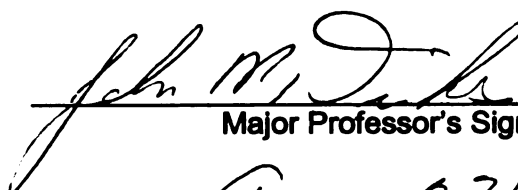This is to certify that the
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A Study Of Adult Learning In Leadership Development.

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TRANSFORMATION AS A SOCIOCULTURAL PHENOMENON:

A STUDY OF ADULT LEARNING IN LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

BY

Frank L. Conner

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Educational Administration

2003

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ABSTRACT

TRANSFORMATION AS A SOCIOCULTURAL PHENOMENON: A STUDY OF ADULT LEARNING IN LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

By

Frank L. Conner

As a model for learning and a philosophy of education, transformative learning is well established within the domain of adult learning. The theory is closely associated with Mezirow (1981), whose original proposal for a comprehensive, idealized and universal model of adult learning was based on a cognitive perspective to learning. Within this perspective, transformation is the reorganizing of the individually constructed structures that create a person's model of the world. A second perspective on transformation is rooted in the depth psychology or neo-Jungian approach to human development. Scholars in this tradition describe transformation as the process of integrating the multiple selves hidden within the unconscious. While there is significant research to support both theories of transformation, independently or together, they do not fully explain the phenomena. Missing from current conceptualizations of transformative learning is a broader understanding of social interaction and the larger social context in the process of transformation.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the role of others, society and culture in the process of personal transformation and transformative learning. Participants in this study included six graduates of a nine month leadership development program. Several subjects were recommended by the program's executive director. Final

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selection was made through telephone interviews that identified individuals who reported this experience as having changed their understanding and behavior in the world.

The findings show that this highly interactive and collaborative learning environment resulted in the individuals developing a new understanding of self in relation to others, a recognition of their own personal biases and an understanding of the value of collaboration. For the participants, transformation was experienced as a disruption of the person's current sense of self in relation to a community's shared assumptions about the world. Personal and social meaning making of this disruption was facilitated through the involvement in a new community of practice resulting in a new sense of self. This community of practice was formed through the interaction between individuals and through interaction with a larger cultural context which held and communicated shared assumptions, beliefs, values, and expected behavior via mediated tools and activities.

This study underscores the strong epistemological and ontological differences that are represented by the dominant theoretical perspectives of transformation. While this research does not attempt to consolidate these differences, it provides a broader understanding of the role of others, community and the cultural context in individual transformation. The findings offer additional insight on the possible role that the larger social context plays in individual transformation. By focusing on a sociocultural perspective to transformative learning, this research contributes to the ongoing conversation on how people make meaning in their lives and how education might play a role in changing their way of understanding and being in the world. Implications for practitioners in adult and higher education interested in facilitating such change, and for scholars interested in the further study of transformative learning are explored.

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I dedicate this dissertation to my two children, Dylan and Spencer. Unbeknownst to them, they have given up part of their life so that their dad may pursue his dream. I will do my best to make it up to you. I love you both.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is impossible to give thanks to all of those people that have assisted a person on a life journey. This journey begins of course with my parents to whom I give thanks for the gift of confidence and curiosity. To the many mentors in my youth and beyond who had the heart and intuitiveness to see the real me hidden behind a gruff façade. The teachers and professors throughout my educational experience who challenged and rewarded my deficits and abilities. My colleagues at Grand Rapids Community College who have provided me with both cognitive and emotional support toward my success.

The faculty at MSU deserve thanks for providing a rich learning environment through their dedication to teaching and scholarship. I could never allocate enough time and space to identify each of them, but I would be remiss in not mentioning a few. My dissertation committee members, Dr. Frank Fear, Dr. Stephen Kaagan, and Dr. Marilyn Amey who provided thoughtful and valuable input resulting in a final product much better than had they not been involved. Dr. King Beach who helped shape my understanding of sociocultural theory. And mostly, Dr. John Dirkx, my advisor and friend with whom I've had wonderful conversation about learning, transformation, and life in general. I would not be here without him.

Lastly, those closest to me in my daily life. My friend and fellow journeyer James, may he find his place in the world. My dearest friend, Judy. Her acceptance, caring, and gift of time helps me find meaning in my life. My children to whom this dissertation is dedicated. My wife Raeni who has selfishly given of her life so that I might make this journey. To all of them I give my everlasting love and appreciation.

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CHAPTER 1

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

"Most of us have a metaphor, conscious or not, that names our experience of life. Animated by the imagination, one of the most vital powers we possess, our metaphors are more than mirrors to reality-they often become reality, transmuting themselves from language into the living of our lives"

Palmer, 2000 p. 5

Introduction to the Problem

At a breakfast meeting previous to the conceptualization of this research, the executive director of a program aimed at developing community leaders said she knew her program was having an impact when she would run into the spouse of a participant and the person would say, "You know, he or she is different at home." What the executive director was sharing is that many of the participants in this yearlong program have reported a deep, fundamental transformation in their understanding and behavior in the community. To the program's benefit, this is its intent; to provide people with the tools and commitment to be leaders in the community. The goal of the program, as described in the literature, " . . . is to develop community trustees - people who accept responsibility on behalf of the whole community to ensure the common good. (Leadership Grand Rapids, 2002)"

If this transformation of one's being is happening as described, what is the relationship between the person and his or her experience in the program? What changes occur, in or around this person, that are made apparent in a different way of thinking, feeling, and acting in the world? How does the participant understand this change? What is the role of the additional 30+ program participants in this person's individual change?

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These and a host of other questions speak to the concept of personal or individual transformation. Addressing these questions requires a deeper understanding of the process of transformation and the focus of this research.

We know that transformation occurs in adults because of their learning experiences. This has been well documented by classic studies on the college experience such as those by Perry (1970) and King and Kitchner (1994) and has been expanded to include a larger domain of adult education exemplified by the work of Mezirow (1981; 1996; 2000) and Kegan (2000). However, what seems less certain is what actually changes, or transforms, in or around the person. Previous studies, as those mentioned above, have focused on personal transformation being within the person's thought process. Others have argued that transformation occurs through the unconscious (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Dirkx, 1997 summer; Dirkx 2001). An emerging body of research posits that significant personal change occurs at a social level (Wenger, 1998; Beach 1999).

Given the tension between these differing perspectives, the fundamental question for this study was, Where does change occur, or what changes in personal transformation? The population studied in this research were the individuals introduced in the opening paragraph; adults who had participated in a leadership development program, and who identified themselves as having experienced significant change in thought and action because of the learning experience. A particular emphasis was placed on understanding the role of society and culture in this personal transformation.

In the current literature of adult learning, transformation is most closely associated with Jack Mezirow (1981; 1991; 1995; 2000) and his theory of transformative learning. Based in part on the philosophy of Habermas (1971), the cognitive tradition of

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Piaget, and current developmental psychologists such as Robert Kegan (1982; 1994), Mezirow has developed a rational model of meaning making and change. In this constructivist model of learning, individuals are active agents in their learning and the development of a personal understanding of the world. Through their lifeworld experience, they construct schemes or mental models of the world based upon their experiences. For Mezirow, transformative learning occurs when an individual experiences a disorienting dilemma (an experience that does not fit his or her mental model), followed by critical reflection and dialogue. The results are a new mental model based on the active interpretation of this new experience.

A second perspective on transformative learning is the depth-psychology perspective (Boyd, 1991; Dirkx, 1997 summer) framed within the theoretical perspective of Jung and modern neo-Jungians such as Thomas Moore (1996) and James Hillman (1975; 1996). The emphasis in depth psychology is not rational, critical reflection as it is in the cognitive tradition, but is focused on understanding the unconscious motivations, drives, personality traits and other hidden human attributes assumed to be inherent in all people. In depth psychology, a rational self or the ego is developed along with a variety of other personas or masks that help a person negotiate the influence(s) of the unconscious through the constraints of the external world. From this perspective, transformation is the integration of all these separate Selves into a single authentic Self. The term for this integration is individuation. The process for transformative learning in this approach is the interaction with the unconscious, through symbols and images evoked in everyday activities (Dirkx, 2000).

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While there is significant research to support both of these theories of transformation, independently or together, they do not fully explain the phenomena, the literature seems to suggest more – the social (Clark, 1991; Clark & Wilson, 1991, Winter; Collard & Law, 1989, Winter; Mezirow, 1999; Sveinunggaard, 1993; Taylor, 1997 Fall).

In scanning the domain of adult learning and development, there is an emerging body of research to suggest that adult meaning making is in part a social phenomena, as well as an individual experience. Broadly referred to as a sociocultural view of learning and development (Beach, 1999), this research considers the interaction of people as well as the impact of shared assumptions, beliefs, values, traditions and behavior patterns within a group, community, or society on how individuals make sense of their world.

This perspective differs from the rational view of Mezirow and the cognitive scientists, and the unconscious, psyche motivated development of depth psychology in that meaning-making does not reside solely in the individual (conscious or unconscious) but is a shared activity between the individual and society. Within this tradition, others and context play a role equal to the individual in adult learning and development.

This tradition can trace much of its origins to the philosophy of Heidegger and Wittgenstein along with Dewey and George Herbert Mead. Current research in sociocultural learning is supported by a host of scholars (Beach, 1999; Bruffee, 1995 Jan/Feb; Bruner, 1986; Bruner, 1990; Cole, 1998; Lave, 1997; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Luria, 1976; Wenger, 1998; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002; Wertsch, 1985). As with Mezirow, this is a constructivist theory of learning that posits the individual is an active agent in constructing his or her own understanding of the world. However, within this model, the individual is coupled with his or her historical and cultural context in an

inter-woven model of knowing. In sociocultural learning, individuals construct new knowledge through their situated and contextual interaction with the tools and socially constructed symbols of society. Thus, in part, knowledge resides neither in the individual or society, but in both.

In summary of these three theories, transformation may occur at the rational level of the cognitive schema, at the unconscious level of the psyche, or at the intersection of the individual and society. The focus of this study was to develop a deeper understanding of where personal transformation does take place and, in particular, to investigate the underdeveloped role of society and culture in this transformation.

Rationale for the Study

The call for significant, qualitative change is constant within our society; in the workplace, in the creation of a more democratic society, in the tenets of adult education, and in the practice of teaching adults. Transformative learning, as originally presented by Mezirow (1985) and as continued to be theorized by Mezirow and others, (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Brookfield, 2000; Dirkx, 1998; Dirkx, 2003; Kegan & Lahey, 2001; Taylor, 2000a) is generally described as working toward a qualitative change in one's understanding and being in the world. Thus a primary method for eliciting this change for educators, is the process and approach of this theory of how adults learn.

In education and the workplace there has been a continuing shift toward a more participatory relationship between employer and employee as exemplified in the original work of Deming (Deming, 1986) and the more current work of many leadership theorists such as Wheatley (2000; 1996) and Kouzes and Posner (2003) and a host of others

(Block, 1993; Bolman & Deal, 2003; Greenleaf, 1996; Potter, 1996; Sergiovanni, 1999). This is also evident in the writings of those people advocating for integrating "soul" into the workplace (Bolman & Deal, 1995; Briskin, 1996; Whyte, 1996).

In addition to the workplace, there is a common concern for individual involvement in the creation and maintenance of an egalitarian society and democratic community. In *Common Fire* Daloz, et. al. (1996) presents a study of adult learning and transformation which documents that personal and social experiences create persons committed to community. Belenky (1999) and her colleagues document how women can transform their lives and others through active engagement in community. The documentation and advocating for a commitment to community through the changing beliefs of individuals is presented by many leading theorists including Peter Drucker (1994) as well as those presented in a series of articles in the book *The Communities of the Future* (Hesselbein & Goldsmith, 2000). Within the domain of Higher Education, O'Sullivan (1999) presents a broader vision of transformative learning as a way of infusing an ecological-environmental understanding into the practice of teaching and learning.

A commitment to organizational and community transformation has always been a key element within the tradition of adult education. The work of Schon, (1987; 1991; 1995, Nov-Dec), Marsick (1987; 1994; 1996) and others in the field have had a great impact on organizational leadership and transformational theory. Clearly the origins of adult education as exemplified by Dewey (1916), Lindeman (1926) and their more modern counterparts, Friere (1970; 1973) and Horton (1990; 1990), show a foundation rooted in a commitment to changing society to better meet the full functioning role of

human existence. Thus education, as focused on changing the lives of people through learning, has a rich history and theoretical heritage.

At a practical level for education, there has been a continuing call for adult educators to change their practice. This argument is framed within a need for shifting from "teaching to learning", (Barr & Tagg, 1995, Nov-Dec; O'Banion, 1997) to integrating the demands of technology (Gilbert, 1995, September/October; Green & Gilbert, 1995, March/April; Walschok, 1995) and to meet the broad ranging needs of society as introduced above. However, significant research has been done to demonstrate that how a faculty member teaches is based upon his or her philosophy of education, belief about the nature of knowledge, and assumptions about the nature of human beings (Fenstermacher & Soltis, 1992; Pratt, 1992; Pratt & Associates, 1998; Zinn, 1990). Thus, the tension of asking a teacher to change his or her practice is not a simple behavior request, but is in fact a request to have the individual change how he or she perceives and makes meaning in the world.

The rationale for this study is thus framed within the communal call for positive change and social development and is predicated on the argument that behavior is a manifestation of individual (and possibly social) meaning making. As supported by Daloz, "meaning making activity lies at the core of every human life. How it occurs and what it teaches is critical, because while we may or may not act in a manner consistent with what we say we believe, we will act in a manner congruent with how we ultimately make meaning. . ." (1996, p.26) Within adult learning and education, this demands a deeper or more comprehensive understanding of transformation or transformative learning.

The Research Problem

Clearly one's way of being in the world changes. As presented above, the literature supports such changes and most people can speak about how they are significantly different today than at other times in their lives. However, the impetus for that change and its relationship to the individual and society is not fully understood. In this study, I explored the experience of adults who had participated in a structured learning environment that they described as being a form of deep learning that changed their way of thinking, being, and doing in the world. The focus of this study was to develop a deeper understanding of this change and where the change resides in relation to the person's cognitive processes, psyche, and relationship with society, culture, and others.

Theoretical Framework

Where change resides addresses the deeper theoretical focus of this research. Presented in another way, What is the unit of change? For Mezirow, the unit of change are the schemes and frames of reference within the individual. For depth psychologist, the unit of change is the psyche. However, in the sociocultural framework, transformation resides in the negotiated relationship between the individual and the community (Beach, 1999; Wenger, 1998). Thus at its most fundamental level, this becomes a question of epistemology and ontology: Where does knowing exist and what is its relationship to the individual? For this study, the basic question was, What transforms? The individual? The psyche? The community? Some or all of these?

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This question has deep roots in philosophy and psychology as well as modern learning theory. This study might be considered as the continuation of a historic debate over how humans make meaning of themselves and the world. This debate can be traced back to the dominant Western understanding of knowing that is founded in the rationalist philosophy of Plato, the dualism of Descartes, and later the reductionism and reliance on logic brought forth by the Enlightenment and Modernism itself. However, on a more practical note, this study begins historically with the development of learning theory as conceptualized by modern psychology.

The history of learning as conceptualized in this study can be traced in part to Thorndike verses Dewey. The behaviorists were caught in the ethos of the scientific revolution and the Enlightenment and believed that all could be known. In fact, Hull, a student of Thorndike and first president and founder of the APA, imagined becoming the "Newton" of learning theory, and to develop a calculus of behavior through application of the principles of both formal logic and the experimental method (Swenson, 1980).

Dewey (1916) saw learning as experiential and integral to individual development. For Dewey, knowing could not be separated from doing. In contrast to Thorndike and the larger behaviorist tradition, Dewey saw the human as an active agent; experimenting, evaluating, constantly changing the environment and his or herself through this purposeful interaction.

Within a similar timeframe, George Herbert Mead (1934) posited an interactionist view of knowing, conceptually parallel to Dewey. Mead suggested a type of reflective intelligence which is a learned form of social interaction. In this knowing, the individual is constantly anticipating and extrapolating meaning from the gestures of others.

Knowing exists not as an abstract set of facts but as an interaction between people or persons. Mead clearly defines mind as a social phenomenon (Mead, 1934).

Historically the behaviorist, reductionist, and abstract model of Thorndike dominated learning for much of the century. Today, however, the dominant understanding of knowing places the person at the center, as an active agent in his or her learning. In the cognitive tradition of Chomsky, Piaget, and Kegan, humans construct a mental model of their experiences. These mental models then become the way in which a person understands, makes sense, and behaves in the world. If the external stimulus is great enough, through active thought, logic, and reflection, a person can change his or her mental model to more closely align with an external reality. While this model acknowledges the involved and internal role of the person in a more complete manner than the behaviorist tradition, it is still fundamentally rooted in a logical, reductionist philosophy that posits a reality outside the person. In addition, this is a reality that can be reduced to smaller "chunks" and stored within the mind.

However, there is a strong emergence of a theory of learning aligned with Dewey and Mead based on the epistemological philosophies of Wittgenstein, Heidegger, the modern philosopher Herbert Dreyfus and the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky. In this model of learning, there is no external reality that can be objectively and independently known, conceptually reduced, and cognitively stored in the mind. Based on what Dreyfus (1992) refers to as the computational model, knowledge is not something that is abstract and generalizable across all situations. For Dreyfus and Vygotsky, as with Dewey and Mead, all knowing exists in a specific context situated in purposeful, human activity. In this framework for learning and meaning making, knowing does not reside solely in the

person but is a shared process between the person and his or her cultural-historical context.

Research Questions

Framed within the intent of this study and the theoretical framework presented above, the following questions guided this study:

1. How does the individual experience transformation?

2. What changes when an individual's meaning making is transformed?

3. What is the relationship between an individual's mental model, the social context and imagination in personal transformation?

4. What role do tools, activity, and identity play in transformation?

Significance of this Study

The significance of this study to adult learning resides at two primary levels. The first includes a more comprehensive understanding of individual transformation with practical implications on how to assist others in changing their practice or way of being in the world. The second is a broader understanding of the role of social construction in knowing and its implications for the development of a more inclusive curriculum.

The value of developing a deeper understanding of transformational learning lies within a broader framework of the idea of learning as transformation, or that learning can bring about a fundamentally different relationship between the learner and his or her understanding of the world. This belief is the philosophical foundation for adult education and posits a way of teaching that differs from what Dirkx (1998) describes as

the "instrumental view" of learning being currently practiced in most of North America. A transformational approach to learning views knowing as more than the acquisition of new information that builds upon previous knowledge, fundamentally abstract and removed from the knower. The current understanding of transformative learning is framed within a cognitive or depth-psychologically approach to deep personal change. The significance of this study was in considering the sociocultural perspective of learning and development in adult meaning making develop a deeper understanding of transformational learning.

While Mezirow, (1990) Cranton (1994) and many others present a strong argument for the usage of a transformative pedagogy in adult education, a fuller understanding of the role of others and the social context may suggest a more comprehensive approach to transformative learning. This approach may include a broader usage of community, practice, and activity in learning (Bruffee, 1993; Bruner, 1990; Lave & Wenger, 1991) . While groups and team projects are used in the current practice of adult learning, the approach to this work is still fundamentally instrumental, asking teams to seek objective knowledge verses the belief that the team itself creates new knowledge shared between the members of its community. The practical value of this study is to develop a deeper understanding of how transformative pedagogy is affected by the social context and activity of human interaction with pragmatic applications for the practice of transformative learning.

There will also be a professional development value to this study. As noted above, there is a public and practical outcry to affect the practice of teaching and in leadership. However, much of the attempt toward changing behaviors or teachers and leaders has

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been focused on techniques or models. However, if in fact teaching and leading comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher or leader as described by Palmer (1998), or in the deep understanding of one's identity and integrity as a leader (Palmer, 1999), we need to have a deeper understanding of how to change or transform an individual's identity and integrity. For Palmer, identity resides at the intersection of the inner and outer forces that make a person who he or she is. Integrity is the human "wholeness" which is manifest of personal choice, action and reaction to the energy within and without of the human experience. Thus changing the practice of teaching and leading requires a comprehensive understanding of how adults construct meaning and identity with a deeper understanding of how this phenomena can be transformed through intentional, adult learning experiences.

The final significance of this study is much broader and theoretical in nature and is framed within the historical ideals of adult education as presented by Dewey (1916) and Lindeman (1926), the modern argument of critical theorists such as Welton (1995), Collins (1991), and Freire (1970) and feminist authors such as Gilligan (1993), Tisdell (1993), and hooks (1994). While this study did not attempt to integrate or validate each of these varying positions, it did recognize the differing epistemological and ontological foundations in support of the differing arguments.

The specific value of this research was to question the traditional view that knowledge is abstract and separate from the individual as opposed to the idea that knowledge is socially co-constructed by groups of individuals within a cultural, historical context. The logic being that if knowledge is social, then what we value most is also constructed. Thus we can be critical about who decides what is true and what is not (what

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is common sense, why is this common sense, who says so?), and what are the possible ways in which one comes to know what society and culture deems important, making learning more inclusive to other ways of knowing. Moving from the rational provides space for an open conversation about what is valued and why.

Methodological Approach

Given that this study was about meaning making and based upon a constructivist framework for adult learning, the theoretical and conceptual framework I brought to this study was interpretive in nature. Well established transformational theorists Mezirow (1991) and Brookfield (1991) agree that a qualitative approach is the only methodology appropriate to this type of research. That to enter into the complexity of another's frame of reference requires extensive conversation over an extended period of time. In the studies reviewed by Taylor (1997 Fall), all employed a "naturalistic" research design described as qualitative and phenomenological, and most of which used semi-structured interviews where participants reflected upon previous transformative experiences.

Given this framework, this was an interpretive study based upon a constructivist approach to change as rooted in meaning making. This study was seeking to understand what "transforms" within the spectrum of human existence when an individual changes his or her understanding and behavior in the world through participation in an adult learning experience. The methodology for the research was semi-structured interviews. The participants where adults who had participated in a learning experience designed to develop community leaders. The specific interviewees were individuals who had been identified by another, and confirmed by the participants, as having been qualitatively

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changed based on this learning experience. This was a retroactive study where individuals reflected on their past and present relationship with the world, in thought and practice, in addition to the influences that facilitated these changes.

Delimitations and Limitations

This study was about the people I got to know through the interviews and collection of material. As a qualitative study, my intent was to understand in a deep way how the sociocultural perspective may provide further understanding into the phenomena of personal change and transformation. The results of this study were not designed to apply to anyone else. They are not generalizable to a larger population. As presented by Erickson , the purpose and generalizability of this type of research methods are, "most appropriate when one needs to know more about...the specific structure of occurrences rather than their general character and overall distribution. What is happening in a particular place rather than across a number of places." (1985, p. 121)

However, this does not preclude this study having value in other settings. Again quoting Erickson, "The responsibility for judgment about logical generalization resides with the reader rather than with the researcher. The reader must examine the circumstances of the case to determine the ways in which the case fits the circumstances of the reader's own situation." (1985, p. 121) The responsibility for determining the application of this study lies in situ, not as universals to be applied to all individuals in all learning environments.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This was a study of deep personal change as facilitated by transformational learning. Transformational learning is both a model of learning and a philosophy of education. The most basic premise of transformational learning is that learning is more than the acquisition of facts and procedures or what Mezirow (1985) and Habermas (1971) refer to as instrumental learning. Transformation constitutes a fundamental shift in the way a person understands and behaves in the world.

The theoretical foundation for this study came from three distinct areas of research on learning and development; cognitive, depth psychology, and the sociocultural tradition. With its epistemological origins drawing on Western thought and a modernist paradigm, the cognitive theory of learning places the individual at the center of the learning process. Depth psychology places primary emphasis on the role of the unconscious and discernment in transformation. The sociocultural tradition posits a postmodern approach to learning and meaning making. In this perspective, knowing is an ever negotiated process that resides somewhere between the individual and his or her cultural and historical context. In reference to transformation and learning, all three of these models suggest a constructivist approach to learning where the individual has an active role in constructing his or her own understanding of the world.

The study was of participants in a leadership development program. As a sociocultural study, the context is integral to the understanding of the individual

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phenomena. While this research was not to develop a deeper understanding of leadership development, the experience of the individual learner is interwoven with the shared assumptions, traditions, values, and beliefs of this particular learning environment. Understanding the individual's experience requires some understanding of the domain of leadership development.

The following chapter will provide a literature review of the three different perspectives on learning as transformational: cognitive, depth psychology, and the sociocultural tradition. It will conclude with a brief review of leadership development as an area of study and practice.

Cognitive Tradition

In the tradition of adult learning, transformation and transformative learning is most closely associated with Jack Mezirow. (1981). Mezirow (1994 summer) defines Learning as a universal theory of adult learning: "Transformational theory is intended to be a comprehensive, idealized, and universal model consisting of the generic structures, elements, and processes of adult learning." (1994, p. 222).

Mezirow's (1978) initial concept of Transformational grew from a study of women attending community college later in their lives. In this research, he identified cognitive changes in how these women understood, perceived, and behaved in the world. It was Mezirow's interpretation that this change was a result of each individual becoming critically aware of her beliefs and feelings. These changes occurred in a community that provided trust, empathy, and genuine listening. Generally these changes occurred after a "disorienting dilemma" which caused the person to reflect on her position, role, and

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relationship with others and society. The result of this reflection was a reorganization of the woman's cognitive schema or meaning perspectives.

For Mezirow, the fundamental element within transformation is meaning making. This meaning making is directed by one's frame of references or meaning perspectives and meaning schemes. From psychology and the cognitive sciences, a frame of reference or meaning schemes constitute an actively constructed model in the mind of external stimuli received through the senses (Boden, 1989). Thus as active agents, humans construct schema or models of the world in their mind that are used to shape and understand one's existence in the world.

At a very simple level, the primary elements in transforming these frames of reference include a disorienting dilemma, critical reflection, and reflective discourse. The disorienting dilemma is some experience that contradicts one's existing frames of reference. This contradiction causes cognitive and psychological disequilibrium and tension. However, through rational reflection on the assumptions and premises that are behind the meaning schemes, individuals can transform their frames of reference. The result being beliefs or ideas that are more true or justifiable in guiding action. (Mezirow, 2000)

Thus for Mezirow, transformation is rational development toward an objective truth or way of knowing. A primary element that Mezirow places at the center of this process is reflective discourse (2000). This open, emphatic dialogue with others provides a context for individual, critical reflection on this frame of references toward the development of a more accurate understanding of the external world.

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To elaborate on the understanding of a cognitive model of learning, in her description of "constructive" psychology, Margaret Boden (1989) provides a similar description of meaning making:

> All these psychologist (Piaget, Bartlett, Bruner, and Gregory) despite their many differences, agree in emphasizing top-down influences in psychological processing. High-level structures or concepts, it is said, inform thought and perception through and through. Perception is then largely a matter of generating and testing-and if necessary adapting-hypothesis....Such a psychology, in addition, normally stresses the contribution of experience to the content of schemata...the theoretical emphasis is on the individual's own experience in the world. (p. 35)

In summary, while acknowledging an influence by the external world, the cognitive model of learning places meaning making and the construction of knowing within the individual.

Criticisms of Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory

In reviewing 46 studies of transformative learning, Taylor (1997, fall) found significant support for Mezirow's theory but presented an argument for a more holistic model for transformation. Specifically, the four major criticisms of this theory are its failure to address the role of systems (cultural, social, educational, economic, and political), learning as situated within a specific context, the importance of emotion, intuition, spirituality, the unconscious and gender differences, and a critical perspective that links individual transformation to social action. Mezirow (2000) himself identified the same four areas as needing additional research to support or augment his theory.

Clark and Wilson (1991, winter) provide the most directed criticism of Mezirow's theory of not attending to the sociocultural (or context-based) aspect of learning. Based in part on Clark's (1991) research on the transformative experience of adults and their own

understanding of the sociocultural perspective of adult learning, Clark and Wilson (1991) argue that Mezirow ignores the role of context in meaning making. The authors posit that his entire supposition that transformation is a rational act is situated in a white, male, middle-class understanding of how one knows and experiences the world. For Clark and Wilson, in separating the individual from the context, "Mezirow has attempted to remove the very element that brings meaning to experience" (Clark & Wilson, 1991, p. 90).

A continuing criticism of Mezirow's theory of transformation, that relates to the social but not directly the sociocultural, is his lack of attention to the power structure inherent in society and its role in meaning making (Collard & Law, 1989, Winter; Cunningham, 1992; Taylor, 1997 Fall). The argument, based on a Critical Perspective, is that Mezirow places too much emphasis on the role of the individual to reflect on his or her own meaning structure with little focus on culture of social change. To the critical theorist, individual transformation cannot occur without radical social change. The logic being individuals are often unaware of being oppressed and thus assume the values and social roles of the oppressors.

While subtle, there is a difference between these two social-based critiques. From a Critical perspective, the social context is culture while the meaning perspective is the individual. While clearly culture and the individual are not the same thing, in reference to sociocultural theory, the critique of Clark and Wilson (1991, Winter), and the research introduced later in this chapter, the two are permanently intertwined in the process of learning and development.

From a developmental perspective, Tennent (1993, Fall) argues that Mezirow places the location of perspective transformation on the individual not society. He

continues that Mezirow does not ignore the social, but locates the understanding of context as an interpretation through the experience of the learner. Tennent advocates for a model of transformation that considers the effect of society on individual development. He suggests the need for a theoretical understanding of the relationship between the two. That the process of transformation must look at changing both the individual and society at the same time. Tennent is arguing that Mezirow's theory should be more emancipatory in its approach in the same vain as Freire's Critical pedagogy. The basis for this argument is that an individual cannot change a flawed meaning perspective without changing society.

