bed that I sold online. She came over and she basically assumed, not in those explicit words, but because I am white, she was able to pay me up front, even though she had asked to leave the bed here. The woman had also mentioned that she just could not go to certain places in the city, because she refused to go to North Central because it was dangerous and unhygienic. She mentioned that my place was clean and in a respectable area. I find there are these moments in a day that I wonder where we have learned this racism or how did we let it become the status quo. Connecting back to the Participatory Methodologies course, in transactions, you get re-socialized again. You sometimes forget that transformational learning experience. I feel like, even in my reflection, that it was deeper, I felt like I went down deep. I think because it cut so much deeper inside of me that it is holding on tighter. I am connecting my learning in those transactions, day to day life; in those random generic transactions. (Interview)

The racist incident affected Elizabeth and forced her to act. She explained:

I was not going to argue with the lady. I feel the biggest aspect for me that has changed, are the things that were once visible have become more visible. The circumference is larger and I do feel more isolated in who I can talk to about it. You are probably the first person that I have really been able to get into about
this. I did eventually call a friend after the Participatory Methodologies course one day. I was very emotional. I felt that it was the moment where everything I have ever known and my new learning was colliding, and exploding. It made me think, now what? So what am I going to do? This whole experience happened, it would be a shame if I did nothing about it. How do you unknow everything that just happened and then do nothing about it? So now I am going to have to be more keenly aware of what I am going to do with those moments that I have. I feel more prepared to challenge more of the status quo that is going on.

(Interview)

Elizabeth was passionate about learning and engaging in dialogue. However, she often avoided confrontation for the fear of hurting someone due to societal norms that have been engrained in her daily interactions, and her feelings about when it was appropriate to challenge perspectives. In this case, racism. She noted that challenging relationships created stress so she avoided it. Even though Elizabeth was driven to learn new things and to engage in dialogue, she also took into consideration the context of the situation:

I have always said that I am an introspective person, but I feel like I have kind of not have withdrawn myself, but tried to really tune into my conversations more. I have tried to be more of the listener than the talker now. That is something from the class, because I have never thought of that before. Now I sit, and wait and listen and process. Sometimes, I do not challenge opposing perspectives.

Clearly options for challenging perspectives and avoiding confrontations were experienced in multiple ways.

**My Critical Reflections: Conflict Resolution**

Challenging relationships was never difficult for me, although this varies according to the situation. I still find it very difficult to challenge social and family discussions when a person voices their ways of thinking, but refuses to listen to that of anyone else’s. Perhaps this stems from a lack of true dialogue in common narrative. In the following excerpt from my own interview, I explained the difficulties of not being able to discuss certain matters:
You have to be vulnerable and listen to other people’s perspectives…And I find where I am trying to have critical conversations and get to the deeper level thinking, people aren’t ready for those types of conversations and information, or they revert back to “truths” they hear from the media. So a lot of the times I find myself talking and then suddenly thinking I can’t talk to this group about that.

For an example of dealing with difficult familial relationships, a relative of mine lives alone, has worked with the same group of people for over twenty-five years, and spends the majority of her down-time with her elderly mother. Although she is university educated, Isabella refuses to listen to any perspectives opposing her own. Oftentimes, when she wants to be heard, she loudly states her views. If the people in the group offer an alternative way of thinking, Isabella becomes angry, raises her voice, stomps her feet, and often walks out of the room defiantly. Although Isabella has differing opinions than others, I think it would be beneficial for her to at least listen to differing perspectives, as there may be something to learn from others.

The following quote from my interview, discussed that even though an alternate perspective that differed from my own was shared, even if I did not agree with it, there was something that I learned from that alternative perspective:

But I think that you can do it in such a way that doesn’t threaten them. You can question rather than tell. I think that’s something that a lot of people have to work on. Don’t tell me, ask me, so that we are getting a different perspective than our own. You may learn something from that person’s perspective even though you don’t necessarily think it is right, you may have something that helps you look at your perspective differently.

Reiterating the excerpt above, after telling Isabella my beliefs, I usually let her share her perspectives. After waiting for some time, I cross my fingers that the conversation naturally dissolves. From prior experience, I have found that repeating myself or rephrasing it differently does not change Isabella’s unwillingness to listen or try to relate
to what I am saying. Therefore, I found it difficult to continue to challenge my aunts, uncles, and grandparents due to feelings of being disrespectful, avoiding a lasting confrontation, or for the feelings of being unable to get my perspective through to them.

In the following excerpt from my interview, I raise the point of the feelings of impostership and inadequacies:

Even Brookfield (2006) discusses that when you are in those group situations you don’t always necessarily want to always say what you are thinking, because you feel like an imposter. The feeling that you are just going to do what they want me to do, because that’s what they want. A feeling of being inadequate surfaces, or you’re ready for someone to call you out on your perspectives.

At times, it can be difficult to challenge some of my friendships, especially with those who are very opposed to listening to alternative perspectives. Although I voiced my opinions, I only presented the information a few times before I intentionally steer the conversation in a different direction. Pushing the dialogue in a different direction allows time to pass and emotions to settle, and it also allows time to reflect on the situation before moving forwards. Even though this is the most suitable practice, in situations such as working with colleagues, it is sometimes necessary in order to keep relationships amicable and collegial.

**Additional Finding**

**Need for Regrouping and Opportunities to Participate in Refresher Courses**

The participants mentioned several times they felt that the course was powerful, and they felt that because they had undergone a transformational learning experience, they had trouble making connections to their pre-existing social and familial relationships. Multiple times the participants addressed the need for a refresher course or
a regrouping opportunity with the other course participants. The participants would be able to discuss their experiences with their relationships, as well as to dissect and analyze their everyday interactions with people who had also been a part of the course. The participants felt as if they created a unique bond with the other participants in the course, and felt a sense of loss when the course ended. Furthermore, the participants felt a need to reconvene as a group so they could feel as if they were able to relate to others who had undergone a transformational learning experience. Therefore, the participants thought it would be beneficial to regroup with as many of the participants from the course as they could, in order to share their experiences as well as to reinforce their transformational learning perspectives. Elizabeth outlined why she felt it was important to reunite as a group:

I do not like the word follow up. I feel like it is an appointment. It feels like business. I like the idea of regrouping again. Recharging ourselves and thinking about issues. I think that we had a nice group of people. It was a good dynamic and I liked that level of diversity because we all had such very different views. Obviously, the class connected us. That will be the thing that we will talk about again, outside of the idle chitchat of work, family and how are your kids. Once that is out of the way, we will go back to the course and then rekindle that fire a little bit again. That may be difficult to coordinate. We are trying to get together for next week, and we are going to just do some socializing. Guaranteed there will be conversation about that. More opportunities. How would you facilitate that? That’s the thing. We lose that and get socialized. It is easy to fall back into the trap of “It is what it is”. (Interview)

Christopher made similar comments. Elizabeth’s need to regroup was evident throughout the interview, and she often referred back to her desire to rejoin as a group to engage in critical reflection and dialogue, as well as to be able to relate to people who were also a part of such a transformational course.
All of these things are going on inside of you. It feels like a hurricane of thoughts, and feelings together. Emotions and thoughts, and you cannot figure out where it starts or where it ends. This mess inside of you is so large. I realized quickly, that I needed to keep connections with these people, for the sake of knowing where they are at in their own journeys. I feel like I can connect to them. They are like my AA group…I guess the analogy of the AA group helps me make sense of my need to regroup. In AA, they are there together to support each other, and only they know what they are facing. In every one of their battles or addictions, or whatever you want to call it, is different. Their own journey is different, but they are all there to support each other, and only they can feel like they can understand it, and each other. That is how I feel like with this group. I think we are the only people who can really understand that. (Interview)

Other participants discussed their need to reconvene as a group, in order to continue to ignite the fire of their new learning, and to re-examine how their transformation affected their pre-existing social and familial relationships. Additionally, they thought more opportunities for participants to analyze their learning in a familiar setting and safe atmosphere would allow them to make meaning out of their own learning and experiences, as well as provide them the opportunity to be challenged and to hear differing perspectives and experiences from their own.

