WATERSHEDES: TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCES IN THE LIVES OF PEOPLE COMMITTED TO THE WELFARE OF THE PLANET AND OF FUTURE GENERATIONS

by

Gordon D. S. Ball

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education
Department of Adult Education,
Community Development and Counselling Psychology
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the
University of Toronto

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A b s t r a c t

Some people view the planet, as well as its present and future inhabitants, as a precious, interdependent system, and demonstrate this awareness in their activities and relationships. Some of those people come to this realization gradually over a lifetime. Others point to one or several significant and time-bounded experiences as the source of their commitment. It is this latter group, and their transformative learning experiences, that are the focus of this study.

Using a qualitative research methodology, interviews were conducted with fourteen men and women, largely Ontario-based, ranging in age from 20+ to 80+. A screening questionnaire was used to select people who care passionately about the welfare of the planet and of future generations, demonstrate this commitment in their daily lives, and attribute it to one or more transformative learning experiences.

Four phases of the transformative learning experience suggested by the literature were used as a preliminary framework around which to analyse the data: (1) leaving the familiar and entering a state of disequilibrium, (2)
responding to the disequilibrium and making meaning, (3) building commitment and responsibility, and (4) integrating through acting anew.

A metaphor from nature – a watershed – was presented and developed as a way of describing transformative learning experiences, through five sub-themes: (1) the climate and lay of the land, (2) setting a direction, (3) gaining momentum, (4) reaching mainstream, and (5) renewal. Following the analogy, a vibrant, fluid, real, and enormously powerful constant – water – served as a metaphor for feelings. Perhaps the clearest learning from the study was the degree to which emotions, and strong ones, accompany transformation.

Still, the study suggests that there is a complex web of factors, including early influences and previous experience, that converge to foster and support a transformative learning experience, and contribute to a person’s readiness to learn from it.

It is evident that transformative change is a fundamental sea-change encompassing the whole person. The establishment of a personal, passionate, moral imperative goes much deeper than mere intellectual rationalization. The commitment of participants emerged from experiences accompanied by deep emotion, and may indeed extend into the realm of the spirit.
Acknowledgements

Researching and preparing this dissertation has been an adventure and an inspiration for me. My first words of thanks go to my thesis supervisor, Professor Allen Tough. In the early stages, as what seemed like a strange and shaky idea was emerging, I was enormously grateful to find kindred interest in Allen. I have much respect for his courage and leadership in venturing into new and unexplored areas of academic inquiry, and for his curiosity about the future. Although I became increasingly committed to it, I know that I could not have pursued this project to its completion without Allen's patient encouragement and support. I am in awe of his deft ability to give helpful guidance without directing or prescribing.

I owe much also to the other members of my thesis committee. Professor David Selby was exceedingly generous with his time and attention to both the big ideas and the details of my work. The seminal work that he and his colleagues have done to infuse education with a global perspective has been an inspiration to me. For me, Professor Budd Hall serves as a model educator who integrates into his teaching all of himself – his courage, humour, passions and commitment. Most of all, I thank him for his generosity of spirit, a spirit which warmly embraced and sustained me throughout my research.

I reserve a special thanks for my student colleagues, Jayne Butler, Maureen Simpkins and Liz Wallace. With them I have shared an important and mutually supportive friendship, as well as regular meetings over the past two years as we faced together our journey, not without detours, towards a doctoral degree. Indeed I owe them a great deal, individually and
collectively. I doubt that I could have persevered without their belief in me and their generous support that only peers can give.

I am grateful to Barbara Burnaby for introducing me to qualitative research a few years ago. The experience in her course led me to have no doubt about choosing a qualitative approach to my research.

I thank my wife, son and daughter – Jane, Jonathan and Jennifer, my father with whom I began but did not finish this adventure, and my friends for their faith in me and their encouragement.

Finally, it was a rare privilege to spend so much uninterrupted time with my research participants – all of them inspired and inspiring individuals from many walks of life. I was renewed by their stories and by the passion in their eyes and voices. In the years ahead, I know when I look back on what has been a very positive experience preparing and writing this dissertation, I will remember most, perhaps predictably, the participants and their passions. They have been an inspiration to me.
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction to the Study

Preamble

In spite of obvious threats posed by the enormous trade in armaments, environmental catastrophes, and the great differential in resource consumption between South and North, social and environmental critics often remark on the human tendency to avoid tackling these global problems where we live, and instead to retreat into private experiences. Apt analogies are easy to find: Nero fiddling as Rome burns, re-arranging the deck chairs on the Titanic while the ship approaches the iceberg, or baling it out with tablespoons as it sinks. Increasingly, observers of the human condition are claiming that we have reached a stage in our evolution where our collective choices are becoming quickly limited, and that current global circumstances are calling for a new kind of planetary consciousness among the world’s human inhabitants.

The problems plaguing the planet are not only serious and global in scope, but they are also urgent. Human behaviour is said to be the primary cause of these problems. Whether or not this is the case, many would agree that human behaviour needs to change, both dramatically and soon. Opinions vary more on how this should come about. Some believe the necessary changes will come only by coercion – either through strong, authoritarian leadership or the pressure of events. Others believe that the human race will learn to change in time, that widespread, rapid learning will transform individuals and societies so that humans behave less like a rogue species and
more in harmony with the rest of life on the planet. They anticipate that learning will release human energies and capabilities on a massive scale in support of behaviours and activities that are healthier for the planet. Most reflective people would likely agree that learning, over coercion, is the option of choice. In this regard Alan Thomas (1991) writes, “Indeed, the very survival of our world today depends on successful learning and successful management of learning” (p. xvi).

Either way, there is little doubt that the planet is heading, at an ever-increasing rate, either towards a breakthrough to peace, justice and environmental harmony, or to massive disaster and oblivion. Allen Tough (1991), examining what he calls crucial questions about the future, describes the situation this way:

If we look ahead a few decades, we note that our civilization has enormous potential not only to flourish happily but also to deteriorate appallingly....At this particular moment in human history, our two extreme potentials (for destroying everything and for achieving a highly positive future) may both be vaster than at any time during the past 10,000 years.

The actual outcome will result from human choices and actions over the next few months, years, and decades. (p. 1)

In this regard, I am concerned about what I see as a current trend in some adult education contexts: a focus on the immediate utility of education for relatively short-term, personal advancement. There seems to be a widespread inability, or unwillingness, to address the most important questions facing the planet and its inhabitants. Within adult education there is talk of instrumental learning and the rise of a training culture, while many believe that the long-term survival of the planet will depend on the emergence of a learning
culture, with children and adults learning not simply new skills but new ways of looking at, and new ways of being in the world.

Nevertheless, in spite of much evidence to the contrary, many people today are seeking a broader consciousness that encompasses and connects us with the entire planet over the long term. It is said that a journalist once asked former Chinese leader Deng Xiao Ping of whom he was most afraid. After a few moments of reflection, the powerful ruler replied, "My grandchildren." A man in a position of enormous power and influence feared nothing more than the judgement of his descendants, who presumably might challenge his actions and decisions as insufficiently far-sighted.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore the noteworthy or marker experiences and events – what I am calling transformative learning experiences – that have led some people to change from caring only a little, to caring passionately about and actively supporting the welfare of the planet and of future generations. What is it in their life experience that has caused them to view the planet, as well as its present and future inhabitants, as a precious, inter-related, interdependent system? What has led them to demonstrate this awareness in their personal priorities and activities, and in their relationships with other people and other forms of life? What has made them perceive a personal interest in maintaining a sustainable world environment and a global culture characterized by peace, sharing and justice? What or who is it in their experience that has inspired them to take on, maintain and act on, a truly *world-view*?
Some people who hold this perspective and this commitment may believe that they were born with them; they cannot remember not holding them. For others, the origin may have been in a nascent awareness that grew gradually and imperceptibly over a lifetime. Still others may be able to point to one or several experiences in their lives that combined an intellectual realization with an emotional, spiritual or even physical one to create one or several incremental transformations.

It is the latter group, and their transformative learning experiences, that are the focus of this study. These are people who value cooperation and harmony with the earth, its inhabitants and each other, in contrast to the more dominant paradigms of competition and dominance over nature. And they attribute those characteristics to one or several time-bounded transformative learning experiences. The purpose of the research is to explore the significant, influential learning experiences in the lives of these people who have come to care sincerely and deeply about the planet, and who demonstrate their care daily through behaviours and initiatives aimed at building a sustainable planetary future.

Jean Houston (1982) quotes a 78 year-old retired nurse from Finland with whom she caught up at a conference, as having said to her,

So many people are losing heart, but not me! I have lived through four wars, have seen unbelievable suffering and misery. And you know what? I am full of hope for the human race. We are tied to each other in ways not possible before. We must now begin to live and grow together to become what we can be. I have dedicated the rest of my life to helping make this possible. I have no money and few have ever heard of me outside Finland, but no matter. The time is ripe, ripe, ripe, and I know what I will do will make a difference. (p. 214)
If this kind of spirited initiative is to come from individuals and groups working in their unique and particular contexts, perhaps this research will indicate some ways in which the number of such individuals and groups can be increased.

While a transformative learning experience may not often happen abruptly, it is sometimes possible to identify critical events in a life that led to a rebirth or a new beginning. Laurent Daloz (1986) calls this kind of experience "a radical change in vision, with perception shifts from smaller to larger systems" (pp. 188-89), causing us to relate to the world in quite a new and different way. He describes transformation this way:

The task facing both sexes is to reframe and understand in a radically new way the meaning of the world they once knew. This does not mean that the old world has been abandoned; rather it has been incorporated into a broader awareness of its place. It is seen in a new way. The journey does not take away our old experiences, as we often fear before we embark. It simply gives them new meaning. This is the significance of the paradoxical Zen saying: "Before practice, there is the mountain. During practice, there is no mountain. After practice, there is the mountain."

Nothing is different, yet all is transformed. It is seen differently. In that change of perspective, in that transformation of meaning lies the meaning of transformation (Mezirow 1978). Our old life is still there, but its meaning has profoundly changed because we have left home, seen it from afar, and been transformed by that vision. You can't go home again. The irony is also that you can't get there from here. That is, for this sort of mythic transformation to occur, we have to get lost. By definition, there are no paths through the wilderness and no ways home save through it. (p. 26)

The experience of transformation throws into disorder any notions of what is normal. This study explores the transformative experiences of persons for whom "normal" took on new meaning. It became a way of life that led them
beyond a goal of mere short-term, personal satisfaction, toward caring about the planet and contributing to its secure and sustainable future.

**Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis begins with an introductory chapter outlining the research: its purpose, structure, rationale, methodology and the personal location of the researcher. Chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature pertaining to (a) the welfare of the planet and of future generations, (b) to adult learning and change, and (c) to transformative learning. This chapter also includes an elaboration of four phases of the transformative learning experience that are based in the literature and proposed as a preliminary working framework. The purpose of this framework is to inform, not to limit, the balance of the study. The qualitative methodology, selected to suit the exploratory nature of the study and the subjectivity of the researcher, is the subject of Chapter 3. That chapter provides the theoretical footings on which the research design was built, and outlines the various procedures and steps carried out in the course of selecting the study participants, preparing for and conducting the interviews, and analysing the data. A critique of the methodology completes Chapter 3. Chapter 4 presents the data, and Chapter 5, the analysis. Chapter 6 suggests another frame of reference that emerged from the data. Implications of the study are the subject of Chapter 7: implications for learners, for educators, for future researchers, and finally for me, the author – indicating what I have drawn from the study experience.
**Personal Location**

In the spring of 1965, having completed a rather nondescript undergraduate degree in general arts at the University of Toronto, I found myself admitted to law school. With no particular inclination in that direction, I was still anticipating that the following autumn would find me beginning my preparation for a legal career. My older brother was beginning his career as a medical doctor, and my parents seemed to think that a legal career would serve me well and round out the family nicely. I had no reason to dispute this; the few lawyers I knew were decent men (of course, all of them men) and seemed to live well. However, a seemingly serendipitous incident was to change all of this.

I was working part-time at a local YMCA as a children's program leader—a position that had led from a field work placement during a third-year university course in child psychology. One Saturday morning, while I was sitting on a chair on top of a table refereeing a floor hockey game, my supervisor came by and showed me a printed, green sheet of paper. He asked me if I were interested in spending a year working in Palestinian refugee camps as a YMCA volunteer. I asked him, kindly, if he were in full possession of his senses, and wondered if he had forgotten that I was already enrolled in law school. He shrugged, acknowledged that he had anticipated such a reaction, and walked away considering the matter closed. The following Saturday, I asked him if he still had the green sheet of paper. I read it this time, took it home and read it again. To make a long story short, I never studied law. Instead I went to the Middle East and worked in Palestinian refugee camps for a year. The experience dramatically changed my life.
The Middle East experience was a watershed experience for me, and filled my 21st year with adventure, foundation-shaking experiences, and a new insight every day. I came home with new commitments. I was committed to social justice (particularly the plight of the Palestinian refugees), to human rights, and to international development. A further commitment to the protection of the natural environment followed some years later, and joined the other commitments seamlessly as a logical and natural extension of them.

Examining my own life, I ask myself where and how I developed these commitments. Was it something that happened to me in the Middle East? Did they pre-date my Middle East experience, lying dormant until provoked? Was it a particular set of subsequent life experiences set in motion by this first one? Were there significant people from whom I learned it? Was it an intellectual realization, an emotional one, spiritual one, or even a physical one? I have often wondered what it was in my life that led me, at various stages:

- to turn my back on a law career that was lying in wait for me upon graduation from university, and go to work as a YMCA volunteer in Palestinian refugee camps,
- to reject a subsequent career in the church ministry after one year of study in theology, believing it to be exclusive and disrespectful of the variety among the world's peoples, and the legitimacy of other faiths and beliefs,
- to continue to seek and find employment opportunities overseas, next in northern Thailand with CUSO, and later at the international level in Geneva with the World Alliance of YMCAs,
to become eventually dissatisfied with what seemed to me to be a
privileged, womb-like existence in Geneva, so remote from and in such
sharp contrast to the realities I saw on my extensive travels in the third
world;

- to return to Canada with a young family and seek partner families with
  whom to establish a rural housing cooperative committed to cooperation,
  owner-built homes, careful stewardship of our 92 acres, a conserver
  lifestyle, organic gardening, and the peace movement.

Has this simply been a blind longing to return to the 1960s? Has it been a
superficial attempt to lead a life that is fashionably and politically correct?
Has it been simply a lust for adventure? Or is there a deeper longing to
connect with life as it really is, as I believe it ought to be lived? Could it be a
life search to rediscover and nurture the silent and fundamental systems,
processes and relationships of a fragile, inter-connected world that is
beginning to break down under the weight of human habitation and discord?

As an educator, more interested in the nurture side of the nature/nurture
debate, I have an agenda which guides and influences my work. I work with
a variety of groups, often in residential learning contexts, and I find I am
drawn more and more to groups of people who are working on the same
agenda as I am. It is an agenda of values, beliefs, and perspectives, all
directed at caring for people, the planet and a sustainable future. I want to
become familiar with the best opportunities to advance this agenda, and ways
to influence learning experiences that are most effective to that end. This is
my motive to conduct this study.

I am not satisfied with simply exploring a facet of the adult learning
process that values strictly individual interests and personal growth. I believe
education can no longer afford to place top priority on individual interests. I believe the end result of education must increasingly be directed away from strictly individual pursuits and ends, and towards instilling the values, attitudes, ideas and behaviours necessary for planetary sustainability and survival. In my opinion, our educational curricula and processes need to be based on more than simply an open-ended, learner-centred approach. All and any learning can no longer be judged to be good learning in and of itself. As I write this I cannot help but think how heretical it sounds in an adult education context. But I know I am not alone in this view.

I set out to direct my research to a global level of interest, yet keep it within a manageable scope. While I necessarily selected a relatively narrow band to study, I did not want to lose the breadth of the larger concern, the big picture. It is precisely this big picture, and the inter-relationships within it, around which I seek to generate wider interest. If I focus all my attention on saving whales, for example, while at the same time consuming non-renewable resources at a rampant rate, eating unhealthy food and neglecting my family and other personal relationships, I and my desired global perspective are both diminished.

While I claim no halo, nor do I consider myself to be in the same league as those I interviewed for this study, I do claim some familiarity with transformative learning experiences as they contribute to a social and environmental conscience. I am intrigued with the potential they hold for influencing people's lives in healthy directions – both for themselves and for the planet. It is because of my personal experiences of them, and my belief in the possibilities they present to supporting a healthy planetary future, that I became excited about studying them in some detail. While my personal
background has doubtless coloured and shaped this study, it has also served to inform and inspire me as I conducted the research.

**Interpretation of Terms**

Most readers will be familiar with the experience of changing gradually. Much of our education is based on gradual and incremental learning. The study of mathematics, for example, uses one mathematical concept as a building block for another. Many people are equally familiar with change that is both dramatic and relatively sudden. A car accident or other near brush with death, for example, is sometimes followed by a new realization—perhaps of the value of personal relationships, of the beauty of nature, or of other simple pleasures. The dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima had a dramatic and profound impact on the people of Japan, to the extent that they eventually abolished their machinery and instruments of war.

When the change is substantial and occurs within a relatively short, time-bounded period among a collective or a society, peacefully or otherwise, it is sometimes called a revolution. When the same kind of change occurs within an individual, it is sometimes called a transformation. One may foster the other, and sometimes they occur together, supporting each other.

Indeed, according to Erich Fromm (1976), a change in either factor means a change in both. Many wrongly believe, says Fromm, that one must logically precede the other. He points to history. New societies, forged in revolution, found themselves recreating the same conditions as the old ones because there was no essential change in human character. On the other hand, changes in human consciousness, says Fromm, remain largely in the
private sphere and have been generally ineffective in the larger social milieu (p. 134).

While my study deals mainly with personal transformation, it does so in the current global and social context. It deals with both personal change and social change, and the relationship between the two.

The Pocket Oxford Dictionary defines “transform” as follows: “make a thorough or dramatic change in the form, appearance, character, etc. of” (p. 970). The Oxford Paperback Thesaurus suggests a number of synonyms for transformation: “radical change, conversion, metamorphosis, sea change, revolution, reorganization, renewal” (p. 838). For purposes of this study, I am using transformation to mean a dramatic and fundamental change in one's perspective on life and consequent behaviour, stimulated by any one or several of a variety of precipitating, relatively short-term and time-bounded transformative learning experiences.

By “transformative learning experience”, I mean an experience, inspirational or disorienting or both, that suddenly causes a change in one's perspective, a re-framing of meaning structures, a breaking outside of prior boundaries, or an opening of a door which until that point had remained closed. These experiences have been variously described as surprises, shifts or leaps in consciousness or awareness, anomalies, disorienting dilemmas, or contradictions in consciousness. Upon reflection, one might consider such an experience as having marked a metamorphosis in one's life, a real turning point when life events dramatically demanded or directed attention and caused one to set out in a new direction. It may have led to a sudden insight or a new perspective – a new way of seeing and being in the world. There
might even have been a feeling of crossing a watershed, from which there would be no turning back.

It is important to comment here on the relationship between transformative learning experiences and religious experiences. While the two may overlap, the meaning I am assigning to the transformative learning experience goes beyond that of the conversion experience of conventional systems of faith and worship. Any experience which reaches into the deep essence of a person's life -- the spiritual foundation beyond body and mind -- and which embodies the undefinable, unknowable forces that shape and guide our existence, qualifies for me as a transformative learning experience. It is a spiritual experience inasmuch as it is accompanied by a deep feeling of connectivity, connecting the core or essence of one's being with meanings of cosmic proportions. These are themes that Martha Rogers (1994) notes in her study of graduate students learning about global futures. She noticed that every participant in her study appeared to “ask questions about the essence of being human, core values, and the secular or theistic meaning and purpose of life” -- themes that Rogers chose to call “patterns of the soul” (p. 150). In a period when the religious imperative is diminishing, at least in Canadian society, when some people are transcending their particular religious heritages to think in more universal and cosmic terms, it is perhaps more timely than ever to explore a wider range of experiences that have prompted spiritual and fundamental awakenings.

Examples of experiences which some people have described as transformative include:

- travel, or other break with one's culture,
- a physical or body-based experience,
- a personal relationship with someone, either close or far away in time or space,
- music, poetry, visual art, a book, a film,
- a community or group experience,
- a spiritual awareness,
- personal trauma, emotional difficulty, loss or estrangement,
- a work-related experience,
- meditation,
- time spent close to nature in rural areas,
- an educational activity,
- a solo experience of personal reflection, creating an openness to one's inner voice,
- a near-death experience,
- a sudden, unexpected change in one's circumstances or role,
- a separation from ordinary habitual routines, environments or patterns.

A more graphic definition of transformative learning experiences comes from popular visionary and futurist Robert Theobald (1997a), who describes them as "mind-quakes." He describes his work as "helping people to achieve 'mind-quakes' through rethinking their basic assumptions about how the world works." Theobald notes that, following this kind of "mind-quake", "it then becomes possible to consider very different tactics and strategies" (p. 1).
Rationale and Significance of the Study

The nature of current global threats and challenges calls urgently for widespread responses of learning and action by people who will think globally and act locally. Houston (1982) writes:

Never before has the responsibility of the human being for the planetary process been greater. Never before have we gained power of such magnitude over the primordial issues of life and death. The density and intimacy of the global village, along with the staggering consequences of our new knowledge and technologies make us directors of a world that up to now has mostly directed us. This is a responsibility for which we have been ill-prepared and for which the usual formulas and stop-gap solutions will not work.

We find ourselves in a time in which extremely limited consciousness has the powers once accorded to the gods.... with an ethic that is more Faustian than godlike. (p.213)

According to Houston, the future of the world is subject to the impact of its human inhabitants in a way it has never been before. Some believe this is only as it should be, and that it is part of a larger wisdom and evolutionary process which will eventually see humankind self-destruct. Others believe that the entire planet's very survival depends on our acknowledging the serious threats we have created and responding quickly to diminish them. For educators who share this latter belief, it falls, at least in part, to them to prepare people for this critical responsibility – a responsibility to encourage and support the values, attitudes, ideas and behaviours consistent with a sustainable planetary future. This study provides some answers to the question, “How can our society generate more people who think and live this way?” Is there a more urgent and important question?
One analysis uses a graph with two axes representing "time" and "space", with short-term, parochial decisions in the lower left-hand quadrant, and long-term, cosmic decisions in the upper right-hand quadrant.

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**Space**

This analysis, which I learned in 1982 at The Shelter Institute Owner-Builder School of Bath, Maine, suggests that much of our current thinking and planning, and many of our solutions to current problems, are lower left-hand in nature. For example, a typical solution to a land-fill site that is filled to capacity is to find another site – a local and short-sighted solution. A solution leaning more in the direction of the upper right-hand arena would be to charge people by the bag or by the kilogram to take away their garbage, providing an incentive to reduce waste at the source.
A quick glance at almost any newspaper will verify that most of us do not seem to think in upper right-hand ways. Many of us tend to over-value short-term ideas, a calculating intelligence, the high-priced skill, while under-valuing or even ignoring our own deeper instincts, emotions, imaginations and long-range wisdom. Few of us are genuinely persuaded that planetary interdependence is much in our own interests, or that our only long-term security is a collective one. How can we develop and encourage more upper right-hand thinkers? I am interested in learning about the changes, particularly the transformative ones, that lead people to such a perspective, to a place where they begin caring about, and acting to support the welfare of the planet and of future generations.

Will we rise to the implicit challenge of future generations? People can and do change. Adult education principles, elaborated by Donald Brundage and Dorothy MacKeracher (1980), tell us that when issues and problems are both real and relevant to people’s lives, when they can see the link between those problems and their own actions, and when they are given the opportunity to create solutions, they can be persuaded to learn and orient their behaviour and activities accordingly. A significant group of people are likely ready and willing to change. Theobald (1997b) says, “Polls show that 25% of Americans are ready to consider fundamental transformative change but are an audience rather than actors” (p. 1).

Most of us spend most of our daily lives close to home. That is where we are most likely to have an impact, where our lives are most likely to make a difference. And many modern thinkers, particularly feminists, agree that it is exactly at that level where the necessary actions need to begin. Nell Noddings (1984) talks about “concentric circles of caring” where we begin in
the innermost circle caring for those we love. Then, as we move outward in the circles, we extend our care to those for whom we have personal regard, to those we have not yet encountered, and so on eventually to the global community (p. 46). Feminist literature draws a close relationship between the personal and the political, beginning with personal experiences and politicizing them. The Hunter College Women's Studies Collective (1983) describes how feminists support change: "Feminists often start by attempting to make our immediate communities more humane and satisfying and cooperative places to live and work. We may go on to developing ways of governing ever wider communities..." (p. 87). Starhawk (1982) believes that integrity means consistency, and that it is only by keeping her commitments, and acting, at a personal level, in accordance with her thoughts, images and speeches, that she will build "power-from-within". She describes what she calls the "beer can principle", which is an ethical guideline that allows her "to keep my sanity in a society filled with exploitation, pollution and destruction" (p. 33). She writes,

If I think and say that I hate pollution, and yet walk by and leave the beer cans lying at my feet, the energy of my feelings is dissipated. Instead of feeling my own power to do something, however small, about litter, I feel and become more powerless. (p. 35)

Elise Boulding (1988) envisions a future global community of association among peoples, not governments, and describes a process of building a "global civic culture." She anticipates widespread responses of learning and action by thousands of small societies – groups of people who have some sense of shared identity and history.

The tireless and ever-optimistic folk singer, Pete Seeger (1995), said in an interview on the occasion of his 75th birthday,
I'm now quite convinced that if there's a world here in a hundred years its going to be saved not by any one big organization of any sort, no big political group, no big church, no big movement. It's going to be saved by millions upon millions upon millions of little organizations. It just might be that what Jesus and Jeremiah and Mohammed and Buddha and a lot of other people talked about just might come true.

We might start treating each other decently, because we have to. If we don't treat each other decently there will be no human race.

Environmental educator David Orr (1990), in a commencement address to a college graduating class, pleaded with graduates to challenge conventional notions of a "successful" life as they began their careers. He said,

The plain fact is that the planet does not need more "successful" people. But it does desperately need more peacemakers, healers, restorers, storytellers, and lovers of every shape and form. It needs people who live well in their places. It needs people of moral courage willing to join the fight to make the world habitable and humane.

And these needs have little to do with success as our culture has defined it. (p.52)

In this study, I am interested in learning from the experience of individuals who are taking initiatives for change, who believe and are demonstrating that there are no such things as future facts, and that looking into the future is not simply a matter of extrapolating current trends. These people are activists – providing and availing themselves of opportunities for small local actions that are related directly to both personal and global contexts. Equally important, they are also visionaries – creating a preferred global future for us all.

How do people learn to assume this kind of orientation? According to S. Merriam and C. Clark (1991), by far the greatest amount of significant learning comes from life experience rather than formal education (p. 180-81). They add, "how learning occurs from life experience has received little
attention in the adult development literature” (p. 195). This study addresses this question directly.

Although a good deal has been written about transformative learning, it has usually dealt with populations more general than those considered in this study. Little research has been done among those who might be identified with a particular worldview, in this case a worldview reflected by activities contributing to the welfare of the planet and of future generations. Educators, policy-makers, researchers and quite possibly future generations themselves may benefit from educational research focusing on this particular population.

From becoming more familiar with how this orientation is learned, we may discover ways in which educators can help it to occur more widely in the population. This research has implications for facilitating learning about global citizenship, the needs of future generations, and planetary life skills in various educational contexts. It can contribute to a re-thinking of curricula, educational approaches, teaching methods and learning activities.

**Research Question**

This dissertation addresses the following question: what is the nature and role of transformative learning experiences in contributing to the change or transition in people from caring only a little, to caring passionately about and actively supporting the welfare of the planet and of future generations?

It is apparent that many human beings are forced by dint of circumstance to focus on short-term, self-centred survival issues. It is equally clear that others, either deliberately or unconsciously, choose that focus. Still others, however, seem to choose:
• to be optimistic and caring about the welfare of others, our community and our planet, over pessimism or apathy,
• to have broader, long-term, societal and global concerns, over narrower, personal, short-term ones,
• to be actively engaged in seeking to influence present and future events seeing life as an opportunity, over feeling like passive victims and seeing life as a kind of prison sentence.

How is it that these individuals come to make these choices? What happens in their lives that leads some people:

• to become activists – taking initiatives for change, providing and availing themselves of opportunities for small local actions that are related directly to both personal and global contexts?
• to become visionaries – defining, articulating and creating a preferred global future?
• to seek collaborative solutions and commit themselves to peace and non-violence?
• to value diversity and realize their dependence on it?
• to value humility and tolerance of other perspectives?
• to be respectful of the non-human natural world, and see themselves as only a small, dependent part of a much larger whole?
• to become sensitive to the inequities, injustices, imbalances in the world?
• to seek simplicity in living and to live gently on the land?
• to seek more involvement in the creation of their lives, such as growing their own food or joining a community group, as ways of adding new meaning to our presence on the planet?
• to develop a spirituality?
• to reject institutional privilege that has been gained at the expense of others?
• to feel a personal responsibility to act for the well-being of the planet and its people?

This research explored the transformative developmental experiences of individuals who reflect this perspective in their daily lives and activities.

**Methodology**

As will have become apparent, I did not bring an impartial, value-free or neutral approach to this research. In keeping with both my inevitable subjectivity and the exploratory, descriptive nature of the research, I chose a qualitative research methodology, consistent with the approach that Catherine Marshall and Gretchen Rossman (1989) describe in their book on the design of qualitative research. They write,

> We intend ... to describe the process of designing mainstream qualitative research that entails immersion in the everyday life of the setting chosen for the study, that values participants' perspectives on their worlds and seeks to discover those perspectives, that views inquiry as an interactive process between the researcher and the participants, and that is primarily descriptive and relies on people's words as the primary data. (p. 11)

The focus of this research is complex, and the variables it examines are not sufficiently identified or polarized to warrant quantitative research methods. The intent of this study was not to prove or disprove an hypothesis, but to build knowledge by conducting a wide-ranging inquiry into people's experiences, interactions and learning processes, and try to unearth some important relationships among them. The intended outcome was a
meaningful interpretation of the transformative learning experiences of participants. The research is therefore particularly well-suited to a qualitative approach.

Fourteen participants were recruited from among the acquaintances of the researcher or from referrals by acquaintances. While no quotas were established, attention was paid to achieving an equal gender balance and to ensuring that the group of participants was not entirely white, middle-class, or Anglo-Saxon. All participants were asked to complete a questionnaire to determine their suitability for the study. Those who qualified were interviewed. They qualified by indicating on the questionnaire, (1) that their current activities and choices were consistent with a global and future-oriented perspective, and (2) that they could indeed point to one or a few significant, indelible personal experiences to which, in large measure, they attributed their global and future-oriented outlook. An interview protocol was followed in a conversational context. Field notes were taken during the interviews, and the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Data were subjected to analysis to seek order and structure in the mass of interview transcripts, and meaning in terms of their relationships among categories. The concepts from the transformative learning framework proposed at the end of Chapter 2 were used as a guide but not to limit the analysis. They were altered as the data determined.

**Limitations of the Study**

There is no question that people come to care about the welfare of the planet and future generations in a variety of ways. I do not doubt that there are many paths to this perspective, with no two alike. I make no claim that
transformative learning experiences are the only, or even the preferred, route. Six individuals approached for interviews were unable to isolate such an experience in their lives, choosing rather to see their perspective and current lifestyle as having grown seamlessly, beginning with their parents and their earliest memories through their upbringing and throughout their life experience. Indeed, in a study of 100 individuals selected for their commitment to the common good, Daloz (1996) and his associates expected “to hear more about the importance of didactic moral lessons, the elaborated content of religious belief, and events creating dramatic shifts in a life’s direction. This was not the case.” They concluded that “there is no ‘Gandhi pill’. No single event can ensure that a person will or will not live a life of commitment to the common good. It is a mix of key ingredients that matters” (p. 17).