While Tennent's argument for enhancing Mezirow's theory through an explicit call for social change is a valid point for dialogue, it still posits a separation between the individual and society and is in opposition to a sociocultural perspective. To elaborate, the relationship between the individual and society in this tradition is explained in Lawrence's definition of internalization: "...internalization can by viewed as the transformation of culturally provided input into the person's active process of co-construction of the self...thus becoming the source of a cyclical influence of the social on the individual and the individual on the social" (Lawrence & Valsiner, 1993, p. 157).

Mezirow and the cognitive models of learning and transformation do not align with the sociocultural model of co-construction and is better described by what Lawrence defines as a simple unidirectional cultural transmission model. In this model, culture provides the context in a one way transmission independent from the individual. From the sociocultural perspective, the cognitive model does not give enough credence to the power of society and its coupling with the individual. Culture is not something that

effects the individual but is created by the individual at the same time the individual creates culture.

Supporting and Contrasting Cognitive Models of Transformation

While conceptually and epistemologically aligned with Mezirow and working in the cognitive tradition, developmental psychologist such as Kegan (1982; 1994; Kegan & Lahey, 2001) and Tennant (1997, fall; 1993; Tennant & Pogson, 1995) attempt to distinguish between normal human development and transformational learning. Drawing on the cognitive development model of Piaget, they make a distinction between the normal process of learning where new information is assimilated into an existing cognitive structure corresponding to the current developmental stage of the person and a fundamental change in the structure through accommodation. Kegan (Kegan & Lahey, 2001) suggests that tranformation is increasing one's capacity for abstract thinking, about understanding the underlying assumptions that guide a persons thoughts and behaviors.

What transforms for Kegan (2000) at a personal or individual level is the relationship between subject and object. As described by Taylor (Taylor, 2000b; Taylor, Marienau, & Fiddler, 2000), transformation becomes a process of stepping outside one's self and seeing self as object. Development is a process of moving away from the constraints of the social and becoming an objective, rational individual who can make logical and abstract decisions. In this process of transformation, an individual comes to understand that he or she is authorized as a person to make good choice about his or her life. Thus a driving question in this model of transformation as described by Kegan (2000) is who authorizes an individual's way of knowing (society or the individual)?

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Kegan and Lahey (2001) provide additional theoretical, research, and practice based support for the cognitive model of learning and transformation. Drawing heavily on the work of cognitive developmental psychology, Kegan and Lahey posit that transformation and transformative learning requires an understanding of the human, psychological drive for equilibrium. At the core of our being-in-the world are "big assumptions" that are constructed and guide our thoughts, understanding, meaning making, and behaviors in the world. These big assumptions are part of the circular process of constructing and being guided by our language, language that is both internal and social.

For Kegan and Lahey, personal transformation and a transformational learning pedagogy must be grounded in using language to make known to the individual these big assumptions. However, what they also make clear is sustaining the awareness of these cognitive structures and the eventual transformation of these assumptions and their associated behavior requires a community. This community, according to the authors, provides safety and a point of reflection for the individual as he or she experiments with new assumptions and behaviors. Kegan and Lahey (2001) have documented that without a community, individuals often become completely unaware of big assumptions that had been made conscious only a couple months previous.

Daloz (1986) provides an individual, cognitive perspective on learning that expands beyond the individual. Working from a developmental perspective, Daloz places an emphasis on the psychosocial role of others, particularly mentors in individual change. In later research on individual commitment to community, Daloz and his colleagues

(Daloz et al., 1996) identify four conditions for transformation: The presence of the other, reflective discourse, a mentoring community, and opportunities for committed action.

The studies introduced in this section provide significant evidence to support the idea that the individual and rational thought, play an active role in adult meaning making and transformation. The following section provides additional evidence to suggest that the unconscious may also affect the way in which adults understand and transform their being in the world.

Depth Psychology

A second perspective on transformation is situated within the theoretical framework of depth psychology or the mytho-poetic tradition. Mostly closely associated with Boyd (1991) and further elaborated by others, such as Dirkx (1997, summer) and Scott (1997, summer), this approach to transformation is based in part on Carl Jung's concept of individuation.

Working within the theoretical perspective of depth psychology, Stein (1998) describes transformation as an unfolding of the true self triggered by an encounter with a transformative image - a religious symbol, a dream, an impressive person, an active imagination. This transformation results in a massive reorganization of attitude, behavior, and sense of meaning. For Stein and many others working in this tradition, transformation is situated in mid to late adulthood.

As opposed to the rational included in the work of Mezirow, this perspective focuses on the unconscious. The unconscious includes a host of unseen energies outside of human awareness. These forces include personalities, desires, drives and motivations

that direct our external behavior. As described by Johnson (1986), the source of our thoughts, behaviors and feelings reside unknown to us, hidden in the unconscious. The influence of the unconscious is most powerful because it is unsuspected. Within depth psychology, we connect to the unconscious through symbols and images. These symbols and images are the communication tools of the unconscious.

Psychoanalytic theory typically posits a priori knowledge. Individuals are innately born with their own personal knowledge, personality, and other psychological traits. Independent of society, development in this tradition is the continuing unfolding of these innate characteristics by moving through a universal set of stages.

Individuation is the process of finding the authentic Self and connecting all of those distinct personalities that have developed in response to social influence. Doing so requires reaching beyond the individual self to touch the archetypes or those principles that are universal and for all time, to touch within ourselves that which makes us human. The Persona or "self-for-others" is a certain image that we present to others; it is our "public Self." We have not one Persona, but many, that we display depending on the situation. One of these "selves" is the ego. The ego is the conscious mind, that which we call "I." It includes those thoughts, behaviors, emotions, beliefs, and cognitions of which we are aware.

According to Bijkerk (1992), these Persona are first developed as a means for the Self to communicate with the world. However, oftentimes discrepancies develop that create a separation between the authentic Self and the public Self. This separation occurs as the authentic Self allows the pressures of society to control the Persona. When this occurs the public Self (or Selves) takes on a life of its own, overshadowing the authentic

Self. In this situation the person begins to identify his or herself with the Persona, not the authentic Self.

For Dirkx (2000), learning for adults becomes potentially transformative when we recognize, accept, and name the deep psychic images that arise within us. This is facilitated through developing and maintaining a dialogue with the images evoked by the content or process of formal learning. Thus transformation from this perspective is individuation or the individual knowing of the authentic self through the integration of the many others or the Persona within one's psyche.

Boyd (1991) posits that transformation is a process of discernment verses rational thought, when discernment means that the learner is open to interaction between the unconscious and images and symbols. Discernment then becomes the process of making meaning out of these images and symbols into rational thought. In this model of transformation, the imagination and the unconscious motives of the psyche appear before the rational. For Boyd, (Boyd & Myers, 1988) transformation is a form of individualization where the unconscious is made conscious. The process of transformative learning is to identify the meaning represented in these symbols.

For Dirkx (1997, summer), transformation as soul work comes through dialogue with the Other. In this model however, the Other can be one's own ego. Transformation for Dirkx is clearly grounded in the Jungian concept of individuation where the many pieces of self are integrated into a single authentic self. In this process, the conversation with the ego becomes bracketed as the person learns to listen to the other parts of self. Listening again comes through the interaction with personal symbols as well as attending to the mysteries, enchantments, and imaginations of life. For Dirkx (2000), imagination

plays a great value in transforming the world; someone imagined skyscrapers and flying long before either were technologically possible.

There is a significant social element in this perspective as well. The early work of Boyd (1991)focused on the emergence of a collective conscious in groups. Dirkx (2000)refers to our imagination and meaning making of the "text" of our world as constructed through the interaction of others and ourselves. Depth Psychologist, James Hillman (1975; 1996) argues that one must attend to the social as well as the individual in understanding how people engage in the world. As an example, therapy for Hillman requires being in the world, not removing one's self from the world, but through active involvement in community.

While not generally labeled as a transformational learning theorist, the work of Parker Palmer (Palmer, 1998; Richland College, 2000) can also be included within the soul, mytho-poetic, and depth psychology approach to individual change. Palmer's model for teacher and leadership Formation posits that each person is born with an authentic self that is deformed in the first half of life. The second half of life triggers a search to strip away the various masks and habits designed to protect the "shy" soul, allowing the true self to emerge.

As an adult learning methodology, Palmer's Formation Retreats create an environment where individuals engage in archetypical material, such as poetry, in community to better understand one's authenticity and integrity. Palmer also places a strong emphasis on community as outlined in the Formation Retreat descriptor: "In small and large group and in solitary settings, the larger questions of life, which we rarely approach together, will be attended to - questions which, though they may indeed be

personal are not entirely private, and are often best answered in and through community" (Palmer, 2002, p.1).

Elias provides additional evidence to support a view of transformational learning grounded in an understanding of the unconscious, spiritual practice, and informed by psychotherapy. Referencing Jung as a criticism of Mezirow, Elias argues that a worldview is shaped not only by rational assumptions, but also by the symbols, myths, and archetypes that emerge from the collective unconscious. Elias is not suggesting one model over the other, but that both are valid and can contribute to individual transformation. To that end, he provides the following definition of transformational learning which reads in part, "transformative learning is the expansion of consciousness through the transformation of basic worldview and specific capacities of self" (1997, summer, p. 3). His definition describes the process as follows, "transformative learning is facilitated through consciously directed processes such as appreciatively accessing and receiving the symbolic contents of the unconscious and critically analyzing underlying premises" (Elias, 1997 Summer, p. 3)

This proceeding section provided additional support for an understanding of how adults come to know and act in the world. While more difficult to quantify, these studies and theoretical suppositions suggest that the unconscious does play a role in individual transformation. The following section introduces research to support a cultural, social, and context based epistemology to meaning making and individual change.

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Sociocultural Tradition

In adult learning, there are a variety of approaches to learning as a social activity. Wilson (1993) refers to Situated Cognition, while Lave and Wenger (Lave, 1988; Lave & Wenger, 1991) introduced the concept of Legitimate Peripheral Participation or Communities of Practice. Outside of adult learning theory, developmental psychologists such as Bruner (1990) and the developmental theories of Vygotsky (1978) suggest that development is a mediated process between the individual and his or her cultural-historical context. Also working within the cognitive tradition of psychology, but pushing the tradition by integrating the role of society and culture, are cultural psychologist such as Cole (1998) and Ratner (1997). A sociocultural approach to learning is also manifest in the criticism of current cognitive models by philosopher Herbert Dreyfus (1992; 1995).

Given this plethora of sociocultural theorists, the overarching theoretical construct of learning as a social phenomena is rooted in the cultural-historical perspective of Lev Vygotsky (1978; 1987; 1997). In cultural-historical theory, the origin of knowledge itself is social. There is no single real world and what is accepted as truth has been socially constructed by society. This development of knowledge is formed in a dialectic between the individual and society. Knowledge exists at the same time within the individual and is distributed within society. The locale of social knowledge can be found in the cultural life of a society: artifacts, technology, tools, rituals, symbols, and technologies. Cognition and knowledge are assumed to go "beyond the skin" as outlined in the classic example by Bateson (1972): Suppose I am a blind man, and I use a stick. I go tap, tap, tap. Where do I start? Is my mental system bounded at the handle of the stick? Is it bounded by my skin? Does it start halfway up the stick? Does it start at the tip of my stick? Does it start

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Thus in cultural-historical theory, learning and development resides within the collective, moving from society to the individual. Vygotsky (1978) states that every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationship between individuals. The means for this development is mediation.

Mediation is the process of communicating the meaning inherent in the "signs" of society. As introduced above, these signs range from language to rituals. Mediation can be visualized as a three way interaction between a person, sign material, and the socially constructed symbolic meaning. An example of this is 1) the reader of this paper, 2) a yellow triangle road sign, and 3) the reader's understanding of the meaning "yield." These artifacts of cultural history preserve and convey the stored knowledge of society. At the personal level, these signs are used to regulate individual behavior. Applying this concept to the individual, all psychological functions begin, and to a large extent remain, culturally, historically, and institutionally situated and context specific.

Development in cultural-historical theory is a change in this mediation process. In the early process of learning and development, mediation is used as a societal process for individual regulation. As one develops, a process of internalization occurs in which external mediating control becomes reorganized in a process of self regulation. This process of internalization can best be seen in Vygotsky's study of speech. In his theory of

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development, the origins of speech are social and are used in the early years of development to regulate a child's behavior. As one develops, speech becomes subverbal or internal.

Elaborating on mediation, the tools of society define an individual's relationship with nature and situate the individual's ability to interact. Tools are one of the defining characteristics of the human species. Through the creation of tools, individuals are able to act upon nature and thereby change it. In addition, the creation of these tools communicates and constrains the future activity of others. As stated above, all knowledge is situated, and it is the meaning and applicability of the tools of a culture that define how the individual interacts with the problems of the world. In other words, human problem solving is always contextually situated and "controlled" by the tools made available by society.

In relationship to mediation, tools, and problem-solving, Vygotsky identified higher and lower psychological functions. Lower mental functions include all the voluntary and reflective processes of thinking, attention, recognition, and need. They underpin a basic repertoire of problem solving behavior that can be organized in response to the here-and-now of environmental stimuli. Higher mental functions include all the voluntary and reflective processes of thinking, remembering, and reasoning that we associate with human life.

The last issue to cover in cultural-historical theory is the process of learning and its relationship to development. As identified earlier, learning is a social phenomena. The process of learning is manifest in a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD is the distance between what an individual is capable of doing on his or her own and what

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he or she is capable of doing with the assistance of a more capable other. Within this zone, individuals learn through basic human activities such as cooking, sports, or yard care. In these activities, individuals are not simply participants but are guided by members of the greater society. It is this process of learning that leads to development.

Current Theories and Research in the Sociocultural Tradition

Lave (1988) produced several of the earliest studies supporting the role of context in adult learning. In her research, she and her colleagues (Lave, Murtaugh, & de la Rocha, 1988) have shown that many adults do not apply or do not learn mathematical skills in a formal learning environment such as school. However, when the same adults are asked to perform relatively advanced mathematical skills such as estimation, ratios, and manipulation of fractions within a real world context, they are very adept. The primary setting or context for this research was adults in a grocery store. The empirical evidence shows that within this context, adults performing these mathematical computations were correct 98 percent of the time. However, when given a traditional paper-pencil test using the type of questions given in school, they gave correct answers only 59 percent of the time.

Lave, et al. (1988) posit that the adults use the context as a tool in solving the problems. The cans, bags and item descriptions become tools by which these adults make sense of their world. A personal directive and active engagement with the available tools in a known environment, created knowledge that apparently did not exist outside of the context. Learning happens as an incidental by-product of participation in social activity.

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Further observations by Lave (1988) suggest that learning involves social interaction with others. That meaning lies not solely in the individual but resides in community. Even in the example of the grocery store context for math, it can be argued that the items used in context to solve problems were tools created by society. These tools had a specific function shared with the participants. As described by Lave and Wenger, (1991) learning involves activity in an environment constructed by others. Bredo (1997) provides the example that a child does not learn to ride a bike but one learns to ride *with* a bike. The riding is not in the child but in the interaction with the environment.

Lave (Lave, 1997; Lave & Wenger, 1991) has expanded on this research developing a model of learning summarized as legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice. In reviewing studies of cross-cultural apprenticeships, Lave and Wenger (1991) posit the idea that learning occurs through the ever increasing inclusion in a community of experts or practitioners. In any given domain, an individual begins as an apprentice on the outside of the community's shared knowledge. An individual's knowledge increases as he or she moves towards the center of the community. In addition, as the individual becomes more involved in the community, his or her owns knowledge will shape the community and thus develop a shared understanding.

Bruffee (1995 Jan/Feb) provides evidence suggesting that learning is a social act of sharing and collaboration. Based on a sociocultural epistemology, learning is produced by a group, not based on the authority within a discipline. Cross (2000) supports a pedagogy of collaboration identifying four primary arguments; belonging, career preparation, deep learning, and diversity. Cross also posits that the acceptance and affective application of collaborative learning in adult learning environments is minimal.

Cross (1999) contends that a social, group, or collaborative environment for learning reinforces the constructivist notions that students must construct their own knowledge.

Drawing on the work of Dewey, Cross (1999) continues her support of a sociocultural approach to learning by emphasizing the role of activity in learning. While referencing the value of internships, service-learning, cooperative education, as well as role-playing and simulations, Cross argues that these approaches are too "linear" and removed from the formal learning experience. Cross argues for a contextualized, problem-based curriculum that requires students to engage in experiences that are real and relevant to their lives.

Donald Schon's (1987; 1991) "reflection-in-action" also posits a type of sociocultural learning. His research on professionals working in the fields of architecture, law, education, and social work suggests that real, deep learning occurs not through engagement in a classroom but through the active problem solving of relevant issues. Practitioners learn by continually reflecting on the success and failure of real-time decisions in-situ. For Schon, practitioners construct their own knowledge through activity.

Bonk and Kim (1998) introduce a body of research supporting the application of scaffolding in adult learning environments. Scaffolding is based on Vygotstky's concept of ZPD where learning is supported by an Other to complete a task the learner would have not been able to complete on his or her own. In this form of teaching, the learner and teacher are mutually engaged in active problem solving. As a co-participant, the learner feels the accomplishment of completing a complex task, shares a set of goals, and constructs meaning out of the event as a social activity.

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Wertsch (1990) posits that adult meaning making is fundamentally situated in the social interaction, culture, tools, and historical context in which a person exists. He has identified three components of sociocultural theory:

1. The use of genetic or developmental analysis to understand the origins and transitions of mental functions.

2. The postulation that individual higher order mental functioning has its roots in social relations.

3. The argument that both social and individual psychological activity is mediated by tools and signs.

Bonk (Bonk & Kim, 1998) posits that these signs in one's cultural-historical context create the shared patterns of thoughts and mental structure that defines an individual's understanding of the world. As the environment or context changes, so does one's meaning making.

Jarvis presents a sociological perspective on learning in which the individual and society co-construct meaning. "…Human learning is self-conscious and reflective. We are both products and creators of culture. Learning is not seen as social adaptation but as social action and interaction" (Jarvis, Holford, & Griffin, 1998, p. 40). Thus for Jarvis, learning is clearly a social activity that happens within a historical and cultural context and happens through the interaction of the individual and others.

Using a case study of claims processors in an insurance company as well as previous research on learning as a communal process, Wenger, building on the model of communities of practice, argues "…in spite of curriculum, discipline, and exhortation, the learning that is most personally transformative turns out to be the learning that involves membership in these communities of practice"(1998, p. 6). Examples of communities of practice range from families, to the workplace, garage bands, church groups, and science

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labs. He is also clear that most communities are not formal or sanctioned in any way. Wenger expands upon this work to posit that participants in these communities also construct our personal identities. Participation shapes not only what we know and do but who we are and how we interpret what we do.

Wenger (1998) introduces four components upon which a social theory of learning is premised:

1. *Meaning*: a way of talking about our (changing) ability – individually and collectively – to experience our life and the world as meaningful.

2. *Practice*: a way of talking about the shared historical and social resources, frameworks, and perspectives that can sustain mutual engagement in action.

3. *Community*: a way of talking about the social configurations in which our enterprises are defined as worth pursuing and our participation is recognized as competent.

4. *Identity*: a way of talking about how learning changes who we are and creates personal histories of becoming in the context of our communities.

Wenger (1998) continues in providing a framework for a comprehensive model of learning that integrates social structure, situated experience, social practice, and personal identity. In this model, the primary tension and vehicle for qualitative change in our understanding and practice of education and learning is at the intersection of the social and the personal.

From a historical perspective, Ratner (1991) and Dreyfus (1992; 1995) clearly articulate an epistemological difference between a traditional, modernist perspective of learning and a sociocultural perspective. For Ratner (1989), sociocultural psychology construes that there is no separation or dualism between the individual, between psychology, and other elements of human existence. In this tradition, all psychological phenomenon is dependent on social interaction. Dreyfus posits that objects and certain

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properties and values in a situation are created by activity, not by reflective thought. Engaging in the activity in an environment that can be made to function in the way of the activity creates relevant objects, that in using rocks to play checkers, the rocks become the checkers.

Beach (1999) provides a sociocultural perspective on learning framed within the phenomenon of transfer. Beach outlines the philosophical, psychological, and epistemological differences between a modernist, reductionist approach to learning and a postmodern, sociocultural perspective. In summarizing a large body of research, King argues that learning is not a linear model of transfer but a continuous and iterative transfer between individuals and an ever changing social context.

Through his research in Folk Psychology and language, developmental psychologist, Jerome Bruner (1986; 1990), provides additional support for a sociocultural understanding of learning. Quoting Bruner in discussing his approach to meaning making, "I propose to discuss how quite young human beings "enter into meaning," how they learn to make sense, particularly narrative sense, of the world around them. …meaning itself is a culturally mediated phenomenon that depends upon the prior existence of a shared symbol system." (1990, p. 68)

The philosophical origins of a sociocultural approach can be traced to such writers as Heidegger and Wittgenstein but are also clearly evident in the twentieth century philosophy of Dewey. When approaching how people learn and make meaning in their world, Dewey (1938) focused on the practical and adaptive role of the mind. As well as understanding learning as being rooted in intentional activity, Dewey also suggested that individuals are continuously adapting to a constantly changing environment. Because our

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knowing is a product of engagement in the world, and individuals are capable of

changing the world, meaning making is thus dependent on the environment.

In conceptualizing how individuals come to understand the world, anthropologist

G. H. Mead (1934), a contemporary of Dewey, posited the idea that the individual's

conceptualization of "self" depended on the "other." Mead went so far as to posit that we

cannot understand the concept of mind and self without attending to their emergence

from the social environment. Referred to as reflective intelligence, meaning making and

identity is a product of social interaction rather than an objective thing. As with Vygotsky

and the other sociocultural theorist, for Mead, we can only learn through the sharing of

society-constructed symbols.

Herbert Dreyfus (1992) assaults the cognitive tradition head on. He first

summarizes the idea that schemes posit a set of rules or pictures in the head that

represents an external reality (regardless of its origin). His counter to this argument

comes from several philosophers such as Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and

Ludwig Wittgenstein. As explained by Herbert Dreyfus, "These thinkers...came to the

conclusion that perception could not be explained by the application of rules to basic

features. Human understanding is a skill akin to knowing how to find one's way about in

the world, rather than knowing a lot of facts and rules for relating them. Our basic

understanding is thus a *knowing how* rather than a *knowing what*" (1992, p. 15).

To elaborate, Dreyfus in his explanation of Heidegger argues, "I continue to assert

that we are able to understand what a chair or a hammer is only because it fits into a

whole set of cultural practices in which we group and with which we gradually become

familiar" (1995, p. 47). This is manifest in Merleau-Ponty's claim that perception and

understanding are based in our capacity for picking up not rules, but flexible styles of behavior. Following this epistemological argument, meaning does not exist as facts; rules or "schemes" embedded within an individual's psyche but exists at a point between the individual and society.

This final section summarized, in part, the current research and historical origins of a cultural, social, and context-based perspective on learning. As with the cognitive and depth psychology perspective, there is significant evidence supporting a sociocultural approach to adult meaning making and transformation.

The Broader Context of Leadership Development

As a sociocultural study, the context is equal to the individual in understanding the experience. Because this study is of leadership development, there must be a general understanding of this area of theory and practice. This section will first present a brief history of leadership and then outline the common ways in which leadership development is currently practiced.

The history of modern leadership begins with the industrialization of Western Society with an aim toward greater efficiency of employees. The first model was the trait, or Great Man theory, where leaders are born with specific abilities that allow them to be leaders (Bennis, 1998). It was a matter of biology. As research on leadership advanced, no specific trait could be identified creating great leaders. In addition, from a cultural context, during the 1950's and early 1960's society became more focused on objective measures of behavior. In response, leadership theory moved to defining the control of the behavior as leadership.

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In this approach to leadership, behaviors were grouped together as styles (Sadler, 1997). Here behaviors could be learned and taught. There was a focus on the interaction between leader and worker and many theories emerged such as McGregor's (1960) "Theory X – Theory Y" portrayal of managers. As context was considered within leadership theory, it was discovered that some styles of leadership did not function in every situation. This introduced a new situational understanding of leadership identified as contingency or situational leadership.

In the contingency model, leadership is dependent on a variety of factors. (Fiedler & Garcia, 1987) From this perspective, the organizational structure and situation required different types of leadership. To be an effective leader meant analyzing the context and producing an appropriate response. Leadership now became relational and dynamic. While still valuable, these models however focused too much on the interaction between the manager and subordinates (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

Current models of leadership are focused on creating an integrated organization with shared purpose and decision making. One form of this is present in the idea of Transformational Leadership (Bass, 1997; Kouzes & Posner, 1995) where the leader raises the level of awareness of the employees about significant outcomes, connects individuals to the value of the organizational team, and finds a way for individuals to integrate his or her sense of self to the work.

A second model is the concept of a learning organization generally associated with Peter Senge (1990). Here the individuals within an organization engage in continuous learning to create the outcomes they truly desire. Systems thinking, the realignment of mental models, recognition of hidden assumptions and positive human

interaction are

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interaction are at the core of this model. Many other similar models exist such as Covey's Principle-Centered Leadership (1991), or Wheatley's (1992) approach to leadership and organizational change informed by chaos theory and quantum physics. A common element in each of these is attention to the interconnectivity and shared influence of all the individuals in an organization. This and the previous paragraphs outlined the history of leadership theory, but the following will identify how leaders are generally developed in today's society.

In *Leadership games: Experiential learning for organizational development*, Stephen Kaagan (1999) presents how the history of leadership development over the last 30 years has moved from the domain of the university to consultants. He identifies four major dimensions to leadership development; who, when, where, and how. Who asks who should do the leadership development? When refers to the length of the learning or time span. Where is the physical location of the learning? How is the what or content of the experience? He then posits that effective leadership development strategies should focus on content and methodology. In contrast to many current approaches that rely on the expertise of others for elaborate and costly experiences outside the workplace, Kaagan suggests an inexpensive experiential approach that integrates activity, reflection, and workplace connection.

Keegan's model of leadership development is supported by many, but should still be considered counter culture to the most prominent forms of professional development. Skill based training, seminars, and conferences remain at the heart of most leadership development activities and according to Bolt (1996) are outdated. The core of these experiences is about obtaining measurable outcomes to perform a particular job function.

How to "Evaluate an Employee" or "Use Power Point to Persuade" are examples of typical professional development opportunities. As suggested by Parker Palmer (1998; 1999) leadership, like teaching, is still dominated by the "tyranny of technique." For Palmer, today's focus of leadership development and practice is on definable skills or "tricks of the trade" that allow one to do a better job. In contrast, Palmer argues that leadership comes from knowing one's inner self. Leadership development should be about understanding the intersection of the person's soul and role.

Peter Block (1991; 1993), a long time consultant to business and industry, has a similar concern about the focus of leadership development being primarily on the skills or techniques of management. To address this issue, he and Margaret Wheatley (2000; 1992; 1996), in partnership with several other prominent researchers, authors, and consultants in leadership, created the School for Managing in 1996. Working with the professional organization, The Association for Quality and Participation, developed the year-long "school" where teams from an organization met monthly in an experiential setting to develop an understanding of their personal mission, organizational mission, and a whole-systems approach to engaging the entire organization in creating everyone's preferred future.

Understanding this study thus requires an understanding of the social context of leadership theory and leadership development. To continue within this perspective, leadership development as a form of learning and specifically as a form of transformative learning cannot be separated from the larger cultural context. As an example, during the dominance of the trait theory of leadership, Blake and Mouton's Managerial Grid (1964) dominated leadership development as a way to diagnose and develop people's behaviors

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in the workplace. Today the dominant model of leadership development is still focused on skill building. However, some scholars such as Marsick (1996) and Cranton (1996) join Palmer, Block and others suggesting an approach to leadership development that reflects a deeper, transformational approach to learning. It is this counter culture approach to leadership development that situates this study.

Chapter Summary

This is a study of individual learning and transformation. Acknowledging the three different perspectives on transformative learning, this study did not attempted to prove one of these models more valid than another. Nor did it attempt to integrate these epistemologically different models into one coherent model of learning. However, what this review of the literature did show is all three models place a significant emphasis on the role of others and society in the process of individual transformation.

While the social is obvious in the sociocultural tradition, within the cognitive domain Mezirow speaks of the need for reflective discourse with others. Kegan goes so far as to posit that transformation cannot occur without a community. Daloz emphasizes the role of mentors in learning and transformation. From a depth psychology perspective, Boyd's work looked at the manifestation of archetypal images in groups. Dirkx refers to the value of dialogue with others. Palmer has structured his Formation retreats in community because of the value of social interaction in knowing one's inner self.

In regards to the cultural, a similar argument resides across all three perspectives. Again, it is at the core of the sociocultural. From the cognitive, Mezirow and Kegan acknowledge that culture and society affects the creation of schema. Hillman and Moore

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(Moore, 1996) speak to the presence of culturally constructed symbols in the depth psychology perspective.

Framed within the context of a leadership development experience, the focus of this study was a deeper understanding of these common elements present in all three theories. The question being, "What is the role of the social and the cultural in the process of personal transformation and transformative learning?"

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CHAPTER 3

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of others, society, and culture in the process of personal transformation and transformative learning.

Conceptual Framework

Individuals changing their beliefs and actions in the world as a result of learning has a strong historical, philological, and research based legacy. The current dominant construct for transformative learning is framed within the cognitive tradition, with a second model drawing upon concepts from depth psychology. While making reference to the need for others and community, neither of these models provide a coherent explanation of the role of others, groups, culture, society, or history in personal transformation.

While there is a broad epistemological difference, a common assumption between the two perspectives on individual transformation and a social theory of learning is the constructivist paradigm. The basic premise is that adults are responsible for their own, active, meaning making. As summarized by Ratner in describing the theoretical study of human thinking and action, "The equivocal, indefinite relationship between psychological phenomena and behavior is a distinguishing characteristic of adult humans." (1997, p. 58) Thus, in trying to understand individual transformation and

transformational learning, one must understand the individual at a deep personal and psychological level.

