The Potential for Experiential Learning
In the Transformation of Young Adults

by

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
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ABSTRACT

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The educational system often undervalues experiential learning in all its forms, relegating it to a subordinate role with respect to the mandated “essential” curriculum. While there is a current increased appreciation for what experiential learning can offer in terms of teaching practical skills for functioning in society and the workplace, its deeper transformative effects on students may still go unrecognized, be misunderstood or minimized. More study is required on the perspectives of students regarding the transformative benefits of experiential learning and the challenges they face during its process and aftermath.

In this study I explore the experiences of fifteen Canadian high school students beginning in Mexico at the Cuernavaca Centre for Intercultural Dialogue on Development. Employing a qualitative inquiry mode, I describe and analyse student experiences as reporter and participant in order to discern what needs to be considered and in place for future effective experiential learning. The transformative process described in this study not only makes an argument for the inclusion of experiential learning at the core of every curriculum but extracts the qualities and understandings from this unique experience that speak to the enhancement of all educational endeavors.
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CHAPTER ONE

Rationale:
The Inspiration for My Work

A challenge that holds for us as educators today is to maintain the personal and social culture of education that, in turn, can improve not only academic learning but heal both individual and societal ills - what James Moffett (1994) calls a "curative education" (p. 56). Ventura (1992) likewise counsels that in order to build a new world we need to pass on "ideas, art, knowledge, skills, or just plain old fragile love, how we treat people, how we help people: that's something to be passed on". He continues his challenge by speaking to his son and the future generation: "If you wanted to volunteer for fascinating, dangerous, necessary work, this would be a great job to volunteer for - trying to be a wide-awake human...and keeping alive what you think is beautiful and important (pp. 236-237).

This compelling work - to hold on to hope, to faith and to love - is essential for global and societal well-being. Yet how do we enable students and ourselves to exercise these life affirming powers? This query has not only motivated my research, but has infused my life focus, leading me to continue inner growth while striving to make personal and global transformation the core of education and the heart of my own calling as a teacher. It has ultimately lead me to ask, How do students experience transformation?

Outline of Chapters

In this first chapter, I discuss my passion, motivation and rationale, as well as conclude with an overview of the rest of my work. In Chapter Two, the literature review, I elaborate upon the many and various strands and
Transformation as Learning

Transformation is the term I have chosen that best describes learning that precipitates deep and lasting change. Transformative learning permeates to the core of a person (not just effecting their knowledge quotient), is connected to larger contexts (the individual's relationship with others and the world), and has a long term impact and change on the individual (a purpose beyond the short term goal of passing a test or achieving a diploma). I define transformative learning, further elaborated in later chapters, as learning that empowers individuals to make necessary and positive change in their own lives and enables them for life-affirming action in the world. The key words "empower" and "enable" not only involve the recognition and envisioning.
of personal and collective need but include the capability of working toward their actualization. While the longest journey is often known to be the distance from the head to the heart, I would add that another significant and often insurmountable stretch is the journey from the heart to the body, where our desires become sufficiently embodied so that we can truly walk our talk. While consciousness is essential, it is not enough to bring about change. For this we need the energy and co-operation of the body and soul.

**Experiential Learning**

Experiential learning, commonly understood as "learning by doing", encompasses all of the various channels by which people learn - best approximating the integrated way that natural life-learning occurs. According to Kolb (1984), experiential learning involves concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. The formal classroom, as I knew it as a student, emphasized abstract conceptualization and reflective observation. These categories contained even further limitations as the learning was more aligned to a concept of absolute truth rather than to the process of student construction of knowledge. There was little room for disputation and the active engagement of students. Essentially education was about taking in and giving back.

Education today, while it has moved considerably forward in its appreciation and recognition of the value of concrete experience and active experimentation, as a system, still woefully undervalues learning that is less apparently controlled or that which occurs outside of the four walls of a classroom. This is partially due to fear of unruliness breaking out from a lack of proper regimentation or decorum, and a distrust of any experience that cannot be traditionally evaluated and easily translated into grades. Increased
recognition of the value of field trips, co-operative education, work experience, service learning and school-to-work transition programs acknowledges the value of experience and applied learning however these are still regarded as best suited for students who are considered “non-academic” and headed directly to the world of work. Arts education, another facet of learning that is largely experiential, continues to lose ground under current political agendas that focus education on job training. The arts once again become easily relegated to the position of frill instead of taking their proper place at the core of the curriculum (Pitman, 1998).

My interest in experiential learning comes from a belief that most learning occurs as a result of active participation within the world, with its ideas and people, instead of resulting from the passive ingestion of knowledge. Experience, being largely integrative and engaging, is effectual learning. Ensuing interest in and endorsement of experiential learning also stems from my observation and conversations with numerous students who are dissatisfied and frustrated with formal school learning and, in many cases, feel that what they learn most of all in school is how to “play” the system.

My inclinations and experience as a teacher have moved me repeatedly into the experiential learning realm, to teach drama where I can create the favourable environment for a student to enter the active “as if” realm, and more recently to teach co-operative education where the classroom is extended out into the world and students can immerse themselves in “real” work. I easily meld the two worlds - delivering co-op credits and using the skills of drama teaching for engaging the heart, mind, and body during in-class sessions. My most intense and encapsulated episode of experiential learning occurred on the ten day excursion to Cuernavaca, Mexico where all the remarkable facets of experiential learning converged to create a unique
educational event for teachers and students. It is this example of experiential learning that I am using for my study.

A Personal Rationale

Global crisis.

I inaugurated my doctoral studies with Edmund O’Sullivan’s (1995) course on transformative learning. His course made a far deeper impression on me than I had originally anticipated as I sensed I was coming home to my deepest issues and longings. It grounded me in a perspective of transformation that began with deep personal change but continued to extend its sphere of concern to respond to the distress of the planet. This dual focus infused my professional and personal work from that point onwards. As I fought my own denial to begin to delve into the certain darkness which revealed the precariousness of the planet and its inhabitants, I could no longer exclude these important realizations from my future teaching and studies. As implored by the poetry of Bruce Cockburn (1983), it was time to “kick at the darkness till it bleeds daylight”. It was time to further disengage myself from the comfort of hiding from certain realities and the denial that life in all its aspects was in jeopardy, and confront my responsibility as a part of the human community who initiated the crisis at the outset by subjugating the earth, mismanaging its resources, and disregarding the others with whom we share this earthly space.

Whether we as individuals work for transnational corporations that exploit land and people, or are simple consumers who are complicit through our buying power, we bear responsibility. As an educator, I have a particularly compelling role to play on the front lines of a public education system that wields considerable power simply because of the fact that school is
compulsory for all. As an educator, who is waking up, I need to be attentive to raising critical consciousness, disturbing complacency where necessary and empowering people to transform themselves from passive consumers to responsible citizenry and ultimately into loving human beings - lovers of this planet in order to save it - for its inhabitants, for all life forms and for the future.

**Student despair.**

As a teacher in a secondary school, I observe daily the glassy-eyed and unhappy natives of a typical classroom. Students often appear half asleep and are reluctant to participate in a formal class, let alone show much enthusiasm. Yet being well conditioned in performing the routines of school, students will regimentally copy almost anything a teacher projects from an overhead transparency. Daily I observe a reluctance in students that spans everything from lethargy to skipping classes to violent uprisings that all indicate students' strong dissatisfaction and unhappiness at school. These students maneuver, according to Shor (1992), through school by "playing dumb", "getting by", and engaging in a "conspiracy for the least" (p. 137, 142) with teachers who are much beleaguered. According to Shor, students, as a result of the endullment they experience in the system, enter into collusion with teachers where they tacitly agree not to cause trouble if their teachers reciprocate in not demanding too much.

Even many high achieving and successful students in the system lose their enthusiasm. Many excellent students become discouraged as they feel compelled to choose between academic success and popular approval within peer groups of intellectual sabateurs. Even the quest for academic excellence is further sullied by the pressure to conform to what seems to be, in some cases, arbitrary "teacher" versions of correct answers that amount to formulaic
hoop-jumping exercises in lieu of academic rigour. Non-conformity, in this case, is treated as insubordination and deserving of penalty. Achieving high marks may be a dubious honour since high achievers can feel compromised and trapped in earning the necessary academic currency to secure their choice of university and to remain competitive for the increasingly necessary scholarship.

Students experience disempowerment in the school experiences that claim so much of their energy, time, and focus yet render them powerless to change the process. Even if and when they encounter teachers who engage them as partners in learning, negotiate curriculum, listen and begin with their needs, this experience is still so rare and inconsistent that students, lacking in trust, often are incapable of taking active responsibility in the situation. The finest teaching attempts can also be undermined out of deep-rooted anger, mistrust, or confusion. Students participate in the phenomenon of classroom sabotage, somewhat inadvertently, to bring down the teacher, intellectual life, as well as themselves - in one fell swoop - in an unconscious response to long-standing systemic degradation.

As a teacher I find it increasingly difficult to teach "content and skills" to students when they are crying out so desperately, and often so angrily, with much greater needs. The conspicuous needs of contemporary youth issue from depleted self-esteem, feeling undervalued or not useful, and a scarcity of meaning, recognition, personal empowerment, and belonging. I have always found it remarkable how a generation, that has been brought up after the proliferation of child-rearing books that aimed to improve a child’s confidence, self-esteem and psychological health, is still so apparently in need of authentic self-esteem, and healthy self-love. The outward manifestations of bravado, cockiness, aggression, disrespect, and gang allegiance that frighten
so many, are stalwart masks to hide or deal with an inner vulnerability. In the attempt to pay serious attention to the deeper, more urgent needs of students I have hunted for educative experiences that reach to a deeper inner core and address both student and societal needs. Looking for and studying educational experiences that are transformative is my source of hope for the future of education and the future of humankind.

**Teacher concern.**

My involvement in teacher education allows me many opportunities to meet wonderfully inspiring teachers of tremendous goodwill who deserve ongoing encouragement, exposure to the best teaching strategies, personal nurturing and recognition for the important role they play generating hope in society. Yet I find an increasing number of dedicated teachers today that respond to their work in the school system as to life on the battlefield. They nod in profound recognition when stories are shared about the loss of political and public support for the work they do, the questioning of their commitment and diligence as teachers, and classroom accounts of disrespect, insurrection, and overall chaos. In my experience with teachers the stories of classroom problems are increasing in frequency and intensity.

The benefits of searching out positive educative experiences that move, transform and bring meaning to students extend beyond students to teachers and to society at large. In uncovering and analyzing the transformative potential in experiential learning and the constituents that make it so, it is my hope that light will be shed on pedagogical practice and teachers will be better empowered to facilitate effective change in their classrooms and make necessary changes to the overall nature of education. During the time of my inquiry, and the writing of my thesis, I have actively participated in a lengthy political protest, two teacher strikes, and with the last strike was legislated
back to work and obliged to make up for lost days. Clearly this is a discouraging and critical time in education when teachers are finding themselves in more than a double bind. While teachers are expected to be fully accountable for meeting society's demand for brighter, more marketable future workers, they receive dictates as to how this is to be done. They are impeded with larger work loads, more responsibilities, and impossible time lines for mastering steep learning curves with new curricula. They are further beset upon by the impositions of standardized testing, a growing market of sub-standard educational products, and the overall commercialization of education which includes everything from school bus advertising to corporate wheeling and dealing over computer technology, to the threat of invasion from the Youth News Network (YNN). Moffet (1994) criticizes the treatment of teachers:

This sort of double bind is indefensible even in the business world from which the cost-benefit concept of accountability issued. A company doesn't try to hold an executive accountable without giving him or her decision-making power commensurate with the outcomes expected! (p. 100)

All of this amounts to the systematic undervaluing and undermining of educational professionals.

In part, my passion to research education is to encourage other teachers to take up their educational birthright and also become researchers in their field, communicating strongly to society from the front lines about what really is effective in preparing students for life and for the world. In this way I hope that my study will inform teacher education, research, and educational practice as well as provide increased encouragement for "right" educational reform in a turbulent age.
Personal development.

Studying transformative learning experience is personally important to me because of my ongoing interest in fostering my own transformative journey. I hope to continue empowering my own life (with authentic empowerment and not power "over" others) and exercising my will to make positive changes that align my life to my soul. This means finding greater fulfillment and expression of self and organizing that into service for a better world. For me this involves an understanding of self that belongs and is connected to the larger world community and increasing my capability for responsibly loving and serving my students as a teacher.

Feelings of disempowerment have frequently accompanied me in my personal and professional spheres. I was brought up in the "children are to be seen and not heard" era of child rearing - both overprotected and strictly controlled. Yet I was unwittingly abandoned by my immigrant parents who, with their fixation on survival, were pre-occupied with working long and hard for the life they hoped for - one that would be secure and protected. Imbued with a good dose of this fear and caution, as a growing child, I was very tentative about my ability to know. Being reflective, filled with ideas, imaginings, opinions and fiercely striving for independence I battled (and still battle to this day), with the demons of self-doubt, inferiority, scarcity, and fear.

Unlike those who entered the teaching profession because school was a positive experience for them, I had not liked school. For me it was a place where I continued to feel small, weak, and insignificant, especially in grade school where I worked diligently yet with insufficient success and under great stress and confusion. I would question: Was I doing things correctly? What was school's real purpose?, and, above all, Why was this so painful? The formidable authority figures of my school life rallied both my fears and
compliance. Whenever I did not understand something, I feared asking for help. In fact I never ever asked for anything - not even once to go to the lavatory. I earned mediocre marks (at least in my parents' and my own estimation) that further attested to the overall mediocrity of my school experience.

In high school, for the most part, I maintained a semblance of being seen and not heard until I discovered the immeasurable happiness and fulfillment of the drama club and drama classroom. Here the persona and mask of character and role-playing provided the necessary protection and support for my expression and voice. Theatre was going to be my life and I proceeded in that direction until I married at a young age and was compelled now to redirect my energies from theatre into the demands of a challenging relationship. Hence my entry into the "stable" profession of teaching and the eventuality of family life which included the mothering of three children. My willing submersion into considerable life responsibilities continued to suppress some important personal goals. For example, my public voice was still restlessly awaiting expression. I anxiously embarked upon a Master's program then dared not speak in the public forum of my first class. Self censorship prevailed, as I would rather defer to others who I perceived were more articulate and profound. My struggle for speech began to dissipate with the powerful affirmations of David Booth (1989) who has continued to this day to support me in my much desired academic pursuit - itself a small yet rich part of my life journey. With David Booth, a trusted teacher-mentor who believes in me, I am further inspired and strengthened to create comparable experiences for others and become such a teacher that can assist in the growth of individuals.
It has been a long but worthwhile experience coming to better trust my own truth, speak my voice, and understand that knowledge itself is constructed and not infallibly doled out from teacher to student. While actualizing this process of knowing requires the support of a teacher, it also requires the full and courageous participation of the student. It is in this task that the democratization of education becomes important as the primary act for empowering students. It is this empowerment through democratization that I want to further develop, share, and encourage in educators and students by my work.

Aligned with my colleagues, I struggle within a system that presently is fixated upon homogenizing, mechanizing and standardizing education. I need to better enable myself to work from within education to reform it in the direction of empowering the variety, plurality, and diversity of the individuals that it serves. It is my hope that the work of my research and the subsequent urgency to write, proclaim, and practice the findings of the inquiry will empower me personally and professionally to become a better activist in the corners of the educational world where I will travel. I need to resist the tendency of becoming a complacent armchair philosopher while ensuring that I do not burn out in a frenzy of activity. The goal of my personal development, linked to this inquiry enterprise, is to have my activist energy find balance with proper nurturance and reflection in order to be sustained, authentic, and honest. It is my belief that activism flows best when it functions like a wave in movement - in a circular motion - moving outwards and then back inwards, returning home to nurture and be replenished before giving once again.
Finding and Researching Transformative Learning Experience

Highly motivated, I engaged in the task of searching out an occasion of experiential learning for students which had the potential of facilitating transformation in order that I could find out more about its nature, constituents, impact, and consequences on students. I was interested in hearing student perceptions of their experience. This would work to satisfy my quest for a successful school experience that fulfills both the student and my own criteria for transformative experience as outlined by my earlier definition.

An opportunity fell into my lap whereby students and teachers from my school had the opportunity to travel to Cuernavaca, Mexico to participate in a unique event we eventually came to call our "third world experience". Students would learn experientially, on location, about the Mexican situation which mirrors the plight of the majority of other world inhabitants who are sustainers or subsist at a marginal level. Sustainers and marginals, according to Durning (1991), number four billion of the world's population and are growing. Sustainers live lightly on the planet, consuming and destroying little, while marginals live at the edge of subsistence with inadequate diets and contaminated drinking water. Our students would visit such communities which included indigenous people and squatter settlements. Students would be able to engage in dialogue with "the poor" as well as with grass roots activists and visionaries at The Cuernavaca Centre for Intercultural Dialogue on Development (referred in subsequent pages as CCIDD, the Program or the Cuernavaca Experience), an organization aimed at raising consciousness through the practice of popular education techniques that have grown largely from the work of Paolo Friere (1968).
Intuition and simple logic informed me that this student encounter with the Mexican people (North meets South) would qualify well as experiential learning with a transformative potential. Even so, I did not presume transformation to be the outcome and wanted any such determination to come from the students. I worked to elicit information from the students of both a positive and negative nature with regards to the experience. Through interviews I questioned them on what they found to be the key events, stories, and recollections of their experience.

In summation, the following is the focus of my work:

1. I want to understand, within the context of the Cuernavaca Program, the richness and complexity of students' experience.
2. I want to understand any elements of student experience that influenced, encouraged, or hampered transformational learning.
3. I want to gain insights into the power of experiential learning.
4. Within the context of my inquiry and the processes associated with it, I want to uncover for myself new insights into the educative process and the context for schooling and learning, and clarify my philosophical understandings which underpin effective teaching and learning.

Student were more than generous with their responses as they not only clearly indicated how they valued the experience but, as I had hoped, offered challenges to certain aspects that were part of or associated with the experience of the Program. Most students felt and described profound and lasting change, yet not all. My search was greatly satisfied and my learning was substantial in surprising ways. I elaborate upon the findings, analysis, implications, and recommendations as they unfold in the following chapters.
CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review:
An Introduction To Various Perspectives

My definition of transformative learning - learning that empowers individuals to make necessary and positive change in their own lives and enables them for life-affirming action in the world - is inspired by many sources. As a philosophy of learning it follows and develops from two major strands of educational curriculum theory: personal relevance theory and social reconstructionism. These two strands, the former inclining inward to the individual and the latter thrusting outwards to remake society, derive and develop not only in fields of concern directly in the educational world but from influences that are educative in the much broader sense of this word: influences from social, political, spiritual and personal growth movements. I outline some of these perspectives that I believe strongly articulate the need for and nature of transformative learning. The exploration of particular clusters of literature and thought form the foundation of my thinking about transformation and deep learning - each separate cluster being an important part of the mosaic of my fuller picture of a transformative experience. These theories, philosophies, and practices help me in preparing to tell the story of my research efforts. They have become the many colourful windows through which I examine my findings. The uniqueness of each perspective on transformation and worthwhile experience - each hue and angle - allows me to look at student learning experience in a special way, picking and pointing out specific nuances and qualities otherwise not highlighted without their aid.
In pulling together the various contributing strands I also shed light upon the particular educational orientation that underpins my research question and process. I first look at education for self-actualization and personal development that is accompanied by its counterpart in the personal growth and development movement outside of the educational mainstream. Under this umbrella I specifically bring forward Psychosynthesis and body-mind theorists and practitioners who have contributed strongly to my understanding of transformation at the spiritual and physical levels, respectively, and are essentially experiential in their thrust and practice. Subsequently I identify the relationship of transformation to moral and faith development and, at somewhat greater length, acknowledge the social and political nature of transformation as explicated by critical theorists and social reconstructionists.

Global education and holistic education are delineated as voices for both transformative experience and experiential learning, while feminism, particularly that inherent in the women's spirituality movement, meld the personal, political and spiritual in the realm of change. Since this is a study of a student experience designed to integrate personal issues with global concerns and theory to its application, the importance and nature of experiential learning is outlined in greater detail at the end of this chapter. My belief is that experiential learning pulls together various ideological strands in the best of ways. It is important to point out at this time that the separation of these various strands is rather false and arbitrary as the clusters overlap considerably in what they say about transformation and then converge in practice in the experiential learning situation. Temporary lines of distinction are drawn here in order to see more clearly the unique contribution each of these representative influences has in my work.
My study does not begin nor end with an exploration of existing theories. As my work stems from a pressing need for transformative experience in education which I observe in students, tangibly feel myself, and extrapolate from the articulation of researchers, intellectuals and visionaries featured in this chapter, my research examines the experience of students involved in a contextual experience that has a transformative thrust. The review of literature in this area does not sufficiently reveal how Canadian high school students behave in and learn from experiences designed to encourage transformation or how students understand, perceive and struggle with their transformative journeys. The expectation of my research endeavour is that its findings will add to the discussion on transformation as it applies to the young adult experience. The questions that arise include: How does transformation happen? What is its nature and constituents? and, What are the challenges and obstacles that ensue?

The purpose of my inquiry is that it increases the knowledge about the transformative process in the context of experiential learning at CCIDD, and provides an anatomy of a transformational experience in the lives of young adults. The various perspectives outlined in this chapter not only help me better define, understand, and recognize transformative learning but help me determine if and how student experiences substantiate and clarify existing thinking. The language and lenses provided by these theories and perspectives assist me in examining student experience. My hope is that analysis of the findings that follow from my research will be useful in helping educators with strategies, perspectives, and attitudes to support further transformative learning experiences for students.
Education for Self-actualization and Personal Development

Dewey's (1916, 1938) progressivism was the first modern educational theory to recognize the shortcomings of an educational system solely aimed at transmitting as a canon of knowledge. As outlined by Eisner (1992), progressive ideology included affective experience in the process of learning while recognizing the need for education to address social reform.

No longer was it appropriate to regard the child as a passive receptacle to be filled with curriculum content. No longer could mind and emotion be regarded as independent.... The child acted on the environment, not simply digested it, and in the process that environment was personally transformed. (p. 311)

Dewey (1938) understood the "intimate and necessary relation between the processes of actual experience and education" (p. 20). Experience, being so closely linked to the child, served as a vehicle for developing intelligence as well as providing the means for personal actualization and fulfillment.

Education that is not solely transmissive makes way for the elimination, not mere remediation, of the chasm between knower and known, and empowers the learner for the construction of knowledge. Humanistic orientations (McNeil, 1977; Neill, 1960; Eisner & Vallance, 1974) further uphold the notion that curriculum make space for personally satisfying experiences and liberatory self-actualization, endorsing schooling as a means for personal fulfillment, growth and development which honours the personal integrity of the individual. Reconceptualists, such as Pinar (1975), note that "what is missing from American Schools...is a deep respect for personal purpose, lived experience, the life of the imagination and those forms of understanding that resist dissection and measurement" (Eisner, 1992, p. 316). Cognitive pluralists (Eisner, 1982; Langer, 1976; Gardner, 1983) advance a pluralistic conception of knowledge and intelligence recognizing
that the creation and manipulation of symbols embodies the human quest for meaning. Gardner (1993) explodes the concept of intelligence to include multiplicitous ways of knowing and urges schools to go beyond their traditional biases for linguistic and mathematical learning to include interpersonal, intrapersonal as well as the many other intelligences so to more fully "mobilize the spectrum of human abilities" (p. 12). Hunt (1987) transcends rationalism and reductionism by strongly advocating that in every educative experience we begin with ourselves. These views on education promote personal growth as a valid curricular objective that in turn serves as a pre-requisite for the creation of a healthy and democratic society.

Arts educators have also been strong advocates of exploration of the self since the intuitive process informs artistic meaning-making and the resulting expressiveness is embodied in the art form. Drama educators see the potency of drama in the connection made from the particular to the universal (Heathcote & Bolton, 1995; Johnson & O'Neill, 1984) - the inner realm to the outer reality. "An identification through role creation and a representation of this into action allows the complex transformation of the self to occur" (Carroll, 1996, p. 76). Drama education that is personal and experiential is grounded in all realms - emotional, spiritual, physical, as well as mental. It requires, validates, and thrives on basic ordinary life knowledge that students already have and bring to the classroom. There is an empowerment that comes in creating honestly within imaginary circumstances in that it is a potent rehearsal for life and a force for change (Boal, 1979, 1992). Drama relies upon and develops imagination, creativity, and intuition: qualities not sufficiently regarded as essential to our notions of conventional cognitive processing, yet essential to the development of the person. The student is
affirmed through "learning that firmly recognizes the child's own resources for learning as valid and useful tools for classroom use" (Neelands, 1984, p. 2).

These humanistic approaches in education have not only initiated an educational welcoming of the whole person but remind us that it is only with whole person integration that effective learning and subsequent global transformation can happen. Moffett (1994) recognizes that the crux of transformation lies in creating and developing strong and self assured individuals that alone can create a caring and just society. Moffet "argue[s] [that] personal development must be central, because all solutions to public problems, no matter how collective the action, depend on mature, enlightened individuals to call for and indeed insist on these solutions" (p. xv-xvi). Here the connection between personal need and global issues is clearly apparent, personal development being the natural starting point for change and the prerequisite human experience for spurring on action connected to any global healing.

Education that focuses on personal development and self-actualization is at the heart of transformative experience that reaches both inwardly and outwardly to planetary concerns. Its consideration is central for studying the experience of fifteen students in Mexico.

The Contribution of the Personal Growth Movement

Outside the mainstream of education, there is a vast amount of literature focused on self-betterment and transformation that is part of an immense personal growth movement. This body of knowledge influences much of the general populace, including students, and needs to be acknowledged as part of the social environment that supports personal development. This is an effect coming from outside of education and in some
cases in opposition to the school focus. (In the students' Catholic school context some of these influences may be regarded as benign or mainstream while others, particularly those smacking of “new ageism”, may be regarded with distrust.)

These influences for personal change - from practical self-help to new hybrid spirituality, has garnered strong interest as evidenced in the proliferation and popularity of books related to self-development and matters of the soul. For the most part, the popularity of personal growth literature is a good thing, however, it also uncovers a new breed of consumers - those out to buy the “quick fix”. These fundamentalist “new agers” seek out magic formulas to solve complex life problems, similar to their more traditional fundamentalist counterparts, favouring pre-fabricated solutions or religious dogma (aligned to absolute truth) over the task of personally grappling with life's mysteries. Fundamentalism, according to Lifton, is readily adopted “in order to overcome the sense of despair and individual futurelessness associated with fragmentation and nonfunctional proteanism” (1993, p. 202).

With the acknowledgment that consumerism also has tainted the pursuit of personal and soul development, nevertheless, the proliferation of personal development resources, responding to increased market interest, reveals a societal desire for change that is understood as needing to start with the individual. Much literature has inspired and grown out of the movements that presently encourage men and women toward greater self-discovery and actualization, calling them to integrate inner and outer realities.

The philosophy that drives much of the current personal growth focus also informs my definition of transformative learning (aspects of which are delineated in the next several pages) and is important to the analysis of my
data. The personal growth movement is vast and I will not attempt to examine all its aspects. However, in considering education that seeks to transform through empowering the individual, it is essential to acknowledge the significance of reclaiming intuition and inner wisdom that is represented by authors such as Vaughan (1979), Myss (1996), Feinstein and Krippner (1988) and Estes (1995). These, and other spokespersons within the personal growth movement, acknowledge the importance of knowing the interior landscape and the primacy of self-constructed knowledge, while encouraging access to that knowing and expression of the individual voices within for discerning one's life direction. Accepting the reality of being able to access inner knowledge endows the individual with new responsibility and empowerment for creating their own reality.

The development of personal empowerment frequently is better addressed and promulgated through popular culture than through institutionalized education. Many "failures" of institutional education go successfully forward in soul affirming life paths through self-study or use of community resources. Authentic power, energized from the core of the self, occurs when the self is both known and affirmed. This self-affirmation and resulting empowerment can actually pit students against the educational institutions that strive for homogeneity and conformity. These societal and cultural forces, creating dynamic interplays between individuals and institutions (and in some cases fierce opposition), need to be seen as additional influences on the contemporary student which in turn has bearing on their responses to educational experiences such as the one studied in this project.

Belief in one's ability to know underpins the constructivist paradigm where knowledge is understood as a "mapping of actions and conceptual
operations that had proven viable in the knowing subject's experience...arising from actions and the agent's reflection on them” (Von Glaserfield, 1996, p. 4). Fosnot elaborates by noting that constructivism is not behaviourist nor maturationist but "is a post-structuralist psychological theory (Doll, 1993) one that construes learning as an interpretive, recursive, building process by active learners interacting with the physical and social world” (Fosnot, 1996, p. 30) - the “constructive building process of meaning” (p. 27). These views correspond to a post-positivist understanding of knowing comprising of the naturalistic inseparability of knower and known set against the understanding that reality is multiple, constitutive of constructed beliefs, and not subject to prediction and control (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This is in stark contrast to positivist reality, still influential to current educational practice, that is conceived of as single, tangible, and fragmentable. The constructivist view of knowing, since it trusts the learners, is central to the process of becoming empowered.

New paradigmatic world views, exemplified in much of the literature on personal growth and development, make up for the belief system which began in the enlightenment with Cartesian mechanism, Newtonian science and Darwinian competition that have doggedly fixed us upon regarding cause-and-effect, objective, scientific, and technological understandings and solutions as those which are solely credible. A serious re-thinking of this process is happening in reaction to the positivistic stance that has eroded and disengaged human innate ability to trust personal construction of knowledge. Stories, personal narrative, oral traditions, knowledge of elders, mythology and intuition number among the casualties of positivism. Crusaders in both contemporary men's and women's movements, responding to the alienation of a post-modern world, call humans back from a world of reliance upon
specialists, machines, and technologies to reconnect to more human, intrinsic ways of knowing (consciousness, awareness, empathy and compassion) which begins with the self and moves to a relationship and connection to the whole. This essentially is a spirituality of natural interconnectedness that promotes life centred values which not only consolidate a sense of unity but bridges the mundane with the eternal. Moffett (1994) articulates on this focus in spirituality: “to perceive our oneness with everybody and everything and to act on this perception” (p. xvii). These visionary perspectives not only influence my understanding of human transformation but influence my research process that does not claim to make conclusive “proofs” but aim to disclose multiple truths through richly describing student experience.

Joseph Campbell (1972) has supported the power of human narrative through his work that reconnects contemporary humans to their mythology and stories, ones that have created culture and continue to serve as an access to archetypal energy. Campbell’s idea of “transformation is really of the whole of humanity and what it means to be a cultured and world-related human being” (O’Sullivan, 1995, p. 6). Thomas Moore (1992) also draws us back to our foundational mythology recognizing that

the great malady of the twentieth century, implicated in all of our troubles and affecting us individually and socially, is “loss of soul”, when soul is neglected, it doesn’t just go away, it appears symptomatically as obsession, addiction, violence and loss of meaning. (p. xi)

Moore calls us to connect with our cultural stories and thus nurture heart and soul by connecting story to personal experience. Alice Miller interprets that the reason for psychological pain is that we are powerless and “out of touch with our true selves”. Miller (1980) sees that this has been systematized as a denial of truth held in the dogma of society that “thou shalt not be
We are alerted to the tremendous need for self-nurturing and awareness by the critical human and global condition, what can be remedied according to Matthew Fox (1990) by the personal development of compassion, the world’s richest yet largely untapped energy resource. “Now that the world is a global village we need compassion more than ever - not for altruism’s sake, not for philosophy’s sake or theology’s sake, but for survival’s sake” (p. xi).

Much of the current focus on personal growth deals with personal distress and existential crisis where popular success formulas have failed to deliver happiness. Integration and healing is also in urgent demand because of the increasing awareness of the planetary crisis. The journey of healing starts with reconnecting to self, then moves outwards to mend relationships and strengthen community. Ultimately it results in the healing of the planet. This way of knowing and being claims mysticism for ordinary people, mysticism being a “capacity for resurrection: for aliveness, wakefulness, awareness and rebirth” (Fox, 1990, p. 34). Spiritual pioneer Caroline Myss (1996) similarly invokes an era of the laitization of the mystic whereby spirituality is developed not only by connecting to God as “other” but by connecting with the divine within. Characteristic of many writers in the area of personal development, Myss does not instruct as a guru, but empowers readers to become their own diagnosticians for healing their energy bodies. The divine is immanent, not merely transcendent, and the immanent and transcendent meld through “compassion...the breakthrough between God and humans. It is humans becoming divine and recovering and remembering their divine origins as ‘images and likenesses of God’” (Fox, 1990, p. 30).
Personal growth advocates call us to trust inner wisdom, reclaim intuition and voice inner truths. What should be a simple fluid movement from inner knowing to voicing is an arduous obstacle course for most since we have forgotten the way, as pointed out by Clarissa Pinkola Estes (1995). Estes guides, using the rich heritage of story, toward accessing the inner voice, the wildness within. She praises the gifts of a "wild" self:

When women [sic] reassert their relationship with the wildish nature, they are gifted with a permanent and internal watcher, a knower, a visionary, an oracle, an inspiratrice, an intuitive, a maker, a creator, an inventor, and a listener who guide, suggest, and urge vibrant life in the inner and outer worlds. When women are close to this nature, the fact of that relationship glows through them. This wild teacher, wild mother, wild mentor supports their inner and outer lives, no matter what. (p. 6)

The ultimate goal of pursuing inner knowing does not rest with personal fulfillment, but transforms the acts of our lives into the bliss of actualizing a life purpose. Individuals become vitally alive and are intrinsically rewarded when they follow unique inner urgings and live out the soul's mandate as unique and worthwhile beings in the universe. This challenges and properly elevates beyond the current educational preoccupation with job preparation which has a stranglehold on so many teenagers today. Students not only are caught up in the fear of global competitiveness, but many distrust their own ability to earn a livelihood or the high life for which their appetites have been prepared. Many students demonstrate, through word and action, the serious loss of meaning they experience and how they attempt to recover the loss or at least cope with it by going to "raves" or doing drugs where they can perhaps capture a sense of community or spirituality. Students are increasingly in a quandary over what is the voice of their heart, or, if they should hear it, should they heed it? They
are advised, rather, to make themselves competitive for the job market whereas the path of the heart of personal transformation demands nothing less than cutting through to one's passion and working towards the fulfillment of personal destiny.

Hillman (1996) likewise spells out the importance of seeking "what is lost in so many lives, and what must be recovered: a sense of personal calling, that there is a reason I am alive" (p. 4). Hillman urges us on the quest to find the "image, daimon, calling, angel, heart, acorn, soul, pattern, character" (p. 207) - all interchangeable terms calling us to see with the heart, read our lives "backwards" and grow our soul "down" into its earthly home. Again this calls for an inward remembering, even going back to childhood's earliest recollections of a calling.

The work of Coles (1990) demonstrates that this type of knowing is indeed inherent in children, as exemplified in a young Hopi girl's definition of spirit: "It is when you are being as much you as you can be" (p. 157). As natural spiritual seekers, children are on a path of growth to self-mastery. Often this path is disrupted in young adulthood, although the passion still seems to hover close by. Arriving at this knowing, being imbued with confidence, passion and connecting to the soul is a sign of transformative personal development. I await hints of this passion to emerge in the students in my study, a knowing that the adult world often dismisses and disengages from their concept of full potential. It is this knowing, beginning as a seed within, that is intrinsic to personal transformation and is key to enabling global change. I seek to understand how this manifests in the student participants.
Psychosynthesis: The Role of Consciousness

[Psychosynthesis:] a method of psychological development and Self-realization for those who refuse to remain the slaves of their own inner phantasms or of external influences, who refuse to submit passively to the play of psychological forces which is going on within them, and who are determined to become the master of their own lives...a method of integral education which tends not only to favor the development of the various abilities of the child or of the adolescent, but also helps him [sic] to discover and realize his true spiritual nature and to build under its guidance an harmonious, radiant and efficient personality. (Assagioli, 1965, p. 30)

Psychosynthesis (Weiser & Yeomans, 1984, 1985), a branch of transpersonal psychology developed by Roberto Assagioli (1965, 1974), is of particular relevance to my work. Assagioli’s understanding of transformation incorporates both an inward and outward focus. In Psychosynthesis the development of personal consciousness continues beyond the western psychotherapeutic practice of tending to the self primarily in the realm of personality. Psychosynthesis acknowledges a “Self” beyond personality, one that is unified with all beings and the cosmos. By recognizing this unity, the Self is drawn out - to actualization through presence, love and service.

Psychosynthesis practice responds to the soul-loss prevalent in our culture, which is experienced as disconnection from our true self, loss of community and separation from nature. Its belief is that humans universally experience a “soul wounding” (Firman & Gila, 1997)) whereby the fullness of who we are as individuals is not fully welcomed either by family and/or society. Thus defenses are set up in order to better survive, which are played out through a myriad of sub-personalities. While these sub-personalities, or many roles that we play, assist in our survival, they also prevent us from fully accessing our true selves since we erroneously yet naturally grow to
identify with roles and not with the soul that orchestrates their functioning. Lodged in protective reactivity, our scope becomes more limited as we are robbed of the truth of our fuller experience and deviate from our soul line. The process of Psychosynthesis exploration includes the elimination of these dualities, dis-identification from sub-personalities, inner integration, self-realization and the re-formation of personality around a more authentic core. The work of Molly Brown (1983) uses meditative, reflective practice to discover who is the self behind the sub-personalities, the larger self, or the one that is aware and has consciousness. This practice begins to discover and reveal the beauty of soul in the particularity of each individual. Re-establishing a relationship with our unifying centre (soul) allows us to more effectively engage our will and reclaim our ability to choose. The personality is more free to realign around a new and more authentic centre and the self becomes a containment for a unified centre.

While the realm of western psychology is focused almost entirely on personality understanding and re-structuring, Psychosynthesis, also called Spiritual Psychology, believes in the possibility for the personal self to connect to a higher Self, accessing a transcendent realm. Recognition of a super-conscious reality opens us to create ourselves anew, access qualities from the super conscious, and empower the will by acting “as if”. Identification then expands beyond the boundaries of personality to include a bigger reality. Belief in our innate wisdom and insight increases in the amount of presence we afford ourselves and expansion of consciousness leads to connection with a larger field of consciousness. When energies of the small self expand, they expand to the higher Self, the ecological self and the planetary self.

Tom Yeomans (1992) continually directs Psychosynthesis into these deeper outward dimensions, reminding us of the macro context of personal
work. He addresses our culture’s proclivity for “soiling the nest” - living beyond our planetary means and decimating non-human as well as human species. There is a level of unconsciousness to all this, mixed with immature and unbridled behaviour which typifies the denial and avoidance of truth, spiritual disconnection and voracious consumer cravings for entertainment, addictive substances, even over-work which is ironically highly esteemed. The remedy for these “ills” include inner work (reconnection to the soul) and social action (from a sense of belonging) that eventually contribute to the overall maturation of our species.

Psychosynthesis is important for my understanding of transformation not only because it focuses on understanding, developing and calling forth the individual, but it delves into the transpersonal realm to reach to “what we may be” (Ferrucci, 1990) and recontextualizes this development so that it contributes to the whole. While this transformation is individual, its context is community and its benefit becomes planetary. Even so, this growth, which involves a deeper personal and planetary soul connection, often results in the individual being at odds with his or her own culture. The personal benefits are vast, as are the community and global gains, but transformation akin to Spiritual Psychology for the most part opposes popular culture that still defends “me-first” individualism and the myths of competitive growth and progress.

Psychosynthesis practice makes more consciousness available to me as a researcher and provides me with a means for “getting out of my own way”. Arriving at a means for gaining better understanding of my own motivations and my identifications, as well as helping me in the important process of letting go my prior assumptions and preferred outcomes, allow for greater honesty to come forward in my work. Overall, Psychosynthesis is a road to
consciousness in the way it illuminates the necessity for inner transformation and in how it lessens the burden of the self in the research process.

The Body-mind Connection: Transformation at a Cellular Level

Personal development is most often understood as a mental, emotional or spiritual activity. When personal change is considered in the physical domain it is most often associated with a dieting, fitness or health program that is disconnected and completely disengaged from any other realm. There are many stereotypes about body builders, fitness fans and athletes that reflect a one-dimensionalism that betrays this partiality. The neglect of formal education to consolidate fully integrative physicality, or the physical realm in general, leads me to the inclusion of the body-mind interface, its theory and practice, to the sphere of personal healing, transformation and learning.

The implications for my research is that body-mind theory alerts me to observe what importance students may attribute to their physical needs and understand what is the nature and meaning of any need in this area. This is pertinent since the educational experience at CCIDD included a physical component that went beyond walking and talking to participation in work projects.

Body mind therapies originated with pioneers such as Reich (1949), Feldenkrais (1949), Lowen (1975), and Rolf (1977), and are further explored and developed by Dychwald (1977), Keleman (1985) and Gelb (1994). The underlying principles of somatic education understand that the body is an expression of the inner self. The body and mind mirror one another, even at the basic level of life history that shapes muscles, bones and tissues. Keleman summarizes that “life makes shapes. These shapes are part of an organizing
process that embodies emotions, thoughts, and experiences into a structure. This structure, in turn, orders the events of existence” (1985, p. xi). There is a mutuality of body and mind where one continuously affects the other. Ida Rolf considers that the relation of physical response to experience produces habit patterns which in turn establish emotional patterns to the extent that a person “lives, moves and has his [sic] being in an attitude” (in Dychwald, 1977, p. 12). Dychwald personally attests that

all sorts of imbalances, confusions, and rough edges [are] alive within my tissues as surely as they are alive within my soul, conflicts that have come to form my physical body as definitely and as distinctly as they have also served to mold my character and life. (p. 18)

Bioenergetics, as a therapeutic practice developed by Lowen, further uses this reality as a starting point for the healing process which involves listening to the body and reading and studying the body’s shape, movement and sensations.