While there is no doubt that many people who have developed this value system have come to it gradually and via a multitude of paths, I have not chosen to study the lives of these people. As an adult educator, my interest is in the area of educational interventions, especially after childhood. While there are certainly other opportunities for adult educators to influence those life-long processes that begin in childhood, I limited this study to exploring the experiences of those who can report one or several times of transformation in their lives – time-bound experiences or events to which they directly attribute their current approach to life and living. This focus was chosen in the hope that I and others might learn something useful as we try to influence and inspire adult learners during the brief window of opportunity that we usually have, in the direction of a healthy and sustainable global future.
This is a critical point, made all the more apparent to me as I read a letter from a personal friend whom I had hoped would participate in the study. As she realized she could not point to a particular transformative experience in her life, she was left feeling rejected and somehow inadequate because she had not qualified for my study. In a letter to me (personal communication, Sept. 21, 1996), she writes,

On another note, for whatever it’s worth, I respect you enough to want to share with you my “gut” reaction to my rejection from your study. (My thanks to you for saying, up front in our phone call, that if I don’t qualify it has nothing to do with my personhood!) In all honesty, even though you assured me of my worth, [when I didn’t] qualify I felt a little disappointed and personally rejected — in my heart if not in my head. I was also genuinely curious and wishing to understand more about the parameters and “rules” when conducting a study of this nature; if a researcher is trying to find out the “truth” to his/her question, can he/she limit his/her subjects of study? Is it authentic research to “use” only the subjects which fit the researchers pre-conceived answers he/she hopes to prove?

In my reply to her (G. Ball, personal communication, Oct. 10, 1996), I wrote,

I too was disappointed [in your disqualification] because I know you would have been a thoughtful, articulate and highly principled participant in the study. I can’t change your life experience, or the fact that my study is about transformative learning experiences. You’re right, I am limiting my study. I have to, or else I’ll be writing into the next millennium. It was a tough decision to know where to put the limits, but I knew I had to set some parameters in order to keep the study “do-able” — especially with a topic as expansive as this one!... While many people (quite likely the majority) who have come to this kind of value system have come to it gradually as you seem to have, my interest is particularly in the more sudden, dramatic, life-changing events and experiences. So that’s what I have chosen to study.... I will simply be saying: “I interviewed some people who demonstrate that they care about a more just, peaceful and sustainable world, AND who say that some particular experience(s) were
instrumental in making them that way. There are (or are not) some interesting common elements in their stories."

Another potential misinterpretation of this research is the notion that the participants in the study are all people who have arrived at some ideal state, that they have achieved a kind of perfection and are now stuck in some kind of hallowed status quo where they intend to stay for the rest of their lives. It is both unlikely and unbecoming of these people to believe they would say that they have nothing more to learn and nowhere else to go with their lives. I make no claim in this research that there is a single, perfect state of global consciousness to which all of humanity should aspire. Marilyn Ferguson (1980) calls transformation “a journey without a final destination” (p. 89). Rather, I suggest only that some human perspectives and activities are worthy of encouragement – perspectives and activities that are clearly in the best interests of the welfare of the planet and of future generations.

Adherents of biocentrism might consider this study to be unduly anthropocentric, insisting that the planet and the future cannot usefully be viewed with humans at the centre. Rather, they would say, the human species hangs in the web of life along with all other species, and it is the web itself that is the more proper focus. Sue Greig, Graham Pike and David Selby (1989) call for

the displacement of a dominant world-view that sets human beings apart from and above the myriad lifeforms making up this planet. A shift is needed from such an anthropocentric (person-centered) philosophy with its built-in ‘biospheric inegalitarianism’, to a biocentric (life-centred) philosophy which humbly recognizes that we are within the environment; that reverence rather than ruthlessness is due to the natural world; that, however special and significant, we are but one creature in an incredibly complex and seamless web of life. (p. 9)
This study is rooted in a whole-systems understanding of global evolution; however its focus is on one part of that system – its human inhabitants. More particularly, its focus is on those individuals whose actions both reflect a consciousness of an inter-connected and inter-related global system, and who are, humbly and reverently, contributing to its sustainable future. I do not claim that it tells the whole story, or even the most important story, but human behaviour is unquestionably a significant part of the emerging and future story of life on our planet.

**Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter has provided necessary background for the research which follows. It has outlined the purpose of the study, its rationale and potential significance, and its parameters or limitations. The structure of the study has been summarized, as has been the research methodology utilized. The researcher’s personal background and location in relation to the research question has been elaborated. The next chapter deals with the existing literature surrounding the research and its major themes, and offers a preliminary framework for exploring transformative learning experiences as they generate commitments to the welfare of the planet and of future generations.
CHAPTER 2

Introduction to the Literature

Approach to the Literature

This chapter explores the themes and issues related to the research question, and relevant literature on those themes. In particular, the chapter addresses the theme of transformational learning experiences and how they may influence activities or behaviour consistent with the welfare of the planet and of future generations.

Literature on the Future Welfare of the Planet

Most informed observers agree that the planet faces critical global issues, threats and challenges. The British writer Ronald Higgins (1978) lists six threats to our survival on planet Earth, and describes them as follows:

1. Population Explosion
   A continuation of this [current] growth rate into the next century would be horrifying. The total could climb to nearly thirteen billion by 2035, twenty-six billion by 2070, and nearly fifty billion by 2100. Further projections become astronomical but I think it silly to pursue them; obviously present growth rates could not continue without calamity. (p. 77)

2. Food crisis
   Ours is not just a world of hunger, but of unnecessary hunger. There is sufficient food to sustain all ... of us. The hunger is due to the cruel maldistribution of our harvests. The food crisis is a food scandal. One way and another we of the North consume so much that slimming has become a multi-million pound [dollar] business while a third of our fellows are grossly underfed. (p. 86)
3. Resource Scarcity
In recent decades the North has been consuming raw materials at a gluttonous rate with no sense of the needs of either the South or posterity.... We have been ravaging the earth as if there were no tomorrow. This could be a self-fulfilling prophecy.... The trouble is that no previous generation has had as much power to consume or destroy the inheritance of the unborn (p. 99).... the age of abundance is almost certainly drawing to a close. (p. 105)

4. Environmental Degradation
All life on this planet is conducted within a thin and fragile envelope of air, land and water not even ten kilometres thick. The entire biosphere depends finally on green vegetation converting solar into chemical energy and maintaining the balance of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. On this foundation are built all the intricately intertwined food chains involving thousands of species. The careless destruction of a single species of predator may lead to a plague of its normal prey and hence perhaps to the defoliation of a whole plant crop (p. 110).... What is certain is that both the poisoning and the destruction of the common environment are reducing the chances of accommodating either the voracity of the rich or the needs of the poor. (p. 120)

5. Nuclear Abuse
Writing about his fifth threat, Higgins documents the dangers of nuclear power: the fearsome risks of meltdown, human error, and nuclear terrorism, and the dangers associated with virtually immortal nuclear waste and the relatively unchecked spread of nuclear weapons. He writes, “Neither intellectually nor emotionally have we digested this compulsory backdrop to our lives” (p. 136).

6. Science and Technology Unleashed
Higgins’ sixth threat deals with new developments in science. He writes,
Science has become something like an autonomous force, with a driving logic of its own. Science feeds on itself. Once secured and published, science cannot easily be destroyed. And as it grows, new connections are made, more and more frontiers for exploration are opened up. No one can know what lies beyond these frontiers; by definition, discovery is unpredictable.... Northern society ... is mesmerized by the scientific and technological imperative, an unquestioning belief that what can be done should be done. There is a hunger for power and its fruits which is stimulated by a materialist growth-minded ethos and sanctioned by a naïve faith that somehow we shall keep our machines under control. (p. 138)

Higgins (1978) claims that each of the six threats, in and of itself, is not beyond solution. His larger concern is the “Seventh Enemy” which he describes as political inertia and individual moral blindness surrounding these threats (pp. 153, 168). Where there is a way there is not always a will. He writes,

The action demanded would need to be rapid, coordinated, and of immense scale. Most important of all, it would require different values and a larger awareness both in the political apparatus and in society at large. Governments and peoples alike have been ‘removed from reality’. Political inertia stems in large part from the other face of the Seventh Enemy, our individual blindness. (p.167)

According to Higgins, “It is our critical lack of insight which ... most sustains the Seventh Enemy” (p. 181).

Canadian writer Mike Nickerson (1977, 1993) recounts the problems facing the planet using other categories and other data, but the themes are similar: diminishing energy supplies, depletion of other vital resources, strained agricultural production, pollution, over-population, deteriorating social conditions, and the challenge of sustainability. Nickerson writes, “Ultimately... we must instill the value of sustainability deeply within our
hearts. We must feel it as clearly as we feel the need to care for our children. Indeed, becoming sustainable is caring for our children” (p. 101).

Joanna Macy (1983) believes that to be alive and conscious in our world today brings with it an accompanying awareness of unprecedented peril. She lists three directions from which the peril comes: “the threat of nuclear war… the progressive destruction of our life-support systems… [and] the growing misery of half the planet’s people” (p. 2). “The pervasive inklings of apocalypse,” she writes, are “not only bolstered by the projections of scientists but imbued with the absurdity of collective suicide” (p. 3).

There is, then, a compelling body of literature that suggests that the problems of the planet are extensive, serious and urgent, and that the brunt of responsibility for them lies at the feet of its human inhabitants. However, while many authors make the claim that the future of the planet hangs directly upon the actions of the human species now more than ever before (Houston, 1992; Higgins, 1978; Nickerson, 1977, 1993), others make a case for seeing humans as only one group of many planetary players who are all subject to a common destiny quite outside the control of any single species.

Some believe that our planet is itself alive. In March, 1988, the Gaia hypothesis of James Lovelock became respectable within the scientific establishment when the prestigious Chapman Conference took it as its theme. Frank Barnaby (1988) explains:

According to the Gaia hypothesis, life shapes and controls the environment, rather than the other way around. The two have evolved together, and every individual life form, from microbe to man, is involved – simply by its own life processes – in homeostatic systems that have evolved to operate on a global scale. Just as a living creature keeps its chemistry and temperature in balance, so Gaia – all of life – maintains harmonious conditions on earth. Gaia is a challenging, and to some
disturbing, idea… Critics argue that for Gaia to use these means to keep temperatures comfortable for life presupposes a conscious planetary intelligence. As Lovelock explains, this need not be so: simple feedback mechanisms between the environment and organisms could achieve exactly the same result. (p. 233)

Following the Gaia hypothesis, it would be simple to conclude that the future of the planet is not in the hands of its human inhabitants, and that there is a much greater force guiding our common destiny. Therefore, one might ask, what can be the point of worrying about individual transformation if the fate of the planet is beyond human influence? Another might argue that, besides serving as merely an invitation to passivity, this perspective of Gaia ignores the fact that human intervention, whatever form it takes, has an enormous, and in large measure a cancerous, impact on the rest of the planetary organism. These Gaia activists would then conclude that if we are to find a sustainable relationship with Gaia, as a part of it, we will have to seek to understand and respect her systems and act in accordance with them.

Asked if Gaia could be proved, Lovelock is said by Barnaby (1988) to have replied, “I don’t think it matters. We should just be curious. Go out and wonder about it” (p. 233).

**Literature Dealing with How Adults Change**

Before exploring the relevant literature on how adults change, it is instructive to examine first what forces are keeping us stuck. Why are so many people unwilling even to acknowledge global problems, let alone do something about them? Why is it that, when the problems are so serious, so stark, and so apparently evident, most people are neither in the streets protesting, nor actively organizing for collective solutions?
Macy (1983), noting that this is the first time in history that a generation cannot be certain of unlimited continuity (i.e. that other generations will follow), sees that loss of certainty as the “pivotal psychological reality of our time” (p. 2). She sees a variety of human responses arising from this condition, ranging from fear to anger, guilt, and sorrow. But even these, she believes, are inadequate in this context. Macy writes,

The feelings that assail us now cannot be equated with dread of our own individual demise. Their source lies less in concerns for the personal self than in apprehensions of collective suffering – of what happens to others, to human life and fellow species, to the heritage we share, the unborn generations to come, and our green planet herself, wheeling there in space. (p. 3)

Psychiatrist Larry Rooney, in a presentation to an OISE class (March 28, 1991),

spoke about the defenses we all use to protect our unconscious – ways of adapting our character structures to survive, and of insulating ourselves from unpleasant realities. One of these defense mechanisms is straight avoidance. We shut out the problems of the world, choosing to think of matters closer to home. We simply do not want to know. Another defense mechanism is denial. We refuse to believe that things are as bad as we are told, or that each of us has a share in the responsibility for solutions. Some of us become dazed by apathy, shrug our shoulders and turn our backs both on the problems and on our moral values, having persuaded ourselves that we do not care. Yet another defense is futile displacement activities, seeking refuge in fragmented and meaningless work and superficial relationships.

Macy (1983, p. 6) calls this the “double life”: on one level we live our daily lives, keeping our appointments, cheering up our friends, while on
another level, underneath, there is this nascent knowledge of the fragility of our future.

Higgins (1978) agrees with Rooney that people resist unpleasant realities that require them to change. He thinks that if the reality entails pain, disappointment or difficulty, our defense mechanisms take over. "We have a profound psychic investment in not taking the reality of the crisis on board," he writes (p. 178). Clearly the collective will to change our ways is weakened by a complex web of self-interests. Furthermore, says Higgins, we prefer to project the evil onto others. He writes, "This sinister process of projection helps explain our blindness to the atrocities we may personally commit or tolerate ... and our corresponding lack of alertness towards the emotionally less satisfying challenges of the six threats" (pp. 180-181).

Macy (1983) too believes we tend to shut out our "pain for the world" (p. 3). She writes, "We block it out because it hurts, because it is frightening, and most of all because we do not understand it and consider it to be a dysfunction, an aberration, a sign of personal weakness" (p. 4).

Higgins (1978) believes the first obstacle to an understanding of the modern world is its sheer complexity (p. 172). Our minds become "fogged" by the mass of information we are exposed to about what is wrong with the world. We see little connection between our day-to-day lives and the plight of two-thirds of humanity. Most of us, writes Higgins, although we claim allegiance to some universal ethic, live by narrower loyalties to our own in-groups, and see the interdependence of humankind as little more than a good slogan. There are incessant demands on our time and attention, and, says Higgins, "over-stimulation reaches such a pitch that many cannot tolerate the solitude in which depth of feeling matures" (p. 176).
Hubert Dreyfuss (1981) described our collective problem as nihilism:

"Our problem ... is that many people today feel that they have lost a sense of the meaning and seriousness of their lives [nihilism]. If nihilism were complete, there would be no significant private or public issues. Nothing would have authority for us, would make a claim on us, would demand a commitment from us. In our age, everything is in the process of becoming equal. There is no meaningful difference between political parties, between religious communities, between social causes, between cultural practices - everything is on a par. That means there are no shared commitments and as a result, individuals feel isolated and alienated. They feel that their lives have no meaning because the public world has no meaning. They then retreat into their private experiences as the only remaining place to find any zing." (pp. 135-36)

The picture painted by these authors might appear to be bleak and discouraging, even hopeless. However, some find reason for hope. Jean Houston (1982) believes "breakdown is always the signal for breakthrough" (p. 213). Tough (1991) lists no fewer than fourteen factors, both individual and societal, that he suggests cause people to act in ways that threaten the future. Says Tough,

"Fortunately, the influence of many of these factors can be reduced or offset by the increasing awareness and understanding that are leading to enhanced concern, caring, and action for the continued well-being of culture and society. We have good reason to retain our hope for a satisfactory future: opposing forces need not deter us but instead can spur us on to more vigorous and effective efforts." (p. 32)

People can and do change. We do have the power to act, all the more so because we know we are not alone. Macy (1983) suggests that we have no constraints on our actions other than ones we choose: "No outside authority is silencing us; no external force is keeping us from responding with all our might and courage to the present danger to life on Earth" (p. 6). We do not
have to depend only upon future generations to find solutions. Brundage and MacKeracher (1980) declare as their very first adult learning principle: “Adult behaviour is not fixed but changes in response to both internal and external pressures. Adults can and do learn throughout their entire lifetime.... Change and learning are normal adult activities” (p. 97). There is still more good news. Brundage and MacKeracher state that adults are not merely curious in general, but their learning interests tend to focus on solving problems that are relevant to their lives. Here are three more of their adult learning principles:

- Adult learning tends to focus on the problems, concerns, tasks, and needs of the individual's current life situation. Adults are highly motivated to learn in areas relevant to their current developmental tasks, social roles, life crises, and transition periods. (p. 103)

- Motives are felt needs with which the adult learner begins a learning activity. These may relate to unmet needs or unwanted conditions in life or to the pursuit of positive change in the direction of desired goals. (p. 105)

- Adult learning which is designed to solve problems is facilitated when the learner works on his own problems and develops his own solutions, rather than working on hypothetical problems and accepting prescribed solutions. (p. 103)

All of this implies that learning requires a readiness, an opening or invitation on the part of the learner. Paul McGinnis (1975), in a study of major personal changes in forty returned CUSO (Canadian University Services Overseas) volunteers, points to a “pivotal component” which he describes as a “state of alert ... a general preparedness for personal change” and the “foundation upon which major personal change is constructed.” His participants displayed an “openness or receptivity to the new wave of ideas, concepts and experiences that crashed through their lives. This state of
readiness enabled them to capitalize upon the experiential opportunities open to them both abroad and after their return to Canada” (p. 120).

When people are open to global issues and problems as both real and relevant to their personal lives, when they can see the link between those problems and their own lives and actions, and when they are given the opportunity to create their own solutions, they are apparently prepared to learn and change. The next question is: How do they become so persuaded? How does their personal world expand to include the planet in its entirety as a single, seamless whole?

**Literature Relating to Transformative Learning Experiences**

As has been noted, this study deals with both personal change and social change, and the relationship between the two. Sometimes discussions on the relationship between personal and social transformation sound like the chicken-and-egg debate. While some authors give more credence to personal transformation as the source of social transformation (Mezirow, 1990, Ferguson, 1980), others have suggested the reverse is at least equally true (Freire, 1970). As noted earlier by Fromm (1976), it is probably a safe assumption that the two are in symbiotic relationship.

In 1980, Ferguson explored what was then new territory – social transformation resulting from personal transformation, or change from the inside out. Her earlier writing had attracted interest from a wide variety of pioneers who were experiencing and experimenting with radical change. She called that network a *conspiracy* (literally, breathing together) and she writes that “conspirators connected me with other conspirators: politicians, stewards of corporate or private wealth, celebrities, professionals trying to change their
professions, and ‘ordinary’ people accomplishing miracles of social change” (p. 20). Ferguson notes that when she started her book, The Aquarian Conspiracy, she was reluctant to write about “conspiracy” and about “transformation.” She writes,

Much as I was hesitant to use the word conspiracy, when I began writing the first draft of this book I shied away from the word transformation. It connoted great, perhaps impossible, change. Yet we seem to know now that our society must be remade, not just mended, and the concept has come into common usage.... individuals are less self-conscious about discussing their own transformation – an on-going process that has changed the tenor of their lives. (pp. 20-21)

Maclean's magazine, in its Oct. 28, 1996 cover story examining the lives of several Canadians whom it considered to be trend-setters, suggests that there are signs of change:

Whatever its name or form – whether provoked by a personal epiphany or a corporate pink slip – there seems little doubt: North Americans in increasing numbers are rebelling against a lifestyle of overwork and over-consumption, putting their maxed-out credit cards on hold and cutting back in ways both small and large.... “No doubt about it, we have never seen a trend as hot as this one,” says Gerald Celente, president of the Trends Research Institute based in Rhinebeck, N.Y., who estimates that 15% of the country's 9.8 million baby-boomers will be practising voluntary simplicity by the year 2000 – with no end in sight. Celente sees it not merely as a re-tailoring of spending habits, but a fundamental transformation of values. “This is really a sea change of thought,” he says, “whereby you suddenly perceive you have a greater purpose in life than material gain.” (p. 46)

Transformation is not new to adult education literature. R.D. Boyd and J.G. Meyers (1988) write about transformation in terms of “personal illumination, gained by putting things together in their relational wholeness” (p. 224). They suggest three activities involved in this process: receptivity,
recognition (awareness that the experience is authentic), and grieving (a kind of ‘talking back’ to the extra-rational message demanding attention at this time)” (p. 277). However, it is Jack Mezirow (1991) who brought the term transformation into prominence with his research and theory development beginning in 1975 and his subsequent publications on transformative learning. Mezirow locates transformation at the heart of his theory of adult learning, and declares transformative learning to be a goal of adult education (p. 198). “While not all adult education involves reflective or transformative learning,” he writes, “reflective, and hence transformative, learning surely should be considered to be a cardinal objective of adult education” (p. 111).

One might wonder how prominent these significant learning experiences are in a person’s overall learning. Is there a particular time or a stage in life when one is more susceptible to them? Do males and females experience them equally and similarly? Do they occur in equal measure and form across cultures? As noted earlier, Merriam and Clark (1991) remark that while the greatest percentage of significant learning by far is derived from life experience rather than formal education, learning from life experience has received little attention in the adult development literature (p. 195). "Life experience," they write, “may be the predominant and most valued form of learning in adulthood” (p. 178). They looked at life events, noteworthy occurrences, marker events, milestones, change events, or benchmarks that usually involved a change in a person's activities. They noticed that, while the average number of “significant learning experiences” per person was 3.9 (slightly lower for men than women), the average number by life stage varied from 3.0 for young adults to 4.2 for people in their thirties, to 3.9 for middle aged persons (p. 179).
Frank Musgrove’s (1977) research indicates that people are more open to new modes of experience in their early adult years than they are later, with the consequent advice that adult education should focus on early adulthood. Musgrove writes, “fundamental change of perspectives occurred most readily between the early twenties and early thirties” (p. 225). Educational efforts during that period, Musgrove believes, will be essentially moral in nature, “not in the sense of propounding a particular morality, but in the sense of affording time, opportunity and preferably a range of real-life experiences for exploration of the moral universe and one's conception of self” (p. 227). Mezirow’s (1991) transformation theory, however, holds that the abilities exist throughout adult life, and that transformations likely to produce meaning perspectives that are developmentally advanced usually appear to occur after the age of thirty (p. 176).

Musgrove’s (1977) findings also indicate that significant, even dramatic changes in one’s life or behaviour did not necessarily lead to changes in values or perspectives, nor was the reverse necessarily true. He writes,

The studies … disabuse us of the simplistic view … that assuming new “roles” means creating a new self. All the people in this study had moved to a new status and a new role, but “real selves” often remained latent and available for recall. All new roles in modern life do not involve personal transformation. (p.14)

The question of intentionality is worthy of consideration at this point. Do transformative changes tend to be intentional? To what degree are they likely to be accidental? Tough (1982), while not describing the changes he examined as transformational, reports research indicating that between half and two-thirds of interviewees describe their changes as intentional (pp. 48-49). In Tough’s study of twenty graduate students in which they were asked
about their most important changes and the most important activities that led to them, he found that “more than 50% of those activities were highly intentional” (p. 49). Tough also notes that the intentional portion of changes was rated by participants as more beneficial than the unintentional portion. David Selby suggests that there may be a “dispositional” location somewhere in the middle of the continuum ranging between intentionality and unintentionality (personal communication, November 18, 1997). This position allows for the possibility that an individual may incline in the direction of a particular change or activity without deliberately choosing it.

Merriam and Clark’s (1991) research led them to believe that approximately ten times more learning occurs when things are going well than when things are going badly, and that this is equally true for both women and men (pp. 180-182). However, they found that learning resulting in a sudden transformation in perspective is more likely to occur when things are going badly (p. 187).

The study which parallels perhaps most closely the current study was conducted by Daloz and associates (1996), who were interested in learning about the experiences and conditions that shaped the lives of people who “seemed to be motivated by some form of the question, ‘How can we be part of creating a more inclusive ‘common’ good?’ (p. 5). Their participant selection criteria included a “commitment to the common good”, “perseverance and resilience”, “ethical congruence between life and work” and “engagement with diversity and complexity” (pp. 5-6). They elaborated a number of factors, including “trustworthy and transformational relationships with threshold people, and hospitable spaces within which those
relationships may be developed and new forms of agency be practised” (pp. 52-53).

Daloz and his colleagues discount the idea of a “Gandhi pill” – a single, turn-around, transformative experience that would generate a commitment to the common good. However, the single most important pattern they found was what they called “a constructive enlarging engagement with the other” or “important encounters with others significantly different than themselves” (p. 63). These encounters were not only ones of ethnic or national differences. The experiences of the other included encounters with disabled people, the homeless, and elements of the non-human natural world. A sympathetic connection with the other was established, which “challenged some earlier boundary and opened the way to a larger sense of self and world” (p. 66).

**Literature on Phases of Transformative Learning Experiences**

Several authors have elaborated phases of transformative learning. Mezirow (1978) believes transformation takes place in three broad phases: alienation from prescribed social roles, re-framing or re-structuring one’s reality and place in it, and finally a contractual solidarity phase involving re-entry into society on new terms determined by the new meaning perspective (p. 105). In another, more elaborate schema, Mezirow (1991) expands these phases to ten involved in what he calls “perspective transformation.” He outlined a sequence of learning activities as follows, beginning with a disorienting dilemma and concluding with a revised self-concept:
1. a disorienting dilemma
2. self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame
3. a critical assessment of assumptions
4. recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change
5. exploration of options for new roles, relationships and actions
6. planning a course of action
7. acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
8. provisional trying of new roles
9. building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
10. a re-integration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective (p. 168).

Stephen Brookfield (1987) lists five phases of becoming a critical thinker which parallel the transformative learning process described by Mezirow:
1. the occurrence of a trigger event that prompts inner discomfort and perplexity,
2. an appraisal of oneself or self-scrutiny ("What is going on here?"),
3. an exploration of ways either to explain discrepancies or to live with them ("How do I know this? How can I validate this? How do others think?")
4. the development of alternative perspectives or new ways of thinking and acting,
5. the integration of new perspectives into one's life (pp. 26-28).

Author Harrison Owen (1990) suggests that the stages of transformation replicate the stages of grief as often described in encounters with death. He writes, "The stages are, in my version, 1) shock/anger; 2) denial; 3) memories; 4) open space – which begins as despair and ends as hope; 5)
imagination; and 6) vision, experienced as triumph and resolution” (p. 1). Owen describes transformation as a “journey of spirit”, as the evolution of consciousness or spirit (Owen prefers the term spirit over consciousness) and the replacement of old paradigms with new ones. According to Owen, transformation and real learning are one and the same.

Ferguson (1980), acknowledging that transformation is a journey without a destination, outlines what she calls “stages in the journey, and they are surprisingly mappable, based on thousands of historical accounts and the proliferating reports of contemporary seekers” (p. 89). Recognizing that no two journeys are alike, she still suggests four stages that are frequently recounted:

The first stage is preliminary, almost happenstance: an entry point.... Entry can be triggered by anything that shakes up the old understanding of the world, the old priorities.... The entry point experience hints that there is a brighter, richer, more meaningful dimension to life. (p. 89)

Ferguson’s (1980) first stage is marked by a discovery that there are other ways of knowing. She describes a number of possible routes leading from this entry point. Some people are drawn to see more, some do not know where next to turn, some are afraid to proceed, and some turn back. Those who go on typically enter a second stage which Ferguson calls exploration. “Warily or enthusiastically,” writes Ferguson, “having sensed that there is something worth finding, the individual sets out to look for it. The first serious step, however small, is empowering and significant. The quest, as one spiritual teacher put it, is the transformation” (p. 92). This stage is marked by a deliberate relaxing of the grip on previous certainties, and the beginning of a search for something new — as yet a mystery. In the third
stage, which Ferguson calls integration, “the mystery is inhabited. Although there may be favourite methods or teachers, the individual trusts an inner guru” (p.92). This stage is accompanied by mixed feelings, says Ferguson, “because fear centres on the disruptive effect the transformative process may be having on the old itinerary: career direction, relationships, goals, and values.... There is a new self in the old culture” (p. 93). While there is less need for external validation in this stage, says Ferguson, “self-questioning may reach the level of inquisition. Usually the individual emerges from such re-evaluation with a new strength and sureness, grounded in purpose” (p. 93). In this stage the individual learns that his/her old habits, values and strategies do not fit any more, and that there are other ways of being. Ferguson’s fourth and final stage is conspiracy, a term she introduced earlier in its literal sense meaning “to breathe together” (p. 19). This is a connecting, networking stage dealing with discovering “other sources of power, and ways to use it for fulfillment and in service to others.... If the mind can heal and transform, why can't minds join to heal and transform society?” (p. 93). There is no intent, as is suggested in the usual interpretation of conspiracy, to impose change subversively, but rather openly to invite it. Social implications reveal themselves at this point, although Ferguson notes there is sometimes a hiatus in social activism while the individual regroups and assesses roles, responsibilities and direction.

Jane Taylor (1989), in a master’s thesis on transformative learning, outlines three phases: a generation of consciousness which incorporates encountering “trigger events” and “confronting reality”; a transformation of consciousness when the transition point is reached and there is a “leap or shift of transcendence”; and an integration of consciousness when a
"personal commitment" is made, followed by "grounding and development" (p. 226 - 249).

Nancy Dudley (1987) studied the paradigm shift of five men and five women "from the view of humans as separate from and dominant over nature to an ecological worldview which recognizes our embeddedness in nature" (p.1). Her aim was to reveal the structure of this process of change. Her evidence indicates that "the process of transformation is a gradual, on-going journey – a living experience of increasingly opening to new sensitivities" (p. 304). Dudley characterizes the process of transformational change as following five themes: a "frame-break" or separation from routine patterns (estrangement from cultural norms, the yearning for something else, proximity to other cultures, exposure to differences, a dynamic questioning process, personal or cultural crises); transcendence over ordinary patterns (new perceptions of the world, not seeing different things but seeing things differently); a willingness to transform one's mind (cooperating with the energies of transformation); validation (confirmation through relationship and community), and integration (incorporating the expanded view into one's way of being, living it, and not slipping back into familiar patterns) (pp. 234 - 268).

Selby (1997) draws on the work of J.O. Prochaska, J.C. Norcross and C.C. Di Clemente (1994) to develop a spiral model of change that can be applied to professional change and to groups involved in a change process (p. 6). It begins with a "pre-contemplation stage, a state of unease with current approaches, behaviours, relationships and purposes." This stage, characterized by a feeling of dissonance between values and behaviours, is not clearly articulated but builds until it finally surfaces, and enters the
second stage: “active contemplation.” A conscious and deliberate weighing of the advantages and disadvantages of a change follows, until the forces are “sufficient to propel the individual to action,” the third stage. At this point the individual has made a commitment and is taking active steps to implement the change. “Maintenance” is what is required to maintain the change, while the almost inevitable “setback” stage refers to the doubts, discouragement and disillusionment that may push the individual to reverse the direction of change. Setbacks lead back into contemplation, and the spiral begins again. “For change to become self-sustaining and ultimately transformative,” writes Selby, “several spirals will be necessary.”

Daloz and associates (1996) describe the process by which we reflect and learn as “imagination.” “As we seek meaning and purpose,” they write, “imagination is the power by which we sort and shape into one the disparate elements of our world, using images, symbols, stories, theories and rituals” (p. 132). The process of doing this, according to these writers, includes five phases, each flowing into the next:
1. conscious conflict or a sense of contradiction, dissonance,
2. pause or taking time, a kind of underground scanning when the conflict is simmered on the back burner,
3. image-insight, an ah-ha!, which crystallizes a new insight carrying the force of reality,
4. repatterning and reframing, connections between the new insight and lived experience, a recomposition of a whole pattern of meaning, and
5. interpretation in dialogue, where the new insight is articulated and acted upon amidst others (pp. 133-34).
Daloz believes that this process is continuous and cyclical, and can begin at any of several points.

What follows is a simple and skeletal working framework to describe some fundamental concepts and a process of transformative learning as they have been described in the literature, and as they might apply to the circumstances of this study. Certainly many, if not most, writers on the subject have more elaborate theories about how transformation occurs than mine. However, no other schema in the literature deals with the particular type of transformation under study here: the transformation that leads from identifiable, time-bounded learning experiences to commitments to the welfare of the planet and of future generations. This framework captures the essence of much of what is currently understood to be true, and serves as a preliminary platform on which to build the balance of this study.

My outline suggests four phases or themes in transformative learning experiences that generate the commitments described above. I hesitate to call them stages, which suggests to me that they will always follow each other in the indicated sequence consistently across all learners. I prefer to call them phases or themes which are, to my mind, less discrete, allow for some overlap and do not imply quite so strict a linear order. Paulo Freire (1972), for example, claims that critical reflection and action (praxis) must occur simultaneously for either to have real meaning.

Here are my four categories, upon which I will expand in the following sections of this chapter:
1. leaving the familiar and entering a state of disequilibrium,
2. responding to the disequilibrium: making meaning,
3. building commitment and personal responsibility, and
4. integrating through acting anew.

