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Can a Story Change a Life?

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Can a Story Change a Life?

by

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Abstract

This paper explores the transformative learning experiences of nine generous volunteers whose change experience was catalyzed by fiction. Using narrative methodology (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), volunteer experiences were analyzed in a three-dimensional inquiry space based on temporality (i.e., past, present, and future), sociality (i.e., relationship), and place. Commonalities included the readers' love of fiction, type of fiction, informal learning experienced, evidence of change, and the role passage of time played in the experience. Links are made from their experiences to adult development, complex catalysts, the roles of emotion and motivation, our storied pasts, neuroplasticity, sustaining change, and motivation for change. Trends in the data compiled in this narrative-based, qualitative study add nuances of interest to adult educators hoping to promote transformative learning. The key to each participant's transformative experience was the combination of cognitive, affective, and contextual meaning conferred by the reader on what they read. The four types of change revealed (i.e., formative, incremental, influential, epochal) coincided with the stages of adult development (i.e., adolescence, young adulthood, middle adulthood, maturity) at which they occurred as proposed by Erikson (1968). It was found that the interviewees were influenced greatly by both emotion and motivation, moving from a purely rational to integral, holistic approach to learning.

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Dedication

Valerie Diane Wolski

August 30, 1969 – February 13, 2011

She loved and was loved.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction

When I went to work in a prison, it was with the idea that I might, as a teacher, make a difference in the lives of offenders. I failed to realize the enormity of lack of education among offenders. According to Correctional Services of Canada (2011), approximately 65% of offenders upon incarceration have less than a grade eight education, with 82% functioning with lower than grade 10. Lack of education negatively impacts employability, which, in turn, is often associated with a life of crime. By teaching, I wanted to help offenders gain the skills, knowledge, and abilities to enable them to find work and enhance their chances of living lawful lives when they returned to the community. What I came to realize was that, although important and often helpful, academic learning often was not enough to help offenders stay out of prison.

It left me perplexed when suddenly, though rarely, one of the offenders would suddenly "get" it. Something almost mysterious would happen. Attitudes would change; behaviour would change; motivation would change and not just to obtain parole. Something sparked a transformation for the positive. That is not to say there were not set-backs or stumbles, but overall, a choice was made by an offender to move in a new direction—out of prison, into the community—into a new life without return to prison or a life of crime. I became interested in what sparked such change, realizing that better understanding it could help anyone, including myself, to transform. In my mind, it is a movement beyond just knowledge. As Livingstone (1995) so aptly summarized:

> The free man, the real man, the complete man, must be something more than a mere breadwinner, and must have something besides the knowledge necessary to earn his living. He must have also the education which will give him the chance of developing the gifts and faculties of human nature and becoming a full human being. (p. 3)

1

Livingstone (1995) did not suggest that knowing for survival (employment) alone is not important, rather that deeper knowing sparks consideration of human potential. I began seeking answers in adult education that would help me better understand such changes and how to attain them. While transformative learning has been an interest for several years, personal and professional experiences during my studies of adult education for this doctoral program set me on a path looking to the possibility of fiction being a spark for that type of all-encompassing change.

I begin chapter one with the background to this study by focusing on the personal and academic impetus leading to my research. I then present the purpose and research questions of the study followed by my approach to the research, with special attention to the less than traditional writing style of this thesis that was inspired by the stories that contributed to my research. I close the introduction speculating on the significance of my research, limitations, and delimitations, and I provide a brief roadmap to the remaining chapters of my thesis.

Background of the Study

Personal impetus

If we can learn to recognize ourselves and position ourselves in stories, we can identify beliefs, assumptions, and social norms that shape the way we see ourselves and the world around us. This has the potential for fostering transformative learning. (Cranton, 2009, p. 78)

Similarly Simpson, Stuckey, and Hoggan (2009) claimed that stories "can reveal otherwise hidden images and assumptions thus promoting and aiding introspection and transformative learning" (p. 324). Using close reading in her critique of romantic fiction, Jarvis (2006) also asserted that "fiction can be used to encourage the development of

particular kinds of transformation" (p. 76). These assertions of the potential for stories to catalyze transformative learning prompted excited personal reflection regarding the effect that stories had over the course of my own development. I cannot picture a time when stories, reading, books, and library membership have not been present in my life. In light of Cranton's (2009) statement, however, I realized that the favourite books I read and re-read were not just entertainment, but had also influenced my personal development. One great example was my early adventures reading about a young female sleuth.

As a nine or 10 year old, I remember anxiously searching the shelves in our local library for the next adventure of *Trixie Belden* (Campbell, 1948). In each book, the *school girl shamus* stumbled upon a mystery that had her ending up in dire straits and saved by the boy on whom she had a not-so-secret crush. It was a smidge of innocent romance wrapped in a bit of mystery that I loved reading. However, looking back through Cranton's (2009) lens, there were some key ideas in those simple, childhood tales that upon reflection, directly influenced my development into adulthood.

In each book, Trixie always found time to contribute to works of charity in her community. Most often, it was an activity or event for the benefit of the United Nations (UN). Once, it was an auction with contributions collected to fund UNICEF (Kenny, 1961); another time, it was a basketball game with the proceeds for a local charity (Kenny, 1962a). Trixie, to my delight, even solved an international jewelry heist while visiting the UN in New York and donated the reward to that organization (Kenny, 1962b).

It was in these moments that a fascination for the UN began for me. It was an interest that would have me entering speech contests in high school choosing the topic of

3

the World Health Organization and later applying for a scholarship to the Lester B.

