

The Ginger Scholar Rhizome Presents....

Sprouting Seeds
in the Field of Transformative
Learning Theory

A seed paper for the Ginger April 2007 Inquiry

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ε·πισ·τε·μο·λο·γι·α
the branch of philosophy that studies the nature of knowledge,
in particular its foundations, scope, and validity

Introduction

If I really strain my memory to pinpoint the inspiration for this essay, it stems back to the intersection of three fertile grounds in my life: my studies at Fielding Graduate University, the Shambhala Institute and the Ginger Group Collaborative.

Over the past two years in a doctoral program at Fielding, I have given a lot of thought to epistemology, the study of the nature of knowledge. Originally trained as a biologist, I was indoctrinated into scientific methodology and the belief that through careful and independent observation, we could understand and predict what would happen in the world. Knowledge was independent of the observer. In reality, I found it difficult to find a point of independence, set apart from the world that I was studying. After my foundational studies at Fielding, I have discovered that a constructionist perspective of knowledge is a

better personal fit. With a constructivist epistemology, all knowledge is constructed by how we view or perceive the world through our social experiences.

For the past six years, I have attended the summer program of the Shambhala Institute and experienced a different approach to knowledge. The Institute incorporates meditation and contemplative arts with large group interventions. It was at the Institute that I discovered through movement, my body also held knowledge. Through watching my mind in meditation, I observed the fluid and fleeting nature of my thoughts; my mind was not nearly as stable as I like to tell myself. The Shambhala Institute describes these processes for accessing knowledge and developing mindfulness as the contemplative arts:

Only too often, we experience how difficult it is to maintain that simple awareness when things begin to get a little more complicated and a little more demanding. The artistic process training is about how to bring that straightforward sense of being there, without complication, into movement and into perception. This will help us bridge the experience of sitting on the meditation cushion, being off by ourselves in a contemplative way, and being engaged in our everyday activity. (Chender, 2001, n.p.)

In addition to the opportunity to conduct my doctoral research at the Shambhala Institute, one of the joys of my relationship with this organization is that I am the field editor for their on-line newsletter, *Fieldnotes*. This fall, I had the opportunity to interview Chris Corrigan about his recent publication entitled “*The Tao of Holding Space*” (Hartley, 2006). This conversation prompted me to think about the role of facilitator and the act of opening space for group wisdom to emerge. Not long after that interview, I attended a Ginger Collaborative gathering in which we used a special process called an “ace-it” to gather collective knowledge from a group. I used this process, as I wanted to get some ideas about my proposed research about contemplative practices from this group of practitioners. The most interesting part of the conversation was when Ginger members started talking very

personally about what they do to create and hold space as facilitators. You could almost feel the energy drop down and intensify in the room. As masterful facilitators, I admire this group's ability to create space for collaborative inquiry and group engagement through what they describe as "other ways of knowing."

All three of these important areas contribute to my development as a scholar-practitioner. I will draw from these areas in this seed paper to document the budding areas for growth in the field of transformative learning. The purpose of this essay is to offer an alternative perspective to the dominant cognitive approach in transformative learning as well as explore the role of the educator or facilitator in fostering the process. Using transformative learning as a focal field, in the first part of this paper I will detail how other ways to knowing are reflected in the scholarly literature and can expand our current ability to help adults shift perspectives. In the second part of this paper, I will investigate the role of the educator in creating and holding spaces for transformative learning. This paper is a scholarly contribution to the April 2007 Ginger Inquiry, with the hope that it might seed ideas from the theoretical realm and open up a cross-pollination between concepts and practice.

The Field of Transformative Learning

Though it has been over thirty years since Knowles (1984) described adult learners as the neglected species and presented his theory of andragogy (1968), adult learning theory is a burgeoning field. For the past fifteen years, transformative learning theory has captured the attention of adult educators and dominated the literature (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2006).

The roots of transformative learning steam back to the mid-seventies when Jack Mezirow first published results from his research investigating the phenomenon of mature women returning to school (Mezirow, 1975). Mezirow (1978) fleshed out his initial thinking to described the process of how perspectives can be transformed in adult learners. Essentially, this process describes how individuals learn to make their own interpretations and question their unconscious or uncritically assimilated assumptions. Mezirow believes that this critical reflection is the primary goal for all adult education (1997, p. 5).

More recently, Mezirow (1991) defines transformative learning as learning that “transforms problematic frames of reference – sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meaning perspectives, mindsets) – to make them more inclusive, discrimination, open, reflective and emotionally able to change” (p. 58). Central to Mezirow’s concept is a shift in perspective in which adults become aware of the nature of their own thinking: “perspective transformation is the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; changing these structures of habitual expectation to make possible a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrating perspective; and, finally, making choices or otherwise acting upon these new understanding” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 167) Though this may sound like straightforward exercise, in practice, awareness of thought patterns and the identification of underlying beliefs is challenging.