1. Leaving the Familiar and Entering a State of Disequilibrium

Before examining the experience of entering disequilibrium, it is appropriate first to examine the familiar, that state of equilibrium that precedes the disruption. P. Berger and T. Luckmann (1971) believe that we learn meanings, through socialization, that allow us to make our way through our daily encounters with life experiences and with each other. According to these two authors, these meanings assume a kind of unquestionable rigidity; they are reinforced by the continued affirmation of others, and become taken for granted in order that we can conduct our lives without experiencing the anxiety that would come from our having to question them continuously (p. 155).

According to Musgrove (1977), within this “normal and plausible world” of familiar meanings,

The individual makes sense of his life in terms of rational, rule-regulated conduct of affairs, decisions taken with little reference to divine assistance; a life plan which is constantly reviewed and revised; timetables which mark and order the steady and uniform progression of time; and established recipes which enable the usual routines of life to be lived with the minimum of conscious reflection; and a private world where “he can really be himself.” These six aspects of consciousness are both the structure of plausibility and the source of modern identity.” (pp. 11-12)

Fromm (1976) believes that every culture known in history has had such a “frame of orientation”, and that human beings would be confused and unable to function without it. He says that it provides
a way of orienting oneself, of finding a fixed point that permits one to organize all the impressions that impinge upon each individual. Our world makes sense to us, and we feel certain about our ideas, through the consensus with those around us. Even if the map is wrong, it fulfills its psychological function. (p. 137)

This comfortable, dependable world is sometimes invaded by an unsettling event, an often unexpected occurrence which suddenly challenges the familiar as something mythical, no longer rock-solid. The individual is surprised, thrown off-balance and out of the normal flow of her/his life. Most writers agree that transformative learning begins with this kind of disequilibrium. Sometimes it is wonderful, the stuff of dreams; sometimes it is tragic, the calamities of nightmares. The learner is either shaken by a sudden change, or else deliberately steps into the unknown and falls off-balance or becomes lost. In any case, this experience invokes a separation from the familiar, a disengagement from the taken-for-granted. Some report this separation to be characterized by feelings of ecstasy, of terror, or of both.

Mezirow (1991) describes this disequilibrium as a “disorienting dilemma”, an experience incongruent with the individual’s meaning structure of personal beliefs, values, norms, and expectations, yet too big to reject (p. 168). Since our need to understand our experiences is very compelling and perhaps our most distinctively human attribute, says Mezirow, we must make sense of them in order to know how to act. The dilemma triggers the creation of a new meaning structure, one that incorporates the new experience – a process Mezirow believes not to be an everyday occurrence. He called it perspective transformation ... the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our presuppositions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; of reformulating these assumptions to permit a more inclusive,
discriminating, permeable and integrative perspective; and of making decisions and otherwise acting on these new understandings. (p. 14)

Perspective transformation constitutes, according to Mezirow, the central process of development in adulthood. It is his hope that “insofar as it is possible, we all move toward such an orientation” (p. 155).

According to Mezirow (1991), we learn many of our perspectives, or our ways of understanding the world, unconsciously in childhood through socialization. These are culturally determined and do not usually surface until we reach adulthood when they become important in shaping how we perceive our experience. Adults, faced by the diversity, contradictions and rapid changes in modern society, can easily become overwhelmed. Their childhood learning is no longer adequate. They meet new, foundation-rocking experiences and discover that they need new perspectives both to make sense of what is going on about them, and to exercise any kind of control over their lives. For Mezirow, “The formative learning of childhood becomes transformative learning in adulthood” (p. 33). Perspective transformation, he writes, is a process of

learning how we are caught in our own history and are re-living it. We learn to become critically aware of the cultural and psychological assumptions that have influenced the way we see ourselves and our relationships, and the way we pattern our lives. (1978, p. 101)

Transformation likely “begins when we encounter experiences, often in an emotionally charged situation, that fail to fit our expectations and consequently lack meaning for us, or we encounter an anomaly that cannot be given coherence either by learning within existing schemes or by learning new schemes”, writes Mezirow (1991, p. 94). He believes it can happen suddenly and constitute an “epochal transformation” of meaning systems
such as is experienced in religious conversions or in consciousness raising. “Dramatic personal and social change,” he says, “become possible when we become aware of the way that both our psychological and our cultural assumptions have created or contributed to our dependence on outside forces that we have regarded as unchangeable” (p. 88).

Or, he thinks more typically, it can happen gradually. Regardless of how it occurs, Mezirow believes it is brought on by critical self-reflection and the questioning of underlying premises (1991, pp. 87-88). If the emotional stress of a conflict of beliefs causes us to transform a meaning perspective dramatically, that transformation will be remembered. According to Mezirow, the most significant transformations in learning are transformations of meaning perspectives, in what he called the emancipatory domain of learning.

Other authors agree that transformative learning begins with such a shake-up. Greig, Pike and Selby (1989), considering the professional transformation of teachers as they move toward more holistic approaches to their teaching, write,

Factors which contribute to such a shift may be gradual in their action but the start of the process of change can often be associated, retrospectively, with a particular event or experience – when a sudden fresh look at assumptions is made, forcing a radical rethinking of current approaches and practices. (p. 58)

Greig, Pike and Selby quote a Newcastle primary teacher as having said, “I just had to have a little chink of light before the door swung really wide open and I was flooded – I could relate it to every other aspect of my experience” (p. 58).
Merriam and Clark (1991), referring to the earlier work of John Dewey, note that in order for an experience to educate, it must fall inside a limited zone in the middle of a continuum of congruence with one’s customary assumptions. If the experience is too congruent, then it does not gain the learner’s attention. If it is too incongruent, it presents too much of a threat and is quickly rejected. The more an experience approaches the incongruent end, however, the more likely it is to be a transformative learning experience.

James Loder (1981) identifies a general “transformative logic” that he claims is implicit in all major domains of learning (pp. 26-34). The first of his five steps in this transformation logic is a conflict: a dilemma pertaining more to one's view of oneself than something externally imposed.

Ross Keane (1985) elaborates a four-phase explanation of the transformative learning experience beginning with “disorientation”, where an individual’s sense of harmony is disturbed while the problem is not entirely comprehended. Keane calls this state one of “inner disequilibrium and tension ... as [the individual] becomes aware that there is something wrong with the self yet is not able to satisfactorily understand, or even name, the problem” (p. 91).

Douglas Sloan (1981) elaborates stages of decision-making during significant life choices. “Shock and immobilization,” which according to Sloan is the first stage, “may refer less to feelings leading to a decision than to those of being surprised afterward of what one has just committed oneself to do. These feelings may include elation, despair, or a mixture of both” (p. 108).
Dudley (1987) characterizes the process of transformational change as beginning with a separation from routine patterns, a “frame-break” (pp. 221-222). She writes,

It is the unexpected experience in life that is most likely to “stop” one’s routine world. This crack can be experienced in times of any break with one’s environment, culture, family or role, through developmental change, loss or estrangement. This severance, then, can be a turning point, in Goffman’s (1974) term, a frame break.” (p. 234)

Ferguson describes the transformation experience as beginning in darkness, confusion, chaos and fear:

The learner is transforming the input, ordering and re-ordering, creating coherence. His worldview is continually enlarged to incorporate the new. From time to time it breaks and is reformed, as in the acquiring of major new skills and concepts; ... Each is a kind of paradigm shift.... A learning shift is preceded by stress whose intensity ranges across a continuum: uneasiness, excitement, creative tension, confusion, anxiety, pain, fear.... Eventually we know that the other side of every fear is a freedom.... Somewhere is that clear memory of the process of transformation: dark to light, lost to found, broken to seamless, chaos to clarity, fear to transcendence. (pp. 291, 294)

Some authors describe these initial, disquieting and precipitating experiences as “trigger events.” Brookfield (1987), describing the phases of becoming a critical thinker, writes that it is the occurrence of an initial trigger event that prompts inner discomfort and perplexity (pp. 25-28). Jane Taylor’s (1989) first step in her schema of transformation is “encountering trigger events ... incidents or experiences that disturb the individual’s current view of reality ... experienced as anomalies, curiosities, contradictions or disorienting dilemmas ... [and] demand attention.” (p. 228). Taylor observed that trigger events are most often occurrences outside the individual such as natural disasters, but that they might also be internal, personal upheavals or
cumulative internal changes (p. 227). Taylor’s second step within the phase “generation of consciousness” is “confronting reality”, which may also be seen as contributing to disequilibrium. Taylor describes confronting reality as “[being] impelled by the stimulation of encountering trigger events” and “a period of intense engagement with the experience of reality, not only in terms of its present state, but also in terms of alternatives and possibilities for the future” (p. 230). Daloz (1986) believes that transformation is triggered by “some change in our world [that] suddenly forces us to relate to it in a sharply different way, and though we may revert back once [we are] in ‘safer’ waters, we have learned something enduring” (pp. 138).

Trigger events also include life events that are not predictable, that surprise us. These may be cause for celebration: a sudden award recognizing an accomplishment or a lottery win. Others can be tragic: the sudden death of an infant, losing a job, or being abused as a child. The course of a life can be radically redirected by an initial confrontation – sometimes self-induced but sometimes brought on by life circumstances. These trigger events shape us, but in ways that cannot be predicted. The same trigger event might lead one person to become more loving, and another to become more bitter. However authors agree that disequilibrium, especially when it not predicted, can sometimes be debilitating.

Patricia Cranton (1994) believes we must seek to understand what trigger events are, from the learner’s perspective, why some events are positive experiences for some and negative for others, and why they initiate reflection for some in certain situations but not for others. Cranton thinks that there is no standard recipe – no way to “hand out one critical incident exercise, carefully add small group discussion, and simmer for one hour” (p. 78). For
Daloz (1986), teachers or mentors should be deliberately trying to create trigger events, "to open a gap between student and environment, a gap that creates tension in the student, calling out for closure" (p. 213). Feedback, or good critical questioning, can create a sense of disequilibrium which can serve as a trigger event for transformative learning. However, too much disequilibrium can be troublesome and threatening, requiring a high level of support to lead learners to growth. Authors agree that the disequilibrium is not always satisfactorily resolved.

2. Responding to the Disequilibrium: Making Meaning

Another theme in much of the transformation literature is the attempt to make meaning of the experience. The individual, finding her/himself in a strange, new environment, seeks to make sense of it and asks questions such as: "What is going on here? Why is this unsettling? What is important about this for me?" Daloz and associates (1996) acknowledge that in our "constructive, enlarging engagement with the other," we do "need to make sense of our experience with the other" (p. 79). The people they interviewed spoke about taking time; more than half of them reported some explicit form of pause as an important habit.

Brookfield's (1987) second phase in becoming a critical thinker is "self-scrutiny," or conducting an appraisal of oneself, asking: "What is going on with me?" A subsequent phase is an exploration of ways either to explain discrepancies or to live with them, asking: "How do I know this? How can I validate it? How do others think?" (p. 26).

George Kelly's (1955) "personal construct theory" proposes that learning is not something that happens to a person, rather "it is what makes him/her a
person in the first place” (p. 75). He believes that a person is constantly in a
state of change as life experiences cause her/him to re-evaluate and re-
construct his/her current system of constructs. Kelly writes,

Experience is made up of the successive re-construing of events... It is not what
happens around him that makes a man experienced: it is the successive construing and
re-construing of what happens, as it happens, that enriches the experience of his life.
(p. 73)

When the old, standard frames of reference cannot incorporate the new
experience, there is a need to rethink, reframe, re-orient, renew, and
eventually to re-build. These do not occur necessarily in any particular order;
rebuilding can occur before rethinking. Cranton (1994) notes that the
processes of making assumptions explicit, questioning them, and possibly
revising them, “may not be distinct processes but rather, simultaneous or
interactive events for some individuals...” (p. 84).

Most authors agree that reflection (usually prompted by some kind of
disequilibrium) may begin simply by forming the intention to resolve the
dissonance, which can in itself require great courage. Cranton (1994) writes,
“Questioning the validity of assumptions is a precarious endeavour. As
mentioned throughout the literature, adult learners will cling stubbornly to
opinions, values and beliefs. To change is frightening and threatening” (p.
84). There are strong reasons for adults to refuse to grow. Taylor (1989)
quoted from an interview with a woman describing her experience, “…the
process of becoming aware was one of the most painful, as well as one of the
most exhilarating experiences of my whole life. It was not easy for me to
look closely at myself and be honest” (p. 240). Daloz (1988) believes that for
many people facing this challenge, "sometimes it is just plain simpler to stay where they are, or at least appear that way" (p. 7).

There is wide agreement throughout the literature that self-concept influences learning. Cranton (1994) notes that "self-concept, or self-esteem, may be the most common source of psychologically distorted assumptions that the adult educator encounters ... learners have poor self-concepts because of previous educational experiences, previous life experiences, and childhood traumas" (p. 40). In order to begin to reflect and make meaning, says Cranton, "the learner must feel empowered and have a sense of security and confidence. One's self-concept as a learner, as a worker and as a person must be strong if any critical questioning of beliefs and values is to occur." (p. 86). Brundage and MacKeracher (1980) agree. Their seventh adult learning principle states:

Adults with a positive self-concept and high self-esteem are more responsive to learning and less threatened by learning environments and the process of change. Adults with a negative self-concept and low self-esteem are less likely to enter learning activities willingly and are often threatened by both learning environments and the process of change. Adults learn best in any environment which reduces any potential threat to their self-concept and self-esteem, and which provides support for change. (p. 100)

Brookfield (1987) described the process of questioning one's assumptions as "psychologically explosive" (p. 30). He compared the challenge of looking at one's assumptions through new eyes with "trying to step outside of our physical body so that we can see how a new coat or dress looks from behind" (p. 29). J. Heron (1988) described this experience as "bracketing" - holding certain of our beliefs in abeyance in order to allow ourselves to assess an experience from outside our usual frame of reference (p. 42).
The literature indicates that reflection requires self-awareness, confidence, planning, skill, and support. The learner must find or develop sufficient confidence, and work through this process in a context that is both empowering and supportive. Cranton (1994) says,

Learner empowerment is clearly a crucial component of transformative learning. Some sense of empowerment is needed before a learner can engage in critical reflection, and a feeling of empowerment sustains an individual throughout the process. Learner empowerment is also the ultimate goal of transformative learning and of adult education. (p. 91)

Mezirow (1978) agrees that this kind of critical appraisal can be emotionally charged and threatening, as there is usually a high investment in maintaining the old perspective. Learning through perspective transformation, believes Mezirow, often involves a fundamental and thorough reassessment of oneself and the values that one has been using to make important decisions and judgements about one’s life. He writes, “Even after restructuring one’s reality and seeing the need for action, the will or determination to persevere in carrying out one’s plans may require special support and assistance” (p. 105). He believes that the shift to a new perspective requires the support of others who share it and are willing to reinforce it (similar to Ferguson’s conspiracy stage, and Selby’s maintenance stage). In this regard, Mezirow notes that social movements can significantly facilitate critical self-reflection both by precipitating or reinforcing dilemmas, and by provoking and legitimating alternative meaning perspectives (1991, p. 194).

This kind of reflection may lead to seeing the dilemma in a larger context, and to the appearance of new horizons. In my own experience, I have felt
this as a kind of breakthrough to a wider world, an aha! experience when I saw clearly the limitations of my earlier perspective and enthusiastically embraced a new and broader one. Dudley (1987) characterized this process as “transcendence over ordinary patterns” (p. 245).

Cranton describes this process in the context of consciousness-raising:

In some situations, consciousness-raising is provoked by exposure to new information, knowledge, insights or values, especially if these are discrepant with currently held meaning schemes. More commonly associated with the notion of consciousness-raising is seeing familiar things from a different perspective, thereby increasing one’s self-awareness regarding familiar things. (p. 174)

Reflection on our prior assumptions is central to Mezirow’s (1988) perspective transformation. He writes:

There are certain challenges or dilemmas of adult life that cannot be resolved by the usual way we handle problems ... life becomes untenable, and we undergo significant phases of re-assessment and growth in which familiar assumptions are challenged and new directions and commitments are charted.... Resolving these anomalies through critical analysis of assumptions behind the roles we play can lead to successive levels of self-development. (p.101)

For Mezirow (1991), reflection is characterized by critique and reassessment of earlier learning, which at that point can be negated. This necessitates a hiatus during which the problem can be redefined. Teaching and psychotherapy are not necessary, believes Mezirow. He writes,

Such [premise] reflection is thought of as occurring mainly in psychotherapy, but it is a natural form of transformative learning that often occurs in adult life, especially during major life transitions, without the intervention of either a therapist or an educator. (p. 138)

The literature supports the proposition that reflection is at the core of transformative learning, and without which it is unlikely to take place.
Authors agree it is usually triggered by feelings of disequilibrium, and requires a willingness to examine one's fundamental assumptions in an atmosphere free from coercion. With a measure of self-esteem and support, the individual questions her/his assumptions, explores the nature and extent of the dissonance, and searches for integration, new meaning and direction, building commitment to act anew.

3. Building Commitment and Personal Responsibility

Along with new insights and new awareness often come new priorities and a commitment to a new lifestyle. As individuals break free of the constraints of an earlier, now inadequate, set of assumptions or perspectives, they may wonder what this means for their lives. One may well ask, “Now what? What are the consequences and implications of this shift? What paths are revealed to me now?” One consequence may be a new sense of unity and integrity, and implications may include new meanings, new directions, new commitments, new roles and relationships, and new actions. They may include a commitment to seeking, or at least being open to, more transformations.

Ken Keniston (1968) studied a group of young American radicals in the 1960s with the intention of learning ways in which they developed their commitment. More than anything else, he learned the inadequacy of any single explanation or cause. “The search for consistencies,” he writes, “neglects the most important consistency, the individuality of those I interviewed” (p. 45). Keniston proposed two hypotheses, both inadequate from his point of view, and concluded that they “overlook the actual complexity of radicals’ development, and both posit either a total break with
the past or total acceptance of it, which rarely occurs in human life” (p. 48). Commitment, then, seems to be a complex phenomenon that defies any simple explanations.

Charles Kiesler (1971) studied the psychology of commitment, which for the purpose of his discussion he took to mean the “pledging or binding of the individual to behavioural acts” or a course of action. He continued, “To the extent that a person is bound to some explicit and attitudinally relevant behaviour, he must accept it as integral to himself, to his self-view, and other attitudes and beliefs must be accommodated accordingly” (pp. 30-31). Kiesler described this process as a solidifying of cognition, a kind of “freezing” of attitudes, making them more resistant to change. He hypothesized that one may increase the degree of commitment by increasing one or more of the following:

1. The explicitness of the act, e.g., how public or otherwise unambiguous the act.
2. The importance of the act for the subject.
3. The degree of irrevocability of the act...
4. The number of acts performed by the subject. We must assume for the moment that the acts are additive in some way. They could be repetitions of the same act, or they could be separate behaviours that are closely connected in some way. ...
5. The degree of volition (or freedom or choice) perceived by the person in performing the act. ... the less the pressure put on a person to behave in a particular way, the more he is tied or bound to the behaviour (the more he is committed to it in present context). (p. 33)

The transforming learner, once having survived both the disequilibrium and reflection with the self-concept intact and perhaps even affirmed, is often interested in finding both a cohesive explanation and in organizing her/his experiences and habits in a way that brings new integrity and order to
meanings and perceptions, adding to his/her definition of self. This new set of assumptions is vulnerable to subsequent change, but it still constitutes a powerful influence on commitment. Reasons for acting on one’s beliefs may be few in number, Kiesler says, “but it is trite to say that people find them important; thousands have died for less. The combination of rightness and hero image can be strong indeed” (p. 10).

An examination of commitment in the context of the current study begs some questions: To what are these people committed? To a new set of behaviours? To new attitudes? Following the transformative learning experience, are they indeed closed, or in Kiesler’s term, “frozen” to further change? Is theirs a commitment to a direction of choice – a particular, desired vision for the planet? Or to continued renewal and further transformation? Noting that some writers call for a commitment to a new massive spiritual awakening, Leon MacKenzie (1991) writes “I would settle for much less on the part of adults: consciousness that their decisions today, to a large extent, shape the landscape of the future.... Attentiveness to worldview construction is necessary. This is due to the fact that adult decisions arise out of their worldviews” (p. 137).

Rogers (1994) found that sometimes the transformational learning process evokes questions about the meaning and purpose of life, personal responsibilities, and the very reason for one’s existence. She described these questions as pertaining to “patterns of the soul.” In her study of graduate students who were learning about global futures, she noticed that students had begun to think of their lives in terms of how they were contributing to the preservation of human and planetary life for the future, in every respect from personal relationships to paid or voluntary work. They started to examine
how they were living their lives in relation to what they thought they could and should be doing. Some saw their personal responsibility linked to their life purpose. For Rogers, the soul piece of her model of learning about global futures (as distinct from the mind and heart pieces) is the most interesting and least understood part of learning, change and commitment to action.

Anne Reece (1990) isolated factors contributing to an environmental commitment. In a study of how environmentalists acquired their values, she notes four factors contributing to the change: the era in which the person lives; the personal characteristics and family background of the individual; experience gained through travel, work and interpersonal relationships; and knowledge acquisition and systematic analysis (p.100). Reece found no prescriptive pattern to value change, noting that one of the factors, or any combination of the factors in varying sequences, could catalyse value change. She believes that a dimension of building commitment, however, is imagination or vision. We construct a vision beyond what is, of what could be. We see new possibilities. We dream dreams. Reece notes that while some of the environmentalists in her study found it difficult to articulate a long term vision, that fact was the source of regret for some of them, realizing that their position was all the weaker for not having a clear vision of a desired future.

Nickerson (1993) described people with an integrated, global perspective as those who are meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. He believes we are these people when we:
I acknowledge that the problems are critical to our lives, ... and that we need to develop sustainable ways to live...

(2) learn about the nature of the challenge, ... recognize symptoms of the problems, understand their causes and appreciate solutions...

(3) make choices in our own actions... When we start to apply the design criteria of sustainability to the world as we see it, any one of us could come up with new insights and ideas that can serve us all...

(4) coordinate our efforts... The likelihood of achieving the goal of sustainability increases with each individual who concludes that it is necessary. (pp.16-18)

While he stops short of defining his own desired outcomes of transformative learning in global, future-oriented terms like Nickerson’s or MacKenzie’s, Mezirow (1991) believes that adult education should move people along towards meaning perspectives that are more developmentally advanced. He elaborates such a perspective as follows:

- more inclusive, discriminating and integrative of experience
- based upon full information
- free from both internal and external coercion
- open to other perspectives and points of view
- accepting of others as equal participants in discourse
- objective and rational in assessing contending arguments and evidence
- critically reflective of presuppositions and their source and consequences, and
- able to accept an informed and rational consensus as the authority for judging conflicting validity claims. (p. 78)

Kiesler (1971) adds support to Mezirow’s third point. He writes, “One’s perception of choice, i.e., one’s feeling that he was free to have acted otherwise, must be a central feature of any exposition on commitment.... When one freely elects to carry out some act, he is committed to it because he is responsible for it” (p.167).
While a vision of a freely chosen, desired future may shape and sustain a commitment for some people, much of the literature suggests that social relationships are also important and influential to building commitment and to the transformation process. It appears from the literature that commitment is increased when our process of transformation is shared with others who have negotiated a similar change, and when our new perspective can be tested on and validated by our friends, peers, and mentors. Selby (1997) notes that changes in the environment ("the ready availability of support and encouragement where there was little before") can "tilt the balance in favour of personal/professional change." Examples of these environmental changes, he suggests might include "being put in touch with a network of like-minded people," "processes which help individuals clarify their perspectives, values and priorities," or highlighting new findings and perspectives previously overlooked (pp. 6-7).

Daloz and his associates (1996) came to a similar conclusion. While they acknowledge that all people depend a good deal upon relationships with others no matter what they believe or do, these authors found that "the people we interviewed more readily recognize this need than do some others, and relationships nourish them in particular ways" (p. 206).

Mathias Finger (1989) describes a paradigm for social action emerging out of new social movements in Europe, including the Green movement, new peace movements, and spiritual or religious movements collectively known as New Age movements. The new movements promote the understanding that transformations are based upon personal emotional commitments to learning their way out of specific dilemmas associated with social concerns. People involved in these movements believe that the motive for transformation
comes from deeply moral, even religious, roots; transformations are not simply cognitive. The purpose of the new movements is to reestablish in a new mode the link between person and society. According to Finger, transformations are of an educational nature; social and political transformations originate from within and happen at the level of the individual. The new movements feature experiential learning, learning through consternation (learning experiences that arouse one's emotions), holistic learning (learning a way of life), and identity learning (learning that personal identity cannot be separated from the way one lives and one's social commitments) (p. 21).

A related study of twenty volunteers working within the Methodist Church was conducted by Trudie Precpahs (1989) to determine how they came to change their beliefs and actions in relation to positions taken by national church leadership. The role of the community was found to be instrumental to their commitments.

Theobald (1996c) believes that improved social relationships are central to the well-being of the planet:

The required success criteria for the twenty-first century are social cohesion, a respect for all of nature and the maintenance of fundamental ecological systems. We must therefore abandon our current commitments to maximum economic growth and international competitiveness.

Mezirow (1991) is known for his claim that it is individual transformation that leads to social action and social change. While he gave less emphasis to change in the opposite direction, Mezirow grants that perspective transformations occur not only in isolated individuals but also in people involved in groups and social movements, and that becoming critically self-
reflective can be powerfully facilitated by a relevant social movement (p. 188). Mezirow acknowledges that there is some debate in the literature as to whether the goal of emancipatory adult education should be primarily social change or personal development.

Mezirow was criticized by Susan Collard and Michael Law (1989) for his inadequate commitment to social action. These critics believe his ideas are "largely devoid of ... socio-political critique" and that he "fails to address adequately questions of context, ideology, and the radical needs embodied in popular struggles" (p. 105). They conclude that the liberal democratic character of Mezirow's ideas are not only inconsistent with but actually suppress the concepts of radical transformation advanced by Freire and other proponents of transformative education. Mezirow (1991) took his critics to heart, and made an effort in his later work to clarify his transformation theory in a social context. He maintains, however, that his theory – and adult educators – can promise only to help in the first step of political change: personal transformation. He believes that it falls to social action educators (specialists within adult education concerned with community development) to help people build commitment to common causes and learn to analyse their common problem through participatory research and the tactics of collective social action. Yet he believes that all adult educators can become activists in fighting to overcome social practices and institutional constraints that keep adults from realizing their most fundamental human right – full, free participation in rational dialogue in order to make meaning from their experience. All adult educators, believes Mezirow, have not only the opportunity but also the responsibility to do the following:

1. Actively foster learners' critical reflection upon their assumptions...
2. Establish communities of rational discourse ... with norms consistent with the ideal conditions of learning, within which beliefs may be questioned and consensually validated.

3. Help learners learn how to take appropriate action. (p. 211)

Yet he maintains that "adult learning transforms meaning perspectives, not society" (1991, p. 208). While his view may not adequately recognize the critical role that social and educational movements can play in facilitating transformative learning experiences and building commitment, Mezirow does acknowledge that perspective transformation is a social process. He allows that others can precipitate the disorienting dilemma, provide alternative perspectives and support for change, and participate in validating changed perspectives through rational discourse. He also acknowledges that identifying with a cause larger than oneself is perhaps the most powerful motivator to learn. Nevertheless, he still maintains the linear view that it is individuals who have undergone perspective transformations who bring the power to social movements, not the other way around (p. 194). This view is in contrast to that of Erich Fromm (1976) who, after challenging the position of those who argue that change must first be applied to the political and economic structure, says:

On the other side are those who claim that first the nature of human beings must change – their consciousness, their values, their character – and that only then can a truly human society be built. The history of the human race proves them wrong. Purely psychical change has always remained in the private sphere and been restricted to small oases, or has been completely ineffective when the preaching of spiritual values has been combined with the practice of the opposite values. (p. 134)

Fromm believes the individual character and the socioeconomic structure to be interdependent.
While Finger’s research (1989) with the new social movements indicated that transformations were rooted in personal emotions and deeply held moral and religious motives – not simply cognitive in nature – the earlier noted characteristics of Mezirow’s developmentally advanced meaning perspective are almost entirely cognitive in nature. The role of emotion is one worthy of exploration in the current study.

In summary, it appears that building commitment defies simple explanations. While there appears to be no single cause, however, a few principles do emerge from the literature. We have seen evidence that a commitment to new behaviour is normally integrated into the self in a way that resists change. The ability to imagine and hold a guiding vision are helpful. When the commitment is freely chosen, it can be deeply held and act as a strong motivator. Social support – a sense of being part of a larger social process with a group of kindred people – is an important reinforcing component in building and maintaining commitment. There is some question arising from the literature as to the role of emotion or passion in relation to the development of commitment. Finally, the literature suggests that actions consistent with a commitment serve to entrench, confirm and maintain it.

4. Integrating Through Acting Anew

Authors agree on the necessary roles of integration and action in confirming transformation. Dudley’s (1987) study of the process of paradigm shift in five men and five women found evidence that this transformative change concluded with integration, “incorporating one’s expanded vision into a way of being … so that it can become the fabric of one’s life” (pp. 267-68). She suggests that, in order to complete the journey,
a path is revealed that one must follow (p. 268). Action is discussed by authors as an integral and indispensable part of transformative learning. Cranton (1994) notes that the more learners are involved in a real-life setting and are doing rather than observing, the more likely they are to be influenced by the experience (p. 182).

Rogers (1994) notes that it was “the feelings of caring, commitment and responsibility prompted students to begin a process of searching for, and in many cases, finding a path of personal action,” and that “it was getting into action that fed a sense of being powerful to make a difference and hopeful about the future” (pp. 151-52). Rogers also noticed that finding a path for action seemed to help resolve emotional and spiritual turmoil that her participants had been experiencing.

Whether the personal path emerged gradually, suddenly or was still emergent, in all three cases students reported a feeling of calmness and certainty that came over them when they began to feel committed to action and started to search for or find a personal path. As one student said, “I had the feeling that this is just right. I have a direction, a feeling of calmness.” (p. 142)

Loder (1981), elaborating on his “transformative logic” that he believes is inherent in every “knowing event” (that is, an event involving comprehension), claims that this logic has as its final step the “interpretation of the imaginative solution into the behavioural and/or symbolic world of the original context” (p. 34). Loder believes that unless the transformation ends with a behavioural or symbolic activity of some kind, the process is not complete.

Mezirow’s (1990) final phases of perspective transformation deal with various facets of acting upon one’s new understandings: planning a course of
action, acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans, provisional trying of new roles, building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships, and a re-integration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective (p. 168). He notes, however that while learners should wind up with more functional strategies and resources for taking action, they can experience difficulties when a commitment to reflective action logically should follow insight but is so threatening or demanding that the learner is immobilized (p. 171).

Brookfield's (1987) last phase of becoming a critical thinker is similar to Mezirow's: the integration of the new perspectives into one's daily life (pp. 13-27).

When Freire (1972) writes of transformation, he means social transformation. For him a transformation in meaning, without parallel action to transform oppressive social structures, is only an intellectual game. Freire describes a transformation of human consciousness through collective self-inquiry and reflection, as conscientization. He believes transition to be a constant in social and historical reality; the key to progress is the creative and transformative power of human consciousness. According to Freire, it is the interaction of reflection and social action which allows people to become aware of, understand and act on their collective reality. Neither one nor the other has sufficient transformative power by itself. Freire believes awareness only has liberating power when coupled with transforming action; action and reflection occur simultaneously.

Donald Schon's (1983) work also describes how individuals (in this case professionals) engage in reflection as they are personally involved in action.
Schon, believing that our knowing is in our action, uses the terms "knowing-in-action" and "reflection-in-action" (pp. 50, 56). Much of this, he thinks, hinges on the experience of surprise. When intuitive, spontaneous performance yields nothing more than the results expected for it, then we tend not to think about it. But when intuitive performance leads to surprises, pleasing and promising or unwanted, we may respond by reflection-in-action. (p. 56)

This surprise, according to Schon, may lead one to construct a new way of looking at the situation or problem, a new frame to apply to the situation in what Schon calls a "frame experiment" (p. 63). Schon wants to increase the legitimacy and use of reflection-in-action, believing it to link "the art of practice in uncertainty and uniqueness to the scientist's art of research" (p. 69).

Nickerson (1993) emphasizes the importance of extending our commitment into the realm of decision-making and action that will make a difference to the future of the planet. He writes,

When one develops the ability to recognize environmental implications, one can assess development plans and public policy as well as recommended products and activities. After a little practice, one can apply the criteria to one's own short and long-term goals and even contribute to the development of regional national and international policy on where society is going....