The purpose of body-mind knowledge, as articulated by Dychwald, is to gain empowerment through greater body-self awareness and achieve understanding of one’s blocks as well as one’s strengths. This new avenue of insight into one’s make-up and potentiality becomes another frontier for personal development and transformation through body work which extends beyond physical fitness training. Understanding somatic structure makes way for the structuring of “verbal, psycho-emotional and physical activities and exercises [that] can be devised to unlock areas of tension and strengthen points of vitality” (1977, p. 10). This is a significant step towards personal integration and self-management where in

discovering and integrating these relationships, you allow yourself to bring greater harmony into your body-mind, thereby
diminishing the conflicts that live within you and increasing your overall health and psychological well-being. (p. 25)

The evolution of body-mind awareness and its integration to the process of learning is indispensable to the development of cosmic consciousness and intrinsic to transformation that extends beyond the personal self. Matthew Fox's (1991) creation spirituality is predicated upon the resacralization of all that is material. Writers in the women's spirituality movement, gathered by Plaskow and Christ (1989), challenge the traditional body/spirit split by questioning the notion of God as "pure spirit uncorrupted by a physical body" (p. 95). They suggest that "theology take a more immanental, or earth and body-centred, direction" (p. 95). Joanna Macy (1991) considers the body of the earth to be an extension of the body of our selves, calling us to discharge our fear of matter. "To restore our environment we need to heal our relationship with it, and that means healing the split in the psyche that cuts us off from the material world" (p. 77).

Scientific systems theory (Bateson, 1972, 1980) recognizes that "consciousness is endemic to the universe and immanent in everything" (in Macy, p. 82), and occupies the smallest cellular units of human bodies and all life forms. Belief in body-mind unity persuasively mobilizes action in giving a better sense of human overall connectedness and belonging to the universe. A sense of belonging or connection is intrinsically linked to acting responsibly, Steindl-Rast (1991) defines love itself as the act of "saying yes to belonging" (p. 57). Dychwald (1977) champions personal transformation, inclusive of change on the physical plane, as a necessary pre-requisite for transformation on the global context.

Self-reflection, self-improvement, and self-initiated change just might be the central channels through which change in human
awareness is beginning to occur... As I see it, the basic work has to be done at the starting point - on oneself. (pp. 262-263)

The implication for education, and for my research, stems from the fact that learning also happens in the body and is imprinted on a cellular level. Lessons learned are locked in cellular tissue.

All your thoughts, beliefs, fears, and dreams are dynamically connected within the structure and function of your psyche...your cells and your thoughts are more directly interconnected than you probably believe at present. (p. 25)

The impact of body-mind relatedness to my research has not to do with assuming a Freudian understanding of anatomy as destiny. Realizing the importance of body-mind integration to learning, simply yet profoundly, insists that the physicality be included in the spectrum of transformative learning since the development of personal potential, integration, maturity and responsibility is central and inseparable from body sense and wisdom. The body plays a key role in learning, modifying learning, or unlearning what is no longer purposeful, and only knowledge that reaches to a cellular level is poised and ready for action. The process of learning must willingly include the physical, as long-standing and thorough learning can not happen without the engagement of the body. Yet, for the most part, we neglect its inclusion in formal schooling except for physical education and the too scarce drama, dance and movement classes.

Students speak conspicuously with their bodies. They show their learning physically and demonstrate their lack of learning through restlessness, body postures, and acting out. As a researcher I found it wise to attune to body language as well as to verbal contributions. Students crave movement, action and activities. The Program at CCIDD included various
aspects of physicality: doing, playing, dancing, singing, acting, and working. As researcher I look to the effects of this aspect through the students' responses to determine if and how learning resonates in the body, grips the memory, and rouses the knowing that lies within.

**Moral and Faith Developmental Stages and Cultural Values**

It is not uncommon to understand transformative experience as connected to moral development. My work as a researcher also searches for evidence of this in the testimonies of the students. Moral and faith developmental theorists consider that the journey to personal empowerment and social responsibility demands behaviour that is motivated beyond avoidance of punishment and blind obeisance of authority. While conforming to the status quo and avoiding punishment out of fear characterize the earliest stages of moral development, what is demanded of a transformed self is that it transcends the preconventional (punishment/reward) and conventional (conformist) stages of moral development, as delineated by Kohlberg (1968) and Kohlberg and Gilligan (1971). Kohlberg's post-conventional stages more closely approximates personal transformation: the recognition of right from wrong as a matter of personal values and awareness of general rights (Stage Five), and adherence to the higher ethical principles of justice, reciprocity, equality and respect for the dignity of all (Stage Six). Greater autonomous agency as well as genuine concern for "other" are evidenced at these stages that do not manifest in prior stages. This "higher" level of moral development is organic to transformative experience, where "just" behaviour manifests to avoid internal self-condemnation (as opposed to external condemnation) and is judged according to its impact on community welfare.
Understanding Kohlberg's stages offers a gauge for marking the transformative progression that proceeds toward greater autonomy and social consciousness ostensibly apparent in orthodox ethical behaviour. However, as an exemplar of transformation, simple attachment of ethics to transformation is inadequate and can cloud the issue. Conventional ethics can incline toward reductionism, over simplicity, and may not take in complex personal, social and cultural contexts. While transformation has a resulting impact on ethical behaviour, it is not to be plainly equated with it. Fowler (1981) who has studied stages of faith development judges that, for his purposes as well, "Kohlberg's focus is exceedingly narrow. It really deals only with the operations of moral judgment, understood as cognitive operations. It avoids dealing with the structuring power of emotions or the affections" (1981, pp. 299-300). Fowler's consideration advocates a more complex treatment of "ethical" behaviour exhibited by students to be combined with Kohlberg's stages. An example of this complexity is evident in the multi-leveled interpretation of the ethics of student respect for authority.

Fowler's stages of faith merit attention because, in elucidating developmental stages, they alert me to the context of youth experience. Fowler provides insight to the quality of development most likely to occur in the teenage years, the age group of students specific to my study. Stage Four, individuative reflective faith, identifies a representative teenage pattern of figuratively "leaving home", distancing from previous assumed value systems, de-mythologizing and critically reflecting in order to enter into novice adulthood and taking on an adult burden of responsibility. While this is a natural course of development occurring in teenagers, it is not a certainty. According to Fowler, this progression is not common to all as most people do not pass through all the stages of faith but are most likely to remain fixed in
one particular stage during the course of most, if not all, of their lives. Stage Four individuation often makes another attempt to root itself in the individual during mid-life, but even then is not always successful. Fowler's stages provide a sense of what can be expected in teenage development and also gives a glimpse into faith development's highest potentials: conjunctive faith and its capability of embracing paradox, multiple truth and the interrelatedness of all things; and universalizing faith, the ideal incarnation of the activist filled with visionary zeal, hope, with his/her life "being spent for the transformation of present reality in the direction of a transcendent actuality" (1981, p. 200).

Fowler provides a fuller context in which to anticipate student experiences of transformation. My research responds to this notion by further attuning to the unique and specific context of Canadian youth that undeniably influences a student's capacity to become empowered and motivated for reaching beyond themselves. I am assisted in this understanding by the composite views presented by market researcher and Canadian social trends analyst, Michael Adams (1997). As Adams examines social trends he tracks the systematic changes that have been occurring in Canadian culture and their impact on the transformation of the nation's psyche. In studying Canadians, Adams organizes the various emergent "tribes" by plotting them on socio-cultural maps that employ the full range of Canadian perspectives: an east-west axis (indicating a continuum of orientations spanning from individual focus to societal concern), and a north-south axis, (indicating differences in world views from traditional to modern). Adams notes the current general trend: "Canadians have generally moved to a more individualistic, less social posture over the past fifteen
years, this intersection has moved somewhat to the right (toward the Individual pole) and slightly down (toward the Modern pole)” (1997, p. 49).

While Adams looks at Canadians in three differentiated age groupings, his eye on “Gen Xers” (the 15 - 39 year olds) is particularly pertinent to my work, providing insight into the general make-up and goals of the students whose experience I am studying. My daily experience with students already substantiates much of Adams’ findings - that Canadian students emerge from a context that is much influenced by consumerism. Adams’ five tribes discovered in this age grouping include: Aimless Dependents (twenty seven percent), Thrill Seeking Materialists (twenty five percent), Autonomous Post-Materialists (twenty percent), Social Hedonists (fifteen percent) and New Aquarians (thirteen percent).

To briefly summarize, all of Adams’ “Gen Xers” are greatly affected by materialism and consumerism and are either driven by its pursuit or function in reaction to it. This does not come as a surprise since this generation of youth has not only been raised on a steady diet of media advertising but has been solidly inculcated in the values of economic self-reliance (relatively easily acquired and preached by their baby boomer parents) which is hooked to the promise and reward of the good life that approaches mythic proportion.

The students in my study are positioned squarely in the midst of this mythology as all of them would be regarded, in the light of the aforementioned value system, as belonging to families that have achieved success. It is their status quo that is challenged in the Cuernavaca experience and my job as researcher is to examine the impact of this change upon them. For the most part the challenge to status quo is one that they understand and appreciate while they simultaneously remain caught in their own reality and
not fully examined assumptions. This can become a problem of personal crisis where the question arises, How much discomfort will people willingly bear in order to change? I understand more clearly the possibility of this dynamic emerging through the context and cultural illumination of Adams’ work.

Obvious in the names given to these tribes by Adams, Social Hedonists and Thrill Seeking Materialists continue to buy into the myth that life fulfillment comes from having, owning, and doing whatever money can buy. Aimless Dependents are also caught up in this myth, but their self-esteem has been so battered that they can no longer risk achieving this on their own. To actualize the best they can of this reality they move back into their parents’ homes where they can continue to live the lifestyle to which they have become accustomed. These three groups comprise sixty-seven percent of the population in this age category. New Aquarians and Autonomous Post Materialists are driven by reaction to what they have determined are the empty promises of materialism and alternatively seek experiences and personal fulfillment, respectively. However they are still products of consumerism now exercising their buying power on cultural rather than on material products. In general, with the exception of the Aimless Dependents (growing in number at an alarming rate according to Adams), the “Gen Xers” are a remarkably optimistic breed, showing bravado, having faith in their self-reliance and awaiting the promised gratification to come.

I am concerned with how accessing empowerment is both frustrating and evasive to students coming from this particular societal context. I see how students wrestle with accessing authentic empowerment when they both witness a world where power is misused by the few who hold disproportionate wealth, and they are still subjected to the persistent mythic
structure that supremely values material wealth and its excessive acquisition. How accessible is empowerment to one who is disabled by being treated as a commodity or, at best, a consumer? Adams' tribes exemplify the forces of materialism and flagrant consumption at work in young people. The consideration of systemic disempowerment, so ubiquitous and common that it is almost imperceptible, is important to my work. This, however, is the soil and nurturance from which my Canadian students come forth. No doubt, this has a significant impact on the process of transformation, on both a personal and social level, which will be discussed in the subsequent section on social reconstructionism.

Critical Theory and Social Reconstructionism

In most cases critical theory and social reconstructionism grow quite naturally with personal development models of curriculum. It is in the interest of my understanding of transformation and experiential learning to underscore their compatibility. Dewey's (1916, 1938) own educational model is dually rooted in the development of the person through experience and in responsible educational social reform. Eisner (1992) clarifies our understanding of critical theory and social reconstructionism. "Critical theory is an approach to the study of schools and society that has as its main function the revelation of the tacit values that underlie the enterprise" (p. 314). It follows from this that an unjust social order would and does reproduce itself through its schools, since educational systems are mandated to serve in the process of adaptation - assisting young people to fit and support the established society. Social reconstructionists follow from critical theory and see schooling, at its best, as the prime agency for social change, demanding of it relevancy and accountability for student and society's higher needs. Social
reconstructionism aims to develop "levels of critical consciousness so that there is awareness of society's ills and how to alleviate them... [in order to] ...build a new, healthier, and more just social order" (Eisner, 1992, p. 65). Society, according to reconstructionism, must go beyond its own maintenance and perpetuation of the status quo to rigorously respect and serve all its members' needs, particularly those whose voices are too weak to be heard. In the writings of educational revolutionaries, the practical and spiritual components blend in the fundamental personal and collective concern for life-purpose and in its movement for change that reaches out to all levels. This amounts to being a transformative process that is on a continuum from the personal to universal context. For instance, the recognition of the necessary link between personal and universal meaning leads to Freirian (1968) praxis: "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (p. 36). Gardner (1993) takes note of the unmistakable link between concern for personal needs and the welfare of all, similar to Moffatt's (1994) understanding as cited in the section on self-actualization:

If we can mobilize the spectrum of human abilities, not only will people feel better about themselves and more competent; it is even possible that they will also feel more engaged and better able to join the rest of the world community in working for the broader good. Perhaps if we can mobilize the full range of human intelligences and ally them to an ethical sense, we can help to increase the likelihood of our survival on this planet.... (p. 12)

Freire (1968) further reveals an intrinsic link between matters of the heart and soul to revolutionary action:

Communion in turn elicits co-operation, which brings leaders and people to the fusion described by Guevara. This fusion can exist only if revolutionary action is really human, empathetic, loving, communicative, and humble, in order to be liberating. (p. 171)
Critical and social reconstructionist theories critique society’s use of education to conform the populace to the dominant model. The overall thrust of a society and the direction of its educational arm has great bearing on whether or not the process of transformation is assisted on both personal and societal levels. Social reconstructionist’s radical perspective challenges adaptive education and calls into question every aspect of the institution from its curriculum to its pedagogy. In doing so, it imparts additional understanding of the input and subsequent hold the dominant society may have on students, which is applicable to my study of student response since the CCIDD experience presented the alternative view of those from the “underclasses”.

The dogmas of a dominant society, proselytized in schools, form part of what is for the most part an invisible yet influential part of the student’s culture. It may take physical distancing from the home and school environment, as in the excursion to Mexico, for students to finally begin to perceive this influence. Social reconstructionism provides a perspective that helps me see more clearly the possible influences of adaptive education upon student experience, be open and not defensive to student adherence or reactions to it, and be more capable of seeing the many layers or filters that students bring with them to an experience such as Cuernavaca. These filters are acquired through exposure to the traditional curriculum taught in schools that is based upon the transmission of a canon of accepted knowledge.

Traditional curriculum represents a firm commitment to a view of rationality that is ahistorical, consensus oriented and politically conservative. It supports a passive view of students and appears incapable of examining the ideological presuppositions that tie it to a narrow operational mode of reasoning. (Giroux, 1979, p. 102)
Educational experiences that inspire activism also empower students personally by engaging them in critical thought that may spur them on to personal change as well as cause them to initiate a more emancipatory social order. Again a circular mutuality is disclosed in the relationship between society forming individuals and individuals subsequently forming society. The fact that individual actions influence the collective, and vice versa, gives us reason to apply tremendous consciousness and care in attending to curriculum, pedagogy and student response. All these templates of understanding are helpful in the process of analyzing student stories about their experiences.

Currently the adaptive model of education continues to gain ground as schools are exhorted by business through government to make better, more adaptive (compliant) workers for the global marketplace. As previously stated, curriculum based on adaptation, for the most part, handicaps the individual and disempowers the collective - all but those already in the seat of power. Canadian students already receive considerable training and programming via the media on how to be faithful and regular consumers of products, dreams, and ideologies. With school-business partnerships and an overall increasing business agenda for education, commercialism is more threatening to schools while simultaneously being more acceptable to boards concerned with diminishing revenues. With this encroachment of commercialism, the distance between an overt and hidden curriculum (What is really being taught?) is dangerously narrowing.

The cautions voiced in critical theory alert me to carefully observe student experience and attend to what types of “impairment” they might be suffering as a result of rampant dehumanizing influences prevalent in society. Dehumanization, according to Freire, is “a distortion of the vocation
of becoming more fully human” (1968, p. 27). This abuse is perpetuated when schools and society still control what is regarded to be “exclusive” knowledge, maintain notions of singular truth, and measure achievement by the student’s ability to passively spew out retained material. Freire suggests that external oppressors can become internalized if there is an unconsciousness of the oppression and a personal appropriation of, or collusion with, oppressor values (the ultimate goal of adaptive education!). In this manner, members of society and certainly the most formative and malleable among us, the young people, can it begin to function with an oppressor within. “This is the tragic dilemma of the oppressed which their education must take into account.... It is only the oppressed who, by freeing themselves, can free their oppressors” (pp. 33, 42). In my observation of students and in studying their response to the experience in Cuernavaca, I am increasingly aware of how easily their free spirits are impinged upon, how easily they succumb to guilt (often false guilt) and how the restriction of free thinking of undemocratic pedagogy thwarts the transformative process.

When looking at student experience, and taking into account its various aspects, I need to not only look at curriculum as the vehicle for transformation but consider how pedagogy supports the autonomous development of the student. Social reconstructionism asserts that both curriculum and pedagogy have the capacity to uphold creativity, free thinking and cultural resistance.

Current corporate educational trends, imposed by government, that champion “common sense” and “back to the basics” as the rationale for standardized tests, a no-frills streamed curriculum, fewer electives, education as job training, and other “improvements” hinged upon financial cuts form another part of the socio-cultural context for the students of this study. In
contrast, the Cuernavaca experience was predicated on a different value system, however endorsed (up to a certain point) by the Catholic school system, to which the students belonged, which still had an adherence to the social justice mandate of the Catholic Church. The alternative CCIDD experience, planted amidst a conservative, fear induced political climate, was vulnerable to a prevailing, yet for the most part, unspoken societal bias that would raise cautions in the students concerning their experience. This is the same bias that considers arts education, democratic classrooms, free thinking and radical questioning as risks that dangerously tempt chaos and insubordination, leading to the creation of people who may be ungovernable.

In this climate of conservatism, not only curriculum but pedagogy becomes highly suspect. Democracy in education is often difficult to achieve as educators are questioned when they instigate authentic participatory learning and students are in a quandary about whether to think for themselves or throw back the canon of prescribed knowledge. The students, who participated at CCIDD with a uniquely more democratic pedagogy, were immersed in an event that counter balanced most of their customary school experiences. This pedagogy, designed for empowerment, could provoke consequences - both in student feeling and thinking as well as in outcomes. An brief examination of the underlying philosophy and practice of "empowering education" helps understand this force for transformation and the CCIDD pedagogy.

The philosophy and practice of several superlative educators come to serve as guideposts for the examination of how students experience learning that is specifically aimed at transformation. Freire inspires with his critical pedagogy and education for conscientization - "learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and to take action against the
Bell hooks (1994) and Ira Shor (1992) exemplify transformative pedagogy and uncover the practices that work for and against it. Hooks' engaged and transformative pedagogy and Shor's empowering education are all related concepts embracing "education as the practice of freedom" (hooks, 1994, p. 4). These practices were exemplified in the CCIDD Program and it was in fact at CCIDD where I first encountered the works of hooks and Shor. The CCIDD library was rich in resources on popular education practice and social justice issues.

Hooks "celebrate[s] a teaching that enables transgressions - a movement against and beyond boundaries" (p. 12) which encourages students to be active participants "in a spirit of intellectual openness that celebrates diversity, welcomes dissent and rejoices in collective dedication to truth" (p. 33). The experience of the student, always central, includes but expands beyond free intellectual discourse to include the whole self, including the body. This is contrary to current educational practice that "erase[s] the body to give ourselves more fully to the mind" (p. 192). Engaged pedagogy teaches to the whole person, not to disembodied spirits, and includes love and passion's proper place in the classroom. Hooks' enfolding of the erotic and ecstatic into learning allows for students to be welcomed, know themselves more fully and heal any body-mind split. "The classroom becomes a dynamic place where transformation in social relations are concretely actualized and the false dichotomy between the world outside and the inside world...disappears" (p. 195).

Hooks (1994) emphasizes the importance of transforming pedagogical practice, not merely curriculum, and sees change as the responsibility of teachers to move beyond the comfort zone of current pedagogical practice which is
authoritative, hierarchical in a coercive and often dominating way, and certainly one where the voice of the professor is the "privileged" transmitter of knowledge.... If professors are wounded, damaged individuals, people who are not self-actualized, then they will seek asylum in the academy rather than make the academy a place of challenge, dialectical interchange and growth. (pp. 85, 165)

While hooks addresses the academy in this last statement, her admonition is even more pressing for teachers of younger students who are even more sensitive, vulnerable and in the formative stages of their development.

Education as a liberatory practice involves more than the inclusion of a liberal curriculum. It focuses on the needs of the students and the teachers. For students, it encourages the exercising of free speech in an environment where many still feel fear and garner punishment (usually doled out in low grades) if they speak out and answer questions from perspectives that are not in full agreement with the teacher. Education as liberatory practice also looks to the care of the teacher. Hooks (1994) makes it clear that

the practice of a healer, therapist, teacher or any [other] helping professional should be directed toward his or herself first, because if the helper is unhappy, he or she cannot help many people. (p. 150)

Shor (1992) similarly adheres to a dual-focused transformative process and has substantially informed my understanding and definition of transformative learning with his concept of empowering education: "a critical democratic pedagogy for self and social change" (1992, p. 15). His student-centred democratic educational program champions individual growth as an active, co-operative and social process because, in his view, the self and society create each other.
Shor’s critical paradigm does an in-depth political analysis on the public persona of the North American student similar to the socio-cultural assessment of Adams, discussed earlier in this chapter. This modern student stance is one of seeming strength, bravado and impermeability. As products of a culture steeped in consumerism, media-lulled into passivity, and raised on the religion of self-reliant competitiveness and dreams of prosperity, the Canadian students of my study are imbedded in a context that cannot help but effect their ability to undergo transformation of the dimension that I describe. These students are comfortably suburban and, for the most part, want for nothing materially yet still experience a disempowerment on levels not often readily acknowledged. Shor (1992) describes this unique yet prevalent obstacle for students that is perpetuated by institutional education which aims to domesticate them for following and depending on authority.

They are not marginalized peasants from an underdeveloped nation; they are assertive aspiring individuals seeking buying power in a runaway consumer society whose government and elite dominate world affairs - and them. They express a self-assertion that is in tune with the power, affluence and aggression of the nation and economy they belong to. But despite their feistiness and their desire for the good life, they have absorbed a political disempowerment different from [Freire’s Brazilians]... This sink-or-swim individualism helps disempower them while keeping power and wealth in the hands of those few who already have it. Self-reliance...is an extreme form of individualism...an oppressive ideology that helps transfer blame for failure from the system to the individual. (p. 61)

Shor (1992) analyses that the act of classroom sabotage is itself a result of disempowerment and a resistance, albeit misguided, to oppressive domination. Student strategies of “playing dumb”, “getting by” (p. 139) and, covertly and oft times unconsciously, engaging in a “conspiracy for the least”
are symptoms of having internalized the oppressor which is "so well practiced that it can resist even empowering classrooms" (p. 143). Students, in kamikaze style, willingly allow themselves to drown in order to sink the ship of authority. Shor’s remedy is “empowering pedagogy”: teachers sharing power with students, beginning with student knowledge and experience, making room for dialogue instead of monologue, reflecting and acting. In this pedagogy a fundamental truth about transformation is commissioned: "knowledge is power only for those who can use it to change their condition" (p. 6).

At this point I refer further to the potency of the consumer mentality, perpetrated by business interests, that leads to the commodification of education and the further distortion of what it means to be a student. Vallance (1986) introduces a current and new conception of curriculum - the “personal success model” (p. 27) philosophy of learning. Curriculum in this case is seen as a means to an immediate and practical end, meaning jobs. How this plays out is described in detail in a recent issue of Harper's Magazine where Mark Edmundson (September, 1997) describes how students now “shop” for courses and professors in universities, which must satisfy the following criteria: affirm student thinking and values, entertain students, and assure student success. I see this in my own classroom by the way students respond to classroom visitors. They evaluate guests largely by how much they “liked” the visitor and by how much they felt “liked” in return, which has to do largely with the experience of “like-ness” - having a sense of comfort, affirmation, and agreement. While “liking” cannot be completely discounted, as it can set the stage for learning, it also can be the antithesis of a challenging learning situation. Moffet (1994) clearly asserts that “you learn most from people unlike yourself” (p. 200). But in this current buyer’s market for
education, teachers are pressured to be entertainers and engineers of educational spectacles. So education becomes instrumental in the worst kind of way as "edutainment". When teachers are successful "edutainers" they fall prey to the pitfalls of typical "star status", according to hooks (1994): needing above all to be loved and admired, blurring or entirely loosing proper professional boundaries, and "playing the role of the performer" (p. 161). These are all important considerations for examining the challenges students face on the road to personal empowerment.

The most typical discussion that I enter into with members of the public, when they discover I am a teacher, revolves around public dissatisfaction with the overall outcome of education - its "product" - in what they observe as insufficiently educated, mis-educated or un-educated students. They experience confusion over the essential relationship between society and the education system, not fully understanding the educational process as a "community cooperative" born from a "social contract" (Moffett, 1994, p. 93). Hence the public are confused about how to maintain a successful working relationship with educators. Many are convinced by the prolific current rhetoric that education should be providing a prescribed service in return for its apparent generous payment through tax dollars, delivering a recognizably valued commodity not unlike how business and industry produce in return for money rendered. It is erroneous in this case to compare people to things and education to business as this comparison misguides our educational practice, creates adversarial relationships, alienates and dissuades us from effectively engaging and supporting schools and their educators through creating mutually supportive community ties.

Moffett points out that the potentially dangerous association of education with industry and business is based historically on the production
and selling of products and the delivery of weapon systems, and has resulted in a particle approach to learning - standardization, mechanization and compartmentalization. For business with its profit agenda and education with its increasing need for funds, this prospect is also seductive and mesmerizing. Yet it eclipses and can destroy the more important focus of educational reform - directed at individualization, interaction and integration, the value of which is substantiated by research (Eisner, 1991) and is tacitly known by good teachers everywhere who are in touch with how children learn. Corporate manipulation and political self-serving results in the current untenable position for educators.

The public has schools in a double bind. On the one hand, it stays apart from them, complains about them, and expects them to do an important job for their children. On the other hand, the public runs schools themselves in important ways by electing state and local officials who set policy according to popular notions about education and political expediency.... The American public has wound up in the position of wanting to hold schools accountable while at the same time telling them how to do their job. This sort of double bind is indefensible even in the business world from which the cost-benefit concept of accountability issued. A company doesn’t try to hold an executive accountable without giving him or her decision making power commensurate with the outcomes expected! (Moffett, 1994, pp. 95, 100)

Ultimately this educational predicament is about control and power in an increasingly less “hidden” curriculum of exploitation. Giroux’s (1979) radical theory critiques “schools as instructional sites [being] powerful instruments for the reproduction of capitalist relations of production and the dominant legitimizing ideologies of ruling groups” (p. 191). This controlling model is supported by fear on a personal level, where sharing power with students is threatening for the teacher, and reinforced by fear at the societal level, where uncontrolled youth poses the threat of chaos, anarchy or change.
For those who live in fear, “an innocuous curriculum is perfect. Parents and teachers, who both have the problem of controlling the young, both want them as tractable and unarmed as possible” (Moffett, 1994, p. 99).

The socio-political philosophers and democratic educators discussed in this section provide important insight into the power and potential of education, the obstacles that are inherent in education, and the products of the current system and political climate: students with culturally induced, built-in disabilities and blind spots, and a society with increasingly less public concern for the welfare of all, particularly the growing disenfranchised and marginalized. This contextual information on the educational climate of the times finds the students in this study in the midst of the turmoil. They are not only subjected to the many “tugs of war” but are becoming increasingly aware of the various issues at stake due to rampant political change and the resulting teacher protests and strikes that have erupted during the years of this research study. Truly it is a turbulent, confusing and angry time for many and students are aware of at least part of what is involved. It is important that these realities be acknowledged and taken into consideration when looking at student experience of transformation.

Global Education

Global education expands the scope of transformation to focus on the livelihood and well being of the entire planet as well as that of its inhabitants - serving the human and “more-than-human world” (Abram, 1996, p. 24). The contribution of global educators is to inform and extend my own understanding of transformation to challenge its activistic strand to reach beyond androcentrism - that which is solely focused upon in traditional notions of good will and service. Abram defines humanity as inextricably
linked to and hinged upon the reality that “we are human only in contact, and conviviality, with what is not-human” (p. 22). Yet human history’s mythical structures, since the enlightenment, have been based upon Copernican dethronement of the earth, Cartesian mechanism, Newtonian atomism and Darwinian social survivalist theory - all of which have defended the domination and exploitation of the planet. These beliefs have been spiritualized in the “mantras” of modernism and industrial capitalism, according to O’Sullivan (1995): progress, growth, development and competition.

Living in accordance with these beliefs has rationalized the global degradations of ozone depletion, desertification, toxic waste, pollution and the endangering of species. In the attempt to rectify long-standing exploitation emanating from industrialization and rampant neo-liberalism, and in working to save our planet, global educators such as Berry (1988), Pike and Selby (1995), Swimme (1992), and O’Sullivan (1995) urge humans to relate to the world as the living organism that it is. This is not a wholly new concept but one that was apparently well regarded amongst much earlier civilizations (Gimbutas, 1991) and is still central to earth-valuing native cultures that regard humans as no more yet no less a vital part of the planetary organism. Humans are thus called upon to work responsibly with and not against the natural world.

There has been a considerable “greening” of education, as a result of the acknowledgment of the global crisis, that brings environmental concerns and ecological practices to the fore that are representative in the works of Pike and Selby (1988, 1989, 1999), Chasty et. al. (1991), Glaze (1991), and Randle (1989), among many others. Green education has birthed, or perhaps salvaged from earlier times (Gimbutas, 1991; Eisler, 1987), an earth-supporting mythic
structure which is crucial to “drive the action” (O’Sullivan, 1995), bring about a “resurgence of the real” (Spretnak, 1997) and re-vitalize our “dream of the earth” (Berry, 1988).

The philosophical reconnecting of humans with their earth mother has grown in tandem with and is strongly supported by the “new” science of particle physics and quantum theory (Bohm, 1951; Zukav, 1979). Swimme and Berry (1992) generate hope for the future by uniting earth-centred science and humanities in their work The Universe Story. Both green education and new physics share a belief in an intrinsic reciprocity that exists between human life and the natural world. Zohar (1991, 1994) takes the making of these connections further by positing a quantum mechanical theory of consciousness that she derives from the work of the quantum scientists (Bohr, 1958; Bohm, 1951; Prigogine, 1984). From Zohar’s perspective, human consciousness itself is grounded in the physical nature of being and humans, as a result, share in the intimate consciousness which infuses all matter. This not only further underscores our most intimate connection to nature, but through this understanding we can gain insight on how to actualize more fully our human capacities in finding meaning and purpose in what is truly a participatory universe.

The whole process of defining a new quantum self rests on arguing that quantum physical and more particularly a quantum mechanical model of consciousness, allows us to see ourselves, - our souls, if you like, as full partners in the processes of nature, both in matter and of matter. (Zohar, 1991 p. 27)

This is strikingly congruent with Sheldrake’s (1988) theory of morphogenetic fields, whereby the concept of an external designing of intelligence is replaced with an accessible and evolving creative organizing principle within life itself.
The implications for these ideas are far reaching, and with regard to my research, it gives me a template for interpreting student behaviour, attitudes and needs corresponding to several areas which were particularly important to them while in Cuernavaca and subsequently manifested in the interviews. These include the students' profound sense of and need for belonging, their connection to the physical world and their own physicality, and their sense of being of service to the global community. According to global educators, for humans to be fully actualized they must remain contextualized within the natural world, function in alignment with a natural rootedness and allow this to flow naturally into personal, spiritual, social, and political ways of being.

The perspectives of those with a strong global consciousness profoundly inspire and connect with my understanding of transformative education put forth earlier, expanding it to a fuller planetary dimension. Transformation, while starting in the self, in many ways begs a release from the captivity of that same self. It is important for me to be able to see the initial and often subtle movements in this direction in the development of my students. The driving force of a vision of this expanse naturally is rooted in the imaginative self and takes root in our mythic territories. As O'Sullivan (1995) reminds, humans need a “dream to drive the action”. This is the bridge between inner and outer life and the connecting thread between thought and action. The important notion of a visionary self as a seed of inspiration has caused me not only to follow the expressed thoughts and ideas of my students in the interviews but to follow their feelings and inquire about any images or symbols that may connect them to the CCIDD experience. Encouraging image, symbol or metaphor may bring forth information otherwise inaccessible.
Another component of transformation of global proportion involves the renewed sense of community that was so profoundly and repeatedly expressed by the students during and after the CCIDD Program. O'Sullivan (1995) and Berry (1995) speak of a transformative ecozoic vision that blends traditional wisdoms with emergent knowledge and draws from the ecological sciences, seeing the earth as a sacred community and web of life. This vision of reality fosters a relationship of equality, not hierarchy, among people and between earth and its people. A realization of this reciprocity is what it takes to move into an adult, responsible phase of human development for the sake of human and planetary survival, challenging humans to find new ways of being and an identity that surpasses the passivity of being isolated individuals or consumers. Students during the Cuernavaca excursion experienced a climax of emotion regarding their connection with one another and with people in Mexico whom they initially regarded as different and unfamiliar. This approaches global educator Greg Smith’s (1992) idea of a new visionary reality of human “being” that achieves true interdependence. Here he admonishes school and social systems that discourage these relationships in favour of self-reliance:

By preparing children to think of themselves as individuals who must sell their talents in a competitive job market if they are to succeed, schools erode social collectivism more than they support them.... Skills and dispositions must include the ability to co-operate and enter into alliances with others to solve common problems and to recognize the fundamental interdependence that people share with one another, only as children come to see that their well being depends on the well being of others will they begin to reclaim and reshape the patterns of mutual support that have sustained human communities throughout millenia. (p. 3)
To behave responsibly with the earth and make effective change in our social structures, we cannot neglect the imperative to reconnect and bond with one another and with the natural world. This bonding must of course begin in oneself and with oneself. Beginning with oneself is a truth commonly accepted and inherent in most religious thinking where love or righteous action is regarded as possible and effective only if it emanates from a wholesome love and respect of self. A sense of belonging, both to ourselves and to the earth as our home, is essential for behaving responsibly. Belonging is an emerging theme in the life experience of the students on the Cuernavaca trip which was evident at the outset in the very first days spent in Mexico. It is central to the student experience and intrinsically connected to any thinking about transformation.

What precedes collaboration, interdependency, co-operation, and a capacity for sharing talents and resources is the necessary connecting of inner and outer realms of existence. People-making is a critical dimension of global education. Pike and Selby (1988) consistently combine two strands of global education in their focus: world mindedness and child centredness. The ability to connect with self at a deep soul level is a microcosm of global wholeness: “The growth toward inner realization of any individual results in a modified global field” (Keys, in Selby & Pike, 1995, p. 19). The outward journey is always part of the inward journey and vice versa. “The two journeys are complementary and mutually illuminating” (Selby & Pike, 1995, p. 18). Global education with its dual focus on inner and outer development supports the multi-fold dimensionality of transformative learning inherent in my definition. Global education also rings the alarm bells which signify and alert us to the sense of urgency we are presently facing at the planetary dimension
and how human interconnecting with one another and with the planet is absolutely necessary for transformation to be worth anything at all.

**Feminism**

Feminist pedagogy (Finn & Miles, 1992; Gaskell & McLaren, 1991; Belenky et al., 1986) is intrinsically transformative - outward reaching in its aim to change society, while respecting the power of experience. This is summarized in the feminist understanding that the personal is political. Feminism thus informs my understanding of transformation and outlines the necessary course that transformation must follow. Feminist tenets such as egalitarianism, holism, transformation, life-centred values and dialectical politics (Miles, 1996) are congruent with social reconstructionism and are based upon rectifying the ills caused by patriarchy that have marginalized a full half of the human population, kept women’s issues at arm’s length, and minimized woman’s strength. Finn and Miles (1982) argue for an integrative feminism, the feminism that I draw upon for my inspiration, where

the holistic, collective, intuitive, co-operative, emotional, nurturing, democratic, integrated, internal, and natural are affirmed against the overvaluation of the competitive, analytical, rational, hierarchical, fragmented, external and artificial. (p. 13)


Feminism maintains a broader perspective on what we conventionally refer to as “life skills”, urging that the building and supporting of human relationships be central. Feminists confirm the value in women’s experience, that creates knowing pertaining to the full scope of life.
For many women, the “real” and valued lessons learned did not necessarily grow out of their academic work but in relationships with friends and teachers, life crisis, and community involvements. (Belenky et al, 1986, p. 4)

Feminists together critique the rampant neglect of relatedness in education, noting that we need to completely rethink what it means to be educated in terms of relationships and caring (Noddings, 1992, 1995).

Feminist assertions, acting on the principle that the personal is political, have advanced both political and social activism as well as personal growth as indicated in Steinem’s (1992) Revolution from Within. This is also exemplified in the women’s spirituality movement where feminism has merged with spirituality to liberate the patriarchal colonization of the soul. Through the focus on understanding and healing, central to women’s spirituality, it aims to bring about fuller consciousness, liberate us from constricting hierarchical and homogenizing mind sets, and anticipate transformation and the advent of new possibilities. My inclusion of feminism in this discourse is to demonstrate how the women’s spirituality movement has grown in tandem with integrative feminism and combines as an auspicious strength and support radically aimed at personal and global transformation. While the focus is on women, the life-centred values and egalitarianism of integrative feminism and the transformative, holistic and powerful collectivity of women’s spirituality benefits all of humanity.

While there are many voices within the women’s spirituality movement, they all speak in favour of empowerment: extrication from long-standing physical and emotional dependency upon androcentric social and mythic structures, and release from the dark shadows of constructed dualisms. These voices urge women into greater self-reference, self-
sufficiency, as well as community interdependency that is not self-negating. My research process - the embracing and valuing of student stories, recollections and personal assessments of experience, rests upon the authority (implicit and personal) that is central to women’s spirituality and feminism.

As well as feminism informing transformation and validating the experiential, feminist practice impacts upon my research process and style. Kirby and McKenna (1989) confirm the feminist research mandate that “there is power in being able to tell your story and hearing others tell theirs” (p. 170). The inclusion of participant narratives and my own story as researcher underpins my work with its intention to explore and construct rather than reach conclusions about knowing and thinking. True to the experience of Kirby and McKenna (1989), I found myself living in my research and learning about myself as I learned about the experience of others.

Knowing, which originates and develops from continuous connecting to the fullness of one’s life experience, is the most natural path to action that has the potential to be world transforming. The personal agency of authentic empowerment has the capacity to translate into political activism - a power that is central to integrative feminism and not satisfied with a nominal equality frame whereby women gain equal access to a flawed and unjust system in order to carry on “business as usual”. Values derived from deep experience are those which drive and motivate activism.

Feminist transformative process is satisfied only with the world being remade. It is comprised of a visionary stance, expressed by Ruether (1979), that extends “beyond our own liberation from oppression to the liberation of the oppressor as well” (p. 51). What consolidates women’s spirituality and feminist goals, and ostensibly defines their aims for transformation as well as my own, includes a valuing and incorporation of women’s (in my case, all
students') experience, knowing and values; empowerment based on community that is contrary to patriarchal models organizing around dualistic perspectives (the separation of body and soul) and hierarchical functioning; holism and affirmation of the connection of all of life (validation of woman/body and earth/body); and the focus on transformation and action to make planetary change.

Feminism and women's spirituality embrace experience and body knowledge in the learning process. Carol Christ (1989) calls for an "embodied thinking" where "we seek to speak a truth rooted in our experience, our time and place, our bodies" (p. 14). Audre Lorde (1989) decries the suppression of the erotic, not to be confused with its opposite - pornography, which emphasizes sensation without feeling. The erotic is an assertion of the lifeforce [of women]; of that creative energy empowered...the sensual - those physical, emotional and psychic expressions of what is deepest and strongest and richest within each of us, being shared: the passions of love, in its deepest meanings. (p. 210)

Feminism and women's spirituality strongly inform an understanding of transformative learning that is passionate and deeply connected to experience where the personal heart of inner work merges with political activism. Transformation is a feminist issue whose embryo finds nurturance in the validation of the personal narrative and inner, sensual urgings. It requires bridging the unnatural and unnecessary gap between "transformative ritual and political mobilization" (Spretnak, 1994, p. 397).

Holistic Education

Ostensibly, holistic education draws everything together for me - collecting and merging the essential ingredients that offer a relatively
thorough picture of transformation with regard to both its process and product. Holistic educator Jack Miller (1981, 1985, 1988, 1994) reveals its many facets which have developed my understanding and ability to recognize holistic education when I see it, as in the case of the Cuernavaca experience. Miller (1985) advocates the transformative thrust of holism, as the preferred aim of education, over the transmissive and transactive approaches. "In this [transformation] position the wholeness of the child is recognized. Programs within this position stress connections between the inner life of the student and the surrounding environment" (p. 129).

Input for present day holistic education has come from many originating contributors, among them George Brown (1971). His confluent education of the sixties facilitated personal and social integration by joining humanistic social awareness with transpersonal techniques. In going further back historically, holistic education roots itself in Rousseau's appreciation for the gentle unfolding of the inner nature as well as the social change orientations of Kozol (1967, 1982, 1978) and Apple (1990). Philosophically it issues from Huxley's (1970) perennial philosophy captured in the aphorism "all is one". It understands that the interconnectedness of reality and the fundamental unity of the universe is mirrored in the intimate connection between the individual's inner/higher self and this unity, and accessed by the cultivation of intuition through meditation and contemplation. This process leads quite naturally to social activity designed to counter injustice and human suffering. These understandings substantiate my own concept of transformation which includes both inner work and outer action on the world. For Miller (1985), fundamental holism revolves around "the transformation position [that] can restore an image of individual growth that is spiritually satisfying and deeply connected to community" (p. 148).
Holistic education in its practice aims to heal fragmentation and duality and integrate the subject content that academia and formal schooling often fragmentizes. This healing is achieved by exercising learning as a natural experience. The underlying belief is that through normal engagement with purposive life activities, knowledge will indeed emanate, drawing together naturally the various components that are otherwise conceived as separate "disciplines". Hence, experience has primary agency. Holism also integrates at the personal level by working to include all the realms of human knowing into teaching and learning - emotional, physical, spiritual, as well as the mental realm. While holism begins with the self, the self that is intrinsically connected to the outer world, it progresses to transform the global community.