Mezirow (2000) provides several useful definitions central to the process of transformation. Mezirow uses the term ‘frame of reference’ to describe meaning

perspectives or how people filter information and interpret experiences. People use different frames to see the world and often these frames are closely tied to the dominant cultural paradigm or our family of origin (p. 17). A frame of reference has two aspects: a “habit of mind” that reflects broad assumptions; and a “resulting point of view” that is an expression of the habit of mind. Mezirow reminds us that many of these meaning schemes “commonly operate outside of awareness. They arbitrarily determine what we see and how we see it” ([. 18). Thus, critical reflection is an opportunity to expand our awareness to see other viewpoints and develop a more dependable frame of reference: “transformative learning involves liberating ourselves from reified forms of thought that are no longer dependable” (p. 27).

One of the most elegant descriptions of the process of transformative learning comes from Cranton (2002) based on the stages originally identified by Mezirow (1975). Rather than the linear steps originally described by Mezirow, Cranton describes seven general facets that are important to consider when teaching for transformation: creating an activating event; articulating assumptions; critical self-reflection; openness to alternatives; discourse; revision of assumptions and perspectives; and acting on revisions.

First, an activating event occurs that reveals a discrepancy between what a person thought was true and what is experienced. Teachers can expose learners to a diversity of views as a catalyst for challenging single-pointed of thought. Secondly, the underlying assumptions need to be raised from the unconscious and identified. As assumptions are tricky to articulate, critical questions, autobiographies and metaphor analysis can be helpful. Third, students need to critical-reflect about the impact or consequences of having these

assumptions. Fourth, teachers need to create an environment in order “for people to try on different points of views- ways of acting out or talking about alternatives” (p. 68). Fifth, engaging in discourse is a means for learners to exchange ideas and assess perspectives. At this point, learners may decide to revise or change their assumptions and create a larger frame of reference based on the diversity of views they have experienced. Finally, learners need an opportunity to act on their revised assumptions. Cranton suggests that there is no magical or route technique for achieving transformative experiences however the teacher must “teach as though the possibility always exists” (p. 71).

With his theory of transformation, Mezirow clearly struck a nerve of adult learning and addressed the issue about the powerful impact of critical reflection for adults. Through her clearly articulated interpretations, Cranton has also been a key contributor for shaping our understanding of the process of transformation and offering practical techniques. However, the theory is not without limitations including the common critique that Mezirow’s highly rational approach limits our way of fully engaging learners. In this next section, I will investigate how scholars are expanding the field of transformative learning.

Critique of Transformative Learning Theory

While transformative learning theory has helped us to understand important perspective shifts critical to adult learning, the theory has been critiqued for reliance on rational knowledge, neglecting the learner’s context and focusing on the individual rather than promoting the larger societal change (Merriam et al., 2006, p. 149). In this section, I will investigate two of the current critiques: reliance on cognitive approaches and the role of the

educator. These areas represent sprouting seeds of new growth for the field of transformative learning.

Other Ways of Knowing

One of the most common critiques of transformative learning theory is that it emphasizes cognitive approaches while neglecting emotional or affective dimensions (Weissner & Mezirow, 2000). On reviewing research from the past twenty years on transformative learning, Taylor (2000) remarked “several studies concluded that critical reflection is granted too much importance and does not give enough attention to the significance of effective learning – the role of emotions and feelings in the process of transformation” (p. 303). Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner suggests that this dependence on rational thinking is a residual tail from the previous dominant scientific paradigm: “rational thinking is a particularly Western concept, a product of the Enlightenment and Descartes’ mind-body split” (Merriam et al., 2006, p. 150). Epistemologically, preference is given to the mind while the rest of the body and any way other than cognition is neglected.

The majority of Mezirow’s concepts are related solely to aspects of the cognition. For example, central to Mezirow’s concept of transformative learning is a change in the frames of reference through “critical reflection on the assumptions”(J. Mezirow, 1997, p. 7) that underpin viewpoints. Generally, Mezirow believes that critical reflection can come from largely cognitive activities such as “reading a book, hearing a point of view, engaging in task-oriented problem solving (objective reframing), or self-reflectively assign our own ideas and

beliefs (subjective reframing)” (p. 7). While Mezirow is clear about the role of the mind, he is less certain about incorporating other ways of knowing.

Dirkx (1997), one of the most vocal critics of Mezirow’s highly cognitive approach, takes a holistic approach that incorporates spiritual, emotional and mythological aspects of the self. Dirkx expands Mezirow’s initial thinking and suggests that rational and extra-rational processes are involved with transformation of frames of references. Dirkx (2006b) contends that in addition to critical reflection, the imagination and emotion are ways to foster transformative experiences: “in formal adult learning settings that are interactive and dialogical, the unconscious is often expressed through emotionally laden experiences, images and relationship” (p. 20).