When we start to apply the design criteria of sustainability to the world as we see it, any one of us could come up with new insights and ideas that can serve us all.” (p. 17)

Rogers (1994) notes that whether the path of action emerged gradually or suddenly, it was accompanied by "a feeling of calmness and certainty ... finding a path for action appeared to be a key element in resolving much of
the emotional and spiritual turmoil that students had been experiencing” (p.142).

It appears as though an element of action serves at least two functions in the transformation process. It is itself a teacher, in that it helps to create and establish the new paradigm and consequent commitment; it also serves to confirm and reinforce them.

**Summary of the chapter**

Chapter 2 has reviewed the relevant literature pertaining to the welfare of the planet and of future generations, to adult learning and change, and to transformative learning. This chapter has also included an elaboration of four phases of the transformative learning experience, based in the literature and proposed as a preliminary working framework designed to inform while not limiting the balance of the study. The four themes are:

1. leaving the familiar and entering a state of disequilibrium,
2. responding to the disequilibrium: making meaning,
3. building commitment and personal responsibility,
4. integrating through acting anew.
CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Introduction and Background

Qualitative research methods were used in this study. The bulk of the data was collected by means of open-ended questions in individual, tape-recorded interviews. Patterns of experience were sought out in the analysis. A good deal of exploration was required in interviews to seek out transformative experiences, as some participants had neither thought of their experiences in these terms nor even ever articulated them before. Those unable to identify any particular transformative experiences in their lives were screened out by means of a preliminary questionnaire (Appendix B) and not included in this study. As I was seeking to understand the influence of such experiences, data from persons who could not report them were of course not useful. Not only are transformative experiences of more interest to me, the researcher in this case, but as Mezirow (1991) has commented, “the study of transformation associated with major life crises has proven methodologically more feasible than the study of those resulting from more gradual changes” (p. 174).

The Researcher and the Research Process

While it is normally assumed that the research problem should determine the methodology, in this case a qualitative approach suited both the research and the researcher. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) allow for this in their book on qualitative research:
People tend to adhere to the methodology that is most consonant with their worldview. We are told that the research problem should define whether one chooses a qualitative approach or a quantitative one. This, however, is not how we believe research necessarily is done, or even how it should be done. To the contrary, we are attracted to and shape research problems that match our personal view of seeing and understanding the world. (p. 9)

Realizing that my personal background and experience of the subject matter would inevitably influence the research process, I was attracted to an approach that would acknowledge and make use of it.

Qualitative research is frequently the methodology of choice in contexts where reality is fluid, complex and socially constructed. While quantitative researchers seek cause-and-effect explanations that are predictive and able to be generalized to other settings, the qualitative approach gives primacy to the subject matter, and acknowledges that the variables are complex, relatively indivisible and difficult to measure.

This research study is exploratory in nature. A qualitative research approach is consistent with the exploratory, descriptive nature of this particular research and with its necessarily wide-ranging inquiry into people’s experiences. The intention was to develop a rich understanding and meaningful interpretation of the transformative learning experiences of participants, and to unearth some important relationships among them. The variables examined were not clear and discrete; they were tacit, hidden, interwoven and complex. A qualitative approach had the following advantages for this study:

- it was rooted in the perspectives of participants in the study, rather than in only the predetermined and possibly inaccurate understandings of the researcher,
• it extended beyond simple dependent variables into deeper understandings,
• it permitted a more global and wide-ranging representation of the research findings, rather than dividing them into arbitrary and isolated segments,
• it allowed for relevant, unanticipated outcomes, not yet identified,
• its rich, thick description provided a valuable elaboration of processes that are complex and only dimly understood,
• it identified important variables which may figure in subsequent explanatory or predictive research, and
• it served to identify areas where educators can have influence.

Within the range of qualitative methodologies, this research question seemed to call for a phenomenological methodology, given this approach's objective of illuminating the structure and essence of a particular human experience. In phenomenological research, the researcher asks, "What does it feel like to have this experience?" However, this descriptive approach does not assume the existence of process nor does it have as a goal the development of theories or models or general explanations (Morse & Field, 1995). The validity of the phenomenological approach rests solely in the richness of the description, and in providing insight into the qualities of the experience.

Marshall and Rossman (1989) distinguish among four major research purposes: exploratory, explanatory, descriptive, and predictive, and indicate research strategies appropriate to each. An exploratory approach, they claim, has as its purpose "to investigate little-understood phenomena, to identify/discover important variables, [and] to generate hypotheses for further research" (p. 78). By contrast, they believe an explanatory approach is called
for when the research purpose is to "explain the forces causing the phenomenon in question, [and] to identify plausible causal networks shaping the phenomenon" (p. 78). The relevant questions in this approach are, "What forces are shaping this phenomenon?" and "How do they interact to result in the phenomenon?" Both exploratory and explanatory purposes are at the heart of this study. My intention was to describe transformational learning experiences as fully as possible, seek out important variables, and construct a meaningful interpretation of the experience along the lines of constructivist research (Guba, 1990). However, I also hoped to find common patterns which might explain these experiences and even point to plausible cause-and-effect relationships. I was under no illusion that I would find a single construction of the transformative learning experience.

The experiences under study in this research occurred naturally. Inasmuch as there was no attempt to manipulate the research setting, this study follows a naturalistic or constructivist design.

**The Preliminary Process**

Prior to beginning the study, an ethical review was completed. An information flyer (Appendix A) was then prepared, circulated and posted to invite participants in the study. Potential participants were contacted either in person or by telephone, at which time the purpose of the research was explained and their participation invited. A letter of information and consent was delivered, signed and returned. All participants were asked to complete a screening questionnaire (Appendix B) to determine whether or not they would qualify to be interviewed.
Private interviews were arranged with each of the fourteen individuals in the sample. In advance of the interviews, participants were provided with a letter (Appendix D) outlining the nature of the interview, elaborating on the term “transformative learning experience” and providing some examples. This page was also available to the interview participant for reference during the interview.

The intent of the study was to discover the nature and role of transformative learning experiences in contributing to the change from caring only a little, to caring passionately about and actively supporting the welfare of the planet and of future generations. From this broader research question, a protocol of interview questions was developed.

Participants were asked first to identify the transformative learning experience(s) contributing to the relatively sudden and dramatic change in their outlook and commitments, and whether or not this was an original experience or if there were other, earlier experiences that led to it. They were then asked to describe, one at a time, these experiences and their contexts: what led up to them, what followed them, and their feelings and frame of mind at that time of the experience. I asked how the experience contributed to the person’s current commitments, and whether the experience was a conscious and deliberate choice or if it were more serendipitous or accidental. I was curious as well to know whether, and at what point, the commitment was established for the long term, following which there would be no turning back. Finally, participants were invited to talk about what sustains their commitment now, and whether there are reference points from the original experience that still guide their lives and activities. The intention was to
accumulate a full and rich account of those experiences judged by the participants to be transformative.

**Participants and Their Enlistment**

I sought out research participants by word-of-mouth and by means of the solicitation flyer (Appendix A). I presented prospective candidates with my flyer and asked them directly if they thought they met the criteria described therein. I also asked them to recommend others.

Humility is often a characteristic of people like this, and often they did not initially acknowledge that they were exemplary in any way. So, rather than by any assumed qualities, they were selected with reference to their demonstrated activities. These are people not necessarily out to prove that they are able or even trying to change the world, but rather they are simply demonstrating that it is possible to live differently in it.

A preliminary pool of candidates was selected whose lives reflect the quality of citizenship it has been argued is needed for the twenty-first century. These are people who are working, either in paid employment or in their leisure time, in concrete and specific ways for a sustainable natural environment and peaceful, harmonious human relationships based on social justice.

Also required of study participants was some integrity to their actions – a reasonably consistent and fundamental commitment that is reflected across their regular life activities. Picking up any thread of the person's life should lead easily to the others. These are people who maintain a global scope, and can easily connect their everyday lives with the larger concerns of the planet and future generations. They see their own well-being as inextricably linked
with the well-being of the entire earth community. Due to their commitments to the two categories of activity indicated above, these people are also likely to maintain a reasonably simple and frugal lifestyle (conscious of wanting to take only their fair share of consumable goods), to seek renewable sources of energy, and to find their joys in non-consumptive activities. Appendix B presents a more complete picture of the participants in the study, via the questions of the screening questionnaire.

Fourteen authentic, compassionate, optimistic, proactive participants were eventually selected for interviewing, half of them of each gender. All of them are people actively engaged with others in influencing the planet and its people towards being more hospitable to future generations of inhabitants. Attention was paid to achieving an equal gender balance. While no quota was determined, an effort was made to ensure that the group of participants was not entirely white, urban, middle-class, Anglo-Saxon Canadians; one aboriginal Canadian, one Mexican and one Mexican-American were included in the group.

Data Collection

Data were collected by means of the screening questionnaire (Appendix B) and personal interviews. The questionnaire served both as a screening device and as a means of gathering personal information on each participant.

As a screening device, the questionnaire indicated if participants' activities and choices were consistent with my description of a global and future-oriented perspective, and if they could indeed point to one or a few significant, indelible personal experiences to which they attributed their global and future-oriented outlook. The questionnaire's 18 forced-choice
questions revealed participants’ (a) broad commitments and worldview, (b) activities in support of the welfare of the planet and future generations, (c) path to commitment (gradual and evolutionary, or transformative and revolutionary), and (d) some personal data. Those participants selected for interviews were ones who indicated a sufficiently strong commitment to answer “yes” to a minimum of 75% of the “yes/no” questions, and who reported that this commitment was brought about substantially by one or several transformative learning experiences.

Demographic data from the screening questionnaires and interviews provided an aggregate picture of the fourteen study participants in terms of gender, age, race, nationality, personal expenditures, and in eight cases, religion. The only personal information solicited by the questionnaire consisted of a choice of four age ranges, and an indication of annual personal expenditure (three choices).

Interviews took place in privacy in a variety of settings, including homes, meeting rooms, coffee shops, and outdoor settings. “An hour of steady talk is a useful rule of thumb to guide appropriate length before diminishing returns may set in for both parties,” write Glesne and Peshkin (1992) regarding the duration of interviews (p. 73). My interviews typically lasted between one and one-and-a-half hours.

Prior to the interviews, participants were provided with some advance information in the form of a letter (Appendix D) outlining the intended focus of the interview. I hoped that participants would give some thought to the transformative experiences in their lives in advance of our meeting, thereby making the interview both more efficient and effective.
While the work involved in preparing transcripts was considerable, my interviews were all tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) note that "the tape recorder ... provides a nearly complete record of what has been said and permits easy attention to the course of the interview" (p. 75). Field notes prepared during and after the interview allowed me to capture other non-verbal observations not picked up by audiotape.

Participants were advised of the possibility of follow-up interviews for clarification or additional information. Some follow-up calls were indeed necessary, and made.

An interview protocol (Appendix E) was followed, but in a conversational context. Following an overview and explanation of the purpose of the interview, questions focused on inspirational or transformative experiences, events, people or places influential in shaping this person's global and long-term perspective.

Flanagan (1954) developed the "critical incident" as a social science research technique for obtaining qualitative data. With this technique, individuals are asked to describe a specific event that is related to a certain topic or theme - one that stands out in their minds as being particularly positive or negative. Usually a set of questions is provided such as: Who was involved in the incident? What were the characteristics of the individuals involved? What made the incident positive or negative? What insights did you gain as a result of the incident? The advantage of this technique is its focus on specific situations, events and people (rather than on abstract concepts) which can provide a powerful vehicle for stimulating transformative learning. While the "incident" time frame was too narrow for
the purpose of the present study, recalling critical incidents can yield strong affective reactions, and was helpful in the preparation of interview questions in this study.

**Data Analysis**

Data were subjected to an analysis to seek order and structure in the mass of interview transcripts, and meaning in terms of their relationships among categories. The concepts from the transformative learning framework proposed at the end of Chapter 2 were used as a guide to facilitate, without limiting, the analysis.

Twenty-five transformative learning experiences were elicited from the fourteen interviews. All of the interview transcripts were combed four times for all references to transformative learning experiences, which were coded accordingly. The data were reduced and organized in the four categories, which were frequently re-examined throughout the analysis in the light of emerging sub-themes. In fact, the original framework was altered slightly during the analysis to better reflect the data. Interview segments from the twenty-five experiences were assigned, where appropriate, to one or other of the four categories:

1. leaving the familiar and entering a state of disequilibrium,
2. responses to the disequilibrium: making meaning,
3. building commitment and personal responsibility,
4. integrating through acting anew.

Other interview segments that did not fall easily into these categories were assembled under other, new rubrics, such as “early influences.”
Interpretation, the process of bringing meaning to the data, involved drawing out and developing sub-themes or patterns in each of the categories of interview segments.

Data concerning age of onset of the transformative learning experience, and its duration, were also recorded and reported in aggregate.

Finally, all the interview transcripts were read again, with a view to determining if the categories and sub-themes did justice to the data. During this re-reading and bouncing back and forth between the stories in the transcripts and the testing of the organizing framework against the data, an alternative framework emerged around the unifying theme of a metaphor from nature: the watershed. It is the subject of Chapter 7.

Towards Trustworthiness

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) the basic issue of trustworthiness is about making a case that the findings of a research study are worthy of attention. They suggest four questions that conventional inquirers pose to themselves: (1) “truth value” or internal validity: How can one establish confidence in the ‘truth’ of the findings? (2) applicability or external validity: How can one ensure the findings have applicability in another context or with other respondents? (3) consistency or reliability: How can one ensure that the findings of an inquiry would be repeated if the inquiry were replicated with the same or similar respondents in the same (or similar) context? (4) neutrality or objectivity: How can one ensure that the findings of an inquiry are not unduly influenced by the biases, motivations, interests or perspectives of the inquirer? (p. 290) Lincoln and Guba suggest that each of these four conventional terms has its “naturalist’s equivalents”: “credibility”,
“transferability”, “dependability”, and “confirmability” (p. 300). In the end, they believe, it is the inquirer’s responsibility to provide thick descriptive data (in this case drawn from a purposeful sample of participants), to ground the findings in the data, and to make logical inferences drawn from appropriate analytical techniques and a suitable category structure. Once rigorous qualitative methodological criteria are met, then trustworthiness, they say, is more a matter of concern to the consumer of inquirer reports (p. 328). “The burden of proof lies less with the original investigator than with the person seeking to make an application elsewhere” (p. 298).

**Critique of the Methodology**

One problem implicit in the qualitative study of transformative learning is gaining dependable access to the meanings of the participants in the research. People responding to questions in interviews are sometimes limited in their ability to articulate their recollections and feelings from sometimes long ago, and when they do, may use terms that have meanings different from those interpreted by the researcher. Additionally, their actual experiences may be coloured by their own analyses and theories.

Furthermore, there is the problem of researcher bias in the analysis. While the interviews were transcribed verbatim, the process of analysis is not so tidy and can lend itself to researcher influence at a number of points, from the coding of the data, through the definition of categories and sub-themes, to theory development.

In the end, this is a story – a story about a series of conversations between fourteen interesting individuals and a researcher held during three months in 1996-97. Its truth lies in its own context of people, time and place. It does
not pretend to be replicable in other circumstances. Participants and researchers change, as does the real world. What I can do as the researcher is:

1. to be clear about who I am and the perspective I bring to the research,
2. to collect and preserve the data fully, carefully and transparently,
3. to be as faithful as I can be to the participants and their data as I seek to understand their meanings,
4. to explore alternative frameworks for understanding their meanings,
5. to present those meanings as completely as I can using summary categories that are reflective of their meanings as I have understood them, and
6. to document those analytical constructs with representative selections from the data.

**Summary of the Chapter**

The qualitative methodology used for the research has been the subject of Chapter 3, in keeping with the exploratory nature of the study. This chapter has provided the theoretical footings on which the research is built, and the various procedures and steps carried out in the course of selecting the study participants, preparing for and conducting the interviews, and the analysis of the data. A critique of the methodology has completed the chapter on methodology.
CHAPTER 4

Data Report

Introduction

This chapter presents the data from both the screening questionnaire and the interviews.

Results from Screening Questionnaires

The screening questionnaires revealed a group of research participants all fourteen of whom indicated a strong commitment to the welfare of the planet and of future generations – a commitment that pervades much of their lives and influences many of their choices. While the fourteen interviewed all indicated that they had been touched by one or several indelible personal experiences that they could identify as having shaped their global and future-oriented outlook, three of the fourteen noted that their journey had also been a gradual or evolutionary one which had developed steadily and progressively throughout their lives.

Four people who completed the questionnaire, while sharing commitments very similar to those eventually interviewed, were unable to point to any particular transformative experiences in their lives that had led them in this direction. They were thanked for their participation, and not interviewed. Data from their questionnaires are not included in these findings.

Of the fourteen who were selected eventually to be interviewed, seven are female and seven are male. Four were between the ages of 20 and 40, five
were between the ages of 40 and 60, and five were over 60 years of age. Eleven declared their annual personal expenditures to be under $25,000, and three indicated that they spend between $25,000 and $50,000. Eleven of the participants are white Canadians. One is an aboriginal Canadian. The sample also includes one Mexican and one Mexican-American. Three are Catholics, three are Quakers, one is a Jew, and one is a Unitarian with a Buddhist background. Others did not mention their religion. None was asked about it.

The screening questionnaire asked respondents to indicate whether or not they were engaged in a variety of activities contributing to the welfare of the planet and of future generations. All fourteen indicated that they support in concrete ways activities which protect significant natural features of the environment. Twelve were involved in at least one effort aimed at improving living conditions for people lacking the basic amenities of life, or at redressing the rich-poor imbalance. Eleven said they were engaged in the search for creative, non-violent, collaborative solutions to interpersonal, inter-group or international conflict. All fourteen declared themselves active in building peaceful, just, harmonious relationships. Thirteen of the fourteen said they were involved in an effort to build democratic policies and collaborative structures and practices.

When asked if they were in the habit of making energy-efficient choices in their daily lives such as turning out incandescent lights when they leave a room, heating with a renewable fuel, car-pooling or choosing public transportation when it is an option, thirteen of those interviewed replied in the affirmative. (One noted, with some expression of guilt, that he needed to work harder at this.) All fourteen indicated that they are personally engaged
in waste reduction activities on a regular basis such as composting, sorting and recycling waste, or buying less in the first place.

When they compared their lifestyles with the lifestyle of the average person within 10 kilometres of where they lived, twelve participants described their own as relatively simple and frugal with regard to the consumption of goods and services. Thirteen acknowledged that they boycott products, based on their commitments to helping make the earth a secure and hospitable home for present and future generations of all species.

All but the youngest participant (age 22) stated that they had sustained these activities and commitments over at least the past five years. Nine declared that they spend at least 20 hours per week directly or indirectly reflecting these commitments in either or both their work and leisure time, and all fourteen agreed that most of their activities in their remaining hours were at least not inconsistent with these commitments.

All fourteen said that they find joy mainly in activities that are based on the qualities of being human – for example, learning, creativity, communication, movement, appreciation, spiritual and intellectual development, being close to nature or other people – as opposed to activities requiring high consumption of material goods or energy, or ones usually pursued for their social status value.

As they reflected on their various activities in support of the welfare of the planet and future generations, all fourteen saw them as fundamentally and obviously connected or inter-related. When asked if it were easier to see themselves as a small part of a vast, interconnected universe than as a distinct and self-contained individual, thirteen agreed that this was so, while one simply responded with a question mark.
None of the fourteen gave fewer than 12 positive responses (75%) to the 16 questions concerning their active support to the commitments indicated above. It should be noted too that several participants, judging themselves by their own high standards, were critical of their efforts and believed they could and should be doing much more than they do.

Interviews

People and Places

Participants were interviewed in a variety of settings: most in their homes, and some in a quiet corner of a coffee shop or cafeteria. All interviews were conducted in comfortable settings as determined by participants, and in privacy. One woman was interviewed in her urban, rent-geared-to-income apartment amidst an enormous jungle of house-plants. Out her window could be seen a community garden which she had initiated for herself and her fellow apartment dwellers. Another was interviewed outdoors at a YMCA mountain camp in South America. Another was interviewed in a Justice of the Peace’s office.

In the following reports of the data, some unimportant details have been hidden or changed (e.g. dates, names of people and places) in order to mask the identities of the participants. Interestingly enough, the one native participant deliberately asked that her identity not be concealed and that she not be given a pseudonym as she suggested is often the case in this kind of research. “Just call me Sherry L.,” she said. For too long her people have been hiding their stories, she said, and it is time they told them with courage and with pride.
All fourteen participants were able to report experiences they considered to be transformative in their lives and which had led them towards a greater commitment to the welfare of the planet and of future generations. Some reported one major experience while others reported several; one participant said she could think of nine, but chose to describe her top three in detail. They described these experiences variously as turning points, as watersheds, as explosions, as defining times in terms of the rest of their lives, and as having changed their lives forever. “Everything changed, all of a sudden,” said one participant. Said another, “It was one of those moments - aha! moments.” “Prior to that [experience] I was quite different from what I became,” said one woman. One man described the transformative experience as something which said to him, “Hey! I’m an important moment! Remember me!” He confirmed that 35 years later, “that moment has not gone away.” The youngest participant said of his current transformative period, “I’m going to be looking back at right now when I’m 80 and going, Whoa! Big time!” Another said, “It was just like – Boom! – it was there. And it was there for good.”

Limiting or Risk Factors in the Research Interviews

The potential distortion in recalling and reporting incidents must be acknowledged. Do these events take on more (or less) significance in the reporting? Does their significance diminish over time? On the other hand, can an apparently innocuous event assume a magnitude out of all proportion to its actual impact at the time? Some might seize on an incident, not because it was particularly transformative at the time, but because it serves as a lovely or convenient metaphor for their approach to life. Assuming that the
judgement of what is significant will always be subjective and personal, and will vary among people, I decided to accept their stories of transformation, and the importance they assigned to them, at face value. My feelings during the interviews confirmed this decision. I had no sense of their reports being anything other than genuine and heartfelt.

For some participants, their experiences were fixed in time, and while the effect remained and was evident in their lives, they acknowledged that the impact of the experiences had diminished over time. Other events had overtaken them in the meantime, though they still continued to push in the direction set by the original experience. For others, the experiences remain vivid and rich with meaning. "[They are still] current, in the way that they’re eternal,” said one, “so you can leave it go, and it will always come back.” Said another: “I think it’s with me every day.” These are experiences not easily forgotten. One said of an experience of almost 40 years earlier, “I can remember it very vividly, it was a moment unlike others.”

A few participants included experiences which they described as transformative, but when pressed to indicate any relationship with their commitment to the welfare of the planet and of future generations, they could not. While those experiences were clearly significant and even transformative in the lives of these participants, they were excluded from this study for fear of colouring the data with experiences not directly related to the research question.

I wondered whether some participants might discount the whole idea of transformative experiences simply because they don’t believe that their lives (or any lives) should be so subject to such fleeting, ephemeral or serendipitous episodes. Simply put, the word “transformation” rolls off the
tongues of some people more easily than of others. It is quite possible that two participants might report the same kind of experience quite differently, depending upon their approach or affinity with the underlying idea of a transformative learning experience. One of them might be quite willing to accept that a single experience could be life-changing and accordingly name it transformative. Another might call this irrational and overly romantic, and believe that only in very rare (and usually tragic) circumstances could a single experience possibly be so significant and far-reaching. One participant seemed reluctant to commit to having had any particularly sudden or dramatic bolts of inspiration on his journey, yet he checked both the gradual, evolutionary and the transformative options on his questionnaire. He seemed to prefer to see his life as a seamless accumulation of influential experiences. Yet, upon telling his story, three clear experiences emerged, one of which he described as “a defining time in terms of the rest of my life.”

Transformative Learning Experiences

Age of Onset

The reported age of onset of these transformative learning experiences varied widely, from age 6 to 40. Of the twenty-five experiences reported, seventeen occurred between the ages of 15 and 30, with the balance evenly divided between under 15 and over 30 (four each). Eleven of the experiences, close to half, were reported to have occurred between the ages of 20 and 25. For participants in this sample, transformative learning often seems to occur in young adulthood, particularly the early 20s.
**Duration of the Experience**

The duration of these experiences is also worthy of note. Five of the experiences were reported to be very short – occurring within a single day, even instantaneously. Seven were reported to have stretched over more than a year. The reported duration ranged from instantaneous to 54 months, with 18 of the 25 occurring within a year or less. One may wonder whether an experience of three years or more can be considered transformative rather than evolutionary. It is perhaps no coincidence that the four experiences of longest duration (30 - 54 months) were all reported by men over 70, and took place during World War II. Over the course of a long lifetime, a three to four year span is proportionately still a relatively short piece of it. Also, world war is an anomaly of such magnitude; it is perhaps not surprising that the war years featured so prominently in the lives of those who lived through them.

Precision is difficult here, as participants varied in the scope they gave to their experiences. Some considered the experience to begin and end with the trigger event; subsequent events were seen more as consequences. For others, these events were seen more as processes extending beyond the boundaries of the event itself, incorporating into it elements of reflection and action. Participants typically chose to describe any experience of longer than a day as bounded not by the nature of the experience, but rather by the time bounds of events or circumstances in their lives at the time (e.g. a 1-year trip abroad, a 2-week canoe trip, a 6-week residential learning program, four years in World War II). In their minds, the time boundaries of the particular period in their lives often became, perhaps simply for convenient reference, the boundaries also of the transformative learning experience.
Deliberate or Spontaneous?

While some of these experiences were deliberately chosen or sought out, often the transformative learning experiences were entirely accidental or spontaneous. Some participants described their experiences as coming "from out of the blue." For some others, their experiences were invited but not anticipated. One woman said her experience was deliberately entered into as "just a kick." She wanted to "try something new ... I had no idea what would happen. Absolutely no idea." For still others, the experiences were deliberately sought out. One man described how he deliberately chose to begin and stay on the transformative course he had charted for himself: "In a sense I was swept along, but at any stage I could have put on a uniform and drawn army pay and had my fees paid, and it certainly was an attractive alternative..."

Still, most often they came as completely unexpected surprises, sometimes in very ordinary circumstances, such as the kitchen table or crossing a street. One participant suggested that there are "keys" to unlock this experience, but that often it "just happens." The keys are not readily known or available. She said,

I think LSD is a key. And I think that there are some other keys. Sometimes I think that crisis can be a key. I think that there are times when – who knows why – but it breaks through the consciousness. It just happens. It's one of those things that just happens.

Another woman, describing the circumstances surrounding an experience she describes as transformative, said, "There was nothing I remember leading up to it. It was just an event that happened to me sitting in the living room in the middle of the afternoon.... Right out of the blue. Very odd. So strange."
One man, when asked if his experience was unanticipated, replied, "Yeah. Out of the blue. No expectation or desire, no plan. Out of the blue. Out of no place. And [it was] part of me.... Call it autocatharsis. I call it satori."

One woman attributed the unexpected nature of her experiences to her own lifestyle. "I don't really plan a whole lot," she said, "I sort of lurch (laughs) ... from one thing to another."

Most participants described their experiences as spontaneous, serendipitous, or out of control, and themselves as having been surprised by them. Only in three of the twenty-five experiences could participants be described as having gone into them with their eyes open, with any kind of anticipation of what was to come.

**Analogies of the Experience**

I asked participants in interviews to think of a metaphor or simile which, in retrospect, would describe their experience. As they reflected on the significance of the experience for their present day lives, I was curious to know what a transformative learning experience was like. Their responses included terms such as "a flower blossoming", "a key", "waking up from a sleep", and "an explosion." One participant described it as "candy" – it was for him both a joy and a delight. Another described her experience prior to the transformative learning experience as "wandering around a lake and dancing and looking at the water," then, following the experience, as "going into the water and swimming."
Sequence of Steps or Phases

As expected, the steps in the transformative learning experience did not follow a particular and consistent sequence. One participant laughed at my question and said, “I know you’re trying to find a pattern, Gord, but life isn’t like that!” In some cases, entering into disequilibrium was accompanied directly by a risky direct action, following which reflection and social support combined to strengthen a commitment. In one case, a transformative learning experience was prompted by a period of reflection and self-study on the question “What is my life purpose?” In others, the transformation took the form of a courageous decision to act, the realization that “I’ve got to do something!”

The Twenty-five Transformative Learning Experiences

As noted earlier, I have gleaned twenty-five transformative learning experiences from the fourteen interviews – one experience from each of six participants, two from each of five, and three from each of the remaining three participants. The following are synopses of the twenty-five transformative learning experiences. I have paraphrased each of the participants’ stories, reporting their experiences in the first person.

In the case of all twenty-five, these stories were reported to have had a deep and profound impact upon the lives of the storytellers. In some cases it was the participant who noted the change following the experience: [I was] “very, very different…. pretty changed.” In other cases it was other people who noticed it: “The rest of my family was, like, ‘Wow! She’s really different’.”
1. Male, age: 80 (currently an organic gardener, peace activist, and conserver).

Leaving medicine in February of 1944 and going to an alternate service camp for conscientious objectors was a very important decision in my life. I never knew if I would return to my study of medicine, and I was leaving behind the one I loved. That decision changed the course of my life. It took me to Asia with a humanitarian service where I learned a great deal about the third world, about other cultures and religions, and about the oneness of humanity. It gave me the opportunity to meet some of the finest people, gain valuable medical experience I never would have got in Canada, and put the strength of my convictions to the test. I knew I had done the right thing, and I was ready to take whatever consequences. That initial experience has faded now, and been replaced by other, newer related experiences and commitments, such as my current interest in ecology.

2. Male, age: early 20s (currently a youth worker working in Asia).

When I got to Jerusalem, I was euphoric, totally amazed by the place, and bewildered by all the guns. I saw a violent scene at the Damascus Gate, involving Israeli soldiers, Palestinian youth that really shook me. I could have been any of the people in the scenario. I wanted to know more about what was going on, and I wanted to do something. After touring some archaeological sites (my original interest in going there), I realized I was more interested in the contemporary situation. My interest was in the here-and-now and not in things that had gone on before. I made a decision then and there that I was going to work with a particular humanitarian service
organization. I just said it point-blank to myself, and to other people. I still believe it, and that was 3 years ago. Upon my return to Canada, I worked with a youth leadership development program that encouraged me to think about my overseas experience and build a global education approach into my work. It was a very good de-briefing opportunity for me. Had I come back to mowing lawns, some of my learnings might have been lost. When I’m 80, I know I’ll look back on this period of my life as a very big time.

3. Female, age: early 30s (currently a youth gang worker in New Mexico).
(a) When I was 8 years old, my teen-age old brother was shot and killed in a racial incident. It had a snowball effect on my life – the guy who killed him was white and wealthy (we were Mexican-Americans and poor) and he ended up getting 2 years probation after having been found guilty of first degree murder. Everything got so bad after that, and I started taking on this role of never wanting to do anything bad, and trying to keep anything bad from happening again. I felt guilty and responsible all the time. And I saw what happened to my family after that. It was terrible. I think that’s why I’m committed now to ending racism and issues of cultural sensitivity among youth, because I’ve seen the consequences. Every time I see a mother who has just lost her son, and I do in my work, I see my own mom.

(b) I would have been pretty messed up if I hadn’t gone to Sweden on this student exchange after high school. I just had to get out the hell out of there. It was such a scene when I left. So painful. Nobody from our family had left home like this before. Everybody was crying at the airport. I’m sure it was bringing up my brother’s death. I had a really hard time in Sweden for the
first couple of weeks. I just wanted to go home. Everything was so
different, and I missed my family terribly. My new friends and my teachers
really helped me. They were so respectful of me. They embraced my
difference. And they challenged me, but gently. For example, I was wearing
all the clothes that I’d used at home to try to fit into the anglo culture - like
high heels, tight dresses, lots of make-up. They would ask, “Why do you do
that? How comfortable is it?” Slowly, I became totally liberated. I began to
question everything. I became very political. It felt great. The year went so
fast. I came home with new confidence. Sweden gave me the start, and I’m
now absolutely committed to taking an active role in challenging injustice
wherever I see it. My confidence, my willingness to try new things, my
commitment to women’s issues, my passion for individual and social change,
I relate them all to Sweden. I feel I’m in a good place now, I work in the
community I grew up in, but I had a chance to get out of it, and go to a very
progressive place where I gained perspective and new commitments.