Noddings (1992) likewise considers that the purpose of education is to prepare students for a full and responsible life as well as to nurture an ethical ideal. Salzburg (1997) reiterates this dual focus of holism - to hold a vision of life where humans understand deeply their innate interconnectedness with all beings, yet they begin with their own internal worlds. This translates into a spirituality, defined as wholeness according to Lemkow (1990) that is true to its root of being both holy and healing and congruent with scientific systems theory where the whole is always more than the sum of its parts. The implication for any educational, as well as societal reform, is that change begins with the individual's connection to his or her self. This harkens back to the value of personal relevance where "successful educational change must take into account what each of the participants finds personally meaningful" (Fullan, 1991, in Drake, 1993, p. 24). For Kozol, this occurs when the educational setting is caring and the school environment is relevant to the needs in people's lives. Holistic education consistently weaves the dual
inward and outward focus of transformative learning and reveals its fulfillment in the integration of disciplines, teaching that includes all aspects of the human being and recognition of the profound interconnection of all human and earth beings.

My notions of relationships and the importance of community are drawn from holistic education. Holism recognizes relatedness as crucial to human existence, critical to the spiritual dimension of learning and imperative in the work necessary to bring about global healing. Relationships place value on “being” rather than on “knowing” or “doing” since peoplemaking is the highest aim of holistic education.

Most of all we care about the students’ being. We realize that the final contribution that they make to this planet will be from the deepest part of their being and not from the skills we teach them. (Drake, 1995, p. 29)

The most significant outcome of holistic education for me is that it binds love and compassion to action - a theme central to CCIDD practice. By this bonding, or mysticism, “the experience of communion with Ultimate Reality” as defined by Steindl-Rast (Capra & Steindl-Rast, 1991, p. 56), love merges with political response. Holism and the thrust of the CCIDD Program point out how essential it is that grass roots activism be rooted in the heart so that action is not only better sustained over long and discouraging periods of time, but hope is generated and maintained. Hope as an ability to sustain visionary ideals and dreams, issue from the core “mystical” belief that incarnation has a purpose and actions are not doomed to insignificance. This hinges upon an individual sense of being loved, wanted, and ultimately sustained by the universe - an understanding also central to psychosynthesis that focuses on the activation of soul love.
Having a sense of personal and collective significance requires being loved into this deeper level of awareness. This must be made available to the student, according to holistic educators, in the process of learning. In short, it calls out for a caring and nurturing relationship between teacher and student. The quality of the pedagogy and the relationship between teacher and learner is as vital as the quality of curriculum content. The philosophy of holistic education has called for my attention to these two aspects (pedagogy and teacher-student relationship) in the research process and dismisses any hint of their neutrality in transformative learning. This has resulted in attentiveness to the pedagogical process and to student reactions to models of classroom management regarding issues of power and control. The proper place of power and the personal aspect of teaching are additional factors, according to holistic education, that contribute to making people whole and more open to the transformative process.

My acquaintance with the CCIDD Program clearly substantiates it to be an experience in holistic education. Discoveries made in the researching process regarding how students responded to the Program, assist in determining if and how they benefited from the holistic aspects, what components they found to be most and least meaningful, and how the learning from their narratives informs and adds to the discussion on holism in education.

Experiential Learning

My inquiry centers around student responses which follow a unique episode of experiential learning in Mexico. My choice, to look at the aftermath of this experience, is largely based on my belief that learning occurs best in and through experience and not through the prescribed curriculum that
occurs within the confines of an ordinary classroom. My assumption is that without opportunity to interactively relate personal experience and knowing to a relevant experience, authentic, meaningful and lasting learning is minimized or virtually unattainable. Following this is the perception that relevant experience is in scarce supply in most formal educational settings. Therefore the theory and practice of experiential learning, which employ the practices of incorporating activity, relevance and personal connection, is important in advising my work and providing a theoretical backdrop for the revelations expressed by the students about their experience.

Kolb (1984) examines the roots of experiential learning that stem from the work of Dewey (1910, 1938), Lewin (1951) and Piaget (1950), and reveals its essence. Experiential learning considers learning as a lifelong process that integrates the process of traditional education to the work of life and the process of personal development. A brief historical background follows:

From Kurt Lewin and his followers comes the theory and technology of T-groups and action research. The articulation of the democratic values guiding experiential learning is to be found in both Lewin's work and the educational philosophy of John Dewey. Dewey pragmatism forms the philosophical rationale for the primary role of personal experience in experiential learning. Common to all three traditions of experiential learning is the emphasis on development toward a life of purpose and self-direction as the organizing principle for education. Piaget's distinctive contributions to experiential learning are his description of the learning process as a dialectic between assimilating experience into concepts and accommodating concepts to experience, and his work on epistemology - the relationship between the structure of knowledge and how it is learned. (Kolb, 1984, pp. 17, 18)

Experiential learning melds personal development, education and work, considering learning to be the ultimate act of human adaptation - the core of a life-long process. The cycle of experiential learning, as outlined by
Kolb, involves the learners in four kinds of essential processes: apprehension of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. This interestingly parallels CCIDD's circular educational model, following the processes of seeing reality, judging by reflection and thinking, acting upon judgments made, and finally, evaluating action. Both the Kolb and CCIDD models involve a journey of the learner to greater consciousness, understood by Kolb as moving from registrative, to interpretive, and ultimately, to integrative consciousness and, for the CCIDD model, revolving around Freirian conscientization. The pinnacle of this consciousness is described by Kolb (1984).

Behavioural complexity at the integrative level begins with the development of an experimental, hypothesis-testing approach to action that introduces new tentativeness that is tempered in the final stage by the active commitment to responsible action in a world that can never be fully known because it is continually being created. (p. 160)

Learning is thus the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (Kolb, 1984, p. 38).

Gardner (1983, 1993) substantiates the limitations of cognitive learning and similarly argues for teaching that addresses multiple intelligences. Educators that follow this conception have developed pedagogical approaches that better meet student learning style needs that are liberating beyond the scope of traditional learning based on lecturing, reading, writing and note-taking. While experience, extending beyond the limited school context, is slowly gaining recognition as a more effective way to learn (as evidenced in the growing opportunities for work experience, service learning and cooperative education), this should not be confused with the wholesale reduction of education to job training. In the latter case, education can fall
into the dangerous sphere of a corporate agenda, a pitfall often unnoticed because of competitive and reactionary attitudes arising from a fear captivated populace.

Despite these cautions, the push for including relevant experience in education is a plea often voiced by students when they complain about traditional learning and its irrelevance. Freire (1968) and other radical educators, in order to overturn the oppressive power structures within society, advocate for more student engagement and active exploration and work to create classrooms that turn students from the tyranny of monologue to the democracy of dialogue. Finally constructivism, "that construes learning as an interpretive, recursive, building process by active learners interacting with the physical and social world" (Fosnot, 1996, p. 30) further strengthens the place of experience in education. All this learning theory substantiates that experience is certainly pivotal to the learning process.

The focus on experiential learning, that is clearly evident in the Cuernavaca Program, has the potential to advance the process of transformation. The qualities of CCIDD pedagogy - the focus on process grounded in experience, the valuing of the individual in community, the holistic integration of learning styles, the handling of authentic problems, the engagement of the student in the world, and trusting and empowering students to create knowledge and invite students to be active participants in their own learning.

Part of the dilemma modern youth endure revolves around their low sense of self-esteem that results largely from being regarded and treated as superfluous in their own world. The students in my study are not exempt from this epidemic of modern culture, that is evidenced in their growing fears concerning the future - not finding sufficient or worthwhile
employment. Canadian youth, trained primarily to be consumers, are often not really needed for the functioning of their own modern households, or for the support of their families. The passivity relegated to them has hope in being remedied through experiential learning that enlists their active participation.

Experiential learning, at the heart of the Cuernavaca experience, speaks to the justifiable concern articulated by Kurt Hahn, “that young people need to know that they are useful” (quoted in Kielsmeier, 1995, p. 3). It remains to be seen how the students respond to their experience in the long term. My hunch remains that by revolutionizing education from being a passive to an active experience, as was done in Mexico, the door is further opened to the possibilities of authentic transformation.
Summary

I have outlined the strands that apply significance to the conception of transformative learning and support and further define experiential learning, each adding their particular voice to addressing the deep needs that connect with personal transformation and activistic outreach. It is from these strands, ideologies, disciplines, and approaches, that I have derived inspiration for transformative learning as a educational aim. It is also from these influences that I have arrived at a definition of transformation that I feel is both comprehensive, worthwhile and balanced between the inner and outer development of a student.

Self-actualization, personal growth, Psychosynthesis and body-mind theory highlight the necessity of addressing inner needs of individuals and discuss how outward change must be first made manifest on the inward plane to be authentic, lasting and personally meaningful. Moral and faith developmental theory and Adams’ study of Canadian societal values acknowledge the influences upon development that derive from prevailing social contexts and the local community environment. Critical theory and social reconstructionism divulge how the wielding of dominant societal power influences individual transformation while it also bears responsibility for how society undergoes change at large. Global education calls for transformation to expand outwards to include care for the welfare of the entire planet and its creatures on the basis of our interconnectedness for mutual survival. Feminism and holism, all coming home to experiential learning, echo the importance of the internal focus, yet increasingly place it in political, spiritual and educational contexts.

All in all, these strands speak with a rather unified voice, constantly overlapping one another and stepping gently into one another’s territory. For
example, there is a profound sense of planetary responsibility in the personal journey of Psychosynthesis. Holistic education incorporates Psychosynthesis, personal growth, spirituality as well as integrating subject disciplines and a strong advocacy for planetary consciousness. Feminism merges the personal to the political, and the body-mind therapies as well as critical theory and social reconstructionism have powerful spiritual inclinations.

These strands provide templates for my process of analysis. They furnish vocabulary as well as concepts - providing the essential "lenses" through which to look at student experience. As well as helping me interpret and categorize what students bring forth in the interviews, the philosophies of these strands help me remain open to a students and the multiplicity of factors that contribute to enhancing and hindering. Alternatively, experiential learning, holism, feminism and body-mind thinking inform me of the complexity of the process of transformation and assist me in holding a diversity of student responses by understanding more comprehensively the multiplicity of truths to be gleaned from student reflections following the experience. These strands support a constructivist view of learning which consequently advocate a pluralistic concept of truth. Truth, created among all participants, allows for apparent contradictions to be held and examined for their own wisoms. In this way, deeper and more complex truths have a greater possibility of surfacing.

Finally, the revelation of these strands further clarifies who I am as a person and researcher doing this work. The strands in this literature review reveal my starting point, academically, just as my brief biographical notes in the first chapter indicate my personal starting point. In the words of Neilsen (1998), "the growth and life of the researcher is written into the work - the body is in the text" (p. 10).
CHAPTER THREE
Methods and Context:
The Research Journey

In this chapter I outline the research methodology and research procedures that I used to shed light upon the student experience resulting from the time spent in Cuernavaca, Mexico. Essentially the question has guided my methodology for studying the student responses to their learning experience at the Cuernavaca Centre for Intercultural Dialogue on Development (CCIDD) in March of 1997.

The question, “How do students experience transformation?” explores deep change as defined in Chapter One - transformation that is both personally effective and outreach oriented. Discussion of my methodology necessitates illuminating my research philosophy and locating myself as a researcher; describing the students that participated in the study and how they were selected; elucidating the constituents of the CCIDD Program in Cuernavaca Mexico and why this particular program was chosen as an example of experiential learning; and, reasoning out the procedures and methodologies I then followed to track the experiences, stories and longer term effects as expressed by the students relating to transformation.

Teacher as Researcher

As a high school teacher with a personal and professional concern with student learning, my research question originated from both my professional need to know about effective education and my personal interest and frustration with ineffectual school experiences. I wanted to discover what students regarded to be meaningful and authentic education in light of
transformation, previously defined, and this initially lead me to finding a learning experience that would most likely be relevant and empowering. As a drama teacher I was acquainted with the potency of drama to personally empower students by immersing them in imaginary realms where they could safely stretch their ability to feel and connect to ever increasing circles of belonging - with themselves, with others and within many worlds. As a co-operative education teacher, arranging and monitoring student learning at work sites, I had witnessed the opening of students' minds, their new-found sense of usefulness, and an increase in their hope for the future made possible through their active engagement in the "real" world that extended far beyond the narrow confines of a regular classroom. Dramatic Arts or the experiential learning in Co-operative Education naturally would have been the first places to seek out experiences that have transformative potential.

When the opportunity arose for students at my school to participate in a program at The Cuernavaca Centre for Intercultural Dialogue on Development (CCIDD) by traveling to Mexico, I sensed that this was a program that potentially contained both the personal and relational challenges akin to drama as well as meaningful experiences of a global proportion that would surpass anything regarded to be relevant by Co-operative Education standards. CCIDD offered a unique consciousness-raising curriculum delivered in the interactive and democratic mode of a popular education orientation. A proposal was drawn up for the student excursion and the "Cuernavaca Experience" was born. My hunch told me that this was the learning experience I was seeking: an exquisite opportunity for students and teachers to engage in experiences not normally available to the customary tourist of Mexico.
My passionate enthusiasm and instantaneous involvement revealed an early and strong heuristic inclination for studying the Cuernavaca experience. As highlighted in Chapter One, Rationale, I was drawn to looking at what I hoped would be a transformative learning experience for students because of my ongoing commitment to personal growth, my desire as a teacher to provide more meaningful, satisfying and effective learning experiences for students, and my concern that formal education address both personal development and growing global concerns. I could only wish for such an experience as a young adult myself and, as a teacher, I would certainly be among the first to secure such an opportunity for students.

An early decision further betrayed my intense personal connection to the issue of student transformative experience. My son, Nicholas, who was of the age of the participants who qualified for the excursion, did not attend my school and therefore was not automatically eligible for the learning experience. Yet a decision was made, based on his natural and expressed eagerness to attend, and my own advocacy on his behalf, that allowed him to become part of the school group. In private admission at the time, I certainly did not want him to miss out on the potential that I felt this experience held.

As a heuristic researcher I valued the opportunity to be enmeshed in an alternative cultural context such as the one found in Cuernavaca. As both a parent and educator, I made the necessary investments of time and energy to ensure that I would be a suitable teacher and mentor for all the students. True to heuristic practice, I valued the personal journey and the life enrichment that was in store for me, as well as for the students, through this research process. Therefore throughout this thesis my own journey of transformation is marbled within the writing in the form of shared personal reflections and change.
The inclusion of the researcher’s voice in the research process is a strong distinguishing feature of feminist research as well as being of my own inclination. Reinharz (1992) expels notions that wish to classify personal interest and involvement as solipsistic, or at best, hopelessly subjective and thus useless for academic thought. Reinharz states that although personal experience is typically “thought to contaminate a project’s objectivity.... In feminist research, by contrast, it is relevant and repairs the project’s pseudo-objectivity” (p. 258). While my work is not essentially a study of my personal teaching practice, there is a “reflexive” (Cole & Knowies, 1999) element in my inquiry, reflexive in this sense meaning “reflective inquiry situated within the context of personal histories” (p. 12).

Since I desire to pursue my personal and professional development, I naturally reflect upon my own learning as teacher in the process of doing the research analysis. Public and private knowledge merge for me, true to the style of feminist research, as I jointly maintain a deep concern over education for society, my personal educational processes and the education of my students and children. I readily put forth my perspectives throughout my work, particularly being open about them at the outset. All the while I rest assured that my perspective does not interfere with the discovery of student “truths” regarding their own experiences. I work in accordance with Reinharz’ (1992) perspective: “Recognizing that she [the researcher] has a perspective does not mean that she then abandons what she considers to be objectivity. On the contrary, she believes that she can present material objectively while guided by an explicit perspective” (p. 262). Reinharz is even more forthcoming in declaring that if a researcher “hides” in the research process, the resulting reports are “woefully incomplete and even dishonest” (p. 263).
The value of welcoming the active presence of the researcher is strongly advocated by Neilsen (1998) who encourages that

the growth and the life of the researcher is written into the work - the body is in the text...making the invisible processes visible is an act of responsible scholarship, the final push to remove the vestiges of Cartesian thought and Western scientism that have allowed us all to escape response-ability. (p. 10)

In bringing to awareness some of my personal mythologies that connect to the conscientizing experience, community-building process, and struggles with power (among others as brought to the fore as a result of the CCIDD Program), and in challenging my assumptions, I have not only further clarified my own journey of empowerment and transformation but this reflection has also helped me establish greater trustworthiness in analysis. By engaging in discourse with students and peers, following the experience at CCIDD, a new personal mythology has resulted for myself concerning both transformation and learning. Such transformation of the researcher - the evolution of mythologies - are assisted by means of Feinstein and Krippner’s (1988, 1997) self-reflective techniques. Thus my analysis reflects and results from the privilege of being able to see through the eyes of my fifteen students and considering how this applies to my own knowing as a learner and a teacher.

Valuing my personal journey in the inquiry process has also helped me uphold, bring to expression, and illuminate the truths of the many diverse and unique voices of student experience. Trusting all the voices, starting with my own, is congruent with my belief in multiple truths and the value of personal experience. Arriving at personal and professional working hypotheses, not conclusive generalizations, is the appropriate goal of my work. Merriam (1988) clearly asserts the inherent learning value of
qualitative research: "the general can be found in the particular" (pp. 175-176). This mirrors an artistic, as opposed to a scientistic, view of research delineated by Eisner (1981) where the artistic perspective, as does art itself, provides opportunities for learning that transfer from the particular circumstance to unfamiliar situations subsequently met. Dorothy Heathcote (in Wagner, 1990, p. 76) reveals the exceptional power of drama to draw a direct plumb line from the particular to the universal. In being open to and trusting the individual voices of my students I feel that I not only respect my participants, but respect the process of constructing knowledge and the ability of my readership to make their own connections and discern what applies and what does not apply to their own educational circumstances. I aspire to the research goals of Kirby and McKenna (1989):

If you can increase the understanding of an issue or circumstance, illuminate one experience, portray one person's story in a new light, you will have helped others to understand the social world a little better. This is what research is all about. (p. 96)

The additional closeness that I had to one participant, my son, gave me the added benefit of securing a depth of data that would have been otherwise unavailable to me. Thankfully, Nicholas was unrelenting in his painstaking clarification at every turn so as to ensure that I did not distort his meaning-making. In fact I believe he was especially able to be frank because of our close and secure relationship. My vested interest, and obvious personal involvement (what could be regarded as intense subjectivity), was scrutinized by his repeated corrections and adjustments to my understandings. My outdated, generational perceptions of the youth experience were challenged by my son as being "adult", distanced appraisals and were amended accordingly. For example, he cautioned about my tendency to over-generalize
the “Generation X” experience. The close and regular appraisal of my son’s experiences and reflections, he now being an independent, articulate young man of twenty-one years of age, has presented me with opportunities to specially observe how his experience in Mexico has influenced his subsequent decisions regarding study, social, personal activities, and employment choices. These observations have particularly assisted me in the assessment of longer term effects of the Cuernavaca experience.

While my heuristic slant may cast doubt on my impartiality as well as question what distance I may have from my findings, I discharge the potency of any false duality pertaining to subjectivity or objectivity by locating myself as a qualitative, naturalistic researcher who also “felt that I had found a research home when I learned that qualitative research existed” (Jill, in Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 9). My choice of qualitative inquiry is part of an interest that represents, according to Eisner and Peshkin (1990), an increasingly accepted way of thinking about the nature of knowledge and how it can be created.

In accordance with a post-positivist, naturalistic paradigmic world-view, my understanding of knowledge is that it is experienced, constructed and constantly emerging. Knowledge is subjective, personal, and while not measurable, is observable through induction. Reality itself is emergent and constitutive of multiple truths. Lincoln and Guba (1985) elaborate upon the philosophical underpinnings of qualitative inquiry: knower and known are interactive and inseparable, generalizations common to positivistic modes of research are replaced by working hypotheses, cause and effect are not easily distinguished from one another, and inquiry is value sensitive. As a researcher I seek authenticity of knowledge and validity in my research by maintaining the standards for qualitative inquiry as advocated by Glesne and
Peshkin (1992): affirming the primacy of subject matter while using relatively small numbers of people, collecting a variety of data, observing behaviours subjectively, and remaining open to discovery, ambiguity, multiple perspectives and emergent design.

...Qualitative techniques allow the researchers to share in the understandings and perceptions of others and to explore how people structure and give meaning to their daily lives. Researchers using qualitative techniques examine how people learn about and make sense of themselves and others. (Berg, 1995, p. 6)

The nature of my question, how students experience transformation, is suitable to a qualitative research approach:

The questions in qualitative research are those framed to seek understanding and meaning in the data. They are predominantly “how” and “why” questions. Research is focused on process more than outcomes or products. In addition, Qualitative Researchers are interested in meaning - how people make sense of their lives, what they experience, how they interpret these experiences, how they structure their social worlds. (Merriam, 1989, p. 166)

I have seen my task as qualitative researcher as being that of strongly attending to the data, or as Coles (1989) exhorts, hearing someone’s story as clearly as possible. To more readily arrive at findings that are authentic, have authority and resonate with other readers, I have admitted to my personal orientations throughout my work yet have held my assumptions in suspension so as to allow my thinking to continuously evolve. The research process, as referred to earlier, has been a journey where I have chronicled my reflections, questioned my assumptions, argued and laboured over the very methods I used to generate information and findings, and I have challenged my categories and emerging themes. By using these methods I have attempted to maintain the utmost respect for and minimal intrusion upon
my participants. I am confident in the trustworthiness of my data by employing the following rigors suggested by Merriam and Simpson (1995): utilizing multiple perspectives, member checks, peer and colleague examination, submersion/engagement and thick description. I found these strategies emancipatory in that they encouraged the emergence of the many different voices involved. I have carefully worked to manage the human instrument in qualitative inquiry while not negating its importance. In accordance with Eisner and Peshkin (1990), I believe that “empathy might be every bit as important for cognition as detachment” (p. 12). The standards for interpretive research involve, above all, good judgment which “depends upon attention to detail, sensitivity to coherence, appreciation of innuendo, and the ability to read subject as well as text” (p. 12).

Coming to understand the meaning of student experience, and engaging in the process of interpreting those student experiences in light of transformation, makes this research study a hermeneutical enterprise as well. In the process of meaning-making, I found myself at times in a quandary over how to hold and make sense of what seemed to be paradoxical accounts of students’ experiences. For example, students would proclaim wonderfully profound experiences of enlightenment, belonging and joy, then in the same conversation indicate a seemingly contrary experience by weeping painfully over events and struggles that related to their Cuernavaca experiences. What appeared in a positive light was at times overshadowed by significant darkness. While some students “owned” and saw themselves responsible for some of the negatives, they also perceived oppression and oppressors outside of themselves yet alarmingly close at hand. I wrestled with how positive experiences could be possible amidst so much pain. I faced the challenge of holding manifold ambiguities and interpreting what seemed to be contrary
experiences arising from the same events. Interviewing the same students one year later helped to clarify and put these issues into perspective, as the students themselves gained additional perspective on themselves and the experience with another passing year.

Hermeneutics - the process of interpreting for meaning - entailed the unraveling of meaning that was cloaked in language and encoded in the expression of feelings, body language, even the practices of avoidance. Often contradictions would surface and a circularity of thinking would become apparent, evidenced for example by how some students would simultaneously argue in favour of teachers presenting their particular world view as well as argue in favour of educator's ideological openness. I had to suspend the inclination to make quick judgments and, instead, hold the ambiguities while I persisted in the process of dialogue with the students to get at deeper realities beyond early assumptions. D. G. Smith speaks of how the art of hermeneutics for the researcher revolves around the engaging of this dialectic:

How I will be transformed depends upon my orientation and attitude toward what comes to meet me as new; whether I simply try to subsume or repress it within prevailing dispensations (a possible prelude to war or hostilities) or whether I engage it creatively in an effort to create a new common, shared reality. (D. G. Smith, 1991, in Short, p. 193)

The problem of interpretation was what pressed me to keep going back for more data, more information, for up to two years after the initial Mexico experience was over. I persisted like Wiseman’s (1974) detective-researcher - “begin[ing] to see a picture of what happened...look[ing] for evidence pro and con, elaborating or modifying that picture” (p. 317). In the first year following the Cuernavaca experience my questioning process was devoid of any
"knowns". At this early stage, I could not count on any evidence for transformation whatsoever. In my questioning of the students, therefore, I did not ask for transformative accounts - but for reports of what they regarded to be memorable events, peak moments and stories. After the first round of interviews, I could better determine what data would become my major focus as the theme of transformation became clearer. In the second year following, I expanded and revised my approach, confident from the narrative conversational data gathered earlier, that I could now use the word transformation. Yet I was still cautious, leading with more general queries, and careful not to presume transformation.

In my attempt to reconstruct student perspectives, multivocal truths emerged. Unlike the logical empiricist who eschews interpretation, I went confidently into it concurring with Sullivan’s (1980) critique of rational empiricism - that “mastery through prediction and control was to eliminate the problems of interpretation by simply eliminating interpretation. Truth was to be univocal because ambiguity was considered bad science” (p. 1). The grappling and confusion that the students underwent, eventually over time and with space for reflection, evolved into a greater understanding of the nature of their transformative experience. There were lessons to be learned even in the students’ apparent contradictions.

The hermeneutical, as well as heuristic challenge, is to chart the transformative process in the researcher:

The conversational quality of hermeneutical truth points to the requirement that any study carried on in the name of hermeneutics should provide a report of the researcher’s own transformations undergone in the process of the inquiry. (D. G. Smith, in Short, 1991, p. 198)
In the end, both for the students and for myself, the positive aspects of their experience were actually better revealed against the backdrop of the negatives. Returning again and again to the students, moving from parts to wholes, and back again from wholes to parts, offered me a better opportunity to authentically reconstruct the student experience, be true to myself as researcher, and be available to the truths that lie at the heart of the particulars.

The Selection of Student Participants

The students who were part of the group that traveled to Mexico and participated in the Cuernavaca Program were students from a Catholic high school in the suburban, greater metropolitan area of Toronto. My son, Nicholas, lived in the same neighbourhood however he attended an arts magnet school in the region. All the students were from middle-class and relatively affluent families, none lacking in financial resources. Even so, most students were expected to contribute all or part of the costs of their own trip. Part of the criteria for acceptance into the Program included the requirement that the students afford what would amount to a little over one thousand dollars for the cost of the excursion - travel expenses and accommodation at CCIDD. Most students had part-time jobs that made them able to assume their own costs, either partially or entirely. Two students had borrowed money from their parents and were continuing to pay off the loans, months after the trip was over. The costs, however, were offset by a series of fund-raising activities in which the students themselves participated. These included selling nachos at school lunch periods, organizing penny drives, and participating in the proverbial chocolate bar sales. The students did well at the fundraising activities and at the end of the trip, while it was agreed that half the money raised would go to charity, the other half was divided amongst the
students as a refund. The students in the end had their costs defrayed by the amount of four hundred dollars a person, although they had not anticipated such dividends at the start.

The only other criteria for entry into this Program was a demonstration of the student's personal interest and parental consent. The students had the full approval of their parents, although there was some apprehension regarding personal safety matters. Parents expressed concern about politically troubled areas in Mexico, as current newsworthy items included the recent massacre in Chiapas, and they wanted assurance that we would not be traveling to such dangerous areas. Several meetings were arranged for students, parents and teachers before the departure where all these concerns were aired. Overall the parents supported this learning adventure and were excited, yet a little apprehensive about the life-changing potential that it held.

The students were all Canadians of European heritage - no ethnic minorities - and they were all Catholic. This composition approximates the complexion of a Catholic student body in a Toronto bedroom-community such as this suburban town. Our school, as of yet, does not reflect the ethnic diversity of a typical Toronto school, although there is a slow change underway. While the students all knew each other from school, they were not all friends. Some of them, however, were very close to one another. They were students of fairly mixed interests and abilities, almost all extroverts, and rather homogeneous overall. Most importantly they could all be characterized by a degree of eagerness and, particularly as time drew near, they had a strong sense of expectation - eager to have a unique experience and see aspects of the world that would normally not be readily available to them. While they were a little nervous, they were open and excited to learn. While I was not directly involved in the student application process, as a teacher
supervisor I felt good about this group of students and I very much looked forward to our shared adventure.

I found out about this Program from a colleague of mine who was the chief organizer of the trip. The description of the CCIDD Program sparked my interest and I accepted the offer of being an additional teacher supervisor. I suggested that the students would additionally benefit if the experience was more comprehensive than just being a ten day excursion to Mexico. So I helped arrange for it to be a co-operative education opportunity. Since the candidates were selected from those students who had already completed the grade eleven mandatory Christian Morality course, we could extend their learning, having them earn an additional religion credit “out of school”. The integrity of the co-op credit delivery would stem from the fact that the students would be working and learning experientially in Mexico, expanding their knowledge in a particular subject area (in this case, religion) and they would further augment their learning by applying it to additional work with social service agencies of their choice after their return home. This would be closely linked to fulfill the religion course of study. The necessary preparatory and integrated learning periods common to co-op would also serve well as providing classroom time for the necessary prep that the students would have to undergo for the excursion, as well as the helpful debriefing afterwards. We had the intention of providing better preparation and follow-up for the experience in this way. I then served a dual purpose of being a teacher supervisor as well as the co-op co-ordinator of the Program (who oversaw the co-op requirements) while the religion teacher taught most of the preparation and integrated learning component that was held in class prior to and after the actual trip.
Studying the CCIDD Experience

To be able to effectively study the student experience, following the ten day Mexican excursion in March of 1997, I needed first of all to understand thoroughly the Program delivered at the Cuernavaca Centre for Intercultural Dialogue on Development (CCIDD). The prerequisite for researching with students was to familiarize myself and describe in detail the components of the Program that the students experienced. This was facilitated by my being a full-fledged participant in the Program along with the students, in addition to being a teacher-mentor. Therefore my description stems from the first hand experience of a participant.

I was not alone in playing the dual role of teacher and participant, as I was one of three teacher-supervisors on the trip, and was also accompanied by a superintendent from our school board. As teachers we did not have any overt curricular responsibilities, since the Program was executed and fully handled by competent CCIDD staff. We experienced the Program with the students, and certainly as students ourselves. I observed activities of the Program, kept detailed accounts of the events, speakers, excursions and work-projects, and made many incidental observations and reflective comments on the impact that this experience was having on myself, fellow staff members and students. The description and explanation of the CCIDD Program that follows is derived from my personal detailed notes (comments from speakers, facilitators and group discussions, notes on participatory activities and observation of events as they happened), from conversations with many of the CCIDD staff (Jim, Delle, Jan, Danielle, Lisanne, Ray, Gertrude), and from literature available about the Program (and foundational to it) that I acquired at CCIDD. The literature included both in-house publications, reflective and
informative writing from participants and staff, and popular education and social justice resources in their library and resource centre.

At the time of my first interest in the educational and learning value of this program, I had not yet fixed myself conclusively on the term transformative to describe the nature of this particular learning experience. This term was not deliberately used during our preparation time with students, nor was it focused upon by CCIDD staff. Yet it became apparent to me that transformation was implicit in the CCIDD objectives and fundamental to their plan. Perhaps the term was purposefully and explicitly avoided, as it was part of the CCIDD philosophy to make learning opportunities available and to not simply preach. This was demonstrated by the way they presented us with the realities of local people while not imposing an interpretation or specific conclusion. As I arrived with great anticipation, it was only with the unfolding of the experience itself that the transformative potential became increasingly evident and crucial, to the point where transformation became the best term to describe the influence of the learning available from this experience.

The conception of transformation, central to CCIDD objectives, seems to be primarily focused outward, centering upon individual and collective action to improve life conditions by ending political oppression, economic exploitation and cultural domination. The fact that popular education methodology begins with and embodies tremendous respect for the individual demonstrates that the CCIDD focus embraces and facilitates transformation on the personal as well as social outreach level. I maintain, as part of my core understanding of transformation, that the inward journey is that which enables the outward journey - an understanding certainly underscored by the strong spiritual emphasis at CCIDD.
The Program, its influences, and objectives.

The Cuernavaca Centre for Intercultural Dialogue on Development is in Cuernavaca Mexico, eighty kilometers south of Mexico City in the state of Morelos.

CCIDD is an ecumenical centre founded by Ray Plankey in conjunction with Bishop Sergio Mendez Arceo in 1977 [also known as the Red Bishop] to promote experiential understanding of Christian struggle in Latin America. The one to two week programs include encounters with historians, labour, women, political, religious and grassroots leaders as well as exiles from Central America. Lectures, personal stories and visits to urban squatter settlements and rural indigenous villages are intermingled with an ample amount of group reflection time to process new insights and challenges. Each program is tailored to the specific group. (CCIDD Program description in handout material)

The CCIDD is run by ten to fifteen Canadian and American volunteer staff and employs about twenty Mexican workers. CCIDD helps out the Cuernavaca community by employing Mexican staff (for mainly cooking and maintenance work), giving stipends out for local representatives who come to speak to visiting groups (union leaders, community activists), allowing townspeople the opportunity to sell their crafts to participants during site or home visits, and maintaining a contingency fund (acquired through donations) that helps out families in desperate financial need. But the heart of CCIDD's outreach is in its educative work to visiting groups, mainly coming from North America. Before beginning the ten day program, the following CCIDD Program Objectives were made known to us:

- Experience some of the social, political, religious and culture realities of Mexico through experiential encounters and dialogue with people
- Facilitate just relationships with partners in dialogue
• Make a preferential option for the poor (to give priority to the voices and experiences of the poor and marginalized)

• Facilitate an encounter with prophetic dimension of the Christian faith

• Facilitate a space for contemplation and action

• Experience a continuum from hopelessness to hopefulness and present alternatives on how to move from the former to the latter

• Name and challenge practices that support inequality such as gender, race, class, economic, ecological and related concerns

• Gain critical understanding of power relationships and tools for understanding oppression and ways for changing

• Put local issues in a global context

• Become aware of how U.S./Canadian roles (i.e. foreign and domestic policies) block liberation

• Build just relationships between the North and South

• Facilitate an experience and recognition of the need for community (moving beyond individualism)

• Become empowered to work for social transformation in various contexts on a personal and collective level

• Leave with compassion (passion-with, responsibility), not guilt (compassion fuels action/guilt fuels despair)

• Include reflection, action and celebration in the teaching model

• Make learning exciting and fun
  (from the handout on CCIDD Objectives)

The objectives suitably pave the way for the process of "conscientization" (Freire, 1970). Students (adult groups are also hosted at CCIDD) are made aware of the realities of the vast numbers of poor and
disenfranchised in Third World Mexico and hear from the many outstanding yet ordinary citizens who struggle to transcend personal and societal oppressions. The impact of the experience for the participants is strong, stimulating emotion, reflection and action.

The powers that energize the CCIDD Program and support a process of transformation include the social justice exhortations in the Judeo-Christian scriptures with their preferential option for the poor. The New Testament declares that “in so far as you served the poor sisters and brothers, you served me” (Matthew 25:39). Old Testament scriptures are similarly oriented: “This is what Yahweh asks of you, only this: that you act justly, that you love tenderly, that you walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). CCIDD maintains an ecumenical and non-dogmatic spiritual focus which implements what is referred to as a “reverse mission” process. Reverse mission, inspired by the realization of Ivan Illich (1973) that Latin Americans actually live a life more oriented by faith than the missionaries sent to educate them, and activated by grassroots liberation theology (Guttierez, 1988), challenges participants in the Program in a unique way. Participants are not asked to aid the disadvantaged Mexicans but, rather, learn from Mexican activists and visionaries about how to deal with problems of global proportion that effect us all. There is an underlying assumption of human interconnection - that we belong to one another. The hope is that participants return home and work to prevent the eruption of the third world in their midst, as well as in the rest of the world, by putting into place social, economic, and political policies that will work towards local and global advantage.
Popular education.

Other sources of power and inspiration for the CCIDD Program originate from the educational philosophy of Paolo Freire (1970, 1983, 1993, 1996), considered the father of popular non-formal education, and other educators that have further developed this philosophy and art of teaching. Popular education is strongly linked to critical theory and social reconstructionism, discussed in Chapter Two. A former CCIDD staff member summarizes that Freirian education allows people to learn how to become literate in such a way that there is a new awareness of selfhood which leads people to start looking critically at the social situation in which they find themselves. Education in this manner is seen as a subversive force in that once people reach this new awareness of social identity, and of their common experiences of oppression, they often begin to take an active role (they become "subjects") in the transformation process of the society that has denied them the opportunities of participation. (Gasparelli, 1997, p. 6)


During the Program in March 1997 I kept a record of the strategies used with our group and from these observations I extracted what I perceived to be the qualities of popular education practiced at CCIDD. There was a distinct lack of hierarchy of authority in the teaching-learning relationship. Everyone was empowered with the authority of their own knowing and was encouraged to express themselves. A customary format for presentations and
discussions involved participants taking turns to share around a circle, allowing everyone “airtime”. All voices had credibility, not just those with status or formal education, and we heard from many remarkable people carrying with them the authority of their life experiences. We were encouraged to engage in dialogue with them, then were given additional time to share and reflect both in groups and privately. Even when we heard from “the experts”, or saw “authoritative videos”, questioning and dialogue would follow. There were quiet times for spiritual reflection - alone and in groups as well as time for meaningful ritual and celebration. Fun was a priority in the learning process with the inclusion of games, simulations, songs and drama as well as outings to the town square, market and the local cafes. In the sharing, feelings were as encouraged and accepted as were thoughts. There was an encouragement for building community - plenty of socializing, communal meals, sharing chores, playing volleyball, swimming and going on walks. Aside from our treks into the various homes and communities, we went on historical outings (to gain a larger perspective), visiting pyramids and the museum. Finally we got our hands dirty with real work - participating in two local community projects - clearing land and composting, and sorting food from the market garbage.

Through my involvement with these approaches and activities, I immediately began to summarize my perceptions of CCIDD pedagogy. CCIDD’s practice of popular education included democratic, egalitarian learning (dialogue not monologue); belief in the individual and collective ability to construct knowledge; participation and experience as the chief mode of learning; unity of body, emotion, spirit as well as mind; a community orientation; a bias for hope; and, a penchant for having fun.
Gasparelli (1996) outlines her perception of popular education practiced at CCIDD by discussing five key elements:

- Individual transformation through the process of conscientization, that starts with the self “‘becoming aware’ or critically conscious of the reality in which one is living” (p. 54).
- Integration of mind, body and spirit in learning that enables feelings to come to the fore and add to intellectual process. “Ray Plankey, says he hopes that the experience will ‘lower’ the group’s education: from their ‘heads’ to their ‘hearts’” (p. 61).
- The use of codes (pictures, photos, drawings, objects, an experience or a representation of experience) as catalysts for dialogue and learning that extract generative themes from the group - what they see to be important issues so “that the group can analyze in more depth, and research and eventually act upon” (p. 65) narrowing the gap between reality and theory.
- Democratic dialogue “[as] the equal participation by all involved in discussion or workshops” (p. 69).
- Finally, action and reflection, the Freirian practice of reflecting on a lived experience - “the acts that the center lives out in running the Program and within the structural make up of the centre itself” (p. 73) and the action in “what the participants take on after returning home from the Program (p. 73).

A third point of view on CCIDD’s educational model, which again indicates its considerable overlap of perspectives, comes from Jim Hodgson, our group’s main facilitator. During a group session, during our stay, Jim outlined the educational model he uses that originates from Catholic Action groups in France and Belgium, Liberation Theology, and Feminist Liberation Theology. This model is circular with learning that moves from seeing a reality, to judging (with the employment of reflection and thought), to taking
appropriate action. Continuing around this circle, there is an evaluation of the action taken and finally, the characteristic Mexican addition, celebration. Jim cautions against the North American tendency to move too quickly from seeing to acting, without taking sufficient time to see and understand.

The popular educator, according to Gasparelli (1996), is an animator, facilitator, organizer and social activist. Gasparelli quotes Freire on the true nature of teaching: “Those who are called to teach must first learn to continue learning when they begin to teach” (p. 18). Our facilitators at CCIDD exemplified these descriptions. While they were knowledgeable, helpful and informative, they were particularly unobtrusive - respectful of the diversity of ideas would encourage participants to find their own answers. This mode of mentorship allowed a truly safe container to be created for the learning circle. Their major role of being our translators as we listened and questioned the local Spanish-speaking Mexicans well symbolized their visions of an educator. They acted as intermediaries midwifing the process of learning that was ours.

All these aspects of popular education harmonized well at CCIDD. Students are not crammed with information or indoctrinated in a particular world-view but instead witness situations first hand, listen and dialogue with members of representative communities. Students become active rather than passive learners and are empowered through the process. The focus on praxis - the dynamic interrelationship between reflection and action (Freire, 1970) allows for the maintaining of a balance between the individual and the collective, the reflective and the active, the inward and the outward journey.
The Program as experienced by students.

The students followed a rigorous program of exploration while on their ten day sojourn in Cuernavaca. This was not to be the typical Mexican holiday that Canadians usually experience. The real teachers of the Program were the Mexican people that the students met daily. The Program consisted of regular site visits, stories and/or talks delivered by visitors to the compound, and time for reflection in private and in the group. The CCIDD facilitators were available to prepare us for visits, translate, and create opportunities to debrief the experiences afterwards. I present a brief overview of the schedule that we followed.