In addition to logic, Dirkx encourages educators to nurture the learner’s soul through the learning experience: “soul has to do with authenticity, connection between heart and mind, mind and emotion, the dark as well as the light. When we are attending to matters of soul, we are seeking to live deeply, to focus on the concreteness of the here-and-now.” (p. 83). Mezirow’s focus on critical thinking is a stark contrast to Dirkx’ affective and imaginative approach. Dirkx believes that working deeply with learners comes with chaos that is not neatly shelved in cognitive boxes: “nurturing soul is an attempt to embrace the messiness and disorder that is adult learning, to enter more fully and authentically into the matters of the heart” (Dirkx, 1997, p. 84).

While Dirkx makes great contributions to validating other ways of knowing in transformative learning, his epistemological underpinnings are largely western based; most of

Dirkx work is influenced by Jung's psychological concepts relating to human development. He compares the demands of the ego for logic and order with the souls need to meander in open and ambiguous spaces (p. 85).

To his credit, Dirkx compliments his interest in Jung with practical experience. Within his writing, Dirkx frequently uses vignettes to describe teaching movements from his own career. These examples illustrate the role that emotions play in adult learning, particularly the impact of individuals' emotions on the group. For example, Dirkx compared times in groups when raw emotions were serviced. Generally, emotions are based in the unconsciousness though they are powerful enough to seep into how we act in the world. Earlier in his career, he attempted to solve contentious group issues and took charge of the agenda. However, this approach often thwarted the group's energy. Other times, Dirkx experimented with letting the group respond to what needed to happen. Ultimately, the aim for both the learner and teacher is to get past the ego:

Learning through soul is thus "transegoic" it connects us to the immediacy of our present experience and, through this process, leads us into an experience that transcends more limited, ego-based views of the world. We connect in imaginative, vital and meaningful ways with these broader aspects of our world. (p. 83).

Dirkx (2001) claims that affective issues such as emotions underpin how adult learners engage in education. In his view, central to transformational learning is Jung's process of individuation in which people deepen their awareness of themselves and their relationship to others. In order to tap into this hidden self, an imaginative rather than a cognitive approach must be employed: "the process of individuation is mediated largely through emotion-laden images"(Dirkx, 2006b, p. 18). For Dirkx, it is this process of individuation and developing self that allows people to develop authenticity.

Dirkx takes issue with Mezirow's highly cognitive approach of critical reflection that does not account for the unconsciousness nor emotion. Rather, he encourages educators to use imaginative rather than a literal approach to help people make sense of their unconscious thinking and individuate. Dirkx suggests several different ways to evoke the imagination including having a conscious dialogue with the unconscious material through an imagined conversation. Rather than literal interpretation or analysis, Dirkx recommends the use of stories and metaphors to allow learners to connect in an imaginative way.

At the last transformative learning conference, Cranton hosted a dialogue between Dirkx and Mezirow. While it was hoped that the two might work towards integrating their concepts, both seemed to stick to their positions. Dirkx discussed the importance of the harnessing the unconscious while Mezirow stated that ultimately all transformational processes involve "a rational process of critically assessing one's epistemic assumptions" (Dirkx, Mezirow, & Cranton, 2006, p. 133). Acting as an intermediary, it was Cranton that was able to find common ground between the dueling scholars:

Dirkx is not denying the existence of a rational process of transformative learning within awareness; he is simply more interested in understanding the subjective world and the shadowy inner world that has such power in leading us to deep shifts in how we see ourselves and the outer world. Mezirow acknowledges the significance of this dimension of transformative learning, adding only that the outcome must involve a critical assessment of assumptions to ensure that is not based on faith, prejudice, vision or desire. P. 137.

I tend to concur with Cranton's assessment as well as believe the realm of non-rational ways of knowing is one of the fullest sprouting seeds in the field of transformative learning. Dirkx has been one of the key contributors to expanding ways of knowing though I believe there is room for alternative viewpoints from divergent epistemologies.

Western and Eastern Concepts of Self

While I am intrigued by Dirkx' holistic approach, his view of individuation is largely a western construct. In this Jungian construct, people individuate through transformative experiences, and get closer to their authentic selves. However, I suggest that this frame limits our understanding of transformation as it places too much emphasis on the self as a singular entity.

In the most recent edition of the influential text *Learning in Adulthood*, there are two entirely new chapters about approaches to adult learning: embodied, spiritual and narrative learning; and non-western perspectives to learning and knowing (Merriam et al., 2006). The authors included these additions as most of the knowledge based is from a western perspective: "we wanted to introduce readers to other epistemologies, other ways of thinking about learning and knowing" (p. xii). These chapters attest to the shift of adult learning from theory building to a holistic perspective on learning (p. 438) that allows multiple ways of accessing knowledge in addition to the traditional cognitive approaches.