4. Male, age: early 80s (currently an organic gardener, circle dance teacher,
visitor to prisoners, and peace worker).
(a) I was about 24 when I heard a voice deep within me say, “Do not kill.
There is another way.” At first I didn’t take it seriously – it didn’t seem
particularly relevant to my life at the time. I wasn’t planning to kill anybody.
But the voice persisted. Then the prospect of a world war became more
apparent. I felt very lonely, as the war effort became stronger, and I felt
increasingly isolated by my friends and colleagues. I thought I was going
crazy. I met a few others who felt the same way I did. They helped me a lot
to understand what was going on inside me. One day I got a call inviting me
to join a humanitarian service organization on a mission to Asia. By that
time, I knew I was a pacifist and that I wasn’t going to give it up. I was
really happy to find something to which I felt I could give myself
wholeheartedly. That experience gave some very important direction to my
life. In the same way that the voice just came to me, other commitments
have come also – such as the commitment to organic gardening and not
eating meat. They just seem to come naturally to me.

(b) This experience is quite personal, very personal. I had an office in an
Asian city near the end of my time with the service organization. A friend
with whom I shared the office was reciting a little bit from the Anglican
prayer book. I found those words coming back to me again and again for
days and weeks. One day, when I was just about to cross a street, all of a
sudden everything around me became lit up and intensified. I was just taken
out of the picture for a little while – 5 minutes, 15 minutes, I don’t know –
yet my two feet were still on the curb. It was a fantastic feeling – purity,
illumination, intensity. And I realized that there was another world around
me that I hadn’t known existed, that there was so much more. I don’t know
how to express it. There was suddenly so much more to my life – more joy,
more peace – than I had ever experienced before.

(c) You know, some of these things seem so personal that it’s hard to tell
about them. One day when I was about 40, I took my axe, my lunch and my
Bible and I went out into the bush to cut some wood. I was sitting down for
lunch and I was reading from the gospel of St. John about the crucifixion. I
read it over several times, then I was drawn beyond what I was reading, and I
suddenly realized that I was at the crucifixion. I saw all those people doing this terrible thing to a person who was innocent. It was terrible to see this happen. And then I realized that in my life, with the people around me, I was doing the same thing as all those people standing around at the crucifixion. I was in the crucifixion scene too, and I didn’t like what I was doing there. I was just completely overwhelmed. And then the word came, “Forgive.” It was just that word. It just melted me. I realized I had the opportunity also to forgive. I was forgiven, I could forgive. It was the possibility of living a life of love that wasn’t possible while pointing a finger at someone else. It gave me the opportunity to see a pathway for my life – that judgement is something which I could let go, and that forgiveness is part of healing and love.

5. Female, age: mid 40s (currently a coordinator of a local exchange and trading network and organic gardener).

It began sitting on a porch with a friend of mine who was 19. I was 15 at the time. We were discussing the question, What is this life? What is reality? I hadn’t thought about these things much before. She said, “What if all this is just a dream?” And I said, “What if all that’s going on is happening in a tear in some being’s eye?” This conversation on this particular afternoon was really the beginning of some earth-shattering concepts that were to change me dramatically.

Shortly after that, with some friends and not knowing what I was doing, I drank a bottle of cough mixture, and stayed up all night in a trance, hallucinating. I was seeing all these different faces. An old face would come up, disintegrate, and change into another face, a young one this time. And so
on. It struck me that life flowed in and out of itself like that, everything was connected. It wasn’t just a matter of you’re born, you live, you die, and that’s it.

Soon after that, a girl-friend and I tried some LSD. I went right into outer space. There was an absolute dissolution of any sense of separateness. It was an absolute knowing. It changed my life forever. There was absolutely no turning back. It was the absolute turning point in my life. I started questioning all kinds of things. I started looking at the whole question of stuff, of baggage. You know – go to school, get a job, get a husband, get a house, all those things. None of it was important to me anymore. It just wasn’t what was going on. It wasn’t real for me.

6. Female, age: mid 40s (currently working in land stewardship education).

I went on a 2-week canoe trip down a northern Ontario river. One of the things you see when you travel on these northern rivers is that nature only extends about 200 yards back from the river. Then forestry takes over. I remember walking back from the river and stepping through the trees into several hundred acres of clear-cut. Wow! I’d driven for a day and a half, I’d paddled for eight days and yet I still wasn’t in the wilderness. I was just outraged! Absolutely shocked, and surprised! I’d had no idea! That was my first real learning experience that nature was not a vast, self-supporting thing with some integrity. I saw that it is being changed, bitten into all over the place.

Up to that time, I hadn’t defined myself as an environmentalist – just me, going on a holiday. What I learned was that nature’s important. Or I value it – let’s put it that way. I saw that it’s not safe, that it’s already being lost. For
me, that was the beginning of the natural corollary — I’d better do something about it. I came home, quit my job, and went back to school to learn how to interpret nature to others.

7. Male, age: early 70s (currently an active volunteer leader of a peace organization and supporter of international development and environmental protection programs).

(a) I stood as a 6-year old boy on the outside of the railway yards and watched the railway men, who did not have a union, complaining about what the company was doing to them. And there they were, standing outside the fence, and along came the goon squad — police on horseback, with bats and 2X4s, and I saw them beat the hell out of my buddies’ fathers and brothers. I was standing right there, and the dust was flying around, and the horses were pushing, and people were lying on the ground bleeding. I was overwhelmed, confused. I couldn’t believe that this could happen. That had a profound impact on me. I went home. I couldn’t talk. My mother finally got out of me what I had seen, and over the following week she helped me to understand what was going on out there. At a very young age, I developed an understanding that life’s not all about me, and that we’ve got to be concerned for one another.

(b) Our regiment lost 200 men in one situation. Some of them were my buddies — we’d been in school together. Then we heard about the bombing of Dresden, and we’d say, “What’s going on? We’re supposed to be here to protect our wives and children, and we’re bombing the hell out of civilians?”
It began to dawn on me that this wasn’t right. This feeling started in 1943 and by the end of the war it was firmly entrenched in me.

My wife lost her brother in the war. I never met him. Apparently he was a wonderful guy. And then there was the dropping of the atomic bomb, killing hundreds of thousands of people. Can you imagine anything more crystal clear, impactful? There it was in spades. I’ve never forgotten that. That would prove to be one of the most profound moments in my life, and in my thinking. Every August we remember it. Out of that experience came a commitment not to look in the rear-view mirror, but to work for a better future, to stand for non-violent ways of operating in the world. I want peace on earth.

(c) I was sent to the National Training Laboratory in Bethel, Maine for a 6-week training program in group dynamics when I was in my twenties. My supervisor had singled me out and said, “I’ve got an interest in you, my boy. I want you to go to Bethel and learn something about yourself that will add to what I know is already inside you.” That’s exactly what Bethel did, with its T-groups and a host of different experiences. It got me to look inside myself, and I milked it. It was not theoretical. It was the internalizing of every experience they put you through. They immersed you in situations where you had to operate, and there were people reflecting on it. It was intense experience of a unique nature followed by reflection. You couldn’t be phlegmatic at Bethel. They forced you to get in touch with your spirit, your soul. When I came back, I knew “me” better than I ever had before. I learned to deal with the world on the basis on trust, openness, and risk. The Bethel experience completed me.
8. Female, age: mid 40s (currently an artist and conservator).

(a) I left the mainstream when I was in Grade 13 and I went to an alternative school. It deeply, deeply affected me. When my friend asked me if I’d like to go, my first thought was, “No, I can’t do that.” I remember getting off the phone and there was something happening inside me. There was a voice saying, “Think about this. Really think about it.” I had to make a decision that was going to change my life. In a few days, I said “Yes, I’m going.” And, wow! Suddenly I went from a very narrow vision to a totally different experience. That school was a corner for me – my first definite shift. The headmaster was a very creative person. He’d been through all kinds of stuff. He arranged for a series of things to happen to us. It wasn’t classroom-based. The headmaster was particularly interested in getting us out there, the five of us in Grade 13. We went out and interviewed people. We went to a native reservation and talked to the band council about what their lives were like. I remember sobbing over these people going through such hardship. That year had a huge impact on me.

(b) My husband and I met a couple who changed us deeply. We were open to things that year – we had done lots of reading, and we were trying to live fairly simply. But they had done a lot more thinking, and were much more active, long before it was popular to be concerned about ecological issues. From an ecological, political viewpoint, they had such an incredible impact on us. Through getting to know them, we changed our lifestyle, and a lot of how we thought. I’ve never been so impressed with a couple in my life who carried through from thought to action. They caused us to start thinking about what we wanted to do with our lives, and about the earth in general.
They introduced us to “Small is Beautiful”, and “The Politics of Food”, and we took an active part in two major, national inquiries. We’d never done anything like that before. That year was a real marker year, politically. We stopped shopping at big grocery stores. We became focused. I was kind of wary of what was happening at first, but then when I could integrate it into my own life, and make it my own, I realized that’s the way I’ve always felt. I do think of it as a corner. My political awareness is essential to my life, and that was the corner.

(c) Our trip to Asia is such a pervasive part of my life. It is always with me. We traveled to out-of-the-way places, and spent some time living in Buddhist temples. I had a tremendous identity crisis that year. I was really disoriented. It made me a lot humbler. I had a spiritual experience during the trip. It’s particularly personal. I have no idea why it happened because I don’t normally have those kind of experiences. One day, during our travels, we were visiting a friend, and I was sitting out on his terrace. I don’t know if you want to hear about this, but it’s really central. You know when you hear Baha’ais say “One People, One World”? I really felt that, all of a sudden, and very directly. I was there, but I was also having an out-of-body experience. It’s hard for me to describe because I’m a visual person, and it was a visual experience not verbal. It was just this incredible sense of peace. It was as if I could see a million faces but they were all one, and there was just this flow, and this incredible joy. Then it was gone. That experience still keeps me going. There’s my spirituality. You can’t put a label on it. It provides me with a strength, very personally spiritual. I guess connectedness with nature is what my spirituality is all about. It’s what I want to share with
my kids. It's very important to us that our kids feel like they're part of the world. We'd like to take them traveling.

9. Male, age: mid-40s (currently a high school science teacher and environmental activist.
(a) I know that when my wife talked to you she told you about a couple of people who influenced us both very deeply. They were really pivotal for me. They really were. He was a very challenging and combative kind of person. He started challenging my values about all kinds of things, mainly politics and economics. I resisted, because this culture that we're all part of here had been pretty well imprinted on me, but I certainly learned a lot from him. I have always found people with different points of view fascinating. Some of his ideas were a little alien at first. We had long arguments. But of course he was such a wealth of information that he could bring up points I'd never considered before. He'd make a great teacher, but I don't think he could coexist with any administration! I liked being challenged in that way. He's very intense too, and I liked that. He introduced us to concepts like permaculture, and she raised our awareness of native issues. And they lived out their ideas in their actions. That was really impressive to me. They enriched my life tremendously, and changed it. It's true, they changed it.

(b) I was apprehensive about spending a year in Asia – apprehensive about being swept away by something, yet kind of hopeful too. We're not travelers; we're small-town Ontario people. It was a fear of the unknown, yet it was also the unknown for which I was going. Asia – it was really amazing, living with Buddhist monks in Thailand and following their
lifestyle, seeing the poverty and the terrible pollution in the cities. It made me sick, realizing that these people through no fault of their own are subjected to that day after day. Deforestation – such vast deforestation, especially in Thailand. So much, gone. And I didn’t like seeing cultures that were so long-lived being so easily toppled by our western consumer culture. But the monks were an inspiration. We stayed in a monastery in an area where people were so poor they had to eat grasshoppers in the dry season. Yet at the same time they were able to be happy, to find joy. That’s so impressive. I don’t see joy in people here very much, and yet where they have so much less, it’s apparent. We practised meditation daily for two weeks and followed the regime. I gained a tremendous respect for people like those monks who choose to separate themselves from desires. I can see the positive value in it. To a large degree that has rubbed off. The monasteries were an inspiration for me. The monks were wonderful, especially the acharn (teacher). He had an aura. I couldn’t see it but I could feel it. Oh yeah. He was just a very peaceful soul. When I came back from the trip, I was ready to become proactive – actually to do some things that might change the way things are. That trip knit things together for me. My commitment is complete now, and life-long. It is a commitment to lifelong learning, and to changing things in whatever ways are necessary to ensure the health of the biosphere and the welfare of the people in it. Really.

10. Male, age: early 70s (currently a full-time peace worker).

(a) One of the most important, most transformative experiences was going to the National Training Lab in Bethel. I had just spent a year doing rural extension work figuring out how to involve people at the grass roots, and
when the opportunity came up to go to Bethel, I went and it just blew my mind. I was just full of the stuff when I came back. I didn’t quite know what it all meant, I had no idea – observation, evaluation – but it was a terrific experience. Sitting around in a large group of people, frustrated, not knowing what to do, and then feeling it didn’t matter. We could work our way out of this. We had control over our situation. Their method, their process was the thing – it was participatory. It had a very strong democratic ethos. It was the first time I’d been exposed to role playing. There was the shared leadership idea – many different roles can be played; you didn’t have to be the chairman or director or whatever. I came back with the realization – my god, there’s 101 things I can do and learn, skills and insights I can use, to the end of democratic, participatory, grass roots activity. I was very much caught up in the thing – my god, it was powerful. I saw in it a way of bringing about social change democratically, involving more and more people. That experience has influenced my life ever since. The next year we started a training institute in Canada and introduced some of the methods I had learned at Bethel. We were all very excited about the idea.

(b) Having the atom bomb go off, becoming interested in pacifism through Gandhi and so on, going out to India, going to Gandhi’s ashram, meeting Vinaba Bhave, this spindly 65-year old man who walked all over India to ask people to share their land – all that was an important part of my development. Looking back, it seems as though a kind of cumulative thing was happening over that time. It was a defining time in terms of the rest of my life. It narrowed my focus. Initially I was not at all ready to devote my life to peace, but through that whole combination of things that happened, when I came
home I knew I wanted to work for peace in some way. I didn’t know exactly how. I went to an organization and said I’d like to work in peace education, and I’d do it for $4000. a year. They said “That’s wonderful. Would you do it for $3000?”

(c) One of the really defining times were the training institutes in non-violence we had in the 60s. We used role-playing and socio-drama. People actually invaded the place. Those were very important experiences. We were learning, instead of just talking about, non-violence. We found ourselves in situations where it was really needed – badly practised, but practised, and we recognized in our failure that there was something very important that had happened. Thirteen people killed in our exercise. And yet it was a great moment. I remember the exhilaration. I remember when we called it off, people ran out and jumped in the water and splashed around. We evaluated it for two full days afterwards. It was highly participatory. We said, “Let’s see if a community of people can resist, non-violently, without going to the police, a harassment and an invasion.” It was the commitment to try and understand and practise non-violence in a conflict situation – not just to talk about it, saying what a good idea it was, spouting Gandhi and stuff, but to try to live it in a very specific conflict situation – still not nearly as living a hell as a lot of people today who are just surviving in downtown Toronto. But we were at least moving in that direction.

11. Male, age: 79 (publisher of a personal magazine to 100 people around the world, and committed to collective action in a labour council, library, and Unitarian congregation).
I was in my twenties, and I was under some stress following the death of my wife. I had two young children and a heavy job managing a small-town business. One day I was in the park eating lunch, thinking that I had more problems than anyone should have. I finished lunch. Walking back along the path beside the lake, without watching what I was doing, I walked into some enormous tiger lilies planted in a circle where the path divided. A tiger lily just sort of exploded in my face! At the moment that happened, I backed off and something loosened up and I laughed. How I laughed! The first thing that happened after that laugh was a sort of Zen unlocking. I have been very influenced by Zen Buddhism, so I interpreted it that way because that is what I knew. The change that took place in that moment was from a situation that was absolutely loaded with unsolvable problems, to a sudden bursting out with the realization that there are no problems! It was an overwhelming happiness. It was an explosion. I was exploding outward. And as I went along afterward, following that initial feeling, it wasn’t all sweetness and light and sugar candy. There was a hurt and an imperative in there too. OK, there are no problems, and balanced against that there is something you’re meant to do. And it wasn’t any clearer than that. It was absolutely out of the blue. Out of no place. And at the same time, it was part of me. That moment has not gone away. It is the experience that has most affected the way I look at the world and at other people. It is part of any decision I make of any size. Following that experience, my receivers worked better, I was a lot more sensitive to people’s feelings, and I cut loose a lot of the baggage I had been carrying. And I decided to learn to dance.
12. Female, age: mid 50s (currently an environmental health activist, peace activist, and student).

We lived for a few years in the States. One day I was sitting on my couch in the living room, while my daughter and another child were playing on the floor beside me. I was reading a newspaper about poverty in our city, about how poor, black children had so little opportunity. At the same time, I was looking at the children beside me, thinking how beautiful they were, how they would never be starving, how they would always have a roof over their heads and an education. I can remember that moment very vividly, when I decided I had to do something. It was a moment unlike other moments. It was like a metamorphosis. I realized that if the world wasn’t going to be better for everybody’s kids, it wasn’t going to be good for mine. I didn’t even know the half of what was happening then, with the environment, military spending, injustice, and future generations. It was that moment of things coming together. I was shaken by what I was reading. It just went to my very core. I started talking to people, and learning. It was very exciting. I met some other people with babies, people who were into politics, people who were demonstrating against the war in Vietnam, and we started to do a whole lot of things. It was a beginning of a lot of social action for me, tied in with learning. I became someone quite different over the following 18 months. By the time I came back to Canada, while I couldn’t foresee how it was going to go, I knew what I had to do. I see much more of the big picture now, but I know I have to work in certain points.
13. Female, age: mid 20’s (currently an activist in support of future generations, and student).

I had started graduate work in a place, new to me, that I loved. I consciously chose to take a particular course dealing with crucial questions about the future. It was a major turning point in my life. I got exposed in detail to what the world is going through in terms of all the global problems – environmental, social, political problems – it was serious information. After learning all those facts I just couldn’t stay immobile and not do anything. The course was so powerful. It made me think from the inside out, from my heart and soul. I had to do something. I feel responsible now. I can’t just ignore it anymore. These concerns had been sort of sleeping inside me, but it was not until something happened – it was the course that woke me up. It was the turning point. My mind took in the information, and my heart was sort of screaming “We have to DO something about it!” I felt fear, anxiety, frustration, anger, but also power and strength. I started opening my eyes to groups of people who were working on these issues, and I realized I’m not alone. Now these things are automatic in my life, while before I didn’t even think about them. The course was the start of a commitment that will be with me all my life. It was just like – boom! – it was there. And it was there for good.

14. Female, age: 30’s (currently a Justice of the Peace).
(a) My father was Chief of a First Nations community for many years, and sometimes I accompanied him on his trips around the area. One spring day when I was about 10 he took me to help put up No Trespassing signs in an area where some people had been poaching. They had been taking fish and
game illegally from reserve land, and partying — we’d find all kinds of beer bottles and debris over there. My job was to carry the signs and nails. I was in the bow of the little aluminum boat as we put-putted across the lake in the early morning, and suddenly my father cut the motor. I looked to see why he had stopped, and there was a magnificent, huge animal with horns standing in the water ahead of us. I learned later that it was a moose. We drifted past it, and went on to put up our signs. I was hoping we’d see the animal again on our return, but we didn’t.

A year later, we went back to put up more signs, after hearing of more gun-shots, poaching and partying in the area. Again, I looked for the moose but there was no sign of it. We got out of the boat at the far shore, and were walking through the bush, when my father suddenly stopped dead. There was a large carcass of a moose lying in front of us, without a head. My father kneeled down beside it, put his hand where the head should have been and said only one word: “Chainsaw.” I knew that someone had been in there, killed the moose and taken off the head with a chainsaw. My father got me to help him use some sticks to make a hole to bury the body as best we could and we pushed it in. But before we covered it over my father said it was important to leave an offering. He didn’t smoke, but he took some tobacco out of a small pouch he had and he placed it where the head should have been. He said, “We leave an offering to give thanks to the Creator for what he has given up, but mostly we leave an offering to ask forgiveness.” We never did finish hanging up the signs that day. We came home, and never spoke of it again. But I’ve never forgotten what happened that day. At the time, I was stunned and confused. It was an emotional experience — it was felt, not thought. It’s only looking back on it that I can take what I felt
then, and feel now as an adult, and fill in the blanks. By saying very little, he
told me what he was feeling. His very clear lesson to me was to ask
forgiveness, to remember that whenever we’re walking on Mother Earth, the
animals are walking with us, and to look after those people and things who
don’t have their own voice and can’t look after themselves.

(b) The other great influence on my life was my grandmother. I used to ride
my bike up to see her quite often; she was gentle and kind. Once, when I
was about 8, I was staying with her for a few days in the early spring. She
woke me up early one morning – I wanted to stay in bed. But she insisted, so
I got dressed and came downstairs where she was making breakfast. She told
me to go out and get some firewood. I didn’t want to – it was cold. But she
insisted, so I ran to the woodshed, loaded up my arms with firewood, and
staggered back to the door. Granny was standing there waiting for me, and
said “Stop, and put down the wood!” I thought, “Why is she doing this? I
want to get inside, finish this and have my porridge!” And she said,
“Listen.” I couldn’t hear anything. She said again, “Listen!” Far off, back
by the graveyard, I could hear a bird singing. Granny said, “Do you hear it?”
And I said, “I hear it.” “What is it?” she asked. “It’s a bird singing, and I’m
freezing,” I said. She said, “Listen to it. It’s calling for spring. Remember
that, and remember to take the time to listen for bird-song.” She told me in
those few minutes that there was a whole world going on around me, and that
what I was feeling was only a small part of what was important on that day.

Even now, I look and listen for the messages out there, those gifts that
come when we least expect them, that don’t appear unless we look and listen
for them with our hearts as well as with our eyes and ears. And I give thanks
for my grandmother who gave me that lesson on that spring day. Sometimes I wonder if she decided, as she heard the bird-song while she was making the porridge that day, that this would be the day I would learn that that lesson. We never spoke of it again. In fact, I don’t think I’ve ever told anybody that story before.

**Categories of experience**

Reviewing the twenty-five experiences paraphrased above, it appeared as though
- seven of the experiences were associated with *geographical travel* (2, 3b, 6, 8c, 9b, 10b, 12),
- five were related to an intensive experience *organized by someone else with a deliberate educational intent* (7c, 8a, 10a, 10c, 13),
- five involved personal contact with a *significant mentor* (8b, 9a, 10b, 14a, 14b),
- four involved a *personal, moral dilemma and decision* (1, 4a, 12, 13),
- four took the form of a *personal revelation* usually in the form of an “inner voice” (4a, 4b, 4c, 8a),
- four were associated with a *crisis, tragedy or catastrophic event* (7a, 7b, 3a, 14a), and
- four may best be described as *paranormal experiences* involving some form of psychic or spiritual travel (4b, 5, 11, 8c).

The total number adds up to more than twenty-five because some of the experiences fit more than one category.
In these categories, I deliberately avoided the suggestion of a cause-and-effect relationship; it is difficult – even impossible – to establish such a relationship here.

Some of these categories refer mainly to a trigger event, which may be simply a convenient handle used by the reporter to gather up and describe the overall experience. In addition to the trigger event, the context – antecedent and subsequent experience – must also be factored into the mix that makes up a transformative learning experience.

It is interesting to note how few of these experiences were educational in intent, at least in a formal sense. In fact, only one occurred in the context of a traditional institution of formal education. Also noteworthy by their absence are other experiences one might expect to be included in the list. For example, there are no direct references to psychotherapy, and books were mentioned only peripherally by a few.

**Readiness for Transformation**

There is, no doubt, a complex and perhaps unknowable web of factors including previous life experiences that converge to foster, support or set up a transformative learning experience. One participant said it this way, “The incident or the particular moment of epiphany ... happens because there are things that have been put into place.” Too often these experiences occur in remarkably unremarkable circumstances for us to believe that an externally-prompted transformative experience is the major operative factor. While some of the participants’ transformative learning experiences occurred in the context of unfamiliar places or dramatic events (e.g. distant travel, war), others occurred in decidedly ordinary times and places – eating alone at a
supper table, sitting quietly in a living room or strolling along a park path. There had to be subtle, internal processes at work behind the scenes, apparently rooted in strong feelings, that were preparing the individual for a sudden shift or break-through and were determining what would be and what would not be interpreted as a transformative experience.

For many participants, even when they could not anticipate the transformative experience in advance, they did acknowledge a readiness factor within themselves, and an openness to a major change. Some said it outright: they were ready for this to happen to them and welcomed it. One man said, “You know, I wanted to experience the unknown, and yet I was apprehensive... apprehensive about possibly being swept away by something, and kind of hopeful (laughs) in a way ... I was looking for different spaces.”

Some knew that something had to give or change in their lives; the stress was becoming unmanageable. Others found themselves in situations where the contrasts were too stark to ignore, too vivid to dismiss, and feelings welled up inside them sufficiently to spark an explosion. “All these issues were in me already,” said one woman, “but it was not until something happened [that there] was a turning point.”

Sudden and spontaneous, or deliberate and planned, there was clearly a complex web of factors contributing to participants’ readiness to learn. When they were ready to learn, something – a person, an event or an experience – appeared to fill the need. The locus of learning, of meaning, and of transformation was in the person, not in the event. It is as Merriam and Clark (1991) write,

It is not these events, in and of themselves, but the learning that we derive from these events – both the ones that we predict and the ones that come as a total surprise – that
shapes our lives. It is the person himself or herself who determines the meaning of these life experiences, and thus the individuality of the life course is preserved. (p. 217)

One participant acknowledged this readiness factor in terms of her own frustration with other people’s unwillingness to change their habits. She said, "Sure, it’s information out there that could make people change, but it’s not until people are ready for the change that they will change. So every time I get very angry or frustrated I just say ‘OK, I’m going to try to make my point, I’m doing it with my life which is already something, and I’m not going to get angry with people if they are not ready yet. Hopefully they will find a way to be ready’.”

Some of the factors involved in this “readiness” will be explored in the following chapter, the data analysis.

**Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter has reported the data gained from the screening questionnaires and interviews. Paraphrased versions of the twenty-five transformative learning experiences were included. Risk factors in the data collection were noted. The age on onset in reported experiences, ranging from 6 to 35, seemed to favour early adulthood. The experiences lasted from instantaneous to 54 months, although most of them occurred within a year or less. Some were reported to be deliberately chosen, some were spontaneous, but virtually all involved an element of surprise. Now we turn to examining the data in terms of the framework presented in Chapter 2, to see what meanings emerge.
CHAPTER 5

Data Analysis

Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of the data organized around the four-phase conceptual framework elaborated in Chapter 2, used here as a working platform. This framework is not seen as the "truth" but only as one way of telling the story. The analysis, as will be seen, is not limited to that framework. There is more to be told, which will be elaborated along the way. Another framework around which the data can be organized will be suggested in Chapter 6.

Early Influences

It became even clearer in the interviews than it had been before them that early influences in generating the commitments described above were a prominent factor in establishing readiness or preparing the participant for the transformative learning experience. As one participant put it, "I didn’t become aware that there was something more to this in the way of a life direction probably until after university, but looking back on it there were a lot of events prior to that that built towards it." One woman recalled learning about these issues as she was growing up, but "it was not until something happened" that her life reached "a turning point to say OK these have been concerns all my life ... now I’m very aware and I’m going to do something
about [them].” Another said, “I think we’re always evolving. We have personal experiences that can sometimes change that, but they’re based on a volume of life experiences to that point. It’s not like we’re in a vacuum when things are happening to us.”

It is highly unlikely that life-long and heart-felt commitments to the welfare of the planet and of future generations are ever determined entirely by identifiable, time-bounded, transformative learning experiences. Often participants in the study began their comments by talking about their upbringing. Only a few did not acknowledge the significant influence of their parents at some point in the interview. One older man remembered how non-violence and a concern for nature were factors in his very early formative years. “If we found a dead bird,” he said, “there was always a feeling of ‘What a pity!’, and we’d take it and bury it…. When we’d get into a scrap as kids, my mother would always say, ‘The one that stops first wins’. ” Another remarked on the influence of his parents by saying,

I would have to say that the implanting of basic fundamental values and perceptions and views given to me in the first years of my life by my parents, who were two unique individuals, set the stage for this evolution I spoke of when we started. I was grounded in that…. the need to be concerned about your neighbour, to take care of yourself, to take care of each other, all of these things were part of my early culture. One man, who did not attest to any particular parental or early influences, said, “Sometimes I would get into a fight with my best friend and I didn’t want to win.” Three participants noted the impact of growing up with opportunities to be exposed to the natural world. One said, “it really opened my eyes to the sense that there was something out there to be seen, to be
experienced, to be admired, to be enjoyed. Protection ... that wasn't really there yet.” Another said,

I can’t underestimate the importance of growing up in nature. And even though my parents ... were not ecologists by any means, they were very much outdoor activity people. And I was very much aware of cycles and seasons ... as children we spent all of our time outside. That was a major factor.

The native participant described her childhood as an:

open learning environment [where my parents and grandparents] had an influence ... and I don’t think you can bottle it.... There wasn’t anything that was kept from us I suppose as secrets... They never segregated us.... So I guess I was better prepared for the lessons.

One participant cannot remember a time when she did not want “to be useful and helpful.” Growing up as a Jew, she was profoundly frightened and moved by the Holocaust. This, she believes, was a powerfully important contributor to her subsequent activist life.

Early childhood interests were mentioned often enough to note here. One young man talked about an early fascination with places around the world he had heard about in stories. He said,

I would get fixated on them ... and go to the library and get as much out as I could on that subject.... When I was eleven, I stumbled upon “Around the World in 80 Days” on my grandma’s bookshelf, and then read it and I loved it. I thought Phileas Fogg was the coolest guy who had ever lived.

Another man recalled a Grade 5 discovery of a book about a muskrat:

So this muskrat – it was a fiction book – it just fascinated me and so I looked for other books like that, and I became very interested in nature as a result, although I was never in contact with it. We lived on a corner lot at a busy street corner with no yard to speak of.... So I was very disconnected in my interests from my circumstances.
Later on, he described another childhood experience with nature, and his feelings about it, in vivid detail:

Way, way back, there was – I remember just like a little vignette almost, as if I were watching myself from outside myself…. I remember seeing a dragonfly on a weed out the back. And of course, me, the young scientist, was looking at it through a magnifying glass, trying to see it so it wouldn’t fly away. And at that moment I got this terrible feeling of isolation, that I was so separate from it, (long pause) from the dragonfly, and that all I was, was an observer. And I didn’t want to be just an observer. You know? I wanted to be part of whatever it was part of. And couldn’t. And I go back to that image of myself in that situation with terrible regret and longing. You know, there’s this feeling of longing. And it’s this feeling of longing that I sense in my future too, you know. I’m longing to do something along that course, in the same way that I was longing there [to get into the world of the dragonfly].

There is no question that early influences play a significant role in the kind of transformation studied here. Whether due to a stream of collective influences, or to the development and cultivation of a fertile ground from which to burst and blossom, the transformative learning experience did not appear to occur devoid of or outside a congruent history and context.

**Applying the Framework to the Data**

The four phases of the transformative learning experience, elaborated in Chapter 2 and based in the literature, were used as a preliminary working framework around which to gather and analyse the data. The four phases are:

1. leaving the familiar and entering a state of disequilibrium,
2. responding to the disequilibrium: making meaning,
3. building commitment and personal responsibility,
4. integrating through acting anew.

1. Leaving the Familiar and Entering a State of Disequilibrium

All participants described their experience as including an initial state of disequilibrium or disorientation. They used a variety of terms to describe it. One woman likened her experience to a fundamental, foundation “shift”, following travel in Asia. She described it as “a tremendous identity crisis that year.” Some described their experiences as “earth-shattering”, “totally different”, “disorienting.” One said the experience “blew my mind – I didn’t know what it all meant.” Another said she found herself wondering, “What’s going on here?” The youngest participant used, as an analogy, the Rubik’s cube, a six-sided puzzle. Each side, at the beginning, has a uniform colour. “You know the Rubik’s cube?” he asked. “Picture [it] set up nicely - six sides. That thing [experience] took the Rubik’s cube and mixed it up.”

It was as if they had arrived unprepared in a foreign land. One man described it as “traveling into the unknown.” The immersion into a new space, where old, familiar rules don’t work, where there are entire new paradigms, and no familiar supports for old behaviour patterns, all prepared the way for transformative change. One woman said, “I was dropped into those situations … I had no control over them, and I was caught off-guard.”

In this initial state of encountering the disorientation, two features of the experience were mentioned by participants in the study, not always but frequently: (1) the intensity of emotion accompanying the experience, and (2) the real, direct, concrete, uncontrived, anti-intellectual nature of the experience. World War II deserves special mention here as an example of disequilibrium which figured in several of the stories.
Intensity of emotion.