We arrived very late on Thursday and were picked up in what resembled a “schoolbus” at the Mexico City airport. The hour and a half ride to CCIDD, through chilly mountain air, gave us little opportunity when we arrived for anything besides going to our rooms and catching a short night’s sleep. The next day began with introductions and orientation to the Program in the “to become very familiar” common room, where we assembled seated in circular fashion. We were then taken on a walking tour around Cuernavaca’s centre core to get an orientation to this very old and beautiful city - the town square, cathedral, The Palace of Cortez, and downtown area. The market was particularly over-stimulating to our senses. It went on for miles - crowded, exotic and diverse - with vendors selling everything from clothing to cactus, molé, what seemed to be thousands of varieties of peppers and exquisite flowers. We continued, back at the compound with an orientation to cross-cultural dialogue (how to speak to and receive the Mexicans) and preparation for the following day which would prove to be a pivotal point of the week.
The next day (Saturday) we visited Los Patios de La Estación squatter settlement. This sixty year old squatter settlement, situated at the looped end of the railroad tracks (with the train service now defunct), now totaled seven thousand people in an area that approximated about 1.5 square kilometres. We were quite stunned by the poverty we witnessed (the sheet metal roofs, lean-to walls, earthen floors, lack of plumbing, flood marks remaining high up on table legs) and deeply moved by the stories we heard of ongoing struggle and day to day survival. We left in a daze, realizing that our worst conceptions of poverty were not only true but more extreme than imaginable. That evening a dynamic sociology professor, Ross Gandy, explained Mexico’s present socio-economic crisis in light of its history from 1910 to the present. He outlined Mexico’s problems with priorities, land reform and education as well as pointing out the forces that are presently in motion for positive change.

On Sunday we departed for Tepoztlán to meet with Padre Filiberto Gonzalez, reputed by the locals to be the new “Romero”. His life has been under threat since he has been involved in a struggle against the Mexican government with the local indigenous (native Mexican) community to save their land from foreign investors for projects such as a golf course development. He spoke to us about the difficulties the indigenous endure (regarded to be the lowest of the low in Mexican society) and how foreign policy impacts greatly upon their quality of life (The North American Free Trade Agreement was an often quoted example). We lunched at the women’s co-operative restaurant and spent the rest of the day working with local youth on a dam project in the indigenous village of Amatlán. Here the students worked hard clearing land in very hot and dusty conditions.
Preparation, reflection and sharing surrounded each of the experiences we encountered. On Monday we departed for a meeting with youth leaders in the Lopez Mateos community who facilitate a “youth culture group”. They assist in education on alcoholism, violence, sexuality and parenting as well as organize daycare, community improvement and ecological projects. Back at the compound, we were invited to purchase crafts from the United Artisans that CCIDD regularly invite to display. In selling to us, these artists and crafts people avoided the exploitation of “middlemen”. We heard from each of them regarding their work and communities. In the evening Ofelia Laureano spoke to us about “Women and Work” and the difficulties that women face in a culture riddled with sexism and disadvantage for women. She has successfully created a union for domestic workers in Cuernavaca. Encounters with these people had a great impact on us all. Sessions would end with all the students converging upon the guest for a photo op.

Tuesday we had a change of pace and traveled as tourists to the pyramids at Xochicalco, learning about Aztec and Mayan culture. Back at CCIDD, we met Isidro, his wife Maria and several of their children who traveled for hours by bus from the mountains of Guerrero to talk to us and sell us their hand-made baskets. Guerrero is an intensely poor and desperate community of indigenous people so we avoided the risks of traveling there ourselves. The problems of Guerrero mirror those of Chiapas. In the evening we continued the theme by viewing a film on Chiapas and learning about the Zapatista movement then engaging in discussion.

On Wednesday we discussed “Church and Change” and listened to Gerardo Thijssen, a former priest and missionary, sharing the story of his life in Chile since 1952 and his forced exile. He outlined the far reaching impact of neoliberalism, defined as rampant and aggressive capitalism. We played the
simulation game “Star Power”, a game of global trading, where we experienced first-hand tendency whereby the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Afterwards there was time spent in religious and personal reflection.

On Thursday we discussed the work and times of Archbishop Oscar Romero, did a meditation on this theme and later visited Sacatierra with community leader Tómas Diaz, potter and community activist. Tómas has organized a community of artisans as well as a project to purify contaminated water that runs in a ravine in his neighbourhood. Some of us also visited a community centre constructed by architectural students on a co-operative education assignment. They were from Seattle with their professor, and were lodging at CCIDD. Their impressive and aesthetically beautiful structure was an example of “real” work, a project that the local people could take pride in and benefit from - incorporating classrooms, community rooms, outdoor gardens and play areas.

Friday we worked on an ecology project and awaited a truck of market garbage to arrive at the site along with local townspeople. We saw the villagers following the truck on foot, anticipating the task of sorting salvageable food, later to be taken home in equitable amounts by each family. The sorting process taught us that a fruit or vegetable that was half spoiled could still be half good. Waste material was chopped up and composted for the garden that locals were creating to grow their own. (A year later we discovered that Walmart, managing the market garbage, was no longer willing to bring spoiled produce to this site, not even allowing the townspeople to pay for it. Rather, it made the costlier decision to have the food taken to a dumpsite farther away.) Later in the day we viewed the videos “Panama Deception”, presenting an alternative view of the USA invasion of Panama, and “Manufacturing Consent”, Noam Chomsky’s (1994) discussion
of democracy in a media driven culture. I am reminded at this point of the words of Gerardo Thijssen who exhorted us with a reminder of the reality that democracy is only possible with an informed citizenry.

The days were extremely full, and yet there was time for going to cafes, the town square, and out for a night of dancing. The end came all too quickly and Saturday was spent in group reflection, wrapping up, paying final bills (for incidentals such as pop and baskets). We concluded with a meaningful celebratory liturgy, which seemed to bring everything together for us. It incorporated a recollection of memories, a bringing forward of our thoughts and feelings, and opportunity to give thanks and celebrate. Quickly after this celebration we had to pile into the school bus and leave for the airport. It was a reluctant and emotional departure for us all.

This series of intense and outstanding experiences of the CCIDD Program clarify my reason for choosing this experience as the starting point for my study. I had never before encountered an educational experience of such proportion which had, in my estimation, such great potential for transformation. Now the question remained. What was the impact of this program on the students? How were they to react in the short term and in the longer term from the opportunity of having been able to participate in this program? Would they experience any aspect of transformation, as earlier defined? If so, how would this be experienced?

Procedures and Methods

In deciding to study a specific group’s experience, following their participation in the learning program at CCIDD, I outline the procedures I employed in concentrating on the group’s learning. I began by taking field notes and collecting information on the CCIDD Program (from which I
compiled the components of the Program previously described), then
continued to observe the students, discussed issues related to the Program
with them, interviewed them over two periods of time, read their submitted
journals, analyzed their responses to a questionnaire I compiled and
participated in more ongoing conversations over time, including those
occurring in letters, visits and electronic mail discussions. While I admit my
interest and bias for the Cuernavaca transformative experience, my procedure
was inductive, whereby I did not assume that transformation had indeed
occurred, nor more importantly did I presume to know the nature of this
experience for the students. My research begins with the information
gathered - the stories told - and the analysis derives from the stories,
reflections and experiences that the students have related to me.

**Researching the outcomes after the first year.**

The Cuernavaca experience developed in me a strong sense of
belonging with the students which was mutual, and for the most part, this
feeling of community was also strongly established amongst themselves. I
was fortunate to gain the trust and friendship of the students and the first-
name-basis relationship that was established during the trip, remained
afterwards and was indicative of an ongoing closeness, comfort and sense of
equality. Fortunately, having an office in the school where I teach makes me
easily accessible to the students. They dropped in regularly just to chat, or talk
about the aftermath of their trip (how it was readjusting to life at home, the
trials and tribulations with fellow students and teachers, and so on).

While the students and myself had numerous casual conversations
during the months following the March 1997 excursion I did not officially
begin to collect data until a time that was close to the Winter break of that
same year. At this point the students were nine months from the experience
and well past the initial strong emotional impact of it all. I decided to wait this considerable amount of time to access their reflections because I felt that the nine month distance would not only give the students a greater degree of emotional distance but, I thought, the interim reflection time would assist them in separating that which was lasting from their instantaneous reactions. I thought this would lend greater trustworthiness and authority to my data.

I chose to do a focus group interview with the group of students for several reasons, the main one being that the CCIDD Program was essentially a “group” experience. We were already well accustomed to one another, had shared repeatedly in the group format and were comfortable with this mode of relating and sharing. In addition, according to the practice at CCIDD, the students were comfortable with sharing in the group in all realms - emotional and personal as well as intellectual reflections. CCIDD staff encouraged student voice - the sharing of differing opinions and contrary views without reprisals. It was this full expanse of data that I wanted.

I also considered that a synergy would evolve during a focus group interview that would generate further in-depth and lively discussion. I thought that the students, present as a group once again, would stimulate thinking and feeling, as they had previously been quite comfortable to express even their most difficult feelings in the group. In my observation over time I did not notice any overt or subtle power plays among group members that might have seriously stifled personal expression. The focus group interview presented an excellent opportunity to observe meaning-making along with disputation over meaning by means of the students expressing themselves together, disclosing the constituents of their relationships, and benefiting from the synergy of the group experience.
I had prepared the students for the interview by a letter and invitation that included the appropriate request for consent. I further encouraged their participation by planning a social afterwards - a pre-Christmas party whereby they could have a reunion. Any added incentive, I discovered, was hardly necessary as they already were well-motivated and enthusiastic. Nevertheless it was an enjoyable evening and the social aspect spurred on continued and lively discussion well into the evening. While students continued to discuss the Cuernavaca experience long after the formal interview was over, their focus was less intense such as sharing their pictures of the trip. I requested in my letter that students reflect on Cuernavaca before they arrive, prompting them only with the fact that I would be asking them to relate stories, events, memories and incidences that they recalled as significant or memorable. I further requested access to any personal journals or diaries for further data collection and, as a result, received five journal books.

The interview itself was very open-ended and focused on one question. There were ten students who attended. The few who could not attend, and expressed their regrets, were held back by part-time jobs or family commitments on that particular evening. At first we went around the circle in the pattern that had been established at CCIDD. Everyone took their turn, with minimal interjections. As the evening progressed and excitement increased over the issues discussed, we moved to a more free-for-all approach, where everyone talked with great animation, added comments, made clarifications, and corrected one another as they wished. The discussion and socializing afterwards progressed very well, without any lulls in conversation. I kept the tape recorder running even after the formal part of the interview was over. The running time altogether was about two and a half hours of, for the most part, fast and energetic discussion.
Following the interview, I transcribed the tapes and began the process of reading and re-reading in order to establish categories for the data. I made notes during the interview and during the transcription process which subsequently proved helpful for establishing categories, and later for the analysis as these were my spontaneous and innate responses to the sum total of what was happening during the interview. I included and cross checked categories in the journals which elaborated upon already existing categories. At this time I felt that I reached a saturation point of which I was satisfied.

I worked and “lived” with the categories for about two and a half months and then presented my findings, emergent themes and initial analysis for the students to read. They eagerly read these papers and wanted to discuss and add points for clarification. A student who was not able to attend the interview requested a copy as well. There were at this time no new categories or themes which emerged, only better clarification from the students of the previously revealed issues and experiences. I also conferred with colleagues although I did not want input of data from the adult teacher-participants of the group. I wanted discussion with colleagues to provide an audience for my thinking and analysis process. I also had the opportunity to discuss my research process with staff at CCIDD, on a subsequent trip to Mexico, which proved most helpful. Not only were they interested in and supportive of this work but they provided me with their own insights on the longer terms effects on participants of their program, although they expressed that they did not have a good notion about these longer term effects. I made some adjustments to my findings and reworked parts of my analysis at this point. Issues arose in the interview process, as can certainly be expected, that brought up student problems of which I was only partially aware such as the
magnitude of the obstacles they faced - their difficulties with returning home and to school, problems with teacher leadership, concerns about their own activity and inactivity. This made me consider what direction and focus I would take for any questioning in the future.

The research process involved the students in the meaning-making process through the continuous conversations that were both planned and spontaneous. They eagerly read my reports on the findings, which elaborated categories and outlined the preliminary analysis, and commented verbally or in writing on the pages themselves then returned them to me for further study. The findings and analysis of this process, after the first year, is presented in Chapter Four of this work. One year later, the process continued, as I decided upon a further follow-up using a questionnaire and more interviews and dialogue.

**Researching after year two: Longer term effects.**

A year after the initial interview and follow-up, I decided to continue with the process of finding out what remained with the students, now two years after the initial experience. At this later date I was able to capture more student reflections, their longer term impressions of the experience and the effects, if any, on their present lives. This continuing process helped determine how their original thoughts and feelings had been maintained or altered. Contacting the students again was somewhat more challenging since they were no longer at the high school but scattered about Ontario in universities, colleges and work sites. I began again with a letter, the appropriate request for consent, and supplied them with a questionnaire. The questionnaire would give me feedback in the event that the students would be unavailable for another interview. I invited all of them to participate in an individual interview, realizing that for some of them this would be their
first. Questionnaires were returned, electronic mail correspondence occurred in several cases and most were eager and available to do an interview.

In the second year of interviews, again, I was very cautious not to make assumptions about transformation - that it had occurred or that it was positive. After the first interview, the notion was consolidated for me that the Cuernavaca experience was indeed outstanding learning from the perspective of the students in terms of the tremendous influence it had upon them. While I was still slow to ask about any transformation or change in the subsequent interview, I inquired about it as the interview progressed, after getting students to express their initial and spontaneous comments, and in the later parts of the questionnaire. When mentioning empowerment or transformation I carefully allowed students the option of negating this suggestion. The students, confident and comfortable, were quite willing to speak their minds and clarify what these concepts meant to them.

This process took a considerable amount of time, since accessing the students presented itself as more challenging. I made trips to their university places of residence, interviewed some over the telephone, doing final interviews during and after the Winter break 1998-1999 and into the Spring of 1999. I was able to reach and get information from all of the participants this time. I transcribed audio-tape recordings of the interviews (which ranged in length from forty five minutes to two hours), took copious notes with telephone interviews as the students patiently waited, and established a list of emerging categories, compiled my findings and engaged in the work of analysis, this time beginning by making comparisons to the responses of the previous year. I continued with ongoing dialogue, when and where possible - in visits, over the telephone and through electronic mail. This helped me in
adding and modifying categories as well as dealing with emergent themes and analysis.

In handling my data from one year of interviewing to the next, I did a compilation of the findings, themes and analysis for year one in Chapter Four. I then used this template as my starting point for year two, beginning again with a compilation of the findings, themes and subsequent analysis which is featured in Chapter Five, where I summarize how the earlier themes evolve. In Chapter Six I take a more intimate approach by working themes around personal accounts and stories which are representative of motifs and further enlighten student perspectives. I use narrative from student interviews in this chapter and for the first time introduce students using pseudonyms, with the exception of my son. I also further personalize with my own reflections in the mode of reflexive inquiry (Cole & Knowles, 1999). The final outcome of analysis is summative and reflects the overall positions of the students at the end of this two year period. I believe that this longer process adds to the conclusiveness of the findings and substantiates trustworthiness in my final analysis and recommendations in Chapter Seven. This final chapter concludes with a "meta" analysis whereby I look at both years, their commonalities, themes and implications.

This has been a passionate endeavour for me that has never ceased to teach and inspire. I have worked with ever increasing drive to be a clear vessel for the experiences of the students while adding my perceptions to their offerings in order to elicit meaning and discern how their experiences might inform education of the future.
CHAPTER FOUR
Findings and Analysis:
Student Perception One Year After the Cuernavaca Experience

In this chapter I outline the findings arrived at from the focus group interview, journal submissions and follow up discussions held nine months after students returned from their experience in Cuernavaca. I questioned the students about what remained with them after the experience. Without assuming transformation or appreciation for the experience, I wanted to get at the student reactions. By listening to their comments and remembrances, I was better able to ascertain the nature of their unique experience and the factors that contributed to the outcomes they experienced. All this helped in determining if and how they experienced transformation.

Emotions ran high after the students' experiential learning process at The Cuernavaca Centre for Intercultural Dialogue on Development (CCIDD) where they engaged with Mexican thinkers, activists and visionaries, listened and dialogued with the poor and marginalized, visited squatter settlements and indigenous communities and participated in local Mexican work projects. While these fifteen Grade Twelve and OAC Catholic high school students had to adjust to the Mexican realities, they found even greater difficulty re-acculturating to Canadian life on their return. They saw, they experienced, and they remembered.

In the interview, I asked for student accounts of peak experiences, critical incidences, memories, stories, "what now?" considerations and best and worst moments, attempting to elicit what they regarded to be important. The purposefully open-ended, non-directive and value sensitive interview questions supported and encouraged a plurality of student expression.
Trusting the data allowed for the emergent design that follows, contributing to an increased confidence in the truth of the findings. I exercised analysis according to the discipline and rigors of qualitative inquiry that maintains credibility through ensuring that the findings and analysis truly represent the thinking of the participants.

**Positive Effects**

The students who were in Cuernavaca summarized their learning experience, above all, as being positive, affirming the overall effectiveness of the Program. In their words, it "put things into perspective" (quotes, unless otherwise referenced, are from the student interview transcripts). They "loved learning about everything that [they] learned down there." Students indicated emphatically that they "learned so much!"

Students repeatedly remarked that being at CCIDD was truly a unique experience in their learning histories. "Mexico is the only time I actually enjoyed learning." "It's the first time I've been interested in learning about anything." With these comments they immediately launch a strong indictment against the school system, as they know it, and question the quality of learning that is normally available to them. These comments, as part of the opening remarks at the focus group interview, indicate a most positive outlook on the overall experience. It was only after this position was clearly made apparent and discussed that students could get into other details and talk about some of the struggles that they had also experienced. Superlatives abounded. Comments such as "we learned more in that week than..." and "we're probably the best educated people in the school" were delivered with conviction and passion.
Commendatory remarks, expressed by the students, included allusions to specific components and factors that, in their estimation, accounted for the success of the experience. It was “learning about ourselves...about what we can do...about community...about power and what it can do...about self-responsibility...how we can’t perpetuate pain.” General accolades proliferated, as they regarded this experience as a “more fleshed out form of education,” a “centre - something to relate everything to.”

Teenage students naturally are - and these students, in particular, were - very open and generous with opinions and feelings, demonstrated by their excitement to attend the interview, the words of gratitude following, and the generous offerings of journals and follow-up conversations. Teens in general are freely emotive regarding significant experiences that have made an impact upon them. At the interview these students were so excited about the experience that they made a point of exhorting one another on the importance of holding on to the memories of Mexico, and keeping them alive in their hearts.

It was obvious that this group of students had previously deliberated and reflected on their experiences. Preparation was demonstrated by their fine ability to articulate their ideas at the interview as well as by the fact that many brought notes, and journals for reference - so they wouldn’t forget anything important. They took it seriously upon themselves to provide data and voiced tremendous appreciation for this opportunity to express themselves. Their responses to the experience varied from the serious and precise to the emotionally tender and explosive. Expressed in their own vernacular, they had “one wicked time!”
Transformation and change.

The students spoke a great deal about what they perceived to be the results of their learning in Mexico. They commented about how they personally changed, using the terms “change” and “transformation” frequently in relation to the experience. Aspects of their transformative learning included:

- A change in what they know, in terms of content and understanding, summarized as “the way I think has definitely been changed by Mexico.”
- A change in how they understand learning. In this case it is a shift from regarding learning as something “that ends with a pre-determined product” to something that is ongoing, “now seeing [learning] as a process, as continual.”
- A change in their activities in how they now live their lives. For example, the experience “had a huge effect on my life. I just turned totally around....[regarding] how I see things and what I do”.
- A change in who they essentially perceive themselves to be, in relationship to self-esteem and identity. “I realized that my friends weren’t really my friends...I actually deserved better.” “I believe I’ve changed.”

The students saw their transformation as resulting from various aspects of the CCIDD Program - its emphases and activities that included:

- Seeing injustices and making connections, thus becoming inspired to act and change things later on. “Going into all these poverty stricken homes and seeing all the desperation and people who are destitute but still focusing on the community...[I] made those promises.”
- Getting a critical “mass of information” directly through dialogue with the people in Mexico (e.g. from experts, local grass roots activists). This pointed students to the “vast human potential” available from gaining knowledge.
• Meeting people in Mexico, who now function as role models for the students - Mexicans who believe in a cause and then act on it to powerfully and effectively change their lives. “They all overcame the hardships in their lives.... They were working to their full potential.”

• Change resulting from the process of internal focus and reflection - inner change being the precursor to outward change. “It made me more aware of who I am and...appreciate myself...and through this appreciation I can start to make changes.... I think you have to be comfortable with yourself and change yourself before you can make changes elsewhere.”

As well as talking about the changes they experienced in their lives as a result of their Mexico experience, the students contrasted this to what they regarded to be an insufficient amount of change in their world at home and they articulated their personal frustration with lack of change on their own part. “We need to be the things we said we want to be.” “[I] made those promises and I guess I broke them.” This in itself demonstrates their heightened consciousness about change, and their continuing strong desire for fulfilling the promises they made to themselves to change, amidst their own disappointment with their human tendency to go back on intentions.

The comments from students indicate their growing recognition for the need and value of change. “There is development work that needs to be done in this country...in the third world.” Their perception of the nature of change is that it is necessary and must first start on the interior, personal level - with themselves before moving onto the collective level. “I think you have to be comfortable with yourself and change everything you want to change about yourself first before you start making any changes anywhere else.” They note the ubiquitous difficulty in actualizing change, although they recognize it to be a potential within us all. According to the students, change grows out
of relevant education and is most effective when it evolves gradually over time with action accomplished in small steps - a phenomenon that is becoming an increasing reality for them.

Learning about power: Empowered and motivated.

Students spoke about their increased understanding of the nature of empowerment, learned from the Mexicans they met. They eagerly cited stories from the people that they found to be inspirational - those who had struggled, not only survived, but transcended their destitution.

[Ofelia] could overcome everything...! Families in the squatter settlement showed...[so much] potential.... [It is] inspiring and exciting to be around people who want to follow in those footsteps.... We saw so much with power and the ability of power.

Student reflection on learning about power and personal empowerment is summarized as follows:

• Empowerment does not counteract but requires individuality that is strengthened through community solidarity. The students remarked upon the “solidarity of the artisans,” how the Mexicans that they saw “built strong communities out of strong individuals.” Additionally, they said that to get things done people need community but it must be a community that encourages and does not negate individuality and its individual voices.

• It is more possible than ever to be able to act and to succeed against insurmountable odds, according to the students, because they now know people who have improved their lives and the lives of others amidst the most discouraging of circumstances. This is an extremely hopeful and empowering realization, “believing in the power we possess”. There is an incredible “human potential” that the students witnessed in the Mexican people that was “considered to be very inspiring”. This potential they realized
is available to all of us, even the weakest amongst us, if it is sustained and strengthened by the quality of persistence as that witnessed in Ofelia. “She just didn’t quit.”

Students spoke about their understanding of how the oppressed people needed to become empowered. They articulated the sources of oppression in Mexico, as they now came to understand it. Oppression, as they witnessed in Mexico, came from corrupt government, global economic and social inequity, and the subsequent disenfranchisement and marginalization of the poor. The students made connections to how in Canada, in their own school environment and in their personal lives, abusive power is also present and can also do tremendous damage. While students perceived that they better recognized the workings of oppression they showed a remarkable ability to reflect upon themselves and take responsibility for their own potential to misuse power. “I see how easy it is to just fall into that rut and just do it my way...but then I realize...I am obstructing other people from getting that justice and love”.

Finally students speak about the nature of their own journey to personal empowerment, made more possible through the experience they had in Mexico:

- They felt empowered as a result of their learning experience. “I am more vocal...more open to social things.... [I] stay more aware.” This was demonstrated by their attempts to make change at school, at their local level (they wrote articles, worked for student council elections, made a presentation to the school board).

- They were frustrated with their relative inactivity, not being sufficiently empowered, “not living up to their promises”. “We need not just remember things, but be the things we said we want to be.”
• They have been frustrated and felt quite desperate about dealing with their own immediate context, where they had "witnessed misuse and abuse of power", and felt too disempowered to make adequate changes within their environment.

Significant Components of the Experience

Contextual learning.

The students recognized that a major part of the success of this learning for them was in the fact that it was experiential, that it occurred within a context, unlike the more customary theoretical learning of school that they felt was disengaged from real life. To the students, the main value of this learning project was in experiencing a particular "reality" more directly. The students spoke about the impact that the context of Mexico had on them: "I remember their faces, I remember the places, the work projects and it stirs everything emotionally." "To be able to experience it and do it just gave us an idea of their day to day routine." "I will always remember going...speaking...seeing."

The students came out strongly in favour of this experience compared to those they had had in traditional school settings. "I've been learning my whole life then all of a sudden they're being put into context and it actually meant something to me." The students go further in judging their traditional learning experiences: "I think the way our educational system is...we learn things out of context.... When we're in Mexico and we're seeing certain things and then...it's in front of me - it's much more impacting." The students pointed out how much they valued this unique opportunity from an educational standpoint. "We are the best educated in our whole school!"
Belonging, bonding, friendships, community.

Students cherished the sense of community that evolved for them during the time they spent together in Cuernavaca and indicated how extremely important this was to them. This community was created on the basis of shared experience and although the group was not entirely homogenous, meaning that they were not all like-minded friends, they came to understand that “we shared a common life altering experience and we all feel...a lot of the same emotions and - that’s a bond.” In this category the comments were imbued with strong emotion regarding not only how they bonded as a group and found comfort, love and support in that, but how they witnessed community in action in the people of Mexico which was a further inspiration to them. “[The Mexicans] looked out for people that they cared about.... Love is all that she [Guadeloupe] was really looking for...[with this] they could overcome everything.” Students witnessed how people became empowered and strengthened when they stuck together and how they were better able to take action in their lives when supported by their community.

There was a renewed, and in some cases, new valuing of family and friends that the students came upon as a result of experiencing community first hand and witnessing community in action in the people of Mexico. Many students expressed thoughts such as, “It made me value my friends and family a lot more.” There was further realization of “the importance of relationships...[and the need for] having faith in each other and in the power we possess” as well as a realization of the immanence of community such that “our community is the school”. While generating a community experience was generally a very positive effect for the students, they warned one another about the dangers they perceived were concealed in becoming too attached to the cozy-ness and comfort of group belonging - where they
could fall into complacency and become inhibited from moving forward. Some suggested that they already had become "too dependent upon the warm fuzzy group."

A poignant story was told by a student during the interview which emphasized the lack of community and even familial closeness in his day to day life, although he lives with his intact and original family. For him, the busyness and demanding nature of our culture invades far too much upon life and causes isolation. While he spoke of his particular loneliness and isolation, these sentiments resonated within the rest of the group that also felt the negative effects of a consumer oriented and dehumanizing culture. Like so many young people today, he hardly sees his family.

...I don’t really have too much of a family, between my sister’s full time job, my dad’s job, mom, and me and my many jobs, I never see a family pretty much. I come home, there’s no one there. I’m lucky if I see everyone once a week. I pretty much live off of Chef Boy-ar-dee....

The Mexico experience, however, gave him the feeling of being in family, and bestowed a sense of security and love. He repeatedly thanked the group for welcoming him, accepting him and loving him, and pointed out specific moments of closeness while in Mexico, such as the welcoming embraces he received. His understanding about the group meeting for the focus group interview was that “the family’s back together.”

This unity was repeatedly mentioned during the interview, with the students pointing out peak times that they sensed it intensify. One such time was during the Mass at the very end of their stay. When they held hands during the liturgy students unanimously expressed a sense of outstanding closeness. In holding the hands of their neighbours, one student articulated for many, we were “holding the hands of everyone”.
Feelings and emotions.

The glue that held this experience together for so many of the students was the intensity of feeling that continuously arose among the group members, permeated their day to day experiences and was allowed free expression. Students of this age, naturally prone to being emotional, took to expressing their feelings like fish take to water. They were fluid, transparent, willing to risk and make themselves vulnerable while in Mexico and again afterwards as evidenced in their communication and reminiscences during the group interview. In many ways, this freedom of expression has added to the authenticity of their comments. They felt safe in this setting and free to express their thoughts, feelings and disputations over issues.

Students made comparisons with what happened while in Mexico and their regular life and school circumstances, which by contrast compel them to hold their feelings in check. According to the students, they have learned their lessons well and have become largely accustomed to keeping their feelings hidden, for the most part, in their daily lives. This however is seen to be a negative condition by the students. As a result they feel that they have repressed themselves, never really learning how to deal with their feelings. One student described her biggest risk during the Mexico trip: “For me, the big risk was talking about my feelings.... We’re just not taught how to deal with our emotions. We’re just not taught to make that a priority”. Therefore, “I’m not really in touch with myself, with my emotions.”

Students expressed the importance of having sufficient opportunity to gain understanding and knowledge that results from expressing and acknowledging feelings. “If I can feel something or if I can remember feeling, then I know exactly what’s wrong and what’s right.” This last statement not only equates feeling with knowing but feeling with moral knowing -
knowing right from wrong. Feelings are seen by these students as being deeply connected to the self and an extension of their physical bodies, even those feelings not readily verbalized: “I was so pumped...[working] allowed me to purge, to take all this anger that I had and just take a machete and hammer....”

Students spoke of the many experiences they had and the images they saw in Mexico that stirred up considerable feeling in them. “I was so confused, upset, angry and all of these emotions were bundled up inside.” Experience would give rise to feelings, then feelings, thoroughly felt through, would give rise to understanding and learning. A student summed it up: “I wanted to work through it and I wanted just to feel everything through to make sure that I understood what was going on”. According to the students the feelings required decoding in order for learning to happen. For them reflection was seen to transpire through feeling. It was through feelings - felt and expressed (“talking about it made it easier to cope with the changes”) that learning and understanding and acting in the world could better take root. Because their emotions had been affected, not just their minds, the impact was greater for the students and the potential for learning actually enlarged. They criticized a school system that stifled feeling, chastising it for thereby inhibiting learning. In highest praise, the experience was said to be “emotionally unforgettable”.

Ultimately the feelings that were experienced during the trip continued after the students’ return home. Feelings lingered and did not easily dissipate and students expressed concern over not being able to continue expressing, understanding and working with their feelings. At times they were frustrated because this did not sufficiently happen. “I was told that I had to stop feeling.” Again this not only speaks to the importance that students placed on feelings,
but to how vital feelings are to their ability to learn and experience well-being. According to them, feelings need be included and greatly encouraged as an avenue to understanding.

**Meaningful ritual.**

The first event the students mentioned in the interview was the Mass that they celebrated at the end of their stay in Cuernavaca. While a spiritual and religious ceremony such as this is not uncommon for students who attend a Catholic school, this particular Mass significantly stood out for them. For the most part, Catholic students who attend a Catholic school are composed of a mixture of the following: devout Catholics (the dutifully respectful, fully espousing their religious roots), those questioning, those disillusioned with Catholicism (many of which who are angry and rebellious), and those who are jaded (going through the motions as a result of the constant emphasis on religion within the system). This group of students represented a smattering of all of the above. However, they all noted how the Mass at the end of their stay at CCIDD was personal, generating in them a depth of feeling that was unprecedented and tremendously supportive. They also greatly valued the cross that they individually received as a gift as part of the ceremony.

They found the ritual to be meaningful for them because it was born out of the context of their experience that transpired over the previous ten days. They commented on how it truly "spoke" to them and everyone agreed on how "it culminated the whole week", being in essence "the climax", and a "frame of reference" which allowed them to more fully feel the "sense of unity" they had developed over the time spent together. It is worth noting how satisfying they found this experience as they mentioned it repeatedly and with great expression of emotion. While it was structurally similar, it was
very different from Masses they had attended in the past. It opened their eyes to greater possibilities for the religion and faith at the foundation of this ritual, a faith that had been demonstrated vibrantly in the people they met in Mexico and had now come alive for many. The ritual celebrated a reality that they witnessed, "a certain kind of Christianity that [I've] never seen before.... Christianity as an active force, as a force of empowering people." The Mass itself was described as "egalitarian, filled with love and compassion and hope.... It really turned my world over."

The Mass, as a significant event and memory, received continuous affirmation during the interview. For the students "it was magical" and was the "culmination of the whole week". Not only was this ritual affirming and celebratory, giving closure to what had happened, but something was created in the sacred space of this ritual - a mystical experience of "unity" echoed by many participants. As mentioned earlier under the heading of Feeling and Emotions, while holding each other's hands, students felt like they were holding and were held by everyone. What made this ritual especially significant for the students was its relevance, its inclusion of everyone, its allowance for feeling, contextualization, mystical experience of unity, climactic nature, its "magic". The ritual was congruent with the rest of the week's experiences.

**Physicality.**

For a variety of reasons students valued the opportunity to do physical labour while in Mexico. They were engaged in clearing land and participating in food sorting and composting projects. As one student reflects in depth on the benefits of physical engagement, he notes his "need for physical connection [in learning] and not only phys. ed., not just running for running sake, but working as an extension of your emotional, intellectual, spiritual
journey.” He spoke of how the school system easily forgets this important component after early childhood, yet it is exactly this type of physicalization that concretizes learning, as memory, awareness and consciousness exist in the body. For students, this embodiment in action provided another necessary link to cognitive processing, a grounding for spiritual considerations and a necessary outlet for high emotion. “If you connect with the body, then it stays with you because it’s physical, it’s tangible.”

Physicalization was regarded by many as a natural extension of the intellectual, the spiritual and most directly, the emotional: “I was so pumped...[working] allowed me to purge, to take all this anger that I had and just take a machete and hammer....” Others added, it “completed things for me”, “it made it real”, “tied everything together”. It “acted like a link” and “connected everything”.

“Working [is] an extension of your emotional, intellectual, spiritual journey. I got more out of that.... I loved that...! It was connecting with my body.” The students were very clear about the value of the physicality for their own sakes not confusing the work as being invaluable and critical aid for the Mexicans. The students were able to easily laugh at themselves, engage in self ridicule, (“we work...we juice...we party”) and reflect on how they initially were misguided in thinking that this work project for themselves, as for many others, somehow justified their trip to Mexico. “The thing that really legitimized it [the trip] was ‘We’re going to do a work project.”’ They now wanted to clarify that they must not confuse their work projects with helping out or doing a significant favour to the poor of Mexico. “I didn’t feel like we’ve been martyrs.... I found it really really arrogant of us to call these people’s everyday work a cause.” In fact they recognized that this type of help is not dissimilar to “the intervention that got Mexico in its mess in the first
place.” Students realized that they themselves were benefiting from this work and it was not to be confused with messianic activity on their part to save the Mexicans, but part of the colonizing experience. In this case they were clear about themselves being the chief benefactors of their work experiences.

Negative Aspects

“Not all of the experience was positive,” commented one student just past the mid-point of the interview. The Cuernavaca experience generated negative as well as positive aspects. The negatives that they experienced fell under two main categories with several sub-points pertaining to both.

Disturbing realities come to light.

The consciousness-raising process that the students experienced through the CCIDD Program disclosed saddening and disturbing Mexican as well as global and local demonstrations of exploitation and power abuse. “We saw the effects of power gone bad.”

The most obviously apparent disturbing aspect for the students (which is not altogether negative) had to do with having had their eyes opened regarding what they perceived to be an improved understanding of the nature of exploitation and the misuse of power. They discovered that the world did not run as smoothly or effectively as they had been lead to believe. While many had anticipated flaws in the system and in their own culture’s mythology, these now became a tangible reality for them. In Mexico students discovered first hand the plight of Third World people and how they suffer the devastating results of economic, industrial, social and political exploitation as their comments indicate. They remarked on the following striking events and “hardships” that they witnessed: “I remember when we went to La Estacion squatter settlement...going in there - it was shocking.”
"There was a baby on the street.... That's how much these people hurt." They recounted meeting people who had endured great suffering such as that of Ofelia ("It's amazing all the stuff she put up with.") and Father Filiberto. They were further disturbed by recognizing that "it's the same stuff here!" - paralleling the problems of Mexico with struggles in our own Canadian society. This point in the interview brought forth some disputation as students disagreed on how similar the exploitation and abuse was in terms of its nature and degree. There was, however, agreement that poverty resulting from active exploitation was also in our midst. "When we go down there, we are looking at a society that is just as sick and dysfunctional as our society." While oppression was prevalent in both Mexico and Canada, the students saw it to be different as well as similar. While Mexico suffered severe material oppression, Canada was seen by students as not only having a growing number of those materially disadvantaged, but a large number who were emotionally, psychologically and spiritually disadvantaged as well. A case in point, that a fellow student pointed out during the interview, was his own sparse experience of family ("I never see my family...much"). It was agreed that while the exploitation in our midst may not be physical to the same degree as in Mexico, nonetheless, the devastating effects of exploitation (material or emotional) remain. One student also referred to Canada as "a developing country". "There's so much pain, there's so much hurt.... Real development work needs to be done in terms of things that aren't visible...[an] internal kind."

The students discussed for some time the cause and the nature of oppression itself. Institutional oppression was cited as an example which included the church's "policies and blunders". In Mexico "we saw the effects of power gone bad," intervening and negating people's own self
determination to “[make] everything the same...easy to run”. “We have a society that doesn’t respect the community, that doesn’t respect leadership.” Simultaneously the students sensed their own responsibility yet susceptibility in perpetuating exploitation. “We must undo the damage that we have inflicted upon Mexico by some sort of intervention.” Further insight immediately amended that statement as students also understood that it is intervention itself that is at the root of oppression. “It is that very intervention that has led Mexico to where it is today.... They [the Mexicans] really know what’s best for them.” Colonization is regarded as rampant and insidious by the students and the Mexicans are subsequently the “real victims of corporatism [as evidenced by] all the coke that they drink”.

The students recognized how easy it was for themselves to get caught up in the trap of helping and succumbing to a “messiah complex”, what is a thin guise for colonization at its worst that provides easy rationalization and justification for all types of interference. Doing the work projects, they later learned, was not a proper justification for the trip to Mexico, however the mention of work projects certainly satisfied many who thought this gave this outing a proper seal of approval. It also drew in the much needed donations. “When we were telling people about the trip, the thing that really legitimized it was ‘we’re going to do a work project’.... Okay...! They would pull out their wallets.” They recognized their own proclivity to comprehend the nature of helping on a superficial level. “I think it [gave] us a false sense of martyrdom.” Although naturally drawn to help, they detected their own suspect motives and their attraction to a hidden agenda with regard to helping. Helping could be a façade for imposing on others, a false way of securing self-gratification, or a way of “cleansing the white middle class guilt”. “It made us feel like we’re doing something for them.” Now many of the
students were no longer fooled into thinking that their efforts were significant help for the Mexicans. On the contrary they understood that they were the chief beneficiaries of the work experience - gaining physical release through working, the fun team experience and appreciating another slice of Mexican life. Again the students take a humourous and insightful look at themselves - and at many of us steeped in Northern culture: “If I help clean up a ditch, I can go back and I can watch Seinfeld. I’ve done my part”. They recognize in this rationalization the dilemma of being trapped, often unconsciously, in the oppressive mythology of our own consumer culture. And this in itself is somewhat of a bondage for them now.

The students actually noticed that their fashion of working was amusement for local Mexicans. Recalling two Mexican men watching on the sidelines: “They laughed at us, I know” and we “think that people in Mexico don’t know how to use a shovel.” Students recognized the pattern of colonization, where helping can amount to a thin disguise for meddling, which creates instead of alleviates problems. Some of the young women students noticed that young men in the group used the project as an opportunity to demonstrate their machismo and engage in competition:

The guys were struggling to beat down this stupid log...taking down the stump.... They never should have cut it down in the first place cause it was a big supportive thing.... We’re going to make things right with our brut strength.

The students showed a tremendous ability to see the limitations in their own capacity to help. “We come down for a couple of hours and then we take a big break...we juice...we party.”

Students proposed different ways of helping besides imposing a North American mind set or our brand of solutions on the Mexicans.
There needs to be more communication.... They really know what's best for them.... Someone has to sit down and listen to what they think needs to be done for their country instead of the people who have the power, even if they do have the right intentions, using it in the right way.

Finally, students drew parallels between oppression in Mexico and what they experienced in their own microcosm of the school community with respect to their feeling disempowered and sensing personal exploitation. For them there was a sharp irony in this, after having felt such a sense of empowerment during the CCIDD Program. This point is further elaborated in the next section.

**Obstacles - Inside and outside.**

Obstacles of great personal frustration were experiences that were not directly related to the Cuernavaca experience but to the after effects of the Program - after returning home. Student frustrations and obstacles were characterized in the following ways:

- They felt impeded in the process of continuing the necessary further processing of their feelings and learning that began in Mexico.
- They were unable to freely and fully act upon what they had learned, both within their regular school environment and in their personal lives.
- They were negatively reacquainted and further disappointed with their traditional school experiences, after having engaged in the alternative and empowering learning experience at CCIDD.
- They experienced conflicts with peers, teachers, and those who represented the educational establishment who did not act in congruence with their new understandings of education for empowerment and who directly impeded their ability to act as they felt they must.
This category of response also is connected to the discussion of misuse of power, however, here the obstacles pertain to students' direct experience in the realities of their own world. The students, having gone to Mexico and witnessed the consequences of exploitation and the abuse of power (political, social, economic and religious), now felt themselves more empowered through this learning - by the knowledge they gained experientially and by being trusted to figure things out for themselves by means of the democratic pedagogy practiced at CCIDD. On their return to Canada, they were confronted with realities within themselves, amongst their peers and in their immediate community (including school) that uncovered difficulties intrinsic to the process of change, betterment and further democratization. They perceived some of these obstacles coming from within themselves and some from outside and, in their reflection, they discovered not only how power structures are operative in their own milieu, but how human agency is the basic unit for determining how power is wielded. This reality was revealed to be a difficult challenge for these young men and women.