Participants expressed that in addition to creating a refresher course, or regrouping opportunities, they thought it would be beneficial if there were a community of support outside the institution in the form of a face-to-face meeting group. Further, they thought utilizing technology to create a group where they would be able to voice their experiences and questions, as well as a forum to reinforce their learning experiences, new learnings and perspectives, as well as a place to feel supported throughout their journeys. Participants felt it would be best if the supports were created outside the university, to create a more casual environment for them to feel at ease, and more comfortable in an informal setting. Participants also felt there was a great need to
reconnect with the facilitator throughout their own processes of understanding their transformational learning experience, as they often felt at a loss about how to navigate their new learning.

The participants also felt it was important to share their story of transformational learning with future students, so the next group of participants would be able to connect with other learners who had undergone a transformational learning experience after participating in the course. Finally, participants thought it would be beneficial if the first face-to-face meeting after the course was established before the closure of the course.

Summary of the Findings

This chapter outlined four themes that emerged from the data analysis and interpretation process. The first theme discussed the passion and excitement that the participants were feeling towards their new learning, as well as how they could be more perceptive and understanding of outlooks that differed from those of their own, while allowing their own perspectives to be challenged. The theme also outlined the way participants confidently challenged their relationships. The second theme examined the participants’ everyday interactions, and how they were able to navigate through those interactions, while continuing to critically reflect on their experiences. The third theme displayed the participants’ excitement to learn, as well as to balance new learning with critical reflection and dialogue. Lastly, the fourth theme discussed situations where participants felt unable to challenge friends and family, or were unable to engage in critical reflection and in dialogue. In the next chapter, I address the findings and data
analysis, as well as the four themes of the research. Then I link the data with the literature to respond to my research questions.
CHAPTER 5: Discussion and Conclusion

The final chapter discusses the implications and recommendations arising from the study questions and relevant literature. The chapter begins with the summary of themes from the data analysis process, followed by my reflections on the research questions and limitations of the research study. I discuss the implications of the findings for practice, and offer recommendations for further research, including extending the research to include a more diverse group of participants, and implementing a transformational learning course for undergraduate students. I conclude with my own critical reflections on the research and the exploration of relationships after a transformational learning experience.

The Course Facilitation Leading to the Study

The Participatory Methodologies course gave learners a unique opportunity to learn participatory methodologies and how they can lead to transformation. Because of the set-up of the course, participants critically reflected, reinforced or challenged their own sets of values, beliefs, ideologies, perspectives and worldviews, with a small and diverse group of people. Without an experienced facilitator, I think the course would not have been successful. The facilitator often played an important role in getting the participants to examine their own standpoints and worldviews critically, while listening and engaging in dialogue with other participants. The facilitator also mediated when troubling moments arose among the participants, and she was able to intervene when participants needed to pull back in order to let other voices to be heard. The course was a summer intensive lasting a week and a half, and so it was necessary for the facilitator to
lay the foundation of building a container (Lakey, 2010) or a safe space quickly in order so the participants could immerse themselves in the learning. Part of doing this included the buddy system, which Christopher noted as valuable to his own transformative learning. As identified by Cranton (2006), facilitators respond to the needs of their learners, provide support and encouragement, accept learners, and create opportunities for critical reflection. Therefore, the role of a facilitator is far more complex than the traditional role of an instructor.

Disorienting Dilemma and Perspective Transformations

The research data was analyzed using Mezirow’s (1981, 1990, 1991, 1996, 1997, 2000) phases of perspective transformation, comprised of four main components: experience, critical reflection, reflective discourse and action. Cranton (1994; 2006; 2016) describes a disorienting dilemma as “A comprehensive and complex description of how learners construe, validate, and reformulate the meaning of their experience” (p. 22). According to Mezirow (1991, 2000), disorienting dilemmas trigger a person to critically self-reflect on their new learnings. The participants in the study experienced disorienting dilemmas, but in different ways. For example, even the content and design of the course created content that surfaced sensitive topics related to global and local social justice issues that were drastically different from ones they normally experienced. In the following excerpt, Christopher explained his disorienting dilemma:

After Hamid [another student in the class] shared his stories, I had an epiphany feeling. It was like I instantly realized that I had been wrong about so many things, and was almost embarrassed by how narrow-minded I had been. Because up to this point, to be honest, I have been quite frozen really and talking to him and realizing that they have basically treated his people to a certain extent, the way that we treated people in the World War II. I was appalled that this
behaviour was still happening in the present day world. When talking to Hamid, he was not angry; he was just kind of saying it is what it is. However, to get his perspective on the situation, and not to mention his first-hand experience with the situation, a light bulb just kind of went off for me, that I have been so narrow minded for so many years. (Interview)

The above quote shows that Hamid’s experiences did not fit with the way that Christopher viewed the world, thus Christopher was unable to comprehend Hamid’s stories within his worldviews. Unknowingly, Hamid pushed Christopher to challenge his own beliefs and assumptions. This excerpt shows Christopher critically reflected on his experiences and made a conscious effort to make meaning of Hamid’s situation by incorporating his new learning with his own worldviews, and then questioning the assumptions, he had created, or as he says, “A light bulb went off.” Christopher experienced conscientization (Freire, 1970) where he acknowledged the contradictions in his beliefs, and begins to shift his perspectives on oppressive realities that Hamid frequently encountered.

I think that disorienting dilemmas may take time for participants to recognize and comprehend. Disorienting dilemmas can be uncomfortable as they challenge the ways in which a person views the world (Mezirow, 1991), thus, critical reflection aims to create an understanding of how new perspectives challenge or reinforce beliefs. Therefore, learner’s move away from their comfort zone to critically examine and question their values and beliefs, while reflecting on their own stories (Mezirow, 2000). In the excerpt below, Elizabeth struggles to make meaning from her new learning. She acknowledged that it takes time alone to decompress and absorb the new learning that challenges her previous views and assumptions:
That course was so intense. I literally had to go home, and this is a horrible parenting admission, but I had to leave on the first and second day, and I had to go to my dad’s house. I did not even go to see my own husband and child. I just went upstairs, closed the door into the study and hoped to decompress. It felt like my ears were ringing, not necessarily from the voices of the day, but my head was just reeling with new information and overwhelming feelings. It was a lot to take in, but it started the path to undoing some things. (Interview)

In the above excerpt, Elizabeth needs time to critically reflect on the events and new learning of that day. Reflection plays a vital role in understanding how her disorienting dilemma and her new learning fit or challenged her perspectives. Understandably so, Mezirow (2000) admitted that after a perspective transformation, life is no longer viewed in the same way. Brookfield (2006) clarified that critical reflection is a choice that a person makes to clarify and challenge their assumptions. That this reflection can lead to discomfort and change was evident for all participants in the study.