Contrary to the western approach, I am interested in how an eastern Buddhist perspective might view the process of transformation and individuation. Several writers such as noted psychologist Epstein have discussed the difference between western and eastern concepts of self. While western society largely encourages individuation, a Buddhist perspective takes a somewhat different view: "while psychotherapy has a long tradition of encouraging the development of a strong sense of self, Buddhism has an even longer tradition of teaching the value of collapsing that self" (Epstein, 1998, p. xvii). Epstein states that rather than finding satisfaction from understanding self, it is possible that the reverse is

true: “happiness comes from letting go. In Buddhism, the impenetrable, separate, and individuated self is more of the problem than the solution” (p. xvi). While the east-west perceptions is not a new area to scholars (Said, 1979), there is limited research about how an eastern framework views transformative learning; I proposed to investigate this in my research with the Shambhala Institute.

Many of the practices at the Shambhala Institute are based on teaching from the Tibetan Buddhist Chögyam Trungpa. Chögyam Trungpa was one of the earliest Tibetan teachers to bring eastern Buddhist concepts to North America. Many of his teachings discuss the goal of cutting through “spiritual materialism” and finding an authentic self: “on the one hand, authentic presence is the result of a gradual, developmental process of letting go of ego fixation. On the other hand, it is also the result of an instantaneous, magical process of letting go of fix mind” (Trungpa, 1984, p. 160).

Surrendering one’s ego and opening up seems contrary to the dominant North American approach of the development of the individual. However, I am interested to learn how an alternative perspective of self views the process of transformation and the role of the educator in supporting this raw and uncharted area.

Arts as an Alternative Way to Access Knowledge

The essence of art is, if it works, it should reveal people to themselves. It shouldn't just tap into a vein that's already there and reflect back at them what they are. It should reveal something that's hidden to themselves.

When that's working, it has power, power to heal and change.

~ Rosanne Cash (J. Boyd, 1992, p. 131).

While Mezirow advocates a rational approach that depends primarily on critical reflection, and Dirkx relies more on intuition and emotion, I suggest a third approach in which the arts may be used as a way to access fleeting glimpses of the self. I believe there is tremendous potential for the arts to be used as a means of accessing other ways of knowing and revealing hidden aspects of the self:

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The use of the arts to foster transformative learning is the second sprouting seed though there is very little research. However, there is a strong case made for using the arts as a means of knowing within the larger field of adult education. The Fall 2005 edition of *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* edited by Lawrence, focused on artistic ways of knowing as a way to expand teaching and learning opportunities: "as educators of adults, we must honor multiple ways of knowing and consider alternative ways to promote knowledge construction and collective learning" (Lawrence, 2005b, p. 81).

Generally, art in this area of the literature refers to visual, music, literature, dance and drama; in this approach, art is used as a means to learning rather than the end goal as in a

traditional art class. Lawrence claims that while most of western learning culture has been dominated by cognitive knowledge, artistic ways of knowing opens up additional “intellectual space” (Lawrence, 2005a, p.4) and lets us draw on spiritual, somatic and affective meaning. As rational inquiry focuses on the spoken or written language, it suppresses what people are able to express.

Many teachers have used art as a gateway to learning a diversity of subjects, other than art. For some, music is a tool to help people with a diversity of cultural backgrounds to learn another language. Lems (2005) suggests that while teachers know that music is a successful way to engage students there is little research to support the claims. Through her work as a national part interpreter, McCrary Sullivan (McCrary Sullivan, 2005) discovered that “information alone is sterile” (p. 25); she used poetry as a means to connect people with the natural world. Within the classroom, McCrary Sullivan uses poetry as a way of knowing and encouraging diversity: “poetry as a way of negotiating experience, of attending to external and internal worlds, of bringing diversity worlds into close relation for arriving at renewed perception, is indigenous” (p. 30). Armstrong (2005) combines the written form of autobiographies with the visual form of photogram as a means to get people to recognize areas of their life experiences that might otherwise go unnoticed.

While I have no doubt that art provides a means for accessing another way of knowing, I suspect that many teachers do not feel comfortable venturing into creative areas, particularly if they have had little exposure to arts in their own life. I would also add that there seems to be a split between the arts and sciences in our North American culture and it rare to find a person that pursues both through a scholastic system that forces choices in

streams. Many other adults have negative associations with their ability to be creative or access their imagination.

Increasingly, there are more examples of the integration of arts into the classroom. Using case study evaluation, Simons and Hicks explored how the creative arts can be used in higher education to allow other ways of knowing into the largely cognitive and verbal means of learning in higher education. In particular, they believe that the creative arts “widen the opportunities for students to learn in different ways” (Simons & Hicks, 2006, p. 79). In particular, they find artistic ways of knowing helpful for students that have been excluded from education for various barriers including age, gender and ethnic origins. The creative process “transcend cultural differences” (p. 81) and helps people break out of their common patterns of framing the world. By these descriptions, this seems to be a natural launching point for transformative learning.