Among the internal obstacles they noticed their own tendency to renege on the "promises" that they made freely to themselves. They chided themselves for having become too dependent upon a life of ease and even the "warm fuzzy group" - the much appreciated comfort zone that they had created among themselves and had relied upon. The human community, while safe and calming, came to be understood also as a place to hide and a road to complacency. They also recognized their own "human tendency to hurt" and their "lack of will" - a demonstration of their human frailty and a product of living within a consumer oriented society and culture. Further they spoke of lack of courage, another weakness to which they are susceptible. "I am going to get in trouble if I do this.... [I could] lose my job" portrayed the
polarity students experienced between striving for security and maintaining their own integrity. The impediments range from their natural inclination to “fall[ing] into a rut [for] convenience,” to the failure to take personal risks and “stand up for things”.

Externally there were also many obstacles that the students experienced, ones that they spoke of with tremendous emotion during the interview - ones that pertained to dealing with others. This was the time when tears flowed. It was tearfully expressed that “I’ve never been so intensely angry before.” Some students had experienced rifts among themselves, only partially related to the presentations made as a result of this Mexico experience. (Part of the follow up back at the school, included students making a presentation at a school board meeting in order to gain support for the Cuernavaca Program.) For the most part, personal sources of conflict and tensions developed that are common to high school students, and were admittedly not regarded to be the chief obstacles that the students experienced as a result of their learning. Personal and unrelated areas of conflict were not discussed at the interview as the students regarded this to be off-topic, as I was told afterwards. Learning and school related obstacles were personal and somewhat varied according to the individual students. For example one student admitted “for me the biggest risk was feeling.” In the area of obstacles students took on different perspectives. However, all of them experienced some form of obstacle from the outside and most students were in strong agreement over challenging the formal educational establishment in which they were immersed.

What the students experienced as their greatest external obstacle back home was paralleled to the obstacles people experienced in Mexico. “This is the same thing that happens in our school’s bureaucracy or our culture’s
bureaucracy. A lot of bureaucracies have the same power problems that we saw in Mexico. A student makes the following pointed and strong statement: “It’s like we were taught how to think and then when we came back we were told, ‘now don’t think now.’” Others said,

[We were] told that..., we can’t say that..., we can’t criticize our school board..., we can’t actually apply what we’ve learned. We can’t really tell the truth.... We were deprived of that ability to attempt to make change in the one community that we really serve a key part of.... We were faced with this wall.

All these statements, spoken with intense feeling, strongly critiqued the established values coming from their school system.

The students’ own analysis of what happened included an understanding that their own learning and empowerment, acquired through the CCIDD Program, was regarded as good “up to a point”, but when they exercised it was “not beneficial to those that control” because “it frightens the people in charge.” “Those in power are unprepared to deal with the application of learning” which points to a “lack of respect for community and leadership” according to the students. It is easier for those in charge to “limit the extent of the experience,” “let the experience stop at the border” or narrow the focus, as in limiting student application of learning to “work[ing] at a food bank.” In exasperation students felt that the powers that be “don’t want real thinkers.” Naturally these obstacles do not appear in disembodied form, but are incarnated in people, these people for the students being fellow students, friends, and certainly particular teachers and adults in positions of power, such as school board personnel and government policy makers.

Again students astutely were able to see the redemptive elements in the obstacles they experienced. While extremely frustrated with these obstacles they, nonetheless, noticed and reported that living in the real world
and coming back to a real world presented them with a unique opportunity to witness how difficult it actually is to act upon what they learned and understood to be right. As was strongly, insightfully and emphatically concluded by a student, "I don’t think we’d recognize how community based and how close problems are to us if we didn’t have [situations] like that pissing us off." Again students are able to make profound connections between the Mexican and Canadian experiences to see through to the universality of the human struggle. At the same time as they are presented with negative situations or negative learning models they are able, in their own words, to "learn the opposite - learn to be not like them." Ultimately the data indicate the students’ tremendous capacity to be responsible for transforming themselves - to transcend negative experiences and demonstrate resiliency, hope and forgiveness.

Emerging Themes

I will consider three central themes emerging from the data following the focus group interview, journals, and follow-up discussions nine months after the Cuernavaca Experience:

- In light of the life changing nature of the Mexico experience, the description of student transformation indicates a movement towards greater consciousness, both personal awareness and global understanding.
- This transformative learning experience is commended by the students largely on the basis that they found it to be of holistic proportion - exemplary of holistic education.
- Students express need for ongoing support in continuing their process of transformation and in acting from empowerment. Educators can learn from
these student accounts how to be supportive to students experiencing struggle with oppression from within themselves as well as from the outside.

**Increasing consciousness.**

The students perceived their learning experiences to be transformative and there is much that indicates that educators can trust their perception to be accurate as their discussion bears evidence of critical self-reflection and earnest determination to sustain the life change that began for them in Mexico. They talked considerably about their personal change and the need for that change to also extend to a global scale. This is not change for the sake of change alone, but change oriented towards creating a more just and compassionate world. This is the transformative education defined earlier, a broader perspective to which Sullivan (1985) appeals:

> We have to completely revise our western understandings of what it is to be an inhabitant of the planet Earth, our human story and the western story; for indeed a new situation reveals the true reality of what we have been doing. (p. 5)

Joseph Campbell similarly supports a “transformation [that] is really of the whole of humanity and what it means to be a cultural and world-related human being” (in Sullivan, 1985, p. 5). The students aligned themselves to this sort of transformation as is disclosed in their development of new perceptions of reality and liberation that surpasses their old world views and well established cultural mythologies, especially those having to do with the workings of power.

Through the Mexico experience they gained not only a greater consciousness of global crisis but greater personal consciousness of their own role in perpetuating the often oppressive status quo. The experience personally empowered them for action within their own school community
as they also considered the nature of proper action on the Mexican front. Positive change, whether on a personal or a global scale, required adherence to life-centred values such as mutual empowerment and personal reflection. They challenged their personal and cultural mythologies and realized how they can succumb to a martyr complex that results from their own inclinations to impose and misuse power. Students spoke about how authentically helping the Mexicans could not be impositional but would have to revolve around listening, co-operating and respecting communities - moving towards greater democratization and their own political and social re-structuring. Similarly this was something that they must also take responsibility for at home. Students made regular references to the values of community and individuality, freedom and respect.

Information gathered was replete with students articulating on their own learning, not fraught with accounts of the social life and party scene in Mexico. Their frustration over their own lack of action, far from indicating a status on their part, indicates a consciousness of understanding the gap between their reality and their ideal. Do their frustrations with themselves perhaps indicate a lack of transformation? It appears not; rather, they point to their awareness of the fact that they have not arrived at where they would fully like to be. If their consciousness had not been increased in the first place, would they be feeling this sense of frustration at all? Not likely. The students betray their movement into a greater sense of awareness, no longer deluding themselves into thinking that they know it all, or thinking that what they don’t know won’t hurt them. They have moved from a state of relative unconsciousness into a state of greater consciousness and with this comes the pain of knowing, a recognition of the “gaps” in their lives - like the gap between knowing and doing or the long journey from the head to the heart.
Thus their expressed frustration, encompassing a growing awareness of their lack of action, is a good sign. Even with their self deprecating, scrutinizing remarks we know from the data that the students came back ready and willing to act and suffered consequences from it.

Moving to consciousness is usually personally threatening because it involves letting go of defenses and giving up old and comfortable ways. Jim Hodgson, program facilitator at CCIDD, sheds more light on the student experience and shares his perceptions in a personal conversation we had in March 1998 - a year following the original Cuernavaca experience. Jim thinks that what happens to students is that they "bank" their experiences and learning. Daily concerns often eclipse the impact of the learning experienced when the initial emotional impact wears away. It is necessary to trust the seed that has been sown as one never fully knows how and when the learning may surface in future actions and decisions. Slowing down is a natural process but one that is hardly indicative of complete regression. Of course there are those who respond to learning in different ways. This variance is well referred to in The Parable of the Sower in the New Testament (Luke 8: 4-8) where seeds that fall on rocks or amidst weeds do not grow as well. But it is evident that the students have taken in "good seed" although it is difficult to be fully cognizant of the ultimate and complete impact of this learning since we rarely have long term views into people's lives. Even so the students in this study, nine months after the initial experience of the Program and long after the initial emotionalism had dissipated, uphold strong evidence that the learning is still very much alive in their hearts and minds and bodies. They have not forgotten.

The students recognize a need to cultivate awareness and consciousness on the interior landscape of themselves as well as make
headway on the exterior landscape of the world. They show evidence by their words and their reports about their actions and frustrations that they have made considerable movement in that direction.

**Holism is central.**

The focus of holistic education is on relationships - the relationship between linear thinking and intuition, the relationship between mind and body, the relationships between various domains of knowledge, the relationship between the individual and community, and the relationship between self and Self. In the holistic curriculum the student examines these relationships so that he/she gains both an awareness of them and the skills necessary to transform the relationships where it is appropriate. (Miller, 1988, p. 3)

This description exemplifies what is at the heart of holistic learning - recognizing and sustaining relationships. Students repeatedly used the word "connection" and understood it as a concept that is unifying. They saw the connection between what happens in Mexico and what happens in Canada. They saw the importance of connecting all elements of humanness with learning - the emotions, the mind and the body. They saw the connection between vibrant individuality and authentic community life, and they became more greatly connected with their selves and with each other. While holism links disciplines and modalities of learning, more importantly the students found out that "people can all be tied together. We aren't all meant to be separated and to be individuals all of the time...but we need each other to be able to stay together as a person."

While students did not directly use the label holistic to describe their Mexico experience, in highlighting the many elements that were of most value to them, they described elements that are at the heart of holistic learning. The students stressed the importance of feelings (the emotional), meaningful ritual (the spiritual), embodied learning (the physical) and the
need for continued reflection and dialogue (the mental). They employed vocabulary such as "relationships", "unity", and "connectedness" and specifically commended the CCIDD Program for its ability to make interdisciplinary connections, integrate modes of learning and most importantly facilitate connection among people. These students, who have long been immersed in the Roman Catholic rhetoric of "loving one's neighbour and being the body of Christ," experienced greater self connection, a community bond and a solidarity with one another as well as with the people of Mexico as a result of living this experience.

The meaningful ritual, regarded as a culminative experience by the students, was integrative joining heart and soul and celebrating both the joys and sorrows of the time spent together by means of an embodying spirituality. This ritual, as holistic experience, was deeply satisfactory as it included the need to celebrate, ritualize, remember, feel, crystallize, synthesize and even re-play in symbolic form what had happened during the previous week, a practice that is often neglected in our scientific, pragmatic, and reductionist culture with little time for the invisible. What made this ritual specially significant was its congruence with the rest of the week's experience as exemplified in its timing, pertinence, relevance, inclusion, feeling, and contextuality. The ritual was strengthening and functioned as a bridge to the future for these students, presenting them with continuous hope as to "not let[ting] the experience stop at the border." As with all good ritual, it served the purpose of grounding and integrating what is known through the process of conscious reflection and symbolic action in community support.

Holistic learning is always contextual in the best case scenario as life itself is holistic, its elements not separated out, fragmentable and exclusive. Raising a family is a prime example of how numerous ways of knowing must
come together: human qualities of understanding, generosity, communication, discipline; practical skills of child care, housekeeping, financial management; spiritual concerns such as values and well-being. Unlike day to day life in the traditional high school, which separates all learning into subject areas, the Mexico experience was real for the students as it immersed them into daily life reality with the ongoing support of caring mentors. It was this that animated the students to proclaim this experience as their best learning ever.

The need for continued support and empowerment.

Students identified many obstacles coming from within themselves. They identified their reluctance, failure to keep their promises, their insufficient action and support of one another. They also distinguished obstacles they encountered from the outside: the recalcitrant educational system which supports the status quo, and educators who put conforming to their vision of learning ahead of authentic student empowerment and construction of their own knowing. Students’ comments give clues to understanding some of the deeper sources of oppressions they encounter.

The internal oppressor is a concept discussed by Freire (1968) whereby the values of an oppressive society become incorporated in individuals, often unconsciously, and thus the oppression is perpetuated outwards and also inwardly upon the individual. This is most commonly demonstrated in overtly politically or socially oppressive regimes such as the dramatic example of Nazi Germany where ordinary people assisted inadvertently in carrying out the atrocities in the routine of following rules or behaving as good citizens. Augusto Boal, whose work continues from Freire’s, has worked with people’s struggle against oppression in “first world” countries. While North Americans may not be struggling with political dictatorships, torture
and loss of life, Boal acknowledges that they experience oppression nevertheless - of a more psychological nature. Oppression in these cases often results from dehumanizing elements within a more civilized-appearing society and manifests as marginalization, loneliness, isolation or the inability to take action within one's own life.

Students, while they might not immediately label what they experience as oppression, speak of their pain in feeling misguided, or being incapable of acting more fully. For instance they discuss their misplaced zeal at the worksites, where they mistakenly removed a useful supporting structure. They acknowledged their susceptibility to the "messiah complex" where they thought that they could "show Mexicans how to use a shovel". They admitted to their low threshold of work tolerance and their need to take their regular "party" breaks ("we juice...we party"). They actually were able to make the connection that these behaviours are related to the pleasure seeking and the ease of lifestyle prevalent and promoted in our consumer oriented culture. Students laughed at themselves: "[We've worked], now we can go home and watch Seinfeld." There is a recognition and admission that they have succumbed to the myths of our culture, the myths that have fueled colonialism and now fuel corporatism. They realize that their own habits, constructed from the messages they receive from society (aimed at the good life), makes them feel deserving of Seinfeld after their guilt has been appeased by helping out. The students well understand that they too are victims of the subtle oppression of the consumer culture that has permeated their very being.

The external oppressor is perhaps more readily identifiable, because most students are well used to an authority presence in their lives, and they encounter "controls" daily in the presence of parents, the vice-principal (the
school disciplinarian) or school and societal rules. Yet their commentary about school oppression is not subject to a shallow analysis, motivated only by a sense of rebellion. They do not take advantage of the interview to voice pet-peeves - criticizing their school uniform codes or lunch rules that they abhor, or see these as target projects to tackle on their return from Mexico. Instead, they go right to more important matters - the more complex, hidden and difficult issues. They challenge the educational system in the way that it is complicit with other oppressive economic and political structures. This thrust is not only a way to deal with their own anger and frustration, but is a way of eradicating injustices in both Canada and Mexico. They are now willing to tackle any anti-democratic hierarchical tendency, whether it be NAFTA or lack of free student council elections. These manifestations are part and parcel of a continuum of oppression that has repercussions throughout the world and eventually affects the plight of the Mexican people. It takes great courage for students to wrestle with these issues and challenge the operation of their own school as they are presently immersed in and dependent upon this system to supply them with much needed grades and recommendations to succeed in their future. The oppressors that students face daily are seen as similar to the oppressors who keep the Mexican people in bondage. As an example, they painfully recollect a teacher’s admonition to them which undermines their move to empowerment: "If you knew anything about community, you’d do as I say right now!" With this recollection they indicate that autocracy and domination is alive and well amidst their school environment and point out the hypocrisy in education merely paying lip service to empowerment in learning.

Students, in their comments, express desire for a support that needs to come in two forms. One form is in self-support - an internal strengthening of
their own internal integrity: belief, trust, and self-esteem, which must also allow them to continue to feel, as well as to see critically in order to help them work their own way out of the web of consumer and corporate culture. The other form of support comes from having good teacher role models who not only facilitate an extenuation of the Mexican experience ("Don't let the experience stop at the border") but are living out the truths in their own lives. These teachers take stands on social justice issues and do their own work on themselves that increases their capacity for teaching in non-domineering, egalitarian, and respectful fashion.

Numerous times students precisely named their needs - opportunities to continue to feel, to reflect, and to act on what they had learned. The students did not want this Mexico experience to end - in more ways than the obvious one. Not only did they miss the family-like, close and stimulating Mexican experience, but they missed the continuance and transference of this learning into their regular classrooms inbuing their day to day learning. The pain that they expressed and the tears that they shed were mainly over this - not over regrets of leaving Mexico. The students felt essentially betrayed by some who had gathered them for and supported them in the Mexico experience initially and then ostensibly abandoned them. Those people were not able to live up to the values of egalitarianism, trust and support that the students expected as a result of the pedagogy at CCIDD. This hurt was profound and the emotion peaked when this pain emerged during the interview.

Students wanted the continuity of their experience to advance, thus indicating their need for continued presence, listening and welcoming. They trusted their experience and needed to be trusted in the dynamic of the
learning - not to have their learning engineered to fit the expectations of a teacher or fit within the limitations of a restrictive educational system.

**Reflections on the First Year Perceptions**

As a researcher with a particular vested interest in not only the positive outcome of the research enterprise but in the Program at CCIDD, which I personally found greatly enjoyable and beneficial, I was somewhat apprehensive about what would amount to be the student verdict on the experience. I was, however, aware of the narrowness and limitations of generalizing from my own experience, and the shortcomings in learning from "data" that was skewed according to the researcher aspirations. What helped in my ability to "let go" was both my trust in the CCIDD experience and my relationship of trust with the students. If this experience was worthwhile and had lessons to teach us all, then those teachings would emerge from student reflections - in fact, teachings could only be derived from their contributions.

I continued to rest confident that the student reflections would authentically reveal their perceptions and I could deliver them clearly because of the students' comfort with me and the fact that they had nothing they needed to gain from me. I was not one of their classroom teachers at the school, had no expectations of them and no grades to confer upon them that were related or unrelated to the Cuernavaca experience. I had gained their trust while on the trip, as they confided in me, vented feelings, suffered through sickness with me and felt free to ask touchy and personal questions. I disclosed the necessary confidentiality of the research process and offered them the use of pseudonyms which they unanimously rejected. At the outset I still reminded then that I was not out to evaluate them but the Cuernavaca
experience and that all comments would be welcome, none being “wrong”. All of this helped to make the information gathering appropriate and successful with both myself and the students feeling satisfied with the report.

While I had fully anticipated that the students might make strong indictments against their traditional schooling process, the mention of particular names of people made me feel seriously uneasy. I was uncomfortable enough with writing material that my principal or school board administration might read and find offensive, worrying about being pointed out as a rebel subversively working to undo the system. But worse than that I was apprehensive about concentrating my work on negative aspects (a task of both displeasing and depressing proportion). I was especially alarmed at the prospect of citing teachers that the students found problematic. I had considered, prior to the interview, restricting the students comments to general expressions of any negatives and warning them not to mention names. I was simultaneously concerned about enforcing what would be blatant censorship. I let the urge to censor pass. At the start of the interview I was quite pleased that no names were being mentioned until just past the midway point where I stopped the tape (due to my own discomfort) to inform the students about my aforementioned worries, telling them that I will not use any names in my writing. They were in agreement and we continued. Therefore, in my chronicling I attempt to be honest to the students, comprehensive in my description of accounts, yet handle the stories of experiences sensitively.

As I mentioned earlier, I was stymied over how a positive experience (as the students were telling me that it was) could be so marbled with negative aspects. Also I was puzzled about what to do with differing student realities, although there was remarkable unanimity over most issues. There
were tears that flowed and intense such emotion during segments of the interview that surprised me considering it was nine months after the event! I went back to my reading for support, numerous times during the course of doing the analysis, and was reassured by Kirby and McKenna's (1989) understanding of the responsibility of the researcher: "to create a forum for presentation of these experiences and ideas rather than seeking the most frequently expressed or the strongest opinions" (p. 162).

I was impressed by the students' use of the actual words "change" and "transformation" and was further assured of their connection to these realities by the accounts they used to back up these concepts. It was more than I could have wished for, although I felt I still needed to remain cautious about assuming that this reality would persist in their future, careful to allow the students to come to a change in heart or perspective.

The recommendations that flow quite naturally from the students' comments on the educational process, both at home and at CCIDD, that have been outlined in the findings and elaborated upon in my analysis, can be considered to be more credible because of the additional time that has allowed for the development of their viewpoints. They have been acculturated according to North American standards, have been made more aware of its many aspects and influences on their lives, and have had some opportunity and time to assimilate and digest the learning gained through CCIDD.

Two issues still troubled me. One was the fact that I had not heard from all the students. Five of them were unable to attend the interview on the scheduled night. The other issue for me had to do with the lasting power of their current perspectives. How would they look upon this experience after they left high school or later in their life? I thought I could somewhat remedy these dilemmas by gathering more "data" at a later date and get information
from all the students who participated on the trip. I made the decision to do a follow-up another year down the road. At this point the students would have left high school and would be involved in new chapters of their lives - at work, at college or at university. This would give me a better idea of what would happen over time and add credibility to my research process.

The subsequent enterprise did not disappoint. The second year interviews offered rich information which not only further elaborated and strengthened previous categories, but added new perspectives, and subsequently, new insights.
CHAPTER FIVE

Findings and Analysis:

Student Perceptions Two Years After the Cuernavaca Experience

Two years following the 1997 Mexico experience in 1999 I was fortunate to be able to locate each of the fifteen student participants, now out of high school, and further elicit their perceptions of the experience and any "long-term" influences it had upon them. I engaged them in individual interviews for the most part and, in cases where distance was problematic, former students answered a comprehensive questionnaire and were invited to elaborate further by telephone. Again the questions in conversation and in the questionnaire (included in the Appendix) were open ended - asking for memories and impressions, any long term spin-off effects and the students' overall assessment of the Cuernavaca experience. Indeed, the questionnaire was simply an alternative to face to face interviews and served the same purpose.

This chapter outlines the information gathered from the students that correspond to the categories originally established in the first year interviews. Information gathered from second year interviews touched upon old categories, emphasized points previously made, added subtle nuances and in some cases veered off into new directions from earlier themes. Both this chapter and Chapter Six bring into focus these fresh responses and concentrate on how they reinforce or modify the content related to earlier impressions. Chapter Six focuses more personally on the new depths that have emanated from the second year research endeavour that converge around three pivotal themes or stances. Chapter Six is a more personal look at students, using narrative, story, and for the first time, names (or
pseudonyms), so as to more effectively disclose the impact of individuals upon various stances and the interplay of the various perspectives of the Cuernavaca experience on student lives.

I found that the extra year's distance from the original experience gave the students additional viewpoints and, in some cases, altered their perspectives. This was due in part to the fact that they were more freed from the emotional immediacy of their original experience. The heightened individuality that I noticed in the responses came as a result of doing independent interviews and responses (as opposed to focus group) and the fact that most students at this later time were more removed (at university, work or college) from most of the other group members.

I separate two perspectives out, as best I can, from the rest of the student input. One perspective is clearly separate, that belonging to my son Nicholas (his story is featured in Chapter Six); the other, my own perspective as researcher, is both enmeshed as analysis throughout the work as well as separately delineated as reflective pieces in what amounts to be a dimension of reflexive inquiry (Cole & Knowles, 1999). My son’s perspective purposefully stands apart from the other students, not that I rank his contribution in some way above the rest, but data received from him is of far greater depth, simply because of his willingness and availability to engage in ongoing dialogue and my own close witnessing of his life endeavours and decisions. In this way I set him apart so as not to “anonymously” include the substantial weight of his data with all the others. He has had the opportunity to read my interpretations (and indeed the thesis itself) and add his point of view to further modify my analysis where need be.

My own story as researcher marbles through both chapters (but mostly in Chapter Six), revealing strong reactions, growth, and moments of epiphany.
that I experienced throughout the course of my researching and writing. The transformative experience of students, of which I have sustained interest, is also my own and clearly evident in my ongoing struggles, increased openness, and shifts in thinking. I also feel compelled to share and show myself, stepping forward then back again, so that my readers are more freed to exercise their right to come to independent conclusions of what this work means for them.

Positive Learning Experience

All students reaffirmed the positive nature of this learning experience. Even those that had serious problems with aspects of the Program (for example, the political content or teacher misuse of authority) or were experiencing a fading interest, when asked to assess its overall value or asked whether or not they would do it again, they answered in the affirmative. One of the students, who displayed little sustained enthusiasm following the experience, surprisingly admitted the following:

My reasons for going were a spare in next semester and an extra credit which I needed to graduate.... If I would pay a thousand dollars to go to Mexico, I would go to the beach, right...? So I was going to go down there, thinking that it was going to be nothing and then it became an emotional experience.... I learned quite a bit from it.

Another student who came across as quite skeptical of the experience similarly concluded: “It was a good experience even though it might not have changed any [of my] world views.”

From the preceding remarks (by the least enthusiastic) the comments progressed, as demonstrated in the following quotes, ultimately culminating in superlatives. At this time I would like to point out that all quotes used in
Chapters Five and Six, even if they sound repetitive to those in Chapter Four, are solely from the second year interviews and questionnaires.

- Mexico was a start in a way of thinking for me.... It's just made me see things a little differently.

- When we were down there...everyone was very enthusiastic about what we were learning. We couldn't get much sleep at night but we'd all be very enthusiastic and interested in what's going on.... We would sit through a lecture or talk or discussion and when we would stop to break, we would continue talking about it afterwards.... It was just this open mindedness and enthusiasm to get a handle on issues and that was good.

- I think it's one of the most well-rounded learning experiences.... It's definitely not comparable to anything else that I've learned because it's more personal.

- It could have been longer.

- It's up near the top of learning experiences in a kind of inner, spiritual way.

- The whole Cuernavaca experience remains with me to this point.

- I don't think the experience could have been better!

The previous comments, all generated by different students, not only reinforce their positive perceptions from the previous year, indicating that the benefits of the experience withstand the tests of time, but the comments begin to disclose the variety of reasons that the experience was found to be "exceptional". It is precisely in the multiple interpretations of students and their varied responses that we see how the Program touched everyone by its integration of doing, intellectualizing, reflecting, feeling, spiritualizing, community building and exposure to human reality. In being all things to all people it touched everyone even though each aspect did not necessarily speak to each individual.
Another indication of the students' positive reaction to the Program was in the fact that they were very willing to be interviewed once again. I was rather surprised by this, considering that they might not easily enjoy being pulled away from their more adult lives at this time to reflect upon a high school experience. Their positive responses affirmed how this learning experience stands out remarkably compared to their traditional educational experiences.

**Transformation and Change**

The focus group interview revealed that students experienced transformation and change in the following areas: their increased level of knowledge, new understandings about the learning process, new focus and engagement with regard to action, and improved quality of their self-esteem and personal identity.

In the interviews two years after being in Mexico most students verified that they had indeed experienced these changes, while not all of them necessarily experienced all these facets of change. The majority of students, in actuality, attributed considerable personal change to the Cuernavaca experience - both in the intensity of change and in the variety of areas in their lives that were affected. The following quotations illustrate the range of their transformative experience:

- It's made me see things a little differently ever since.

- I'd have to say if I looked at my life in different stages that would be the catalyst of me jumping into the next stage, into another stage of maturity, into another stage of discovering who I am, who I am emotionally as well as spiritually.... It was a catalyst [that] steered me in one direction...just a tiny little spark...everything seemed to open up - with people, with
relationships. It's all seemed to be a broader spectrum than it did before.

- Awareness [was transformative].... I think the effects of the trip are going to be very long term.... It's in the brewing if you know what I mean.... Something's going to come out of it.

- The trip really opened up for me that there are other parts of your life than living just today.... There's more to it.... It's changing me or changing me slowly in different little increments.

- There must be some certain instance of circumstance that sparks transformation. Mexico was this spark. As a result I began to change in my thoughts, in my words and in my desire to learn. My spirituality has taken different shape and form yet it doesn't stop right there.

- [It's about] cracking my cocoon, coming into the world but at the same time being centered in myself by learning how I impact the world and vice versa...my thinking has shifted - less practical to more compassionate.

- Empowerment came through the realization of what I have, appreciation for who I am, and understanding that all goals, dreams and wishes have limitations.

- I see myself as being more aware of my surroundings, both locally and globally and finding the desire within me to learn as much as I can about it.... I learned to be more vocal about things that matter to me, whether it be about my personal well-being or about another person's.

- Before I went down I had a certain philosophy or I thought one thing with regards to religion for example. Some things really changed - my emotional state, ideas about our country. Coming back I am more politically aware and more open to other people's needs. Transformation is a change in my state.... I think differently....my personal initiative has changed.... It's weird how one and a half weeks really changes a person!

- I bonded to that place over the ten days we were down there.... I made great friends.... Obviously my outlook on the world is greatly different.
A small number of students did not perceive lasting change, only temporary change while in Cuernavaca or shortly following the experience. Two students articulated about this phenomenon of fading. One student attributes the fading of his experience to the natural process of coming back to ordinary life. “There was a feeling while we were there, but ever since we came back...it doesn’t have that much of an impact on me anymore. It did for the first couple of months...it did though.” When queried more on the nature of this impact, the student replied, “I think I was more compassionate towards others. Then the more compassionate you are, the more people take advantage of you, then you’ve got to learn where to stop, right?” This quote reveals an internal change that could not be sustained (or is perceived to not be sustained) because of external pressures. Yet the student still praises the learning experience saying that “I learned morally about it” which indicates a deep impact nonetheless.

Another student is more critical of the experience as she willingly reverts to her previous world views. She suggests that she may have been duped by the experience.

[Change?] No. It hasn’t remained for me. I changed viewpoints while I was there, yes [viewpoints] concerning the system and the poor. My viewpoint changed while I was there - into thinking that North American companies were doing wrong.... I thought they were doing wrong, exploiting. That was a fact, but now I’m just skeptical. I’m just as skeptical as I was before.... I like to think that I was just as sensitive before [to people’s needs], I guess.

Two additional students articulated on their present state of needing to further consider and reassess the experience, coming out of it with “more questions than ever”. Similar to the previous student they had concerns over the political perspectives promulgated at CCIDD. They questioned the
different political climate and economic perspective as presented by the Mexican people they met and wished to withhold final judgments based on the fact that these too were opinions.

There are so many people who come to conclusions right away with whatever they’re being told. Having had the Mexico experience, it makes me critical, not that I disagree with what’s being said, but that I am consciously stepping back from it, putting in context and seeing if I agree with it or not.

Here we are reminded that instead of certainty they “came out with questions.”

The locus for change in most students was on the inside. “It’s not like going up, but going down [pointing to inside of himself]...being open to yourself and your feelings.” Those who spoke originally about a personal change in the first interview remained steadfast in their opinion one year later, this being the category in which students experienced the greatest and most constant change. What characterized internal change included a resurgence of energy, interest, drive and motivation - and for some, they were compelled more than ever, to reach out in service to others. Regardless, some students (the particular ones mentioned earlier in this section) felt more immobilized than ever, more perplexed and left to further consideration of their positions rather than committing to any action or response at this time.

As noted in the quotes at the start of this section, students remarked on change in their level of awareness while others reiterated their consolidation of knowing and what they understand to be effective approaches to learning (to be discussed in greater depth later in this chapter).

Where there was talk of inner change, a strong connection was maintained between inner change and outward action - the former necessarily preceding the latter. “You can’t really help others until you’re
really happy with yourself," declared one student. There was a strong agreement among students for the endorsement of the following educative practices that they valued at CCIDD: finding a place for emotions (a heart focus as well as head focus in education), group bonding and community making, and building a sense of solidarity and understanding with others which in this case was with the Mexican people. These factors had the power to provoke internal change because they touched their hearts as well as minds.

As will be indicated by narrative examples that follow, any change in political or world view was considered to be the most controversial of issues for the students. For many of them, their interest in politics flourished after the Cuernavaca experience. Many made decisions regarding future university studies and work based on their Mexico experience, decisions that they probably would not have made otherwise. For a smaller proportion of the students, while they were temporarily convinced of the place for an alternative political world view while in Mexico, they regarded the process to be more akin to "brainwashing" after they returned home. Among these skeptics, some felt more unsure than ever before and increasingly cautious about vilifying any societal group including corporate structures. At the same time, for others, politics was not even an issue because for them their experience happened at other levels - on the emotional and spiritual planes.

Whether or not change or transformation can be proven conclusively for all students is of minor importance. My inquiry is not out to prove this, but to richly describe, analyze and reflect about what these student experiences have to teach about the process of transformation in the context of experiential learning. This type of change cannot be forced in any way and coercion was far from any intention related to the Program. What is
significant is that all the students were challenged by the experience and all continued to consider issues from different perspectives and angles. Their choices regarding outcomes remain their own, yet are now informed by the seeds of alternative world views that were presented to them through their participation in the Program.

Learning About Power: Empowered and Motivated

Students remained solidly impressed by the quiet heroics of the Mexican people that they had encountered. They recalled sensory images of the people and their homes and names that hung in their minds - all inspiring hope and increasing the possibility of truly bringing about effective change. "The image that always comes to mind when I think of Mexico is Guadalupe. She herself is a symbol of strength and perseverance.... I still pray for her." Already many students expressed that since being in Mexico they had come upon a new resolve to serve humankind, to work for social justice and be a source of gratitude, peace and understanding in their world. "I want to become a participant in the global community, not just a bystander." "I can make a difference." This outward focus manifested in several ways: in choosing their university courses ("My interest in global politics has greatly increased"), in becoming more vocal on issues ("I am usually more empowered to voice my opinion), and by working diligently in small ways in the intimate circles of their families and friends ("[I’m] trying to make a better life for myself and help my parents when they get older)."

When it came to students' understandings of the workings of power and what they perceived to be oppression wielded by those in power in Mexico (related to political, economic, and social injustices), opinions differed. Many, who had an opinion in this area, felt as though blinders had
been lifted from them with the new first-hand information they gained. These students now had a different view of the many institutions that were more highly regarded in their home culture. They now perceived a more ruthless and unconscionable side to these institutions, as in how they had potential to exploit weaker nations and peoples. A student strongly states:

My thinking has shifted.... I realize that what is deemed to be the most practical answer [in our Northern society] often has deleterious effect on humans and culture, examples such as the Common Sense Revolution, Structural Adjustment Policies, NAFTA [the North American Free Trade Agreement]....

Others, such as the smaller group who came out with more questions, retained a stronger degree of skepticism. As mentioned previously, these same students felt strong reactions ranging from skepticism to feeling duped and even brainwashed. "It's almost as though you temporarily get brainwashed. And I know it's a bad word to use - brainwashed - but it's almost like it temporarily did at one point." At best these very few were left with more doubts than ever. At their most critical they challenged what they considered to be another biased view held by the people who were involved in the CCIDD Program.

The reasons for these negative stances, what could be regarded as retrenchment, are worthy of examination. Questions arise such as: Are their reactions due to being re-immersed in a system that still works for them? Is the new perspective garnered at CCIDD too threatening, or just unsubstantiated in their own life reality? As researcher, I gently hinted for the students to more closely examine their reasons, while I did not press too strongly. I thought that unwanted pressure might elicit a defensive stance or I could be left to untangle the circumlocutions of denial. What is more important is that the Cuernavaca experience afforded these students the
opportunity to question their previously unexamined assumptions through exposure to alternative world views.

Many students, as was made clear by the previous interview, were now drawing parallels between oppression in Mexico and problems in Canada.

I think there are structures in society that you don’t really recognize when you are part of it, but you recognize it when you see it somewhere else. It’s almost as if you are too close to notice it.... I think we’re faced with the same powerlessness but we don’t realize it.... It’s made me more critical of things.

Students again saw the impact of oppression from those who hold power in circumstances most close to home such as their school experience, these oppressions being political as well as personally coercive. They expressed emphatic statements which delivered bitter criticism upon the educational system such as, “There’s one thing I’m very pessimistic about and that’s education.” Many criticized teacher stances that disempowered students as they pertained to the Cuernavaca experience and the follow-up. “I found it very controlling, even in terms of what we were allowed to discuss.” When I asked for clarification on whether they were including CCIDD staff as part of the problem, they carefully pointed to the contrary. I asked: “You mean you felt controlled by the CCIDD people?” The student replied: “No! .... I’m not out to.... You know....” The emphasis, then hesitation of this student indicates both her defense of CCIDD staff and her tactful referring to what had become a common understanding of how and where supervisory power was misused.

Student criticism of oppressive pedagogy ranged from gentle (“I don’t think it was preferred for us to ask certain questions”) to severe (“I just felt that the control that was exerted over the group paralleled the control that we were studying when we were there”). At the extreme they railed against times when educators abuse power and the general violations of authority they
witnessed in the educational system where mere lip-service is paid to the concept of empowering education. "It's safe to be educated up to a point, you know.... I think we're restricted [by education]." This is where the issues again hit very close to home and re-ignited distressing emotion in many of the students.

As far as their own empowerment was concerned, students saw increased knowledge and information as their source of empowerment - knowledge that they received in abundant supply from their contacts in Mexico. "I feel I am personally empowered because I am aware now of things that most [people] only hear about through the media.... I feel I have the power to make a difference." As well, the pedagogy, which trusted the learners, was regarded as being empowering. "We had opportunity to reflect and observe." However, there was indication that students were frustrated by their inability to generate the amount of action and service that they felt they "should" demonstrate after being inspired in Cuernavaca. This itself indicates growing consciousness of their sense of belonging and responsibility to a larger global community. "...Trying to help others. I think about it all the time.... I hopefully will act." Many commented on their continued volunteer work and how they get "involved in campaigns - things to help make change or make statements." Others, as mentioned earlier, were in a state of waiting, still deliberating about where they stood before moving forward into action. "I think it's important to take your time before you decide what battles you're going to fight," one student reminded.
Outstanding Components of the Experience

Contextual learning.

Once again the students saw the Cuernavaca experience as valuable because of its realism and relevance and they delighted in the uniqueness of this learning opportunity. "It was discover for yourself.... The discovery method of teaching makes it all come to life." They favourably compared the Cuernavaca experience to what they had traditionally encountered in formal Canadian schooling. All students had a sense of appreciation for the experiential aspect of the visit which is essentially why all field trips are popular with students. They saw the Mexico experience to be in sharp contrast to usual educational methods. "You are learning from people, interacting with people - instead of just the teacher standing up at the chalk board writing, writing, writing, and you handing in all this stuff...."

Students commented on the many opportunities for observation and reflection built into the CCIDD Program - activities such as walking about the market, visiting people in their homes, doing real work and numerous built-in times for reflection. Generally, the term "hands-on" is used extensively by students to name relevant learning. The Cuernavaca experience merited this adjective. "It was a real hands-on thing.... You could get more of a first hand look.... You could actually see their faces. Then it's a different sort of thing."

Another student called it "personal learning". Even those who learn well by textbook and lecture appreciated the experiential aspects - a visceral aid for learning as "certain smells, sights or sounds bring it back". For those not inclined to be successful in the traditional classroom mode experiential learning is a veritable godsend. Again and again students praised the relevance and sensorial aspects that spoke to their whole being. Loftiest praise called the experience "all-encompassing" and included summative
statements such as, "We learned more in ten days than in fourteen years of school."

**Belonging, bonding, community, friendships.**

"In the ten days we were there, it was like we knew each other for so long and that was what stuck with me the most."

The participating students generally and typically experienced teenage conflicts and tensions since they returned from Cuernavaca. Some discord and disharmony was evident between a couple of group members at the time of the focus group interview. Since that time there was an additional physical parting of ways naturally due to graduating and progressing onto colleges, universities and work sites across Ontario. The original group was no longer in regular contact with one another for work, educational and personal reasons. However, in the interviews, most of them fondly recalled the exceptional bonding experience that they shared while in Mexico. Evidence of the exceptional sense of community that they had established among themselves is provided by one student: "Most prominent [for me] are the relationships and the bonds that developed between what were fourteen strangers into life-long friends."

A special connection had been established during the trip as many shared feelings such as "it was great getting to know other people and just the atmosphere - everyone was really together." For the student, highlighted in the analysis from the focus group interview, who regarded the group as his "family", he remains steadfast in his perception. He reiterates similar sentiments one year later. "We were a family.... I felt bonded with others.... It has always been a family." When asked if he had any concerns over the trip, his only concern was about the current welfare of fellow students, CCIDD staff and supervisory teachers.
Students again referred to the outstanding community spirit they witnessed in the Mexican people. "In Cuernavaca, even in La Estacion, everyone knew and helped their neighbours." Mexico continued to be an inspiration for students to maintain their close ties with friends and families and has been the impetus to bring about significant renewal in some of their lives. "It was a catalyst.... I just seemed to pick up and get the ball rolling in little places like with my father or my mom...improving relationships."

One student wears a symbol of a sun and moon - a necklace that he bought in Mexico - every day. When asked about the significance of this piece, he answers, "It just means that everyone in the whole world is under the same sun and moon." This necklace reminds him of the reality of that experience in Mexico - bonding with the Mexicans and with the newly formed yet temporary community of staff and students. Although time has passed the recollection and learning from the bonding that had occurred and from the communities that they had witnessed remain significant for the students and still touches them deeply.

**Emotions, feelings.**

For some students the trip was not at all about gaining political insights or increasing global awareness. For them the trip was mainly a journey into their interior world. As one student put it, "It's not like going up, but going down [pointing inside to his heart area]." The major revelation that some discovered was not at all what they had previously anticipated. While they may have expected to learn about things in the external world, they mostly learned about themselves and in some cases got in touch with this interior dimension for what appeared to them to be the first time.

For one student, who experienced such a revelatory experience, it was about "discovering who I am, who I am emotionally as well as spiritually." In
Mexico and afterwards, "I was alive and energized...refreshed, invigorated, having new energy.... I felt alive and I felt great. [It was] a blast of energy - everything seemed to open up." While some students in the first year referred to the "high" they experienced, two years later, this "high" is still making it's impact, signifying more than a momentary euphoria but an awakening of new ways of relating to themselves and their world. "There was a big breakthrough.... I know what I'm feeling and what I'm thinking at the same time. And not all my decisions will be from my head." There is a balance evident in the previous student's statement, one that recognizes that feelings are not necessarily superior to thinking, but it is for the best when they both work in tandem. The following quote indicates that the students actually make a connection to action through their feelings. "You deal with your feelings, then you do something about what you feel." For them feeling spurs on action.

This intertwining of thinking, feeling and acting is regarded as integral for learning and speaks to the dearth of emotion and attention to feelings in the regular school classroom. In addition to the emphasis made in the focus group interview, students recognize that the absence of attention to emotion creates adverse effects to learning. They link feeling with knowing and especially with deep knowing that is moral, relational and deeply human.