Based on Christopher and Elizabeth’s disorienting dilemmas, Mezirow’s (1978, 1991, 2000) theory of transformational learning demonstrates critical reflection plays a role in shifting viewpoints such as those experienced by Christopher and Elizabeth. Both Christopher and Elizabeth’s disorienting dilemmas indicated that it was not necessarily how learners experience a disorienting dilemma that makes them question their views, but it is their willingness to listen to differing outlooks and critically reflect upon their own assumptions. Christopher and Elizabeth took actions based on a change in their opinions (Merriam et al., 2007). Conscientization (Freire, 1970) as a process of developing a critical consciousness prompted them to reflect and to begin to take action on the oppressive realities they encountered. The data analysis provided evidence that perspective transformation challenged pre-existing social and familial relationships for
the study participants and the ways in which they navigated their relationships changed. This is further discussed in the next section, the summary of themes.

Summary of the Themes

Through the data analysis process, four themes emerged from the participant interviews. The themes identified were: 1) excitement for learning builds confidence to challenge relationships; 2) everyday social interactions and belonging; 3) stepping outside of comfort zones; and 4) challenging perspectives and avoiding confrontations.

In the first theme, participants were eager to challenge their pre-existing social and familial relationships. After taking the course, participants were excited to share their new knowledge and perspectives, as well as to listen to alternatives, all while allowing their perspectives to be challenged or reinforced. Cranton (2006) explains that “Learner empowerment is both a goal of and a condition of transformative learning…an empowered learner is able to fully and freely engage in critical reflection, participate in discourse, and act on revised perspectives” (p. 59). When reading the transcripts, I thought the participants felt more equipped to challenge relationships with people they were close to, especially those who seemed more resistant to the introduction of new knowledge or beliefs, rather than people they encountered on a daily basis. This may have reflected an issue of trust.

The participants felt a strong obligation to share their new learning and were quite comfortable with their ability to challenge viewpoints from past relationships. Cranton (2006) points out when “People become aware of assumptions, make them explicit, consider the sources of the assumptions and the consequences of holding them”
(p. 63), then they can begin to question those assumptions. Throughout the course, Elizabeth spent a fair amount of time challenging her father’s worldviews, in hopes she would be able to challenge his capacity to hear an alternative perspective from his own. With Christopher’s new perspectives, he challenged his friends from the gardening club in hopes new knowledge and alternative perspectives would help them to understand more about the world from a wider lens than what they were familiar. Freire’s (1970) notion of conscientization gives Elizabeth and Christopher strength, as it “enrolls them in the search for self-affirmation” (p. 36). Elizabeth and Christopher tuned into their new learning by challenging and reinforcing their perspectives, while learning to perceive “[s]ocial, political, and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (Freire, p. 35). One of the main ways they challenged previous views within their relational circles was through engagement in dialogue. For example, Elizabeth challenged her sister-in-law about gender specific clothing and how imposing those beliefs on a toddler was unjust and inappropriate. Janz (2018) suggests, “If one is convinced, through divine revelation, political expediency, social conditioning, or some such means, that a particular conclusion is the right one, then dialogue becomes a kind of game, a step on the way to war” (p. 125). Likewise Elizabeth realized when she challenged her father to consider differing perspectives from that of his own, it was key to share thoughts and then listen to what he had to say. Before she would speak again, she needed to critically reflect on what he was saying before she spoke or posted questions again, mainly to lessen the escalating tension between them.
By questioning their pre-existing relationships, participants became more aware of the everyday situations that were emerging around them, and “being confronted with knowledge that directly contradicts previous accepted knowledge, particularly knowledge acquired from an authority figure, leads us to question what we thought we knew” (Cranton, 2006, p. 62). Throughout the data, participants often discussed how they became more aware of the everyday situations happening around them, and how they could play a more critical role within those situations. Participants also noted prior to taking the course, they often felt unable or unwilling to try to empathize or challenge their everyday situations that were occurring around them. Mezirow (2003) explained empathy as one of the “obvious assets for developing the ability of adults to assess alternative beliefs” (p. 60). Furthermore, Rogers (1980) describes empathy as “entering the private perceptual world of the other…temporarily living the other’s life” (p. 142). Gramsci’s (1971) concept of hegemony surfaced through the data analysis, as the participants were aware that systems of power, and societal norms and structures were very evident in the world around them; however, in the past they often did not take the time to question what was happening around them and how they were a part of it. The course helped the study participants create a better understanding of the subtle or not so subtle power structures, which continually enforce dominant perspectives.

The second theme looked at how participants navigated themselves through everyday situations and interactions in a more critical reflective lens that would challenge or reinforce their own perspectives. Cranton (2006) identifies that people “Have strong principles and points of view that are not easily shaken… [And] an
alternative viewpoint is likely to be dismissed without a second thought unless it is accompanied by a logical and convincing argument” (p. 94). The participants were motivated to be more consciously present in their thinking throughout their everyday interactions. According to Lakey (2010), “Some people are socialized to be fairly relaxed around open conflict while other are taught that conflict is dangerous; still others are brought up to accept some kinds of conflict and not others” (p. 66). Elizabeth spoke about ensuring that the time and place was appropriate in order to challenge perspectives that differed from her own; however, she struggled with the balance of challenging relationships in a non-confrontational way with people she knew would be more receptive to listening to her. Through the data gathering process, Christopher spoke about taking a step back, with the purpose of listening to other perspectives more critically. Janz (2018) added, “Listening is difficult to compel, hard to measure, and easy to mischaracterize, but it nevertheless is crucial in establishing the conditions for productive intellectual exchange” (p. 124). Fostering supportive relationships and environments enabled the participants to be more confident, and capable of becoming more critically reflective of their assumptions, thus empowering the participants to be more self-confident (Mezirow, 2000). Elizabeth and Christopher were motivated to stay as authentic as possible in terms of critically questioning and reflecting upon their everyday experiences, including how those situations challenged or reinforced their worldviews. Although participants did not directly reference racism, the course challenged how the participants dealt with racialized students, and asked them to examine their own racism within societal constructions of racism. Elizabeth and Christopher spoke about trying to avoid cultural insensitivities, but did not consider
racism a factor in their actions and experiences. Christopher spoke about how his friends were uninterested in learning more about other cultures, and how another student in the class, Hamid, challenged Christopher’s own perspectives, which were rooted in structures of racism. Elizabeth identified her father’s racism, and that of the stranger that purchased her mattress. Even though Christopher and Elizabeth did not explicitly speak to racism, it manifested itself through the interview process.