While most of these examples are in the formal classroom, there is also evidence of the arts being used as a means to engage learners in informal environments. Over the years, Bunker and Alban (1996) have documented the evolution of large group interventions. In their 2005 recent compilation, Bunker and Alban expand their selection to include two journal articles about approaches to accessing other ways of knowing through theatre and graphic facilitation: “although we know that deeper commitments involve more than knowledge that change is needed, we do not know a great deal about how to engage the whole person” (Bunker & Alban, 2005, p. 13).

The use of theatrical ways of knowing is also infiltrating organizational learning. In the late sixties during the era of Freire's emancipatory approaches, Boal (1985) developed a popular theater process as a way of raising political consciousness. Theater of the oppressed is a way for society's invisible people to intentionally convey their issues in a creative way. Noble (2005) used this popular theater approach with a group of people with mental illness in Vancouver. Noble notes that this approach shifts the power of the teacher to the participant.

In the Netherlands, Mirvis (2005) used theater as way to help organizations to have "fresh eyes for seeing and new frames for understanding these large-scale interventions" (p. 124). Mirvis discovered that theater is a means for people to see the situation as well as their staff more clearly: "an event is like a magnifying glass. You can really see where your company is. And people can see each other. With such transparency you can easily define next steps." (p. 136). Theater provides another avenue for accessing more than the mind. While many people may believe they have no theatrical experience, a good facilitator can create a space for participants to feel comfortable to try another form of expression.

Tyler, Valek and Rowland (2005) documented how graphic facilitation was used to engage participants from a diversity of cultures about issues of faith. What was interesting about their approach is that they had a total of ten graphic facilitators that enabled them to work at a very intimate level to document the reflective and nuanced dialogue. They found that the visual element helped not only to engage and focus the energy of the group, but also documented both the heard and unheard voices.

There is great potential to use the arts as a means of helping adults become aware of unquestioned assumptions. As Lawrence eloquently states, not only the arts access hidden aspects of individuals, it provides an alternative means of expression:

Artistic forms of expression extend the boundaries of how we come to know, by honoring multiple intelligences and indigenous knowledge. Artistic expression broadens cultural perspectives by allowing and honoring diverse ways of knowing and learning. Making space for creative expression in the adult education classroom and other learning communities helps learners uncover hidden knowledge that cannot easily be expressed in words.” (Lawrence, 2005a, p. 3)

There are several sprouting seeds in this area from Fielding. At Winter Session 2007, a group of Fielding alumni and faculty presented their proposed book that documents innovative ways that transformational learning is being used beyond the formal classroom setting (Fisher-Yoshida, Dee Geller, & Schapiro, 2007). Annabelle Nelson is investigating how the oral tradition of story telling can be used to connect to the subconscious while Hameed Williams is using the theatre of the oppressed as a means of decolonizing and embodying learning. Working with Dreamfish, Tiffany von Emmel has specifically linked the opportunity to used arts as a way of knowing to facilitate connectivity, meaning, embodiment of values and adult learning.

The use of arts with adult learning is a ripe bud. I anticipate that there is much more to come in this vibrant area. I believe the Ginger Group has much to offer the scholarly literature about the use of arts in collaborative inquiry and invoking deeper meaning in groups.

Role of the Educator

While the field of transformative learning broadens its epistemological approaches to include more than cognition, the educator's place in fostering these experiences is also under examination (Merriam et al., 2006, p. 154). In reviewing the seminal literature in the field of transformative learning, I note there is limited discussion on the role of the educator in creating or fostering such life changing experiences. In many articles, it appears that the transformative learning experiences occur almost spontaneously, with little details about the intervention or support from the educator.

The role of the educator is the third sprouting seed in the field of transformative learning. While Mezirow articulated the need for critical reflection through dialogue, he did not go into depth about the role of the educator in fostering transformative learning experience. However, Cranton (1994, 2002, 2006b) has explicitly explored the role of the educator and offered a variety of techniques and methods. Cranton suggests that techniques cannot be too prescriptive. While teaching new college instructors, Cranton herself struggled with learners that wanted specific rules: "we cannot teach transformation. We often cannot even identify how it happens. But we can teach as though the possibility always exists that a student will have a transformative experience" (Cranton, 2002, p. 70-71). These comments are reminiscent of Palmer's (1998) observation that people use technique until the teacher shows up.

Rather than simply relying on techniques, it is important for educators to develop a natural or genuine way of teaching that is true to their self. Most recently, Cranton has extended the exploration about the role of the educator into the realm of authenticity:

Being an authentic educator involves having a good understanding of oneself and bringing that understanding into teaching, understanding and relating in a meaningful way with learners, being aware of the context of teaching, and engaging in critical reflection on practice. Not only does authenticity bring us to better connections with students, but it is also models the transformative process itself. (Cranton, 2006a)

Cranton and Carusetta (2004) described authenticity as a “neglected area” (p. 21) in adult education and set out to fill in the gaps. In 2004, they published results from a three-year study tracking twenty-two educators and their personal development of authenticity as teachers. Using a grounded theory methodology, interviewed educators at various stages in their career to reflect on their practice. What emerged from the data was a tentative hypothesis about the importance of reflection on self, the learners and the context. From this study, Cranton and Carusetta discovered five interrelated categories related to authenticity: self, other, relationship, context and critical reflection.