**Meaningful ritual.**

The ending liturgy surfaced again as a most positive remembrance for the students. Considering the propensity these Catholic students might have for being jaded at the experience of a Mass, this Mass however remained unique to them for several reasons. It acknowledged and celebrated the bonding that had been established, allowed a fresh expression of deeply felt emotion, and was culminative and celebratory encapsulating the learning,
unity and spirituality that they had lived in the previous ten days. Students pronounced that “the Mass was exceptional” indicating the valued place of religion and spirituality in their learning experience.

There were elements of surprise that some students experienced with regard to the Mass - some new discoveries being made during the interview itself. One student shares his surprise at the impact it had on him. “When we had that last Mass, that’s when it [the trip] became an emotional experience. I thought I was going to take everything in stride, that is was just going to be another trip.” For another student who deliberated on the Mass, he experienced shock at his own vivid remembrance of it. In response to the interview question of What comes to mind when you think of the Mexico experience?, he relates the following:

The Mass. Definitely at the end. I can even picture where everyone was sitting. This is where I was sitting, the carpets on the wall and that picture that stuck in my mind a lot. Because I think that night, within that hour’s time span was when everything came crashing down on me and was probably the hardest hour for everybody there. Everybody broke up. Everything hit you then. It really did.... I remember exactly where you were sitting. I remember you reading your homily. I remember exactly where Paul was sitting. As a matter of fact it was very clear in my mind [astounded] Wow! Wow! I remember what he was wearing. Very clear. I never thought about that before....

For this last student, the Mass was the pinnacle, the point of everything coming together with great clarity and with great emotion. The strong emotional impact brings about a striking ability to remember detail. His description demonstrates how the spiritual melds with the emotional to create profound meaning and memory. The heightened details disclose his state of aliveness at the time and the subsequent impact and memory
embedded within him. Although it was not consciously accessible, on reflection it came flooding back.

Physicality.

Students differed in their opinions about whether or not the work projects in which they participated were truly substantial help for the Mexicans. For some of them working on projects was the time they felt they really contributed and had an opportunity to give back a bit. “The work projects enabled me to feel as if I was really accomplishing something.” For others it was minimal, mostly self-gratifying and included some strategic errors caused by misguided bravado as was exemplified in the removal of a tree stump. “It [the stump] was to be a [necessary] support.” Apart from the questions on the validity of the helping, most students found the act of working to be beneficial for themselves.

Many found the physicality of working valuable because it allowed them to engage their bodies in action which lead them to feeling energized, happy and fulfilled. “I wish I could have done more hands-on helping.... I worked hard.... I felt great afterwards.... I can see results.... I feel energetic, I feel great, I feel happy.” Another student adds, “It’s got to be a great thing - getting out and exercising and helping, so I thought it was a great part of it...you get to learn more about yourself and about others.”

These comments alert me once again to the value students place on physical activity, not just as a means for helping others but as a way of further integrating learning into their bodies The students with their comments are urging that this aspect not be ignored in the process of learning. In accordance with bodymind theory (Dychwald, 1977) this is not only an enhancement to learning but its necessary component - embodying and concretizing knowing at the cellular level so that it becomes lasting and available.
Obstacles

By and large, students had surmounted any difficulties they had in the first year re-acculturating themselves to the Canadian lifestyle and context. They still had their Mexican "lenses" through which they negatively viewed atrocities such as food wastage and rampant consumerism, although they were no longer reacting in the extreme as recalled by one student who was "sickened" at the lavish restaurant meal that her parents had planned for her to celebrate her return home from Cuernavaca.

A new theme regarding obstacles soberly emerges two years later. This obstacle is perceived to be inherent in the approach of the CCIDD Program whereby students were directly acquainted with the poor and oppressed who offered explanations for their plights that were contrary to the established notions of dominant "first world" nations. Some students judged this to be indoctrination and brainwashing. "[We] were brainwashed...especially in the political parts [of the Program]", one student reported. "I think it was biased to make us feel guilty" with "United States-bashing and seeing corporations as wrong". This was regarded to be an imposing obstacle by a small proportion of students. For them the experience would have been better "without the political parts." It is noteworthy that while this was most likely brewing in their minds after the first year, it took a another year for their full reaction to set it, which begs the question, What has caused this?

There are several possibilities. One is that this is an inherent fault in the Program (Could the Program be too heavy handed?). Another possibility is that students are not really ready for such alternative world views, or they required further preparation. The first two possibilities are somewhat contraindicated by the fact that most students applauded the political content and focus of the Program and appreciated the opportunity to hear first hand
from the people and be presented with new views on which to reflect. A third possibility is that some students who found the political perspective objectionable were reacting because it was contrary to their own strong political views, inaccurate according to their reality and perception, and perhaps threatening to their status quo. With these possibilities in mind, I still doubt that this seriously calls into question the CCIDD approach or calls for more caution in the way their Program is presented. I will extend my discussion on this theme further on in my work (see the section in Chapter Six, "Developing a Critical Eye").

Interior obstacles were also highlighted by the students. This, as before, had to do with their own perceived sluggishness or inability to act as they wished they could and sufficiently respond to the lessons that they had learned in Mexico. While there was not as passionate-a-plea as before to "not forget" the experience, nevertheless, the students in some cases were quite critical of themselves. One student repeatedly stated how he wished he could act more. He regards himself somewhat negatively as an observer (in actuality he is a quiet, sensitive and seemingly caring young man). "It's difficult for me to implement, or take a chance or take action". He muses, "helping others.... I think about it all the time.... Why can't I do more of it?" He has very high aspirations and is hard on himself. Perhaps he might be going too much against the grain of his own personality, being an introvert. Yet from other comments he has made he is obviously doing a lot already. He is overwhelmingly grateful, spreads a positive outlook on life wherever he goes, and is conscientiously working to improve his close relationships, particularly those with his girlfriend and parents. He persists in a hopeful fashion. "Maybe in the future I could do something". Another student justifies his inactivity in another way. "I think I was more compassionate
towards others [after the trip] then the more compassionate you are, the more people take advantage of you, then you’ve got to learn to stop, right?” Most students talked about their willingness to be more active, do more service, and help out, indicating the ongoing nudging with which they challenge themselves.

By far, the most talked about obstacle, one that was mentioned by all the students - in kind to more harsh ways - was the problem they had with certain aspects of authority. This manifested for them specifically as the misuse and abuse of teacher authority witnessed during and after the trip and was generalized to include, for some, an overall dissatisfaction with oppression as a ubiquitous problem in education. “We were faced with the same powerlessness but we don’t realize it.” “It just felt that the control that was exerted or tentatively was exerted over the group paralleled the control that we were studying when we were there.” Students in every instance were most careful not to blame or attribute this problem to the staff facilitators at CCIDD. Their complaints were restricted very specifically to particular pedagogical practices associated with a particular teacher on the trip and having to do with the follow-up afterwards. Several students commented that for them the worst part of this problem developed after their return home.

Most students pointed clearly to specific behaviours while others felt a more general malaise and attributed the problem to having to be answerable to “school rules” Comments such as “[I felt] somehow arm twisted in the way that we should act,” “I’d rather just be more myself,” and “I needed more independence,” are representative of this stance. Others generally sensed a “tension between students and teachers” or commented on the atmosphere as being inhibiting at times, and perhaps were reacting secondarily to other
students' discomfort. One student's explanation for the problem was that the excursion was attached to a religion course and the credit delivery necessitated a religious focus and content throughout. "The link with religion - some people had problems with that."

The problem with authority manifested in too much control:

I found it [aspects of the Program that were influenced by home school demands and personnel] very controlling, even in terms of what we were allowed to discuss.... I don't think it was preferred that we ask certain questions.

Students themselves drew conclusions that "it's safe to be educated up to a point and once you're beyond that, you know.... I think we were restricted." Students noticed how "some [student's] opinions weren't looked at as or deemed valid". Teachers seen as manipulators, demanding "cookie cutter" answers, lording power over students, applying "major pressure," "not admitting to biases, thinking that [they] unequivocally transmit ultimate truth" - are all negative qualities in schools that students found to be objectionable, creating serious obstacles to their learning in traditional classroom situations.

While the students found the CCIDD staff remarkably different in their democratic orientation, some negative qualities permeated the Cuernavaca experience because of the presence of school supervisors, the necessity of following school rules, and the necessary preparation and follow up experiences which took place back home. Commenting on the negative quality of the learning experience, one student said, "If we had less of a drill sergeant and someone more relaxed.... We needed more time to reflect and think on our own." Even so, one of the most vehement and pained critics retained compassion and balance saying "I don't think we would have
learned as much if s/he wasn’t there” - meaning that her own personal struggle with abusive, coercive power was in itself a learning experience. These sentiments were equally strong two years afterwards as in the previous year and, although the wounding students had suffered had lost its sting over time, the emotion still ran very deep.

Comments about negative aspects or ways the entire experience could have been improved upon are arguable, such as the opinion on political content and attachment to religion. Most students did not find these objectionable and actually praised this content by including a request for even more emphasis on politics and culture. A few did oppose this focus, a couple of students were still strongly reflecting and questioning, and still others did not have an opinion one way or the other in these areas. Most students however concurred with the assessment of misuse of teacher or school authority either directly or indirectly (through noticing others discomfort, for example). Comments such as “it could have been longer” speak to the core of student sentiment. All of them said that they would have repeated the experience had they been given another chance.

Reflections on Beginning to Let Go

I became increasingly aware of my attachment to certain responses (namely the positive ones) and my negative reactions which I could feel in my body, to responses that I judged to be opposing. While I was initially aware of my biases and pointed them out earlier in this research report, I was increasingly aware of how difficult they were to completely transcend, especially at the second round of interviews where discussion of negative aspects seemed more prominent. For example, while I was pleased with student reports of long-lasting change, desire to serve the world, their work
on relationships and attainment of greater levels of self-discovery, the responses that indicated doubt, immobility and questioned aspects of the Cuernavaca experience (such as the political thrust) disturbed me. There was a part of me that did not want to hear them. Fortunately, during the interview, I had sufficient self-awareness of my low level reactivity so as not to consciously attempt to stifle any student responses. My determination to ask open-ended questions somewhat saved me here. Fortunately there was another part of me that wanted to hear all and also welcomed the ambiguity and polarization of opinion.

Nevertheless any amount of reactivity caused me to further reflect on my own attachment to specific research results and my over-identification with the Cuernavaca experience itself. Another aspect which brought another twist was the surfacing of my own inner "teenager" - frustrated and unhappy with her school experience. She also was coming to the fore and wanted her needs to be met too! My vested interest in having a preference for particular student responses disclosed my own agenda for education based on not only my adult teacher perspective, but on my teenage and childhood perspectives that were based upon unsatisfactory school experiences. These multiple perspectives needed to be brought to greater consciousness, revealing the complexity of my own desires. The overwhelming aspiration however was to have my research be an authentic discovery and not to be propelled by the force of my own agenda.

Here, what I learned in psychosynthesis was most applicable. I have engaged (and still continue) in psychosynthesis practice in order to increasingly free myself from the chatter of my own personality (the personality essentially being a configuration of aspects of self, organized in the best way possible, for the survival of the individual in a not fully welcoming
world) in order to be more available to my soul. Soul in this context is larger than self, yet contains the self while being connected to a more universal Soul. Allowing soul to be more permeable in myself, in turn, makes me more available to others' soul. This is attained through practice that parallels meditation whereby I notice my distractions, take note of them (and do not suppress them), then, let them go. For me the application of letting go and listening is possible with others only if I have some sense of being able to do this with myself. This means being able to hold lovingly my own polarities, paradox and personality aspects, while not identifying with any one aspect in a reductionist fashion. An example of this would be letting go of my need to be right which satisfies my "authoritarian" sub-personality (Assagioli, 1993) but not my larger self.

For the research situation this translates into remaining open to my students through regularly checking into myself and noting any reactivity that is based on defenses and sub-personalities (that could include anything from the hurt child to the scathing critic) - all making their demands. When sub-personalities emerge, provided I can recognize them, I try to take note of their input yet recognize them for what they are and put them aside for the time being. Through this practice and increased awareness I have a greater appreciation for the important place for soul work in learning to listen and in becoming a better researcher. I thus make a case for research being a spiritual exercise.

The central practice of presence - making the soul force of the researcher more permeable in the interview and analysis process - allows for a greater openness whereby the truths that need to emerge have a better opportunity to do so. The point of the listener (the researcher) in this case is to hold the input creatively, not to solve it and to express whatever creative
tension there is without the pressure to solve it. This is what I find most difficult, as I too want to solve the mysteries of the universe, or at least partially solve the mysteries of unsatisfactory education during the course of this thesis work. This calls for more letting go. While I find frustration in doing this it is also liberating and it is in listening to that which I do not want to hear, in all its frustrating detail, that I realize that there is as much to learn in the limitations as there are in the expansions.

This work parallels the work of a good therapist. Thus teachers, therapists and researchers are all engaged in doing sacred work (many teachers are already acutely aware of this!). The best therapist, in my understanding, does not impose his or her agenda on the client but assiduously pays attention to the unfolding of the soul and midwifes its continuous birthing. It is my belief that a therapist/researcher/teacher must do his/her own work - not once and for all - but daily as the issues continue to arise that "push buttons", cause reactivity and ultimately have the power to drive the work into areas of self-indulgence, when this work must maintain its posture of service. All the while this is not to deny the positive self-serving aspects of it as well and the precept that one can not truly help others unless one can take care of oneself.

This act of "getting out of my own way" is not meant to invalidate my perspective as researcher and scholar. It parallels the practice of making biases known which is central to feminist research (Kirby & McKenna, 1989) and perspectives of qualitative research which situate the practice of researcher as central to the process of inquiry. Here the journey of the researcher is as important as the research journey itself - beginning and ending with the self (Cole & Knowles, 1999). So I hold both realities and enmesh them in my work, listening for where my voice emerges, what connects to them, and all
the while honouring the voices of the students that agree to share themselves with me.

When I started this work several years ago, I knew that for me to say anything of significance - for this work to be at all personally meaningful and for my interest to be sustained in it - it would have to be a work of personal integrity and be imbued with honesty. It would also have to be a work that was personally challenging, involve my own growth as a human being, and finally, be a work which would be of significance beyond myself - while heuristic, not solipsistic. I can best achieve this by cultivating self-awareness and scrutinizing, yet not dismissing, my motives and through this become a better vessel for the student voices to be held and heard. At this point in the research process, instead of bemoaning the fact that the students did not all have lasting, epiphanal experiences, I need to find out what I have to learn from those students who did not “transform” as well as from those who did. This is my task of learning as a teacher, researcher and fellow human being.
CHAPTER SIX
Findings and Analysis:
Two Years Later - Personal Accounts and Narratives

In this chapter I discuss themes that emerge from the same interviews in a more personal fashion than in the previous chapter. I use information gleaned from students, this time using names (or pseudonyms) in order to give a better sense of them as individuals, that singularly and collectively contribute to various themes. I use these narratives to delineate the three differing outcomes or stances in response to the Cuernavaca experience. It is my belief that the use of personal narrative gives better shape to the students' depth of perspective, strength of feeling, and indicates how individuals configure around themes.

The three categories of response to the experience include students who developed a more critical eye, students for whom the experience has faded into ordinary existence, and the majority of students who felt they were the beneficiaries of long and lasting transformation as a result of the Mexico experience.

In this section, in keeping with the personal style of discussing and analysis, I continue to divulge my reflections on my journey as a researcher which are included at the end of clusters of exposés and discussion and after narratives that evoke particularly strong responses.

I have separated out my son Nicholas' perspective (for reasons noted in Chapter Six) and it appears near the end of this chapter followed by my final reflective piece. The chapter concludes with a short summation which ushers in the final chapter of my work where implications for education and educators are considered.
Developing a More Critical Eye

Without a doubt, the Cuernavaca experience challenges the "average" North American sensibility that regards middle class prosperity to be the result of capitalistic free enterprise, a competitive market economy and an effective democracy. Included as part of this world view is the belief that, for the most part, any citizen who participates through hard and honest work will garner the benefits this society has to offer - a degree of success leading to a decent standard of living. The viewpoints of the Mexicans whom the students encountered challenged this world view, attributing naiveté to its adherents and duplicity to its perpetrators. Not only had democracy and free enterprise not worked for these Mexicans, but the prevailing influences of rampant capitalism (neoliberalism), international intervention (including free trade) and democratic corruption continued to erode at the fibre of their dignity, stability and well-being. The United States' economic and military presence, transnational corporations, even the complicit Church were vilified in their joint venture to gain power and wealth at the expense of ordinary people.

Most students returned from the trip having had their eyes opened to these realities that they had not witnessed before and, subsequently, adopted a more critical stance with regard to the power plays of economics, politics and religion. Back at home this was evidenced by their reports of becoming more vocal on issues, challenging the status quo, involving themselves in campaigns and taking courses in areas that they would never previously expected, such as in politics, economics and religion.

However the presentation of this alternative view, with its criticism of the many monoliths of North American society, could be said to have backfired on a small number of students who reacted strongly to most or part
of the views that were generally representative of the Mexicans they encountered. The negative reactions, to aspects of the CCIDD Program, of a few students appeared to have strengthened in the time these students spent reflecting from the vantage point of their home surroundings. There were two areas where students strongly criticized aspects of the Mexico experience itself. First of all these select students (four in total) conflicted with the political perspective, as outlined, which was prominent in the milieu of CCIDD. Their positions ranged from skepticism to outright disapproval. The second area of criticism (which garnered the support of far more students) had to do with problems in education, which for the most part related to their back-home school experiences but which somewhat permeated to the Program in Mexico because of the qualities of some of the teacher supervisors and the necessity of having to adhere to established school rules and protocol. Many students consequently hammered away at education both generally and specifically.

André, a student previously quoted, found the political stance offensive, openly "disagree[ing] with all their [CCIDD staff and the Mexicans] political beliefs." He also objected to the links that were found and made in the CCIDD Program between politics and religion. He used the word "brainwashing" in the interview, then politely apologized for using such a strong term. When encouraged to elaborate on why he used the word, the truth became apparent that he truly did resent what he perceived to be a brainwashing aspect in the CCIDD Program, particularly in what he perceived to be an anti-North American and anti-capitalist political stance. This mind-oriented, thought provoking part of the Program ran directly contrary to the "heart" and "feeling" components that he truly adored. "The feelings part - for me that was the biggest thing." He did not perceive any change in
thinking as a result of the Program and its very focus on politics detracted from what he found to be far more valuable - "going down [into himself]."

Interestingly, André shares some facts about his process and discloses some important contradictions that have bearing on the paradox that many others experience. He says that he was capable of seeing things in a different political light while he was in Mexico, but on his return, he reverted to his previous views.

I got brainwashed when I was down there - temporarily - to agree with them. But then when I started thinking again and started doing research on the things, I never had agreed with some of those political things.

André attributes his change of thinking while in Mexico to his emotional vulnerability at the time. "We were in a very vulnerable state down there." He claims to have had a temporary change in political view due to the factors surrounding emotion rather than thinking. Yet it is precisely this emotional part that, in other respects, he greatly values. Another factor in his turnaround may be that while in Mexico, he (as well as others) were more freed of the influences and constraints of a North American world view, in a similar way that they enjoyed the freedom from their geography, family influences and the adherence to customary routine. However a new constraint, suggested by André as his inclination "to agree with them", also cannot be ignored in that the pressure to please the "new" grouping may also be an operative factor of influence. A dynamic group was in formation for those ten days - a group that included Canadian friends, but also CCIDD staff and local Mexicans weaving in and out of our circle. It is difficult to discern which pushes and pulls had most influence, but it is hard to deny that all of them played some influential role in influencing political stance. Ironically,
in the interview André admits that "before I was very narrow minded, very politically narrow minded...now [I've] opened up a bit more."

Undoubtedly it is easier for students to accept new ideology while they are, at least temporarily, dislodged from their own environment and are more free to see through others' eyes. Granting the status of ultimate truth to either their old or new perspective is relatively inconsequential for students, compared to the functional truths that they need to live by within the context of their own realities. For instance, upon returning, it may no longer be in their interest to see things in a new way. A new perspective can actually pit them against their own society. For those who function successfully within this realm, by subscribing to its dominant ideology, an alternative stance can be threatening and even hazardous.

Throughout the interview André expressed enthusiasm about the experience of emotional awakening that occurred for him. Near the end of the interview, after having criticized the brainwashing elements, André applauds the Program, giving it high compliment and creating an interesting contradiction to his previous remarks. He calls the Cuernavaca experience one of "discover[ing] for yourself...the discovery method of teaching.... We discovered what it was like there, rather than being told." In this, André's ability to discover and ultimately discern for himself (including positioning himself politically) reads as a testimonial for the learning experience. Perhaps questions may continue to surface in his future demonstrating the Program's ability to effectively plant seeds in his mind. The final chapter of the results of this experience has not been written for André as well as for all the others. Any "brainwashing" that may have been experienced cannot be considered to have been all that successful because André freely states his position which, in the case of his politics, is in opposition to the CCIDD perspective. With
regard to his objection with the linking of politics and religion, André likewise remarked that any spiritual renewal he had experienced was only temporary. However, he felt his emotional awakening would last him a lifetime.

Natalie likewise objected to the political stance and to the religious content. She characterized the political stance as "United States’ bashing - It emphasized seeing corporations as wrong." She felt "a lot of it was very biased - shown in one light. I think it was biased for us to make us feel guilty...to make us responsible." Unlike André, Natalie did not experience transformation in other areas. Now, for her "it was the same as any extended field trip." But Natalie takes us into another prime area for developing a critical eye - looking at the educational system. Natalie experienced considerable frustration with the aspects of poor leadership demonstrated on the trip. Natalie bluntly suggested that the trip would have been better, "if we had less of a drill sergeant and someone more relaxed. We needed more to reflect and think on our own." Yet she immediately separates the CCIDD staff out from this indictment in saying,

the CCIDD people avoided imposing their ideas upon us. They brought in people and showed us what they wanted to show us, but they let us form our own opinions.... It was stressed by the CCIDD people not to accept anyone [person’s] source of information.

It is hard to determine how much the overbearing style of one predominant school teacher coloured Natalie’s overall learning experience but, going by the strength of her feeling, it was undoubtedly a factor. Natalie did not stand alone in voicing this complaint as most others addressed the same issue (this is outlined in the section on obstacles). Natalie did not feel empowered, or changed by the Cuernavaca experience, just enlightened as to
the obstacles that she perceived, mainly those that rested with leadership. "Maybe I learned more about how people choose to lead, rather than learning about poverty." Natalie, among others, was deeply disturbed by the negative influences centering around poor leadership and teaching - the classic authoritarian model that "fills" and "forces" and otherwise does not trust the learners. Positive remnants do remain for Natalie, however, despite her strong criticisms of the Program. In the end she still maintains that "it was a good educational experience."

Jake and Mary, who very much spoke in concert with one another, ventured furthest into the complexities arising from their consideration of oppressive forces, structures of power, and teacher "power mongering". They focused considerably on their increased awareness of oppressive societal power structures, which continued to open up for them in Cuernavaca. Jake states: "Down there we got to see how people live in this kind of quasi-oppressive regime that pretends to be a democratic government." They disclose their growth in critical awareness. Mary notes that "Mexico was a start of a way of thinking for me." Jake delineates some of the dilemmas that unfold for him by comparing Mexican problems with local issues. "When we come back here, you could almost say that we have the same type of quasi-democratic government that really doesn’t have an opposition."

While they admit that they gained a certain empowerment that came with understanding political and economic realities, their empowerment is somewhat questionable as they also have an increased sense of their own relative powerlessness amidst immutable and all pervasive societal structures. "I think we’re faced with the same powerlessness but we don’t realize it." The dilemma is that this "knowing" can border on distrust and, if you’ve "crossed the boundary," it can move on to despair and hopelessness.
Jake states: “It is empowering [but] it can get to the point where it [becomes] cynical.” Still Jake and Mary feel preserved from a state of despair and maintain their optimism.

I think I came back from Mexico pretty optimistic.... There are deep rooted problems anywhere, but people still seem to manage and pull together and get by and grow somewhat.

While they recognized ubiquitous power wielding in society, they doubted theories of global conspiracy. They suggested that there were greater complexities inherent in how power works. It is not “just one structure that was causing every problem in the world” but “people who do what they genuinely think is right,” even so, “poor decisions are made.” Mary considers the role disinterest and disconnection play in creating injustice. “I think a lot of problems about society [are due to] people who really don’t have a good understanding or don’t try to have good understanding of anything that’s going on and how everything is interwoven.”

While Jake and Mary saw how the Program at CCIDD exposed the exploitations perpetrated by power structures such as corporations, the official church and “quasi-democracy,” and noted CCIDD’s predilection to vilify the rich, (at their most critical moments they too thought “maybe we were manipulated”), they appreciated its non-coercive pedagogy. “We were not confrontational or conclusive down there. We’d discuss the issues and kept an open mind.” It is this open-mindedness and non-judgmental attitude that Jake and Mary especially want to maintain in their own lives.

An interesting twist for Jake was that he was selected to work as a student intern with a powerful and prestigious corporation the summer following his Cuernavaca experience. This opportunity presented him with a unique problem. “It was so easy to walk in thinking that all these guys were
so crooked." He found himself caught between two perspectives - seeing corporations as evil or seeing them as a good and necessary impetus for a growth economy. So he recalls:

[I] learned to be open-minded in Mexico.... Why would [I] come into this other situation which is just as alien to me.... Why would I come to one with prejudices and not the other one...? Why would I take what we learned in there [at CCIDD] and use that as ammunition to prejudice myself against something else?

The scenario of Jake's dilemma and his reaction can be examined from several perspectives. In one respect, taken at face value, Jake adopts the openness that was the pedagogical thrust at CCIDD. Looked at from another angle, Jake's position could be one of rationalization - a means to justify and maintain his position at the corporation. After all, why would he want to de-legitimize his own position with the company - a position that would give him valuable learning experience, references, and connections? A sound argument for openness would also appease his conscience as he would be troubled to become involved with a company that, in his estimation, was unethical or oppressive. My reading of Freire (1968) suggests that here is evidence of the successful internalization of the oppressor, whereby there is an unconscious element that is capable of doing damage to the self as well as to others. The oppression thus perpetuates itself in what appears to be a natural and benign fashion - by maintaining the status quo. My concern about equating a non-judgmental attitude with openness in this case has to do with whether or not we truly have a level playing field. I think not. There is considerable difference between going light on judgment when you are considering the plight of disadvantaged Mexicans (the underclass), and going light on judgment when you are considering the corporations in society that form the dominant power structure. It does not seem sensible (nor fair) to
apply the same measuring stick and expect the same degree of responsibility from both.

Regarding any analysis that is applied to the student comments, the fact that they are still undergoing and in the midst of a learning process needs consideration. Kolb’s (1984) third characteristic of experiential learning states that the “process of learning requires the resolution of conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of adaptation to the world” (p. 29). With respect to this characteristic, the learning experience must allow for the uncomfortable place of doubt and the lengthy process of discourse which both Jake and Mary have commendably undertaken. Kolb’s further thinking gives additional reassurance that Jake and Mary are in a good place with their learning: “Learning is by its very nature a tension - and conflict - filled process” (p. 30).

Being involved in this discourse, however, presently immobilizes Jake and Mary for any action. Mary states that “it’s inspired me to be socially inactive for now.” Both of them are taking a “wait and see” approach when it comes to becoming involved with any political or social action. “I think contemplation and observation are things that are missing,” says Jake, as they ridicule the hastiness with which so many people rush into action with extremely limited knowledge. Jake recounts, with some sarcasm, a recent incident he has observed.

In my native studies class...we talk about issues like this and they pull out the poster paper and we have to brainstorm solutions to things. Well, I’ve been reading about this for a good two days and I guess I’m skilled enough to solve the problems of the indigenous people of North America.

Within the narratives gleaned from Mary and Jake, paradox and contradiction prevailed, yet on deeper analysis paradox, incongruity and
contradiction is the state befitting a middle class North American citizen who has just increased in global awareness. Jake and Mary appeal for greater open-mindedness and more time for consideration before they draw conclusions because of the complexity that they see inherent in any analysis of power structures. While able to critique North American exploitative tendencies they simultaneously understand them and border on exonerating them. Perhaps such a contradictory reaction exposes the crux of the dilemma of being embedded within this system, or perhaps it is a function of just knowing what side of your own bread is buttered. Jake and Mary's struggle for integrity amidst their growing awareness is most palpable.

If their thoughts on global power structures tolerate great ambiguity, their thoughts about education do not. This scathing critique, launched by Jake, compares world corruption to the vices in education:

Okay, there might not be a huge [global] conspiracy, but I really do feel that there is one in the educational system.... There's one thing I'm very pessimistic about - and that's education.

With regard to the Cuernavaca experience, Jake

felt that the control that was exerted or tentatively was exerted over the group [by a teacher, not a member of CCIDD staff] paralleled the control that we were studying when we were down there.

The main impetus of Jake and Mary's educational criticism was to examine the specifics of control and misuse of power during the trip and move this into a larger discussion over what is problematic throughout the entire educational system itself with regard to its practices and motives. The Cuernavaca experience was a catalyst for them to critique and better understand the oppressive realities that they themselves had experienced in their own school setting. They felt subjected to censorship, coercion and other
forms of impositional “learning” in their classroom experiences before and after the CCIDD experience that caused them hurt and anger. The following quotes reflect their frustration with personal experiences of oppression and censorship that they encountered during their time spent in formal school.

Jake is passionate with the following assertion: “I honestly don’t think there are enough good teachers....” When asked to describe a good teacher he feels more confident in approaching it from the negative: A good teacher is not one who

manipulates people, wants them to think in a certain way, wants [you] to produce a cookie cutter essay, the cookie cutter notebook and cookie cutter thoughts. It just really makes me angry.

He goes on to relate an example of what he considers to be a bad administrator

...[he] did not want Modern Western Civilization taught because it was about democratic revolution.... He decided to take it upon himself to decide that humanity should not know about democratic revolution.... I think he should be thrown in jail for that. I think that is the worst thing, that is the most criminal thing anyone could ever do.... It’s worse than murder, because in murder you kill one person, but if you don’t teach people about this sort of stuff, if you don’t teach people about the struggles that have occurred, what people have gone through, I think a lot of other people get murdered in the future.

Jake’s answer to this problem is “I think there has to be at some point, some check that makes people aware” of teacher biases just like there is consideration made for a historian’s bias. For Jake there has to be this built-in protection for students:

warning [for] the kids that the teachers might be pointing to the wrong direction...that their [teacher’s] perspective of things is just as legitimate as anything else, but it’s not like it’s some kind of ultimate truth.... I think they can’t pretend to have the answers like a lot of them do.
Just the same, Jake concludes with hope in the progress that has been made in education. "I think things are evolving." He tells a brief story how an older friend of his parents reacted after hearing of his complaints on education. When he had finished describing a manipulative and controlling teacher in great detail, the friend of the family replied, "When I was your age, we called that education." This comment verifies for Jake that "progress has been made. There's no reason to think there's no hope".

Mary likewise challenges the hierarchical system in education that results in the creation of unhealthy gaps - those between students and teachers and the gaps between valued and not valued knowledge. She calls these relationships "sort of meaningless" and argues for a more egalitarian functioning of education. "I think a good teacher can be interested in what students have to say or feel not for the sake of being 'interested' or as a teaching philosophy but because, generally, students have important things to say." In addressing the second point she notes the affront to democracy and underlying elitism in this type of education.

I think the fact that the educational system recognizes certain values as more important right away sets a gap in who can learn and who can't or whose thoughts are valid and whose aren't valid.

Despite the difficulties, Mary and Jake have salvaged important learning from their experience in Mexico. Mary underscores that what one anticipates to learn is not exactly what becomes the necessary learning outcome. "What we've learned [was] not necessarily in terms of development, but in terms of our whole experience and the way we learned, and about learning and people's attitudes..." Mary is even capable of seeing the advantage of having to struggle against an adversarial teacher. "I don't think we would have learned as much if Mr. Z. (a pseudonym) wasn't
there...we came out with more questions than answers.” Jake surmises that tangling with these negative aspects of teachers

serves as an inspiration too, when I get older to do something about fixing these flaws.... Maybe it's important that there's always those negative aspects...because there's nothing to compare to. The biggest problem is that they [teachers] don't admit they're flawed.

Mary adds a dose of reality. “It's inherent in everything.”

The development of these students' criticality characterizes the complexity of the experiential learning process. While leaving a necessary openness for the construction of knowledge and maintaining the autonomy of the learner, “learning is by its very nature a tension - and conflict - filled process” (Kolb, p. 30). It does not bring students to a destination point, but leaves them on their individual journeys. Natalie, for reasons that we will never fully know, has somehow distanced herself from the experience. André did not fully articulate the detail of his political criticism precisely because it wasn't in the area of cerebral cognition that he had been affected. He altered in a way that was truly beyond words - in his emotional realm.

Mary and Jake responded with an advancement in their own criticality that has the potential to pit them against their own society - a society in which they have the opportunities to be very successful because of their intellects, their ability to articulate well, and their supportive middle class base. These students, while they think and challenge, are not typical “teenage rebels”. They are the bright young people who the business world would seek out, not only to hire for a summer job but to mentor and groom for promising positions in the future. More than anyone Mary and Jake, in most dramatic fashion, embody the complexity that can face students on their return from an experience such as the one at CCIDD. They see the power structures at
work in Mexico, the flaws inherent in the education system, and sense the quest for power within themselves. In some ways they must know that an indictment on these structures comes back as an indictment on themselves - a burden that is hard to admit, let alone bear. Their being "stuck" is a testimony to the powerful influence of the dominant society: it tempts its citizenry with the promise of prosperity; it can even hold students hostage within its educational system. This speaks to its capacity to forever perpetuate itself.

Reflecting Upon Control Issues

Interviewing these particular students and dealing with the data from the interviews was a troubling part for me as a researcher. Gaging from the feelings and the tension that I experienced, I had to acknowledge my attachment to specific outcomes - outcomes that these students were not entirely meeting. Put bluntly, I wished these students had different political views.

I was equally troubled by the thought that I shared qualities that characterized the controlling teachers that the students had criticized. Perhaps they were more camouflaged in me because of my own abhorrence of authoritative strong-arming and as a result my working overtime to conceal any slippage in this area whatsoever. I also realized that any propensity I had for control stemmed from my own experience of being stifled in the school system for as long as I can remember. This, coupled with forceful discipline at home and a cultural view that teachers were always right and deserved automatic respect, made me develop into a student who rarely talked in class. My excruciatingly painful silence as a student concealed hurt and anger that came from never feeling I was heard and subsequently thinking that I did not have the ability to construct knowledge. I actually found that child in me
cheering for Mary and Jake when they were gaining their vitriolic momentum.

My deliberation on both my attachment to specific outcomes (wishing to see a political change that works to dismantle the dominant societal model) and my empathy over Jake and Mary’s passion (their hurt and resolve concerning educational problems) brought me to consider my own projections. My use of “projection” is psychological in understanding describing unresolved and unconscious inner conflict that is more easily dealt with by the personality when it is attributed to something outside of oneself - made into an external phenomenon and often identified in another. In considering projection in myself, it would equally apply to others, whereby pent-up anger (for me, largely school-induced) resulting from being blocked, not heard, and censored, eventually builds up as an anger that wants to have power over others. This satisfies as a vindication of sorts where finally you have your turn to be heard. When this occurs, its unconscious nature simply exchanges one state of oppression (on you) for another (from you). This is a fairly common psychological phenomenon (Miller, 1980; Bradshaw, 1988, 1990) explaining how abuse and oppression is perpetuated. Understanding of this phenomenon sheds light on how a coercive and abusive educational system can also continue to replicate itself through its psychologically unwell teachers.

There are two types of abuse - coercive, forceful abuse and that which stems from over gratification which is another demonstration of lack of caring, reasoned at length by Seligman (Seligman et al., 1995)). Both approaches represent forms of neglecting and suppressing the individual: a lack of welcoming as delineated in psychosynthesis (Assagioli, 1965, 1993; Ferucci, 1990; Brown, 1983, 1993), and a negation of democratic equality as
outlined extensively by hooks (1994) and Shor (1992, 1998). They both tend to produce the similar results of alienation accompanied by anger.

My reflections brought about a reason to check myself (and keep myself in check) so that I would not perpetuate the same anti-learning tactics as the teachers who lost respect of the students. I needed to continue and deal with my own issues of control, that was in this case, manifesting in the desire to control outcomes. Understanding came with the realization that control is a central issue for all teachers, as was evidenced in my own democratic stance yet struggle with control. For generations teachers have been questioned about their suspect motives for entering into the profession - going into teaching in order to control, be “boss”, and be the one who held and most scrupulously disseminated “truth” to weaker, compliant vessels. There is some truth in this perception. The students picked it up, spoke of it vociferously, and I came to notice remnants of this remaining in myself, remnants that I hoped to have exorcised.

Again I needed to take another step toward letting go and finding a balance between respecting my own hunches and perspectives and being a proper vessel for the narratives of experience that I received from the students. This meant respecting them and what they had to say, realizing that there is learning in precisely who they are at the present moment, and respecting my readership sufficiently by disclosing my subjectivities so that they can make up their own minds with the evidence presented. I continue with respect for all three student stances by bringing out the complexities as best I can while simultaneously offering my own thoughts and feelings without falling too far into the trap of self-indulgence.
The Faded Experience

What characterizes another small group of students is that the Cuernavaca experience for them, while meaningful and exciting at the time, had largely faded in scope, intensity and impact and had essentially receded into the landscapes of their ordinary lives. Two students previously discussed, André and Natalie, took a critical stance but they also offer perspectives on the nature of faded experience.

André admitted to a short term spiritual renewal but, in the long term, "I think, spiritually, I did go back to the old way of things." By spiritual, André clarified his understanding: "I was talking about my belief in God, my faith in God." It increased while in Mexico "and now it has decreased since then." It seems that the impact of witnessing the Mexican struggle, the atmosphere of community, the emotionality, and perhaps the disequilibrium caused by unsettling realities was what it took to open André to a more immanent spiritual realm and have a peak spiritual experience at the time. In Mexico André was provoked to question and this questioning yielded to a spiritual response. "Then as I came back, I slowly stopped asking those questions again and then I didn’t need spiritual answers." It was only in the realm of his spirituality that André noted a fading of the experience.

For Natalie, the faded experience was more general and encompassing. "It hasn’t remained for me. I changed viewpoints while I was there, yes." Natalie did not note any change or sense of empowerment from the Cuernavaca experience. For her the experience did not really matter any more and this was strongly demonstrated in her inability, or lack of desire to remember details of the experience.

It was the same as any extended field trip. Definitely different - twenty four hours a day learning, learning by experience,
although I must learn well from textbooks too. I can't really judge how important any of the elements are from this experience because I really can't remember.

For both André and Natalie the faded experience was also accompanied by a criticism of aspects of the Program, as mentioned in the previous section. It is quite possible that the problems they had with the experience (political content, abuse of power, attachment to religion) affected their overall outcome.

Two other students, Carl and Simon, did not take issue with anything regarding the trip although they did make, as most students, some comments about the tension they noticed between students and teachers. This was mostly a second-hand reaction for them and not something in which they were principally involved. However this tension, anger and hurt that was evidenced particularly during follow-up school sessions, between students and a teacher, was moderately troubling for them.

Simon could be described as being the atypical student to go for a trip like this. He admittedly went because it would garner him a credit enabling him to take a spare in the following semester.

My reasons for going were a spare in next semester and an extra credit which I needed to graduate. So I was going to go down there, thinking that it was going to be nothing and then it became an emotional experience....

For the group to be substantial enough in number to form a class, and be able to take part in the Program at CCIDD, a sufficient number of students were needed and Simon knew that he was encouraged to go somewhat due to the need for extra bodies. Even so the trip had an impact greater than he had expected. He developed a more compassionate outlook immediately as a result of the Mexico, but it faded with the difficulties he found in making
compassion a practical reality in his life. "I think I was more compassionate towards others. Then the more compassionate you are, the more people take advantage of you, then you've got to learn where to stop, right?"

Simon, however, admitted to the success of this learning experience pointing out how he liked the "hands-on" style, the experiences ("you actually see their faces") and relevance that reached him more than traditional schooling methods. He enjoyed the personal relationships with the teachers - an important factor for him regarding learning - and was quick to point out less approachable teachers, both on the trip and back at school, who do not allow themselves to be real and personal with students but maintain a distance and their need for complete control.

Simon's chief memory of his own contribution and effectiveness as a participant centered around the genuine helping he felt he did, referring to the projects that required manual labour such as the clearing of the land in the "dam project". He understood this enterprise as authentic helping and did not perceive it to be, as others did, an opportunity to demonstrate machismo, or an exercise akin to colonization. He saw this experience to be authentic because, in his own heart, this was his way of "doing some good". This thrust continues now in his life as his career goal is to serve society in the area of law enforcement. Ideally he hopes to be able to make the world a safer place stamping out drug dealers and the like. "There's all these people in the streets causing problems and I don't really like that...." Simon still strives to help society while maintaining his groundedness in reality which warns him of the difficulties and pit-falls inherent in being too soft and too vulnerably compassionate.

Simon applauded many aspects of the positive learning experience, but always minimized its long-term effect in his own life. It is doubtful, given his
life dream and current underplayed sensitivity, that he has no remaining connection with the experience at CCIDD, however, it is quite apparent that the Cuernavaca experience was not the sole influence in making him into the service oriented person he is today. At best, it would have just reinforced qualities that were already inherent to him. Nevertheless it was a combination of both Simon’s high expectations and his discomfort with sustained emotionality that further helps him to minimize the experience. In addition to his valuing the experiential learning and personal approach of the teachers, he appreciates the community bonding, the emotional impact at the time, the “real” work (helping), and the relevance of speaking to people directly in their contexts. While Simon discounts any long-term effects, he somewhat contradicts himself by being able to sharply remember highlights of the trip, admit that he is still affected from time to time, and maintain an idealism concerning his future career.