Many times throughout the data-gathering phase, it seemed evident that the course had sparked an excitement to continue learning in both of the participants. Foote (2015) notes, “Learning to re-evaluate and re-story prior learning experiences can lead adults to make sense of their experience and find a new sense of identity” (p. 84). Listening to the participant’s stories, and watching how they critically questioned and reflected on their experiences provided insights into transformative learning as both empowering, enlightening and challenging. Through critical discourse, adult learners need to understand their experiences and how it relates to their stories and worldviews (Mezirow, 2000).

The qualitative methodology created a platform for me, as the researcher, to understand how people make sense of their stories, and the meaning that they assign to specific experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Ledwith & Springett (2010) point out that the stories a person tells, are the stories they use to create their identity, thus “these identity stories interpret perceptions of everyday life and become the filters through which [one] interacts with the world” (p. 197). It was clear to me in the interview stage that when adults question their stories, they interrupt how they view the
world around them. It was evident through the interviews that the participants embodied their learning, examining their feelings while building a deeper understanding of their experience. “Emotions have an energy that emerges from the inertia of apathy, releasing feeling from atrophy and generating action. They are an essential part of being fully human, so a good dialogical space is one that pays attention to emotional energy (Ledwith & Springett, 2010). Participants were excited to discuss their shifts in perspectives, and were ready to challenge their own preconceived ideas, notions and mindsets, in order to reinforce or transform their own viewpoints. Often times throughout the data, participants were beaming with excitement, and they were enthusiastic to put their new knowledge into practice. Using Mezirow’s (2000) phases of perspective transformation, the participants experienced a disorienting dilemma, underwent a self-examination of feelings, recognized there was a shared problem, and began exploring new ways of acting, building competence and confidence. Participants were still working towards planning a course of action, acquiring the applicable knowledge and skills, trying new roles, building or rebuilding relationships and reintegrating into society with new perspectives. Their excitement to continue was infectious and refreshing.

With the excitement to learn, participants realized it was beneficial to share their own perspectives, and to listen closely to the experiences and worldviews of others around them, all the while understanding that experience played a role in building perspectives. Lakey (2010) explained that when people feel discomfort, they have ventured out of their comfort zone and let themselves feel vulnerable, thus, entertaining
new thoughts and reflections. Transformational learning and the process of developing a more open mind can “Free people from constraints and is a liberating experience” (Cranton, 2006, p. 178). Choosing a course that promotes transformational learning was uncomfortable for the participants at first; however, pushing the participants out of their comfort zone allowed them to be present within the course and authentically learn through their experience. The literature on TL suggests that it can be uncomfortable as the learners deal with pain, grief, conflict or a feeling of separation from their old lives (Brookfield, 2005; Cranton, 2016). The course was challenging participants to allow openness to vulnerability and to learn from their own actions and beliefs. According to Lakey (2010), everyone has a comfort zone, “That consists of those habits, beliefs, relationships, feelings, thoughts, and actions that for us are comfortable and familiar” (p. 18). When participants left their comfort zone, they experienced tension. Lakey indicates that upon leaving one’s comfort zone, one enters a learning zone, as new learning happens when a person ventures out, takes calculated risks, challenges some of their fears, and begins to reflect on differing perspectives. This is also the process of conscientization described by Freire (1970).

Although the participants had good intentions when engaging with family or friends, at times, they found it difficult to work through their new learning. Participants reflected on their feelings prior to, during, and after taking the course. They also reflected on how those feelings affected their transformational learning experience and their ability to question alternative perspectives critically. Cranton (2016) indicates that individuals have comfort zones where they feel safe, and usually a fine line where they
begin to feel uncomfortable, lack knowledge or expertise, or feel unable to relate. In order for the participants to keep the peace in some situations, they were uncomfortable challenging alternative beliefs due to a feeling that it was an inappropriate time to engage in a critical dialogue. According to Freire (1970), dialogue “characterizes an epistemological relationship…and is a way of knowing [that] should never be used as a mere tactic to involve [participants] in a particular task” (p. 17). Engaging in dialogue is more than conversing with another person, but it is a key component of the process of learning and knowing. If facilitators foster building strong containers (Lakey, 2010), participants are more likely to engage in meaningful dialogue that challenges or reinforces their perspectives. With the container created in the course, the participants were more willing to open up and share their ideas and perspectives feeling they needed to be accepted for what thought or felt. In some of their pre-existing relationships however, the study participants worried more about keeping the harmony in the pre-existing.

Many times throughout the study, participants discussed situations where they felt they were unable to challenge perspectives, and engage in critical dialogue for to a variety of reasons, such as lack of knowledge on the topic, inappropriate timing, and hesitancy to create ripples within the pre-existing relationship. Sometimes participants felt guilty about avoiding confrontations. In order for participants to be able to engage in critically reflective dialogue, they felt they needed to eliminate their reservations, while adapting to the situation as carefully as possible.
Reflections on the Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore how study participants’ social and familial relationships were altered or sustained following a transformational learning experience, specifically after taking the *Participatory Methodologies* graduate course at the University of Regina, and to further explore how their experiences compared to my own. The research questions for this study were:

1. How does a transformative learning experience alter a learners’ ability to maintain existing social and familial relationships?
2. How do transformed learners experience new and existing social networks?
3. How do learners position themselves to critically analyze and evaluate pre-conceived notions and assumptions?

As mentioned in Chapter One, the research on transformational learning is vast; however, research that specifically focuses on transformational learning and relationships is limited. Courses that promote transformational learning allow students to begin questioning their own perspectives, lived experiences and preconceived notions. Transformational learning can be empowering; however, it can also be isolating if the participants are unable to connect with other people who have also undergone a transformational learning experience, or if they are unable to find literature that identifies other’s experiences navigating pre-existing social and familial relationships.

Understanding how participants work through their relationships is key to creating programming within courses that supports the participant and their experiences, as well as to create supplementary programming outside of the courses participants can attend.
A reoccurring theme throughout the data was that the participants felt their familial relationships were sometimes the most difficult to navigate through because the conversations were usually emotionally charged. Cranton (2006) suggests, “Different people engage in transformative learning in different ways” (p. 43), and some participants may learn more about their experiences through their relationships. However, some relationships may be challenging, as there are other societal norms and expectations at play that may interfere with one’s willingness to challenge their familial relationships (Cranton, 2016). The participants also thought some of their familial relationships were less difficult to challenge, because they felt a sense of safety within those relationships. However, the participants agreed there were certain familial relationships that they could challenge and others where it was too difficult.