Perhaps the most defining characteristic of this state, as described by participants, is the intensity of emotion that accompanied it. “It was feeling! It was feeling!” exclaimed one participant describing his experience, “I’m having difficulty putting word structures around it because it was essentially feeling. And what I’m doing now is trying to use words to interpret an original feeling. Very hard.” Another said, “It was my heart that it affected the most... it was emotional and it was felt, not thought.”

These feelings (and their intensity was pronounced) were not all unpleasant or uncomfortable as has been suggested in some of the literature. In fact, most of the feelings used by most of the participants were ones normally regarded as positive or pleasing ones. One said simply of his sudden experience, “any negative feelings were stripped.” Terms used by participants to describe their feelings as they experienced this disorientation included: “joyful”, “inspired”, “exhilarated”, “euphoric”, “elated”, “great happiness”, “overwhelming happiness”, “peace”, “amazed”, “great!”, “carried away”, “heaven-like”, “surprised”, “excited”, “juicy”, “terrific”, “unlocked”, “a good feeling.” However, there were other terms as well, not so typically regarded positively: “floored”, “bewildered”, “frustrated”, “overwhelmed”, “off my rocker”, “confused”, “stunned”, “outraged”, “shocked”, “kicked in the butt”, “fearful”, “shaken”, “anxious”, “angry”, “pissed off” and “insulted”.

One young woman, describing her initial, triggering experience as a door, spoke of the fear associated with approaching it:

It was the first door of many doors that followed that corridor. It was just the first door, and ... once I crossed it, it was easy. Inside was very nice, but the door was
probably painted black and was, like, spooky, scary. It took some courage to get to that door... It was scary, but it was a release.

More than simply the nature of the feelings, it seems that it was their intensity that was common to the various transformative experiences. One man, when asked if there was a common feature among all three transformative experiences he had described, clapped his hands together and said:

Yes! Yes! OK! Good question! … It’s intensity. The intensity of experiences to me…

So [the three experiences] had a profound inner – inner, that’s the point, that’s it – not that out there it was so bad, it’s what that did inside me. It stirred in me an emotion that made me react intensely.

From the data, it is apparent that the capacity of a learning experience to evoke or provoke feelings, and strong ones, is an important feature of its transformative character.

Real experience.

A second, and related, notable characteristic of these experiences of disorientation is that they were rarely contrived, ideological or intellectual. Rather, they were more typically real, immediate, concrete and direct. “This was not theoretical,” said one man of his experience. When asked where his experience was based – in his body, his heart or his head, he responded quickly, “No, no, that was the thing. Ideological, it was not. It was contra-ideological, and it dwarfed all ideology.” “This is life,” said a women of her experience, “This is real. This is important.” Often the experiences described were physical or multi-sensory, body-based ones that people actually touched and felt. “You’re getting it from all senses,” said one woman, “not just your eyes, or your ears, – you’re getting eyes and ears and
touch and smell.” It is perhaps noteworthy that only one of the twenty-five experiences occurred in the context of a traditional, formal educational setting.

A woman recalled an incident, at the age of 8, when her 15 year-old brother was shot and killed in a racial incident. “That was one thing that ended up creating this snowball effect to a lot of other things,” she said.

Most of it felt bad up until I went to Sweden [at age 17]. Because of R.’s death everything went haywire. And I was so young, as was my little brother. He completely shut down. I’ve not seen that guy cry since he was 7 years old. As for me I became quite openly emotional. I’m very sensitive. I just kind of opened up for a lot of other people’s feelings. I can really feel pain – I get really touched.

One woman recalled an experience during a transformative year at an alternative school:

We went to Christian Island and talked to the band council about what life was like. I remember sobbing on the way back on the ferry. It was November and the waves were 6 feet high and I’m thinking, “How could I have been so ignorant up to this point – that I didn’t know these people right outside my door were going through this hardship?”

One young man found himself in the midst of a confrontation between Israeli soldiers and Palestinian civilians in Jerusalem.

There were about 40 [soldiers] in the marketplace asking Palestinians my age for all their ID and stuff, and they ended up arresting between 10 and 20 of them. I got my falafel and went out to sit on the steps to eat my lunch and they got marched out the Damascus Gate and the last Palestinian started pushing the officer. This Palestinian was just a, a nothing, pushing this guy with a gun... [There was] immediately a massive reaction from all the IDF that were there. They had two personnel carriers up the street and they came down, they stormed right past me and they just completely overwhelmed the situation. They threw the guys, all of them, up against a wall. All
the Palestinian kids started throwing fruit and rocks, and the soldiers just went – they just completely overwhelmed everything. I saw little kids throwing strawberries or something and then another soldier came up and grabbed him – a kid my brother’s size or smaller – grabbed him by the back of the shirt, picked him up about 4 feet off the ground and hoofed him in the back of the legs as hard as he could, and I was, like, that’s overdoing it a bit… this is a real problem here … Like, I could have been any one of those three people involved in that scenario! I could have been the Palestinian, I could have been the kid, I could have been the soldier! All were essentially my age!… When you see things like that, it’s not just Middle East political analysts going yap, yap, yap. It’s kids getting hoofed by soldiers because they’re seeing their brothers getting their faces smashed against a wall! And it’s soldiers having to use that sort of force to say “Don’t mess with us because I don’t want to shoot you!” It makes you feel.”

These are feelings, evoked by real situations that were experienced up close and personally.

The experiential component was the operative element for some, more than it’s “realness.” One was able to describe a simulated experience as transformative:

The fact that we were learning instead of just talking about non-violence – finding ourselves in a situation where it was needed, practised. Badly practised but practised, and recognizing in our failure that there was something very important that happened. Thirteen people killed in our exercise. And yet it was a great moment. I remember the exhilaration. I remember when we called it off people ran out and jumped into the water and splashed around. We evaluated it for two full days afterwards.

Some found that merely being in the presence of a special person had a direct, real and immediate impact. The two experiences reported by the native participant both centred around people – ones she considered to be the two most significant people in her life – her father and her grand-mother. For
another, even a fleeting encounter with a significant person was powerfully influential:

Going to Ghandi’s ashram and meeting Vinaba Bhave on the road after his walk – this spindly 65-year old man who had walked 15 miles before breakfast... the green visor and the tennis shoes... He was walking all over India to ask people to share their land... It certainly strengthened ... the peace aspect of my life.

One participant was able to find his experience of “realness” even in a book:

I read it [Silent Spring] in Grade 7, and that, to a large degree, changed my life. That book, at that time. It made me worry, and that worry, for better or for worse, has stayed with me ever since.... It was very real. She [author Rachel Carson] was very real. Although I’d never experienced it directly ... it was real, and it remains with me to this day.

For some participants, the term “immersion” describes what they felt was an essential feature of their experience. For example, one woman told of her experience on a 2-week canoe trip (where she realized what she really wanted and made the decision to pursue a career in nature interpretation), as fundamentally different than a trip of just a few days:

Two weeks is different. You lose all thought and memory of civilization and become completely embroiled in the hour-to-hour necessities of living and travel. You don’t do anything else. You paddle, you stop, you prepare a meal, you paddle, you stop and set up camp for the night, prepare a meal, protect yourself from the elements.

Everything you do is aimed at travel, keeping dry, setting up a little home. It’s a total immersion.

In that state of immersion, far away in the remote Missinabi River, she encountered an expanse of clear-cut, and a personal transformation.

I was just outraged. Absolutely outraged, and shocked, and surprised. I’d had no idea! That was my first real learning experience that nature was not a vast, self-
supporting thing with some integrity. It’s being changed, impinged on, bitten into all over the place.

The same woman, in a subsequent adventure, revealed another dimension of real experience. The absence of routine and superficial distractions allows one to see behind oneself, more deeply into one’s lived experience, and perhaps more clearly into the meaning of one’s life. She said, of her travel in Africa:

We’d had a long enough time to shed the urban lifestyle, to slow down 200%, after having spent a year, actually very similar to a canoe trip. Your life is simplified to the absolute essentials: you travel, you prepare meals, you find a place to sleep for the night. During that, you’re experiencing something…. I was just experiencing, observing, being there. The time, the lack of pressures and worries and outside influences. There’s nothing – think about it – there’s no car payments, there’s no job, there’s no parents, there’s no kids, there’s no getting your daily exercise, there’s no phone bill. There’s nothing. Absolutely nothing. You’re just going along experiencing the world. Amazing!

The degree to which all of these experiences were full-bodied, first-hand, authentic, unimpeded and unmediated was very much a factor in the power they held for those living inside them. Life itself was the teacher, and transformation was the outcome.

World War II.

Mention must be made in this section of World War II. It is an example of disequilibrium that marked dramatically the lives of four of the five study participants who lived through it. For one, it provoked a crisis of conscience, resulting in a life-changing and far-reaching decision to register as a conscientious objector. He was nearing the end of his medical studies when
he was called to alternative service camp, leaving behind his career, his wife-to-be (a class-mate), his family and friends. For many of them, he was leaving in disgrace. He said, 

Leaving medicine was a very important decision in my life. It was following through on what I believed in. And while I didn’t know if I’d ever get back to medicine, and I was leaving behind the one who meant a great deal to me, I went with a light heart, knowing that I was, you know, the feeling that you’ve done what’s right.

As it turned out, the decision was a watershed, leading him in a new direction which influenced significantly, and happily, the rest of his life:

I think it was a decision that has changed the course of my life because it took me to Asia where I had an experience of the third world and became interested in the problems of the third world in a way which I might otherwise never have done. And I also came to recognize the oneness of humanity. It was the conviction that war was wrong [that led up to my decision], and it was the first time I’d put it to the test.

For another man, who served as a young officer in the Canadian Army, it taught him only the futility of war. He said,

And of course, out of the war, you come out with the feeling that, God, this is not the way to go. You know, that war and violence are not the way to solve the problem. Our regiment lost over 200 men in one particular situation. Some of them were my buddies. We’d been in school together and I can remember one in particular, very close. It was so – you’d say to yourself, why? What is this all about? It’s stupid. And then we got word of the bombing of Dresden... and we’d say “Hey! What’s going on? We’re here to protect our wives and children and homes, and we’re bombing the hell out of civilians?” And the service men talked about that. We couldn’t understand this, and it created a whole new thing. I would say, a year before the war ended, 1943 let’s say, it began to dawn on me that this was a stupid way to run a railroad.... It started in 1943 and by the end of the war it was there. It was there.

This is lousy. I’m glad it’s over. And of course we ended it with the same thing. The dropping of the atomic bomb.... The dropping of the atomic bomb would be one of
the profound moments in my thinking about peace and war.... Can you imagine anything more crystal clear, impactful, more tangible? ... You drop a bomb, kill hundreds of thousands of people. And the picture that I saw of the of a concrete front porch with the imprint of a child in it like a shadow. That's her. She was blown into it.

Another participant also noted that the dropping of the atomic bomb was a significant factor in his path to pacifism.

One of the other participants struggled deeply with the contradiction between all the people around him preparing for war, and the persistent voice within himself saying “Do not kill, there is another way.” He said of his dilemma:

I needed something. I thought I was going sort of crazy. I felt that here everybody was beginning to sign up or talk about it, and here I was talking the opposite. That, in a way, hurt.

Fortunately for him, around that time he was recruited into a humanitarian service in Asia. He left just a month or two before he would have been called up and the pacifists were brought together in camps. He said of that time, “I was really very happy to hear that there was an opportunity to do what I felt I could do and give myself wholeheartedly to.”

Another man said, “I wasn’t an activist until I got into the air force and met people in the air force who had been around ... got me interested in socialism, along with friends in college. But it wasn’t until I came back from the air force that I began to think about the world.”

Perhaps more clearly and vividly than any other experience for those who lived through it, war illustrates the two major features of disequilibrium as identified in this study: intensity of emotion, and direct, real experience.
2. Responses to the Disequilibrium: Making Meaning

While the literature, particularly the writings of Mezirow (1978), suggests a deliberate, conscious, rational and analytical stage that logically follows a triggering transformative experience or event, the data in this study suggest that this is not at all a deliberate, intellectual, rational process. Mezirow believes that learning through perspective transformation involves a fundamental and thorough re-assessment of oneself and the values that one has been using to make important decisions and judgements about one's life (p. 194). While this may occur for some people at some level, data from this study did not appear to support such a conclusion. With only a few exceptions, the lives of this group of participants did not typically allow for discrete or extensive reflection and self-scrutiny, nor did most of them report it. It is no doubt tempting, particularly among academics, to believe that, following a transformative learning experience, people subsequently enter into a period of self-reflection and critical analysis of their prior assumptions. As I work through a process of analysis in writing this dissertation, it is easy for me to assume that most people do something similar with their own experience. However, I did not find this to be uniformly evident among the participants in the current sample. In some cases, this phase, if it can be called that, seemed to be skipped entirely, or to occur concurrently with either the experience itself or subsequent behaviour changes; people often seemed to move directly from one way of being and behaving to another. Also, the locus of change seemed to be at least as much in behaviour, in being and acting differently, as in intellectual processes, perspective shift or attitude.
change. Behaviours that previously were automatic were shed. New behaviours were acquired, which themselves eventually became automatic.

Some participants were tongue-tied when asked to talk about how and why the change occurred in their lives. They readily talked about their experiences, sometimes very personal ones, and about their interests and activities, but most did not acknowledge spending much time or effort on critical self-reflection or questioning their earlier assumptions. If these reflective activities actually took place, and they did in a few cases and may well have in others, they seemed to happen inconspicuously in the lives of most participants, even subconsciously, and in the context of everyday activities. One participant put it this way: “You don’t make sense of it at the time or the next day ... other things come along that remind you of it... Life’s going on around us.” As noted earlier, another laughed at my effort to find a pattern in her experiences. Another sighed and said with some impatience, “What can I say? I eat sunbeams? I don’t know how to answer some of these things, how to verbalize.” Another, when asked to relate her transformative experiences to her current commitments, said, “If those things hadn’t happened would I still be the same? Who knows? If I knew that I’d be sitting in a circus tent telling people’s fortunes!”

Nevertheless, the experiences themselves remain empty without some activity on the part of the learner to draw or make meaning from them. It is important to note that at least for a few, there was both a need and a time for reflection, a time to take stock of what happened, interpret it — in the words of one man, to find “a meaning here beyond what I can immediately see” — before or as they integrated it into their behaviour and their identities. One woman said “It’s only looking back on it that I can take what I was feeling ...
and fill in the blanks.” Another man spoke of the opportunity afforded him to “de-brief” his travel in a post-experience summer camp job. Still, even his reflection was in the context of a related activity.

Camp was a really good de-brief for my trip. The de-briefing is where you really learn what happened. And so at camp I was given two months to sit and comfortably absorb what I had gone through in a positive atmosphere. Like, I’d just come back from 7 months away, and I was put into this nice little cushion with a good job, a good atmosphere, good friends, and part of my job was to think about the things I had just done and adapt them into global education sessions and stuff like that. So it was like a de-brief. Had that not been there, some of my experiential learnings might have been lost. Had I come back to a summer of mowing lawns, it wouldn’t have been the same.

How did the rest interpret their experiences? How did they transfer meaning from their experiences to their perspectives, their values, their activities, their identities?

From an analysis of the data, three features appear to be particularly evident among the participants’ interpretations of and responses to their disequilibrium: (1) a sense of break-out, metamorphosis or break-through, (2) a sense of unity and connectedness, and (3) a renewed confidence or empowerment.

**Break-out or metamorphosis.**

An aspect of this experience, as it was explained by several participants, is best described as a break-out or metamorphosis, even a break-through into previously unknown dimensions. It is an experience of being lifted up and out of ordinary experience, to places one had not been before and could not foresee. This is similar perhaps to Dudley’s “transcendence over ordinary patterns” (1987, p. 245), or to Merriam and Clark’s notion of “expansion...
enlarging a person's capacity to work and to love” (1991, p. 227) – an expansion which “is not limited to one dimension, but encompasses the whole person” (p. 203). In the current study, this break-out was accompanied by the shedding of old frames and a sense of unlimited new possibilities, visions and horizons. While the disequilibrium discussed in the last section connotes being off-balance, this experience is almost the opposite inasmuch as it offers a broader foundation of support. Participants used terms connoting a sudden release, expansion, an awareness of much more than they had realized – more experience, more meaning, more interpretations and perspectives, more opportunities and possibilities, simply more world. For some, this break-out was experienced simply by leaving home. One woman described how important it was for her to be away from her familiar environment, and immersed in a totally new one. She said, in relation to her own experience,

I think that you have get out of your home because you can’t really see what you are until you can look at it from an outside perspective. And the other thing is it’s so important for people to see that there’s a lot out there.

One man described being carried away by his experience. He was about to cross a street in an Asian city, and,

All of a sudden the whole, everything around me became lit up in a way that – it was – I don’t know, everything was the same around me – the streets, the cars, but everything was lit up and intensified. So I was just taken out of the picture for awhile. I was still there, I was still with my two feet on the curb. How long I stayed there I don’t know. But it was as though I’d gone into a whole new world. This was, OK, maybe this is what heaven is like, I didn’t know. It was a tremendous thing and I was carried away by it so that I didn’t know how long, whether it was 5, 10, 15 minutes I
was standing there. Sensitive, purity, what’s the word for it? – illumination.

Everything was illuminated around me, intensified, colours. Fantastic.

And what was the effect of this illumination?

Just that there was another world right around me that I wasn’t aware of.... And it just
helped me to realize that there was something more, I don’t know how to express it....
I was carried into another world... I was elated, absolutely elated for quite some time
– some days, then it slowly dissipated.... [It left me with] a sense that there was much
more to my life than what I had experienced before.... so much more than the world
that I lived in – more joy, peace, and absolutely incredible. Much more than I was
aware of....

One woman described the flash of insight that came during a deep
conversation with a close friend:

So we were thinking like this, and I think that conversation on this particular
afternoon was really the beginning, sitting on her porch with these concepts that I’d
never thought before. So these were just such earth-shattering concepts to me, even to
consider that anything was other than what it appeared to be.

Another woman said of a discovery, “I had absolutely no idea that there
was anything like that in the world.” She later described herself as having
come back from her travels a “world citizen,” meaning for her “that you see
way beyond the confines of your own village or your own province or your
own country.... You’re seeing so much more of the larger picture. It’s a lot
harder to try to save the tree on the lot.”

A native woman, telling the story of a lesson taught her by her
grandmother, said,

And she told me in those few minutes that what I was feeling wasn’t important.
Because there was a whole world going on around me. And she made me as a little
kid stop and listen for bird-song.... And that what I was feeling then was away, way
down the list of importance on that day. She forced me to do that. And so even now,
I stop and listen for bird-song when some people think I shouldn’t. Because I’m looking for those messages that are out there. Those gifts that are given to us when we least expect them. And again, I give thanks for my grandmother who gave me that lesson on that early spring day.

Another also described his experience as a “gift”, an “explosion”, and an opening out:

The gift was the way I felt and the fact that I didn’t feel I was loaded with problems. And the fact that everything was opened out instead of closed in. It’s illusion that everything is possible, but I came very close to that illusion – everything is possible. Never, never is everything possible, but the feeling was there…. It was an overwhelming happiness. It was an explosion. I was caught up in the explosion. I was exploding outward.

This sudden expansiveness came as release from a stressful, limiting time in his life.

I was under stress…. one of the things that causes the tension, that causes the pressure, is feeling that you are in a box … and the experience said there isn’t a box. Not only are there no problems, but you’re not in a box. You’re not in a time box either. There was a feeling of, what, open-endedness? of continuity? of, of … that there’s all the time you need…. it said, “There are no problems, you have forever. You’re not boxed in a 10-minute or a 1-hour or a 1-life box”….

Another of the participants escaped from what was for her an extremely stressful situation. She described how, while still a teenager, her home life had deteriorated following the shooting death of her older brother by a racist attacker. Years later, she went on a year-long student exchange to Sweden, which she described as a transformative learning experience in her life. “I think I would have been pretty messed up had I not gone to Sweden,” she said. “My brother’s death caused so many problems… I just needed to get the hell out of there.” She described her experience in Sweden as opening
her up, liberating her from many of the restrictions she had been living with and had imposed on herself:

I remember sitting there in one of these dresses and heels and make-up and such and he had on a big sweater and a pair of Levis and he said “Why do you wear that stuff?... Like why do you do it? Is it for you? How comfortable is it?... And I was just like, wow!, you know, why do I do this? And little by little I started changing. I started wearing clothes that were comfortable.... It was this total liberation. (laughs) It was just like – woo hoo! – I was feeling liberated.

There is an irrational, emotional side to making meaning of the transformation that is not at all peripheral but rather very central to it. For several, words were hard to find and, at times, that experience was clearly frustrating for them. One man sighed and said, “Ayyy. The rational part of it I didn’t have. I don’t know. (pause) I suppose one of the things that happened to me was that – yeah, I know exactly – ideology became much less important. Immediately ideology became far less important.”

This feature of the responses to disequilibrium was characterized then, by a break-through of existing limitations to new freedom and new stability, all prompted by the initial loss of balance.

Unity and connectedness.

Participants also spoke of a sudden awareness of unity and connectedness following their initial disequilibrium. It was as if boundaries had dissolved, all division or separation became arbitrary, things flowed together, and horizons were extended beyond limit. One woman described it as “that moment of things coming together.” Another referred to a “connectedness with nature” as the realization that she gained then, and the spiritual theme
that guides her life now. Another woman, describing her transformative experience with LSD at age 15, said,

We took this LSD. And that changed my life. [I went] right to outer space. Right to outer space. For me one of the most significant things that happened in that experience was an absolute dissolution of any ideas of separateness. I saw that there was no separation between myself – what was in or outside my body. It was one of those very fluid experiences where you’re down to molecular level. And then the questions start coming up. Well, who is this observing this? Who is thinking this? All of that. It’s pretty heady stuff. And at that time, I didn’t have any language for it, but it was an absolute knowing. My body knew. It was that kind of experience. ... I literally went out into the cosmos. My perception was of looking down on the planet, looking down – much more vast than the planet – but it was just that kind of awareness. So that changed my life forever.

Another woman talked about the same sense of unity and connection in the context of a spiritual experience she described as “particularly personal”, part-way through a year of transformative travel in Asia. She said,

I have no idea why it happened, because I don’t have those kind of experiences (laughs), but I just figure I was open to it... You know when you hear Baha’ais say “One People, One World,” I really feel that. I’m not Baha’i but I had this experience ... all of a sudden ... I guess it was what people call an out-of-body experience and there was just this flow ... and it was just this incredible sense of peace. And it was as if I could see a million faces but they were all one, but there was this flow.

One man describing a similar sudden burst of insight, when asked if it were a spiritual experience, replied,

Hard word for me to use. You may notice I haven’t used it. Yeah, I guess you could use that expression... the feeling was of relatedness, of connection and of freedom from the limitation of immediate time... the thing that happened was a real crashing through the structures through which I had looked at the world, through which I had responded to the world.
Three people spoke of this relatedness or connectedness in the context of human community as a central feature of their experience. One young man said,

I really valued living and working and existing … with the same people in a closed setting…. The value in that – I’d never gone to camp as a kid, never existed in a small community of contemporaries – the same people doing the same stuff, same ideas… everybody has a role – that’s important…. Maybe that’s what it was … the first time I’d ever been in a closed cell environment with people my own age and thinking. And I was like, you know, this is cool. A lot of good stuff can come out of this.

Another spoke of his transformative experience in community as a conscientious objector working in Asia during World War II:

The idea of community got hold of me because I joined the unit and I saw what was happening in the unit, that people were sharing everything. Guys dying – my best friend on the Burma Road – two days he was dead – typhus. That sense of community, of caring and sharing – that was very evident…. That’s where my commitment to community was born. That was to be the next step. After non-violence … the second was community.

Speaking about the transformative power of her academic year in Sweden, a young woman credited her school community of caring young Swedish friends with a pronounced influence. She said, “I never wanted to leave. I loved that place so much, it was so great. I loved the community of young people.”

In his book Path to Liàng Zhi, Katsuhiko Yazaki (1994) describes this sense of unity and connection as “liàng zhi”:

Liàng zhi is a way of being able to feel a basic sense of oneness with all creatures of the world. It is also said that as a result of liàng zhi, through this sense of oneness, it is possible to share – and have sympathy for – the joys and sorrows of others…. Everything begins from the self-realization of life as “connection.” … The process of
pursuing individuality, or differences, leads to a loss of continuity with others as well as a loss of a sense of oneness with the world and the universe. As we become slaves of the ego, it is a natural result that we begin to regard nature, the earth and others as objects of exploitation. (pp. 21-24)

Confidence and empowerment.

The establishment of an undergirding of confidence was a common feature of many of the participants as they made meaning from their experiences. This bears out Cranton’s contention that learner empowerment is a “crucial component” of transformative learning (1994, p. 91) and sustains an individual throughout the process.

For many, their experience was sufficiently out of the ordinary that they initially felt strange and alone. In one case, a man wondered if he were going crazy. People found ways to overcome this feeling and gain the confidence they needed. Most found it in relationship with other people.

In one case, a woman found her entry into a foreign culture very uncomfortable. She said, “I had a really hard time the first month or two. Oh God, every night I was crying, I wanted to go home…. Everything was different.” The confidence she gained from the combination of her openness and the respect given her by her Swedish friends prevailed.

People in Sweden were very respectful. They would say, “L. what do you think?” And at first I was like, “Oh, I dunno, whatever,” and they’d say “No, what do you think, really?” And I would say it, and I’d be listened to, and people would say, “Hey, you know, that’s a good point”…. They never made me feel bad…. It was really hard coming back [home], you know, people are so different, very extreme roles between men and women, even though nobody wants to say that there really are…

Now, she says,
Having the confidence to speak up, I relate to Sweden .... A lot of my confidence pieces came from Sweden. I think my willingness to travel and try new things came from Sweden .... On women’s issues, I constantly refer to Sweden, as to the woman I am. In relationships, friends and male/female and romantic partnerships, also Sweden. That people can truly change as a society, and work for the development of the individual as well as for the development of the community... I think about Sweden. And the active role that people can play in transforming a government.

Some people found support and gained confidence from a particular mentor – someone who assumed a significant, almost parental, level of interest and influence in the life of the participant. Two women spoke in this way about their grand-mothers. One of them said, “My best friend was my grand-mother who was the most spiritual person I ever knew – she was very connected with nature.” Another participant, when asked where he found the courage to turn down the draft call, replied,

The principal of the theological college [that I had been attending] - the fact that he said to me, “I don’t agree with the stand you take, but I’d give my right arm to defend your right to take it.” That certainly was a back-up.

Some spoke of the impact of peer support – the confidence gained from respected peers who shared or supported their feelings. One woman said, “I started opening my eyes ... [and saw] there are several groups of people that are highly committed. Yes, all of that contributed, because, I said, “Hey! I’m not alone!”

One man spoke of the importance of having a partner in change:

I’m not sure that [transformative learning] would have been possible for me without Wendy. Very important to have a partner. It provides reinforcement for you. It gives you somebody you trust to try out new ideas, interpretations of things on, and especially if the person feels the same way about you do about various events...
When one man, whose decision not to go war meant that he would have to leave the study of medicine, approached his fiancée with his decision, he “didn’t know whether she’d turn her back on me at the time.” She did not, and “this again was a back-up.” Another man, seeking to make meaning of the voice he kept hearing, was wondering “Am I the only person in the world who has this feeling?” He found himself isolated in his church when the church was asked to support buying war bonds.

So I was put on the spot. I was on the board. I wouldn’t make it unanimous and they wanted it unanimous. I found it very hard. I was so emotional about the thing that I could hardly explain it.... I heard about the Quakers, and I went down to see them and they gave me a lot of support. They did help me a lot to understand this voice... There were others who were feeling the same way and we began to meet at a church... That worked very well, it focused, it was more a group experience as well as just individuals.

One woman found support on a canoe trip. “Exposure to these people who had already been involved in environmental activism for a long time,” she said, “Pretty amazing people. From that point on I got quite involved in environmental activism.”

Others found confidence and encouragement in books and periodicals. One man who chose not to go war drew important support from an author he had never met: “I became very interested in the writings of an English clergyman who was a pacifist, and it made good sense to me.”

One man found support in the Bible:

I began to have confirmation from the Bible and from the odd person that I met. That helped. It helped and strengthened ... I was truly a pacifist, and I knew I wasn’t going to give it up.
But perhaps the most significant factor in building confidence and empowerment was the personalizing of the change and integration of it into their identities. Making it their own, they became, in the words of one man, “inside-out people” as opposed to what he considered more fickle and less secure “outside-in people.” According to him, inside-out people draw their strength from within, from their fundamental knowledge of themselves, from their clarity of purpose, from their values and ideals, from their deep understandings of life and people. He described how he learned to “look inside-out at the things I approached … the key in the whole thing is the inside-out living … that inner security and understanding and awareness of oneself.” Often, the transformative learning experience contributed markedly to that self-knowledge and strength. One man, greatly influenced by Buddhist thought at the time (and still), noted that “up to the time that the experience occurred I was in the middle of it as a student of Japanese Buddhism. And after it happened perhaps I was no longer a student… It now for me had much more depth than it had before. I was no longer a student.” Another man, having taken the courageous decision to become a conscientious objector during World War II, still went off to the work camps “with a light heart.” He reported that his commitment only increased as time went on, because he had “a sense that I’d done the right thing, and [I was] ready to take whatever consequences.” Another said the transformative experience taught her to learn to experience things more personally, to bring her own self more fully to her experience, “to listen with my heart and not just with my ears.” One woman “got it” that the “answers weren’t outside, they were inside.” Said another, “I’m constantly tuned into my inner voice. I’m really grounded now.”
There is no doubt that the confirmation of others – mentors, heroes, peers, authors – was significant in building the confidence of participants in this study. However, there was also evidence of a more subtle, internal dimension to the building of confidence – a deep knowing, at the level of the soul – that gave the person the reassurance, strength and foundation on which to build long-lasting commitments.

3. Building Commitment and Personal Responsibility

Kiesler (1971) defines commitment as “the pledging or binding of the individual to behavioural acts,” or a course of action (p. 30). Keniston (1968) remarks on the inadequacy of any single explanation for how commitments are established. Rogers (1994) notes how the transformative learning process can evoke questions about the meaning and purpose of life, and how some came to realize how their personal responsibility was linked to their life purpose. She says,

I have suggested that learning about global futures appeared to cause every student in this study to ask questions about the essence of being human, core values and the secular or theistic meaning and purpose of life…. It was the sense of caring that began to stimulate questions about the meaning and purpose of life. (p. 150-51)

The data in this study support all of the above. In particular, the data indicated four prominent features related to the theme of building commitment and personal responsibility for the welfare of the planet and of future generations: (1) clarity of vision or direction, (2) the integration of a personal, moral imperative, and (3) passion for the cause, and (4) reinforcement and support for the direction.
Clarity of vision or direction.

Reece (1990) suggests that a dimension of building commitment is imagination or vision. We construct a vision of new possibilities and dreams, of what could be. Participants in this study invariably drew a clearer and more focused direction, and renewed passion for it, from their transformative experiences. One man, when asked what sustains his commitment, replied:

A clear, clear understanding of what I meant in my own mind about pursuing the four dimensions that I’ve spoken of... Every time I might have been tempted to deviate, to go down that road, up came the clear signals that I’d articulated in my head and on paper. I wasn’t flirting with, “I wonder what I’ll believe in?”

For another participant, the effect of the transformative learning experience on her commitment was clear; in her words, she “became focused.” Another participant also found his focus clearer upon his return from a foreign adventure:

The changes which need to be made became more obvious as a result of seeing the repercussions of the failure to do so first-hand in many different places. It also became clear about Canada... that I was able to start seeing where we’re failing here more, having seen something of the influence that our culture had on other cultures in Asia – cultures that were so long-lived and so strong yet so easily toppled by consumerism... The western influence... that was really a powerful lesson.

A clearer focus was also a consequence for another woman. She said, “I see the big picture but I know that I have to work in certain points.”

A clear direction seemed to run like a thread through each of the lives of these participants. A woman said, “there are lots of lane-ways, detours on the main road. But I feel that the main road is fairly clear now ... a love of nature and a wish to protect the environment.”
For one woman, her life purpose came to her suddenly in a memorable moment as she was sitting at her kitchen table, eating a bowl of her “cosmic soup” of raw vegetables, and looking out her window at a bright, spring day:

I got it. It was one of those moments – aha! moments – and I got that what my life purpose was to eat this cosmic soup. To eat raw food. ‘Cause through that, it would raise my consciousness. And my purpose as a human being – it was so clear – was to be conscious of nature and to celebrate it. Period. That was it.