Simon, oriented towards the good, but admittedly no saint (a self-admitted “typical” high school student in many respects), still would recommend the Cuernavaca experience to his own future son or daughter. He remains with positive yet somewhat faded memories but readily has returned to “ordinary reality”.

The student experience profiles in this section are reminiscent of Jim Hodgson’s (CCIDD staff person and the main “leader” of our school group while in Cuernavaca) understanding of how the Program experience is “banked” (in conversation with Jim, March 1998). Jim speaks of how teachers and CCIDD facilitators will never know when a piece of the experience may surface positively in the lives of any of the former participants. The routines of daily life consume all people, and for former Program participants this reality causes a fading of the emotional impact of the original experience.
Coming back to ordinary life and being consumed by day to day busy-ness makes activism quite improbable for most. Yet, as many of the students referred to and teachers continue to believe in, there is a low level awareness or subterranean unconsciousness that can spring to awareness in subtle or even grand ways when the need arises. Therein lies hope - that no experience is ever completely lost. Of course, a certain degree of "fading" is not only common but appropriate since people can not sustain the energy required for emotional peaks or unrelenting activity.

Reflections on Fading In and Out

This phenomenon of "fading" is common, and perhaps even more common to the student experience than most of them were willing to admit. I question how much the context of the interview itself encourages students to say "pleasing" things regarding their experiences - not for any external reward to be gained but because of their natural inclination to please. Occasionally they would betray their obliging natures by saying, "I don’t know if this is what you want me to say but...." At this point I would, of course, correct their mistaken notion that I am after a particular answer. Nevertheless I sense the inclination in them to please. However, amidst this inclination, students are able to criticize and disclose any reduced excitement about the experience. The fading of experience is actually not a "bad" thing. It may actually create the conditions for hope to erupt in the future in same way that a bulb that has bloomed and faded needs to go underground to lie dormant and await the next spring.

While the commonalities that the students experienced reinforces central themes, the range of their experience (from elation to consideration, from activity to inertia) brings up more questions in me. What I do not know,
in consideration of complex human nature, is the history and current state of each of the participants, not only at the time of the Cuernavaca experience itself but at the time of their interviews.

With respect to personal histories, I believe that what has gone on before in students’ lives has a degree of impact on the outcome of their experience. I will, however, never know the full impact or nature of these influences. Some students undoubtedly have been “pre-evangelized” either by the power of their family, school, church or collegial influences which has made them positively pre-disposed to having this experience become a positive one. Conversely there are others who could have been negatively pre-disposed at the outset due to similar influences that would discourage them, imbue them with skepticism, or even set them up for rebellion. These are all influential factors with their subsequent unique impact on individuals.

It is probable that additional events transpired in the students’ personal lives and between group members, since the original event, that also had an impact on their current stances and feelings regarding the Program. This is substantiated by a small amount of information I received from students at the end of the focus group interview that pointed out fractures within the group attributed to the natural events in teenagers’ lives that were - unrelated to the Mexico experience. What was remarkable was that there were negligible rifts between students during the trip, which is evidenced by the unanimous accounts of closeness between group members during the time of the trip and afterwards, and by my own witnessing of the positive group dynamic. Yet some rifts did develop later that positioned some students more on the inside and others more on the outside of various groupings. I did not delve into the details of this with students as it did not have any direct
bearing on the Cuernavaca experience (rifts were over boy-girl relationships and over competition in other school areas). Yet all this may have had some bearing (especially two years later) upon the “final verdict” a student may have regarding the overall outcome and value of the trip.

How do these other levels of reality for the students inform this discussion? To be certain, their reactions, as does all reactivity, connect to many realities beyond what is apparent. As researcher, this discussion attests to how I have wrestled with the interview narratives to hear its confessions. To arrive at trustworthiness I can best deal with what is obvious and proceed with arguments that come from both my rational considerations as well as my intuitive hunches. All the while I attempt to be as clear as possible in identifying one from the other.

**Strong and Lasting Transformation**

All the students, with the exception of Natalie, admitted to some degree of transformation that was catalyzed by the Cuernavaca experience. Even so Natalie maintains that “they [CCIDD staff] let us form our own opinions.... It was a good experience, even though it might not have changed any world views.” On examination of the narrative evidence, coming forth from the interviews and questionnaires, there appears to be a loose pattern of integral elements that take students on the journey to empowerment - empowerment, cited by the students, as being a culmination or direct testimony of strong and lasting transformation.

The pattern brings to light aspects that facilitate the transformation process, aspects (not necessarily all of them) that were present for all students, including Natalie, even though not all of them expressed a resulting strong and lasting transformation. I will outline in this section the constituents of
the journey to transformation as elicited from student responses, highlight supporting evidence from specific students, then focus on case stories and allow these narratives to speak strongly and dramatically for themselves pointing to the deep changes within. Students who benefited most strongly from what they regarded to be a peak learning experience at CCIDD were definitely in the majority. All of these students experienced an increase in global awareness and self-awareness, accompanied by a sense of gratitude and appreciation which resulted in their serious consideration of acting in and being of service to the world as well as making the most of their own lives. This process brought them a sense of their own empowerment - not a "power over" others, but a "benign power" (Yeomans, 1999) which is not oppressive but honours the integrity of the self and others.

It all starts, as was gleaned from the students, with awareness. They increased their knowing. For Mary, "Mexico was a start of a way of thinking for me.... It’s just made me see things a little differently...." This increase of knowing came in many forms. For many students it was a newfound political awareness. André states, "....Before I was very narrow minded...especially politically narrow minded where my world was my world, where now it’s opened up a bit more," and, for Dominique, "My interest in global politics has greatly increased." Anne, among others, experienced increased global awareness: "I am aware now of things that most only hear about through the media...." Dominique echoes: "I see myself as being more aware of my surroundings, both locally and globally, and finding the desire within me to learn as much as I can about it." The experience expanded their knowing beyond its typical boundaries. Lise says, "coming back I am more politically aware and more open to other people’s needs." Rob adds: "My eyes are open to what the world is really like outside our little community of York Region."
Increase of knowing was also attitudinal, Mary referring to “the way we learned about learning and people’s attitudes,” and for Simon, “I learned stuff morally about it.”

Awareness in some cases brought about a realization of how much they actually do not know, such as noted by Carl: “the vast amounts of knowledge that we learned there.... It makes me think I don’t know everything.” Students like Jake “came out with questions” commenting that “it’s made me observe more.” Students discovered that, for them, knowledge connected to power. Carl echoes the sentiments of many: “It’s really really empowering me with more knowledge.”

Another focal point of awareness for students, that precipitated a long and lasting impact, was their growth in self-awareness. For some like André it was very dramatic.

[It was a] catalyst for me jumping into the next stage, into another stage of maturity, into another stage of discovering who I am, who I am emotionally as well as spiritually. I was alive and energized...[in the] long term...refreshed, invigorated, having a new energy.... I just wanted to do stuff, do stuff, do stuff.... I wanted to go after everything..... It’s not completely gone away.... I’m still more motivated.... There was a big breakthrough.... I’m a bit more emotional. I know what I’m feeling and what I’m thinking at the same time. And not all my decisions will be from my head.... I’m open to myself and my feelings.... [This effects] little things that I just seem to pick up and get the ball rolling in little places with my father or my mom...improving relationships...just everything seems to open up - with people, with relationships....

André was not the only one whose transformation focused on self-discovery. Lise shares that for her, “transformation is a change in ‘my’ state.” Shannon experienced that it was a “cracking [of] my cocoon, coming into the world but at the same time being centered in myself by learning how I impact
the world and vice versa.” Alithea experienced an “appreciation for who I am” while Anne’s “spirituality has taken on a different identity…. I feel like I can accomplish anything I put my mind to....”

**Carl: “It’s all about gratitude.”**

Awareness at all levels opened up to gratitude and appreciation for so many students. Carl’s story is the most poignant representation of a student’s growth in his development of a sense of gratitude. Obviously an appreciative young man to begin with, Mexico further demonstrated to Carl how much he had to be thankful for as he witnessed people who had so little and yet were still making the most of their lives - people who did not have our wealth or stability. Mexico comes up for Carl on occasions when those around him, like his friends, complain about their daily small inconveniences. He was moved enough to say this to his friend:

Hey do you know how lucky you are? You’re driving a car around. Why are you complaining that you have to go pick up your brother or something? Be happy that you have a brother and you know where he is....

Repeatedly Carl came back to how lucky he felt - fortunate to have relative wealth, good relationships and stability in his life. He was grateful for the Mexico experience for giving him this opportunity for empowerment through knowledge, gaining a wider perspective on reality and also learning about himself in an “inner spiritual way”. He openly thanked the teachers, leaning into the tape recorder during the interview, for giving him this exceptional opportunity.

Flowing out of his gratitude, Carl feels compelled to act, yet is disappointed with his own lack of action. He pointed out that he hasn’t fully followed up yet he feels that somehow he must. “I wish I would do more
stuff about it, but it’s such a chance. I feel like I’m taking such a chance and such a risk. You know you’re out to be a strong person.” He regarded himself to be much more of an “observer” of life. In truth he is very caring, sensitive and willing to help others a great deal. “I think about it all the time” he says. Yet he finds this to be a leader’s task and for him “its tough to be a leader”.

He underestimates how he behaves as a leaven in his own world. It appears that his own sense of perspective, kindness and gratitude already speaks eloquently to those around him and he makes more of an impact than he thinks.

...[I’m] trying to make a better life for myself and help my parents when they get older.... It seems to come up a lot in my relationship with my girlfriend.... It’s changing me slowly in different little increments that they won’t even realize but I will myself.... That’s what the trip opened up for me was that there’s other parts of your life than living say just today.... There’s more to it....

For Carl, authentic and fruitful activity starts with the self. “You really can’t help others until you’re happy with yourself.” The long term effect of the experience for Carl has been an increased self-knowledge and contentment that moves him to serve others in a more pure and untainted fashion. “It’s hard to deal with others when we can’t even deal with ourselves.”

Carl’s appreciation of the experience extends to include the bonding and closeness that was established precisely because of the group dimension of the trip. “It was great getting to know other people - and just the atmosphere - everyone was really together.” All this gratitude propels Carl to be of service to the world and make best use of his life:

...[I] use what I have to my best advantage...and it all stems back from Mexico.... I have an opportunity.... That changed me
because I never thought that before. It really opened my eyes to basically that.

Carl is a strong example of someone who has transformed through the Cuernavaca experience because of awareness gained that now is embodied in him as a profound sense of gratitude and a deep sense of connectedness. He showed me a necklace that he purchased in Mexico and now wears every day - a sun/moon symbol that for him represents his increased feeling of connection to the global community. It reminds him of “everyone in the whole world being under the same sun and moon.”

**Action and service.**

From the place of awareness and gratitude flows the natural response of action. Carl’s account represented this aspect very well, although he was frustrated by it, but he was not the only one who came naturally to this response. Lise is motivated for action to change things in herself as well as change things in the outside world. “My long term goal is to make others aware and be less materially oriented personally, be less commercially minded.” The scope of action extends from little things to the big task of changing the world. André “notice[s] that these little things...just doing little things” is important, and Anne speaks out about small things such as when she gets “angry to see people being so careless and just throwing away an abundance of food”. Dominique speaks eloquently about her highest aspirations:

I want to be a participant in the global community, not just a bystander. I want to continue to have experiences which challenge me to question my (and society’s ) actions.

Action comes from different sources of inspiration and must properly be channeled through an individual’s needs so that integrity can be
maintained. Jake gets inspiration from the negative experiences which “serve as an inspiration too, when I get older to do something about fixing these flaws” and Alithea has learned an economy of self in her generosity: “Mexico has taught me that helping others does not always mean giving away what I have.” Cal strives to be his best yet has a realistic appraisal of his limitations.

While I was in Mexico I also learned that one must find their place, do what you want or can.... I think that my place in life is to be the best person I can. When I find someone in need, I will help them. If someone falls, I will help them up....

Helping, to Dominique, means being “more vocal about the things that matter to me,” and Alithea adds that she “no longer ignore[s] the problems I see. I now put full effort into all I do. I now listen.”

An attitude of service for these students came with not only greater awareness but from a sense of empowerment. Lise passionately indicates that “the Mexico experience made me realize that I am/can make a difference, so I’m more empowered to voice my opinion, get involved in campaigns, things to help make change or make statements....”

An extenuation of the notion of service is demonstrated in the students’ capacity to make decisive moves pertaining to their own lives. Lise, Dominique, Anne, and Shannon all speak of how the Cuernavaca experience has affected their decisions regarding the courses that they take at university. “[The] changes show up in my courses.... It’s weird how one and a half weeks really changes a person.... My goals are shaped by it.” For Cal the decisiveness takes root in his own life. “I have decided to take more initiative into doing what is right for my life, in a way, not waste it away.”
Liz: “Stories are brewing and awaiting action.”

For Liz the main impact of the trip came from the life stories of the Mexican people that she witnessed. They moved her and were very real, delivering an emotional and experiential impact not available in the usual school methods of learning. She called this a “personal learning...instead of just the teacher standing up at the chalk board writing, writing, writing [and students] handing in all this stuff.”

While formerly oriented to the prospect of service, the revelation through the stories of the Mexicans, “learning about people,” and the subsequent comparisons made from personal reflection, allowed Liz to further “open up”. While she thought she was “going down there to help all those people,” in actuality “it was more of helping yourself to help people - getting the knowledge and then applying that to help.”

Liz is renewed now in her drive to help others and feels that the Cuernavaca experience has added to her inspiration in ways that she does not yet fully understand. Her personal mode of helping will be in the area of art therapy, she believes. This, for Liz, speaks to the interrelationship between helping and personal expression - expression itself being the healing force. Cuernavaca for Liz is still “brewing”. It will affect her life as an artist, both by having an impact on her artistic content as well as on her style.

I think the effects of this trip are going to be very long term.... Something’s got to come out of it... I’m just not sure how.... Nothing has really come out yet, but it’s in the brewing.... I feel like I’m waiting for something.

Empowered and inspired.

Students saw empowerment as a culmination point resulting from awareness, increased confidence and self-esteem, a resurgence of spiritual energy and gratitude.
For Anne a new sense of spirituality developed as a result of the trip. "My spirituality has taken a different shape and form." This is no longer a "head" spirituality - one developing from rules and dogma, but one having to do with being connected to others in a profound way. It started with the group and with the Mexican people she met. "The most prominent [of my memories] are the relationships and the bonds that developed between what were fourteen strangers into life-long friends."

She senses her empowerment as being lifted out of her ignorance and more importantly "I feel like I have the power to make a difference." It is a strength that comes from witnessing those in the Mexican community who withstood great odds to rise above their state. She particularly commented on Guadalupe who is her personal symbol of strength and perseverance.

Shannon’s input can be summarized in a new understanding that “people form God” - a mighty full-dimensional spirituality that evolved from the Mexico experience. To Shannon this spirituality not only opened to self-determining empowerment but to human potentiality - the powerful essence inherent in being human. Shannon “understands that together we fulfill the destinies we make for ourselves with help from a powerful energy.”

This understanding simultaneously involved an awakening of her own sense of self - whereby she “cracked [her] cocoon,” an appreciation of the bonding of community, the “great friendships formed” and a valuing of the lives of “others” previously undisclosed to her. It is interesting to note how in Shannon’s case, as for others, an appreciation of self occurs simultaneously with an appreciation of others. This phenomenon of consciousness growing simultaneously in all direction is known to both Kolb (1984) and Psychosynthesis (Assagioli, 1993; Weiser & Yeomans, 1984). This contrasts to the more common and erroneous belief that any type of attention to self takes
away from our care of others - that self-love is somehow opposite to a giving spirit. For herself, Shannon connects her empowerment to the learning and believes that “we learned more in ten days than in fourteen years of religion classes.”

For Alithea “the feeling of empowerment still burns very strongly within [her] heart.” She is renewed with a sense of self and a sense of others. Through the experience she was inspired to continue to help and serve others although this now included a greater variety of approaches - from offering a smile, to listening, to actively assisting. Her “empowerment...came from the realization of what I have, appreciation for who I am, and understanding that all goals, dreams and wishes have limitations.” She is grounded in the reality of her own capabilities. “This empowered me to do what I can with who I am and what I have.”

For Carl, the Mexican experience further encouraged him to solidify himself to make better use of his life, “being the best I can”. He is determined to “take more initiative into doing what is right for my life.” Carl’s concept of service begins with a solid self and moves in a realistic fashion to do what he can to help others, all the while setting “realistic standards” for himself. Mexico helped Carl realize what he had - realize that his North America lifestyle affords him power, a power that he wants to use and not lose.

Cal echoes a similar progression from awareness to gratitude to service.

I was lucky to have been born into this life and now that I have seen more of the world and how they have to go on living their lives.... So I know some of what is out there. I feel more powerful in a way. I have more options to do things that they (the Mexicans) do. I have better resources. I have more money. I can go places they can’t go. It must be recognizing this that has made me feel more powerful.
Rob: “It’s always been the family.”

Rob’s experience in Mexico spelled out “family” in every which way, admittedly in stark contrast to his personal experience of family and issuing from an undeniable longing for family in his own life. He was the student who spoke of his sparse experience of family (living off of “Chef Boy-ar-dee”) in the first year interview.

Rob felt empowered in two ways. One way stemmed from the world knowledge he gained: “We saw poverty in the street.... The child in the street crumples you from the inside. This is actually happening. We saw people holding machine guns, rifles.” Another source of empowerment came from the bonding which fortified him. “I felt bonded with others” from the “friendships formed there”.

The memories [of family] still keep it together.... I still feel bonded to the others.... It’s always has been the family.... I feel empowered that I can start to make the world a better place. There’s only a bit that I can do but.... It just takes one person to speak up and make a difference.

Rob strongly reiterated the strong sentiments he shared at the focus group interview. His life at home does not well resemble his hopes for family life but sadly typifies the workaday world of middle class suburbia that is York Region - a community largely composed of up-and-coming business people who own large homes, large mortgages and service their lifestyles by incessant working. Rob himself holds three jobs.

In my sub-division people are rather unfriendly. It feels kind of lonely here. But not in Cuernavaca, even in La Estacion. Everyone knew and helped their neighbours. Here it is different. Everyone has two to three jobs. The closeness of our family is not there. We write each other notes. There’s no sense of closeness at all.... I spent my birthday by myself.
Rob, however, is creating his heart’s desire - a sense of family which includes encouragement, support and happiness. He proudly heads an eight hundred member basketball league of children and states that his greatest joy in life is to make a difference with these kids.

I can make a kid’s day with something I do, like giving him a free shot, let them get a basket and it’s just great to see the smiles on their faces and the parents saying “good job”.... It takes three seconds to make a kid’s day.

Rob is inspired by the Mexicans who “all take care of one another” and he is strengthened by the community of friends that was established for him in that very short time. “I bonded to that place over the ten days we were down there. We were a family. When we were leaving, a part of me was staying there.” In this he is overcome with appreciation, works to create a sense of community in his own life and lives out his empowerment.

The students featured in this section, by and large the majority of students who went on the trip, experienced long and sustaining change through greater awareness of self and others, the welling of a sense of gratitude and their natural response in action. This expanded for them into greater empowerment - an empowerment that many believe will last a lifetime.

A Prayerful Stance

It is at this point, enmeshed with the preceding snippets of narratives, that I am overcome by waves of compassion and deep respect for all of my participants and experience a compelling desire to do justice to their perspectives as clearly and as lovingly as possible. While at one time I might have imagined that there was a “preferred” result for the Cuernavaca
experience, I now see that all the student perspectives are not only valid but necessary - imparting distinctive meanings derived from individuals that speak to their own unique points of development, sensitivity, inclination and need.

I find myself moving into what can only be described as a prayerful stance - a reaction that strongly gripped me and was somewhat surprising. The strength of their truths entreats this posture. I find myself needing to make space in myself for their vastness, their diversity, their plurality of being, and somehow finding in myself a big heart and large enough arms to hold all this. The prayerful stance is necessary for my opening - to help me be more free of my own intents and thus become a better vessel for their truth and the lessons that I am increasingly confident will be learned from the recounting of their stories.

Being open and prayerful, becoming a clean and clear vessel - a proper channel - is my most urgent need right now. It is about getting out of the way, becoming more of a gate than a door for the procession of their narratives, channeling all these different streams into a single river of a piece of substantive work that somehow will help with knowing.

It is a challenge and an honour to let these students stories flow through my work. The intuitive level is important as I remain a very human vessel and need to bring my whole self to the work, not only my rational mind. The complexity, contradictions and ambiguities require listening in a multi-faceted way, yet still being open to finding the still point at the centre.

I found the gratitude that exuded from Carl remarkable and considered him to be so fortunate to know such gratitude at his young age and in this societal context. I need to remember his gratitude when I feel submerged by my own criticality. Carl is so purely thankful and the power of his gratitude
seeps into my own soul and continues to grow as my own gratitude - for these students, for their differences, for their anger, uncertainty, ambiguity and sense of service and joy.

Rob's story is also most poignant, yet painful too, somewhat due the fact that he speaks of his pain so casually. He has an acceptance of loneliness although he forever longs for and is able to create community wherever he goes. He is a friend to alienation, just like most of us who live amidst twentieth century de-personalization and the loss of community. My heart goes out to Rob partially because I know this pain of isolation as well, particularly in institutions such as those of education and religion - where one would expect to find the best of humanity to come to the fore. I am consoled that, with Rob, I too am not alone with this angst nor must we maintain the isolation.

Rob's longing is so strong and he is so rightfully deserving of it. It is valid and good for him to feel what he does. I feel he should cry out and expose this all too common scourge of modernity from the rooftops. I want to celebrate his expression of need and give voice to it in any way I can.

The family, the main unit of belonging and welcoming that we need, deserve and work to create, and the horrific lack of it is acknowledged by Rob. Perhaps he somewhat romanticizes it in the Mexicans, but more importantly, what he sees (or envisions) about the Mexican people reflects his belief in its possibility. From his belief comes a reality that he himself creates in the community of his own life with his children's sports club.

Rob's story is a story that belongs to many but is never sufficiently told, and less rarely taken up as education's major task. I am reminded of how impossible it is for a teacher to teach a student when s/he has more pressing unmet needs. It is similar to how religious zealots have evangelized to those
with hungry bellies only giving food for the spirit instead of the more urgently needed food for the stomach. Now this phenomenon is reversed in our well-off suburbia. Our students are crying out for soul needs yet we still feed them materially - with more and more information and things. We give them food for the mind and practical skills at best instead of food for the spirit as we so often ignore this greater hunger.

I champion Rob’s story, and Carl’s example of gratitude, and Lise, Dominique, Shannon, Alithea, and Anne’s ability to already commit to service, as well all the other stories. They are all important to hear as the full rainbow of experience is not fully available without each and every story told. They all need to be heard. And I am left satisfied now that I have heard them and have passed them on.

Nicholas’ Story

For Nicholas the Cuernavaca experience primarily was about embodied spirituality, a spirituality that was solidly grounded in compassion. Matthew Fox (1990) is attuned with such a holistic vision as he defines spirituality as a celebration of justice and compassion “born of an awareness of the interconnectedness of all creatures by reason of their common creator” (p. 34). Spirituality develops, according to Fox, not only by finding the God that is “other” but by finding connection with the divine within. “Compassion is the breakthrough between God and humans. It is humans becoming divine and recovering and remembering their divine origins as ‘images and likenesses of God’” (p. 30). Essentially this spirituality is a creative act resulting in acting in the world. This is at the core of holistic education that understands the importance of working from the inside-out (Miller, 1988).
Nick began the interview with acknowledging the awakening of a deeply personal spirituality inside of him.

The biggest thing for me was a reinvestigation of spirituality and particularly Christian spirituality.... I mark a big distinction in my own development of spirituality after that trip because I began to seek Christianity as a possible route for engaging my spiritual needs.

In the interview he repeatedly came back to the centrality of spirituality when he was asked additional questions. “The spiritual dimension...that’s going to have to be the biggee. I’m going to have to stick with that.”

In our circle discussions in Cuernavaca Nick brought up a long-standing concern, something that had been troubling him for some time. His contention was that, according to his own experience, social activism and religion have rarely mixed but remain seriously polarized. Either he would see groups that were concerned with social justice while ruling out any spiritual context (many would in fact eschew religion of any sort), or he would witness religious or church communities that would “talk faith” and spirituality but not connect it with world realities or with any need to take up activism as an extension of this faith. Here in Cuernavaca the two came together for Nick in a powerful way. “It embraced and incorporated all elements of importance in my life.”

These two realities, finally coming home to one another at CCIDD, was what Nick considered to be a result of “the holism of the experience”. Holism for him was about connecting: internal realities with external realities, the personal with the political, the body with the mind and soul, people to one another in community and the overall Mexican experience to relevant life purposes. This connectedness was not typical of most other formal learning experiences or group functioning. In discussing these integral components
Nick indicates how holism is at the very heart of the spirituality he seeks. This view is congruent with holistic education where "the student is not just viewed in the cognitive mode, but in terms of his or her aesthetic, moral, physical and spiritual needs" (Miller, 1988, p. 55).

Nick gives evidence of the holism he saw practiced. Whatever external reality was being looked at, be it poverty or colonization, CCIDD staff... always brought it back to a human element, which I think is the crux of Jesus' spiritual teaching.... We'd examine the politics, but we'd take it down to a real human personal level...making the political personal.... We have to see this on human terms and approach it from a compassionate, loving approach.

This makes perfect sense to Nick as he is reminded of the politics of Che Guevara:

I'm reminded of a quote by him. He says...my political struggle and all political struggles should or are results of a great love.... And that's what I saw there [at CCIDD]. I hadn't seen that prior to that.

Another aspect of holism that Nick applauded was the "notion of body incorporation into your life...having a balance between intellectual and physical life". This was most appreciated by him in the physicality of the work projects which were not about "helping Mexicans to figure out how to use a shovel...[but helped] solidify things and to really integrate learning." For Nick "retained learning happens when people are physically engaged, and I also think, when there's a stake involved."

This additional requirement of holistic connection, that being to purpose, was unique to the Mexico experience and contrasted not only with traditional school learning but with other educational excursions that Nick has experienced. He found the Cuernavaca experience to be distinctly different from tramping around in Paris or London, visiting Cathedrals or
museums. "There was something more at stake in the Mexico experience...a purpose [beyond] just looking at things." Nick grapples with what this additional "stake" was and suggests that "maybe [it was in] seeing things as they could be ...[and] connecting that to our lives directly in Canada." Here he hits on the ultimate purposive activity of work - to make this world a better place.

Nick has touched upon the importance of relevance for education - not only that learning be pertinent to the greater global picture, but that it be relevant for the individual, coming full circle to the germane position of personal relevance to learning. According to Miller, "change...should be congruent with our centre, not according to some external set of expectations" (1988, p. 55). For Nick the experience was "internally transformative because it [was] connected to ourselves and to our history and to our experience in Canada". Furthermore the purpose of the Cuernavaca experience was of considerable magnitude to him. "Well, to be really simplistic. I think it's to make the world better - to make it a better place - assess what the world is and assess the faults that are inherent in the world and to do something to make it better." The way the CCIDD experience facilitated this large purpose was by "allow[ing] people to think about issues in relation to themselves and to their own actions - to see themselves as part of the process". Nick is emphatic. "I think in learning the most important thing, for me anyway at this point in my life, is to position yourself within the learning.... In a sense I think that lays the ground for physical transformation."

Finally, what Nick found to be the most emotionally impacting upon himself was the community bonding that developed in Cuernavaca. "I felt a real community at CCIDD.... I felt a community with a lot of people there that I don't feel here.... I felt really embraced and supported and I felt I could
risk....” This moves him to further seek this out in the future directions in his life which will be noted further on in this section.

These elements of the Cuernavaca experience contributed to Nick’s experiencing a long and lasting transformation and is evidenced in his life by how he puts into practice what he has learned and re-creates the life-affirming aspects that he values. This has made an impact upon his current attitudes and decisions. Although his humanistic orientation has been well established long before the CCIDD experience, the experience itself certainly has supported and encouraged him in ways that he would welcome. The compassion that permeated all the analysis at CCIDD has “forced me to really see anything I do with compassion and love - through a human lens.” When discussing tough issues such as structures of power, he tries “to see the humanness behind it”. When he converses with members of the corporate world, he “doesn’t want to reduce [them] in the same way this corporate speak has reduced others to automatons and statistics...not just dismiss them but really try to commune with them.” Compassion for Nick is not reductionist but it holds complexity with openness. He felt he was encouraged to be a critical thinker at CCIDD but to always “think with compassion.”

A most obvious follow-up to the Mexico experience, a follow up that I was surprised was not immediately obvious to Nick, was the fact that one and a half year afterwards he applied and was chosen for summer work with Frontier College. Frontier College is an organization well established in Canada (with about a hundred years of service) which is oriented towards education for literacy. While it originally trained its labourer/teachers to work with Canadians in the mining and lumber industries, it is now involved primarily with assisting migrant farm workers who come to Canada from economically disadvantaged countries for short term employment. The
ad for Frontier College candidates advertises "Hard Work, Low Pay and the Experience of a Lifetime!" Nick landed work as a labourer/teacher on an Ontario farm with migrant workers from Mexico. He had an remarkable and most challenging experience. In a follow-up paper he wrote for Frontier College, he sums up his working and teaching experience and the satisfaction he gained from it.

The most tangible evidence of teaching success for me came while thinning apples for six hours on a Sunday afternoon. [It was] an ideal spot for an English lesson.... While we were chatting, Delfina expressed to me that she was having difficulty communicating with Mary (La Patrona) and wanted to improve her English.... We must have practiced that exercise for two or three hours, rotating adjectives or having her ask me the questions. It worked well because it was relaxed; there was no intimidation of the formal class or the other Mexicans watching her.... [The exercises] sank into her because the physical activity of thinning connected the words to her body and thus they became not just mental images but concrete things in her body.... The best feeling for me came when we had a formal class doing the verb “to be”. She had remembered everything that we had done in the trees and spoke with ease and confidence. She even winked at me after she conjugated a verb. Suddenly minimum wage didn’t feel so little after all.

Nick continues to write and be influenced by this work. He is now fluent in Spanish and has decided upon a year’s “break” from his university studies to participate in a pedagogical program with Canada World Youth in Cuba next year. The process continues.

When questioned about what triggered the interest in Frontier College and choosing to work with Mexicans and questioning whether or not the Mexico experience was an influence on these choices Nick acknowledges: “I definitely think the Program had a deep impact. I still don’t know why though - like Spanish and development work and all these things really surfaced....” Nick deliberates further and offers:
I felt like I was dealing with the real in Mexico, I was dealing with reality. I wasn’t living in a detached world and in university I feel like I’m very detached as well, and in the summer, even with Frontier College I felt like I was living in the real too. I felt, wow, everything is here.... I feel really connected to things. For once I felt I was living in a life-giving community.... That’s what I loved about CCIDD. There was a community there and maybe my desire to go work with Mexicans is a result of recognizing that there is community there and I want to get a part of that. I want to be part of a community. That’s a really strong issue.

Here Nick connects the experience of CCIDD to his current life and to his future life. The community aspect strongly weaves purpose in his life, then and now. He has confidence that he will be forever engaged in meaningful work during the course of his lifetime. I also have no doubt of this. Yet he also realizes that, in most probability, he will not be highly remunerated for the work that he will choose to do during the course of his lifetime. I also see this as being a distinct possibility. While Nick is prudent when it comes to money, seeking a high wage will not be his first priority.

Nick, like the other students, was alerted to negative aspects of the trip. He commented on the unique problem of translation and how much power a translator actually holds. As a non-Spanish speaking student at the time, he was never sure about how accurately the native Mexicans were being translated, although he had no reason to distrust the CCIDD staff. He also wondered about how natural it was for participants of the Program to visit homes repeatedly and have these Mexican people showcase their lives. He wondered if there was an artificiality or performance element to this for them. All these issues were included in his ponderings.

Of course Nick noticed what concerned other students, that being the imposition of authority and abuse of control by a teacher. It did not trouble him to the extent it did the others since he “didn’t have to live with it”. He
was no longer part of the "class" after arriving home since he was from a different school so he did not have to put up with the in-class sessions of preparation and debriefing. Nevertheless "this element [was a]...blatant contradiction in terms of what was being taught and what was being practiced [at CCIDD]." This mentality aligns with a problem of education Nick recognizes elsewhere: "It's okay to be critical, to think critically up to a point, but you can't do it after that."

Nick recognizes the phenomenon of power dynamics present in education, ubiquitous in all segments of society and clearly observable in the power dynamics at the farm he worked on in the summer for Frontier College. He writes in his follow-up paper:

It was interesting to see how power can be created from nothing. People with no real power (control of their lives and future) will either be endowed with invisible, symbolic power or create a power position in order to justify their role and feel important.... However as humans we have the need to justify and feel a sense of worth in the work we do, regardless of what it is...[and] need to create some sort of dignity in a job [especially in a denigrated job like farm labour] which is hardly envied.

In this account Nick points out the human need for dignity, respect and legitimate power that, if not met, is sought after in illegitimate ways that become oppressive to others. This brings forward the need for legitimate power (for both teachers and students) that is a pre-requisite for learning situations to be able to function democratically. Thwarted power, for teacher or student, opens the door for the delegitimation of power. I will return to this issue in my final chapter.

Nick gives evidence of minuscule and trite power mongering, a last resort for those disempowered, that he sees manifesting in all facets of human existence. Again he refers to the examples that he witnessed at the farm.
The most evident thing that I saw at the farm was the constant grappling for power by positioning yourself above someone. Farmer over wife, wife over plant manager, him over field manager, him over workers, them over Mexicans, them over other "lazy" Mexicans at home, and so forth and so on.... As long as you had minuscule power over someone else, your position could be justified and you could feel worthy as a human being....

In summation, the central focus of the Cuernavaca experience for Nick, the notion of grounded spirituality, speaks to him in many ways. It grounds him in human reality satisfying in him his need for "intellectual structure...as well as a desire for the real, rooted, holistic, integrated foundation on which that is based." Learning is thus embodied for Nick and with reflection on this experience he maps out the features he believes are necessary for relevant education: dialogue, trusting the learners, moving learning into action, connecting to the world, being real and engaging with educators who walk their talk. All of this, experienced at CCIDD, happened in the context of a community of learners which Nick wants to replicate in seek out life-giving community experiences throughout the rest of his life.
Reflections of a Teacher, Mother, and Friend

It's been some time since I could hold you
in - completely in my arms.
Boy-ish bursts to far directions
are explorations - making scars.
Beyond my measure
in an instant,
you play comfort-challenge tugs of war.
Yet come as friend now
- still provoking
shape change guises time to time
They summon me
call more than me,
To places beyond me, too...
Kind requests
for wider arms, open spaces,
opened mind.
A fair demand for a creator
and now re-creator of human kind.
I now am on the search for spaces
seek to find open places
those that open for trust and love.

Nick's experience and reflection upon his experience is tremendously satisfying for me as a teacher. He is receptive, reflective, analytical, challenging and willing to apply what he has learned by grounding it to his life. What more can an educator ask for? Throughout the interview process and afterwards he willingly engaged in discourse whereby the learning continued on - for both teacher and student. He is empowered as a learner and does not take information in without consideration of how it resonates with his prior knowledge, experience and with his understanding of self. He has gleaned from his experience greater awareness of global realities as well as continually applying learning to his personal development. I had a strong sense that I was learning along with him through the mutuality of our sharing.
As a mother I experience great pride in observing the quality of Nick's integrity and compassion. I witnessed how well he melded with the group while in Cuernavaca, he being an outsider at the beginning. He gently worked his way into the heart of the group and maintained a sense of appreciation for having been included. I remember well how he spontaneously took it upon himself to publicly thank the group for including him while we traveled sadly and reluctantly back to the airport at the end of our sojourn. He has an understanding of what belonging to an authentic community is all about - maintaining respect for others while holding fast to his own individuality and respect for self.

I have witnessed how he has grown, how he learns and applies his learning to new situations. His work at Frontier College was extraordinary, challenging him in ways that were most difficult for him. He learned assertion, standing up to intimidating and bullying work supervisors who were bent on maintaining their power and covering up the atrocities committed at the workplace. These included unsafe pesticide spraying practices, to carbon monoxide hazards, to taking advantage of the Mexicans' every which way which was made easier by Mexican yearning to be asked back to the farm for another year's work. I was privileged to watch another of Nick's leave-taking at the farm where "macho" Mexican men held back tears as they were saying good-bye to a co-worker who was their advocate and now became their friend.

I do not regard this intense humanity, that Nick exhibits, to be the result of either the Cuernavaca trip or my mothering practices as much as the result of his own orientation toward developing integrity and compassion. But nevertheless the experience provided him with an opportunity to learn and grow and access new experiences gained from the powerful impact of
It had an effect on him to be sure, such that at times I have felt somewhat culpable for my own small role in exposing him to social activism and even taking him on this trip as I realize that in some small way it has become a force in his life that will continue to lead him to work of integrity, but also to work of risk and perhaps danger. At this point another type of motherly concern steps in as I worry for his well-being and safety and sensitivity of spirit. However I do not worry or question his goodness, and that is most important - the best gift of all.

Nick has come from me, but he is so strongly his own person that our relationship has naturally moved into the realm of friendship. An equal adult to myself, we engage in continued dialogue about issues that tangle deeply with the mysteries of life. I remain moved. I am thankful. I see that the Mexico experience has been an important and necessary part of both our separate journeys - the ultimate result of the experience yet to be revealed.

It draws me finally to consider the unforeseen dilemma of the educator (whether it be the educator role of parent or teacher) that surfaces when one's student or offspring has learned. You have essentially helped usher them to the brink of the unknown. You have done your part and now are left to watch and wait.

The words of prose are no longer sufficient or adequate in expressing my depth of feeling or the sense of gratitude that I feel with regard to Nicholas and his growth as it readily ventures out into the world. It gives me great hope and it continues to challenge me.
Summary

This chapter has dealt with new angles on old themes as well as new emerging themes and configurations that have emanated from the students from the interviews completed two years after their initial Cuernavaca experience. The chapter focuses on named students and discloses their stories and portions of narratives that they shared with me. My reflections as a researcher, educator and mother are included throughout as well as the final account, that being of my own son and participant, Nicholas.

There is a profound satisfaction in hearing from all the students and getting a fairly full picture of how they have “moved” with regards to the Cuernavaca Program in the past two years. There is much to deliberate upon from the information they have provided, information that goes into recommendations and visions for the future of education as discussed in the final chapter of my work.
CHAPTER SEVEN
Discussion and Visions for Education

In this final chapter of my work, in the context of the literature cited in Chapter One, I will discuss how this research project has illuminated my original question regarding how students experience transformation. What I have learned from the students in this study is in congruence with, and adds to, the discussion on transformative learning. As a result I disclose my vision for education and the practical considerations as they apply while including aspects of experiential learning highlighted by the Cuernavaca students that support the means to achieve transformation. My discussion includes affirmation and an expanded notion of both holistic learning and democratizing education, as well as the essential consideration of teacher health, the human vessel upon which holism and democracy depend. Finally, student experience reveals the centrality of the process of ongoing reflection and dialogue to transformation, a process that is a pre-requisite for the re-organization of world views so necessary in our post-modern era. These areas open to new beginnings and directions that will for me, and hopefully for others, encourage the exploration of new visions for the future of education.

Holism Expanded: Education as Something for Everyone

It has long since been my contention that for education to be a successful and meaningful endeavour - and be in fact transformative, it has to be all things for all people. I am more firmly convicted of this notion than ever before as a result of my study of the Cuernavaca experience. While this all embracing aim may seem simplistic, idealistic and impractical, educators
cannot cease working toward this end. Being all things for all people is hinged to the fact that it is compulsory that all students participate in education, in one way or another, and in turn, that the service of education be provided for all students. Essentially this is about reaching students - if you can’t reach them, you can’t teach them. This may seem like an insurmountable task and, due to the increasing plurality and complexity of Canadian society, the challenge is further intensifying. Nevertheless, schooling simply will not work effectively unless it has the capacity to be sufficiently varied, effectively communicative, and welcoming to everyone. While this goal may never arrive at a point of perfection, the direction of educational endeavours must be aligned to diligently work toward this end.

Inclusivity and connectedness are essentials at the heart of holistic education, whereby the continua of all reality belong in educational curricula by nature of prevailing interrelatedness. Holism in education incorporates, according to Miller (1988),

the relationship between linear thinking and intuition, the relationship between mind and body, the relationships between various domains of knowledge, the relationship between the individual and community, and the relationship between self and Self. (p. 3)

This vast scope of interconnection incorporates “every thing” that students praised about the Cuernavaca experience that in turn underpins my advocacy for including them in the educational process. The specifics of what is to be included (and what students valued) are detailed and endorsed by the holistic philosophies inherent in education for self-actualization and personal development, personal growth movements, Psychosynthesis, body-mind theory, feminism, global education and experiential learning. These strands not only affirm experience as a principal vehicle for relational learning but
also recognize that within this process we must, as Hunt (1987) advocates, "begin with our selves" (Hunt, 1987).

Considering every student's need (functional and personal) and learning style is the necessary dimension of education's adaptive function. Schooling should adapt to the student rather than vice versa. Welcoming each student, by considering and accepting their needs as well as their social, cultural, and developmental contexts (Adams, 1998; Fowler, 1981; Kohlberg, 1968), imparts a sense of belonging that was seen by the Cuernavaca students as being the most direct path towards the practice of authentic and responsible behaviour. Steindl-Rast sees moral rightness itself "consists in behaving as people behave when they belong together" (Capra & Steindl-Rast, 1992, p. 16). Jake, a student of the Cuernavaca experience, points out the necessity of affirming individuality when creating community when he asserts that "community does not negate individuality". Accommodating to student needs is a positive adaptive function for education - not like force fitting students into society by coercion or negating the individual, but by encouraging the development of community through belief in our fundamental unity. Huxley's (1970) perennial philosophy of universal wholeness, supporting the individual in community, is the foundational thrust of holistic education. By nurturing a sense of belonging, education can create a safe environment for creative expression and best advance visionary exploration of the problems that beset us in complex times.