The research question also looked at how transformed participants experience new and existing social networks. When participants are exposed to social norms or expectations that differ from the ones they are familiar with or ascribe to (Cranton, 2016), it can challenge the way they view their relationships. Throughout the interviews, the participants explained how their relationships might have changed due to new worldviews, and they discussed ways they now needed to navigate through some of the difficult situations this created. In reference to this, Barner and Barner (2011) pointed out:

Mindful practice supports transformational learning through a number of mechanisms including attending to the present moment, assuming a nonjudgmental attitude when presented with new and potentially challenging information, becoming fully aware of our embedded experience, staying engaged with challenging life events, and discovering how to dis-identify with our thoughts (p. 349).
Therefore, when differing perspectives are presented, participants learned that it was important to take a step back and reflect on what was being said. Often times, critical reflection was stimulated when unexpected or differing points of view were present (Cranton, 2016). When participants had experiences “That are somehow inconsistent with their existing way of thinking about themselves, others, or the world around them” (Shor et al., 2017) it created a disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 2000). After engaging in critical reflection, participants thought they were better equipped when dealing with social relationships, as they had more time to process the information being addressed, and had a better understanding of different perspectives. Participants also believed that by engaging in dialogue they were making connections with other participants with similar stories, or were critically re-evaluating their own values and beliefs based on what was shared through dialogue. Clark(2005) suggests that transformative learning cannot happen without friendships, perhaps because many people most often turn to their social relationships to work through their everyday life events and shifts in perspectives, while still questioning their assumptions and beliefs. In addition to reaching out to friends for support, participants also used critical reflection as a way to assess new roles or the shift in roles in their relationships, and how it affected their relationships. Participants also agreed that some relationships were less difficult than others were to navigate; however, they also acknowledged that not all of their relationships might continue due to new perspectives they now held. They also realized the process of conscientization created a broader social awareness and that also led to new friendships and social networks.
Short-comings in the Research Process

There are a few limitations in this study. First, the adults involved must have undergone a transformational learning experience during the *Participatory Methodologies* course in the Summer 2015 semester. The study, therefore only looked at a small sample of students and a specific transformational learning experience. Thus, it is not representative of all learners, types, or kinds of transformation. The study focused on the influence the transformational learning had on an individual’s relationships and excluded other kinds of change, which may or may not have been present.

The participants were interviewed two weeks after the course ended, therefore, the data only represented the participants’ interactions and reflections from a short period, and did not take into account how their transformational learning experience had affected their social and familial relationships over an extended period.

In hindsight, not including the participant’s critical reflective journals in the data analysis and interpretation process was a shortfall of the study. I could have gleaned additional data from the journals of the other two participants.

The study did not include participants from the minority groups. Although some participants from minority groups who took the course wanted to participate in the study, they did not undergo a transformational learning experience because of the class, and therefore they felt unable to take part in the study. The fact that study participants largely represented dominant social groups is also potentially problematic.

There may have been gaps in the information the participants shared, as that information was based on their memories and reflections from the course. When a person
reflects upon past events, they are recollecting “Knowledge from the past and not necessarily knowledge about the past” (Bochner, 2007, p. 203); therefore, participants may have unconsciously created gaps within their stories based on their recollections. Bochner recognizes, “Making stories from one's lived history is a process by which ordinarily we revise the past retroactively, and when we do we are engaged in processes of languaging and describing that modify the past” (p. 203). According to Trahar (2009), “Research participants will often find ways to tell the stories they want to tell rather than or perhaps as well as those that they think the listener wants to hear” (p. 1). Therefore, some data may have been omitted due for personal reasons, or because they felt that, some pieces of information were irrelevant to the research questions. Overall, I concurred with Franks (2016), as I felt as if the participant’s stories were very similar to my experience.

**Implications for Practice**

Although not all class participants thought they underwent a transformational learning experience after taking the Participatory Methodologies course, they enjoyed taking the course despite feeling discomfort or being challenged, or upset about the information shared and learned. There were many times the participants felt saddened by the stories and the differing worldviews shared. Many had never heard perspectives other than their own, or critically examined their own pre-conceived notions, and ways of thinking. For others, the course ignited a passion to examine their ways of thinking and to challenge beliefs that were oppressive more critically.
Those participants in the course who underwent a transformational learning experience after taking the course, worried about how they would translate their new learning into their everyday lives and relationships. Some of the participants felt excited to share their new learning, but wanted additional supports to continue to foster their transformational learning experience outside the institution.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

From the study and the conclusions, I suggest three recommendations for further research. The first is to continue the research by extending the interviews over a longer period to gather long-term data. The second recommendation is to replicate the research with a more diverse group of people to understand how diverse groups process their transformational learning experiences after participating in the course. A third recommendation is to build a similar course into all undergraduate programs in the final year or semester of study.

One of the components missing from this study is the long-term data of how the participants continued to navigate their relationships after undergoing a transformational learning. An additional study could follow up with the participants over a number of years to learn how their changes in perspectives continued to alter their actions or whether they moved back to previous status quo positions. More specifically, it would be of interest to learn how participants have maneuvered through challenges and successes of their relationships.

In the present study, participants articulated that not enough time had passed since the course concluded in order to discuss how their relationships were affected long-
term, or how they sustained their transformational learning experience in their everyday lives. Both participants felt that due to their workplace and home environments, they were unsure of how they would continue activating their new learning without the support of others.

A future study could also examine how the participants’ transformational learning experience affected their workplace environments. This might focus on how they incorporated their new social justice perspectives and the people that they teach. Further research might also explore how the participants applied transformational learning to their teaching, and how that affected the ability of their learners to engage in critically reflective thoughts and actions.

The present study only represents three students from the Participatory Methodologies course, and it failed to examine how people from racialized minorities navigated their relationships or adding additional complexities based on social structures of power and privilege. Based on the conclusions from the present study, a replicated study with more diverse participants over an extended period help to comprehend the extent to which data from that study correlate with data from the present study.

Throughout the interviews, participants repeatedly addressed the need for courses that promote transformational learning in undergraduate degree programs, and they often stated that if they had learned some of this information in their previous degree, they would have been able to change their ways of thinking and how they viewed the world. However, due to the nature of the intensive course and the transformational learning experience that some of the participants went through, the course would be best situated
in the last semester and year of the participants’ degree program. I think it would also be beneficial for more learners from different faculties to take part in a transformational learning course, as the content learned is beneficial to all learners, not just those enrolled in a Faculty of Education. Further research into the implementation of courses that promote transformational learning would be alluring, as it will demonstrate how learners in different faculties navigate their relationships after undergoing a transformational learning experience.

**Final Thoughts: Personal Reflections and Connections**

The research study was prompted because of my own disorienting dilemma after taking the *Participatory Methodologies* course. I struggled to work through some of my relationships and felt isolated in my inability to connect with people who had also undergone the same. Admittedly, there were times after taking the course where I felt discouraged because of the lack of opportunities to engage in critical reflection and dialogue with my family and friends about the changed views I now held about the world. This research study allowed me to watch from a distance how other students underwent changes throughout the course. However, the research study also surfaced a multitude of different emotions the participants were expressing, that made me relate to my own experiences. I found myself suddenly being able to relate to the participants on a different level than I had before, and I no longer felt isolated in sorting out my own emotions and experiences.

Further, the findings brought to light the need for regrouping opportunities to allow participants time to check-in with the other classmates, and to provide a place
where they could share their emotions and experiences with people who had also taken
the course. Additional research into how to support learners after they had participated in
a transformational learning experience may be beneficial as it would energize learners
and give them time to work through their shift in perspectives.