Using a Jungian definition, Cranton and Carusetta’s research emphasizes the importance of individuation for developing authenticity in teaching:

Within the category of self, we can propose that a person who has a good understanding of herself or himself, both as a teacher and a person, is more likely to articulate the values, demonstrate congruence between values and actions and be genuine and open. This teacher is also more likely to bring himself or herself as a person into the classroom, be passionate about teaching, know his or her preferred teaching style, and see teaching vocation. (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004, p. 19).

In addition to critical reflection of self, reflection of the “other” and the educational context were also important components of the emerging model. In investigating how people relate with others, they found awareness and interest in the student to be critical.

Cranton and Carusetta also discovered that teacher's awareness of the environment and social context of their classrooms shapes their ability to make authentic expressions.

Later, Cranton (2006) succinctly articulated the five main criteria for this emerging model of authenticity:

- Having a strong self-awareness of who we are as teachers and as people;
- Being aware of the characteristics and preferences of learners and others including how they are same and different from our own;
- Development a relationship with learners that fosters our own and their ability to be genuine and open;
- Being aware of the context and constraints of teaching and how these factors influence what we do and who we are;
- Engaging in critical reflection and critical self-reflection on practice so as to be aware of the assumptions and values we hold and where they originate. (Cranton, 2006a, p. 5)

While not directed solely to transformative learning, the most recent volume of *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* (Number #111, Fall 2006), edited by Cranton is dedicated to investigating authenticity in teaching. The impetus for the volume came from Cranton and Carusetta's grounded theory research that was entering into the fifth year of reflective interviews, at the time of publication. Some of the emerging issues in this volume include the relationship of power to authenticity, institutional constraints, cultural dimensions and the on-going investigation of individualism through a Jungian lens.

The role of authenticity is also a central pillar to Dirkx' work (2006a). As a means for developing authenticity from a Jungian perspective, he suggests that the imagination can be a

means to understand the deeper unconsciousness and develop self-awareness. Dirkx uses examples about how teaching is an inherently an affectual profession as it is based on relationships. Without self-awareness, it is possible for teachers to create a delusional image of themselves, yet it is likely that the “potent emotional context” (p. 28) will bring these inauthentic aspects to the surface. As the critical reflective process is egocentric in nature, it is possible that emotions will swamp and overwhelm a persons ability to reflect. The imagination can be used as a means to mediate between the unconscious and the outer world. Dirkx describes how authenticity can be fostered through engaging with imaginative techniques such as free form writing about specific experiences:

we should also not be afraid to let ourselves wander because the psyche may be taking us places the conscious ego would rather we not visit. Our goal here is to give voice to non-egoic dimensions of our being and rely on our intuitive imaginative capacities, such as fantasy or daydreaming. (p. 34)

Teachers can also take a symbolic approach by noticing their reactions to particular images or metaphors in teaching as well as in reading texts. Ultimately, the journey to authenticity is symbolic and depends on “our willingness to muck around in the dark, messy, unpredictable world of the unconscious” (p. 37).

Of all the articles related to authenticity in teaching, it is Kornelsen writing that peaks my interest the most. Kornelsen (2006) observed several adult education exemplars in order to understand how teachers can bring their best selves forward in teaching. She related the best examples of teaching to a state similar to what Csikszentmihalyi (1991) terms “flow”. Kornelsen describes this phenomenon as “presence” though also suggests the alternative phrase “being authentic.” Characteristic of teaching in flow include feeling acutely present or open to the learning experience, including forgetting both time and sense of ego. In

addition to being present to learners, exemplars shared several other qualities such as an enthusiastic content knowledge for the topic and a willingness to abandon a prescribed agenda in favor of “a conscientious quest to be open to the moment, to their students, or to an unfolding revelation in the class” (p. 77). Kornelsen drew upon Dunne’s (1993) two knowledge descriptions: of *techne* (technical) and *phronesis* (personal). While the technical knowledge is important, *phronesis* and the practice of reading the situation are paramount.

Kornelson article reminded me of Otto Scharmer’s work around the concept of “Theory U.” Scharmer (2004) has written at length about the blind spot in understanding where our actions stem from. Most people are unaware about their inner source that drives how they operate in the world. In interviewing former CEO of Hanover Insurance, Bill O’Brien remarked to Otto Scharmer:

He told me that his greatest insight after years of conducting organizational learning projects and facilitating corporate change was that “the success of an intervention depends on the interior condition of the intervener.” That sentence struck a chord. What counts, it dawned on me, is not *what* leaders do and *how* they do it, but that “interior condition,” the *inner place* from which they operate or the source from their action originates. (Scharmer, 2004, p. 5)

Scharmer, working with Senge, Jaworki and Flowers, started work on “presencing” or what he terms “learning from the future” as an alternative to Kolb’s traditional model of learning from past experience. While Kornelsen uses similar terminology and concepts as Scharmer, I was surprised not to see his work referenced. However, I am also discovering how the stovepipes of academia often limit cross-pollination of thinking between fields.