The responses from the Cuernavaca students, including their moving narratives of experience, go a long way to strengthen the rationale for holistic education and justify experiential learning that makes holism a reality. All the students, at one time or another in the interview process, expressed how they valued the Cuernavaca learning experience because of its relevance and
unique ability to make an impact on them in some way. The components that were repeatedly singled out and applauded by students included the melding of body, spirit and emotion with the intellectual focus, the strong community bonding, and the opportunity to have “first-hand”, “hands on” experiences to see, hear and witness directly. The students praised holistic elements for assisting them in learning, and in many cases, they credited these holistic aspects as that which made learning possible for them.

While the students valued the various holistic elements that were part of the Program, there was much diversity in their responses. Each student found some aspect particularly crucial for them, that element being the primary vehicle for their personal meaning-making. While there was considerable agreement, there was also much variance as all did not agree on which element was pivotal or virtually indispensable to them. They differed on whether it was the spiritual focus, body integration, emotions, intellectual focus, excursions to communities, reflection times, work projects, community closeness, or a combination of particular elements that “made” the experience for them. What is significant to learn from these diverse reactions is that everyone found something that worked for them.

This diversity regarding “which quality is best” reinforces the need for education to speak all the languages, use all the entry points available, or as Gardner (1993) would have it, address all the myriad of “multiple intelligences”. A consideration that further affirms a multi-path approach is that, according to Kolb (1984), “development in one mode precipitates development in the others” (p. 140). Reaching a higher level synthesis in one path (be it behavioural, symbolic, affective, or perceptual complexity), by moving from acquisition to specialization to integration, involves a growth in consciousness that eventually promotes an overall growth in
consciousness in all areas. This was exemplified in Nick’s learning. Although he specially appreciated the physicality and spirituality, this further opened him up intellectually and academically following Cuernavaca and is now able to bring greater relevance to his theoretical learning. It was likewise for others like Dominique. Although her experience was primarily emotional, it has set her more firmly on an academic route. The learning theory, generated from student accounts, calls for attention to be given to all learning contexts and all holistic paths available.

Students generally endorsed the multi-dimensionality and integrated focus on body, spirit, emotions and mind, and the natural integration of disciplines in the reality of experience, but their enthusiasm and specific comments bring further insight into how these elements can be enriched and expanded upon in relation to the understanding and scope of holism. Information gathered from the students (the emphatic endorsements for emotion, passion, intensity and physicality) makes a case for expanding holism in the direction of more in-depth embodiment and reclaiming the erotic (Lorde, 1989) in learning. Embodiment includes physicality, yet goes further in immersing and embedding learning in the body, in life and in other-ness including sensual reality. This focus has the potential to ground learning, bring it home to the body-self (Dychwald, 1977), and impassion the process of learning through sacralizing the material that is an understanding close to Fox’s (1991) own creation spirituality. Reclaiming the erotic (Lorde, 1989) eliminates false body-spirit dualities and connects to the feminist and women’s spirituality validation of woman-body and earth-body that merges immanence with transcendence.

While this focus on impassioning and grounding has something to say to all dimensions of learning it needs to speak first to spirituality, spiritual
bankruptcy being cause for the human devastation of injustice lacking compassion, generosity, and love, which is at the root of global crises. The spiritual context of education relates to meaning, purpose and direction "born of an awareness of the interconnectedness of all creatures by reason of their common creator" (Fox, 1990, p. 34). The global dilemma, a problem of the earth and the spirit, requires as its remedy an awakening and renewal that requires more than ethereal spirituality, Platonic notions of corporeal inferiority, Christian mortification of the flesh, and afterlife as the locus for meaning. It is only through an immanental grounding of the spiritual that the earth can hope to find redemption and humans can authentically and viscerally come to know joy and belonging. Acceptance of our bodily and sensorial selves in turn draws us to the body of the earth, no longer on the outside, but an extension of who we are. This provides the sense and rationale for transforming the earth because we are part of her. It is this undertaking of the heart and soul, grounded palpably in the human-body and earth-body, that education must take up as a necessary part of its task of addressing the concerns of this age.

The students deemed Cuernavaca spirituality to be exceptional. While they benefited from reflective and more traditional times of prayer and meditation, the outstanding aspects for them had to do with the ritualized events and the connectedness of spirituality throughout. For them the ritual in Cuernavaca was an emotion-filled celebration and culmination of shared experience connected to personal, political, economic and social contexts. The ritual was not a static event, but a means of further moving forward their understanding and knowing. Students also greatly valued the concrete symbols that were central to the ritual and how they imbued and blessed their overall experience with additional meaning. These included the clay crosses,
the rocks, as well as other mementos that extended far beyond their functional purposes such as the blankets from the artisans and pieces of jewelry. These material objects had become infused with tremendous meaning and significance for the students and became their treasures.

Ritual activity (defined as representing meaning in activity), symbolic objects and ardent devotion are universal to most spiritual and religious practice as they are universal to all deep human experience. Love, for example, is an invisible reality demonstrated largely through symbolic expression. These expressions, however, are increasingly absent in a secular educational climate that fears to offend by showing partiality to any particular religious tradition. Thus within the educational system we often please no one in our avoidance to offend. The result is a barrenness and sterility of spiritual experience or else a stumbling around an amorphous new ageism. In denominational schools, students often demonstrate a similar loss of connection to the value of ritual. This is demonstrated through verbal or non-verbal protests as shown in their customary lack of attentiveness during traditional ceremony. Yet human spirituality with its need for expression through observances and customs prevails. The problem is analyzed by feminist Audre Lorde (1989) who notes that “we have attempted to separate the spiritual from the erotic, thereby reducing the spiritual to a world of flattened effect, a world of the ascetic who aspires to feel nothing” (p. 210). Students in their accounts disclose their hunger for renewed spirituality.

How is embodied spirituality, a spirituality profoundly connected to people, to be re-introduced into education? Firstly, this is a task that the arts can well take on since their major aim of meaning-making is akin to religious purpose. Secondly, educators can assist in enlivening the connections to spiritual traditions as well as encourage the creation of new
practices that connect to present realities where need be. It is good to bear in mind that it is in the specificities, not generalities, that the soul is revealed and spirituality truly “comes home” (Yeomans, 1997-1999). Feminist Monica Wittig harkens back to a time when spirituality connected, affirmed and empowered. Her suggestion for retrieving this spirit for the present is poetically expressed: “You say there are no words to describe this time, you say it does not exist. But remember. Make an effort to remember. Or failing that, invent” (in Weaver, 1989, p. 54).

Embodiment and reclaiming the erotic and passionate are not to be restricted to the realm of spirituality. It is also intrinsic to effective cognitive learning. Nick experienced an appreciation of this in Mexico, practiced what he learned in his summer work, and reaped results as related in his retelling the story of Delfina’s English lesson while thinning the apple trees. This example, as well as other evidence from student accounts, substantiates the mutuality of body and mind in accordance with Kelemen’s (1985) concept that “life makes shape” (p. xi). Embodied experience, made intrinsic to educational practice, is the best way to get knowledge to a cellular level where alone it can be poised and ready for action.

The other arena for embodying and re-capturing the sensual is in the area of emotions, the core of human passion and compassion. Students repeatedly spoke of their deep appreciation of this element in their experience like André who confessed that “feelings were the biggest part for me”. The Cuernavaca experience, which actively encouraged feeling and its expression, allowed for feeling to get inside and linger in the body and not be repressed, suppressed, or stifled in any way. The ultimate tribute to this free flow of feeling came with students relating their feeling to knowing - deep knowing and moral knowing.
A few isolated holistic experiences in the context of a student's educational life is not enough. Students need consistency in the area of embodied and experiential learning, and when it comes to an exceptionally deep experience like the one at CCIDD, students require follow-up. Those in this study voiced their pleas for more. They wanted the experience to continue, not to be left high and dry in what they perceived to be the desire of the educational system - that they learn, but only up to a point. They valued the interview process itself since it provided them with a form of follow-up, systemic support and continuity to the experience.

For holism to be available and continuous, schools are best to function like communities comprising of networks of opportunities and relationships that do not stop when an experience ends. Being all things to all people, the educational mandate set out at the start of this section, can not happen easily in either confined classroom spaces or short time spans. The openness that is needed is a matter for a larger concept of relationship.

Relationship that fosters holism requires time and energy for its nurturance. For students, a strong sense of school community can provide a continuity of learning where caring is given first priority (Noddings, 1992) and follow-up is intrinsic in programs. Caring and follow-up, being recognized to their full importance, should make way for new understandings of what is considered to be quality instructional time.

A more full bodied holism can also be enhanced by the inclusion of arts experiences. Drama, the relational art form, is a profound connector of people as well as being an enhancement and rehearsal for life. Arts, and specifically drama, rely upon making connections and are integrative by nature. Drama counters the tendency toward perpetuating fragmentation where other subjects compete for superiority - a practice that intensifies in the
rise to higher learning. John Raulston Saul critiques the fragmentation inherent in the university where "the principal occupation of the academic community is to invent dialectics sufficiently hermetic to prevent knowledge from passing between territories" (1995, p. 301). Integrative approaches, on the contrary, promote wholeness, well-being and life learning.

Creating connections with the community at large is another substantial way that a school can be all things to all people in an increasingly complex world. On a purely functional level there is not a school that has sufficient resources to provide for all students' needs. Schools must reach out to the community, including to other schools, to provide more of what students need. This may include anything from a work experience with an organization, agency or company, to a course in a specialized trade that is not available in the home school. We need to maintain strong home bases, like families, but send our students confidently out into a larger world. Schools will also function better when they realize what they do best and accept where they are limited. We as humans, and schools as institutions, are strengthened when seeking help from the outside and pooling resources. The opening up of the institution of education whereby it goes beyond its present confinement of space, restrictions, boundaries and philosophy is as important as the opening of the teacher vessel (to be discussed later in this chapter) in order to provide the diverse paths required for transformative holism to occur.

Schools are still essential, and in some cases they provide the best opportunity for care and nurturing that a student will ever have. To think that we can function without them, because they have limitations, is elitist and unreasonable. Instead we must strive to expand on what we already know works and expand the boundaries of school - both geographically and
ideologically. From the accounts of the Cuernavaca students, this means an expansion of holistic thrust in both its scope and its quality. We must increase the scope of holism inwards to include the body, feelings and passion. Simultaneously we must expand its scope outwards to include the community, as far as we can see and reach it, and ultimately to embrace our entire planetary home. In this way education can slowly transform toward becoming all things for all people.

**Democracy Alive: Settling and Unsettling**

Transformation on a personal scale ultimately unfolds and spreads its positive change to the global dimension in the same way that the health of a cell contributes to the health of the entire organism. Conversely, any drive for change that does not consider personal needs does not have the capacity to transform on a larger scale in the same way that a dysfunctional cell eventually can create a diseased organism.

The capacity to change and empower with transformative energy depends not only upon the transmission of knowledge and information, but on more deep awareness and consciousness of both interior and exterior realities. Students of the Cuernavaca experience verified that both self-awareness and knowledge of far-reaching global realities were that which they found to be their sources for empowerment. Thus our job as educators is to further facilitate this awareness - both in depth and in scope, whereby multiple voices are heard in essentially what is the democratic process of promoting social equality and individual rights.

Gerardo Thijsse, speaker at CCIDD, delineated the intrinsic link between allowing for all the voices to be heard and the democratic process when he posited that "democracy is only possible with an informed
populace” (CCIDD Program, 1997). Geraldo’s assertion is based on the reality that a populace experiences only a façade of democracy when voices are excluded, they are subjected to censorship and equivocation or they are otherwise left unaware of the complete picture. This phenomenon was exemplified in the society of Mexico, and students were able to draw parallels to their Canadian experience, where the media is controlled, biased and manipulated by the state in order to cultivate a level of ignorance. Democracy under these circumstances is impossible even though there is a public demonstration of election by majority rule.

For democracy to be truly present and alive in schools, education must do more than pay lip-service to democracy. Critical theorists urge education to correct its false mandate of “serv[ing] to reproduce the technocratic and corporate ideologies that characterize dominant societies” (McLaren, 1994, p. 1). I agree more vehemently than ever, on the basis of the student experiences, that there has to be a settling of accounts in this area so that all voices are heard. This notion was underscored by the students who highly valued the new perspectives gleaned from previously unheard voices of the poor and disenfranchised. They also advocated on their own behalf, divulging that they too wanted to be more included in educational discourse. Mary reminds us that “students have important things to say.”

The voices of corporatism and the dominant society are loudly heard. They filter through unconsciously as the status quo and form the main course of the North American steady diet of media consumption. What is more important is that a balance be created by including the other voices - those of the poor, weak and marginalized. An open forum of voices needs to be available on the macro scale, including all sectors of society, and on the micro scale in the culture of the classroom.
Taking democracy seriously in the classroom means allowing respect and equality to emerge by means of Shor's (1992) transformative pedagogy, hooks' (1994) education as the practice of freedom, and Boal's (1979) replacement of the monologue of oppression with the dialogue of empowerment. Students were clear to point out their pain of not being heard over the constant and imposing pontifications of teacher "truths". Unless a welcoming of all student voices is not only allowed but encouraged, we can never expect students to become tolerant of "other" voices. They will remain naturally stuck at the point of their own unmet needs for being heard.

We need to be aware of and begin with where students are at and this also involves recognizing the oppressor that lies within them as well as their external oppressors. Teachers need to gently challenge students to examine their assumptions and thus open up the often too tight boundaries of what they might consider to be knowledge. Psychological consideration for the safe emergence of the unconscious, as well as what is conscious, should also be in place. While teachers are not therapists, nor should they pretend to be therapists, there is a therapeutic quality to education much like the therapeutic quality that Boal (1979) attributes to his work in theatre for liberation. We can learn from Boal's (1990, 1992) work, where he allows for safe and constrained "play" in a dramatic mode (often without words as in his powerful image theatre), which works at freeing the oppressors within while simultaneously devising strategies for dealing with external oppressors. In the safety of role the unheard voices of inner selves, shadows, fears and weaknesses can be encouraged to emerge to greater consciousness. Where else can students have opportunity for their non-dominant qualities and less expressed selves to come out and play? This play can be the beginning of deep discourse and self-knowledge.
Kolb (1984), in what amounts to be an indictment of democracy as we know it, shares how society actually works against the best interests of individual development by valuing (and rewarding) only the specialized adaptive orientations that stem from an individual's dominant function that society can capitalize upon. This ultimately leads citizenry to becoming completely identified with the societal structures themselves as their utilitarian function turns the wheels within that system. This is typified by those who identify themselves by their job.

We are ensnared by our particular specialized interpretative consciousness [and our favoured way of knowing] and reinforced for this entrapment through the specialized structures of social institutions. (Kolb, 1984, p. 158)

This ubiquitous phenomenon works against learning as well as it works against democracy.

Carl Jung (1923) similarly critiques this destructive element of society: "The favoritism of the superior function is just as serviceable to society as it is prejudicial to the individual" (p. 94). Alternatively, we need to move to Jung's concept of individuation whereby we, subversively in some cases, seek out the mandate of our own souls. Kolb's experiential learning stands in congruence with the process of Jung's individuation where the "adaptive orientations of the conscious social self are integrated with their complementary nonconsciousness orientations" (p. 157) to create empowered and not merely subservient individuals. Schools must assist in this process firstly by making students available to the full range of societal voices from which to pool understanding, then allowing them the freedom to discover and express their own voices. This way of incorporating Kolb's full range of experiential learning will eventually produce a class of revolutionaries who
themselves will create the momentum that continues to change the system from within.

Democracy that allows for all the voices is a settling of accounts - a positive experience of education whereby students are challenged with the voices of others and also encouraged to voice themselves. All the students in the Cuernavaca study endorsed this aspect of the Program and it was this openness, if anything, that was instrumental in encouraging any transformation. Many also identified that this empowerment of learners was seriously lacking in most of the schooling that they had experienced - a commodity that they felt was much needed to remedy the maladies of the educational process.

Even so, there were students that became more critical and/or less satisfied with the Program over time who found aspects of the experience to be unsettling for them. I suggest that we not fear this result but regard it as a natural and frequent consequence of rigorous learning - learning that is new, challenging and therefore even threatening to some. To help students through a precarious transition in their learning, we need to know and accept their context and not wring our hands wishing that they were like the students of a previous era. Here the context of cultural influences, as elaborated by Adams (1998), needs to be recognized as our starting point and not criticized or ignored. Likewise, the stages of moral and faith development (Fowler, 1981; Kohlberg, 1968) are similar contexts that needs to be acknowledged as reality, yet not regarded to be necessarily permanent or immutable. It is my view that students' negative reactions be recognized often to be a function of their socialization as well as being their personal position so that educators do not become either discouraged from the act of challenging nor become narrowly judgemental. Negative reactions indeed
often confirm that education is doing its work in causing the shifts and uneasiness that come as natural precursors to making leaps in learning or growing out of old skins into new ones. Discomfort accompanies any growth period whether it be in a young infant cutting teeth, a child with growing pains, adolescent awkwardness or adult mid-life crisis. Dewey (1958) forewarns us that discomfort is part of the learning process, here quoting William James:

To know means that men [sic] have become willing to turn away from precious possessions; willing to let drop what they own, however precious, in behalf of a grasp of objects which they do not as yet own. (pp. 130-131)

To maintain an “optimum” stress for successful learning, (not too severe, not too lax), it is important not only to maintain respect and equality throughout the process but ensure that new views are never forced or decreed as truths but are presented along with an encouragement for discussion as outlined in the pedagogy of Shor (1996). While we should not shrink from our responsibility to impart hard lessons from time to time, we must become good ritual elders - “hold” the students with care and maintain continuity in being willing to take them across the leap of faith. We cannot practice “hit and run” teaching, something that our fragmented and pressured high school programs often force upon us in their drive to meet outcomes. Ultimately it could be said that education that opens to the possibilities of transformation, that is intrinsically democratic, is really about compassion that returns us to the connection that Guevara (1967) makes between love and activism.

In summing up this look at the democratic process, we must consider seriously whether education is part of the global solution or part of the problem. How much does the educational system support the dominant
model of society, as suggested by McLaren (1994), Kozol (1967, 1978, 1982), Giroux (1979, 1988) and others, bent on perpetuating itself while hiding truths of the vast majority of world people? Does education pay lip service to acknowledging a global context yet hypocritically foster hierarchy and “power over” models in the individual classroom in the determination to pass on prefabricated truths? Are we willing to trust the process of constructing knowledge even when it goes beyond our personal comfort levels, challenges the system and even our authority within that system? Is there a limit on just how much we want students to learn, on how much we want them to be critically thinking or problem solving? Do we want to control exactly how much they must learn? We need to recognize the personal and institutional predispositions that curtail learning at certain points in order to maintain the revered status quo.

Transformative learning calls for Freirian (1968) “conscientization” of the institution of education itself, a task for educators working from the inside and activists from the global community at large. We need to support students internally to maintain their power, self-esteem and authenticity in the midst of a consumer oriented culture that promotes passivity. We also need to support authentic learning, conscientization and constructivism in order to further democratize and build a life-centred and freedom-valuing society.

Caring for Teachers: Maintaining Educational Health

Both embodied holism and the practice of authentic democracy hinge upon my third point for advocacy, that being the care for teacher health. This issue evolves from the comments that students made regarding their learning process and the important role that teachers play in it. It also
connects strongly to a personal and global transformative vision that is in accordance with Krishnamurti's (1976) conception of education, whereby students are understood as they are, not imposed upon and nurtured into becoming integrated individuals capable of dealing with life as a whole.

Despite intimations that future learning processes will increasingly be driven by technology, it is my view that their transformative potential will be maintained to the degree that the human element is sustained. Information and knowledge, while necessary for the expansion of narrow-minded views, are limited in their ability to bring about positive change without the model of teacher who can imbue the process with compassion and mindful human interaction. Information gathered from the students brings this issue boldly to the table as they talked considerably about positive and negative teaching models, that which helps and hinders their ability to learn, and their need for mutually respectful relationships with their teachers.

Life centred values such as nurturing, sharing, co-operation and compassion can only be inspired through human intervention as it is through the caring action of individuals and communities that people emerge with sufficient strength, integrity and moral fibre to be able to put knowledge and talent toward the betterment of humanity and our world. In order for education to have a moral and compassionate impact it must be personalized. Nel Noddings (1992), in urging for the cultivation of care in schools, advocates for meaningful in-depth communication that alone can bring the generalities of knowing to deeper personal levels that connect to self-knowledge.

Students must be invited to ask questions about themselves, not merely about humans in general...ask the existential questions that might make a difference in their own lives and those of humankind.... We need to press speakers [and teachers] to
translate their recommendations into the language of living bodies. (pp. 118, 119)

Ultimately this links education's highest function to "peoplemaking" that requires the human vessel for its accomplishment.

The suitability of teachers to do this work, however, is predicated on their ability to ask similar questions of themselves, engage in deep reflection, draw upon inner strength, model positive behaviour, and act out of love. James Hollis (1980) synthesizes that "education...pre-supposes self-education" (p. 107). Conversely, teachers driven by a compulsion to control, who redirect energies from circumspection to criticism of others, tacitly collude with their fears, use the persona of teacher as a hiding place, and otherwise act out of deep seated neediness and unconscious deficiencies are prone to minimize learning or perpetrate considerable harm. This behaviour is particularly damaging when students are unaware of what is going on, low in self-esteem or blindly obedient to authority. Hence it is the health of the educator, both physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual that enables a teacher for the task of effective teaching. It is my view that, above all, teachers teach who they are far above and beyond teaching content.

The good health of a teacher makes effective and holistic integration possible since reasonable comfort in the physical, emotional, spiritual as well as in the mental realm is necessary for integrating and utilizing these aspects in the learning process. Any blocks that a teacher may experience in these areas will in turn translate into an inability to open these domains effectively to the student. Essentially a teacher's efficacy and validity is in direct proportion to his or her ability to demand of self what is demanded of the student. This in turn depends upon a willingness and courage for the teacher to do their own work. In Hollis' words, "the willingness to address one's
personal healing is essential before one can contribute a measure of healing to the collective" (1980, p. 111). This, I hope, introduces a new and vital dimension to the idea of teacher preparation and training.

The Cuernavaca students shared their pain of dealing with teachers who they found to be restricting and censoring, disallowing certain thinking, feeling, or spiritual experiencing. This controlling tendency is all too common as I too became aware of my blockages and reactions surfacing as I interviewed students. Without a capacity to recognize, address and subsequently let go of defenses (at least to a certain degree), the teacher can skew the learning in the direction of her unmet needs. This would not connect directly to a soul need but to a need of a psychological complex, one's unfulfilled history, or a sub-personality as illuminated in Psychosynthesis (Assagioli, 1990, 1993). With the increase in emotional needs of students, apparent in the modern day classroom, emotional health that frees the teacher to genuinely care (with fewer strings attached) is more important than ever. This health care must start in teacher education and be ongoing throughout a teacher's career.

Likewise, without a modicum of teacher health, a democratic classroom cannot substantially evolve. Establishing democracy is dependent upon the ability to hold, accept and listen while keeping reactivity, the need to control, and oppression in check. Democratic relationships are established through healthy mutual respect. Shor (1992, 1996) berates the autocratic teacher who is recognized in the incessant lecturer and fierce controller who singularly directs the learning agenda without student input. Another hindrance to democracy occurs when the teacher sacrifices his or her own identity in the classroom and functions out of the need to be liked. These two extremes are both examples of teachers bringing their unmet and often
unconscious needs to the classroom. The teacher who has sufficient inner strength and balance has an easier time with give and take, sustaining dialogue over monologue and sustaining the integrity of all involved. This teacher has less need to manipulate, exercise "power over" control and otherwise abuse power and authority which is a function of oppression not education. Teachers require inner strength and courage to prevent falling into the easy trap of what Shor (1992) calls the "conspiracy for the least" (p. 142). More than ever before, with increased school violence, teacher intimidation, heavy work loads and public distrust, it is more difficult yet more essential than ever for teachers to be firm and humane in maintaining standards, providing leadership, applying just consequences, integrating the perceived "other" and utilizing the interpersonal skills of building relationships and community.

How is teacher health to be encouraged and maintained? First of all I believe that we must recognize teacher health as an essential need and pay attention to it in both initial teacher training, professional development and in teacher life-long learning. This means going further than including an occasional stress management seminar at a staff meeting. It means providing regular opportunities for personal growth, self-awareness, community building, spirituality and play. It is essential that all these occasions happen in a non-critical, non-evaluative and open atmosphere without punitive consequences. Regarding this, I am reminded of how many professional development "faith days" I have attended where I observe staff suffering from low level anxiety throughout the experience. Although it is promoted as a day of relative relaxation staff behave as if "on display" - feeling pressured to prove their worthiness to peers and supervisors alike. Free expression, in this case, is either non-existent or done at great risk.
While other professions, particularly therapeutic and religious, have recognized the need to nurture the health of the practitioner, in education the focus is on training the teacher in subject related skills and competency rather than nurturing the more indispensable human qualities. As I complete this inquiry the Ontario Provincial Government continues to target teacher inadequacy with the current proposal for mandatory teacher testing as the newest panacea for educational ills. What can be tested, I ask, that will assess a teacher's capacity to care and have compassion, those being the most critical components of a teacher's qualification? The proposal for testing is not only perfunctory and nonsensical but it misdirects appropriate public concern for education. James Moffat (1994) targets misguided societal values as the problem behind ineffective schooling and beseeches that humane values permeate the educational system.

From a shallow critique of schooling we could easily blame poorly qualified teachers. But until schooling begins to metamorphose into a humane, creative garden of learning, public education will continue to attract too few of the best people into the profession.... School reform has to be part of a bigger social reform.... Find out how to act on what we know about learning, and don't let politics and economics obscure this obvious practical knowledge staring us in the face from the whole environment. (pp. 150, 151, 153)

Healthy school community environments, more than anything else, can improve the health of the profession which in turn help make for effective schools that ultimately create a compassionate and just citizenry. Well being comes from being loved and cared for and then finding that source of love and caring in ourselves.

While there needs to be a respect for various personal paths to teacher health, the role of conscious awareness is central and accessible from spiritual practice, transpersonal psychology, meditation and devotion, global
consciousness-raising, the arts and even new post-Newtonian science. All these paths take us forward in understanding our connectedness. Renée Weber (1986), speaking from the worlds of science and spirituality, links this awareness to the ultimate goal of compassion:

The awareness of the unity and interconnectedness of all being leads - if it is consistent - to an empathy with others. It expresses itself as reverence for life, compassion, a sense of the brotherhood of suffering humanity, and the commitment to heal our wounded suffering earth and its peoples. (p. 17)

The purpose of life itself largely revolves around the task of increasing consciousness. While this process starts with personal consciousness, it eventually leads to recognizing that personal consciousness is connected to larger cosmic consciousness, as is acknowledged in Psychosynthesis.

Teaching and learning requires consciousness because conscious awareness increases our ability to encounter and open to the "Other". Hollis (1980) elaborates:

We befoul our relationships with our own psychic debris, that the best relationship we can ever achieve with the intimate Other, the corporate Other, and the Wholly Other, is a function of the relationship we achieve to ourselves. (p. 138)

The Cuernavaca students had substantial experiences with Others: the global Other, Other world views, the Other within their own community, and ultimately, the Other within themselves - the parts they did not know. It is for the teacher to responsibly hold the container of the highly varied ingredients, the Others, for the students. Yet, for the teacher the same Others also exist. The student is, at least at first, an Other for the teacher. The Other is also present in unfamiliar knowledge and realities outside of oneself - that which we may perhaps not wish to acknowledge, but in acknowledging it
(increasing our consciousness) we increase our capacity to open both inwardly and outwardly. The first and final frontier of Other, for the teacher as well as for the student, is the Other within. The acceptance of this Other is that which makes "holding" students possible.

Openness requires, according to Hillman (1996), speaking from a psychological and personal development perspective, "the eye of the heart. Something moves in the heart, opening it to perceiving the image in the heart of the other" (p. 120). Abrams, from the area of philosophy and global consciousness, evokes what it is that causes us to experience Other: "our senses are the gates where our body receives the nourishment of otherness" (pp. ix, 22). Zohar, from the world of science and social science, makes a most significant statement in praising the potentiality of Other as the "one who evokes my own latent possibilities.... The quantum other is my necessity.... the unlived potentiality deep within myself." (pp. 193, 197).

In response to the question of how students experience transformation, it is by becoming enabled to encounter Other in all of its forms within the safe environment, safe-keeping and safe-holding of a solid and balanced ritual elder. In our culture this is the teacher. For this important holding to be possible, the teacher must be an exemplar in working on his or her own health at every level. This is the prerequisite for teachers becoming the transformative vessel for students and students reaping the rich results of their own transformation.

Transformative Experience: Reflective and Dialogic

The Cuernavaca students affirmed the value of experience by praising the "hands-on" approach which included opportunities for personal encounters with diverse individuals and alternate world views, participation
in real work projects, and accessing the sights, sounds and smells of a unique culture that was made available to them through CCIDD. Additionally, some students expressed straightforwardly what was most revelatory in the process of their journeys. For them the transformative power of their learning experience was strongly connected to opportunities for reflection and dialogue. Likewise the hampering of reflection and free dialogue was seen to hold back transformation. The recursive component of their experience (reflecting in private and public) flourished in the community building process of circle sharing that began at CCIDD, continued (with some setbacks) at school in the formal follow-up and in the informal ongoing conversations, and was further encouraged by means of the two year interview and continued dialogic process.

While experience has a powerful transformative potential, as evidenced in the testimonies of little miracles associated with the Cuernavaca excursion, its greater transformative potential is unleashed through both personal and interactive reflection. It is this fuller appreciation of concrete experience, accessed through reflective observation and abstract conceptualization, that enables students to actively experiment and thus complete Kolb's (1984) cycle of experiential learning.

Burgeoning transformation was both uncovered and facilitated by the "snapshots" taken of student process by means of this inquiry. This research process bore witness to epiphanyal moments, increased conviction, discovery of new paths, as well as to questioning, skepticism, tension and conflict - all signs of an authentic learning process. What began as my own reflection on how students experience transformation, developed into deeper student examination of their own process. In this way my questioning and observation had somewhat of an effect upon the outcome for the participants.
This consequence, not unlike the Shrödinger’s Cat “experiment” (Zukav, 1979, p. 85-86) where observation and the observer affect the outcome, not only demonstrates real shortcomings to “so-called” objectivity, but more importantly, illustrates the value of ongoing dialogue and reflection to deepening experience.

Affecting outcome, however, clearly does not result in the neat packaging of solutions, arriving at consummate ideology, or jumping to conclusions. Conversely, it more often nudges students toward a more complicated, indeterminate and perhaps even chaotic state. This state more closely mirrors a post-modern and open epistemology that is predicated on pragmatic doubt, inherent indeterminacy, multiple perspectives, and eclectic integration - knowledge that is created, not found (Doll, 1993). Further, post-modernism (post-scientism) observes tenets of new science that values chaos as the source of creation itself and the means to a more complex order (Prigogine & Stengers, 1984). The less apparent yet deeper self-organizing principle that underpins chaos is the hope we need for dealing with the intricacies of our times.

Anne Yeomans (1984) applies a psychosynthetic understanding of transformation congruent with post-modernism that “includes both the falling apart of old known ways of being and the coming together and reforming of new and more evolved ways of being” (p. 67). Piaget’s (1978) biological model of development also recognizes the role disequilibrium plays in providing the optimum tension and stress that bring about necessary movement. Dewey (1938) suggests that there is an indeterminacy to the learning process where “perhaps the greatest of all pedagogocial fallacies is the notion that a person learns only the particular thing he is studying at the time” (p. 48). Student growth and their struggles with growth, witnessed in
the information gathered from the students, are all part of the adventure of meaning-making. This constructivist experience wields transformative power and is supported by a curriculum that is rich, recursive, relational and rigorous (Doll, 1984). When learners take up their responsibility and live through the shadows of their learning, the arduous, risky, yet necessary shift to self-knowledge is underway. John Weiser (1984) acknowledges the challenge yet necessity of this path: “All of us know how difficult it is to obtain the type of self-knowledge that allows us to see outside of our conditioning” (p. 158).

For the students the Cuernavaca experience was a beginning that could advance further with expanded reflective time, supportive interaction and opportunity for public forum. The process begun at CCIDDD and furthered through school, community and personal interactions could well be the mainstay of school experience and not the mere add-on or option to the school curriculum as it was for our student participants. The outstanding community, that was created in the short time around the Cuernavaca experience, disbanded too soon for some but offered all of us a taste and longing for what more could be. It is by the conscious and diligent creation of time and space for both concrete experience and subsequent reflection and interaction that education can advance beyond the seeking of pre-existent truths “out there”.

For myself, my own best teaching and learning experiences have occurred when a community has been established and both teachers and learners are free and comfortable to stray from the line of prescribed curriculum and allow for ideas, according to Whitehead (1967), to “be thrown into every combination possible” (p. 2). This exploration, and at times wild abandon, brings every involution possible to bear on the problems at hand
and allows for the input of the unique content of every individual. The teacher too is part of the exploration (and not the expert in all things) who works side by side with the students sharing experience and lived knowing. For myself, I recall the many collaborative moments (most readily available in the experiential learning context of both drama and co-operative education) whereby I profoundly have sensed my strengths along with those of my students, our equal standing, mutual respect, humanity, easy movement into metaphor, emotional accessibility and sense of belonging that fully demonstrates learning as a journey.

For transformation to take place, experience is truly the starting point that entices us into more learning, but reflection is what makes experience transformative. This certainly may happen on its own but as teachers we must work to encourage it. Personal reflection and dialogic interplay need active encouragement throughout the educational process. This research inquiry has itself exemplified the value of this process.

Final Thoughts

Not all students can have an intercultural and challenging experience such as the one at CCIDD in Cuernavaca. In ideal circumstances I wish it could be so and I would find it rewarding to continue to make these experiences accessible for students. However, there is a great deal that we can learn and apply from the Cuernavaca experience to more ordinary school experiences. The valued elements and critical issues that the Cuernavaca students brought to the fore can and should be injected into the mainstream of education. Qualities that were highly valued by the students - the integration of emotion, body and spirit to the cognitive process, contextual learning, relevance derived from starting from where the students are at, the
creation of opportunities for engagement in experience, the maintenance of an educational environment that is respectful and egalitarian, and reflection and dialogue all carry a transformative power.

Proposed directions for education can be extrapolated from the students’ comments about their experience. These have to do with expanding the concept of holism to reclaim passion and the erotic and allowing for a more substantial embodiment to learning. This thrust derives from the profound way students valued and learned from the passionate intensity of their experience and appreciated the physicality, emotions and ritualized spirituality available to them in the Program.

Democracy is crucial. This admonition derives from the students’ frustrations from abuse of authority as well as their increased empowerment from the popular education strategies practiced at CCIDD. Knowing what education could be like, and sensing the gap between that and their reality, brought them to challenge the system as they know it. The Program itself worked in creating some significant revolutionaries within the group.

Arising from both student needs and frustrations, as well as their forthright comments on what makes for good teaching and learning, the issue of the care of the teacher comes forth in an attempt to effectively enable the profession for what they most need - to become open and compassionate vessels for the process of transformation in students.

Finally, a tip for functioning in our post-modern age - let us not be afraid of chaos, but enter into it with the belief and hope that we will discover the larger self-organizing principles emerging from within. Through reflection and dialogue, we welcome our students to construct knowledge and advance beyond seeking the pre-existent truths “out there”.
The voices of the students speak loud and clear to those who listen. We must now reach our students with our entire compliment of what we know works for learning and reach them with our whole selves as educators, for ultimately we teach them who we are. In this way, we can continue to create a face for education that has power to transform individuals and in turn becomes our hope for continuing to change and better our world.
APPENDIX A
LETTER OF CONSENT, 1997

Julia Balaisis  52 Tribbling Crescent  Aurora, Ontario  L4G 4W6  905-727-4494

As well as being a familiar face, I am also a doctoral student at OISE/UT engaging in research for the purpose of completing a term paper in qualitative research. It is also my hope to use this data and its subsequent analysis for work on my doctoral thesis, as well as possible future publications and presentations.

My purpose is to investigate what learning has been achieved by students who participated in a unique educational opportunity of experiential learning in Cuernavaca Mexico. The study of this experience especially interests me because it included what I believe to be the key elements of critical, authentic and lasting learning: reflection combined with action, heart-centred community building, integration of body, mind and spirit as well as subject disciplines, relevancy which extends to the entire global community and a focus on justice and compassion. It is my further belief that the study will work to increasingly validate this type of learning experience and necessitate the solid inclusion of humane and Christian qualities in an education for the future.

My plan is to gather together the student participants of the Cuernavaca 97 Experience at my home on Sunday December 14 at 4 p.m., in order to conduct a focus group interview. My key question will inquire into what was learned from the experience, encouraging a sharing of memories, reflections, opinions and peak experiences from the time spent in Mexico. I anticipate that the interview itself will take about an two hours, followed by a social where other adult supervisors will be invited to join us as well. The interview will be taped, anonymity will be maintained, and a transcription will be made to assist in my analysis. The purpose of this interview is to evaluate the program and the learning, not to evaluate the participants. In discussing memories, typically there is a risk of touching emotionally sensitive ground, yet I do not feel that this study will put anyone at undue risk. In every case, however, steps will be taken to maintain student safety and anonymity, and the necessity of these measures will be discussed and agreed upon with the students involved, step by step as required.

Each and every participant is free to withdraw from this study at any time, and if withdrawal is requested, I will destroy any data that has come forth from the withdrawing participant at any time.

I thank you sincerely for your participation in my work, and look forward to being in your presence again, learning from you, and being open to data which will develop me as an educator and inspire me with continued vision for the future of education.

Julia Balaisis  (consent form to be signed on reverse side)
APPENDIX B
INSTRUMENTS OF RESEARCH FOR FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW, 1977

Primary questions to be asked of the focus group during the interview:

What remains with you nine months after the experience we had shared in Cuernavaca Mexico?

Did you learn anything from the experience? if so, please elaborate.

Probes:

Feel free to discuss memories, opinions, stories, peak or special experiences, and/or reflections that pertain to the question, or help you in answering the question.

What, if any, change have you experienced in your life that you feel can be attributed to the Cuernavaca experience?

How does the Cuernavaca experience remain with you today? (discuss behavioural or attitudinal change, if any)
APPENDIX C
CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEW, 1998

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In continuing my doctoral work at OISE/UT, I am continuing to gather data that will contribute to my thesis, as well as possibly appear in future publications and presentations.

My purpose is to investigate what effects you have experienced through the educational opportunity we had in Cuernavaca Mexico in 1997. I hope that this study will work to clarify what makes for effective learning.

I am sending out a questionnaire for you to complete, and offer an additional opportunity to follow up with either a telephone or person-to-person interview. Key questions revolve around your overall reflection upon what is still memorable and/or valuable to you after the experience, as well as commentary as to what long term effects (if any) it may have had on you. I would ask that I could tape record any subsequent interview that you would agree to, as I would like to make a transcript to assist in my analysis. The purpose of the questionnaire and interview is to evaluate the program’s effect on you. I will take steps to maintain safety and anonymity. While I do not anticipate using names, if need be, I will ask for additional permission from you and offer you the option of using a pseudonym.

Each and every participant is free to withdraw from this study at any time, and if withdrawal is requested, I will destroy any data that has come forth from the withdrawing participant at any time. On completion, you are welcome to read the results of my findings and analysis.

I thank you sincerely for your participation in my work, and look forward to hearing and learning from you.

Julia Balaisis

I have read the letter and agree to participate under the conditions outlined:

participant’s name (please print): __________________________________________

signature of participant: __________________________________________

APPENDIX D
Questionnaire on the Cuernavaca Experience of March 1997

Please answer the questions that apply for you:

In referring to the Mexico experience, please feel free to include any aspect from the initial process of being selected to the experience of returning from Mexico.

1. What (if anything) remains with you after the Mexico experience? (impressions, feelings, thoughts, memories...)

2. How would you define the term "transformation"?

3. Was there anything from the Mexico experience that contributed to your becoming more personally empowered? Please elaborate.

4. Was there anything in the Mexico experience that contributed to your understanding of helping others or being of service to the world (either effecting your thinking or acting)? Please elaborate.

5. How could the Cuernavaca experience have been better for you? Do you have any lasting concerns or questions?

6. Are there any other long term effects that the Mexico experience contributed towards in any way? (examples: personal initiatives, personal change, attitudinal change, encouragement, feelings, influence on decisions regarding study, career...) Please describe.

7. Does anything in your present life connect back to, or remind you of the Mexico experience?

8. Is there an image, a symbol, or a metaphor that comes to mind when you think of the Mexico experience? Can you explain this symbol’s meaning?
...We are living in a Dark Age. And we are probably not going to see the end of it, nor are our children, nor probably our children’s children. And our job, every single one of us, is to cherish whatever in the human heritage we love and to feed it and keep it going and pass it on, because this Dark Age isn’t going to go on forever, and when it stops those people are gonna need the pieces that we pass on. They’re not going to be able to build a new world without us passing on whatever we can - ideas, art, knowledge, skills, or just plain old fragile love, how we treat people, how we help people: that’s something to be passed on.... And I said to my son, if you wanted to volunteer for fascinating, dangerous, necessary work, this would be a great job to volunteer for - trying to be a wide-awake human during a Dark Age and keeping alive what you think is beautiful and important.

Ventura, in Hillman & Ventura, 1992, pp. 236-237
References


Kirby, Sandra & Kate McKenna. (1989). Experience, research, social change: Methods from the margins. Toronto: Garamond Press.