It is my hope that the research study will provide insights into how participants
might feel after they undergo a transformational learning experience. Reflexive writing
as a method is demanding. It challenged me to deeply analyze my experiences, my
beliefs, assumptions and values. Using a qualitative methodology, that borrowed from
narrative inquiry allowed me to hear the participant’s perspectives first-hand, and to
make connections with them. Working with two of the participants from the course gave
me the spark I needed to activate my passion for learning again, as well as my continual
need to challenge and/or reinforce my ideas. Realizing that I am not alone validated my
feelings in this journey to understand new perspectives and it demonstrated for me that
many of the Participatory Methodologies course participants also experienced the same
feelings of isolation in navigating their social and familial relationships. Renewing our
passion for learning, critical reflection, and opportunities to regroup as a learning
community are perhaps ways to bridge this isolation.
REFERENCES


Darder, A. (2000). *Teaching as an act of love: Reflections on Paulo Freire and his contributions to our lives* (Unpublished manuscript). Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, CA.


Goodall, H.L., Jr. (2000). *Writing the new ethnography*. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.


Monday, July 13th, 2015

Dear Study Participant,

I am currently working on a Master of Adult education Degree at the University of Regina. To complete the requirements for this program, I am conducting a research study that will become the basis of a thesis. This qualitative study is entitled, *Transformational Learning Experiences and Changing Social and Familial Relationships.*

Simply defined, transformational learning is an opportunity to change how a person understands the world and their place in it. Such changes also can create changes in a person’s existing social and familial relationships.

The researcher will interview three adult learners who have experienced transformation after taking part in the course EAHR825 (870AB)—*Participatory Methodologies to Facilitation and Engagement of Adult Learners.*

It will be suggested to participants that they maintain a reflective journal documenting any thoughts, emotions and insights they experience throughout the course as a reference for themselves, and not necessarily a part of the research itself. Participants will be able to use their journals to reflect on their experiences, and those experiences can then be shared in the face-to-face interviews, if they so choose. The researcher will not be accessing the participant journals, but will be using her own journal as a source of personal data and reflexivity during the research experience.

Study participants will be involved in two semi-structured face-to-face interviews to review and discuss their transformative learning experience. As a semi-structured interview, the researcher will give you some questions to guide the conversation. The interview questions will relate to your transformational learning experience, however the focus will be more on your previous social and familial relationships, as well as any new relationships made through your new change in perspective. Each interview will be for the duration of about approximately 60 minutes in length. The interviews will be face-to-face and will be conducted at a time and location which is convenient for the participants. The interviews will be audio taped and professional transcribed. The first interview will involve discussion of each participant’s transformational learning experience and how it has affected their social and familial relationships. The second
interview will help to clarify understandings and be an opportunity to discuss any further changes that participants may have experienced within pre-existing relationships.

After the transcriptions have been completed, the researcher will contact the participants via their preferred method of contact, to notify each person that the transcriptions has been completed and to ask if they want to review the section of the transcript that involves their personal interviews. At this point participants will be given two weeks to return the transcription, indicating suggested changes to ensure that their words have been understood correctly, or signing off that they have read the transcript and have no changes to recommend.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw within one week of the second interview, and a $25 University of Regina gift card will be awarded to those participants that complete the second interview. The identity of the participants will be known to the researcher, however, the participant's anonymity and confidentiality will be protected by the use of pseudonyms, and no specific person will be identified at any time during the research process or writing of the thesis. None of the answers to any questions used from the interviews will be attributed to any particular participant. At the end of the study, the research data will be securely archived for five years, and then destroyed to protect participants' privacy and confidentiality. The researcher will take precautions to ensure that the data is securely protected.

This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Regina. If you have any questions regarding the content or ethics of this study, please contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Board by phone at (306) 585-4775 or by e-mail: ethics@uregina.ca. If participants have any questions they can contact the researcher by phone at (306)533-4004 or by email at ziegleke@uregina.ca.

Your participation in this research study is greatly appreciated. Please sign the attached consent form to indicate your agreement to participate. A copy of this signed consent form should be kept by you, indicating that you have read and agreed to the conditions it contains.

Thank-you for your time and consideration of this request, and I am looking forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Kelly Ziegler
Faculty of Education
Master’s Thesis Student
APPENDIX B: DRAFT PARTICIPANT’S CONSENT FORM

**Title of the Study:** Transformational Learning Experiences and Changing Social and Familial Relationships

**Researcher:** Kelly Ziegler  
Graduate Student  
Faculty of Education, University of Regina  
zeigleke@uregina.ca  
(306)533-4004

**Supervisor:** Dr. Cindy Hanson  
Associate Professor  
Thesis Advisor  
Faculty of Education, University of Regina  
Office: ED221.8  
cindy.hanson@uregina.ca  
(306)585-4513

**Role of the Study Participants:** If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to share a transformational learning experience and stories related to how your existing social familial relationships have changed because of that experience, or how new relationships have fostered because of the new way in which you see the world and your place in it. Your experiences and stories will be shared through semi-structured face-to-face interviews, where the researcher will give you some questions to guide our conversation. The interview questions will relate to your transformational learning experience, however the focus will be more on your previous social and familial relationships, as well as any new relationships made through your new change in perspective. The interviews will be audio taped and transcribed by the researcher. The study participant will be given the opportunity to review the transcriptions, to provide any feedback or suggestions for changes that they would like to make to ensure that their words have been understood correctly. Participants will be asked if they are willing to sign the document indicating that they are aware such changes have been made by the researcher.

**Working Study Definitions:**

**Transformational Learning Experience:** that a person has learned something new that has changed their perspective, or the way that they see the world. Often times, a transformational learning experience feels like a sudden change in perception or realization.
Social Relationships: are relationships between people which may involve people who are also family relations.

Familial Relationships: are relationships between members of a family (this can be interpreted different culturally, but that interpretation remains social or familial) so it does not change the focus of the study.

Duration of the Participation: The interview will require two semi-structured face-to-face interviews that are approximately sixty minutes in length. If clarification or additional questions arise after the first interview, a second interview may be set-up to gather additional data. The decision to participate is strictly voluntary and participants may withdraw within one week of the second interview without question or penalty.

Potential Risks, Discomforts, or Inconveniences: Study participants are not expected to experience any risk or discomfort during the interviews, but if this occurs, the interview can be postponed or canceled. While there is no anticipated risk of emotional harm, there may be discomfort experienced. The discomfort may also however be mitigated by talking about it, or by declining to answer any of the questions that may cause them discomfort in the interview. The study participant will also be given the contact information for the Student Support Centre.

Potential Benefits of Participation: There are no direct benefits to the study participants beyond the knowledge they may acquire about the research topic and process. The researcher hopes that participants and other graduate students, who have had a transformational learning experience, might benefit from the shared experiences by feeling less isolated.

Confidentiality of the Data and Withdrawal from the Study: Participants will be anonymous in the published results, however they will not be anonymous in the research process, as the researcher will be interviewing the participants. Anonymous quotations from interviews with the participants may be used in the thesis. Participants will be asked to select a pseudonym for any direct reference to them in this thesis. To maintain participants' confidentiality, the interview data will be stripped of their legal name and the data will be stored on a password protected private computer. However, when using technology, there is a possibility that computers, voice recorders, portable hard drives and other technology can be misplaced or stolen, although the technology used in this research will be closely monitored and kept in a locked cabinet to help prevent the misplacement or theft of study information.