While a clarity of focus was evident, it must be seen in the context of the metamorphosis and connectedness described in the previous section. This was not experienced as a restrictive, narrow focus, but rather as a freeing and enabling worldview that showed participants how they could live in harmony with, rather than against, the planet and its future. It was as if the transformative learning experience was a pure, clear bell, whose single note continued to resonate deep in the soul of each individual.

Integration of a personal, moral imperative.

Dudley (1987) suggests that transformative change concluded with integration, “incorporating one’s expanded vision into a way of being ... so that it can become the fabric of one’s life” (pp. 267-68). To a greater or lesser degree, all participants in the current study said that their transformative learning experiences had led them to a freely-chosen, self-imposed duty. In some cases it took the form of a vow to themselves. For others, the experience came to them and remains with them as a voice, an inner voice telling them a truth or providing a direction. One woman referred to an inner voice that directed her to attend an alternative school for Grade 13. Later the voice returned to help her at the point of another critical choice
in her life. "You know, it's great now," she said, "because I'm constantly tuned into my inner voice. And I'm really grounded now, and I know that all along there was someone in me saying, you know the direction to go."

One man described his inner voice as "something deep down" and difficult to ignore:

[The voice] came absolutely out of left field, and I tried to move it away or forget it, but it didn't forget me. ... I found it very difficult to listen to the voice because I thought I could, like a lot of other things, brush it aside. But I didn't seem to be able to do that with this voice or this direction that was asked of me.... I was led.

For most participants, however, the integration of a personal, moral imperative was a matter of redefining themselves, as persons with a personal, global and future-oriented mission, and in some cases as part of a larger social movement. Their life missions, consequently, have become very clear and straightforward. They do what they have to do. Ultimately, the only explanation they can give is that they are who they are and they do what they do. One man, when asked about what motives or commitment lay behind his activities, replied, "I suppose the answer to that is that's the way I am, or that's the way I have become, I am becoming." Another man, when asked where he gains the strength to keep going in his work, simply replied, "Strength? I don't know that I need the strength. I don't know what I need it for. I'm doing what I like to do." Speaking about his decision not to fight in the war, another man said, "it was the conviction that war was wrong... It was the first time I'd put it to the test.... it was a sense that I'd done the right thing, and ready to take whatever consequences."

For some, it was a matter of taking a personal stand based on personal conviction, no matter what was the tide of popular opinion. Risk, or courage
did not seem to be big factors. Said one, “It’s a conviction that one does what is one’s duty to do and that’s all that matters. We’re not asked to be successful, we’re just asked to be faithful to the light we have.” Another came to realize that, “the future of global survival rests in the hands of one child, one man and one woman working together in some common kind of way.” One woman described acting with a future-oriented, planetary perspective as a personal habit; she thinks about her role in planetary survival every day. She said, “There’s rarely a day goes by that I don’t say to myself, “OK, now Wendy, what about today? And I try to keep conscious of just where I need to change. I worry lots about the world, but I think I’m more concerned with what role I have in that.”

When asked what it is that makes her act on her passions, another woman replied, “It’s the fact that we have to change the world and it has to start with us and the people around us.” She interprets her passion in terms of a duty. One woman said of her experience,

What I learned was that nature’s important – or I value it – let’s put it that way, I value it. That it was not safe, that it was not secure, and that it was going to be lost. It was already being lost. For me, that was the beginning of the natural corollary. That is, if it’s going to be lost then we’d better do something about it..

For most of the participants in this study, this commitment is integrated into the self, and has become, to some degree, resistant to change at a fundamental level. While none would likely describe her/himself as closed to change in the future, what Kiesler (1971) called an “additive” effect has occurred – the more often an act (or a similar, related act) is performed that is consistent with the commitment, the more likely it is to be performed again
until they become part and parcel of a person’s life and lifestyle (p. 33). One woman, following a transformative experience, realized:

... a sense of this as a lifestyle, this as a philosophy, an attitude which was very much stronger. So I can go on and my life takes a lot of different forms, but the thread that runs through it is a love of nature and a wish to protect the environment in some way.... You know, that thread just sort of naturally runs through me.... I take it to a personal level.

Following the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, another man realized his personal mission:

As a result of that and coming out of that and getting married and having a family and thinking about that – and I’m talking about let’s say a year here – I crystallized in my mind that I would stand in the future out there for non-violent ways of operating in the world. That would include the elimination of war, which would have nuclear arms as a fundamental, eliminate violence in the streets, and so on.

One participant, when asked about whether his commitment – a commitment which “crystallized” during travel overseas – was life-long, said,

Oh yes, and it’s a commitment to a number of things. It’s a commitment to learning... and to changing things in whatever ways are necessary to ensure the health of the biosphere and the welfare of the people in it, really.... and of course it’s still crystallizing, so maybe you can’t say it’s complete. (pause) No, it is complete, that is complete. Where to go from here isn’t.

For one man, his experience was a gift with a responsibility attached: “I had a feeling, well, you’re supposed to do something with this, you know?”

For one woman, the dawning of the commitment was the experience. She remembers the moment vividly, and described it as a transformative learning experience:

I can remember when I knew I had to do something. I remember I was sitting on my couch in the living room, my daughter was playing with ... another child. And I know
I was looking at them, and thinking how beautiful they were, and I was reading a newspaper, and it was about poverty and struggling – something about the local situation and how poor, black children were, and how they didn’t have an opportunity.... It was that moment – reading the newspaper and seeing my child with another child – that I said “I have to do something”.... It was like a moment unlike other moments.... Got to do something. What am I going to do? Who am I going to do it with? Where? And How? But I know I have to do something. It was very exciting. And we did a whole lot of things.

What keeps her going?

It’s hard to know. I’m a grandmother now. And I look at the future and I think of my little grandchild.... That’s part of it. It’s future generations – it’s more than my kids at this point ... I love that little girl.

She was not the only grandparent with this feeling. A grandfather, when asked what sustains his commitment, said, “You know what I have to say? I think it’s my grand-daughter... what’s the future going to be for her? ... We won’t be here in 25 years. But she will, a young woman, what’s going to happen?” Three other participants, all mothers, noted how having babies, in the words of one, “really transforms you in a very different way.” While having a baby can no doubt itself be a transformative experience, these mothers saw it in terms of building their commitment to a healthy future for their children and others. A mother said “I realized that if the world wasn’t going to be better for everybody’s kids, it wasn’t going to be good for mine.” Another mother said that she started moving on environmental issues,

when I was pregnant with my son. I was 18. And I started thinking about what was really going on, on the planet in terms of the environment.... When I was pregnant I just became very aware, and really quite concerned, of the fact that I had unconsciously become pregnant and [was] carrying a child, and was going to bring a
child into this world. And it was a very difficult time. That was when I first started thinking about clean food, clean air and this crazy commercial lifestyle.

Though not typical of participants in this study in this respect, one woman described her path to her commitment through a university course which she described as an awakening. It was followed by a period of self-reflection quite consistent with the sequence described in Chapter 2, leading from disequilibrium and reflection to commitment and action. She said,

It was almost at the end of the course when I communicated to the group that I had the need to do something about it [the state of the world] — that I had thought about it, reflected on all these global problems and now I had the need to do something. I just sort of felt that it was not enough to reflect on it... They gave me the strength to go and try to do something... It was the start of building up commitment... It was just the beginning of a constant thing that will be there in my life... There was no choice in my mind... I really didn’t feel I had any choice after having that information.

For her, the commitment really took hold once she began to act. “I think that the real commitment started,” she said, “after or during that course when I started changing things in my life.”

Participants in this study typically described their commitment as a personal, moral imperative that was a central and abiding feature of their identity. Seared into their souls, the commitments are not likely to fade. Even in the face of no apparent progress or few returns for their efforts, they are more likely to question their strategy than their commitment.

**Passion for the cause.**

These were no mere intellectual commitments on the part of these people. Strong feelings accompanied them. Data from the interviews suggest that the
role of passion, of intense emotion, is central to the establishment and sustenance of commitment and a sense of personal responsibility.

One participants said, quite simply, "I get motivated about things because I get passionate about them." Another said, about her feelings following a university course, "So my mind was taking in all the information and my heart was sort of screaming, you know, like we have to do something about it. It’s so depressing! It’s so urgent! So I felt fear, anxiety, frustration, anger." She described how she eventually had to work out a balance, "keeping in mind the importance of fighting for future generations, and yet still be able to live in harmony and enjoy the process, and not to be angry towards everyone because they are not doing what you believe in."

For one woman, some of whose motivation dates back to the shooting death of her younger brother long ago, passion fuels her work to this day. She said,

I think that’s why I’m in gang work, and into a lot of cultural sensitivity pieces and the ending of racism, because a brief moment of anger can change families for generations. And I see that in my family – it affects so much.... I just know what happens when a young person dies.... People are like, “Oh, you’ll get used to it,” or “You’ll become de-sensitized,” and I just don’t. I mean, I’m so emotional at the gang program, and every time I see a mother’s face after she’s lost a kid – because it happens all the time – I’m really seeing my own mom.

For some, their commitments were not only passionately held, but they were parked close to their souls. The source of their commitment is spiritual. One man replied to a question on the source of his guiding inspiration by saying “I would say that it is a spiritual light.”

Describing her transformative learning experience as a “spiritual” one, a woman uses that experience still as a touchstone. “It does motivate me,” she
said, "it's very much in the base of me, you know what I mean?.... It's very important to me."

**Reinforcement and support.**

While clarity of vision, a personal, moral imperative, and a passion for the cause may be enough to sustain a commitment, participants in this study drew considerable sustenance from a number of on-going external supports. Once there is some activity along the line of a particular commitment, various forces often come or are brought into play to support it. Participants reported that they drew on-going support from other people, from circumstances, from readings, and from nature.

Perhaps kindred others provided the most reinforcement. One woman described her political involvement as "a social network" of friends who share political passions. "And knowing that I'm part of a bigger circle of people who are doing work gives me the sustaining power... We are in a circle of wonderful people who are trying to make change. We couldn't do it alone. It's bigger than any one of us."

Sometimes circumstances or the course of events seemed to bear out an original decision, and outcomes indicated the virtue of a commitment. One participant, after having taken the decision not to fight in World War II and finding himself instead working with a humanitarian service organization in Asia, found only confirmation of his commitment there:

I met some of the finest people, [and] I got opportunities that I would have waited a long time for in the regular course of medicine, and I suppose it fitted me for [my subsequent] work... in a way that I couldn't have found elsewhere... I think it [my conviction] increased.
A peace worker said he sees results that support him in his commitment and his work,

Well, you do see results. I mean most of the time you’re losing in terms of the issues, but you see results in terms of people getting involved, you see participation, and you also see results in the long run. I mean now people are talking about peace-building. Never did that 15 years ago. Not because of my work but because of a lot of different things that are happening, including my work. And they’re talking about an end to war, and an end to nuclear war…. This year in the last 6 months, major collaboration between governments and NGOs on the biggest system of weapons – nuclear weapons, to the smallest – land mines, and that’s encouraging.

One man spoke, with excitement in his eyes, of his experience as one of 1400 delegates at a UN conference for non-governmental organizations:

Meeting these people, magnificent people, it had a profound impact on me... I heard 1399 other people saying the same thing that we were saying in [our organization] … how are we going to move this world, this global village, to peace and cooperation? ... Now I can go into that in detail...

Written material provided important support for some. A book written by radical community organizer Saul Alinsky provided one participant with inspiration to take a community development job in Saskatchewan. For another, a simple subscription to a magazine provides important on-going support:

Every issue of that [The New Internationalist magazine] reaffirms the interconnectedness of all things. Like permaculture – it’s nice to know that people are working on these things, even if you don’t come into direct contact with them.

Another noted that, in addition to her social network of support, “Mother Earth News started coming out at that time. All of these things were a big influence.” A particular author, Joseph Chilton Pierce, provides her now with on-going guidance and support. He has helped her to realize
what a human being is here to do: to be conscious of nature - nature has created us - to be conscious of itself and to celebrate it. Period. Now, so life becomes very simple and straightforward then. Then you get to see all this other dance that we’re doing to create meaning - it gives you ulcers, you know?

A man who read widely drew much of his on-going information and support from books and periodicals. He said,

And the things that began to emerge from the various books we [he and his wife] read, magazines, lectures, we began to see that global survival depended on ... the environmental aspects, economic aspects, the social justice elements... and then finally democratic action.

Nature serves as a reinforcement for others. One person spoke of the “beauty of the earth” as an abiding inspiration. “Sunsets keep me going,” said another,

Every time I watch a sunset... I wish that future generations will be able to enjoy this amazing thing. So I guess that beauty in the world, in nature, is what keeps me going... the change of the seasons, seeing a flower grow, seeing the birds singing, as well as seeing birds dead on the streets of Mexico City, because of the pollution. It’s so powerful.

Reinforcement appeared to be an important factor in sustaining commitment. Participants reported gaining it from many sources. One man repeated two quotations he remembered from a quiet meditation during a training institute in non-violence a long time ago:

[Someone in the group] said “We get our nourishment from our spiritual roots. We must keep them clear.” And [someone else] came in a few minutes later and said, “Or like the deep sea plants, we gather our nourishment from all around us.” Which I loved, that’s the one I really remember... I get it from all around me. I just like the figure.
4. Integrating Through Acting Anew

Data from this study support the notion that action is necessary to confirm the transformation. Dudley notes that in order to complete the journey, a path is revealed that one must follow (1987, p. 268). Cranton too says that the more learners are doing rather than observing, the more likely they are to be influenced by the experience (1994, p. 182). Brookfield’s last phase is the integration of the new perspectives into one’s daily life (1987, pp. 13-27). In the current study, action served both to establish the new identity and commitment as part of the individual’s repertoire of desirable behaviours, and to reinforce them continually.

The follow-through.

Participants in this study were uniformly impatient to act, to do something that was consistent with the new commitment following their transformative experience. It was therefore important that there were opportunities for such activity. When opportunities were not available, or unclear, frustration was the result. Loder (1981, p. 34) writes that unless the transformation ends with a behavioural or symbolic activity of some kind, the process is not complete. It is the response to the stimulus, even if they are milliseconds apart.

Participants in this study did not much report on their periods of self-reflection. This may be because, as Schon (1983, p. 50, 56) suggests, they were engaging in reflection as they were personally involved in action; perhaps their knowing was in their action. They were eager, sometimes almost desperate, for action opportunities.
One woman returned from a transformative canoe trip, quit her job and went back to school with a cause on her mind – the cause of environmental protection. She described the scene:

I quit my job! I thought my boss was going to have a fit. He’d just promoted me!... My poor boss, I’ll never forget the look on his face. “You’ve just been away on holiday for two weeks and you’re quitting?” (laughs) I think I gave two weeks notice and I was gone. Just gone! You know, this was a career – I’d put in four years at university. I’d been at [workplace] for three or four years, set on my career path. I was pretty good at what I was doing. The boss had just promoted me, and I just walked in the door and said, “Now I’ve changed my mind, I’m leaving!” (laughs) And I went back to school.

One participant felt compelled by his conscience to act, to make a decision, which was in itself a transformative experience. For another, the transformative learning experience appeared as a call to action. She said, “I realized I had to do something and not just think about it.”

One man, following an inspirational conference at the UN, found himself challenged, and ready, to act. He said,

I’m in the airplane, sitting there, just coming out of New York... wondering, “What can we do?” She [Prime Minister of Barbados, a speaker at the conference] said one child, one woman, one man, can do something. We can. We’ve got to. And so I said, here I am, a man, sitting in this chair. What am I going to do? ... And suddenly, down through this plane, came a bolt of inspiration ... I said to myself, why couldn’t we get the youth of the world in some way thinking about global survival? Could I do something to focus on youth and use this concept? [his tested and proven model of youth leadership development] ... I went to the Canadian government, and thought if I could get Jean Chretien to ... say that Canada was going to sponsor a Youth in Action for Global Survival Conference on an annual basis for the next ten years...
Another man was uncomfortable being a westerner traveling in an Asian country, in view of all the damage that he was seeing the western culture wreaking upon the host culture. When he came back from the trip, he was feeling strong enough to act on his own initiative for the first time in his life. He said, “I was prepared ... to start becoming proactive. To actually do things that might change things – not that we hadn’t in the past, but I was always under the tutelage or organization of others.”

One woman described the challenge as initially overwhelming until she went into action. She said,

I started seeing the world through the eyes of how all of our actions are affecting the future.... So it was quite overwhelming.... Like, Gee, this is such a big task, you know? So I went through that first. And then I started getting very, very active in my life, making lots of changes – most of them environmentally related. I started consuming less, using things that have no package, and I joined a food co-op and I started recycling every single piece of paper. You name it, all the things I could think about I started doing then, and I started talking to people. And it was something present every single moment of my life.

One man, in his 70s, is still hungry for more action opportunities:

What I’m looking for ... is to express in a much more radical way the teachings of Jesus and Gandhi and Aung San Suu Kyi and a lot of other people. That’s the thing that’s missing in my life. I’m not living anywhere close to that level of sacrifice.

Feelings - the joys and the frustrations.

Once again, it is the presence of strong feelings in this process that is pronounced. Following their transformative learning experiences, participants had strong feelings about what they should, wanted to, and planned to do. They were sometimes delighted and sometimes frustrated in
their planning and in their activities, but for the most part, they were energized, charged up and ready to go. Following her year abroad, one young woman acknowledged,

I really changed. Like you know, I'm very opinionated. I'm very independent. I work my ass off, I work so hard. To me, work is part of my life. I can work ... for 12 hours and still feel I haven't done enough. I'm not scared of anything... I'll question everything... and I always push for young people to question everything they're taught ... looking at things analytically and critically.

And, by and large, they felt good about engaging in action. One man, after a frustrating time of feeling alone and isolated because of his convictions, said he was relieved to find something he could do in good conscience. He said, “I was really very happy to hear that there was an opportunity to do what I felt I could do and give myself wholeheartedly to.” One woman, after having made her decision to change careers and quitting her job, said of the time immediately afterwards, “I was excited. It was great. Didn’t feel guilty.... [and subsequently] I was very happy, very happy. Very content. Very calm.” Said a man of his transformative learning experiences, “They were the highlights of my life. They were the exciting parts. I hope there’s lots more. And the experiences in actually trying to do something have also been highlights.”

Mezirow says learners can experience difficulties when a commitment to reflective action logically should follow insight but is so threatening or demanding that the learner is immobilized (1990, p. 171). More than one participant found this to be true. Taking action was not always fun; there were fears and frustrations. One man said of his turmoil at the time, “It was difficult to act on what I was listening to [the inner voice] because all my
friends were gearing up to assist in the war effort." Another man returned from his travel to become immediately caught up in political issues. "How hard it is to do anything," he sighed. While he got "embroiled" in these issues, still he was not discouraged. He said,

Of course immediately real life gets in the way, you know? We got immediately embroiled in brand new political situations.... And that of course saps all of your energies, and it’s important. I suppose in one sense it’s working towards the same end, making the world a better place to live. Because certainly if these political things hadn’t had those elements, I wouldn’t have been interested in being involved.

Another participant spoke of her discouragement and anger. She said,

It was quite overwhelming, because, as you know, there so many things that are not really contributing to the well-being of future generations. So, in a way, I was feeling angry a lot of the time.... I got really, really upset, with lots of anger and frustration with trying to do things and realizing that in spite of all my very strong efforts there were a lot of terrible things going on. This is still something that I’ve struggled with, to find a balance, keeping in mind the importance of fighting for future generations, and yet still able to live in harmony and enjoy the process, and not to be angry with everyone because they are not doing what you believe in.

She found some relief in personal action. She said, "I started getting very, very active in my life."

Based on the experiences of these participants, transformation without the follow-through into action is incomplete. When no action opportunity is available, it is like the experience of a baseball pitcher whose arm is thwarted in the moment just after the wind-up before the pitch. A follow-through is necessary, otherwise some serious and painful damage can occur. The action is the logical extension, or completion, of the commitment.
Some typical activities.

The following is a list of some of the activities participants mentioned or described as activities prompted by their transformative learning experiences:

- joined a humanitarian service organization overseas
- attended teach-ins
- formed or joined a group or organization (e.g. a food co-op, a naturalists club, a peace group)
- began to re-cycle waste in earnest
- changed careers
- quit school
- went back to school
- studied visual art and became an artist
- began a career in youth work
- faced up to and resolved a long-standing interpersonal problem
- sought out opportunities to talk to groups, present slide shows, etc.
- wrote letters of advocacy
- commits 10% of income to causes consistent with mission
- started non-violence training institutes
- submitted a proposal to the Canadian government
- shops with a conscience (e.g. avoids excess packaging, supermarkets)
- cut back on personal consumption of material goods
- became a political activist
- organized advocacy around the Vietnam War
- contributed a brief to a national inquiry
- got into mediation work
• initiated global education activities with teenagers in a leadership development program
• set up cross-cultural exchanges
• organized a community garden
• learned to dance
• built a passive solar house
• went full-time into conservation and strategic land use planning as a career.

One woman went on a second, extended canoe trip (the year following her transformative 2-week trip) into a threatened natural area, and came back with a slide show. “I must have shown that slide show 30-40 times over the course of a year,” she said, “so I was actually involved in having a piece of nature protected in a very direct way.” Some decided to boycott huge “big-box” stores and environmentally offensive products, and one veteran said he turned down invitations to join the Legion. “I could never join the Legion,” he said, “because they were the macho people who wanted to keep looking in the rear view mirror…. I don’t believe in the goals of the Legion or what it will tend to promote or perpetuate.” Regularly he carries out a small symbolic action on the anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima, a ritual important to him and his family. In many cases, actions took the form of very local, everyday, individual initiatives, such as recycling paper and plastic bags, shopping carefully and with an active conscience, joining activist organizations, or protecting one acre at a time. One woman said of her new focus following some transformative travel,

Some of it [focus of action] was more localized … we got involved in a local naturalists’ club, and involved with a land trust…. We decided we didn’t want to be
in a rat-race anymore. [We said] "We will not live any closer than two hours from [big city], so we won't be tempted by those really nice jobs that come up from time to time." [We made that decision] after we came back.

Political action.

Political action is deserving of special mention here. Many of the participants found themselves either directly or indirectly engaged, following their transformative learning experiences, in political issues and political action. One woman said,

Swedish gave me the start to it, but then I took this commitment towards political action and community progress, and taking an active role in things that I would consider unjust. In the Chicano community you really see that, out of fear, people don't demonstrate or become proactive. People just sort of stay in their places. ... So now, I want to be as community-involved as I can... Everything that I do has some political motive behind it. I don't care about money, which is good and bad. But I just don't have enough time to worry about that. I know how to take care of myself, and I know how to make my pay cheque go a long way, but I'm really generous. I don't believe in that whole material part of life at all. I actually look down on it. I have a hard time when people say they care about the poor, and say they care about justice, and they're just consumers in such negative ways, not even thinking about anything else but satisfying that initial need. And politically, I'm trying to mobilize people all the time. You know I take voter registrations to the office. I talk to young people about voting.... I really push, even in uncomfortable spaces.... My whole life is very, very political. Almost everything I do, like even partying is political.

Everything I do.

One might claim that a political analysis would logically precede political action, but the two also happened simultaneously. Freire (1972) says that it is the interaction of reflection and social action which allows people to
become aware of, understand and act on their collective reality, and that neither one nor the other has sufficient transformative power by itself. At least sometimes, action and reflection occur simultaneously. One participant, attributed a profound change to collaborating in action with two political activists

who changed us deeply, and that’s when we became political people. From an ecological, political viewpoint, they had such an incredible impact on us that they changed a lot of how we thought and our lifestyle… I’ve never been so impressed with a couple in my life who carried through from thought to action. They introduced us to Small is Beautiful, and The Politics of Food, and we took part in the inquiries – we had an active part … a real marker year, politically… We became focused… My awareness politically, it’s very essential to my life, and that was the corner… I’m even more political now.

One woman, shortly after her sudden realization that she had to “do something,” found herself being swept into political causes by some friends. She agrees with Freire (1972) that a transformation in meaning, without parallel action to transform oppressive social structures, is only an intellectual game. Part of her transformative learning experience (over 18 months) was becoming engaged in activities in the company of others who felt as she did, and particularly some “smart people who had an analysis”:

We met some wonderful people in [city] and I went to my first peace march with Dr. Spock… and I was introduced to some wonderful people through some friends that we met … I began to go to teach-ins. There as a lot of activity in [city] at that time – lots of political, anti-Vietnam War activity, and I began to learn some of the connections… peace, militarism, racism and violence… All of these came together and it was a real university for me in a way to be exposed to all of these ideas… My learning was a process of being with these smart people who had an analysis. Before it was a gut reaction – oh, isn’t this terrible, I feel sick about this, isn’t that sad. But it
didn’t have a social, economic, political analysis like it did begin to develop when I got into peace stuff. Another got a start in socialist thinking in the air force during World War II. When asked what original experience charted the course for him, he acknowledged the role of “meeting people in the air force who had traveled in Russia, who had read about what was happening in Russia, socialism.” However, that was not the whole story of his transformation. “When I came back I got into that [the CCF, a left-wing political party] and discovered socialism as a way of thinking about life... Getting into student politics, that was important.”

While people became active in a variety of ways, with varying degrees of impact, perhaps the most striking feature of their action was that it had become personal. This inner-directed, inside-out action was of greatest consequence to the actor. Regardless of the consequences, good or bad, successful or not, it was important that the actor do this thing. One man said,

From the position I held I couldn’t see my way clear to do that [put on a military uniform] so I registered as a conscientious objector... it was following through on what I believed in. And while I didn’t know if I’d ever get back into medicine, and I was leaving behind the one who meant a great deal to me, I went with a light heart, knowing that I was... you know, the feeling that you’ve done what’s right.

For most participants some form of political action, addressing issues of social transformation together with others, was a logical companion or extension of their personal transformation, though not necessarily in a sequence.

Perhaps even more important than the actions themselves, these people were also inspiring and setting examples for others in the same way many of
them had been inspired – as one man said of his own mentors much earlier, “They were walking their talk, and that was really impressive to me.”

**Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter has reported on the data gained from the screening questionnaires and interviews, and has organized them in the framework proposed in Chapter 2, adding new sub-themes:

1. leaving the familiar and entering a state of disequilibrium
   - intensity of emotion
   - real experience

2. responses to the disequilibrium: making meaning
   - break-out or metamorphosis
   - unity and connectedness
   - confidence or empowerment

3. building commitment and personal responsibility
   - clarity of vision and direction
   - integration of a personal and moral imperative
   - passion for the cause
   - reinforcement and support

4. integrating through acting anew
   - the follow-through
   - feelings - the joys and the frustrations
   - some typical activities
   - political action.
In the light of these findings, I would like to propose another way of looking at the data. In the next chapter I will build on a metaphor from nature – a watershed.
CHAPTER 6

Watershed

Introduction

This chapter presents an alternative way of viewing the data collected in this study, building on the metaphor of a watershed.

Watershed as a Metaphor

A watershed is a geographical term used to describe the divide between waters flowing to different drainage basins. It is the place, usually a line, where waters divide and flow in different directions. It is also commonly used to refer to the catchment area where these waters gather, and from which all surface waters flow to a common point – a river or lake, and eventually, the sea.

Metaphorically, to arrive at a watershed is to come to a turning point, a cross-roads, a moment of truth, a place of personal change. Participants in this study referred to their transformative learning experiences in ways that often suggested a watershed. There was an initial triggering experience which caused an inclination – maybe only slight at the beginning – and headed them in a particular direction. It was sometimes a fragile direction at first, with frequent detours, but it was one that would trigger a cumulative sequence of subsequent influences over a lifetime, some of them deliberately chosen, some coming in from the side in passing, and some that were simply logical extensions of the previous ones. Prior inclination, events and the geography of the terrain determined the direction in which they went. In the
early stages, it was a tentative direction; they were uncertain, off-guard, slightly out of control, sometimes tempted to step back from it. They made a winding and complex trail, gathering momentum through a cumulative sequence of actions and reactions which themselves triggered other increments. As they moved further down the watershed, other streams going in the same direction joined in, adding reinforcement. Obstacles were encountered, but the momentum was strong enough to push over or around them and move persistently in the same direction. More momentum accumulated until eventually, for these people, their momentum and direction became the normal way of doing things. Their attitudes and behaviours became mainstream in their lives.

Fromm (1976) explains how the shift occurs in his examination of the change from an orientation of "having" to an orientation of "being":

This is not a question of new Man as different from the old as the sky is from the earth; it is a question of a change of direction. One step in the new direction will be followed by the next, and taken in the right direction, these steps mean everything. (p. 199)

In their study, Daloz and his associates (1996) found that the people they studied were formed little by little, step by step, to become the citizens they are now.

Their commitment was not skin deep, nor were the daily choices they made impulsive. They had grown that way over the years.... Moreover, commitment snowballs.... Each step builds on the prior one and prepares for the next. As one of the interviewees put it, "We are only asked to take one step that makes another step possible." (p. 210)

Are there clear and distinct stages in transformation? Not for the majority of participants in this study. Typically, it was a seamless process. Any categories seem to be arbitrary and potentially misleading. Cranton writes
that there “may not be distinct processes but rather, simultaneous or interactive events...” (1994, p. 84) Nevertheless, I have chosen to describe five aspects of the watershed experience:

1. the climate and the lay of the land,
2. setting a direction,
3. gaining momentum,
4. reaching mainstream, and
5. renewal.

To follow this metaphor, it may be helpful for the reader to imagine a tiny piece of land – a square metre or less – with a ridge through it that descends to small valleys on either side leading off in different directions.

1. The Climate and the Lay of the Land

Weather reporters call it a “disturbance” or “weather system.” Ordinary people usually call it rain. Whatever it is called, water falls on our square metre of land, and begins a journey. The slope of the land, the wind, the obstacles and barriers on the ground – all conspire to send the water in a particular direction, leading to one side of the ridge or the other.

Rather than emerging from a low pressure area as storms often do, transformative learning experiences in this study often came from high pressure situations where the immediate antecedent was a situation of some stress, some discomfort, some readiness for change – even if only slight and barely recognizable at the time. The wider historical context, however, (“the lay of the land”) had long been established in the form of early influences which would impact on what was to emerge.
2. Setting a Direction

Rain water abruptly crashes onto land, halting its gentle fall. It finds its direction suddenly and radically changed. In no time it is racing across the ground. No new direction is immediately apparent. The trickle is initially disoriented, weak and fragile. It encounters sticks and stones – barriers causing its progress to be erratic, sometimes even threatening to stop it dead. The trickle is persistent, however, and winds around the obstacles, wending a circuitous route through new, uncharted terrain.

In the case of each participant in this study, a triggering event occurred which served to set the person off in an initial direction that led into new territory. Whether they involved geographical or spiritual travel, personal revelation, crisis or dilemma, or an intensive educational program, virtually all of the experiences involved some kind of travel into the unknown. Like a trickle begins to find its way down a slope, participants frequently reported feeling initially like strangers in a strange land, but without much time for hesitation or reflection. It is as if they were saying, “Wow! I’ve never been HERE before! And there’s no stopping now!”

The initial provocation may have been either external or internal. The triggering event may have been an event over which the participant had no warning or control, it may have been deliberately chosen, it may even have been something which welled up inside until it needed release, or it may have been some of each. However it occurred, it set a course, determined a direction from which it would initially be difficult, and eventually impossible, to turn back.
3. Gaining Momentum

The trickle falls over a sudden drop, building speed and momentum. It encounters other streams, coming from different sources but headed in the same direction. The trickles blend and become bigger streams, more stable and more direct. Together they are a force. Increasingly, they find their stream-bed is an established one which has carried water before and has cleared itself of many of the smaller obstacles.

Participants in this study found important reinforcement as they moved into the new territory invoked by their experience. For most, it came from other people they trust and who share their commitments. Support also came from circumstances, from readings, and from nature. All served to build passion for their cause, and pull the pieces of their commitment together into an increasingly strong, integrated, personal, moral imperative.

4. Reaching Mainstream

By the time the stream reaches the river, it has accumulated significant volume, its direction is firmly established, its force is strong and enduring, and its progress is steady.

Likewise, the people who came through the transformative learning experiences in this study eventually found themselves in a pattern of new behaviours and attitudes that has become habitual, perhaps even comfortable, and serves as a means of defining themselves. It has become a part of them. This pattern has become internalized, established, steady, focused, the normal flow of their lives. In some cases there is a feeling of belonging to a movement. There is little or no hesitation. Directions are clear. There is no choice about direction, and there is no turning back.
McGinnis (1975) notes the manner in which personal change sometimes develops cumulative momentum. He says that some of his participants “discovered that the process of personal changes in one area of their life generated the state of alert necessary to launch them into alterations in other areas of their life” (p. 120).