This is a study about how adults come to know their world and how their knowing is changed. The appropriate research methodology for this type of inquiry is qualitative and interpretive. From a theoretical perspective on research, justification for this approach to inquiry is provided by Holstein and Gubrium in their description of phenomenology, ethnomethodology, and interpretive practice. Building upon the work of Schutz and Husserl, Holstein and Gubrium characterize this type of qualitative research as "interest in the ways in which ordinary members of society constitute and reconstitute the world of everyday life, introducing a set of tenets that provide the basis for subsequent phenomenological, ethnomethodological, and constructionist theorizing and empirical work." (1994, p. 263) The philosophical assumptions of this type of inquiry are consistent with the constructivist nature of transformational learning.

With a focus on meaning making, Guba and Lincoln present an argument for a constructivist approach to researching issues that deal with individual paradigms. They said: "A paradigm may be viewed as a set of basic beliefs. It represents a worldview that defines, for its holder, the nature of the "world," the individual place in it and the range of possible relationship to that world and its parts. . . " (1994, p. 107) This constructivist approach directly aligns with the model of transformation presented by the primary theorists in transformative learning and sociocultural theory. In this approach to understanding, the aim of inquiry is "understanding and reconstruction of the constructions that people (including the inquirer) initially hold." (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 108)

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Merriam provides the following perspective on qualitative research, "The key philosophical assumption. . . upon which all types of qualitative research are based is the view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world." (1998b, p. 6) Creswell (1994) , citing Merriam (1988), outlines six assumptions of qualitative research:

1. Qualitative researchers are concerned primarily with process, rather than outcomes or products.
2. Qualitative researchers are interested in meaning – how people make sense of their lives, experiences, and their structures of the world.
3. The qualitative researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analyses. Data are mediated through this human instrument, rather than through inventories, questionnaires, or machines.
4. Qualitative research involves fieldwork. The researcher physically goes to the people, setting, site, or institution to observe or record behavior in its natural setting.
5. Qualitative research is descriptive in that the researcher is interested in process, meaning and understanding gained through words or pictures.
6. The process of qualitative research is inductive in that the researcher builds abstractions, concepts, hypotheses, and theories from details.

Developing an expanded understanding of the lived lives of individuals, how they make meaning, and how that meaning is altered by themselves or others clearly aligns with the six assumptions presented by Creswell and Merriam.

Further support for this approach is garnered by past research in the field on transformational learning. Transformational learning theorists Mezirow (1991) and Brookfield (1991) agree that a qualitative approach is the only methodology appropriate to this type of research. That to enter into the complexity of another's frame of reference requires extensive conversation over an extended period of time. From a depth

psychology perspective, studies, such as those by Boyd (1991), Dirkx (1997 summer), Scott (1997 Summer-b) and others, reference a naturalistic methodology quoting case studies or phenomenological research of transformation. In addition, all the transformational learning studies reviewed by Taylor (1997 Fall), regardless of their conceptual framework on learning and transformation, employed a "naturalistic" research design described as qualitative and phenomenological. Most used semi-structured interviews where participants reflected upon previous transformative experiences.

Further support for a qualitative methodology in understanding the social and cultural context is supported by Ratner (1997; 2001, September) and comes from direct e-mail communication between myself and one of the key theorists within sociocultural tradition, Etienne Wenger (1999). Wenger fundamentally believes that research directed at understanding how community effects meaning making must be rooted in the qualitative tradition.

Research Context

Six subjects were interviewed for this study. Each of these persons had previously participated in a nine-month leadership development institute to be referred to as Leadership Great Falls (LGF.) This program is part of a national model designed to develop community leaders. As described in their brochure and website, "Leadership Great Falls is a custom-designed community leadership development program. Our goal is to develop community trustees - people who accept responsibility on behalf of the whole community to ensure the common good." (This quote comes from the program's program material and cannot be cited for reasons of anonymity for the subjects in the

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study.) In the program, approximately 36 adults spend two weekends in retreats and seven days (one each month) in a learning environment directed toward their stated goal.

LGF selects a diverse population of participants. Examples of LGF graduates include attorneys, K-12 teachers, corporate CEOs, and ministers. Tuition is $2,250.00 and participation in every session is mandatory. Since 1985, approximately 400 people have participated in this program.

This adult learning program is founded in a constructivist, collaborative, and experiential approach to learning. Again quoting their brochure, "Participants will be actively involved in the research and study of community issues to better understand how systems in the community must work together for the common good. You'll learn by doing." This is further exemplified in one of their guiding principles: "Learning is active--learning by doing and by experiencing with emphasis on skill building and processing."

There are multiple reasons why I chose to study participants in LGF. First is the pedagogy which is founded on the following: "Four platforms support the curriculum: community connections, diversity, leadership skills, systems thinking." Having reviewed their curriculum, assisted in a few sessions, worked directly with the designers of their curriculum, and spoken with participants, it was obvious that this learning experience is founded upon the best practices for adult learning.

LGF's foundation of community leadership, collaboration, and teamwork are a second reason I chose this context to study. Given that this study looked at personal transformation as a phenomenon with a particular lens on the role of others, community,

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and cultural context, this learning experience allowed for the investigation of the individual, the social interaction between participants, and the cultural context.

The final reason for selecting this context was the participants. Through my own community involvement I have had many conversations over the last few years with LGF graduates who speak very clearly about how this experience changed their understanding about leadership, community, and themselves. While they didn't use the same terminology, these people described Leadership Great Falls as a transformative learning experience.

Research Participants

I interviewed six adults who had completed the adult learning experience of Leadership Great Falls between 1996 and 2001. Each subject participated in two interviews. To identify the participants I worked with the past executive director of the program, Pamela James. Ms. James left the position in August 2001, but was director for the previous four years. The nature of this program is such that the director is always present at the sessions and co-facilitates with one or more outside faculty. In addition, many graduates continue to work with LGF as facilitators, in community projects, or in supporting the program in various ways. Because of this, Ms. James has developed a very intimate relationship with many of the participants.

In conversations with Ms. James about this research, she was very confident that she could nominate several people that had experienced a significant change in their life because of this learning experience. I asked Ms. James to nominate ten people who had participated between the years 1996 and 2001. The reason for the time boundaries was

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twofold. The first reason is that previous to 1996, the curriculum was very different. During that time, the program was very didactic. Participants went to different locations in the city and spent the day meeting important people and receiving information about the city. These experiences were at places like city hall, the police department, United Way, etc.

The reason for ending with 2001 graduates is that since Ms. James has left, there have been unknown changes to the curriculum. By using this timeframe, all of the participants in this study experienced the same curriculum design. Also, interviewing persons who had been out of the program for at least two years provided time for personal reflection on LGF as a learning experience and on the continuing impact of any changes that might be attributed to their participation.

In addition to the years of participation, I also asked Ms. James to use the following criteria as a guideline when selecting participants:

- Individuals who have directly communicated to her that the program had a significant effect on their lives.

- Individuals who have taken some direct action in their lives that they attribute to LGF.

- Individuals who have publicly shared the impact LGF had on their lives with others.

I asked Ms. James to nominate a diverse group of people based on attributes such as gender, race, socio-economic class, vocation, etc. This study does not intend to consider diversity of participants or develop a representative sample. Though, having a diverse group of subjects allowed for greater variation in voice and experience, while adding more depth and a broader perspective to the interview process, data analysis, and interpretation of results. Ms. James provided me with twenty-four names.

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I called 19 of the suggested participants, making contact with 12. Three of the participants spoke highly of LGF, but did not speak of it as a transformative experience. Three spoke of it as a transformative experience, but were not enthusiastic about spending the time needed to do the interviews. Six spoke of significant change because of the experience and were willing to be in the study. I interviewed the 6-willing participants more in-depth, according to the protocol attached as Appendix A, then asked them to participate in a face-to-face interview.

During this interview I asked participants to identify a significant person with a sustained connection with them before, during and after the transformational period to share observations about the experience. The purpose was to provide additional confirmation of the transformation and to collect data on how the change process was perceived by a person close to the subject. The specifics of my interaction with significant others is further outlined in the section, Additional Data.

The six subjects who participated in the study ranged in age from approximately their early 40's to mid 50's. All were working professionals in leadership positions. Three had advanced degrees, two had bachelors, and one had an associate degree. Each of them fully participated in the leadership development experience described later in this chapter. The earliest participant was in the class of 1995 – 1996 and the most recent was 2000 – 2001. There were four women and two men. One woman was African-American and five appeared to be Caucasian. Three worked for not-for-profit organizations, one for a family foundation, and two in the business sector.

Because of the personal nature of the study, I limited participation to six subjects. participants. Transformation and meaning making are at the core of how individuals

engage in the world. By interviewing six participants I was able to spend more time seeking depth of understanding on how this change occurred in each person. In addition, given that this is a study asking individuals to reflect upon historical events, six participants assisted in eliminating some of the memory lapses that may occur within a single individual. Lastly, I chose multiple participants to contrast and compare their experience during the analysis process as a means of developing a better overall understanding of personal transformation.

Interviews were at locations selected by the participant. Of the twelve interviews, three were in my office, eight were in the subject's office, and one was in a coffee shop. Each participant signed a consent form that included permission to speak with the significant other. Pseudonyms are used throughout the study to preserve participant anonymity.

Data Collection

Most of the first interviews lasted the full 90 minutes allocated. I chose semi-structured interviews for the specific data collection because it is more conversational and assisted in developing the type of deep-level relationship needed to address issues of personal meaning making. The specific protocol for the interviews is attached (See Appendix D).

I developed questions for the second interview (approximately 60 minutes) designed to probe deeper on issues of importance or to clarify what I perceived as contradictions within and between participants. The protocol for these interviews is attached as Appendix E.

Additional Data

The first set of data was obtained from the significant others. While the concept of triangulation of data is less appropriate for qualitative research, a primary purpose of these interviews was to determine how, or if, this change was experienced by another person. The goal of these interviews was to develop a deeper understanding of the process of change in the subject as experienced by an observer. These were short, telephone interviews that lasted about 20 minutes. The protocol for these interviews is attached, as Appendix F. A consent form for this interview is also included as Appendix G.

In regards to the lived experience of the participants, the best approach would have been to have to directly observed the subjects. However, since this study is after their participation in the program, that was not possible. The next best approach would have been to observe the participants in the current class. Unfortunately, this was also not a viable option. With the departure of Ms. James, the curriculum has been changed to be more instrumental and less experiential. So, while the program may be valuable to the current participants, it is not representative of the experience shared by the people in this study.

To fulfill this part of my study, the documentation of the participants' experience was through the interview of a knowledgeable observer. This person was the former executive director, Ms. Pamela James. Ms. James actively participated in all of the learning sessions during her tenure at LGF. She provided a sense of the experiences by sharing both her observations and the direct comments made to her by participants. The

protocol for this interview is attached as Appendix H. The consent form for this interview is attached as Appendix I.

Data Analysis

I began the analysis process using a method framed within the phenomenological tradition requiring the identification of meaning units, central themes, general themes, and general structure, culminating in a general summary of the data (Creswell, 1998 . As the process of qualitative research calls upon constant reflection and reframing during analysis, I attended to the development of emergent explanations of the phenomena being studied (individual transformation) as well as searching for alternative explanations. This process was revisited during the report writing, and included in the analysis. Each of these stages required data reduction and inductive interpretation to generate meaning from the volumes of data.

Organization involved immersing myself in the data through several readings to become intimate with the data. In summarizing Ratner (1997; 2001, September), the first step was to identify "meaning units" within the document. A meaning unit might have been in varying length from a single word to several sentences. These units were related to a theme discovered by me after reading the entire document while being guided by the research question. The rigorous process of identifying meaning units provided a basis for further analysis. The intent at this level was to probe below the words to understand what the subject was trying to communicate. One of the fundamental tenets of this type of research is that expressions do not have a priori meaning but must be understood within the context of the conversation.

Once the meaning units were identified, they were paraphrased into "central themes." Quoting Ratner, "The central themes should represent the psychological significance of the meaning units." (2001, p. 2) The generation of central themes requires understanding what had been said in the entire context of the conversation. Again, it is the situation or context that defines the meaning. While culture may have a general definition for words, behaviors, and expressions, I sought to seek out the subject's meaning both situated and independent from the culture.

The next step was to group central themes into general themes. The general themes named the meaning of the central themes. For sociocultural research, during this stage it was important to pay special attention to cultural themes. In the development of general themes, I looked for ways in which the social environment, dominant culture, and sub-culture shaped the way the individual creates meaning.

Once these themes and general structures were identified, I read through the other interviews to determine if this structure was useful and if there are any omissions. When this was finished, I read each category as a single entity to confirm that everything fit. I also read those data not in a category to see if I had missed anything and to see if anything of importance remains.

After completing my own analysis, I returned to theory to see how my data aligned with existing models of transformation. Once I developed a plausible structure for this phenomena, I sought alternative explanations. This was a critical phase in which I tried to remove myself from my original explanation and look for other plausible explanation from other theoretical perspectives.

The final phase was to write the report. As presented by Marshall and Rossman, "Writing about qualitative data cannot be separated from the analytic process. In fact, it is central to the process, for the choice of particular words to summarize and reflect the complexity of the data, the researcher is engaging in the interpretive act, lending shape and form – meaning – to massive amounts of raw data." (1995, p. 117) Thus as I wrote my explanation for this phenomena, I continued to evaluate my conclusion as I located sufficient, substantial, and meaningful data to support my analysis.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, I was present in all the research. I framed the questions, designed the methodology, and collected, analyzed, and interpreted the data. In qualitative research, because of the direct interaction with the research participants and the iterative process of data collection, my role as researcher became magnified. This intimate relationship between subject and researcher required that I continually worked to identify my own biases, assumptions, and perceptions before engaging in the data collection. Merriam (1998a) makes it clear that all observations and analyses are filtered by the researcher's worldview.

However, the philosophical foundation for qualitative research is that there is no single objective truth. Our knowing or understanding of the world exists on many levels and thus this particular research becomes one type of knowing. Try as I might to eliminate bias, my perspective created a unique "reality" in which my understanding of the world is as present as the person being interviewed. The value of this as presented by Lincoln and Guba (1985) is that the researcher as instrument, offers significant

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advantages in bringing adaptation and insight to data collection as well as allowing intuition and real-time thoughtfulness to direct the entire research process.

Merriam (1998b) summarizes that this role requires three primary attributes of the researcher; tolerance for ambiguity, sensitivity, and good communication skills. The "answers" in qualitative research are not obvious. I had to live within the process and with the data for an extended period of time allowing the analysis and interpretation to emerge. There was an objective path during the interview process, always with the primary question in mind, I tried to be attentive to the nuance and underlying meaning of the communication process and shape the interaction with the participants in a way that best met the needs and intent of the research.

In addition, given that this type of research is asking of an individual to share a part of his or her world, I recognized that I was entering into a sacred space and needed to be sensitive to the emergence of personal feelings and emotions. Good listening and empathy were at the center of this process. Throughout this experience, I tried to "hear" what was being said and understand at a deeper level the full context of the communication beyond just words. In this type of qualitative research, even the reading and rewriting of the text and context required striving toward a higher degree of technical and intuitive skill to understand inwardly and communicate outwardly the complexity of the human beings in this study.

Limitations of the Study

This study is intended to develop a deeper understanding of individual transformation. This study is about the people I have gotten to know through the

interviews and collection of material. As a qualitative study, my intent was to understand in a deeper way how this phenomena of change was manifest in their lives. The results of this study are not designed to apply to anyone else. They are not generalizable to a larger population. Erickson (1986) emphasizes that the intent of qualitative research is not to develop abstract universal concepts that can be generalized to other populations. The meaning and value of this research is defined by the reader as he or she continues to find meaning in his or her world.

This does not imply that this work has no value to a larger community. This is an exploratory study and my hope is that its end result will be to expand upon an existing body of research in adult learning, adding to our understanding of transformative learning. While it is limited to the experience of this group of people, in this sociocultural context, the discoveries and implications may be of value in both our understanding and practice in education.

CHAPTER FOUR

STUDY CONTEXT AND THE SUBJECTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of others, society, and culture in the process of personal transformation and transformative learning.

This chapter is intended to introduce the reader to the subjects as people and their shared experience as participants in Leadership Great Falls. The information on the subjects was gathered from their interviews. The information on the LGF experience was gathered from the interviews of the six subjects and the interview with Pamela James, the past executive director of Leadership Great Falls. The purpose of this chapter is intended to provide context for the detailed finding presented in the following chapter.

The Subjects

Laura

Laura is a white female and the President and CEO for a major not-for-profit. As described by her, "[our organization's] mission is to help people with disabilities and barriers to employment to reach a level of self sufficiency through employment." The size of this organization is a seven million dollar operation with both retail and industrial facilities.

Her childhood was spent in a small, Midwest community that has a regional university. She was a "townie" with little relationship with the college. She described her childhood as, "...very peaceful, nice, you know, leave it to beaver kind of childhood." It

was a place where, "we didn't lock our door." Her family was active in the church, friendly with the neighbors, and engaged in primarily family related activities. A conservative childhood from the perspective of both family and community. A community where, "it seemed everyone knew your business."

Laura attended a public school. She describes her high school experience in the following manner:

> I truly enjoyed my high school experience. It was a good experience for me. I was actively involved in a lot of different things, the French club, the Honor Society. I received the Daughters of the American Revolutionary Award. I had fun in high school. I was a good kid. I was like every mother's dream. I didn't get into any trouble. I met my curfews. If I was going to be late I called. So, now you kind of have the picture of small town Laura.

As a student she got all A's and was on student council.

Laura has an older brother, older sister, and younger sister. Her older sister of three years has very severe cerebral palsy. "She was very severely disabled. She was never able to feed herself or anything so it was quite a burden on my parents because they had three children after her." This sister lived with the family until Laura was nine. "Then indeed they succumbed [her parents] to the professional advise of having her at the State Home for Crippled Children. So she left our family at that point in her life." Laura attributes this experience to the reason she is in her career today. "I don't believe that individuals should be institutionalized."

Laura attended college at a very large research based state university. Her choice was partly motivated by getting away from the small town atmosphere that she grew up in. "I selected [this university] on purpose because I knew that I could sit in a class of 300 if I chose to and listen to a lecture and take a test and be a number and for me at that point

in my life that was comfortable and I was intrigued by what that would be like." For Laura, the college experience was "intriguing and fun" with its size and diverse student population, much different from her small town upbringing.

She began in physiological psychology, but after "the first rat maze thing" decided it wasn't the right major. By her sophomore year she decided on psychology and had moved to taking smaller classes, realizing she did not want to "be just a number." During this year her mother died which she describes as "devastating." Her grades dropped and she worked through the pain, in part due to the support of her eventual and current husband. Upon graduating from college, she immediately pursued a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling.

After graduating with her masters, Laura has worked in several not-for-profit, governmental, and university-based agencies focused on employment related services for people with disabilities. She also had one position in which she was recruited to work for a very large manufacturer employing 6000 workers. Because of differences in "values and philosophy" she quit this job describing it as "the worst employment experience I ever had."

Laura came to her current organization in 1993 and has been President and CEO since 1996. Laura describes the passion in her work as, "in rehabilitation counseling focused on people with disabilities and the vocational lives of those individuals. Very involved with the inclusive movement of people with disabilities, barrier free design, employment opportunities, accommodations, deinstitutionalization, the breaking down of the sheltered workshops." Although she admits that in her current position she is no longer as directly involved with the actual process as she might like.

Laura described her reason for participating in Leadership Great Falls as stemming from her need as the CEO of her organization to have a leadership role in the community. To that end, "[she] didn't feel as familiar or comfortable with the community issues, the systems in the community that interact and interface and as a community leader, how can you impact those systems enough about the larger community issues." She believed that LGF would give her this perspective. Laura was so committed to the value of this experience that she asked her board to pay for her tuition in lieu of a pay raise for the following year. Her reasoning being, "I felt it was that important that I gain the skills that I anticipated."

Rachel

Rachel is the program director of a faith based, urban organization who's mission is, "to invite individuals, congregations, the community into greater reconciliation as together we promote justice be in cooperative ministry and celebrate God's love." The organization is ecumenical and provides leadership and support to a variety of community-based social justice initiatives such as the care of AIDS patients, education, ending poverty, and racial justice.

Rachel grew up in a working class neighborhood in a large midwestern city. She recalls her childhood as being a positive time. Lots of friends and community-based interaction, "It just seemed like it was kind of fun because it was real neighborhood based..." She attended Catholic schools. Middle school was difficult with the conflict of adolescence. As she describes it, "7th and 8th grade were kind of tough years. I just remember getting kind of picked on by the guys and just I thought, Like I want to go with them in high school. Your self-esteem drops."

For high school she attended an all girls school. This was a very positive experience, "I don't think we were maybe as inhibited or worried about maybe all that other stuff because it was just an all girl school. High school years were great years." She attributes this as the place where her leadership skills first began developing.

After high school, her original intent was to leave the area and attend a larger university. For financial reasons, she chose to attend a local Catholic college, where she had a scholarship. Her intention was to go here for two years and transfer elsewhere. As she describes this experience, "Well I ended up really liking it and my sophomore year I spent a semester in France. So that helped me get whatever out of my system that I needed to leave the area."

Upon graduation she became an elementary school teacher in a Catholic school. She enjoyed her teaching but described it as such, "I moved around there a lot. I started with young children, 2nd grade and then I was in junior high for most of it – 7th and 8th grade. And then getting to a point I thought, I need to change schools or change what I'm doing."

During this time she had connected with the organization she now works for through her congregation. During that time as a volunteer she had chaired several committees including, a hunger walk committee, a hunger shelter education committee, and a peace and justice committee. While working with the organization, one of the staff members quit. She voiced her interest in a position with the organization to the executive director and was hired as Assistant Program Director in the summer of 1994. A year later the Program Director left and she was promoted to this position. She reports directly to the executive director and is second in command of the organization.

Her reasons for participating in Leadership Great Falls were multiple. First she was encouraged by the executive director to participate. He had gone through the program and felt it would have value for her. A second reason was to develop her own leadership skills for application in her new vocation. And thirdly it was to develop a deeper understanding of the community and to develop community connections. She describes it in this manner, "I think it goes back to for me feeling so isolated from what was going on around me when I was teaching. I felt like I didn't really know what was going on in [the city]."

Brian

Brian is a white male and is the Chief Information Officer for one of the largest health care networks in the Midwest. In this Vice President level position, he describes his role as, "Having responsibility for information technology management across the entire organization. All the care delivery aspects in terms of the hospitals, long term care, home health, anywhere where patient care is provided."

Brian grew up in a small metropolitan area in the Midwest. He describes his community in this way, "Kind of, middle America. Population probably about fifty thousand, blue collar, my parents and grandparents were all raised there." He was the youngest of six children. In speaking about his childhood, "I think it was probably just pretty average, pretty typical being the youngest of six children you kind of had that family unit, if you will, and there's not really anything remarkable of my childhood."

He attended Catholic school through grade eight and a public high school. When speaking of his high school experience, "Public education was challenging in terms of budget issues back in the late '70's you know, sports programs - eliminate sport program,

arts programs - eliminate arts. Not that much unlike what schools are faced with as of late." High school did impact his career choice however, "My junior/senior year I started getting involved in information technology or data processing as it was called back then and I actually did like a co-op in high school with an accounting firm area and that's how I kind of got my feet wet in the whole information systems arena."

Brian attended a regional state university and received a B.S. in Accounting and Information Systems. He chose this university because he did not want to be a computer scientist but wanted to be involved in the business side of technology, particularly electronic data processing auditing. This was the emphasis of the particular university's program. While at college, he had the following epiphany, "I was finishing up my accounting degree and I was in my last few accounting core courses, which were auditing courses, I thought, "My god, what am I thinking?" I don't want to be doing this for the rest of my life. I started focusing more on the information system side of things." He later got an M.B.A. from a different state university.

With this new focus, he began his career as a Systems Analyst for a small health organization. His intention was not to go into the health area, it simply happened by coincidence. As he says, "I could have very easily ended up in manufacturing actually or retail." But continues when contrasting what his experience might have been in another environment, "It's very meaningful working in a health care environment." He continues when talking about his work in regards to a problem with information systems, "Okay, what's the impact on the patient, what's the impact on the clinician, what's the impact on the physician population that may have been rounding at the time. So it's a very different environment."

Working within his first health organization, he was continually given promotions, culminating with Regional Vice President. During that time he moved around to different health facilities managed by this organization throughout the state. As he describes this position, "I'd seek a promotion or whatever, kind of constantly changing in terms of scope and responsibility so forth so it was always fresh, always challenging, always providing opportunities for growth." He came to his present employer and position in 1997. He did this for stability of location and being able to have the same level of position at a much larger institution.

Brian's reason for attending LGF was to develop a deeper understanding of community connections and to further develop his understanding of systems. As he describes it, "It afforded me the opportunity to come together with a cross section of the community and to learn together more about the community." He continues, "Because of my I.T. background, realizing that things are interconnected, that the cause and effect aspect that everything has a relationship, and see that play out in the community environment." He concludes with, "I would not have otherwise been afforded the opportunity at least and within the timeframe that LGF did it. It would have taken me probably many years to have gotten that kind of exposure of the cross section of the overall community."

John

John is Vice President for New Business Development for a national architectural and engineering firm located in the Midwest. In this position he works within the marketing department and directly with new and existing customers to obtain new business. He is a white male.

John grew up in a small town on the East Coast near a major metropolitan city.

He describes it as, "a middle class, working class neighborhood." He describes his

childhood in the following way,

> It was fun, I had a good time, and we had a big family. I've got four
> brothers and one sister, nothing traumatic about. We lived fairly close to
> all my relatives on both sides of the family, so we did a lot of family
> things together. My parents both came from larger families so most
> everything we did, looking back on it now, probably for financial reasons,
> focused on interaction with the rest of the family. We didn't do a lot of
> things like we do now, not very much on vacations or things like that. We
> did weekend things, nothing out of the ordinary out of that. My mother
> didn't work out of the home, so she was there all the time.

John attended public schools with no particular memories of that experience.

During the summer after graduation in 1967, John got a job in surveying. That fall

he joined the navy. When he was home on leave, he continued to work for the same firm

because, "I always needed money." When he got out of the navy in 1970 he went to work

for the same firm full time. During this time he attended a one-year program in surveying

at a vocational and technical college. In 1972 he decided he no longer wanted to live on

the East Coast and moved to live with a friend in a major Midwestern city as a survey

field person.

After moving to the Midwest, to meet state surveyor licensing requirements, he

was able to take the qualifying exam based on past education and experience. However,

as he described it, "I failed so miserably in my first time I knew that I had to get at least

some education if in fact I was going to be able to pass the exam." To that end he

enrolled in a Land Surveying Associate Degree program at a local community college.

Reflecting on this experience, "I took that degree and without it I would have never been

able to learn all the higher math or anything like that."

During this time he was hired by his professor at the community college as a surveyor and received his license after graduation. In 1976 he then took a new job as a surveyor in the upper Midwest. Here, he and three others started their own surveying company in 1979. In 1987 he moved to a large metropolitan area in the Midwest to expand the company and to move away from the cold, unpopulated area he was living in. Two years later his company merged with a larger Architectural/Engineering firm. In late 1990 he left and became a consultant for a firm in a small metropolitan city in the Midwest. In 1992 he was hired at his current firm to develop a surveying unit to complement their other services. He became a Vice President in 1999.

John joined Leadership Great Falls for his own personal development, to have an impact on the community, and develop a network of people for himself and his position at work. In responding to why, he states, "It was a learning experience, I like meeting new people and doing new things, it makes the day go by quickly and you can learn about yourself as well." In continuing, "I wanted to help impact the community and also help the community, be a steward in some way, but also have a broader base of network."

Sherri

Sherri is an African-American female. She is currently a Program Officer for a fully endowed family foundation with year 2000 assets of approximately $160,000,000. During this same year, grant payments were approximately $6,200,000. In describing her position, "If I worked at a bank I'd be called a loan officer. It's a similar role. It's a duel? diligence role. People in my job do research and evaluation. We go out and make sure that grantees who are looking for gifts actually have the capacity to do what they say they want to do, so, that's sort of the research role." She continues, "After they get the money,

people like me make sure they go out and spent it the way they said they would. So, that's where the evaluation comes in."

Sherri grew up in a major city in the Midwest. Up until she was nine she lived in a low income neighborhood and then moved to a middle class area of the city. During this time she experienced a lot of "white flight" from the areas where she lived. When describing her childhood,

> We had a not ideal childhood; I was raised by my stepfather, both parents worked, so, they weren't home very much. I understand the sacrifices, but kids whose parents were home say they wish they were gone and kids whose parents were gone wished they were home. So, we were principally raised by extended family or raised ourselves. I'm here really by the grace of God. I should be hung out to dry somewhere for all of the stuff we got into. It was fine comparatively. When I've heard other people's childhood stories mine are probably middle of the road okay, they're not awful and they weren't great.

She began her education as a "Head Start Baby" and attended public school. Sherri was very successful in school. In describing this experience, "I was at the head of my class forever. I was the smart kid they put in the back with a book because I was annoying the teacher. Went to honors classes all the way through high school." After graduation, she attended a large, research based, state governed university.

At the university, she experienced tremendous academic difficulties. She found that her high school experience had not prepared her for college. She relates her story in this way,

> Then I went to [the university] and was on academic probation from the time I got there until the time I got off, so I was horribly unprepared, even though I was at the top of my class in high school, just was not prepared at all, so I spent a year, really, just being angry, just mad. I couldn't believe, I couldn't believe it. I sailed through school and got to [the university] and just got knocked on my heels.

To get a handle on her problems, she took a semester off and attended a local community college near the university. She then returned to the university and completed her degree in Business Administration.

After graduation she worked in sales at a small wholesale/retail furniture company in a medium city in the Midwest. From there she moved to sales at Xerox. After working in sales for several years, she moved to the Neighborhood Business Specialist Program. This was a neighborhood revitalization program funded by the City and the Chamber of Commerce. She then moved up to Vice President of Small Business at the Chamber. After seven years she left and went into consulting for a strategic communications consulting at a company. She was then recruited into her present position by her old boss at the Chamber who is now executive director of the Foundation. This was in approximately 1999.