Teaching from a Buddhist Paradigm of Authenticity

Once again, the dominant view of authenticity in the scholarly literature is linked largely to the Jungian and western concepts of individuation. Further research from alternative perspectives is needed to decolonize the dominant euro-centric epistemologies. Rather than a strengthening of the ego, Chögyam Trungpa describes authenticity as a process of opening without expectations:

Inner authentic presence comes, not just from being a decent, good person in the ordinary sense, but it is connected to the realization of primordial space, or egolessness. The cause or the virtue that brings inner authentic presence is emptying out and letting go. You have to be without clinging. Inner authentic presence comes from exchanging yourself with others, from being able to regard other people as yourself, generously and without fixation. (Trungpa, 1984, p. 160)

The role of the teacher's self, particularly inner or more spiritual aspects of self are emerging in the literature. Trego and Jamieson (2007) claim that while the subject of spirituality in management has moved from individual conversations to a concerted effort, the question of how management teachers can "integrate their spirituality with their work" (p. 60) remains untapped.

Kernochan McCormick and White (2007) tackle the issue of how they, as management teachers, integrate Buddhist practices into their classrooms. Specifically, they explore the Buddhists concepts of compassion, mindfulness and selflessness. Compassion is the hope that all beings are free from suffering and involves being present to the students, wherever they are at: "practicing compassion involves putting aside self-righteousness and judgments that others are less than oneself" (p. 64). Mindfulness is about being present to the classroom as it "removes the cobwebs of concepts and expectations that interfere with

seeing my students as they really are” (p. 66). The concept of “no-self” relates to the interconnected nature of all beings. Contrary to the western view of self-identification and attachment, the no-self dissolves boundaries between others, the environment and the community. In the classroom, it is possible that artificial boundaries about roles can be softened: “as we let go of our roles of teachers and students, as we become capable of seeing ourselves as a (comm.) unity of learners, we become able to expand our personal concepts of boundaries and preconceived ideas about the course material.”

I am intrigued by the potential of how contemplative arts can be used by educators to help them be present to the group. I am also curious to find out more about how Ginger members bring their full self into their teaching environment. In October, we had a discussion about all the things we do as practitioners to create and hold space for learning.

Creating and Holding Liminal Space

Emptiness

*It is called "Open Space."
The centre is empty except for a few tools.
These tools are all that is needed
to completely fill the space.
Blank sheets of paper are open to any possibility.
Entirely new worlds can be created out of this emptiness.
Great quantities of unknown energy can coalesce
around the invitation to step into the full
emptiness and give birth to the new.
You are holding this space.
You have all of creation in your hands,
like a delicate glass ball.
You must simply allow it to rest there,
and let the people draw on the echoes
planted in their genes, and continue the
journey of evolution together.
-Chris Corrigan (2006)*

This past fall, I interviewed Chris Corrigan, a well-known Canadian facilitator, about his practice of opening and holding space for groups. This conversation turned my attention to how a masterful facilitator creates room for a group to simply show up and engage on their own terms rather than a predetermined agenda. While creating space seems like such a simple concept, in reality, it requires the facilitator to share control of the conversation and respond authentically to what most needs to happen in the moment. Around this same time, I also read an article about Fielding Faculty member Charlie Seashore and his wife, Edi. The article describes how the couple uses group interventions to foster transformational experiences: “the real impact of the group is unleashed when people learn to communicate directly and authentically” (Helgesen, 2006, p. 11). The article describes the important role that Edie and Charlie take as a “connoisseur of disturbance, a master of those awkward moments of conflict and unease that most of us prefer to gloss over, move past, get beyond” (p. 45). Clearly, holding space is not an easy task with a straightforward set of instructions.

However, I believe it is another important sprouting seed in the field of transformative learning.

While the stories about Corrigan and the Seashore's approaches relate more to a practitioner's perspective, their examples prompted me to investigate this concept about creating space in the scholarly literature on transformative learning. Interestingly, it appears that Mezirow himself was conscious about the role of creating ideal conditions for conversation, as this was an issue that was explored at the First National Conference on Transformative Learning in 1998. Participants at this conference identified creating the space for deep listening and speaking as a fundamental practice for transformative learning (Wiessner, Mezirow, & Smith, 2000).

Several other adult educators have given considerable thought to the nature of the space for learning. Palmer (1993) defines three essential ingredients for the ideal space: openness, boundaries and an air of hospitality. Balancing openness with boundaries, the educator needs to cut to the quick of what is essential: "openness of a space is created by the firmness of its boundaries" (p. 72). Hospitality involves welcoming both the truth and the alternative perspective: "the classroom where truth is central will be a place where every stranger and every strange utterance is met with welcome" (p. 74).