Daloz and associates (1996) write:

They are sustained by the very processes that have made them who they are. The people we interviewed have learned that they and all others are an integral part of the fundamental interdependence of life. Knowing this, when faced with a violation of what they believe to be true, they cannot not act. Their commitment derives from knowing that we are bound to one another and to the planet; it is as untenable to turn away from the world’s pain and unrealized potential as it is to abandon one’s child or sever one’s hand. As an acorn takes root, or as a field flourishes in the spring, they grew into their commitments bit by bit…. The ground of commitment is experienced, not as a struggle to do something that one would prefer not to, but rather a response to a call that one ignores at peril to one’s soul. In effect, to quit would mean to part company with reality. (pp. 196-7)

5. Renewal

What starts as an original, sudden, disorienting jolt eventually develops into a preferred way of living – simply “the way I am.” However, this new condition, “the way I am”, incurs new risks and begs new questions. Does it imply a new rigidity, a fixed state in which no further change is likely? Is there a risk that patterns of behaviour will become too comfortable and too habitual? Could the banks of the mainstream river become so high a barrier that no other routes are explored? Could the water-course become so narrow and fast that there is no room for any other influence, no new perspective possible? These risks cannot be denied.
Participants in this study however, while describing their commitment to a lifestyle, did not appear to be closed-minded about it. In fact, the reverse is closer to the truth. Their transformative experience seemed to open them up to rediscovery and renewal rather than to close them down to any new developments. These are not people who are likely to adopt blindly any particular commitment or course of action. First they measure it carefully against the ethics they have come to value, the passions they feel, and the persons they have become. As they move down the watershed, the nature and extent of their original transformative learning experience may even have made it all the more likely that they will encounter other, new adventures and challenges leading them – just as water evaporates, condenses and falls again to ground higher up on the watershed – to begin again with other triggering experiences and changes.

The changes reported in this study did not appear to be changes simply from one situation to another, but rather an opening out, an expansion, an emergence into a new level of awareness. The new commitment is not so much a closing in on a particular answer as an opening up to a new set of questions. These are people who are experiencing the world through a new and wider, in Fromm’s (1976) words, “frame of orientation” (p. 137). It is a frame which, far from inhibiting, rather invites subsequent shifts, just as several participants made the shift from an initial commitment to peace and justice to incorporate environmental concerns and organic gardening. It is a change from a narrow vision to a wide-angle and long-term vision. When participants said that their change was likely to be a lifetime commitment, they were simply reflecting the difficulty of returning to a limited worldview once they had seen the bigger picture. Simply put, “You can’t go home
again.” In this regard, the watershed metaphor falters inasmuch as it implies that, as the stream meets the river, it is inexorably bound to a single path by its steep banks and the unidirectional pressure of the water surrounding it. Only if the metaphor is expanded to allow for evaporation and re-condensation, and for the fanning out into various new rivulets as the river meets the delta, does it begin to describe the experience of participants in this study, and their openness to renewal.

The Constant and Defining Characteristic

Throughout the entire watershed process, there is one constant – vibrant, fluid, living, real, and enormously powerful.

It is water.

Following the analogy, water serves in this case as the metaphor for emotion, for feelings. Perhaps the clearest learning from this study is the degree to which emotions, and strong ones, accompanied transformation. (A corollary may be that unless strong emotions are present, transformation is not as likely to occur.)

Rogers (1994) referred to the many ways in which her participants exhibited a “stirring of the soul”. She noted how

the path to the soul was through the heart, through the emergence of a deep caring about humanity and the planet along with a sense of urgency to act. Factors contributing to the soul’s awakening included an awareness of global problems, intense emotional responses, and, for some, the breakdown of old perspectives which held that the world would, by chance or design, unfold in an even better matter. (p. 133)

McGinnis (1975) also comments on the importance of “emotional upheaval”, or what one of his participants called “explosive excitement”, in
the change process. He writes that those of his participants "who believed they had experienced rather dramatic personal shifts reported intense emotional upheaval during their process of change" and concluded that "the vast majority of self-perceived major personal changes will contain an important element of emotional upheaval" (p. 151-52).

While the feelings accompanying the transformative experiences in this study were not always immediately joyous and uplifting, positive emotions were more frequently reported than negative ones. Over time, like the build-up of running water behind a dam, the feelings that were generated were the principal force in establishing and reinforcing passion for the cause.

**Summary of the Chapter**

The metaphor of a watershed is used here as a theme around which to gather some of the salient themes that emerged from the data. The notion is supported by the analysis of Daloz and his associates (1996) who write,

> It would be misleading to convey the impression that an enlarging, constructive engagement with the other is typically a single event after which everything is dramatically different. For most, the encounters we have described are best understood as crystallized moments of memory in a larger pattern of engagement with otherness. Most typically, successive experiences over time create a way of being in the world [my italics] which is continually open to rediscovering that "we" and "they" share common bonds. (p. 71)

While Daloz and his associates discount the impact of a single, transformative event, their analysis supports the notion of a watershed as a descriptive metaphor for the transformation process. The experience of participants in the current study, however, highlights the significance of an initial, trigger event which was shown to set the process in motion.
CHAPTER 7

Implications of the study

Introduction

This study has examined the role of noteworthy or marker events and experiences that seemed to accompany a change in a person’s life priorities and activities. Daloz (1986) describes it as a change in our world that suddenly forces us to relate to it in a sharply different way, and though we may revert back once we are in safer waters, we have learned something enduring. In the current study, times that shaped and directed people’s lives were sometimes seen as specific, time-bounded events, and sometimes as processes that began earlier in life and extended well past the event, trailing even into the present.

There is no doubt that transformative events or experiences did occur in the lives of these people. Nor is there any doubt that the impact of these experiences was not in isolation from other life experiences. One may wonder whether it is therefore legitimate to focus attention on the role played by such relatively short-term and time-bounded experiences, and if it is not giving them an undue and disproportionate emphasis in the process of generating commitment. The only response to such a question is to look again at the data, and notice that participants in this study had no difficulty in pointing to one or more times in their lives to which they attribute their current passions and commitments. Are they misreading their lives? Were they pressured into construing their experience in this way by the focus of the research? We cannot know for certain. In the end, however, it is they who
identified and highlighted their experiences as transformative in shaping the direction of their lives. We are left to assume that those experiences figured prominently in directing the development of their commitment. The judgement of what is significant and life-changing is both personal and subjective, and varies considerably from person to person. On the face of it, it seems safe to say that transformative experiences had a significant role to play in the lives and personal changes of people interviewed, and therefore warranted the attention given them in this study.

A second point of note is that, while these experiences were deemed by the participants to have shaped their lives, they did so in ways that could not always have been predicted. By their very nature, they are surprising, and part of their effect seems to come from the fact that they startle us out of the normal flow of our lives. There are simply too many variables to try to predict outcomes, too many possible reconfigurations once the pieces have been shaken.

What clues, then, can we find in the lives of these persons committed to the welfare of the planet and of future generations, about the influences that made them the way they are? How can learners who seek such adventures, find them? How can adult educators best develop an appreciation for global integrity and future generations in learners facing the challenge of life in the twenty-first century? What are some implications of this study for future research? And what of the experience of the researcher?

**Reflections on the Nature of Personal Transformative Change**

One clue from the experience of participants in this study is to be found in the breaking out of previously limiting boundaries into a greater sense of
unity and connection with a wider reality. Daloz (1996) referred to this kind of experience as “a consciousness of connection.” (p. 215) He notes that the single, most important pattern he found in his interviews of people committed to the common good was “a constructive, enlarging engagement with the other.” (p. 63) He writes,

Always the storytellers would describe some event or experience of ‘otherness’ that jolted their idea of who they were and where they stood in the world, challenging their previously held assumptions about who was ‘one of us’ and who was not. This kind of constructive, enlarging experience with the other counters the tribal fear of the outsider and tills the ground in which a seed of commitment – not just to me and mine, but to a larger, more inclusive common good – can be explained. (p. 65)

Noted Canadian environmentalist David Suzuki (who agreed to participate in this study, but was prevented from being interviewed by scheduling difficulties) believes that the massive public transformation that is urgently necessary will only come when we change our attitudes, values and beliefs. In a newspaper article (1991), he reported,

A few scientists with impeccable professional credentials are beginning to use words like ‘spiritual’, ‘religious’, ‘love’ and ‘God’ – words once unthinkable in scientific discourse. They believe we must develop a new vision of our place in the natural world, a view that goes beyond merely treating nature carefully to ensure our own survival... The objectification of the animate and inanimate through science distances us from our surroundings. It creates an apparent separation between us and the rest of the world, thereby deluding us into believing we can do with it as we wish. Our reimmersion in, and reconnection with, the natural world changes the notion that we end at our skin, and inserts us as part of a greater whole. We may call it love that binds this web of life together. (p. 2)
These scientists, says Suzuki, “identify the spiritual dimension as the key place to begin the personal revolution that will trigger the needed transformation in our social and economic systems.”

Owen (1990), writing on learning as transformation, stated, “There will come a time ... when we are ready to explore and develop the new territory of Spirit.” He added,

There seems to be a lot of effort going into the improvement of our knowledge, skills and attitudes, and the associated education and training programs. But if it is actually true that knowledge and skills are always dependent upon context, and that context is ultimately determined by the level of consciousness (Spirit), then we must await the arrival of the new level and the new context. (p. 21)

Rogers (1994) noted how her participants took their personal change to a spiritual level in different ways. “Connecting with the soul took different forms”, she writes. “Four students spoke of doing some form of meditation in order to connect or reconnect with their ‘centre’, ‘core’ or the essence of their being. Others reported a need for more ‘spiritualism’ in their lives” (p. 137).

The current study supports this notion that the establishment of a personal, passionate, moral imperative goes much deeper than mere intellectual, rational realization. The commitment of these participants comes out of experiences which were accompanied by deep emotion. Based on some of their descriptions, it may indeed extend into the realm of the spirit.

A second clue from the current study is in the context of change, and the importance of support and reinforcement. Following the watershed analogy, it is critical to the stream’s continuation that, as it flows, it gathers strength and support from its own momentum and from other streams joining it from
the sides. Supports from family, friends, mentors, allies, books, magazines, as well as from confirming real-life experiences, were critical to sustaining the personal changes. At any point, without these supports, the trickle might have entered a pool, stopped, and stagnated.

**Implications for Learners**

It is evident, from both the literature and the data in this study, that transformative change is not like an acquired skill or bit of knowledge that is limited to one dimension; it is a fundamental “sea-change” that encompasses the whole person. Learners who are seeking a transformative experience may therefore want to head themselves into situations where their fundamental values, perspectives and assumptions will be challenged, and where strong and primal emotions are likely to be evoked. These might be experiences where the person comes face to face with, and is immersed in, entirely new, unsettling and unfamiliar circumstances such as a foreign culture, a disadvantaged group in one’s own society, or a natural environment being systematically destroyed. Daloz and his associates put it this way: “encounters which evoke empathetic recognition of a shared humanity and will-to-life foster a generous commitment, not simply to me and mine but to the common good upon which we all depend” (p. 215).

In this context of experiencing diversity and difference, it is important, again in Daloz’ words, to “develop and practise a consciousness of connection” across the lines that divide us from other people and the rest of the natural world. We can deliberately and wilfully seek out and probe into the complex connections across the gaps that stir our conscience – the gaps
between rich and poor, human and non-human, north and south, justice and injustice, peace and war, and present and future generations.

For learners to engage in this activity, it is clear that supports are important. A kindred network of peers and a trusted and capable mentor are factors which need to be built into their experience. This study and others suggest that those who enter into this realm by themselves are headed for discouragement and are less likely to sustain their commitment.

**Implications for Adult Educators**

While it is apparent that adult educators cannot prescribe transformative learning experiences or reduce them to a formula, we can speculate on some approaches, behaviours, and sensitivities which educators can make available to support the learning process. Normally, in their professional relationships with learners, adult educators do not have a long time to extend their influence into the lives of learners. Indeed, they likely have a window of opportunity that does not exceed the average duration of the transformative learning experiences reported by participants in this study. This suggests that the relatively short-term interventions available to educators, if they are to support or effect the kinds of desired changes described in this study, will need to be powerful ones, and that educators should be seeking ways in which they can make their interventions transformative. What, then, are some appropriate roles that educators can play in this regard?

**The Role of Change Agent**

Mezirow (1991), writing about perspective transformation, notes that it "is a mode of learning that neither learner nor educator is able to anticipate or
evoke upon demand” (p. 202). However, he also described the supportive “role of a provocateur, one who challenges, provokes and stimulates critical thinking.” MacKenzie (1991), writing about the development of worldview construction, believes that “a ‘right’ development can be facilitated through educational processes” (p. 139).

The educational role of change agent is noted by Selby (1997). In the belief that “effective change agency is about dissolving barriers,” Selby writes,

The change agent can ... help provide the most fertile context for a positive decision in favour of change by fostering a conducive environment, helping provide new information and facilitating ... processes that will help participants rethink their perspectives, values and priorities and respond creatively and positively to previously disregarded factors. (p. 7)

In this role of change agent, educators can create opportunities and programs where learners can immerse themselves in new, unsettling and unfamiliar settings such as a foreign culture. They should be deliberately trying to create trigger events, or in the words of Daloz (1986), “to open a gap between student and environment, a gap that creates tension in the student, calling out for closure” (p. 213).

One thing that seems evident from the current study is that it is only in rare situations that the educator is the prime mover of the transformative experience. Rather, the educator is more often relegated to the sidelines, coaching, encouraging and helping the learner to draw meaning from her/his experience. The educator may have identified or set up the experience in the first place, but s/he is not usually on the playing field. The role is one of
looking out for, and drawing attention to, experiences in the lives of the learners that hold the potential for transformative learning.

It is important to add that these experiences are not merely provocative, but are capable of evoking deep emotion, and come from direct, real-life experience. There is no doubt that an effective educator can nudge a learner towards the edge of the watershed.

When leading learners to this kind of experience, educators may be challenged on an apparent imposition of their own values. On this subject, Cranton (1994) writes, “People usually react initially to the concept of transformative learning with concerns over ethics. The process appears to be one in which the educator imposes values or assumptions in learners or tells learners that their assumptions are distorted” (p. 199). Mezirow (1991) has a persuasive response to this challenge:

There is no such thing as a value-free educational experience; to avoid the question of values is to opt for perpetuating the unexamined values of the status quo. Since most educators are committed to helping learners change and believe that such change should lead to making the world a better place, they cannot be expected to hide their own ways of seeing and interpreting. (p. 203)

Mezirow quotes Miles Horton as going even further: “Educators should work only with those with whom they can have a feeling of solidarity” (p. 204).

While adult educators disagree as to whether the goal of personal development should be subordinated to social goals (Mezirow, 1991, p. 208), it is not unreasonable to suggest, given the context of this study, that the welfare of the planet and of future generations is a necessary and fundamental pre-condition for positive personal learning and development.
The Role of Co-activist and Co-learner

Educators can have an additional impact by influencing learners, once a commitment has become conscious and is articulated, to take appropriate action on their beliefs. By offering frequent encouragement and direct support for personal initiatives, and by building networks of learner-activists, educators are contributing to the phase in the watershed experience described earlier as "gaining momentum." Perhaps the most effective way of doing this is for the educator to be an authentic activist and learner her/himself. Mezirow (1991) writes, “All adult educators have a responsibility to participate actively in public initiatives in support of political, economic and social change.” (p. 212) Whether individual change precedes social change, or social change accompanies individual change, is moot. Certainly, as Cranton notes, "change can take place in both directions" (1994, p. 81), and, as was evidenced in this study, both can occur together.

The Role of Leader

It can be argued that the common good, and therefore social change, should be fundamental to any and all education. Is it reasonable, or even ethical, in this day and age for educators to ignore or withdraw from social and global realities that are challenging the very survival of the planet? Must educators not declare an agenda of global survival and actively seek opportunities to support it? In the end, of course, learners (particularly in young adulthood when much transformative learning seems to take place) must and will choose for themselves what they learn. However, so too can educators choose what and how they will teach – what issues they will choose to bring out into the light and onto the agenda for open discussion.
Does the educator not often influence the learner's analytical frameworks? Educators seek the empowerment and well-being of the learner; their efforts are devoted to empowering learners and assisting them to provide for their own well-being. Critical educational theorists such as Freire write of freedom from oppression as the goal of learning (Cranton, 1994, p. 139). Surely threats to the well-being of the planet and of future generations are oppressive enough to warrant educators taking a proactive, leadership role — authentic, passionate, explicit and absolutely transparent — in this regard.

Some authors view changes in individual learners as the necessary prerequisites to social change. Mezirow (1990, p. 208) writes, “Significant learning, involving personal transformations, is a social process with significant implications for social action.” Cranton (1994) agrees:

Through personal change and development, the individual comes to see flawed, immature or distorted ways of thinking. As learners revise their perceptions and act on the revisions, these actions may influence interpersonal relationships, organizations or even societies. The educator has a role in supporting such actions. (p. 206)

However, few authors are prepared to define contemporary goals towards which educators can lead, in the current global context. Cranton (1994) describes Patricia Cunningham’s (1988) suggestion that “professional development of educators should include such subjects as peace education and global resources sharing. She also stresses that the training of adult educators should not focus only on technology but the purpose of that technology” (p. 215). Selby (1997), writing for a constituency of school teachers, unabashedly declares that his approach to change is

grounded upon the ecological principles of diversity, energy flows, dynamic interconnectedness, interdependence, non-locality and assertiveness/integration. Such an approach, it has been both explicitly and implicitly suggested, is essential if the
curricular, whole-school and school/community changes that environmental educators call for are to prove sustainable. (p. 9)

**Implications for Further Research**

There remain unanswered and unexplored questions. Perhaps the biggest question is the degree to which transformative learning experiences are significant in developing people with an active commitment to the welfare of the planet and of future generations. While this study has explored the impact of these experiences in the lives of fourteen people, one may still wonder whether there are other, more significant determinants or contributing factors. Do the learning experiences described here, by themselves, in fact transform? Or do they merely push to the surface commitments which were already present and were only lying dormant? As educators, we can only hope that our relatively short-term interventions can have a significant impact. Yet it may be that early and long-term influences lay the foundation, without which the benefits of succeeding experiences and opportunities are lost. Rogers (1994) also suggested that “there is ... a need to study the factors that precipitate or stimulate people to engage in this kind of learning” (p. 175).

Further research into the lives of people with the kind of commitments described in this study is needed to explore and discover other sources of their commitments. It is likely that there are many. Studies of different cultural groups may reveal some interesting ideas that are still foreign to Canadian learners and educators. Of course, such research, like the current study, may have to be based on the assumptions that (a) the participants are
conscious of the influences which shaped their commitments, and (b) that they can accurately identify and articulate them.

Additional research into educational and employment programs which provide young adults with life-changing opportunities such as cross-cultural work/learn experiences is also warranted. At a time when they are perhaps most open and ready for such transformative influences, it seems that most of them are being encouraged to stay in the classroom or take a low-end job – neither of which, if the experience of participants in this study is an indication, is likely to contribute to transformation in a direction of health for the planet and future generations.

**The Experience of the Researcher**

As a result of conducting this study, I have a consuming curiosity now about the kind of experiences I have examined. My ears perk up in conversations where transformative experiences are mentioned, and I find myself making pointed inquiries about their nature, antecedents and effects. I have been struck especially by the variety of possible interpretations – how a simple experience that sometimes seems quite uneventful in the reporting can have such an enormous impact on the subject who is in the middle of it. This has given me a new appreciation for, and awareness of, *perspective* – for the idea that two different people looking at the same incident might put two entirely different interpretive frameworks on it.

Of course, this makes me wonder about the interpretation that I have given to the data in this study. I realize that another person might look at the same data and place on them another analytical framework. Both of them might be well-grounded in the data, rigorously analysed, and carefully developed. And
still very different. I realize now more than before how important it is for me to be fully present in this study as a fundamental part of it, and declare my personal background, motives and perspective. I am very much a part of this study, from the conception of the original research question, through the review of relevant literature, the framing of the interview questions, the data collection, and of course the analysis.

Listening to the twenty-five stories of transformation has been an unusual privilege. There are times, both during the interviews and even sitting in front of a computer screen transcribing them later, when I have been deeply moved. I have met people for whom I have enormous respect, and who serve as inspirations for me in my daily life. As a result of hearing their stories, and the subsequent analysis, I find myself looking in my own life for transformative personal change opportunities, and ways in which I might contribute to the same kind and degree of change in the lives of others around me.

Finally, the words of one participant in the study remain with me as a guide to my own life and work. Replying to a question on the source of his inspiration and the foundation for his life-work, he described it as a "spiritual light". "One does what is one's duty to do and that's all that matters," he said. "We're not asked to be successful, we're just asked to be faithful to the light we have."
REFERENCE LIST


URL http://www.voyageur.ca/~lhunt/canceled.html

URL http://www.transform.org/transform/tlc/index.html

URL http://www.transform.org/tlc/rsintro.html


Appendix A

Flyer Soliciting Participants in the Study

DO YOU KNOW SOMEONE LIKE THIS?

I am conducting educational research with people whose everyday activities reflect a commitment to the welfare of the planet and of future generations.

I want to interview people...

- who, through their actions, show that they care deeply about the earth as a secure and hospitable home for present and future generations;

- who, through their actions, show that they care deeply about peaceful, harmonious and just relationships.

These are people who are not necessarily out to change the world, but rather are simply demonstrating in their day-to-day activities that it is possible to live differently in it.

Do you know someone like this? Please advise:
Gordon Ball, Rowanwood, R.R.#2 Oro Station, Ont. L0L 2E0 Telephone (call collect): (705) 835-2674
Fax: (705) 835-3630 e-mail: gball@oise.on.ca
Appendix B

Screening Questionnaire

To: ___________________________  1996

From: Gordon Ball

Re: My OISE research project

I will appreciate your taking a few minutes to answer some questions. As you know, I am gathering this information in connection with my research. Will you complete the following questionnaire and return it to me? Thanks.

1. Do you have a strong commitment to the welfare of the planet and of future generations - a commitment that pervades much of your life or influences many of your choices? ____ yes  ____ no

2. People come to this kind of commitment in different ways:
   (a) Some people have had one (or a few) significant - even indelible - personal experiences that they can identify as having shaped their global and future-oriented outlook. Examples of such experiences might include spending time in another culture, life events with deep emotional impact, intense spiritual experiences, relationships with inspirational individuals either close or distant, and intense experiences of a particular piece of music, art or writing.

   (b) Some people have taken a more gradual or evolutionary journey that is not marked by any particular or notable "transformative" learning
experiences. Rather, theirs has been a more seamless and growing awareness or consciousness. Their global and future-oriented outlook may have been established very early with their parents and then have developed steadily and progressively throughout their lives. They cannot recall any particular turning point or choice point that led to their commitment to the planet and future generations.

Which of these comes closer to describing your journey? ____ (a) ____ (b)

Please proceed only if you have answered "yes" to Question #1 and selected (a) in Question #2. If you have not chosen these options, you need not complete the balance of the questionnaire. However, I would appreciate your returning it to me in any case.

Are you currently engaged in, or do you support in a concrete way, any of the following:

3. an activity which protects significant natural features of the environment such as air, wetlands, fresh water or soil, against either local or global threats? (e.g. pollution, abuse, nuclear technology, global warming) ____ yes ____ no

4. an effort aimed at improving living conditions for people lacking the basic amenities of life, or at redressing the rich-poor imbalance? ____ yes ____ no
5. an effort to search for creative, non-violent, collaborative solutions to interpersonal, inter-group or international conflict? __ yes __ no

6. an effort aimed at building peaceful, just, harmonious relationships? __ yes __ no

7. an effort aimed at building democratic policies and collaborative structures and practices? __ yes __ no

8. Are you in the habit of making energy-efficient choices in your daily life? (e.g. turning out incandescent lights when you leave a room, heating with a renewable fuel, car-pooling or choosing public transportation when it is an option) __ yes __ no

9. Do you personally engage in waste reduction activities on a regular basis? (e.g. composting, sorting and recycling waste, buying less in the first place) __ yes __ no

10. Compared to the lifestyle of the average person within 10 kms. of where you live, would you describe your lifestyle as relatively simple and frugal with regard to the consumption of goods and services? __ yes __ no

11. Do you ever boycott products, based on your commitments to helping make the earth a secure and hospitable home for present and future generations of all species? __ yes __ no
12. Have you sustained these activities and commitments (the ones that you acknowledged in questions 3-11) over at least the past five years?
   ____ yes   ____ no

13. Do you spend at least 20 hours per week, in either or both of your work or leisure time, directly or indirectly reflecting these commitments?
   ____ yes   ____ no

14. Are most of your activities in your remaining hours at least not inconsistent with these commitments? ____ yes   ____ no

15. Do you find joy mainly in activities that are based on the qualities of being human as opposed to activities requiring high consumption of material goods or energy, or ones usually pursued for their high social status value? (For example, do you find your joy more in activities such as: learning, creativity, communication, movement, appreciation, spiritual and intellectual development, being close to nature or other people?) ____ yes   ____ no

16. As you reflect on your various activities in support of the welfare of the planet and future generations, do you see them as fundamentally and obviously connected or inter-related? ____ yes   ____ no

17. Is it easy for you to think of yourself as a small part of a vast, interconnected universe, more than as a distinct and self-contained individual? ____ yes   ____ no
18. Will you provide me with the following information about yourself?

- your age: ___ under 20    ___ 20-40    ___ 40-60    ___ over 60

- your annual, personal expenditures:

  ___ under $25,000    ___ $25,000 - $50,000    ___ over $50,000

Please return this questionnaire to:
Gordon Ball, Rowanwood, R.R.2 Oro Station, Ontario  L0L 2E0
Fax: (705) 835-3630   e-mail: gball@oise.on.ca
Appendix C

Letter of Invitation

, 1996

Dear:

As you know, I am a graduate student in the Department of Adult Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), which is the Graduate Department of Education at the University of Toronto. As part of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Education (Ed.D.), I am required to complete a research study. This letter is to invite your participation in this study.

The purpose of my study is to explore inspirational or transformative learning experiences that have shaped people whose everyday activities reflect a commitment to the welfare of the planet and of future generations. What, in the life experiences of these people, caused them to view the planet and its inhabitants as an inter-related, interdependent system, and to demonstrate this awareness not only in their spoken commitments but also through their personal priorities and actions, in their relationships with other people, other species, and the earth? What or who is it in their experience that has inspired them to take on, maintain and act on, a long-term "world"-view? I intend to interview a number of people who meet these criteria and ask them about the life experiences that led them to this commitment. I am hoping that you will agree to participate in this study.
Should you agree to participate, I will ask you to complete a questionnaire accompanying this letter. Depending upon your responses and the desired demographic balance of my participant sample, I may then ask to interview you, at a time and place convenient to you where we could meet face-to-face and in privacy. I will need to tape record the interviews in order to carry out my analysis later.

All data collected will be for the sole purpose of my research, and will not be used for any other purpose. Upon completion of the study, the questionnaires and tapes of the interviews will be destroyed. Data collected will remain confidential to me and my thesis supervisor, Dr. Allen Tough. In order to protect your anonymity, personal names will be replaced by pseudonyms, and any other potentially identifying information will be excluded from the text of the thesis and any other reports or articles based on it.

Since the extent of the interview will vary from person to person, it is difficult to predict how much time your participation in the study would take. In order for me to understand fully your experiences, I would expect that we would need one or two interviews lasting between an hour and an hour-and-a-half each. Any follow-up conversations to clarify or ask additional questions would be much shorter, and might take place over the telephone. Of course you would be entirely free to withdraw from the study at any time, for whatever reason.
Your participation in this study should not involve any cost to you. I am prepared to reimburse any costs you do incur such as travel, mailing or telephone.

My intention is to find out how a global orientation, and a sensitivity to the needs of future generations, is learned - at least by some people. By learning how you developed this commitment, we may discover how we, as educators, might foster its development in others. It may lead to some re-thinking of curricula, educational approaches, teaching methods, learning activities, as well as to further, more specific, research.

Your personal benefit from participating in the study may be to increase your own awareness and understanding of some experiences in your life that made you the person you are. When deciding whether or not to participate in the study, please consider that the interview may involve recalling and relating experiences both joyful and painful. If you like, I will be pleased to provide you with a summary of my research findings upon completion of the study.

I believe you have something important to contribute to this study, and I hope that you will agree to participate. If you do, I will ask that you read and sign the "Consent to Participate" section below and return this copy of the letter to me (another is enclosed) in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope, together with your completed questionnaire.

Sincerely,  
Gordon Ball (705) 835-2674
Consent to Participate

I understand the nature of the study as described in the accompanying letter from Gordon Ball. I agree to participate under the terms and conditions described in his letter. I understand that he and his thesis supervisor, Dr. Allen Tough, are the only ones who will have access to my questionnaire and interview data.

Signature .......................................................... Date .................................
Appendix D

Letter to Participants in Advance of the Interview

, 1996

Dear...

I'm looking forward to our interview, and thought that you might like to know a little about it in advance. I will be asking you to recall particular transformative learning experiences that contributed to your personal commitment, beyond the welfare of yourself, your family and friends, to the welfare of the planet and future generations. What do I mean by "transformative learning experiences"? Let me elaborate.

Perhaps there were some experiences in your life, either inspirational or disorienting, that suddenly caused you to alter your perspective, change or reframe your entire meaning structure, break outside of prior boundaries, or open a door that until that point had remained closed. These experiences have been variously described as surprises, shifts or leaps in consciousness or awareness, anomalies, disorienting dilemmas, or contradictions in consciousness. Upon reflection, you might consider such an experience as having marked a metamorphosis in your life, a real turning point when life events dramatically demanded or directed your attention and caused you to set out in a new direction. It may have led you to a sudden insight, or a perspective transformation - a new way of seeing and being in the world. There might even have been a feeling of crossing a watershed, from which there was no turning back.
Here are some examples of experiences which have been transformative for some people, and may trigger some memories for you. Of course, this list is far from exhaustive, so please don't be limited by it.

- travel, or other break with your culture,
- a physical or body-based experience,
- a personal relationship with someone, either close or far away in time / space,
- music, poetry, art, a book, a film,
- a community or group experience,
- a spiritual awareness,
- personal trauma, emotional difficulty, loss or estrangement,
- a work-related experience,
- meditation,
- time spent close to nature in rural areas,
- an educational activity,
- a "solo" experience, a period of personal reflection, open to an "internal voice,"
- a near-death experience,
- a sudden, unexpected change in one's circumstances or role,
- a separation from ordinary habitual routines, environments or patterns.

During the interview I will be asking you about any transformative learning experiences that led to your strong commitment to the welfare of the planet and of future generations. Perhaps you will give this some thought beforehand.
Appendix E

Interview Questions

1. What transformative learning experience(s) contributed to your change or transition from caring only a little, to caring passionately about and actively supporting a sustainable environment, peace, social justice, human rights, etc.? (refer interviewee to guide sheet)
   a) Was this (Were these) an original transformative experience, or was there another, earlier transformative experience that led to it?

2. Please describe this (these) experience(s), what led up to it (them), and what followed it (them).

   Before the experience:
   a) At what age/stage in your life did this (these) experience take place?
   b) What was (were) the event, experience, activity, or interaction that "triggered" this experience?
   c) Were you inspired by any particular people, groups, social movements? Describe.
   d) What was going on in your life around that time?
   e) How were you feeling then? How would you describe your frame of mind at that time?

   During the experience:
   a) Was this a conscious decision on your part to leap to a different consciousness, or was it more of a dramatic shift that "just happened" to you?
   b) Was this experience accompanied by any particular feelings or emotions? How would you describe your frame of mind at that time?
After the experience:

a) What were the short-term effects of the experience for you?

b) How did you feel after the experience? How would you describe your frame of mind at that time?

c) At what level did you feel the effects of the transformation? Head? Heart (spirit)? Gut? Hands and feet (activity)? All?

d) What were the longer term consequences of this experience for you?

e) At any point did you feel your direction was "set" for the long term? Was there any experience of a kind of "watershed," following which there was to be "no turning back"? At what point? Describe.

3. What sustains your commitment now?

a) Are there reference points from that (those) transformative learning experience, or are there other symbols, metaphors, stories, myths or items of faith (not necessarily religious), that sustain you and guide you in your actions for the planet and its people? What is their significance for you?