Sherri's attended Leadership Great Falls when she worked for the Chamber. Her reason for attending was because it was a program housed and supported by the Chamber and thus it was expected. As she describes it, "I worked at the Chamber at the time and you know you have to sort of walk the talk and it was expected of me to go, so, I avoided it for a long time. I'm just not into credentialing, I don't care." To elaborate on her position,

> "I think you're just as bright and have as just as much to give with or without what [formal education] is going to say about you. So, I didn't feel I needed to go through some certificate program to tell me I was a leader, I was wrong, it was good in that way, but, I didn't want to go, I wasn't there to really give anything, I just was going because it was, sort of, a right of passage, I was suppose to get through this thing."

Said succinctly, Sherri did not want to attend this program.

<u>Sharon</u>

Sharon is a Vice President in commercial banking for one of the largest banks in the Midwest, a top ten bank in the nation. In her role she is responsible for business development and portfolio management. She describes a normal day for her as, "Interacting and introducing myself to new people and maintaining my relationships with existing clientele and problem solving." She is a white female.

She grew up in rural town in the Midwest. In describing her childhood, "It was great! It was small city living, that's for certain, a lot of farm experience and animal husbandry and things of that nature, lots of kid time, play." Sharon grew up in a banking family.

Sharon describes her public school experience as "normal." Upon high school graduation she attended a regional university where she received her Bachelor of Science in Business Administration. Her major was finance and her minor was economics. She completed her MBA through the university's Extension Program about nine years after completing her undergraduate degree.

After receiving her Bachelors, she began work in banking as a Commercial Credit Analyst in the Midwest. She moved around in the banking industry, working primarily on loans and the financial area. She moved to a larger metropolitan area in 2000 to take her current position with a new bank. When describing her current position, "I get the yahoo out of the job, or the wahoo, or whatever you want to call it, to help someone grow their business and to bring them resolutions to problems that have been plaguing their company for a period of time."

Sharon's reason for attending Leadership Great Falls was because of the urging of some key individuals in her business domain, to develop her leadership skills, and to better understand the greater community in which she was living. In regards to those people suggesting she should participate, she shares, "When you have people like [the region's primary economic development officer] and the president of [a major bank] at the time, which was one of our competitors, saying that this is what you need to do to really get involved and become a community leader and make a difference, you know, I knew that I just had to."

In reference to leadership she says, "Being a leader, either in community or in business or in a family or whatever, to me those people either have an inherent ability or it's a learned process and I just I think any time that you can enhance those skills it's going to pay off either in your personal life or your professional life." In response to understanding the community she provided the following context,

> Being an outside in the state and looking at [this city] throughout my childhood and the recession of the '70's and '80's, [this city] was the only city, maybe even in the Midwest that was actually experiencing some level of growth and expansion. You have to ask yourself why is that, how does a city become immune to economic turn down and all of that.

To answer this question, she joined LGF to "kind of look at the organizational underpinnings or the forefathers [of the city.]" She continues, "You get into the culture and the understanding of how it is they do what they do."

Leadership Great Falls Experience

This section is intended to provide an overview of the Leadership Great Falls (LGF) program. This section creates a context for the experience and will assist the

reader in making sense of the following chapters. Further details and a deeper understanding of the experience will be provided in these subsequent chapters.

Overview

There are nine sessions in this learning experience over nine months. The first and last sessions are two day retreats (including an overnight stay.) The remaining seven sessions is each one full day. There is a general curriculum and four platforms upon which the program is based. The platforms are systems thinking, diversity, community connections, and leadership skills. Pamela James, the former executive director described the four platforms in the following manner,

> The diversity piece played out in a lot of ways. In terms of the diversity of environment that we took people into as well as the approach of the kinds of people we wanted to have all kinds of leaders, racially, socioeconomic, non-profit, highly corporate getting them all mixed in the class at the same time, systems thinking, understanding all the systems in the community and how they all impact each other and how they are all interconnected, community connections in terms of forming relationships to accomplish great things for the community, leadership skills, to know thyself as a leader.

The intention here and the process that follows dates from a curriculum change begun in 1996 and corresponding to the participants in this study. A LGF graduate, former board member, and member of the curriculum design team describes the old Leadership Great Falls curriculum as a lot of "talking heads" (Olivarez, 2003). It was very passive. There was a belief that the new model needed to be contextualized. That the participants needed to feel the issues not just hear about them.

Along with the four platforms described above, Olivarez communicated that there was a realization by the board and sponsors of LGF that organizational leadership wasn't enough. The intent of this program was to move beyond leadership to stewardship, to

develop within the participants an understanding of themselves, their organization, and the larger community. As leaders, community issues such as racism, poverty, education, and health care needed to be held in trust.

Using the four platforms and this philosophy of leadership and learning as a guide, all nine sessions are designed and facilitated by a team of previous LGF graduates. Each session has a different volunteer team. A full-time director and one administrative assistant provide guidance and support to this team.

Each participant must apply to be part of LGF and must sign a contract agreeing to participate in all nine sessions. The participant's employer must also sign a contract committing the employee's time to participate in all nine sessions. Great attention is given to selecting leadership participants directed toward providing a high degree of diversity. Thus the final group of approximately 36 participants is comprised of people of different race, age, sex, employment sectors, education, economics, and so forth.

Opening Retreat

The first gathering for a new class is the opening retreat. Because the participants stay overnight, in addition to planning and facilitating this session, previous LGF graduates also cook and "take care of" the new class during this two-day weekend. Since 1996, this session has been at a camp-like retreat facility in the country. The facility has extensive nature trails, open space, meeting spaces, and a "ropes" course. All but one of the subjects in this study stayed at a retreat facility. The 1995 - 1996 LGF graduate stayed at a hotel and her group drove to the ropes course.

Upon arrival at the retreat facility, the new class is individually greeted by a few past LGF graduates, the director, and a few hired staff. With some classes, nametags with

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first name only were given out at this time, with other classes no nametags were shared. At no time is there a formal introduction process. In addition, there is no sharing of an individual's professional credentials such as place of employment, job title, or educational background. The primary activities of these two days are learning and practicing the skills of dialogue, team building exercises, and going through a ropes or challenge course.

The dialogue training has been performed by Bonnie Wesorick and Laurie Shiparski, authors of *Can The Human Being Thrive In The Work Place: Dialogue As A Strategy Of Hope* (Wesorick & Shiparski, 1997). As described by Pamela, the intention of this training is as follows:

> One of them [goals of dialogue] would be, better relationships, another one would be an expanded view of another person, or the person in front of you to maybe be able to hold an opposite of yours through listening but not totally give up your own position and to grow and understand how you were united. You may be at polar opposites of a position but have similar goals within it and to try to be honoring of the group as a whole.

In this training, Wesorick and Shiparski introduce the model and then create and maintained a practice field for the entire retreat. Dialogue is first practiced in a hypothetical situation, and then integrated into debriefs after each of the weekend activities.

This first retreat also includes several teambuilding activities. To do this, teams are created by the facilitators to include a diverse configuration of members. The teams remain intact throughout the retreat. They are then asked to perform tasks or solve problems that require group decision making, problem solving, and cooperation. After each activity, dialogue is practiced to have the participants share their experience and how the activities related to the goals of LGF.

The other major event for the retreat is the ropes course. The ropes course is a series of activities that require members of the teams to traverse many outdoor obstacles. Examples include climbing a very high wall, walking across a high bridge made of rope, leaping across water on the end of telephone poles sticking out of the ground, and crawling through tires hanging from a rope. While many of these activities need to be done by an individual, others are performed as a team. However, even with the individual activities, members of the assigned team perform the safety support role and provide emotional support for an individual member's success.

The ropes course, as well as the end of the retreat, finish with reflection and dialogue. Participants are also asked to complete a reflection sheet at the end of this, and all future sessions. This is an anonymous reflection on the experience of the session. In addition, at the end of the retreat, the new members receive a book that provides information on all LGF participants, past and present. This book provides a profile that describes a great deal about the new people in this group including employment, job title, life experiences, education, current commitments, and hobbies.

Monthly sessions

A team of past LGF graduates plans monthly sessions. They are held all day, at the same time and day each month (e.g. third Friday of the month.) Each session is held at a different location in the community. Examples of these locations include the community college, a hospital, a not-for-profit that repairs homes for the poor, City Hall, a law firm, the wastewater treatment plant, the county jail, and a major manufacturer. Each session begins with everyone sitting in a large circle. In that circle, dialogue is practiced to allow each person to speak. Each person responds to any thoughts they have

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during the month based on the last month's experience. Typical questions include,

"Could you practice what you learned during the month?" Or "What's going on in your

life – anything you want to share?" Also at this time, the director will share the

anonymous reflections from last session as a point of dialogue.

After the opening dialogue, the group generally tours the site. After the tour, the

group is then introduced to some new learning. The general themes for learning is framed

by the four platforms of LGF and connected to the site being visited. An example is

teaching systems thinking and interconnectedness at the wastewater treatment plant. The

theory of systems is introduced and then the processing of waste is used as an example of

how it applies to the real lives of the participants. The day ends again with a dialogue

circle and the writing of anonymous reflections about the day.

Community Project

In addition to the nine sessions, each participant is required to learn and report on

a leadership issue important to them and the community. In their second monthly

meeting, the group brainstorms issues. They then individually rank the three projects as

to which one's they would be most interested in working on. At the following session, the

director assigns people to groups of approximately six people based on their preference

and group diversity. Examples of issues include the effect of urban renewal on displacing

low-income housing, finance in an urban school district and racial profiling.

Each group then spends the next five months researching this area. Much of the

research involves meeting and interviewing people in the community who are

knowledgeable on the topic. As part of the process, they interview people on all sides of

the issue. As a group they plan what information they need and where or from whom to

get it. Once the information is collected, they develop a consensus understanding of the issue and developed a presentation for the final retreat.

Ending Retreat

The ending retreat is again a two-day, overnight session. Participants plan the closing retreat themselves and it includes a service project for the community. This might include cleaning an inner city park or working at a soup kitchen. Another significant component of ending retreat includes each group presenting what they learned in their project, dialogue about these projects, individual reflection and dialogue about the entire year's experience. There were some group activities, but these are primarily designed to connect to the learnings of the previous year. All or part of this retreat is attended by facilitators from the past year and several previous LGF graduates.

Two Year Commitment

As part of their original commitment, LGF graduates are highly encouraged to remain active for two years beyond their one-year experience. There are many ways to do this. There is a yearly "Big Event" where LGF honors a community leader and various fund raising activities (including the Big Event.) Participants may elect to engage in a recruitment drive and dinner. Periodic special events bring in speakers specializing in leadership skills for community presentations. They may opt to plan and facilitate one of the nine sessions. Most participants honor this commitment for at least the two years, many continue for years beyond.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the shared experience of the participants through an analysis of the key themes that emerged when viewing their stories as one. I have identified three major themes with multiple subcategories under each. The major themes are 1) the context of their learning, 2) the sources of their learning, and 3) their individual learning. The difficulty of this analysis is that the nature of this learning experience was framed within a holistic, experiential, critically reflective pedagogy. Thus, while key themes did emerge, many of the major and sub-themes crossed over and were present in multiple areas of the learning experience.

An example is personal reflection. This is a key theme identified in self as a source of learning. However, personal reflection also is present in dialogue, which is a context for learning as well as in new information, which is another source of learning. A similar dilemma is present when separating process from outcome. The third major theme, individual learning, provides an overview of the key learnings for the participants. This is clearly an outcome. However, most of the other themes which are generally considered part of the learning process also have learnings that emerged within the theme itself. To create a full picture of the experience for the reader, the outcomes have been identified within each process theme as appropriate.

The Context of Leadership Great Falls

In this section I introduce the elements that emerged as the context of Leadership Great Falls. The context is the larger setting in which the learning occurred. This includes

not only the physical, but more so the affective environment that surrounded this experience. This category was developed from the specific activities or experiences that the subjects identified as shaping the overall learning experience. There are four sub-themes in this category. These categories are 1) Initial Removal of Roles and Labels, 2) Community Building, 3) Skill of Dialogue, and 4) Group Dynamics.

Initial Removal of Roles and Labels

As identified in the previous chapter, the opening retreat began with people not being introduced by their position, job title, professional history, organizational affiliation, etc. The purpose and result of this was the subjects getting to know their classmates at a deeper level as people, not as lawyers, bankers, CEOs, etc. The long-term benefit was an openness and sense of community that continued through the year.

For most participants, this was a novel way to begin a gathering of professionals and thus there was an initial level of shared discomfort. As long-time leaders, their historical experience was that meetings were structured around the roles of the participants and the purpose of the meeting. In this instance, people knew why they were there, but were caught off guard by the removal of personal roles. As described by the banker Sharon:

> Well, the opening retreat is, in my opinion, getting people out of their
> comfort zone and getting people used to the fact that structures don't
> always exist that we're comfortable with and we have to learn to function
> without them and to not put labels on people right away.

When the executive director first took the job at Leadership Great Falls, it was just a couple weeks before the new class started. Because a group of past LGF graduates, as with all the sessions, was planning this retreat, she did not know about this way of starting the retreat. Given this, she experienced this same

discomfort of beginning with no initial information being shared in the opening

session:

> My first year, I asked too, don't people have name tags? "No, we don't do that." Nobody even told me why, which, I just, even after the first retreat, October/November, I thought, heck, we could have nametags and just have there first name. It just seemed kind of extreme to me until I got into the program and it was like, that was really important. That made a huge impact on people.

What was communicated however was that this beginning, with no names

or titles explicitly proclaimed the implicit curriculum of the program. Not

sharing where people worked, job responsibilities, and so forth set an expectation

that this retreat and future sessions would focus on the individual. This

underlying expectation was one of acceptance of the participants as people. As

shared by Laura:

> ...as you're going through this process you don't know that you're working together with architects and the chief of police and the CEO of such and such a company and the marketing person for so and so and whatever. You're a group of people who are coming together to be able to work together, talk together openly and honestly and dialog and I really think that really set the stage in an important way, which made the whole rest of the learning experience, again, in my opinion, much more positive and meaningful because you were learning in an environment of trust and comfort with your peers.

This process also freed the participants from the constraints of their own

organizational roles, as described by Laura, "...there was no expectation placed on me

because I was the president and CEO of [a large not-for-profit.]"

The effect of this removal of roles was identified by all of the participants as

having a tremendous impact on their overall experience in LGF. Rachel identified how

organizational titles may cause one to privilege the voice of one person:

I don't know I just liked that approach. I didn't know if they were a CEO of their company. Sometimes titles, I think you may, you don't even realize you're doing it, but you may put people maybe on a pedestal a little bit or you think wow, they really must know a lot so I'm going to listen to them more than someone else.

Laura elaborated on how she might have constrained her behavior and willingness to be open because of the impact of titles and positions in the community. "I placed no expectations based on title or employment or status on anyone else. So, it seemed to create this kind of level playing field." She continues that by removing the roles and titles, "I think what it did was just make us all just people."

Brian was very specific about the impact of labels and his own recognition of how labels effect his interaction with others:

> You're brought together you start learning about each other without those kind labels. That was just kind of an ah-ha in terms of, you know, how much we take for granted when we go to meetings and we do introductions in a work environment. You're not introducing yourself as the individual as you so much are the role that you fulfill within that organization

Sherri spoke deeply of how our way of being is constrained by people's position and connection. She further elaborates on how the removal of these barriers allowed for the development of deeper relationships:

> I'll speak from "I", there's so much that comes with title, it's all about power and, you know, history and, you know, breadth of experience and all of those things that you overlay on people by virtue of what letters are behind their name or what position they have in the community and, you know, who they might know and those types of things and how you can behave, you know, because that might get back to your boss, I mean it's just all of those filters that you put up and by not acknowledging those until after [the retreat], they allowed us to form some relationships without it and it just works, it just really works.

Sharon experienced this at a personal level where people were asking about her as a person, the attributes of her life, her life history, who she was outside of work:

We have to learn to function without them and to not put labels on people right away instead of saying, well, Sharon, what do you do for a living, people were asking me more questions like, where do you live, where did you grow up, you know, what do you like to do in your spare time, do you work downtown, do you work outside of the city, that sort of thing. They never really asked me about my occupation,

What became the overall result of this experience of removing organizational ties, job titles, community connections, and so forth was knowing "you as a person" as stated by Rachel.

The relationships that formed between people because of the absence of their roles in life were clearly articulated by the subjects in this study. Rachel describes the experience in this manner:

> I got to know people based on not a title, not their job category or their skills that they had for their job but I got to know them on how we interacted in our group and how we built the team together, kind of their personality came out there.

Sherri describes this experience as, "I think it's just, it's just terrific, learn about each other first, learn about each other's hearts first." She continues that once you know someone from the heart, then the fact that one person is a Dominican Nun and the other a lesbian, feminist didn't matter. Sherri thought, "it was just extraordinary to watch those folks come together."

For Sherri, this meant getting to know people she might never interact with, people she might never meet or get to know in her typical life. The key to this experience was having what Margaret Wheatley describes as "having a conversation that matters:"

> There was a guy in our class, I think he was a machinist or something, he was a welder or something, I don't know how they found him, why they found him, where they got him. He was a nut, but bright, had a lot to offer but, I know I wouldn't have given him ten minutes of my time because, first of all I wouldn't have met him, he was a machinist, a shift worker so our lives are just different. I wouldn't have ever... I don't know how I

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would have met him, and I don't know that I would have...I don't think we would have engaged on community level issues. I think we would have talked about baseball or children or church, I don't think we would have talked about persistent social issues or sustainable social change.

Sherri makes sense of this as being constrained by certain roles that we project that effect our interaction with others. Much of this can be explained by the personal biases that are brought to each interaction. This experience tried to remove these biases as described by Sharon, "I think the whole idea was to get away from labeling people and putting them in a box for which they don't belong."

Sherri elaborates on how this bias effects her interaction with others and how removing these barriers allowed her to find a common bond between people she would have historically ignored:

> It was just really powerful to have had that experience prior to the usual introduction, which includes your credentials. I think it allowed us to connect in a way that we wouldn't have otherwise. I just really believe that if I had known that one of the folks I care a lot about I probably wouldn't have worked real hard to get to know them because I have a bias against attorneys, same for accountants. I don't believe they add any wealth they just sort of distribute the wealth and that just, you know, I have some biases about that. If you take all that away and what you're left with is faith and family and work in that order instead of work and other things followed behind it. I think that really served us well. It helped me a lot just because I was bringing so much baggage in to it. It helped us get off on more solid footing than I think we would have otherwise.

What resulted from this structure was a sense of personal openness and community between the participants. For Laura, this effect was transparent during the retreat, but only made visible at the end:

> I'm not sure I even recognized it was happening until we talked about the fact that it had happened and it like dawned on me that that really did make the two days different. Had I known that the Chief of Police of some city was there would I have felt a little less comfortable doing some of the ropes course stuff? If I had known that so and so was the board at such and such of a bank would I have been as open to talk?

This openness and getting to know each other on a personal level, without the burden and bias of roles, created a strong sense of community. For Sharon, "There was a distinct feeling at the end of the day on Saturday of community and connection with that group of people that you really didn't want to leave them. It was almost like a new found family and that was really rather heart breaking."

As the retreat ended, the sharing of the participant directory provide further evidence of community and the barriers that are often created by roles. Sherri describes it at an emotional level; "at the end of that day or close to the end of that day is when they passed out the leadership guide where we learned all of the titles and all that good stuff. I was just shocked"

Sherri further elaborates on the source of this emotion from the joy of community and her own awareness of the diversity of people coming together:

> They give us the leadership directory or the leadership guide that tells you what everybody is or what everybody does and it was just wonderful to look around that room and see the kinds of ties that had been put together that had been put together by people who shouldn't like each other at all.

John describes a similar experience. He also elaborates on this ending as a time for his own personal reflection about trying to get to know the authentic person behind his or her public mask:

> I can still remember when I left that day at the end of the two days and they gave me the little booklet that had the overview of each individual, their picture and so forth and I can remember going home that Saturday night and flipping through that and going, oh, I wouldn't have thought that person was in that role or I wouldn't have thought that, oh, or that makes sense, or whatever and so it was just one of those, it was a different approach that really for me kind of highlighted the concept that I intuitively knew but I don't always practice and that is to get to know the person for the person before you get their persona of who they are trying to present themselves as being.

Thus the first major experience and theme to emerge for the participants was the startling opening of the retreat where they were not able to present themselves by their roles and positions in the community or workplace, but as people.

Community Building

People began as individuals. Most of the people arriving at the retreat did not know each other. It was the primary intention of this retreat to first bring people together as a community and to provide them with a few foundational skills that would be used throughout the learning experience. Specifically, as outlined by the executive director, the opening retreat was about using "a challenge course and various exercises for trust building and dialog building skills."

The following quote by Sherri, an African-American woman, describes the natural grouping that occurred as participants first arrived and transitioned from individuals to a more inclusive group as the retreat progressed:

> When we got there the first sort of organic groups were women, men, white, black, tall, short, I mean, it's fun to watch groups come together and we, from what I remember, that's how we came around. I had talked to a couple of the women of color who were there first and then other women and then men. That was kind of my movement through the group and then as we…as the facilitators took us through the exercises even those labels went away. They assumed, deliberately, put us in different groups with folks we wouldn't have otherwise talked too naturally, and so we were able to come together that way.

The purpose of this retreat and becoming a group was also clear to Rachel, "So that first session was, I mean, I felt like we were really working on building our own community, our own small personal community."

This process of community building began with specific group exercises. As described by Laura, "some of the group activities were setup to create some type of

tension within the group that you could work through." This included group puzzles to solve, tasks with hula-hoops, etc. However, the primary activity identified as bringing these individuals together as a community was the ropes or challenge course. This was a foundational experience for the participants in Leadership Great Falls.

Laura identified the holistic value in the ropes course experience. She said "through the whole two-day ropes course experience, that was not only the physical ropes course, but the emotional bonding that also occurs in that process, to begin to build a community within those participants really was a unique learning experience for me by design."

For Brian, the vice-president of information systems, the experience of the ropes course was deepest when he observed others breaking outside of their own comfort zone:

> There was that camaraderie when you were doing the ropes course and
> you were encouraging one another and you were encouraging people to
> take risks to the level they were comfortable with and you were just as
> you said the community you felt very engaged. I think, there were
> numerous people or individuals that were successful crossing the ropes
> course that I probably felt a greater sense of accomplishment in that they
> crossed it verses myself just because of knowing, getting to know the
> individual and what they might have been perceiving in the
> struggle for doing that course.

John described a similar experience:

> We had the student, this young girl; I was holding the ladder when she
> went up, holding the ladder, I was under the ladder, holding the ladder
> like this while she walked up there and she had the look of absolute terror
> on her face going up there and I found that pretty impressive that she
> would do that, trusting all these people that she didn't know to help her
> through this process.

The ropes course was also about deciding how individuals would work within a team. In describing one of the exercises, John makes the following observations:

The point being you could even…you could save most the people and abandon others and so you had to come up with a criteria of what you were going to do each time you did this. You had to say, well, first of all, it's important that everyone gets across. Yes. That set the tone, from there on you had to decide how you were going to everybody to this other segment and they were all like that. You had to think about the large community in every problem that you did and was it okay to sacrifice somebody else for the larger group. As I recall in our group that was never okay.

Beyond developing empathy for others, the ropes course had a personal component. Brian identified this team building work as a point of personal growth and reflection, "well if it was competitive it wasn't competitive, you knew at the end of the day part of this was learning about yourself as well as the team." Sherri also identified the ropes course as a growth experience that allowed her to put aside some of her own fears:

Folks, who would have traditionally intimidated me, you know, I saw them hanging from a rope and needing my help or else they were going to fall and so and they were put in situations where they had to depend on me instead of me being so intimidated by them that I couldn't partner with them or collaborate with them, so, really it lends itself to breaking down those barriers.

In addition to the team building exercises and the power of the ropes course in facilitating team building, time was identified as a significant factor in the progression from a group of individuals to a community.

Brian provides an example of how time in the two-day retreat began a connection that allowed for deep personal sharing:

I think it was all part of the bonding process, obviously you spend enough time with a person and they start to get comfortable with you and they start telling more and more about themselves personally you get a lot more empathy for them, you listen to them I think a little bit more closely.

Rachael also identifies the value of time:

I really feel like if something like that happens that it takes some time and so that as you're spending this time together you're getting to know

people better but also when people show a willingness to listen to you and really use dialog skills that's how it can happen because then they feel like they're respected for what they're saying even though you may not agree with it

What emerged was a community. Rachel describes the result of this overall experience as developing trust amongst the participants, "You can do this. Just push yourself a little bit and see what you can do and accomplish. And it was just that kind of that camaraderie I guess." This sense of trust continued beyond the two-day retreat into the following sessions. Laura provided an elaborate confirmation of the long-term effect of this retreat:

> I don't know that there was one person who didn't have some kind of extremely important things happen to them in the space of that two days. Whether it was for me the jumping off or falling off backwards off a thirty-five foot platform or whether it was draw your life and let's talk about the good things, the bad things that have happened to you, your timeline, your life timeline or whatever. Whatever it was everyone left there having had a meaningful experience of some sort and we all talked about those and I think when you do that you come together having shared emotionally and having shared physically and having shared intellectually and that just set the tone for me for the whole rest of the time we're together.

The continuing trust that was established in this first retreat, and supported in further sessions, was identified by Sharon when in a later session she chose to share with the group that she was part of a law suit against a former employer. It was a sexual harassment case in which she was asked to testify. She described this experience in the following way:

> I really opened up and let the group know what was going on … I launched this through tears of which the impact on me about dialog and those conversations and feeling free. I would have never done that in a room full of forty some odd people. I would have never done that, I mean, it was all confidential, it was stuff I wasn't suppose to be talking about that I had to get off my chest, if you will. I'd have never done that, so, the impact on me was profound, I mean, I don't know.

This level of trust allowed the group to engage in deeper issues of importance. For Sherri, "I think what LGF did for me mostly was provide me an avenue to interact with others in a delicate fashion, to know that it's not going to erupt into this huge confrontation that might get ugly." Rachel identified this togetherness as, "it seems like we built this relationship with each other where for the most part there was a feeling of like trust with the group." She contrasted this feeling to a typical educational environment in the following way, "We felt free to say really what we believed and not worried that someone's going to...not like in school where you feel like you're criticized."

John confirmed how this feeling of trust created a powerful platform for the sharing of ideas:

> There was emotion, you know, people would be very emotional and passionate about any number of issues and because of the, I think, because of the setting where you felt like you were within a group of people that were your peers or you're real close to who, it never seemed to be directed at individuals it was directed at a situation.

Sharon summarizes the impact of this two-day experience of no names and the ropes course as such:

> It's funny because, it's kind of at a paradox on one hand, when you walk into the opening retreat they don't have any nametags or anything and they want you out of your comfort zone, you do the high ropes, you're out of your comfort zone, you're talking about sensitive issues you're out of your comfort zone, yet, the paradox is and the dialogical piece is they give you practice rules and dialog skills and then they want you to talk about sensitive issues and get down to the crux of it, so, it's a co-existence.

A community built on trust was a theme that clearly emerged. It began through the activities, the ropes course, and time. It was fostered throughout the

one-year experience. A key element in this trust was the use of dialogue. This tool was taught at this first retreat and used in all subsequent sessions.

Skill of Dialogue

The one constant in the LGF experience, other than the participants themselves, was dialogue. It was introduced in the first retreat. It began and ended every day session. The rules of respect, acceptance, and seeking to understand the beliefs and options of others were used to frame every minute of the experience. The essence of dialogue is inherent in the comment by Brian, "Learning to listen as opposed to speaking and learning for true meaning in terms of what the other classmates in the LGF class were saying, so really trying to focus on the whole person and the true meaning of their words and so forth."

Dialogue was introduced as a skill at the opening retreat. It was then applied, first in practice, and then as a continual way of interaction. Laura outlines how it was introduced:

> "This is dialog. Here's kind of the rules." Then you share some and tweak the rules so they become your rules, which I think was good. So, it was a skill that was taught. ... And then it was practiced, and practiced, every session both opening and closing and often in between. And the use of it in leadership for me made conversation safe and let every voice be heard in our session.

Laura further elaborates on the rules of dialogue:

> Dialog, the way they teach it in leadership the way they teach it, which is the "I" statements, the listening and accepting the...you don't cut people off, you don't interrupt, you hear them through, you try and understand as deeply as you can.

Sharon shares how these rules provided a safe space for sharing:

> Well, yeah, I think I had talked earlier about feeling comfortable with the group and in a setting where there are boundaries, where there is a

practice field, where you can feel free to express yourself without labels and that is only accomplished through the agreement, the collective agreement of the group and the support of the group and people embracing other people's viewpoints no matter how different it is.

Brian describes how dialogue as practiced was different from typical conversation outside of this learning experience:

> Oftentimes [outside of LGF] when somebody says something to you if you're ready to respond to what you heard you don't hear all of what they said because you're thinking about your response instead of thinking about what they said. I had a tendency to do that, try to complete somebody else's sentences or interrupt them when they were not done because I think they're done and I quickly want to get my point of view across.

Laura provides an additional perspective on how dialogue is different than the average human interaction:

> I have the tendency to be thinking ahead to my next, my next statement or quite literally making a decision. Do I agree with what you've said, do I not agree with what you've said, where is this going, what are the action steps? I tend to run ahead of the conversation a little bit especially in a business environment. I'm also fairly quick in some cases to decide, no, I disagree with that. Where as in dialog that's not what dialog's all about. Dialog is not to be rushing ahead. Dialog is to take the time to really listen and to hear, to not feel like you have to say anything, which, again, for me in a professional sense is hard to do.