In *The Courage to Teach*, Palmer (1998) further fleshed out his paradoxical design for creating space for learning. Parker describes six tensions that he uses in design:

1. The space should be bounded and open.
2. The space should be hospitable and "charged".
3. The space should invite the voice of the individual and the voice of the group.

4. The space should honor the “little” stories of those involved and the “big” stories of the disciplines and tradition.
5. The space should support solitude and surround it with the resources of community.
6. The space should welcome both silence and speech.

Theorists such as the anthropologist Victor Turner, have used the word liminal, stemming from the Latin word for threshold, to describe the second stage of a rite of passage or ritual. In a liminal state, a person is in transition between states and often one's sense of self is put to the test. Moving into the education literature, anthropologist Joan Halifax (1999) examined learning as a possible vehicle for much need initiation process in the Western world. Halifax discussed the common rites of passage: from separation or moving away from the familiar, to the liminal or threshold experience of chaos and not knowing, and returning to the everyday world. Halifax believes our western world has little opportunity to move into a space of not-knowing as this is a place to separate ourselves from our regular habits and patterns to really see our minds: “what is required today, and for the next century, is an education that is willing to plunge into the unknown, into the unknowable; and education of redemption; an education that prepares us to return and serve” (p. 181).

McWhinney and Markos (2003), co-founders of the Transformative Learning Journal, explored the importance of communities in creating liminal spaces for transformative learning. Drawing upon Turner's descriptions of ritual, they use the word *communitas* to describe the intimate groups of seekers: “such communities are made up of wanderers who seek intimacy with others as they become strangers to themselves. Some mentors would speed up this process by facilitating appropriate dialogue among the participants” (McWhinney & Markos, 2003, p. 26). Liminal states and community were critical in making

the transition from what was known into the unknown. At some point, a leap of faith is required and this liminal space can feel quite risky as Garvey Berger (2004) describes:

Transformation is not an easy process as we meet the edges of our own thinking and transformative space can feel very dangerous as people move out of their comfort zones: My experience has shown me that the edge is the most precarious – and important-transformative space. It is in this liminal space that we can come to terms with the limitations of our knowing and thus begin to stretch those limits. (Garvey Berger, 2004, p.338)

Transformation in groups is even more precarious as we come to terms with the blurring of own thinking and the collective wisdom of the group. While Kasl, Marsick and Dechant (1997) suggest that it is possible to balance teamwork and individual expression if they are consensually developed, O'Hara remarks on the magnitude of strength that is needed for an individual to move to the edge of knowing within a group:

To surrender to a group of people we barely know and allow our own being to be altered in the meeting is in a psychological sense to die and be reborn, transformed in the meeting. Deep dialogue risks psychological death. This is an immense challenge and not a state to be entered into lightly. Letting go requires a kind of faith. (O'Hara, 2003, p.76)

The upcoming book on transformative learning by Fielding colleagues also explores the importance of creating space for learning. Using improvisation with adults, Fielding graduate Meyer described the importance of a liminal learning space that is “not empty, but dynamic and charged with what one co-researcher described as an energy force” (Meyer, 2006, p. 4).

The role of the liminal space presents many interesting opportunities for my research with contemplative practices as well as the Gingers for supporting transformative learning. This is a key intersection of the working knowledge of the practitioner and the theoretical

concepts from the literature. It will be interesting to investigate exactly how the educator helps to create these liminal spaces for others.

My Own Sprouts

A mind that is stretched by a new experience can never go back to its old dimensions.

~ Oliver Wendell Holmes

It has been an exciting decade with many scholars working to help us understand the depth and diversity of transformative learning. With my own research, I will be taking an alternative view of authenticity and the role of the educator in creating and holding space for transformative learning. I hope to extend the western-centric epistemological conversation about other ways of knowing as well as investigate how educators steeped in an eastern contemplative practice think about a learning environment as well as observe what they do in the moment.

As a member of the Ginger Group's scholar rhizome, it is my hope that as a group of practitioners, we can intensify theory by articulating our unique contributions to the practice of creating and holding space with groups in innovative ways. As my Fielding colleagues have noted (Fisher-Yoshida, Dee Geller, & Schapiro, 2007), the majority of transformative learning discussion is based within the academy though I suspect many practitioners such as the Gingers are doing relevant work in informal learning settings. As scholar practitioners, there is an opportunity to blend theory with practical experience and observations from the field.

The field of transformative learning is a vibrant area of adult learning in which scholars and practitioners are piecing together a puzzle to build a comprehensive theory (Wiessner et al., 2000). While there remains to be many questions unanswered, the field itself appears to be ripe and fertile grounds, open to the fresh sprouts and growth. I hope this paper will act as a seed for both the Gingers and myself to germinate the budding concepts about ways of knowing and authenticity.

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