Information about the Study: All study participants will be offered the opportunity to review results before they go to the Committee and they will have access to the completed thesis document through the University of Regina, Education Library.

Research Ethics Approval: This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Regina. If you have any questions regarding the content or ethics of
this study, please contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Board at (306) 585-4775 or by e-mail: ethics@uregina.ca.

**Participant Questions:** If participants have any questions about the research study, they can contact the researcher by phone: (306)533-4004 or email: ziegleke@uregina.ca.

**Consent:** Please ensure that you have read the Participant Request Letter and the Participant Consent Form thoroughly before continuing on to the portion below. By signing this document, your signature on this form indicates that you have understood the information provided to you about the research study and your role as a participant in this study, and that your interview will be audio taped and transcribed. In no way does this document waive your legal rights nor release the researcher or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You will be given a photocopy of this form and the Participant Request Letter.

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**SIGNED CONSENT**

The researcher has read and explained this consent form to the study participant before receiving the study participants consent, and the participant had knowledge of its contents and appeared to understand it. In addition, this consent may be audiotaped.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the description provided; I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my/our questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the research project. A copy of this Consent Form has been given to me for my records, and a copy will be kept by the researcher.

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<tr>
<th>Name of Participant</th>
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APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT PRE-SET SCREENING QUESTIONS

(In the case that too many study participants volunteer)

1. Tell me about yourself.
   a. Background information.
   b. Educational background.
   c. If you are presently enrolled in a post-secondary program, where are you in your studies?

2. Why do you think that you would be a good candidate to participate in this research study?

3. Please tell me about your transformational learning experience.
APPENDIX D: SAMPLE OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about yourself.
   a. Background information.
   b. Educational background.
   c. Presently where are you in your education?

2. Can you describe when you realized that you had experienced a transformational learning experience as a result of the EAHR825 (870AB)—*Participatory Methodologies* to Facilitation and Engagement of Adult Learners course or another post-secondary course?

3. Explain your transformational learning experience.
   a. (Prompt) Did it seem gradual, or more like an epiphany?
   b. What were the key ways in which you experienced the change?

4. What changes has your transformational learning experience had on your everyday life?

5. What influences has your transformational learning experience had on your existing relationships?
   a. (Prompts) Familial relationships? Social relationships? Other?

6. What personal changes have you noticed about the way you interact with your prior transformational learning experience relationships, familial or social, in order to sustain them?

7. Have you sustained relationships from before your transformational learning experiences, or have you found it difficult to continue to maintain those relationships?

8. Has the transformative learning experience resulted in new relationships in your social or familial life that likely would not have occurred previously?

9. What resources, if any, have you used in order to deal with the influences of your transformational learning experience?
APPENDIX D: SAMPLE OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS CONTINUED

10. What recommendations can you make for someone who is currently experiencing a transformational learning moment?

11. Are there any other points of your transformational learning experience that you would like to share?
Research Ethics Board
Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR
Kelly Ziegler
9 Pearl Crescent
Emerald Park, SK S4L 1A5

SUPERVISOR
Dr. Cindy Hanson

FUNDER(S)

TITLE
Transformational Learning Experiences and Changing Social and Familial Relationships

APPROVAL OF
Application for Behavioural Research Ethics Review
Poster
Recruitment letter
Consent Form
Participant Pre-Set Screening Questions
Sample Interview Questions

APPROVED ON
June 23, 2015

RENEWAL DATE
June 23, 2016

CERTIFICATION
The University of Regina Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above-named research project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The principal investigator has the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this research project, and for ensuring that the authorized research is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the original protocol submitted for ethics review. This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above time period provided there is no change in experimental protocol, consent process or documents.

Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures should be reported to the Chair for Research Ethics Board consideration in advance of its implementation.

ONGOING REVIEW REQUIREMENTS
In order to receive annual renewal, a status report must be submitted to the REB Chair for Board consideration within one month of the current expiry date each year the study remains open, and upon study completion. Please refer to the following website for further instructions: http://www.uregina.ca/research/REB/main.shtml

Dr. Larena Hoeber, Chair
University of Regina
Research Ethics Board

Please send all correspondence to: Office for Research, Innovation and Partnership
University of Regina
Research and Innovation Centre 109
Regina, SK S4S 0A2
Telephone: (306) 585-4775 Fax: (306) 585-4893 research.ethics@uregina.ca
PART 9: Declaration by Principal Investigator (or Supervisor for student projects)

Project Title
Transformational Learning Experiences and Changing Social and Familial Relationships

I confirm that the information provided in this application is complete and correct.

I accept responsibility for the ethical conduct of this project and for the protection of the rights and welfare of the human participants who are directly or indirectly involved in this project.

I will comply with all policies and guidelines of the University and Health Region/affiliated institutions where this project will be conducted, as well as with all applicable federal and provincial laws regarding the protection of human participants in research.

I will ensure that project personnel are qualified, appropriately trained and will adhere to the provisions of the REB-approved application.

I certify that any significant changes to the project, including the proposed method, consent process or recruitment procedures, will be reported to the Research Ethics Board for consideration in advance of its implementation.

I certify that a status report will be submitted to the Research Ethics Board for consideration within one month of the current expiry date each year the project remains open, and upon project completion.

If personal health information is requested, I assure that it is the minimum necessary to meet the research objective and will not be reused or disclosed to any parties other than those described in the REB-approved application, except as required by law.

I confirm that adequate resources to protect participants (i.e., personnel, funding, time, equipment and space) are in place.

I understand that if the contract or grant related to this research project is being reviewed by the University or Health Region, a copy of the ethics application inclusive of the consent document(s), may be forwarded to the person responsible for the review of the contract or grant.

I understand that if the project involves Health Region resources or facilities, a copy of the ethics application may be forwarded to the Health Region research coordinator to facilitate operational approval.

Signature of Principal Investigator and/or Supervisor

CINDY HANSON
Printed Name of Principal Investigator and/or Supervisor

04/14/15
Date (MM/DD/YYYY)

Signature of Student Investigator

KELLY ZIEGLER
Printed Name of Student Investigator

04/14/15
Date (MM/DD/YYYY)

Department Head (UofS and RQHR only): The signature/approval of the Department/Administrative Unit acknowledges that he/she is aware of and supports the research activity described in the proposal.

Signature of Department Head

Printed Name of Department Head

Date (MM/DD/YYYY)

REB Application for Behavioural Research Ethics Review (last update 16-May-2012)
EAHR825 (870AB) – Participatory Methodologies and Approaches to Facilitation and Community Engagement
Room ED315  9:00-3:30 (July 13-22, 2015)
Instructor: Cindy Hanson, PhD
e-mail – cindy.hanson@uregina.ca  phone – (306) 585-4513
Office hours: By appt. Office Room 221.8

Course Description:
Starting with theories of participation and facilitation, this course will develop skills and knowledge for use in facilitating participatory learning, designing participatory methodologies, and developing participatory learning and research environments. The approaches will demonstrate links between participation, social inclusion, societal transformation, and participatory decision-making. Students will learn and develop original participatory methodologies for a variety of fields and contexts.