The result of these boundaries and experiences was a deep listening to people as people. As described by Brian, "The whole issue in terms of trying to really have dialog and be intent in listening to what people were sharing and understanding their point of reference, understanding what they brought to the table and so forth." Rachel supports this with her reflection on dialogue, "I remember the listening and understanding component."

Silence was also identified as a key component in dialogue. For John, the form provided safety at any time to respond, "I don't have anything to say today and pass

along, no big deal, you're not suppose to be judgmental." For Laura, "Dialog is not to be rushing ahead. Dialog is to take the time to really listen and to hear, to not feel like you have to say anything."

This experience translated into the personal. Sherri provides an example of using these tools outside of LGF in her workplace:

> I went back to work with those skills, so, I think it made me a better professional. It made those committees that I ran better, more effective and then as a volunteer on the board too I volunteer on it makes me a better community volunteer. I'm far more patient than I was, much better at probably listening and things that go along with that.

Sharon also provides an example of how the form of dialogue affected her:

> With respect to the dialog piece just being comfortable enough in that group of forty to share it, I guess today if I think it's going to be helpful to the group, I'll share it, I mean, I guess I don't have that reservation that I had before. The transformation part for me personally regarding that whole event that I'll always carry with me is that I handle myself entirely differently today than I would have two years ago or before Leadership Great Falls.

When referring to the cause for her own personal development in LGF she references the following, "Through that transition process, through that whole dialog piece, through that practice field, I mean, that's where it came for me." For Laura, there was also a personal safety in dialogue, "It gave me the freedom to really listen and to learn from the listening and to frame what I said in that same manner." It was this interaction with people, that provided for Laura her own environment for personal awareness, "So, most of my ah ha's were a broadening of my own thinking about people and community rather than a fact I didn't know or a process or system I didn't know."

The form of dialogue provided the framework and process for the rest of the learning experience. As described by Brian, "I just kind of went with the territory that

you learned in the opening retreat and carried throughout the whole series that different points of view were held by the different class members and you need to honor them."

<u>Group Dynamics</u>

The final theme that framed the context of Leadership Great Falls was group dynamics. This is a more general category that documents the issues consistent with individuals working within groups. This included group roles, collaborations, self-policing, and tension among individuals.

When referencing roles in the group process, it was identified that certain people would take on specific roles, but it was not overly problematic. As described by Laura, "Roles emerged, but I did see from session to session sometimes those would change depending on the topic or what we had learned, so, somebody that may have been real quiet one week maybe the next was less and took on more of a leadership role depending upon what we were engaged in doing." While roles were minimized as an issue, the idea of working as a group through collaborating and self-policing did emerge as the most common and preferred approach to being together.

According to the participants, collaboration was something that had to be learned. Given the nature of the participants, their positions and backgrounds, this took time. As described by John:

> After awhile you weren't necessarily there to try to stand out, to be in charge – because that is some of the role, what you learn in Leadership Great Falls, there's thirty leaders in the room, but, there can only be one leader at one particular time if you really want to get something done otherwise you got a herd of cats, everyone's trying to go there own direction. So, there was a lot of collaborative work with the individuals there.

For the community, collaboration was dependent on self-policing. This is defined as group managing, the process for the safety and success of the group. As described by Brian, "There were different opinions shared by certain individuals or mannerisms or habits or so that the group would need to learn how to deal with and in some cases they were dealt with directly where different group members would articulate, okay, you know, we need to do something at such and such or with so and so in terms of the influence that they are having." Sharon provides a specific example of the group dealing with open prejudice, "There was tension, especially that day where we called the one guy out on the carpet for being closed minded about the fact that regardless of sexual orientation or your skin color you're still a good person."

As introduced by Sharon, there were times when there was tension in the group. Sometimes around process, other times around an issue. One issue that brought tension was when people did not honor the structure of dialogue, particularly individuals feeling they weren't being heard. Rachel provides the following example of a debrief after one of the exercises in which some participants were blindfolded, "The people who were blindfolded really felt that people were not paying attention to them [We were not listening.] So there was some little anger. I just remember the facilitators having us talk about that together and trying to so that the people who were angry were able to say how they felt through it and why and then the people who thought they were doing the right thing."

As the group continued overtime, the tension increased. As described by Sharon, "As the group got more comfortable with itself the tension began to grow with respect to certain topics." This tension caused some personal doubt as described by Rachel, "Are

people really listening to me? Do they really understand what I'm saying?" There could also be a real, temporary disconnect from the group if it continued. John describes this from a personal experience in a game called Win All You Can. In this instance he was taking a collaborative approach to the game and his group members were taking a competitive approach. "What ended up happening in that particular instance, ...I would voice my concern up to a point and then after awhile when that was shoved aside and enough people were trying to go in another direction I end up being kind of a nonentity within it."

The participants did understand that tension was inherent in the process and were required to move forward. To that end, they developed a strong connection to collaboration and open dialogue and were frustrated when it didn't occur. Sherri gives an example, having just been exposed to an emotional issue and not having time to process it as a group:

> I came away from that experience horribly disillusioned with our criminal
> justice system.... I don't know that I have processed it and it's been six
> years or seven years or whatever it is. The day we were there ninety
> percent of those kids in there were of color. How can that be? They're
> fourteen to seventeen, I think, and we're locking them in closets. I didn't
> come away with any answers and I came away just as mad as when I got
> there. We didn't as a group discuss it.

However, it was acknowledged that the structure of the experience generally allowed for group dialogue and processing of these events and emotions. As described by Sherri, this tension was important to the group process, "So, you had these explosions during some of our meetings which is really, really tough, but at the end of it we worked through it. The good news is most of the group was trying very, very hard to know we were there to learn." John describes the process in a similar manner; "Oftentimes the

decibel level could be real loud while people were trying to get their point across on how things should be resolved. It's interesting to see how that works out, you know, the dynamic for individuals."

Sharon summarizes how the process allowed for dealing with eventual conflict in a productive way:

> So, it's the dialog, it's the facilitators, it's the questions that they ask that they prompt, it's the questions that other people ask of the group to respond to, so it just kind of self manifests [positive group process], but, with guidance and that's really a critical role of the facilitator, so, if that comfort zone doesn't exist for dealing with this or those rules didn't exist and this group was just thrown together haphazardly and there was confrontation that wasn't handled in a safe fashion, I don't think that you would ever get to that level of community.

Sherri, who experienced strong emotion when the group process was not allowed, provided support for the value of tension in the group:

> For some people it was awful and they didn't understand why it had to be that way and all that. So, I don't know what impact it had on their learning, but on mine it felt like I was among family and it was Thanksgiving and there's always one family member who drinks too much and makes it long for others and you have to talk through it and explain to the kids why this is happening, you know, all those kinds of dynamics came out in our group. I think it helped us. It helped me anyway.

So, while typical issues of group dynamics did occur, in general the Leadership Great Falls experience was one of positive interaction by the individuals as outlined in this section.

This previous section introduced and provided support for the contextual environment of initial removal of roles and labels, community building, skill of dialogue, and group dynamics as experienced by the participants of Leadership Great Falls. The next session outlines the sources by which the participants learned.

Sources Of Learning

This section introduces what stimulated learning for the LGF participants. The category of data emerged from the participants' stories about where learning was derived in either content or process. There are four sub-themes within this larger category. They are 1) others as a source of learning, 2) information as a source of learning, 3) self as a source of learning, and 4) interconnectedness as a source of learning.

Others as a Source of Learning

In speaking with the six subjects, others were identified as have a significant role in the experience of the participants. This came in many forms but is succinctly described by Sharon. "The biggest piece for me was seeing the world through other people's eyes on a consistent basis." Others provided critical feedback. They provided a perspective that was new or different. There was mentoring. Finally, there was an understanding that people were learning from and shaping each other.

For many, the reason for entering LGF was affected by, or in relationship to, others. For Rachel it was at the urging of the executive director at her new place of employment. Brian describes his reason for going through this experience by saying, "it afforded me the opportunity to come together with a cross section of the community and to learn together." For John, "it was a learning experience, I like meeting new people and doing new things, it makes the day go by quickly and you can learn about yourself as well." As a newcomer to the community Sharon was persuaded by business associates to join. These were people who influenced her and the community, bank executives and economic development leaders. She describes their comments about joining as, "It's

great, you'll learn so much about the community and the connections and networking, you'll meet people, it'll just be a phenomenal building block."

Once they began in LGF, one source of value to the participants was the feedback provided by others. Brian is very specific about speaking with others during this experience. In reference to a conversation with a person he met in LGF, "[I] wanted to get that person's feedback instead of just thinking on this on my own." Rachel uses the same verbiage; "It was the value of having another person give me their feedback."

There was more then critical feedback. Deep relationships developed that allowed the participants to learn from others. Sharon describes this in the dialogue sessions:

> The role of others, holy cow, I can remember sitting in those openings, where you have like an opening and closing piece where they go once around the room and being absolutely stunned at the insight and the thoughtfulness and the feelings that were being shared by the other people and not stunned in shock but stunned in, oh my gosh, I never thought of that, just eye opening stunning not stunned.

For Sherri, she describes a mentoring type of relationship in which the learning occurs from sharing the wisdom of others:

> You know, some kinship, seeing that folks deal with things the way I might and seeing people who have far more experience than I do struggle with some things that I don't struggle with so there is no need for me to be as tough on myself as I might have been prior, so, it was just good training.

Rachel describes this as a type of learning through modeling:

> I just think that when you're with people in a learning experience, and this was nine months, you take a lot from, you're gifted from them. I guess it is a good way to say it, and you learn from them and from their style and say, "I hope I would approach it like that if something like that happened to me."

John describes this as a shared learning experience, of people shaping each other. "What the leadership experience did for me is it gave me the opportunity to meet with

others [to] view their opinions and help them mold part of mine or help my opinion mold part of theirs."

Learning also happened through not only emulating what you saw, but seeing what you didn't want to be. Sherri provides an example of this:

> We had a couple who were horribly disrespectful and cloaked the disrespectfulness in faith and other things and it was extraordinary to watch and even, I think, if you were one of the people who were thinking, I don't agree with this person, I don't accept their view, once you saw how awful it looked to be as disrespectful as some of our classmates were, I think that really served to teach those who might have been on the fence to teach them, that's not what they wanted. If I look like that, I don't want to look like that anymore.

There was also a recognition that the community in this class was an extension of a larger community. In commenting on this after her experience of working with a planning team, Rachel shared:

> I realized that this group of people who brought their expertise the group would shape that class. I was on the planning team for whatever those two or three times and I'm thinking if I wasn't there that activity wouldn't have been in there or if another person wasn't there... So I think even just for that theme day the people who planned that just brought in what they thought was the richest experiences that they had and their activities... or places they visited.

The relationship that developed here continued and created a common bond between the participants. For Sherri, "We all have that shared experience so we don't have to have ...to kind of reconnect....with leadership folks. If I see them we kind of jump right in where we left off and move forward."

The experience of having a shared relationship with others extended beyond the class. Sherri provides an example of how the LGF experience provided the context for a conversation with friends outside of the class. This

conversation became a learning experience for her that translated into a change of

her behavior in LGF. She describes it as such:

> Prior to leadership, if there was conflict I would really just disengage. I
> would wait until it was done and then I would reengage when it was over
> and I would tell friends of mine afterwards, this is what happened in this
> meeting. I can't believe they just didn't know, and my friends would say,
> "Well, why didn't you say something?" I don't know, just kind of blow
> through it and it was an epiphany one of these meetings I said, why don't
> I just say what I told my friends I should say and, you know, I did that
> once or twice and it worked and I thought, Oh, okay, this is good.

By sharing her experience with others outside of LGF, this relationship shaped the person

and eventually the experience.

The relationship with others, primarily in their individual class, but even extended

to previous LGF graduates or friends played a significant part in the participants learning.

It was a key source for their understanding of self through critical feedback, modeling

through the observation of others, and a connection for learning from others outside of

this context.

Information as a Source of Learning

During the time of this learning experience, participants were introduced

to new information, ideas, beliefs and so forth in many forms. There were the

activities or exercises that they engaged in during their sessions. There was the

data they were provided about the city and region. There were the places they

visited during each session. And there were the voices of the other LGF

participants. In many ways, information from any of these sources became what

several participants referred to as "eye opening experiences." This was the

presentation of a hard fact or a personal perspective that was very different from

theirs, causing them to evaluate their own understanding of the community or even themselves.

In beginning with the activities during the retreats and day sessions, they became more than team building, oftentimes evoking cognitive or emotional conflict within the person. Rachel identified this experience in the ropes course:

> This concept of this high ropes course thing which I had never been through and, you know, it was just, it was out of the box for anything that I had experienced. Being thrown into nothing basically but numbers and models and very technical skills in school to more of the softer touch and how does community really work and work well

Sherri identified a different team activity that had a similar impact on the group:

> We also played another game.... There was a point system on resolving an issue and the long and short of it is in the end, ...if I convinced you to go a specific way and it was a lie and I was telling you that because it was to my benefit I would get more points than you if you believed me, but, the reality was in this point system they had set up that if we collaborated we actually together got more points.... It got very, very competitive.... [M]ost of us failed actually because we started thinking too much about ourselves as a group instead of the other part of the community... .It could have been a win/win but we weren't looking at it like that and that was the lesson.

Besides the activities, the location was mentioned as another means of challenging the participants existing understanding of the world. For Laura, "We always met at a different place in the community. Some of those places I had never been to which was another learning." John describes the value in this way, "Having it move around the community and understanding the different component of the community and how you were looking at any particular issue and you're looking through certain filters that there are a series of issues that need to be considered. Don't be blinded by looking at in a particular way."

Brian provides several examples of the value of different locations as an "eye opening experience." One of these included the county jail:

> Kent County Jail, fortunately, knock on wood, I've never had any encounters with the law enforcement agencies and so forth or a personal or family perspective and so that kind of environment was...it's what you see in the paper and what you see on television and so forth and it gave me a different level of appreciation kind of experiencing it and granted it was third party, you know, you're there for four hours or whatever the tour was and then the discussion with the sheriff's department.

As an African-American woman, Sherri's trip to the jail, and particularly the juvenile facility, was very moving:

> Then the tour of the juvenile facility was stunning. To see the number of African American youth in there and to watch what, as a society as a community, we believe will make them better is just beyond my understanding. To think we're going to lock a kid in a room the size of a closet and expect them to come out okay is just beyond me...I had not seen that before.

As described by Sherri, these experience had an emotional effect on the participants. John felt this not during the experience of the monthly meeting or a retreat, but as part of his project stage of LGF. As part the data collection for his project, he rode with a police car through some of the lower economic sections of the city. In this following quote, he's referring to learnings from a previous day session around a volatile issue in the community of racial profiling:

> It was eye opening giving me that exposure and at that point in time I'd been living in [this city] for about seven years and the number of encounters I had ventured down Division [Avenue] other than driving down and the police ride along did that as well when I did that as part of LGF where we went and rode with a [city] police officer and I got assigned when I did that to the South Division area and that was enlightening and probably personally troubling as well in terms of asking them, okay, why are we stopping this car? What profiling are we doing now and just thinking, this is something that I've not experienced or been exposed to and in reality happens every day in [this city].

Rachel provides another example of how the introduction of specific data about the community was powerful:

> I think that's with a lot of things you have your own background or what you've read or what your slant is on things and you kind of put things in a box and realize, oh, I didn't know everything, maybe those statistics would help me make a better, informative decision on something or judgment or whatever. So, I think that was a key learning for me.

While the participants identified the value of new information coming from the exercises and outside experiences, the sessions themselves provided a rich forum for learning.

During the sessions, the diversity of the group became a source for new information to the participants. In this case, the new information came through the dialogue or interaction with others. Brian provides an overview of this experience:

> We might all like to think of ourselves being sensitive to cultural differences and so forth, being put in that kind of setting, getting more comfortable that people would challenge different statements or different notions and so forth within that kind of environment. Everybody was responsible for representing their own views but at the same time trying to understand what the views were of others

Rachel spoke specifically about the value of racial diversity, and diversity as a whole:

> I think having people of color as part of that discussion all of that contributed to that because they may have us see a different point of view than what maybe I thought before and it's just because maybe my background was limited that way that I didn't have the experience of being in a group of, a very diverse group of people where we are all coming from...we have different ethnic backgrounds, different socioeconomic backgrounds whatever, all those differences that I think sometimes and that up until then I may have been in a kind of limited group. So, I think just being with that group of people helped me with that

For John, the interaction within the group and the focus of his group project on racial diversity had a significant impact. In referencing the changes that have occurred in

the U.S. over the last four decades, his understanding of the improvements made as a society were challenged. As he states it:

> I could see after talking to others that it's maybe not over. There is…continues to be racial disparity and it's just kind of covered up. We don't have signs on drinking fountains anymore, but, there are other ways that that can happen. That opened my eyes to that and tried to be more aware of it.

This interaction with new information was a key element in the participants learning. To summarize a change in their behavior over time, as the group became more acclimated to new experiences and new data, there was a general sense of looking for what "I don't know" verses arguing or making decision solely on what "I know."

Self as a Source of Learning

Looking for what "I don't know" and adding it to what "I know" could be described as a form of personal reflection. Reflection or thinking about what a person believes about him or her self, the community, and others was an integral component of the learning experiences. Reflection came in many forms. Silence and time was allowed for reflection whenever possible. Each session began and ended with reflection. This reflection was tied to the previous month or the activity of that month.

Laura provides an example of the value of silence in learning, "Silence was okay and that's very unusual in most settings for adults that it really was okay if nobody was talking for awhile and that's a strange… that's strange in any setting with adults, I think. And sometimes the silence was a learning experience too."

In exemplifying the allocation of time, Sherri describes, "That would be the main thing for me anyway. It's just having the dedicated time and say, okay, don't be doing

something here, think…let's just chill. The time, almost the time, it's like, sit in that chair man and think about what you're doing and that was it. The time."

John gave additional evidence of the value of time:

> There are often times when you are so busy doing what you do that you don't have the opportunity to reflect on what you're doing or what you're going to do next. Leadership, by having that one day a month where you were out of doing what you do, you know, in a totally different setting, usually involved with something like dialog, or just getting a different perspective on something you thought you knew about everyday, you have reflection time.

As part of the learning process, written reflections were collected at the end of the day for each session. These reflections were anonymous. During the time between sessions they were typed into one document. At the beginning of each new session, they were shared with the group the following month. Rachel describes the value of this as reflective learning:

> One of the tools they had used too at the end of every class they really wanted us to take the time to think about what were the good things that happened, what were the strengths or something that we took from there that was real important to us and then they wrote them all out for us for the next session and when you read through that some of those pieces were stressed. How important it was to listen to each other and listen to the different perspectives and try to understand why people thought differently than us. I just kind of reinforced each piece that we were doing.

Reflection on the activity and reflection on one's own experience was inherent in the work. It was often this reflection on the process where learning was identified, more than the activity itself. As identified by Rachel, "The process, not even the actually going through the exercise, but it was the processing afterward that was just amazing to me of things that I really hadn't thought about when we were doing that exercise."

There were specific spots for this reflection, but it also occurred as part of the on

going process. John describes how this occurred for him immediately after one of the

rope activities. In this case he was reflecting on his choice to try and complete an activity

after everyone else in his group had finished. If he had failed, everyone would have had

to do this strenuous activity over:

> I just thought to myself, now, boy that doesn't talk very well to my team
> work because here I was the last one, I could have screwed everybody,
> made them all [do it again]... well, I'll go back and start all over again,
> simply because I was too prideful to say that I want, you know, I'm
> getting tired and I should quit and walk over because I could. So, it made
> me start looking at me a little bit and I think as you go through those
> processes, especially with a bunch of people, whether it is your family or
> whomever you start to examine yourself a little bit differently. That had a
> pretty big impact on me. It made me think about things a little bit
> different.

As described by John, this reflection became one of personal self awareness. Of

understanding one's self within the context of Leadership Great Falls. This became a

strong, reflective theme for the participants. LGF as a place of personal growth and

reflection. Sharon describes it in this way:

> You're working on getting people to really plug into what their life
> experience has been and what their foundation of their belief system is,
> you've got to reflect back, there's no other way to do it, so, absolutely,
> you can't do it any other way. And that was, quite frankly, and still is, I
> think, one of the most enjoyable things

In addition to personal growth, it was a time of personal renewal. As described by

Laura, "Well, it literally is a...when there's no cell phones and you're going to

concentrate on community leadership with peers, there's a cleansing about it. There is a

renewal about it..." Sherri describes the renewal in this way, "Most of us our lives are

very, very full and we don't have an opportunity to sit and reflect and that's a really good

thing to do I think. I enjoy that time. It helps you recharge your batteries and maybe do some forward planning on bigger issues."

After experiencing the value of personal reflection and renewal through LGF, some LGF graduates have integrated these principles into their own life. Sherri gives an example:

> So, that kind of took hold during the year and then by the end of it I had kind of taught myself to schedule time off and that was new for me. I'd never really done that before. That became a part of my planning and part of how I organized my day and my life, my approach to learning and I still do it now.

Honoring and allocating time for personal reflection emerged as one of the key components by which people learned in this environment. It had a profound effect on many and made its way into the lives of others beyond their specific LGF experience.

Interconnectedness as a Source of Learning

Interconnectedness was a key for them to emerge. This concept took several forms. Connections with the community and between people are obvious in several themes. A second form of interconnectedness is manifest in the LGF platform of a systems approach to thinking and problem solving. The final theme of interconnectedness came from pushing participants to see connections between the experiences and the participant's personal and professional lives.

The use of a systems approach, just as the other three platforms of diversity, community connections, and leadership skills was woven through the nine month experience. Laura highlights the value of this approach in the following way:

> I'm not going to be an effective leader or advocate more advocate for the people that I serve if I don't understand and appreciate a systems approach and the interconnectedness of systems and the difficulty of changing a piece over here and neglecting other players and other

systems. So, it did impact me in kind of a, okay, I'm going to have to realize this and kind of broaden what I do and that is actually one of the results of leadership for me. I did broaden beyond my own little sphere.

Rachel provides a perspective on how systems thinking was always part of the experience:

> We talked about how it related to other community connections so I think the whole for me the understanding behind that is trying to understand the whole community and how these systems fit into the community and how the relationships between these systems work together and what do we need to know about that relationship to change something. Like if you really thought something needed to be changed they connect with so many other things so how would it effect the other systems they are connected with.

For Brian, as someone who works within commercial architecture, engineering, and environmental planning, he brought to the experience a deep understanding of "infrastructure" and thus systems thinking. What LGF did in its systems approach was to support and expanded his perspective, "Leadership Great Falls gave myself that additional perspective. I went into it with a systems way of thinking but as I experienced LGF it really cemented that whole notion that everything is interconnected." For others, such as Rachel, it also expanded their view of interconnectedness, "So, it helped you see it in bigger picture that it's not just one simple thing that there's all these other connections in the community and relationships that go into those connections."

Connection of the curriculum to the lives of the participants was also a key element of the experience. Laura translates how this happened using systems thinking as an example. "You could be talking about something in a practical way, like systems, and how they interrelated and how you can focus on these issues but you're really taking it down, or up, to a level that's beyond the technical learning. It actually makes sense then in application."

Sherri refers to this element of connecting the experience to one's larger life as the "experiential learning method." She goes on to describe this process as, "You, sort of, learn it first, you experience it first and then look for lessons and then you try to apply those lessons to whatever the problem is you're trying to solve." Rachel talks about connection between the sessions and then being explicit about thinking or applying the learning outside of LGF, "We left [our session with a question], okay now see how this will connect with you in the next month? What did you learn in this session that connects to what you are doing in the next month? So, through the month we're suppose to be thinking about it. I think that was a good way to open up the session was sharing one of those connections."

Sherri is very specific about how she still applies the learnings of LGF to her work today:

> The systems themselves, that was really helpful for me, and it helps me even today as we work to build systems for children zero to five. I still go back to my notes from leadership and back to my readings from those lessons and reflect on those to help me get through the types of things we're trying to do here even today, so, I think I might have learned it anyway, but, it's really, really, helpful for me here to have had that kind of foundation, those foundational experiences, pick them up and use them here.

In this instance she is referring to both systems thinking but also the knowledge of the systems in the community that effect her work. This is another example of not only personal connection of the work, but the LGF platform of community connection.

This ends the major theme of sources of learning, the role of others, new information, personal reflection, and interconnectedness was applied within the context of LGF to create many opportunities for individual learning over this nine month period.

The final section of this chapter introduces the three major themes that describe this learning.

Individual Learning

Over the course of nine months, learning happened. This statement is supported by the interviews given by the subjects and is represented in this theme of learning outcomes. Because each person is different and because each person constructs his or her own understanding of the world, what each person learned is unique and thusly different. However, based on the cross case analysis of these six interviews, three themes did emerge around shared learning. These are 1) understanding of self in relation to other, 2) recognition of personal biases, and 3) the value of collaboration.

Understanding of Self in Relation to Others

Each participant identified several key learnings about him- or herself through the interviews. Several of these have been reported earlier in this chapter. The structure of this experience was intended as such. When the executive director defined the fourth platform of being an "integrated leader" she said:

> Someone who knows themselves and where they fit and is comfortable
> with it instead of always comparing themselves to other people, and who
> learns how to develop the support systems for some of the weaknesses
> they may have within themselves, as well as outside themselves in terms
> of creating opportunities, and being successful at what they're driven at.
> Where their place is.

The structure was designed for self awareness. What emerged as one of the themes around self was not only a deeper sense of self, but also a deeper sense of self in relation to others.

Laura's experience provides a detailed example of this. This opening quote summarizes her relationship to others coming into LGF and the impact of that first retreat:

> I have tendency to be, and I knew it but would never say it out loud, I have a tendency to be distrustful of people and I can see what it's like to be distrustful of people and I don't intend to be, and a little distrustful even of myself, and those first two days, kind of, resolved that.

She elaborates on this history in saying, "I have the tendency to believe, and I have from a very early age, that I need to do this myself. I'm going to be independent and do for myself. I'll manage it. I'll solve this problem."

She talks about the origins of this way of being coming from her childhood and the lose of her mother. Her description of her "Leave It To Beaver" home life is as follows:

> Laura was the smart kid, Laura was the kid that did real well in school, Laura was the kid that parents could count on to do the right thing and to do what she was told and to take a leadership role. My kindergarten teacher wrote home to my parents that I was too conscientious, kindergarten teacher, too conscientious, so, there's something in me that says, I'm going to do this and I'm going to do it right.

In referencing the death of her mother while she was 20, "The lose of my mother then of course created a tremendous amount of, I'm not going to get close, I'm going to put this neat little wall around myself because the closer you get to people the more you share with people the more you're going to be hurt." She summarizes, "It's how I grew up and then the loss of my mom that combined those things, created this stand off, nobody would describe me that way but I was well aware that was exactly what I was doing and then I was one of those people that could always say, you don't know me."

Her experience of the first two days, and particularly the group exercise culminating in the ropes course, changed her relationship with others. She describes the moment as, "That group, helping me do something that never in my life would I have thought that I would do and that's just simply fall backwards from forty feet, wow. It was incredible." She continues, "Absolutely, honestly, it changed, I sound overly...and I apologize for the emotion. It literally was changed at that, forever at that moment period. I am different because of that experience."

In elaborating on how this change is still present today, she provides the following:

> I never would have shared this with you had I not had that experience, how's that? I never would have let myself sit here and cry in front of somebody I hardly know about an experience that changed my life. I wouldn't have done it prior to that retreat. I never would have done it. It wouldn't have dawned on me to share something that personal with somebody I hardly ever knew. I wouldn't have thought to do it. I would have said something. I would have answered something, but, I never would have answered something that felt so personal to me.

John provides a similar example from his experience in the ropes course where his choice of trying to complete the course, verses asking the facilitators to allow him to quit, almost made the entire group have to do the exercise again. This was after a long time of trying to get people of all ages and sizes across a very difficult passage. As he describes the moment, "We were going through a physical exercise and there was something that I did as I was going through it that jeopardized the whole situation that we were in and I didn't even think about that until I had almost totally failed."

Immediately after completing the activity he had a flash of understanding, stated as, "That was stupid, I could have impacted everyone just because I wanted to be able to

do this my own particular way." He continues, "Then I had to think about other things that I have done in my life up to that point, maybe reconsider where I thought I was at that time" He describes his learning from this event as so:

> I learned that, probably the biggest ah, ha for me, as much of a team player as I like to say that I was, I did have, and probably still have a bit of ego of my own of trying to do things myself without help from others. Sometimes without regard to others and it made me think about that.

His further elaboration on this learning continues, "I had to consciously think about situations when I'm in them that it isn't all about me, there's a larger purpose in most everything we do." He continues, "I used to think that I was...that was very much the way I approached things in a larger team spirit but that was not always the case. I probably could still use some improvement on that but I think it helped me a little bit at least made me aware of it more aware of it than I had been before."

Sherri provides a third example but from a different perspective. For her it became a deeper sense of her role with others within a group, particularly as an African-American woman:

> They, my classmates, my colleagues, really taught me...helped me understand what my role is. ... I'll bring a different point of view, I can look at something from an inner city perspective and a low income perspective and an African American female perspective and I can make it...help you see it, I can bring you over to my side and help you understand what it means to walk where I walk... So, that was really important learning for me.

Similar learning occurred when people spoke of being leaders.

Brian learned "comfort in letting other do it [lead]" and that times this can, compliment the dynamics within a group." Rachel provides a learning in relation to others that she can't always be "nice" and avoid conflict. She provides the following

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perspective, "I don't think things will change if we all try to be nice to each other and not want to rock the boat." Sharon provides a similar example,

> I think what LGF did for me mostly was provide me an avenue to interact with others in a delicate fashion, to know that it's not going to erupt into this huge confrontation that might get ugly, but, it provided me a skill to engage and foster and encourage dialog with someone else who comes from a completely different viewpoint....Now I have the courage and the skills to find out why people think the way they think and why.

She continues later on how this is a matter of bringing balance to her interaction with others. "I just want to tell some people to get the hell out of my way because I know exactly where I'm headed with this thing and I need to get it done, so, I can be formidable. There's got to be a balance there somewhere, so, I'm either a freight train or I'm at stop, I think." In summary, she provides the following, "In ways that I deal with people in my personal life has entirely changed as a result of LGF, entirely changed."

These examples and this frame work of understanding self in relation to others brings together many examples of the learning shared by the LGF participants in several of these themes. Another form of understanding self and others is a recognition of the preconceived biases we bring to our relationships with those different than us.

Recognition of Personal Biases

A second key learning theme for the participants was the biases they carry with them that influence their thinking and action toward others. The context and sources for learning introduced earlier, combined with the platform of diversity woven through the entire nine months, was directed toward this as a learning outcome.

An example of this as a learning is succinctly stated by Brian, "I think that that whole experience gave me more appreciation for the culture of the community and the diversity and biases that I may have had going into that I was able to adjust or change as

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a result of having had the learning and the experience." Laura provides a similar statement, "One thing I learned about myself certainly was that I was no where near as tolerant as I thought and needed to be a little bit more open and little bit more willing to listen and hear people."

For Sherri it was a recognition of her own bias through the interaction and observation of others not like her in gender, race, or background. As she describes it:

> I'll use the word disrespectful, I was being disrespectful about issues of race when I'm the one who has the most to gain by other people getting their arms around it and I needed to be more respectful when it came to that question and I learned that by watching someone in Leadership really act the way I was headed and so that really turned me around, it really was one of those, ah ha's and that really helped me take a step back and say, wait a minute, I need to be far more respectful than I've been.

With this recognition, she also developed an understanding of her role as an African-American woman in helping others move to a new understanding of culture and prejudice. The new awareness is communicated in the following, "People just sometimes don't get this and you need to be willing to help them get it not hit them over the head but invite them to learn and understand what your perspective is, so, I was just being disrespectful in some environments, so, I learned quite a bit."

Rachel describes it in terms of developing a deeper understanding of how her beliefs interfere with hearing the beliefs of others, "I learned that I know that I know I'm coming...I have my own beliefs and values in thinking about certain things or if you want to call them issues or subjects in that I'm one person and I bring that in but I also know that there is all those other perspectives." She continues on a point of self reflection, "I asked myself, how open minded am I if I have certain beliefs and values? Am I willing to think about something completely different than what I believe in and try

to understand that perspective or that idea?" She describes the leadership implication for this in the following manner, "Just knowing that information would help me I guess be able to work with people in a better way or maybe make a decision that it wouldn't just be my focus that there's all these other ideas about that."

Laura provides detail on a similar learning. She describe it as, "That discovery was a little hard for me, that I was probably not as tolerant as I was strutting around feeling." She continues by providing a specific example of people for whom she felt this:

> I recognize, and I'll tell you who they were, that there are people in that group that outside of leadership I would have not liked and I would have judged them based solely on their opinions on certain things. Poverty was a huge issue and is a huge issue for me and there's opinions in our society that people have created their poverty and there were people of that opinion in our group.

She then shares her learning through the form presented in LGF:

> When I listened to why they thought that, I could understand why they thought that, so, we could both learn from each other and so I realized that I almost have, and still do, it's almost a reverse, it's not bigotry but, I have this understanding and tolerance of people who are poor and people of color but I have definite stereotypical bias on the other side of that, you know the white, wealthy business person.

At a personal level she then summarizes, "If I'm going to be tolerant, I need to be tolerant across the board and listen to everybody." She continues, "I have to understand the business person who thinks that that guy did create his substance abuse problem and I have to dig a little deeper and see why that person thinks that way and recognize that it's, for the most part, is not with ill intent."

The recognition of personal bias was a key learning for the participants. This learning about self was in part a manifestation of understanding and experiencing the power of diversity. As people began to understand the real

value of diversity they began embracing the last theme, the value of collaboration.

The Value of Collaboration

The value of having everyone's voice in the room or collaboration was another key learning for the participants. As persons and leaders, they shared the discovery of the need to listen to other before deciding, to slow down so that others have the time to provide input, and to value diversity as a way to make better decisions. In understanding collaboration, this theme goes beyond simple cooperation, but embraces an environment where the decisions and responsibilities are shared within a group to the maximum capacity of the members of the group.

Laura first describes this inclusiveness as a form of listening. "It's really important to have been able to communicate that with someone or to talk that out or to listen to their perspective of maybe why something didn't get done or why something didn't get followed through on." She continues as a point of self reflection, "I think what I knew as myself as a leader that I just can't assume or jump to a conclusion that I need to really sit down one on one and talk that out."

Brian provides a similar perspective, "It gave me that reference point that being back in the work setting to make sure that I was listening to the points of reference." He provides an example of facilitating dialogue between two different "camps" in his organization that both had strong opinions on how controversial issues should be dealt with. He describes the process as having both parties in the same room and, "Making sure that all voices were heard, each individual was given time, each individual felt

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comfortable expressing themselves." The results of this process were that the problem was solved in a way that satisfied both parties.

Sherri describes this as the need to "slow down" and to assure that "everybody is on board." She contrasts this with her previous leadership style, in which she was, "Oriented to a flat edict that I expect you to move because I asked you to and I really believe that's good enough and I don't want to talk about it long. I just expect that you're gonna get up and do what I ask you to do. And so with that knowledge I was able to take a different approach." This understanding came from the information shared in LGF and is described by her as a reflection on the personal, "Understanding what those tools are and how they best fit me and all those types of things are important but you have to learn where you are and that's what Leadership did."

Laura also describes it as a knowledge of self. "I'm a participatory manager but I'm not sure I am. Leadership helped me realize I wasn't quite sure I really was that because I always kind of had an idea in my head to start with and so leadership helped me kind of get rid of some of that and truly be more of a participatory leader and listen to what people have to say." Rachel supports the value of diversity in leadership, "knowing too, that from people's perspectives in leadership and the diversity that was there, you know, the values, the cultures, the different perspectives all that kind of, you know, told me that what I learned was right, I mean it was another piece that just helped that thinking."

John provides a specific example how he has brought this perspective of diversity to the workplace:

> Those experiences [in LGF] gave me an opportunity to be more of an
> advocate for diversity within our organization to try to ensure in the areas

that I am directly responsible for that we promote a level of acceptance. That then makes it more accepting of individuals with diverse opinions, diverse preferences, people of color and so forth, just diversity in general. That's been kind of an ongoing take away.

Rachel summarizes this point, "You can't just make a decision based on one thing because this is what you believe, there's lots of connections."

The final learning theme thus directly supports the platform of diversity and provides the participants with personal awareness as well as a practical application for the role as a leader.

Additional Data

As a source of additional data, others were interviewed beyond the six LGF graduates. The others included the past executive director of Leadership Great Falls and six people who knew the LGF graduates during and after their experience in the nine month program. The primary findings from the executive director were reported in the previous chapter introducing the Leadership Great Falls experience. The findings for the interviews of the significant others are presented here.

In general, these interviews did not provide rich and specific data useful for this study. During the interviews, the interviewees were positive about the LGF participant as persons but gave general responses in regards to the questions about the experience. Examples of these responses include comments about how the person was "always learning" or "open to change." Another example was how a significant other believed that the participant, "always brings a lot to a

group" that the others in the LGF experience probably learned as much from her as she learned from them.

A few of the interviewees had also been participants in LGF after the persons in this study. In this case they often referenced their experience in responding to the questions. An example being that, "I've learned so much about our community through LGF, I'm glad he encouraged me to attend." It was also difficult for the interviewees to provide specific responses about how the program had effected the graduate. A typical response was, "She's always been really good at getting others to share their opinion. I think her experience reinforced this behavior."

As a group, they provided no evidence to contradict or negate these findings, and in general, affirmed the findings. What they did not do was provide specific data around how this LGF experience was transformative for the other person. The individual interviews with the participants themselves were much richer and specific and so it is their voices that are present in this findings chapter.

Chapter Summary

Each of the participants in this study entered Leadership Great Falls with varying reasons. Most indicated a desire to connect with other leaders, learn more about the community, and improve their leadership skills. One, Sherri, had no desire to participate but did so out of professional obligation. The opening retreat began with tension as there were no traditional introductions around titles, work roles, or any other professional

affiliation. During these two days, the participants were introduced to the skill of dialogue. This skill became integral to the experience as it created the guiding principles for this and future sessions. They also engaged in a variety of team building exercises concluding in a ropes course. All of the retreat was planned and facilitated by previous LGF graduates.

Leaving this retreat there was a strong sense of connection and trust between the participants. They had learned something about themselves as persons and leaders. They had formed as a community and believed that they knew the people in their group at a deep level, as people, not as professionals. This was supported by the surprise that they experienced after receiving the LGF membership directory and seeing the positions many of their classmates held in the community.

The foundation that was established in this opening retreat was continued in seven monthly sessions. During that time the participants had their full day meetings at different locations around the city, again planned and facilitated by previous LGF participants. Here they were introduced to content around systems thinking, housing, policing, and other community and leadership issues. The content and place as a source of learning was continually connected to the personal, professional, and community based lives of the participants. Each session was bounded by the framework of dialogue and allowed significant time for personal reflection and participant interaction.

This context, combined with the monthly content of the sessions, and the diversity of the participants often caused cognitive disequilibrium in the participants. What they were being exposed to in real data, or the lived experience of their fellow students, at times conflicted with their understanding of themselves or the world. Trying to make

sense out of this tension became a time for continued public meaning making through the interaction with others and personal meaning making through individual reflection.

Outside of the monthly sessions, participants worked in smaller teams to understand selected topics around community leadership issues. The overall experience culminated in a retreat planned by the participants. Part of this final retreat included a community service project, presentations on what they had learned in their group project, and final dialogue and reflection about the entire experience. Participants left this nine month experience believing they had a deeper understanding of themselves and how they interact with others, a recognition of some of the hidden biases that had been shaping their beliefs and behaviors, and a new understanding of the value and power of diversity and collaboration.

CHAPTER SIX

THE TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

In the stories of these six individuals who participated in the Leadership Great

Falls experience, transformational learning was felt at a personal level, processed within a

community of others, and shaped by the larger cultural context. Transformation was

experienced as a disruption of the person's current sense of self in relation to a

community's shared assumptions about the world. A new understanding of self was

facilitated through personal and social meaning making of this disruption within the

cultural context of a community of others.

This chapter provides a deeper perspective on this experience of the participants.

As a study in individual transformation, it begins by defining transformation. It then

applies this definition to the participants to develop an understanding of their level of

learning in Leadership Great Falls. The chapter concludes by providing a theoretical

perspective on the elements within Leadership Great Falls that facilitated this learning.

Defining Transformation

A scan of the literature does not provide a clear, operational definition for

transformative learning. Many adult learning theorists suggest a difference between

learning in an informational sense and learning of a personally deep or transformative

nature. The following draws upon several different perspectives to develop a functional

definition for the analysis if this study.

The person most associated with the concept of transformative learning is Jack

Mezirow. Mezirow (1991) distinguishes between learning that is instrumental and that

which is transformative. Instrumental learning is a technical or type of learning where

truth can be known using empirical methods. It is about building upon existing knowledge structures the acquisition of new, testable data. Transformative learning is the process of changing one's meaning perspective or frames of reference. Frames of reference being the structures or assumptions through which we understand or make meaning from our experiences (Mezirow, 2000). Adams provides a similar definition of transformation as, " Profound fundamental changes in thought and actions which create an irreversible discontinuity in the experience of a system. Generally the result of the emergence of radically new belief systems (paradigms)" (1984, p. 32).

Drawing on the work of Jung and neo-Jungian scholars, Boyd (1991) provides a definition of individuation as integrating the multiple parts of the psyche through imagination. This process results in the full emergence of the authentic or Original Self. Dirkx (2003) provides a simplified working definition that transformation is about making the unconscious, conscious. Within this perspective, an alteration of the psychic energy changes the way one sees his or her self and his or her relation to the world.

What is clear from the literature, as described by Brookfield, transformation is not "Having a more informed, nuanced, sophisticated, or deeper understanding of something" (2000, p.139). In referencing these definitions and scanning the literature, the common difference between transformational and informational learning is that transformation causes real change - something about the person is different than before. As described by Sue Scott (1997 Summer) transformation is when an old way of seeing or doing is changed to a new way of seeing and doing.

For the purpose of this study, transformative learning is defined as deep personal learning resulting in a qualitative change in one's understanding and being in the world.

Identifying Transformation

In determining if this was a transformative learning experience for the participants we need to identify a qualitative change in the person's understanding and being in the world. Since transformation is an individual process, each of the six subjects must be considered by themselves. The following section highlights sections from the previous chapter for each of the participants in relation to their new understanding of self and the world. In addition, because this is also a study of transformation framed within the context of Leadership Great Falls, I will also end with a summarization of some of the learnings that occurred across the group.

As can be expected, the effect of this learning experience had a differing impact on each person. Laura and John are the most articulate about the effect of this learning experience. They can identify the specific activities and time when they felt changed because of Leadership Great Falls.

For Laura the primary change came around trust. She describes her personal history as being social, but always holding back big parts of herself from others. This manifested in her being highly independent and always feeling as if she was responsible for doing things herself. She attributes this way of being to her family structure and the death of her mother. However, after her experience with LGF, she is different. As she states it, "Absolutely, honestly, it changed, I sound overly...and I apologize for the emotion. It literally was changed at that, forever at that moment, period. I am different because of that experience." She then provides examples of how she was able to trust on the ropes course or be more open with her feelings to others in LGF or with me as a

"stranger" in an interview. All of this represents something she could not have done previous to this learning experience.

John's big moment of change was very similar in context to Laura's. For him it was the epiphany on the rope's course that he was willing to risk the comfort and success of the group for his own "ego." This facilitated the recognition, that while he had thought of himself as a "team player," in fact he was oftentimes doing what was best for him. This had a profound effect on John and changed the way he interacted with others in LGF in the future, and eventually changed his intention and actions with others outside of this experience.

Sherri and Rachel also provide specific ways in which they are different and how the experience changed them. They are more general in identifying the cause, but clearly associate this new way of being with the learning experience. Sherri's deep change was around finding her voice with others, particularly in a group. A big part of this understanding was the value she provided as an African-American woman in helping others comprehend what it is like being part of a marginalized group in the current culture. She also came to understand that she has a mediating or calming presence that she can use to improve the function and success of a group. This new way of understanding herself continues in her work today.

Rachel identified how her biases or preconceived beliefs were effecting her decision-making. How she had made judgments about people or actions within the community without even trying to understand the "perspectives" or "ideas" of others. She developed the same understanding of how oftentimes she was making decisions based on what she assumed the data should be around an issue, without actually seeking the data.

She also links this to her need to be "nice" and avoid conflict. This understanding has caused her to change her behavior and inclusiveness of others in her personal and professional life.

Brian is more general about the deep lasting effect of this experience on him as a person. He describes that because of his vocation, he already had a good understanding of systems thinking. He speaks highly of the tools of dialogue and the value of community developed during LGF. He identifies the emotions he felt around possible police profiling of people of color and how that experience changed his understanding of the justice system. He provides some specific examples of how he is different in some of his behaviors because of LGF. He is clear about how he now uses dialogue to develop a shared understanding of complex issues between people. He shares how he has learned the value of diversity and uses his leadership position within the organization to promote diversity.

Sharon is very clear that this experience changed her as a person. When reflecting on what she learned about herself in the experience, she responds with great energy, "A lot. I learned a ton." She points to LGF bringing some balance to the way she interacts with others. It provided her with the ability to "...interact with others in a delicate fashion...to foster and encourage dialog with someone else that comes from a completely different viewpoint." Previous to LGF she avoided the dynamics of such an encounter, afraid it would "get ugly."

The biggest effect on Sharon was identified by her in relation to her family. She begins her description in this manner, "I learned that my mother and father are not always right. I learned that some of my childhood lessons were not maybe as meaningful as they

could have been. I learned that I am the person that I am today based on some of the experiences, be it good or bad, and my role in that." She elaborates further on the change that was caused in her in relationship to her father because of LGF:

> He and I use to go at it, just go at it and then not talk for maybe two months, and he would say some of the most hateful, hideous nasty things to me. I was crushed for a long period of time and then through LGF I figured out that, you know, it's okay for him to have those views, that's his I don't have to own it.

She continues with, "I feel, reconnected in the greatest of fashions, in fact, he's on the top of my list today as being one of the people I most admire and honor."

Her father recently died of cancer, and she provides one more example of the value of LGF, "Those experiences and the skills that I learned in LGF allowed me to reconnect with him and actually be a leader and help him through the transition from the disease to death and dying and no one else in my family was able to do that for him," For Sharon, the personal effect is very clear.

These are a few specific examples attached to each subject, respectively. However, there are many other examples of change beyond the creation of what Brookfield refers to as, "...more informed, nuanced, sophisticated, or deeper understanding of something."(2000, p.139) The individual learnings identified in the previous chapter provide several additional examples of change. Laura's recognition of her own lack of tolerance for "the white, wealthy business person" and the need to be more collaborative as a leader illustrates this change. Sherri's revelation of not being "respectful" toward others who did not understand her experience. Sharon described a similar need to find a better balance between her needs and those of others. For Brian it

was letting others lead in a group. John's was increasing diversity through the hiring practices of his company.

These learnings do not simply add to what the participants already knew, many of them represent a fundamental shift in their sense of who they are. For these participants, their relationship to diversity wasn't enhanced, but experienced as a new form. The same can be said for collaboration. It was more than getting a few people involved, it represents a new understanding of how to make decisions, solve problems and lead. The following section provides a deeper interpretation of LGF as a transformative learning experience.

Learning as Transformative

This section revisits the data from a theoretical perspective, connecting the learning experience with transformative learning. In expanding upon the finding in the previous chapter, six themes emerge: 1) others shape our learning, 2) context influences the form of transformation, 3) learning can be disruptive, 4) knowing comes through practice, 5) who we are is entwined with what we know, and 6) learning is personal. These categories were developed from the perspective that deep personal learning has the potential of generating a qualitative change in one's understanding and being in the world.

Others Shape Our Learning

Others played a significant role in the learning and development of the Leadership Great Falls participants. They were present throughout the entire experience in group activities, community visits, dialogue sessions, session debriefs, and the service project.

The presence of others however is not evidence enough that they influenced individual learning. The support for others shaping the learning and the eventual result of transformation is inherent in the voices of the participants.

The effect of the dialogue sessions and listening to the experience and opinions of other LGF participants was shared by all the subjects in this study. In these sessions, they heard voices and opinions that oftentimes were different or even challenging to their understanding of the world. The same was true in other LGF settings where participants openly shared ideas and beliefs. Others provided a new perspective on the world.

The development of a new or deeper understanding of the world was facilitated through interactions with others in groups and one-on-one settings. Participants in the study shared how the diversity of the group, the acceptance of the group, and rules of dialogue allowed them to discuss some very contentious issues. By doing this with others, there was a synthesis of information that allowed people to make meaning in a new and different way. The group process created a public forum for understanding that was much richer and very different than attempting to understand such issues in isolation.

The importance of others to the learning process was evident both within LGF and outside its structure and process. Participants shared how they spoke with others outside their group about what was happening within the experience. These people listened, or gave advice, or asked clarifying questions, etc. They did what friends do. The value of these conversations was to help the participant make sense of the experience itself. Similar conversations happened between LGF participants but outside of the process. The subjects in this study shared how they made a phone call or had breakfast with someone else in the experience to try to understand what was going on. This did not

occur often, but again, others were helping an individual make sense out of the experience.

Another role of others was in providing support for courageous acts, trying something new outside of one's normal beliefs or behaviors. Trusting others as you jump off a wall, not being afraid to share your opinion in a group, or admitting to yourself that you have a strong bias against a group of people are all acts of courage when you do them for the first time. The participants shared how others supported them in taking these, and other, first steps towards a new understanding of who they are. In addition, the subjects communicated that the ability to maintain this new sense of self was aided by the positive involvement of others.

The importance of others in the learning of LGF demonstrates that who shows up shapes the learning. The design of LGF is to have a diverse group of participants. Diversity is constructed through as many factors as possible; workplace, age, gender, sexual orientation, race, and so forth. Had the group been more congruent in its composition, the learning would have been different. Even with diversity, there is no predictability on what each individual brings to the setting as exemplified by personal experience, beliefs, or personality. So the group becomes an amalgamation of the individuals present in the experience. Different people create a different group . (Bushe, 2001) A different group creates different learning. Different learning creates a different personal transformation.

Context Shapes The Final Form Of Learning

The experience of the participants in this study was situated in a specific context that includes a host of variables. The shared assumptions, beliefs, values, traditions and

behavior expectations of those planning and facilitating the sessions, as well as those that control resources, and even the larger community values shape this experience. Leadership Great Falls is not a separate entity from the surrounding culture but is tightly interwoven with the larger environment. What was learned at an individual level was dependent on what was expected at a cultural level.

The experience of the participants in this study was not arbitrary, but part of a history that preceded them. The Leadership Great Falls initiative is part of a larger community based leadership development program that was started when a plane full of community leaders were killed in a plane crash and a city was left with few people to fill the void. Thus there are hundreds of Leadership programs within cities, villages, and regions throughout the United States that take on the name of the geographic region they serve such as Leadership Orlando or Leadership Detroit. While each of these is autonomous, they share a common goal of providing a community with sufficient leadership capacity regardless of the circumstances.

This particular program is housed within the city's Chamber of Commerce. The executive director reports to the head of the chamber. The funding resources come from a variety of corporate and non-corporate resources. Fund raising is a continual aspect of maintaining the program. There is a board of directors made up of prominent leaders in the community. Given this, the belief and assumptions of those who provide resources to the program are represented in the participants' experience.

A curriculum was implemented in 1996 and designed by people who had specific beliefs about leadership and learning. The committee was formed by the board to revamp the old information based curriculum. The designers of the new curriculum brought to the

program a strong set of beliefs: learning must be active, and requires interaction between people and time for personal reflection. Also, leadership requires an understanding of the larger community context, and the curriculum should be framed by the four platforms of community connections, diversity, leadership skills, and systems thinking. This curriculum model shaped the experience of all subsequent classes.

All of this history and structure and shared beliefs were present in the experience of the participants. The tool of dialogue represented a particular belief about interaction between people. The makeup of the group communicated a shared assumption around the definition and value of diversity. The sites visited, the team building exercises and the ropes course were all part of larger cultural context.

Beyond the larger structure and activities creating context, the shared beliefs and expectations about being a leader were also communicated in smaller symbolic ways. One example was at the end of the opening retreat. Each participant received a carabineer to keep as a reminder of the experience and what they learned. Many of the participants in this study still kept this object in a prominent location years after their personal participation in LGF. A "bineer" was also used as a talking talisman in the dialogue circle. The person who had the bineer had the privilege of speaking and being listened to by the group. This object communicated the shared rules of dialogue. A final example of a symbolic act was the inclusion of an empty chair in the opening circle. This represented the greater community that was always present and that should be considered in all the participants' leadership decisions.

Thus, the context shapes the eventual form that emerges from the transformative process. In Leadership Great Falls, the transformational learnings where exemplified as

self in relations to others, recognition of personal bias, openness to diversity, and using dialogue to solve problems. Each of these results can be linked to the shared assumptions of those who maintain and influence Leadership Great Falls. As a specific example, the use of dialogue posits a particular way of interacting with others. Leadership Great Falls could have introduced argument, coercion, or no interaction with others as a viable leadership strategy. Had these been the values of the larger cultural context, individual transformation would have been different.

The specific context of Leadership Great Falls is also part of a larger cultural belief about leadership that is dynamic. In Chapter Two, it was demonstrated that what it means to be a leader has changed often over the last 80 years. It is a reasonable assumption to make that had Leadership Great Falls been around 40 years ago, the shared assumptions, beliefs, values, traditions and behavior expectations would have been different. What we learn and how we transform is thus interwoven with various levels of culture. The form in transformation is shaped by the context. In this example, the context is a set of shared assumptions about what it means to be a leader and the processes of leadership development (Block, 2002; Kaagan, 1999; Palmer, 1999; Wheatley, 1992).

Learning Can Be Disruptive To The Person

The role of comfort in the process of transformative learning is a somewhat contested issue, with some questioning whether transformative learning always requires a level of discomfort. The experience of Leadership Great Falls, however, demonstrates that the process was not always pleasant for the participants. Through the interaction with others, the experiential activities, the community visits, or other stimuli, the participants in this study found their understanding of the world and themselves disrupted.

Participants identified disruption as integral to their learning, findings consistent with the intentions of the designers and facilitators of Leadership Great Falls.

From the very beginning, the participants were put on edge. Not using titles or labels as introductions, learning a new way to communicate, the ropes course and interacting with others not like them were all designed to create disequilibrium in the participants. These activities and the many that followed caused the participants to reassess their understanding and behaviors in the world. It also connected them to the community of Leadership Great Falls.

The disruption of the person was generally done in community. The dialogue sessions were a key location for this questioning of personal meaning making as reported by all the participants. This also occurred in other communal environments such as the ropes course for Laura and John or in the community project for Rachel. In addition, time was always allocated to debrief or make sense of the activities in community. This process of personal disorganization and reorganization brought about membership in the community of Leadership Great Falls. Membership included a deeper understanding of the way this group of people made sense of the world. And of course, this group of people was situated in the cultural context of shared assumptions, beliefs, and appropriate behaviors as identified above.

Given this, the events that initiated the disruption communicated certain values. Using a visit to the jail and talking about racial profiling or visiting a center that built homes for the homeless to evoke disequilibrium was a choice that communicated the cultural values of Leadership Great Falls. The tools of dialogue or systems thinking and the process of social interaction in making sense of this experience also represented the

values of LGF. The type of disruption and the process of resolution was all part of the design of this learning experience.

Within the literature, transformative learning is often associated with and thought to follow a significant life event, such as job loss or childbirth (Mezirow, 2000). In LGF, however, this learning experience integrated disruption as an intimate part of the experience. The disruption itself arose from and then further contributed to the learning experience. It was through this personal disequilibrium caused by the disruption that facilitated the new meaning making that resulted in transformation. This meaning making while personal, was still within a community participants and a larger cultural context.

Knowing Comes Through Practice

As shared by participants in Leadership Great Falls, their understanding of the experience came through practice. As exemplified by more than one participant, it is easy to think you are an accepting, open person. You only come to understand how true this is, or isn't, through the interaction with others, particularly others not like you.

A constant theme in LGF was to experience each of the tools or ideas presented in as real of a setting as possible. For some, dealing with such issues as respect for diverse opinions or the rules of dialogue, this was integrated into the sessions themselves. For others there were active simulations that were designed to give meaning to a concept. Throughout the nine months, participants were encouraged to look for ways to observe or practice the learning of LGF back in their outside world. This was continually reinforced through an opening question and closing remark at each of the sessions and was given precious time within the dialogue session for sharing and interaction. Rachel describes this part of the experience in the following way, "We left [our session with a question],

okay now see how this will connect with you in the next month? What did you learn in this session that connects to what you are doing in the next month? So, through the month we're supposed to be thinking about it. I think that was a good way to open up the session was sharing one of those connections."

It was through using the concepts or tools that people developed understanding. As reported by the participants, some of the people with a business background found dialogue foreign to their understanding of human interaction. As described by Sharon, "there were a lot of us that just didn't get it, but most of us that didn't get it were in the business sector, had never been exposed to it, didn't know what the heck the instructor/facilitator was talking about." She continues that understanding dialogue developed, "through that practice field, I mean, that's where it came." Thus it was through application that she and the other participants made sense of dialogue.

The value of diversity was another example. Many people spoke of supporting diversity, but it was only after their experience of hearing the life stories of others and seeing how a solution is better formed when more voices are in the room, that they fully embraced the power of diversity. This process began in LGF and according to the subjects in this study, continues today in their work environments.

From the perspective of transformational learning, a new form requires active experimentation with new ideas and concepts (Dirkx, 2000; Mezirow, 2000). It is the activity that causes the type of deep understanding that is transformative. A new concept without practice, such as tolerance, can be rationalized into the old form. Discernment of this new concept as a truth within the individual can only be known through application.

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Who We Are Is Entwined With What We Know

Each of the participants shared their personal history. What they spoke about exemplified how their understanding of the world and themselves was woven into this personal narrative. Key events or people highlighted these stories and their effect; spending a college semester in France, the death of a mother when the subject was 22, losing a job in midlife when the company closed, or becoming bored with a job at midlife and changing careers. These might be framed as disruptive events as outlined above. The participants also shared how unexceptional life experiences such as growing up in a small town where everyone knows your business or working in a bank shaped who they were.

The participants were clear that such experiences constituted their sense of self and understanding of the world. Their roles as CEOs, as Information Officers, as an employee in the religious sector or a bank also provided them with a form for their being in the world. Within the context of Leadership Great Falls, as the participants learned more about others and their community, their understanding of who they were changed. As an example, Rachel considered herself a "participatory" leader and someone who has always sought the voice of others. What she discovered is who she thought she was did not align with her way of being. She discovered that she was much more authoritarian than she believed herself to be. This learning caused her to change her sense of self and her behavior. John gives a similar example in that he considered himself a "team player." What he learned was that he was more ego driven than he allowed himself to believe. This discovery caused him to think differently about himself and eventually evoked a transformation in his way of being in the world.

These examples come from the participants discoveries about themselves as leaders. It needs to be noted that these discoveries around the inclusion of the opinion of others or teamwork are culturally bound definitions of what it means to be a leader. As outlined in chapter two, the socially agreed upon form of leader has changed over several decades. The idea of leader, as other roles in society, is a social construct (Hewitt, 2000; Senge, 1990; Wheatley, 1992) and represents the values and assumptions of the culture in which it exist (Rost, 1993).