Course Objectives:

☐ Enhance their ability to use participatory methods of facilitation
☐ Understand the links between participation and power
☐ Develop capacity to design and deliver participatory methodologies
☐ Articulate the links between participatory methodologies and democratic citizenship
☐ Understand the theory and practice of Participatory Methodologies/participation
☐ Provide examples of how Participatory Methodologies have been used in a variety of learning and research contexts

Course Overview
Each class period will offer a blend of theory and practice; individual work and groupwork; and lecture and hands-on activities. Participation in class activities is part of a participatory facilitation model and thus, is expected. The course is structured as an intensive and therefore students must comply with the workload accordingly. There are several readings assigned for each class. Some of the readings and at least one assignment (the book review) should be completed before the class begins. Students are recommended to have most of the readings done before the class commences.

Texts & Readings.
Only one text is required for the book review, but you need access to all texts for seminars and daily readings.


Course requirements:
- Attendance and completion of all assignments is required to pass this course.
- Guidelines for grading in graduate programs according to the U of R (See URCourses);
- Full attendance is assumed necessary as you are contributing to each other’s learning.
- Plagiarism will not be tolerated. Please familiarize yourself with university policy in this regard.

COURSE OUTLINE

Pre-course assignment:

Book review of Facilitating Group Learning: Strategies for Success with Diverse Adult Learners by Lakey or Starhawk’s The Empowerment Manual

See assignment details URCOURSES homepage for EAHR825 (870AB)

Readings required:
- Lakey – Chapter 1
- Starhawk – Chapter 1
- Ledwith, M. & Springett, J. Chapters 1, 3
**READINGS FOR JULY 14-21**

*THESE READINGS ARE REQUIRED FOR THE COURSE. Please read all as the readings correspond with the student seminars.*

Abbreviations used: SH - Starhawk; L&S – Ledwith & Springett

**Lakey**: Chapters 3, 7, 16, 18, 20 (pp. 35-40);
**Starhawk**: Chapters 4, 5, 7, 8
**L&S**: 2 (pp35-40 only); 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9

**CAMPBELL AND BUNABY** – CH. 9 TO BE POSTED ON UR COURSES HOMEPAGE

2-3 OTHER READINGS TBD for July 20&21.

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<tr>
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<td>Power, participation and facilitation</td>
<td>Participatory decision-making</td>
<td>Morning – Speaker; community facilitator</td>
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<td>Worldviews</td>
<td>Dialogue</td>
<td>Asking questions</td>
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<td>Student seminars</td>
<td>Participatory methodologies: metaphors, story-telling, dialogue, World Café, case studies, videos, and meaning-making in methodologies</td>
<td>Story-telling as methodology</td>
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<td><strong>Critical reflection</strong></td>
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Readings: L&S pp. 35-40 and Chapter 7’ Lakey Ch. 16; SH 5.

Readings: L & S Chapter 6; Lakey 7, SH 7&8

READINGS: Burnaby Ch 9; L&S Ch. 5; Lakey 18; Starhawk – review examples.
Assignments:

REMEMBER TO ALWAYS USE APA (6th Ed) style

The following web sites may assist with some of the guidelines:
- [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_apa.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_apa.html)
- [http://www.uregina.ca/owl/](http://www.uregina.ca/owl/)

Assignments should be submitted electronically through U of R courses. Assignments will be graded on:
- Overall organization – important – **begin with clear thesis statement**;
- Presentation (English, form, grammatically correct);
- APA 6th edition format;
- Easily read and understood;
- Ability to analyze, synthesize and clearly explain the ideas as indicated in the assignment description;
- Application of theory to practical exercises;
- Adequacy of summary and concluding statements.

1) **Book Review**
SEE URCOURSES FOR DESCRIPTION

2) **Seminar Facilitation.**
Each student will facilitate a one-hour seminar based on the core concepts listed on the seminar sign up sheet. The contents of your seminar will vary according to your interests in this concept/theme/theoretical idea, or practice, but it should be linked to the contents of the reading. Along with the F2F seminar you should produce a 1-2 page hand-out which identifies the importance of the concept in the field of participatory facilitation/methodologies. This hand-out should also be referenced with sources consulted (while you are not expected to go beyond the chapters listed on the seminar sheet posted, it is encouraged). It is imperative that all students be familiar with the associated readings so that they can participate in the discussion, so please read all the assigned chapters. As a seminar leader you will consider a discussion of the content of the readings in a way that both engages and challenges the learners. You are encouraged to use seminar techniques that are active and involve high levels of participation by the learners—the seminar should not be facilitator-centered. As a guide, I suggest that powerpoint, prezi or similar tools, occupy no more than 20% of the time used in the seminar. The seminar will be evaluated on the basis of creativity (5 marks), content (10 marks), the hand-out (5), participation from the class (5) and facilitation/delivery (5).

Value: 30 marks

3) (Co-) facilitation of participatory activity Each student will work with a “buddy”/partner to co-facilitate a participatory activity. The chosen activity should be appropriate for 15-20 minutes max. The instructor will provide examples during the first day of class. Ideas are available in the Chamber book listed under other resources. The focus of the activity is on techniques, delivery and stating an example of when this would be used. The methodology should be appropriate for the context and audience. In most cases these activities will be used to open the day (opening) or to close the day (closing or last word). Value: 10 marks

4) Personal Learning Reflective Paper

Self-reflection in adult learning is expected; critical reflection is part of a participatory approach. While you are engaging with the readings and class activities you are expected to look critically and reflexively at the relationships between power, participation, facilitation and possibly transformation. A good way to do this is through a personal journal into which you write regularly—both your personal reflections about the class as well as critical reflections about the learning. For this assignment you are not expected to go beyond the literature assigned for class readings, but you are welcome to do so. Explore what you are learning academically and how it applies to your work or potential work situation or area of study. For example, does it ask you, the learner, to challenge your beliefs and assumptions? What are you learning that you consider important for a facilitator or research practice? How does what you are learning challenge your assumptions about facilitation, participation, living in communities, or even democracy? Be specific, reference articles (in APA style) as you go along.

This paper is a chance for you to RESPOND to the articles read for class, including the seminars. Please quote author and year in brackets (APA style) when referencing readings in your journal. These should not be summaries of readings, but responses – what does this mean to your practice and theory as an adult educator,
researcher, activist, etc.? Because this is a reflective paper you may write in first-person, but be consistent if you do.

This final reflective paper should be approximately 10 pages long (Max 12; min 8). Use APA style – 6th ed. (12 pt font; proper referencing of articles; attention to format). It is due July 23; no exceptions. Value: 20 marks.

Participation:
Participation is based on attendance, active learning, and meaningful participation in the class; including in groups. A rubric upon which your participation will be assessed will be posted on URCourses.Value: 15 marks

SUMMARY OF ASSIGNMENT GRADING AND DUE DATES:

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<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Value</th>
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<td>Book review</td>
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<td>July 13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Facilitation of a seminar &amp; paper</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>July 14-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Co)facilitation</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>July 14-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal learning reflective paper</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>July 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation/groupwork</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>On-going</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Articles and web-sites to supplement the course readings
See also videos posted on URCourses2 course page.


www.raisingvoices.org

Participatory Methodologies: A facilitator’s guide. VSO. http://community.eldis.org/.59c6ec19/