Each of the six people in this group identified themselves as leaders coming into Leadership Great Falls. During this experience, a new concept of leader was presented. For them to adopt this new form, they would have to change. Whether this became transformational or not depended on the distance between the old concept of leader and the new concept and their acceptance of the new form.

As an example, the idea of a leader as a community steward did not change Laura's understanding of self. She identified bringing this thinking to LGF from personal history and work experience. She already understood herself in this role. However, learning about trusting others had a profound effect on her sense of self. The leadership concept that even those at the top must abdicate some responsibility and trust in the team, changed Laura's understanding of herself as a leader and very much so as a person.

Beyond the leadership role, other examples were given about changes in individual's beliefs through learning. Sherri learned that as an African-American woman she had a voice worthy of sharing in a group. Brian came to know himself differently as he developed an understanding of his role in a society that provides a different level of justice for people of different races. Sharon learned about herself as a daughter. Each

participant gave several examples of how their learning in LGF caused them to question what they believed to be true about their world and themselves.

Who we are is thus constructed by what we know. What we know is situated within the relationships between ourselves, others, and the larger cultural context. As we learn new information, interact with others in community, or come in contact with a different cultural context, we create a possibility of transforming who we are in the world. Our sense of self and the form of transformation is thus shaped by our interaction with that outside of us.

Learning Is Personal

Six subjects participated in this study. For each of them, this experience was at some level transformational. However, rarely did the same event in this learning experience trigger the same response in each participant. When speaking about their own moments of discord or self-awareness, there was no common event. Similar experiences such as the ropes course, dialogue sessions, or the community project were identified, but no common activity evoked the same reaction by all participants.

To elaborate, Laura, John and Sharon found the ropes course a very powerful experience. Laura identified her problems with trust. John discovered he was more self-centered than he thought himself to be. Sharon spoke of it with emotion, but did not equate it to any specific point of self awareness. However, even within this common activity, they describe the process and the outcome differently.

Outside of the ropes course, Sherri spoke about the value of the readings. No one else mentioned readings, which was valuable to Rachel and Brian. For these two the process was the same, but the content was different. Rachel's was the effect of urban

development on low income housing. Brian's was the criminal justice system. The process of dialogue was mentioned by everyone, but the content of the discussions varied in regard to what was disruptive and what was not.

There was no predictability on what activity might be potentially transformational. For some it was racial bias, for others it was poverty, for others systems thinking. For some the event appeared small or gradual. For others it was something big or immediate. The stimulus for change was as different as the persons in this study. Thus while similar, each person experienced Leadership Great Falls in his or her own unique way.

What these experiences suggest is that for transformative learning as a practice, there must be diversity in delivery. Leadership Great Falls had a shared vision for the process and outcomes of this experience, but they provided diverse avenues toward meeting these objectives. A set of shared assumptions, beliefs, values, traditions and behavior expectations guided the work. However, within this structure, the design called for as much diversity of experience as possible to facilitate the desired learning. Based on the experience of the subjects in this study, there was no single trigger event, but many.

Conclusion

There is evidence to suggest that the participants in this study did experience deep personal learning resulting in a qualitative change in one's understanding and being in the world. How the learning occurred was dependent on a wide array of factors. This study identified six; others, context, disruption, practice, our sense of self, and personal difference. In transformation, the final form is different depending on these factors. Said succinctly, given the individuals in this study, if the other participants or the context had

been different, transformation may have not occurred. And if it had occurred, it would

have resulted in a different form. Transformation is thus a shared process between the

individual and his or her relation to the world and others.

CHAPTER SEVEN

INTERPRETATIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of others, society, and culture in the process of personal transformation and transformative learning. In the previous chapter I present data to suggest that a deep personal change or transformation did occur in these participants because of this learning experience. The literature provides several theories on how this happens, two of the more common examples being the cognitive model of transformative learning closely associated with Mezirow (2000) or the depth psychology perspective associated with Boyd (1991; 1988) and Dirkx. (1997 Summer; 2003) There is significant research to support these perspectives. However, there is an ever-stronger position to further investigate or associate this learning with a model that includes the social. (Clark & Wilson, 1991, Winter; Collard & Law, 1989, Winter; Taylor, 1997 Fall; Tisdell & Tolliver, 2003)

Sociocultural Model

This chapter will provide a broad understanding of the role of the social and cultural context in transformative or deep personal learning. This model considers the interaction of people as well as the impact of shared assumptions, beliefs, values, traditions and behavior patterns within a group, community, or society on how individuals make sense of their world. Unlike the cognitive or depth psychology perspective, there is currently no comprehensive model that draws upon the sociocultural

perspective. Thus to do this investigation, we must first create a sociocultural framework by which to evaluate this learning experience. In reviewing the literature, I've chosen a sociocultural perspective based on the work of Lev Vygotsky, and Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger.

Vygotsky is the Russian cultural-historical psychologist upon which much of the sociocultural tradition is constructed. Lave and Wenger have created a model of learning framed within context and community. The combination of these three authors, and the extensive research by others based on their theoretical framework, will provide an appropriately comprehensive model for understanding Leadership Great Falls from a sociocultural perspective.

Cultural Historical Psychology

There is an overarching fundamental in the sociocultural tradition that how we learn, how we know knowledge, and ourselves in general, are social phenomena. For Vygotsky and his cultural historical model of psychology, learning and development are different; whereas learning is the acquisition of new information, development is a qualitative change in the person (Holzman, 1996). While intricately woven together, learning precedes development. In this construct, Vygotsky's concept of development aligns with adult learning theorist's model of transformation.

Given this context, to draw on the framework provided by Vygotsky, I will use three of his primary concepts in application to this research; Dialectic, Mediation, and the Zone of Proximal Development. In addition, there is one other theoretical construct that crosses through all of Vygotsky's model, this being that all learning and development

begins at a social level and then moves to the personal. As described by Wink and Putney, "Development begins as an interpersonal process of making meaning and then becomes an individualized process of making sense" (Wink & Putney, 2002, p. 91). They continue, "When we enter into discussion and meaningful interactions with others, we employ the process of moving from inter- to intrapersonal communication." Thus, development or qualitative personal change always occurs twice, first on the social and then at the personal (Vygotsky, 1978).

In the Leadership Great Falls experience, the dialogue and interactions that were occurring at the personal level was about public meaning-making. Through the introduction of diverse opinion and experiences, guided by the form of dialogue, the group was negotiating a public understanding of the current issue, experience, or phenomena. As this process continued, the external dialogue moved from the group, to the individual in the form of internal dialogue. The sociocultural learning model is a constructivist model. Thus the person is internalizing, or making personal sense of this experience in his or her own unique way.

The fundamental issue is that the meaning making occurs first in community, before it is integrated into the personal. Truth is thus constructed by those present, guided by the larger historical context. In this study the historical context are those shared assumptions, beliefs, practices, and rituals that structure the program. Rachel acknowledges this when she reflects on planning a retreat after completing her time in LGF, "If I had not been there...or someone else hadn't been there...it would have been different." What cannot be lost, however, is that Rachel is also describing the individual role in the creation of culture. Sociocultural theory is one of co-creation. The individual is

shaped by the culture but at the same time creates the larger context. It takes much longer to shape culture, but it is a manifestation of the collective.

Even times of quiet, personal reflection as identified by the participants, fall within this framework of human development in community. As described by Wertsch (1991), mental action carried out in isolation is still situated within a social context. The language we use for internal dialogue, the points we consider for critical analysis, our historical lifeline, the books we read and so much more are extensions of the larger environment. Thus the personal reflection that was so important to the participants, in time and process, was personal, but it was also socially framed with the cultural context of LGF.

Dialectic

In understanding how this process of group meaning making occurs, one must understand the concept of dialectic. Vygotsky was influenced by the work of Hegel and thus the dialectical process was a key element in his theory. Dialectic is a juxtaposition of opposing directions of thought to achieve synthesis. In dialectical synthesis, two opposite ideas are united in a continuous whole (VanderVeer & Valsiner, 1991).

Vygotsky (1986) uses the metaphor of water to describe a dialectic. Water is the combination of two hydrogen molecules and one oxygen. When combined, they become something completely different than their original form, which is still present in water. In fact, the new form is the opposite of its origins. Hydrogen is highly volatile and oxygen fuels fire. When combined as water however, they squelch fire. Thus in a dialectic, two distinctly different entities fuse to create something qualitatively different. In applying this to learning, Wink and Putney provide the following; "One cannot separate the

individual from the context and still have a complete understanding of either. The unification of a person within that social, cultural, historical, and political context informs our understanding of the dialectical relationship" (2002, p. xii).

The dialectic in reference to transformative learning provides a foundational understanding important to the sociocultural view. In applying a dialectical perspective to the Leadership Great Falls experience, I argue that personal transformation was facilitated through the coming together of opposites. Key examples of where these opposites originated include the opinions presented in dialogue, specific data presented at session, and community visits. These, as with many other opposites, created conflict within the individual or the individuals and the group, and the context for the creation of a new form of understanding among the LGF participants. Within the data collected from the LGF experience, dialectical processes are most present in the appreciation of diversity, new information, collaboration and the group process.

The appreciation of diversity was obvious with the group. Where the participants found value was around the ways in which this diversity shaped the whole. As described by John, "It gave me the opportunity to meet with others [to] view their opinions and help them mold part of mine or help my opinion mold part of theirs." He is giving this example within the context of interacting with a diverse community of others. He is describing a process where ideas, opinions, experiences and information are coming together in community to create something new. The energy present in this experience is described in another of his quotes where he refers to, "the decibel level could be real loud."

The result of this dynamic was something new and unique to this group. In relation to diversity, the individuals did not simply add to or deepen their understanding of diversity, but created a new way of knowing, valuing, and applying diversity. Laura and Sherri's sharing about their lack of respect or tolerance for the dominant culture was more than a shift, but constituted a reconstruction of their understanding of diversity. This is an example of a dialectic, not because several ideas were generated through brainstorming, because two opposing belief sets came together with great force that created something new.

When Laura, the champion of the "poor and people of color" came head on into the meaning making of the "wealthy business person" who believed in a "boot strap" approach to dealing with the poor, the result was deeper than a more informed understanding. It fundamentally shifted the way Laura saw these business people, the way she now works them, and her understanding of who she is (or was.)

The experience of receiving new information, processing it within a group, and creating a shared understanding is another example of a dialectical process. The new information stands alone; it is the intersection with the beliefs and knowledge of the group that causes the dialectic. It is the energy that is present that melds this into something different. This is inherent in the comments by Laura when she speaks about the, "process being more important than the activity."

This process is part of the larger dynamic created around being and functioning as a group. Developing and working as a group were continual elements of the LGF experience. The resulting shared experience by the participants was that the group process itself, was more than the sum of its parts. Or to use another common phrase, in

the group process: Two heads are better than one; not because they create something that is better, but because they create something that is better and qualitatively different, something that cannot be created by the same individuals working alone. In this experience, they come to know that there are problems in this world that cannot be solved by one person (just as with the ropes course), but for which a group can find a solution.

Further support for this perspective is how the participants came to value group tension. Sherri describes how "explosions" during the session where important and helpful to the group in moving forward. The participants generally recognized that tension was required for group success. Merging two hydrogen molecules and one oxygen to create water requires great energy; so does the dialectical process of positive group dynamics. Conflicting beliefs, ideas, experience and data sets create a highly charged environment resulting in a new form of understanding.

Another measure of how conflicting beliefs formed new understanding is present in the participant's learning outcomes as manifest in their new commitment to collaboration. While coming in to LGF, many perceived themselves as open to the opinions of others or as participatory leaders. What they identified in the interviews however was that they were not as open to the opinions and ideas of others as much as they had previously believed. The structure of this learning experience caused them to listen to and to seek out people and ideas different than their own. The personal outcome being a new understanding of the power of diversity through collaboration resulting in better decision making.

As a result of this learning, participants communicated how they have made collaboration with others a key component in their life after Leadership Great Falls.

Individuals provide several examples around how they lead, seek multiple voices in decision making, and are shaping their hiring process to increase organizational diversity. They have created what Bruffee (1995 Jan/Feb) refers to as a philosophy of collaboration – an understanding that the group process exceeds the authority and expertise of the individuals. A new way of being that requires the dissenting voice.

Without using the language of dialectic, the subjects are talking about how conflicting information and differing perspectives come together to create a unique, single entity that is an amalgamation of the diversity present in the group. It is this dynamic that is unique in the true process of collaboration. The result being the creation of knowledge that is qualitatively different than the sum of the knowledge inherent in the group. Sharon speaks specially about the role of opposites and their value in the process of LGF.

> It's kind of at a paradox on one hand, when you walk into the opening retreat they don't have any nametags or anything and they want you out of your comfort zone, you do the high ropes, you're out of your comfort zone, you're talking about sensitive issues, you're out of you comfort zone, yet, the paradox is and the dialogical piece is they give you practice rules and dialog skills and then they want you to talk about sensitive issues and get down to the crux of it, so, it's a co-existence.

Paradoxical, or more specifically, dialectical processes in transformation are two opposing beliefs, ideas, assumptions, expected behaviors or other ways of being coming together to form a new understanding and way of being in the world. In the dialectic, the change does not happen within one person but happens in-between the person and one or more persons or entities. However, the result of this new way of being is not arbitrary. While unique, it is still framed within a cultural context. The process that causes the opposites to exist, the quality of the

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opposites, and the preferred new understanding are all shaped by the larger culture. This instrument for this structure is introduced as mediation in the next section.

Mediation

Mediation provides a crucial framework for understanding personal transformation as manifest in Leadership Great Falls Experience. Mediation is the process by which the cultural artifacts of a society shape a person's learning and development. These artifacts are part of the sociocultural domain and are coded with the expectations of the context in which they reside. They perform as communicators or "bridges" to first shape a person's actions and higher mental functions from outside and over time become internalized into the person's understanding of the world (Wertsch, 1985). Presented from the opposite perspective, human activity can only be understood if we take into consideration the "tools" that mediate this activity (Moll, 1990).

Language is the most universal form of mediation. Vygotsky (1978) posits that an individual's cognitive meaning making and self regulated behavior are manifest in a form of private speech. Private speech is our internal dialogue and forms through the social interaction with others and the mediational or cultural tools of society. Again, this is further evidence that knowing begins at the social level and then moves to the individual.

While language was a very important aspect of Leadership Great Falls, it is the tools that were provided that best illustrate a sociocultural understanding of this experience. A clear example of this is the skill of dialogue. Dialogue was introduced as a skill and a framework by which the group would be together. There was a very specific form as described by Laura, "You don't cut people off, you don't interrupt, you hear

them through, you try and understand as deeply as you can." This was apposed to other forms of communication such as argument, debate, or negotiation. The use of dialogue was a choice that represented the shared assumptions, beliefs, values, traditions and behavior patterns inherent in LGF.

This tool was first taught at a very instrumental level. Next it was practiced in abstract. From that point forward it was used often. Each session began and ended with dialogue. Dialogue was used to debrief each activity. Along the way the facilitators and eventually members of the group maintained the form of dialogue within the group process. By the end of the nine weeks, the subjects in this study had come to understand dialogue as a fundamental way of being in the world. This was evidenced not only in their reference to dialogue throughout the interviews but by the continued application of dialogue in their lives.

Dialogue was not the only tool that shaped the participants. Systems thinking was another. The idea that much (if not all) in this world is connected changed the way the participants now understand their world. There was a new recognition that solving problems required expanding their perspective and the recognition of systemic connection. They came to know that effecting one part of an issue will effect something else - oftentimes with unforeseen consequences. Sharon provides an example of how systems thinking was new to her understanding of the world when referencing her grasp of how business, not-for-profits, and government are connected, "There's a lot of interconnectedness that goes around in the systems process that came to light for me, so, it was another one of those eye opening experiences." The result of being provided with this tool shaped the way the participants experienced and made meaning in the world.

Dialogue and systems thinking are examples of the pedagogy and content of Leadership Great Falls respectively. Thus in a learning environment, these elements can be seen as central to the mediation process. From the perspective of this research, the introduction of dialogue can be viewed as a cultural shift. As described by the participants, it was not a typical form of communication for them before LGF. Systems thinking is also relatively new in the leadership arena. Most widely associated with Peter Senge (1990), it would not have been part of most curricula much more than a decade ago and is still not present in many leadership development activities.

How transformation was effected through curriculum choice is also in evidence in the absence or removal of mediated symbols in the LGF experience. If language and words are mingled with roles and norms (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2001), then the removal of certain words shape the roles and expectations of the community, exemplified in the opening retreat when people were not introduced by their titles and job functions. By not presenting a person with his or her occupational label, the individuals were not affected by the strong socially constructed symbolic meaning attached to the label.

Not having these cultural clues to guide their interaction, the participants avoided some of the cultural dynamics around power and privilege. Sherri provides support about the effect of removing labels. "So much that comes with title, it's all about power and, you know, history and, you know, breadth of experience and all of those things that you overlay on people by virtue of what letters are behind their name or what position they have." These boundaries were recognized not only in the interaction with others, but as suggested by Laura, she felt freed from the constraints of her role as a CEO.

Given this context, they interacted on a personal level, getting to know each other as individuals. Rachel describes this in the following, "I got to know people based on not a title, not their job category or their skills that they had for their job but I got to know them on how we interacted in our group and how we built the team together, kind of their personality came out." Mediation thus comes not only in the tools presented, but in the tools or symbols not present.

The final element of mediation is activity. When tools are present, it's their usage or activity within a larger sociocultural context that gives them meaning. (Dreyfus, 1995) From a personal perspective, it is learning to interact with the mediated elements that cause personal meaning (Bredo, 1997). In the LGF experience, dialogue went from the simple learning of a new skill to continued application in ways that were relevant and applicable to the participants.

It is this practical activity that causes a shift in human psychological functionality (Cole, 1990). For the participants in this study, it was the connection of the active application to their world that made it meaningful. As described by Laura, "You could be talking about something in a practical way, like systems, and how they interrelated and how you can focus on these issues but you're really taking it down, or up, to a level that's beyond the technical learning. It actually makes sense then in application." Again, as a mediated activity, the participants made meaning in application, and by making meaning of the tool at the social level, they constructed meaning at the personal level.

The tools, language, activities, and way of interaction with Leadership Great Falls were examples of sociocultural mediation. They were choices that communicated the culture of LGF. As presented by Wertsch, " Human activity can only be understood if we

take into consideration the 'technical tools' and 'psychological tools' and 'signs' that mediate...These forms of mediation, which are products of the sociocultural milieu in which they exist, are not viewed as simply facilitating activity that would otherwise take place. Instead, they are viewed as fundamentally shaping and defining it" (1990, p. 114). Within this framework, transformation of persons in this learning experience was within a larger context. The value of diversity, collaboration, sense of self, and so forth was in concert with the context of Leadership Great Falls. If the context had been different, the transformation would have been different.

Zone of Proximal Development

The last concept drawn directly from Vygotsky, the Zone of Proximal Development or ZPD, is probably his most well known. The Zone of Proximal Development is the distance between what an individual is capable of doing on his or her own and what he or she is capable of doing with the assistance of a more capable other (Vygotsky, 1978). This zone measures potential development. The "other" in the definition represents a person or persons.

To understand the Zone of Proximal Development we must revisit the idea that learning precedes development. We learn to do something at a spontaneous level before we understand it at a scientific level (Moll, 1990). In the LGF experience, the participants learned to use dialogue at a spontaneous level, which created an experiential path for the development of the complete understanding of dialogue at a scientific level. The path to this development was the more capable others facilitating the process. This included not only the actual facilitators but any written material which would be mediated artifacts. Cazden (1981) refers to this as performance before competence. Going back to the

beginning of this section, we are reminded that development first happens at the social or interpersonal and then moves to the individual or intrapersonal.

A further elaboration on the ZPD is that the "more capable other" need not be an obvious expert working in relationship with a novice. Research on students solving complex academic math problems have shown that two people working in collaboration, who cannot solve a problem on their own, can oftentimes find a solution working together. Later, they can then solve a similar problem on their own (Tudge, 1990). This was exemplified in many of the team building exercises. No one person was initially capable of solving the problem, but through team collaboration, a solution was found.

There are many examples in the LGF experience where learning from others occurred as a possible precursor to personal transformation. The dialogue sessions, the ropes course, team projects, and so forth. There are also examples where learning did not occur. Sharon describes some business folks who either took a long time to learn or never understood dialogue. Others describe how for some participants, they could never connect in a meaningful way to issues such as race, sexual orientation, or poverty. Using the ZPD as a theoretical construct, this learning was beyond the zone for these individuals.

In these instances, the place where they were on their developmental path was too distant from the ideas or concepts being presented. This could be because they were well behind on that particular path as exemplified by John telling a story about a young white girl who could not understand the prejudice experienced by an much older African-American woman. It could also be because they were on a completely different path. This was exemplified by some of the business folks who were identified as finding

collaboration non-productive. For them, there was nothing in their personal history or life path that allowed them to connect with this form of personal interaction.

The concept of the zone of proximal development also has value in the group dynamics process. Participants gave examples where in a dialogue session the group might approach a level of discord or emotion around a topic and then just back down. In this instance, as the same with dialectics, it is possible to conceptualize the group as one entity and the individuals in the group as others. As a group, their ZPD, or potential for development, was still too distant to engage in such activities. However, with the guidance of another, in this case a facilitator, it was typically possible to deal with volatile issues. The same is true as the group developed. Over time, the group could approach topics that they would not have dealt with in early session. By then, the group's zone of proximal development had narrowed.

This example points to the value of community building as experienced in Leadership Great Falls. These activities narrowed the zone of proximal development between the participants so that they could work both as a team and in developmental collaboration with others. The initial community building process began with a zone of simple group problem solving and continued to move forward, ending in the ropes course. To have started at the ropes course would have been outside the ZPD of the group and would have most likely failed.

Communities of Practice

The previous components of sociocultural theory come from the work of Lev Vygotsky. This section introduces the Lave and Wenger (1991; 1998) model of

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Communities of Practice. Communities of Practice are theoretically consistent with Vygotskian concepts, draws upon them, and build upon them, to create a model of learning that has been applied at both the level of individual and organization. The basic premise is that knowledge is integrated in the life of communities that share values, beliefs, languages, and ways of doing things (Stucky, 1993).

The four components of this model are learning as doing, learning as experience, learning as becoming, and learning as belonging (Wenger, 1998). This section will introduce each of these components and apply them to the LGF experience. I will introduce these parts in the order listed above, ending with learning as belonging. This order will present these concepts, beginning with those most similar to Vygotsky, ending with the most distinctive and drawn upon construct in the communities of the practice model.

Learning as Doing

Learning by doing is the human activity of engaging with others in a shared practice. Practice here is defined as one might use the term "medical practice." It denotes a communal understanding of ways in which members of a community engage in enterprise. It includes the artifacts of this practice such as books, procedures, tools, stories, theories, myths, rules, etc. (Wenger et al., 2002). In the same sense as Vygotsky's mediation, the artifacts of the community communicate the cultural norms and expectations for members of that community. Wenger (1998) defines this as reification. In this perspective, it makes explicit the expected actions as well as the tools. This knowledge is held in the community and can only be fully known through belonging in the community.

In understanding Leadership Great Falls, the skill of dialogue again provides a specific example of learning by doing. This practice of being together was introduced in the opening retreat. It included specific behaviors, rules, and expectations. Within this community, membership included engaging in the practice. However, the practice was not stagnating. As identified by Laura, after being taught dialogue the group "made it ours" through small modification that fit this community. Thus knowledge is dynamic, always being renegotiated by the members of the community. In this example, dialogue as practiced within the context of Leadership Great Falls can only be known as a member of Leadership Great Falls.

Learning as Experience

Learning as experience is about meaning making. In communities of practice, individually we derive our meaning of the world through doing with others and the reified objects of that doing. Thus meaning making is a result of doing or participation in a community. This process is continually being negotiated as we engage in the world (Wenger, 1998). Negotiation happens at the intersection of the individual and the larger community or cultural context.

Continuing with LGF and the skill of dialogue, the participants came to understand the practice of dialogue and eventually the value of dialogue through experience. This is clear in that they begin using dialogue as an external set of rules to guide their being together. By the end of the nine weeks they have internalized the tool of dialogue and are applying it as a vital part of their life.

A similar example is their eventual understanding of diversity. The makeup of the group, the places they attended, the activities they shared introduced diversity as an

experience. As part of this communal experience they found conflict in their personal meaning making. This conflict was voiced through participants' comments of personal realizations of being "disrespectful" or "not as tolerant as I thought." The participants were voicing their renegotiations of meaning. Introduction to new experiences, within a community of practice – a community that has its own reified ways of being - caused them to construct a new way of making sense at a personal level.

Learning as Becoming

Learning as becoming is about a person's sense of self and the personal changes that occur because of learning (Wenger, 1998). A sense of self or identity is constructed through practice and reification. Identity is negotiated in the same way as meaning. Within this theoretical construct, identity is located between the interplay of the person and the community of practice. One's sense of self is defined both by the communities in which we participate and by those in which we do not belong.

In the LGF experience, all three themes identified as Individual Learning (Understanding of self in relation to others, recognition of personal bias, the value of collaboration) constitute examples of a changing sense of self. In the diversity example given in the previous section around meaning making, this renegotiation of meaning around the learning experience also caused a renegotiation of the participants' identity. Laura's sense of trust was about renegotiating her identity as a completely independent women who had to do everything for herself. Rachel's recognition of personal bias caused her to renegotiate what it meant for her to be an open minded person. Brian's experience with dialogue allowed him to renegotiate his identity as a leader.

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Throughout the LGF experience, as persons came into contact with meaningful experiences that conflicted with their present sense of self, they needed to renegotiate their identify. Identity is thus the produce of doing and experience. The negotiated understanding of who we are is framed by our community of practice.

Learning as Belonging

Learning as belonging is the process of having a membership in community of practice. Learning is social participation and thus to learn, one must engage in social practice. The activities and reified objects of society are held and taught within a community. Examples within Leadership Great Falls include the rituals of the day sessions, ways of listening, a particular understanding of systems, the meaning of the bineer, or "how to approach another graduate to donate money to your political campaign" as described by Sherri.

As individuals, we begin on the outside of a community, not knowing the knowledge held within that community. Through an individual's own effort, or the needs of the community, he or she can be provided peripheral status within a community. Here the person is allowed to learn from the community but not fully participate as a member. As the person becomes more competent, he or she may be brought in as a full member. This process of engagement between core members and those on the edge is termed as legitimate peripheral participation. It signifies the complex dynamic between the member of a community, its activities, its process of reification, and outsiders. In this case, learning increases with participation in communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Learning communities are also involved in renegotiation. While they have a strong core, they know that new knowledge comes from the periphery. They also know

that members of one community are also part of other communities, and thus to maintain a vibrant community there must be room for interaction within the community. Within the community, experience and competence are continuingly in varying degrees of tension. Without this tension, the community becomes complacent, reproductive communities of practice (Wenger, 1998).

The systemic picture of Leadership Great Falls constitutes a community of practice. There is a formal organizational structure that continues before, during and after the learning session. However, this is not enough. Communities of practice are defined by their community, not their formal structure (Wenger et al., 2002). In this case we can identify a clear communal structure for LGF. Past participants stay involved with the organization in a variety of leadership roles. All of the activities of LGF are planned and facilitated by past graduates. They have a shared understanding of the purpose of LGF and feel connected to the community that is Leadership Great Falls. This is evident in the executive director's comments about the continual help that she received in planning each of the events from the many program participants and from the ongoing connection of the subjects in this study. These people are at the core and maintain the reification of LGF.

Non LGF participants are on the outside of the community. They apply to participate and are selected by a subset of the community. This allows them to formally engage. It gives them periphery status. When they attend sessions, the sessions are facilitated by core members of the community. These activities are directed toward the reification of the objects of LGF such as dialogue, diversity, and systems thinking. Many start to belong in the community such as those identified in this study. In doing so, they

learn and eventually begin the process of renegotiating their own sense of self and the LGF community itself.

Not everyone who joins Leadership Great Falls becomes part of the community. Sherri identified some participants who were never comfortable with the LGF curriculum. She attributed this to a curriculum change that began with her class. The previous LGF sessions were very instrumental. Each month participants went to different parts of the city and met important people. It was very unidirectional in its approach, in contrast to the more constructivist curriculum identified in this research. However, for those people that never engaged, this new curriculum did not represent a community they had interest in joining.

Others did not join the community because the community would not let them move beyond the periphery. Sharon provides an example of how one person was not brought to the core because of his, "Very closed mindedness about sexual orientation and sins, and the people who are of a certain orientation are sinners and are no good." So participation required a shared desire to belong, both with the individual and the community. This belonging provided the deep learning described by the participants. This is evidenced in their high praise for the community building exercises, the dialogue skills that allowed people to be in community and the projects that required "doing, experiencing and becoming."

Summary of the Sociocultural Tradition

The key element in the sociocultural tradition is that learning is a collaboration between the person and cultural context. The cultural context includes the norms,

behaviors, expectations, beliefs and all that there is that defines being human within a given community. These artifacts are present in the tools and activity of mediation as described by Vygotsky or the reification of objects and behaviors as described in communities of practice. In the Leadership Grand Falls experience, this is manifest in the four platforms of systems thinking, diversity, community connections and leadership skills. Each of these words has a very specific meaning. As an example, leadership for LGF is described by the executive director as, "Someone who knows themselves and where they fit and is comfortable with it ... who learns how to develop the support systems for some of the weaknesses they may have ... of creating opportunities and being successful at what they're driven at." Had these words (symbols) had different mediated values, the learning for the participants would have been different.

There is a recognition of the ever-evolving relationships among objects. For Vygotsky this is present in the framework of the dialectic. For communities of practice, this is present in the continuing renegotiation at each level of learning. The dialogical nature of LGF made this obvious. Causing people to be uncomfortable through the ropes course, the interaction with others not like them, visiting places in the community outside their domain, the interactions between individuals and the group, required the creation of a new way of understanding their world.

Action defining meaning is present in the sociocultural tradition. In the Vygotskian perspective, tools are defined through their usage. Activity causes meaning. The same is true for communities of practice where doing and experience are cornerstones in the way people make sense of the world. In LGF, this was present in

having people engage in real projects, in real time application of their learning outside of this experience, in the active nature of the sessions themselves.

Interaction with others within a larger cultural context is the central theme of both theories. For Vygotsky this is present in the zone of proximal development. In communities of practice, this is manifest in belonging. Individuals can only learn when they are appropriately connected with others. Learning first happens at the social level and then at the individual level. This is described in Vygotkian terms as moving from the interpersonal to the intrapersonal. For communities of practice, this public meaning making happens as a precursor to personal internalization. The team building, group process, and dialogue circles in LGF was directed toward the creation of community. The time for reflection created the space for personal meaning making.

The final theme across the two traditions is the forming of the person through everything identified in the previous section. Within a Vygotskian framework, learning proceeds development. Doing, experience and belonging contributes to becoming in communities of practice. In both Vygotsky's development, and learning as belonging from communities of practice, there is a qualitative shift in the person. He or she now sees him or herself differently and understands the world in a uniquely different manner. The individual learning reported in the previous chapter is evidence of this phenomenon.

A Sociocultural Perspective on Transformative Learning

This section draws upon the theoretical constructs of the sociocultural tradition and the theoretical analysis of this study in the previous chapter to identify elements within the social and cultural context, which provide a deeper understanding of

transformative learning. While learning in general, or instrumental learning, are affected

by the social and the cultural in many ways, from the perspective of transformative

learning the sociocultural perspective can be presented in two major findings;

transformation is shaped by the culture, transformation involves expanding a persons

belonging in community.

Transformation is Shaped by the Culture

The Leadership Great Falls experience was constructed through a set of shared

assumptions, beliefs, values, traditions and behavior expectations. The original

curriculum designers had shared beliefs about leadership and learning. The Chamber of

Commerce, LGF board, and financial sponsors all shape the experience. The session

planner and facilitators, all past LGF graduates are part of the context. The executive

director and the participants themselves combine with all of these elements to experience

the culture of Leadership Great Falls.

This cultural context is inherent in the tools, rituals and artifacts of LGF. It is

exemplified in the four platforms, the definition of leadership, LGF's particular approach

to diversity, the site visits, the use of dialogue, the opening circle, and all the other

activities that create this experience. These are choices that represent or mediate the

shared assumptions, beliefs, values, traditions and behavior expectations of Leadership

Great Falls. Combined, these are its culture.

Knowing comes through doing. Through activity the participants make sense or

come to understand or make meaning of these experiences. It is this meaning making that

shapes the individual transformation. If Leadership Great Falls had a different culture, if

their definition of leadership had been different, if dialogue had not been provided as a

tool, if it had not been active, if any number of other significant choices been different, the individual transformation would have been different. Transformation as a form is thus shaped by the culture in which the new meaning making occurs.

Within a sociocultural perspective, the form is the co-construction of meaning making that resides between the person and the cultural context. The context is what brings meaning to the experience. An individual's knowing cannot be separated from cultural mediation (Wertsch, 1990). This meaning making that first occurs on the outside, over time becomes internalized into an individual's understanding of the world. The internalization process takes time and is what creates stability in an individual's meaning making. In the Leadership Great Falls experience, there was nine months of active engagement with the context, allowing for the social meaning making and eventual internalization of the tools representing the culture of LGF.

Transformation Involves Expanding A Person's Belonging In Community.

The majority of learning in Leadership Great Falls was facilitated through group activity. Group process as a form of pedagogy has been well researched as a valuable form of learning (Bruffee, 1995 Jan/Feb; Cross, 2000). In relationship to being transformational however, the group process constitutes more than shared learning. Transformational learning involves becoming part of a new community while developing a more permeable membership between other communities.

From the very beginning, the Leadership Great Falls experience worked toward creating a community. The structure of the opening retreat, the team building exercises, the participation of past members were designed to create a psychological connection

between the new participants in LGF and the established members of this community. This community building was an intentional and represented the culture of LGF.

A component in the LGF creation of community included disrupting old connections and creating new ones within the community of participants. The disruption was exemplified through not using titles in the opening retreat, through challenging the participants' definition of tolerance, through providing them with experiences in the community that conflicted with their existing knowledge. After the disruption, meaning making was established within community. Individual knowing then became dependent on those present in the group making sense within a cultural context.

While entering into the community of Leadership Great Falls, there was no requirement that participants abandon their existing communities. There were cultural values, beliefs and expected behaviors that were part of LGF. To be part of this community, participants did need to adopt these cultural standards. In doing this it was acceptable for participants to hold membership in other communities. This was made clear in Leadership Great Falls approach to leadership. As conceptualized by the designers of this curriculum, the intention wasn't to create a new definition of leader but an expanded definition (Olivarez, 2003).

The transformational impact of Leadership Great Falls was in the development of individuals who understood and fully participated in LGF as well as making more permeable the boundaries among additional communities in which they had membership. This was inherent in the learning outcomes defined in the findings chapter. Trust, ego and confidence exemplified the understanding of self in relation to others. For Laura it was in trusting others. For John it was the recognition that his ego was keeping him from

participating as a team. For Sherri it was confidence in the value that she provided to a group as an African-American woman. Each of these examples is about expanding their relationship with others, and about expanding their connection to others in community.

The two other findings of recognition of personal biases and the value of collaboration performed the same function. In the first learning, the removal of biases expands the authentic involvement a person has with another. Embracing the value of collaboration demands the inclusion of many diverse individuals in meaningful activities. Each of these learnings moved the LGF graduates toward participation in a larger range of community. Transformation for these participants thus became a process of participating in a new community as well as more easily residing and holding the values of other communities.

This transformational process not only changed the person's relationship with others in community; it also changed the person's sense of self. From a sociocultural perspective, a person's sense of self is defined by the communities in which he or she participates. It is an ever negotiated relationship between the person, others and the social context (Wenger, 1998). As a person joins or expands the communities in which he or she is a member, so does his or her sense of self. Transformation thus becomes not only a process of meaning making in the world, but it also constructs a new way in which the person understands his or her self. For Laura, it was not only that she could trust, but that she now perceived herself as a trusting person. For Sherri, it wasn't just that she could add the perspective of an African-American woman to the conversation, it was that she saw herself as having value as an African-American woman.

Implications for Practice

The Power of Context

The context of Leadership Great Falls shaped the learning that occurred in this study. In practice, the tools that a teacher provides to students in method, material and content selection; the amount of information that leaders share or the way they perform performance evaluations; all that is done creates meaning making at a larger social context. No behavior or object is incidental.

Meaning making comes from the use of the mediated objects. As an example, utilizing teams in a classroom is a tool. Meaning making comes from how the tool is used. Is it a collaborative, power sharing tool or is it a way to organize students share information to complete a diagram? How the tool is used creates the meaning. As a practical implication then, practitioners must decide not only what tools they are to use, but why, and what is being communicated in the use of that tool.

What is selected to be taught or excluded in the way of content communicates cultural values. What is presented as worth knowing shapes the relationship of the class at both a social and individual level. At the social level, content is the medium for interaction. In LGF, the dialogue was always structured around the daily content. System thinking, police profiling and urban sprawl helped create the context for the class. Within a sociocultural perspective, the content becomes part of the social meaning making. Because meaning making happens at both the social and individual level, the process of individual transformation is thus effected by content choices.

Pedagogical decisions have equally powerful, but less obvious ramifications. Mediation, or reification as described in communities of practice, includes not only objects but also the actions of a culture such as expected behaviors, procedures or rituals. Inviting students to construct the syllabus or decide methods of assessment creates a context of social participation. The uses of groups or learner contracts are mediated choices just as classroom lecture and the attendance policy. For students, each of these constitutes activity at a social level. These and many other choices create a level of meaning making for the student that effects his or her learning beyond the content. From this perspective, the process of teaching is equal to the content being taught.

The value of activity in meaning making emerged as a key component of transformative learning from a sociocultural perspective. The active engagement with a mediated object creates the meaning. If content and pedagogy are mediated objects, then students must actively engage with them to construct the intended understanding. As an example, teaching content as a passive activity causes passive meaning making. It communicates that the content has little value. To elaborate from a different perspective, if there is no communally guided mediated application of the content, the student will bring his or her own understanding, which may be very different than the intended learning.

The Power of Others

Collaboration as a teaching strategy is not new. Bruffee (1993; 1995 Jan/Feb) and others have provided strong evidence in support of a collaborative learning environment. However, what this study suggests is that transformative learning involves participation in a community, not just the collaboration with others. Creating the community requires

time and intention. LGF spent an entire weekend retreat just creating the learning environment or context before introducing the content. This is important to the outcome but it is also important for a successful process. Students bring a larger cultural context to the classroom. Working in community is not always part of their history. If a class is going to deviate from those student expectations, time and process must be allocated to moving the students outside of their expectations.

The value of creating this community is that meaning making happens first in community. There are many formal and informal communities in which all of us live. Students have multiple communities. Not all communities are equal. For some, students are full participants, for others they are on the periphery. For students to engage in deep learning in a class, they must be full participants of the class as a community of practice. This requires a desire on their part to have a role of the community. Creating such an environment requires making the overall curriculum meaningful and valuable to the student. To be a community, the student must also have his or her own rights and responsibilities in the class. For legitimate communities to form, power must be shared.

Critical Pedagogy

The history of adult education, from Lindeman (1926) forward to Welton (1995) and Tisdale (1993), has argued for the purpose of education to create an egalitarian, power neutral society. Building upon the arguments presented above about curriculum, a critical teacher needs to look deeply at how his or her students are being shaped by mediated content and teaching strategies. When content is selected and shared, it is being mediated as knowledge worth acquiring. Given this, several questions need to be entertained with making curricular decisions. An example from content is, "Who

determines which knowledge is best known? In reference to teaching strategies, "Who decides what behaviors are most appropriate?" Since individual and culture are intricately entwined, the answers to these and other similar questions determine a person's behavior and sense of self. If knowledge is socially constructed as suggested in this study, what community is making the decisions?

Professional Development

This study provides support for a concept posited by Wenger that much of what is of value to a person in the workplace is learned through the interaction with more capable peers. (Wenger et al., 2002) While the curriculum did include specific content that was introduced each session, the participants in the study made little reference to this learning as valuable. They focused on learning from others within a meaningful context. They reported on how the nine months allowed them to consider themselves in relation to their community, their practice and their personal life. This study does not suggest that training at an instrumental level has no value, it only suggests for this population, the real learning was about themselves and their relationship with a larger community.

The implications here are, however, that professional development should be seen as more than the technical acquisition of facts. Deep learning that may be transformational requires a focus on the person within his or her personal context. In addition, given the premise that meaning making is a reciprocal process between the individual and the social, the impact of the type of education provided to employees is powerful. As an example, by only providing technical or skill based education to employees, the mediated message is that a person's job can be reduced to a few sets of measurable tasks. Larger issues of quality, respect for others, connection to the

organization are lost within this context. Said another way, How an organization treats learning mediates its value to the person.

Leadership Development

The overall purpose of this educational experience was leadership development. Each of the areas for application discussed so far inform the context of leadership development. Leadership itself is a socially constructed concept. What it means to be a leader is a mediated process. The content of the four platforms communicated a specific approach to leadership. The group process and time for reflection mediated a specific approach to leadership. The learning reported by the participants is a manifestation of these decisions. Given the process and outcomes in this experience, compared to typical leadership institutes, this one could be considered counter-cultural.

From a cultural perspective, the pedagogy and content selection of the program in this study was very important. Leadership was not narrowed to a set of skills or activities; it was made larger to connect to the entire community. Participants did learn skills important to their organization. They did this however in the context of the role and responsibility of leader as community steward. The active application of their learning was connected to their lives, personal or professional, and the community in which they lived and worked. The participatory nature of the experience communicated to them that they had something to contribute as a person and a leader. The larger context allowed them to see their work as connecting to the common good.

Beyond the community focus, this leadership development program was focused on the leader as a person who needs to understand his or her inner self. The framework

for this leadership development is parallel to the definition of a leader as provide by

Parker Palmer:

> A leader is a person who has an unusual degree of power to project on other people his or her shadow, or his or her light. A leader is a person who has an unusual degree of power to create the conditions under which other people must live and move and have their being--conditions that can either be as illuminating as heaven or as shadowy as hell. A leader is a person who must take special responsibility for what's going on inside him or her self, inside his or her consciousness, lest the act of leadership create more harm than good. (Palmer, 1990, p.2)

If this is considered counter cultural, the implications from this study are

derived from the fact that every person in this study had socially important

positions in the community. They were generally well educated, had high level

job experience, and had participated in extensive workplace training through

conferences, institutes, etc. Given this, these leaders found this to be one, if not

the, most important learning experience to their career. When reflecting back on

their learning experiences since college, only one person could describe a

similarly powerful personal experience. That learning was of a similar nature

directed at understanding race through white privilege.

The implications thus being that this type of leadership development does

have value. Those leaders from many professional sectors may find value in

knowing self as a leader. As reported by these leaders, this type of learning was

equal or more valuable to their role as a leader than most other learning

experiences they have had as professionals.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study opened the door on an area of transformative learning that others have

suggested be opened - a deep understanding of the role of culture and society in personal

transformation. Further research is required to develop a more comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon. The framework presented in this study should be continued to develop a deeper understanding of the role of community in transformation. A specific question arises around the qualitative posture of transformation. If transformation is human development toward a more complete self, does joining another community alone posit transformation? This answer seems to be a definitive no. What are the elements of belonging that do initiate positive personal development?

This research focused on a geographically bound group of six leaders who all participated in the same experience (while at different times.) Expanding each of these parameters would be of value. The location of the learning experience could be made larger. Other areas of learning could be researched which might include formal, academic education. A single research study could consider individuals from different learning experiences.

This learning experience was highly social. This area of study could be informed by the study of transformative learning experiences that appear to occur in a more didactic approach. The interactive nature of this research may have affected the findings. If the sociocultural perspective is present in transformation, it will be present regardless of the delivery system.

This study interviewed those people for whom this was a valuable learning experience. Future studies could study a cross section of students to determine if there is a difference why something is transformative for some and not for others. A question arises around how might individual learning styles and preferences affect transformative learning?

This study used the lens of the sociocultural tradition to make meaning from the research. After the fact, this was contrasted in a theoretical way with the two dominant theories of transformative learning. Further research is suggested to look at where these theories align and where they contrast. An interesting question would be to determine if these three approaches to transformative learning align in any way to individual differences. Does one approach work well with certain people and a different approach with different people?

From a methodological perspective, this study tried to use significant others in collecting evidence of individual transformation. While the interviews with these individuals generally supported the results, they did not provide specific examples of change. There are two speculations why this occurred. The first is the length of time between the experience and the interviews. These people were asked to reflect on events that ranged from three to seven years past. So, while the memories were still available in the participants themselves, the timeframe was too distant for those who may have observed or heard about the experience.

A similar issue of distance speaks to the second possibility. All six subjects provided contacts that were professional acquaintances, not personal. So while the leader may have changed his or her professional practice, it is less likely that colleagues or subordinates understand or remember the path of change. Future research studies in transformative learning may have better results interviewing others who know the participants as the experience is in progress or from third party observation using individuals more intimate with the subjects.

Conclusion

Transformative learning as a theory of adult learning and a philosophy of education has a significant place in the domain of adult and higher education. More than two decades ago, Mezirow (1991) suggested that deep personal learning that transforms an individual results in a more inclusive, differentiating, permeable, critically reflective, and integrative understanding of the world. This suggestion created both an ideal and a theoretical foundation for others to move forward, creating a more encompassed understanding of what transformation really means. However, there is still a loss of understanding around one possibly significant element of transformation, the role of others, society, and culture (Clark & Wilson, 1991, Winter; Collard & Law, 1989, Winter; Mezirow, 1999; Sveinunggaard, 1993).

The results of this study suggest that others, society and culture play a significant role in transformation. Context, the use of mediated tools is an important learning. Everything done in a learning environment matters. The content, pedagogy, assessment, even the way the facilitator engages with the participants, communicates the values, norms, expectations of a larger culture. Nothing is incidental. The understanding of the cultural tools came through activity. People need to use something to make meaning. Since transformative learning is framed in meaning making, individual transformation requires activity.

The power of community emerged as equally important to context. The personal meaning making around the tools of culture is first created within a community of others and is then internalized at the personal level. Time is required to develop inclusion in a new community. A psychological connection is also required. The knowledge held in the

new community may result in a disruption within the person and his or her previous communities. The reestablishment of order through social meaning making and individual internalization results in personal transformation.

This research was not meant to replace, prove wrong, or contradict the previous research and models of transformation. Rather the intention here was to provide an additional perspective on a previously underdeveloped element within transformative learning. There are still some large epistemological and ontological differences between these theories. The creation and location of knowledge at a social level within the sociocultural tradition is counter to both the cognitive and depth psychology tradition.

A multiplistic self known through the involvement and interaction with others in community is in opposition to the cognitive perspective on transformative learning which has a unitary notion of self. While both the depth psychology and the sociocultural embrace a multiplistic sense of self, from the depth psychology perspective multiplicity coming from the various selves or persona within the unconscious and its entwinement with the conscious self. Mutiplicity from a sociocultural perspective comes from the idea of self as a continuous process of becoming while actively engaging in multiple communities situated within a cultural context. These are important questions and concerns beyond the scope of this study. The hope for this research is at the functional level, it may provide some new ways of understanding and facilitating transformative learning.

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

Initial Telephone Interview Protocol for LGF Grad

Initial Script

Hello, my name is Frank Conner and Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning at Grand Rapids Community College and I am a Ph.D. student working toward on my dissertation at Michigan State University. I received your name from Cynthia Wood as someone who participated in Leadership Great Falls. I am studying Leadership Great Falls with the intent of developing an understanding of the experience by the participants. Would you be willing to talk to me about being a participant in my study?

If they agree to talk further about my study -

Would tell me a little bit about your experience over the phone.

If it is apparent during this short conversation that they have experienced a form of transformation that they attribute to this learning experience, I will ask them if they would like to participate further in the study. I will explain that doing so would include two interviews of about 90 minutes each. Both interviews would be taped, but their identity would remain confidential. Also, if they chose to participate, I would like them to identify a significant person in their life that could speak about their change. I am particularly interested in a person who has had a sustained connection to the subject; knowing him or her before, during, and after, the learning experience.

If they agree to participate in the study –

I will schedule our first meeting and inform them that I will be sending them a letter and a consent form outlining the research and procedure for confidentiality. I will also get the name of the significant person at this time and inform them that I will be calling that person within the week.

If at any time they communicate that they are not interested in participating in this study, I will thank them for their time and end the conversation.

<date>

Dear <name>:

Thank you for agreeing to spend some time with me talking about your experience in Leadership Great Falls. Our 90 minute meeting is scheduled for <time> on <date> at <location.>

In preparation for our meeting, I've enclosed a copy of the Consent Form that outlines the details and parameters of this interview. I will review this document with you prior to our beginning the interview to clarify any questions or concerns you may have.

Should you have any questions before that date, or need to reschedule our meeting for any reason, please feel free to contact me at xxx.xxx.xxxx (work) or xxx.xxx.xxxx (home) or email me at xxxxxx@xxx.edu.

I look forward to our meeting.

Sincerely,

Frank L. Conner

APPENDIX C

UNDERSTANDING LEADERSHIP GREAT FALLS
AS AN ADULT LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Participant Consent Form

Purpose of this study

The purpose of this study it to develop a deeper understanding of how adults learn and the impact of this learning on their lives. This research will focus on one particular adult learning experience – Leadership Great Falls (LGF) . This study is a part of a dissertation for a Ph. D. in Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Learning at Michigan State University

Procedures

As a participant in this study, you will participate in two sets of interviews. These interviews will contain questions about your background, experience in Leadership Great Falls, and any continued results of the LGF experience. Each interview will be no more than 90 minutes. These interviews will be audio taped and for analysis purposes, the audio tapes will be transcribed.

Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose to not participate at all, or you may choose to not answer certain questions. You may choose to discontinue the interview or your participation in the study at any time.

Risks

There are no known foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study.

Benefits

There are no direct benefits involved in participating in this study.

Confidentiality

Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. The records for this study will remain confidential. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications resulting from this study. All tapes, transcripts, and summaries will be given codes and stored separately from any names or other direct identification of participants. Research information will be kept in locked files at all times. Only the researcher and his academic advisor will have access to the records generated from this study. Once this study is complete, the audio tapes will be destroyed

Additional Information

As part of this research project, I would like to interview someone who knew you before, during, and after your experience with LGF. This interview will be a 30 minute telephone interview and will focus on what they observed about your LGF experience. The same confidentiality procedures will apply to the interview with them as with you. They also have the right to not participate. Please provide below the name of such a person and a telephone number. Doing so documents your permission for me to contact them.

_____   _____
Name   Telephone Number

Additional Interview

After interviewing the other participants in this study, as well as analyzing your interview, I may contact you for a second interview. This interview will be of the same nature and will be governed by the same guidelines outlined in this document. The purpose of this second 90 minute interview will be to probe deeper on issues of importance that have emerged in the original interview(s) or to clarify what I perceive as possible contradictions within a single interview or between participants.

Contact information

If you have any questions about this study, please contact:
- **Frank Conner**, Grand Rapids Community College, 143 Bostwick NE, Grand Rapids, MI, 49503, (616) 234-3612, fax (616) 234-3363, email – fconner@grcc.edu;
- **John Dirkx**, PhD, MSU Professor and Dissertation Committee Chair, 408 Erickson Hall, E. Lansing, MI, 48824-1034, (517) 353-8927, email – dirkx@msu.edu

If you have questions regarding your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time or with any aspect of this study, you may contact—anonymously, if you wish—**Ashir Kumar**, M.D., Chair of MSU's University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS) , (517) 355-2180, fax (517) 432-4503, email – ucrihs@msu.edu, or regular mail: 202 Olds Hall, E. Lansing, MI 48824.
Your signature below indicates your voluntary agreement to participate in this study.

Signature: _____   Date: _____
                 Research Participant

Signature: _____   Date: _____
                 Interviewer

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol for LGF Grad

Review the consent form. Turn on tape recorder.
Ask participant if s/he has any questions before we begin interview.

Background
I'd like to know a bit about your background.

Where did you grow up?

What was it like as a child?

What is your current work?

What brought you to this work?

What was your prior work experiences?

What has been your educational experiences?

Have you experienced other forms of learning?
      Do any of these stand out as partially meaningful?
      If so, what was it about that particular experience made it stand out from the rest?

LGF Experience
When did you attend LGF?

What do you see as the purpose of LGF?

What led you to participate in LGF?
      What were you trying to achieve?
      Did you have any goals in participating in LGF?

Describe the experience for you –
      Does any particular experience stand out as memorable?

What was the nature of this as a learning experience?

What was the roles of others in this experience?

Can you describe what else was going on in your life at this time?
      What were you doing?
      Who was involved?

What was or has been the result of this experience to you personally?
      In what way are these results still present today?
      Have there been other factors that have helped you continue the results of this experience?

APPENDIX E

Interview Protocol for Second Interview with LGF Grad.

Remind the person that the consent form is still in effect.
Ask person if he or she has any questions before we begin.
Turn on tape recorder.

Remind them of the purpose of this second interview

Could you please tell me more about the opening retreat?
> No Name, No Labels
> Team Exercises

Could you please tell me about the role of dialogue?

How did you experience new information in LGF?
> Many described as "eye opening experiences"

Could you tell me how the group respected each other?
> Tolerance of other view points
> Acceptance of additional perspectives
>
> How did this happen?

Could you tell me more about how the group interacted
> Did roles emerge?
> Did people make allies?

Were there times when you or the group experienced tension?

Could you elaborate on how systems thinking was part of the experience?

Are you still part of the LGF community?
> Can you give examples?

What was the role of individual reflection in the experience?

What did you learn about yourself?
> Self discovery?
> How did this happen?

What did you learn about yourself as a leader?
> How did this happen?

APPENDIX F

Interview Protocol and Script for LGF Significant Other

Initial Script

Hello, my name is Frank Conner and I am Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning and Grand Rapids Community College and am pursuing a Ph.D. in Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Learning at Michigan State University. Your name was given to me by _____. He/She informed me that you knew him/her during the time he/she participated in Leadership Great Falls.

As part of my Ph.D., I'm doing a study that looks at Leadership Great Falls as an adult learning experience. Would you be willing to spend about 30 minutes to talk to me about what you observed in _____ in regards to his or her participation in LGF?

If they agree –

May I tape record our session? You can be assured that everything will remain confidential. If you do agree to being tape recorded, I will turn it on now and read to you a consent form that outlines the details of this study . If you agree, you will be asked to speak your consent.

Turn on tape recorder and read consent form.

Ask participant if s/he has any questions before we begin interview.

Questions
How well do you know _____?

What was your relationship with him or her during his or her experience in LGF?

While he or she was participating in LGF, what did they tell you about _____'s experience in the program?

Now that the program is complete, has the program effected _____ in any noticeable way?

If at any time they communicate that they are not interested in participating in this study, I will thank them for their time and end the conversation.

February 1, 2003

UNDERSTANDING LEADERSHIP GREAT FALLS
AS AN ADULT LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Participant Consent Form

Purpose of this study
The purpose of this study it to develop a deeper understanding of how adults learn and the impact of this learning on their lives. This research will focus on one particular adult learning experience – Leadership Great Falls (LGF) . This study is a part of a dissertation for a Ph. D. in Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Learning at Michigan State University

Procedures
As a participant in this study, you will participate in one 30 minute telephone interview. This interview will contain questions about a person close to you who was a participant in Leadership Great Falls. Your name was given to me by this person. These questions will be about your observation of his or her experience as someone who new him or her during this time and if you now know of any continued results of his or her participation in LGF. These interview is being audio taped and for analysis purposes, the audio tapes will be transcribed.

Participation
Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose to not participate at all, or you may choose to not answer certain questions. You may choose to discontinue the interview or your participation in the study at any time.

Risks
There are no known foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study.

Benefits
There are no direct benefits involved in participating in this study.

Confidentiality
Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. The records for this study will remain confidential. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications resulting from this study. All tapes, transcripts, and summaries will be given codes and stored separately from any names or other direct identification of participants. Research information will be kept in locked files at all times. Only the researcher and his academic advisor will have access to the records generated from this study. Once this study is complete, the audio tapes will be destroyed

Contact information

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- **Frank Conner**, Grand Rapids Community College, 143 Bostwick NE, Grand Rapids, MI, 49503, (616) 234-3612, fax (616) 234-3363, email – fconner@grcc.edu;
- **John Dirkx**, PhD, MSU Professor and Dissertation Committee Chair, 408 Erickson Hall, E. Lansing, MI, 48824-1034, (517) 353-8927, email – dirkx@msu.edu

If you have questions regarding your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time or with any aspect of this study, you may contact—anonymously, if you wish—**Ashir Kumar**, M.D., Chair of MSU's University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS) , (517) 355-2180, fax (517) 432-4503, email – ucrihs@msu.edu, or regular mail: 202 Olds Hall, E. Lansing, MI 48824.

A signed copy of this form will be mail to you at the following address:

Your verbal acknowledgment indicates your voluntary agreement to participate in this study.

Signature: _____   Date: _____
Interviewer

APPENDIX H

Interview Protocol for LGF Executive Director

Review the consent form.

Turn on tape recorder.

Ask participant if s/he has any questions before we begin interview.

<u>Background</u>
I'd like to know a bit about your background.

<u>LGF Experience</u>
How long were you the Executive Director at LGF?

During your tenure, what were the goals of LGF?

What kind of activities made up the experience for the participants?
      What was it like for them?

If I had been a fly on the wall, what might I have witnessed?

What did you observe about participants over the course of this program?

What have participants told you about their experience?

February 1, 2003

UNDERSTANDING LEADERSHIP GREAT FALLS
AS AN ADULT LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Participant Consent Form

Purpose of this study

The purpose of this study it to develop a deeper understanding of how adults learn and the impact of this learning on their lives. This research will focus on one particular adult learning experience – Leadership Great Falls (LGF) . This study is a part of a dissertation for a Ph. D. in Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Learning at Michigan State University

Procedures

As a participant in this study, you will participate in one 90 minute interview. This interview will contain questions about your observations of the student experience as participants in Leadership Great Falls. This interview will be audio taped and for analysis purposes, the audio tapes will be transcribed.

Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose to not participate at all, or you may choose to not answer certain questions. You may choose to discontinue the interview or your participation in the study at any time.

Risks

There are no known foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study.

Benefits

There are no direct benefits involved in participating in this study.

Confidentiality

Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. The records for this study will remain confidential. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications resulting from this study. All tapes, transcripts, and summaries will be given codes and stored separately from any names or other direct identification of participants. Research information will be kept in locked files at all times. Only the researcher and his academic advisor will have access to the records generated from this study. Once this study is complete, the audio tapes will be destroyed

Contact information

If you have any questions about this study, please contact:

- **Frank Conner,** Grand Rapids Community College, 143 Bostwick NE, Grand Rapids, MI, 49503, (616) 234-3612, fax (616) 234-3363, email – fconner@grcc.edu;
- **John Dirkx,** PhD, MSU Professor and Dissertation Committee Chair, 408 Erickson Hall, E. Lansing, MI, 48824-1034, (517) 353-8927, email – dirkx@msu.edu

If you have questions regarding your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time or with any aspect of this study, you may contact—anonymously, if you wish—**Ashir Kumar,** M.D., Chair of MSU's University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS) , (517) 355-2180, fax (517) 432-4503, email – ucrihs@msu.edu, or regular mail: 202 Olds Hall, E. Lansing, MI 48824.

Your signature below indicates your voluntary agreement to participate in this study.

Signature: _____   Date: _____
        Research Participant

Signature: _____   Date: _____
        Interviewer

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