Pearson United World College of the Pacific (sponsored by the UN). As recently as

November 2010, I applied for a position to work with the UN in adult education

management. I also attribute the hours I spend actively working in non-profit agencies to

the stories of Trixie volunteering in her community and giving time to the causes in

which she believed. Neither interest in the UN nor actively volunteering in the

community were familial practices during my childhood. My classmates and teachers

never spoke more than in passing of the UN or volunteer opportunities. Trixie's stories

entertained and delighted me, but more importantly, made a big impression on my life,

the plans I made, journeys on which I embarked, and those I will consider in my future.

As I grew older, I gained new friends as I called them—new books that became

favourites. I began collecting a series by Grace Livingston-Hill. One in particular that I

will never forget was called *The Finding of Jasper Holt* (1916/1984). I loved Livingston-

Hill's stories as they spoke to the romantic in me, but this book, I now believe, influenced

me in a way that I did not realize until writing this thesis.

Hostetter (2013) outlined *The Finding of Jasper Holt* (Livingston-Hill, 1916/

1984) as follows:

> Jasper Holt began his earthly sojourn under somewhat inauspicious conditions,
> given that his parents were indifferent to him, to them he didn't really exist. His
> anger at this cruel fate found various modes of expression, including the
> development of a ferocious independence whereby he did what he needed to do in
> accord with his personal integrity, not worrying if someone happened to
> misinterpret his behaviors or motivations. . . . Until, that is, he [met] Jean
> Grayson. (para. 1)

Livingston-Hill (1916/1984) told how Jasper Holt chose to change his life to

become worthy of the admiration of Jean Grayson, a truly good and moral person. With

critical reflection, I realized that by reading *The Finding of Jasper Holt,* I was influenced

to believe that someone could select a new direction for his/her life given the right

motivation. As I matured and built on that foundational concept, I moved past the

romantic motivation in Livingston-Hill's story to the conviction that by positively,

enthusiastically teaching alternatives, one person could help another change for the

better. That foundational belief in the ability to change, which I later linked to

transformative learning theory, was instrumental in my choosing to teach in a federal

correctional centre. I believed that as an educator, I could influence others to change

through what I taught and because I believed in a person's right and ability to change—

even in the life of an adult offender. The promise of change carried me through what

sometimes seemed like hopeless hours of training offenders in the depressing and

challenging environment of the prison. I only continued because of my "hope clause." I

hoped that through my efforts as a teacher, I could really help someone see the

possibilities and change for the better. I choose to believe that sometimes I was

successful.

I am certain that without that developmental framework, I would not have braved

teaching in a prison school. That developmental framework began with the fictional story

Jasper Holt (Livingston-Hill, 1916/1984) and was no doubt positively supported by my

philanthropic tendencies that I attribute to reading *Trixie Belden* (Campbell, 1948). With

Cranton's (2009) assertion that fiction had the potential to spark transformative learning

and my own personal reflections, I was impelled to look more closely at the power of

fiction to change lives. However, it was in conjunction with reading and studying adult

education and, in particular, transformative learning theory, that personal insight and professional experiences united leading to this research.

Professional impetus

One of the first publications I was really drawn to as I studied adult education was Lindeman's (1989) *The Meaning of Adult Education*. Lindeman helped me recognize adult education as an impassioned call for change, in stating,

> Small groups of aspiring adults who desire to keep their minds fresh and vigorous; who begin to learn by confronting pertinent situations; who dig down into the reservoirs of their experience before resorting to texts and secondary facts; who are led in the discussion by teachers who are also searchers after wisdom and not oracles: this constitutes the setting for adult education, the modern quest for life's meaning. (pp. 5-6)

Lindeman's (1989) adult education was not just about gaining knowledge, but a holistic journey into and about life. It encompassed the journey of becoming that I was personally first introduced to in Jasper Holt's journey toward change. It was, however, *Riches for the Poor* (Shorris, 2000) that translated the excitement of Lindeman's definition of adult education into a professional example that I could relate to on the journey of becoming. Shorris spoke to my experiences training in a prison setting and the potential for change—ideas that continue to shape my approach to adult education.

In studying the circumstances of poverty for about three years, Shorris (1997) realized that the poor were not *political* in the Thucydides meaning of the word: "engaging in activity with other people at every level, from the family to the neighborhood to the broader community to the city-state" (p. 1). Shorris knew that the poor's inability to relate politically imprisoned them in poverty. Then Shorris met Ms.

Viniece Walker, a prison offender who changed his understanding of poverty and how it could be battled. Ms. Walker challenged Shorris:

> to begin with the children. . . . You've got to teach the moral life of downtown to the children. And the way you do that, Earl, is by taking them downtown to plays, museums, concerts, lectures, where they can learn the moral life of downtown . . . a moral alternative to the street. (para. 9)

Ms. Walker's moral life downtown was the humanities:

> The study of human constructs and concerns, which has been the source of reflection for the secular world since the Greeks first stepped back from nature to experience wonder at what they beheld. If the political life was the way out of poverty, the humanities provided an entrance to reflection and the political life. (para. 15)

Shorris (2000) credited Ms. Walker with insight gained from a personal radical transformation that took her from a jobless, moneyless prisoner to a life of reflection through her personal studies in psychology and philosophy. In conjunction with a local college, Shorris (1997) created a program to verify that the poor could indeed escape their circumstances by studying the humanities. His program stressed reflection on the circumstances of the world as opposed to reacting to those acting against the poor.

Of the first 30 students, who were between the ages 18 and 35, living below the poverty level, but able to read a tabloid, and who were admitted to the pilot program, 16 completed the program, with 14 obtaining college level credit. More importantly, self-esteem and the ability to problem solve had increased in those 16 as did appreciation for compassion, spirituality, and the importance of all society working together (Shorris, 1997). One year following graduation, the lives of those 16 former students could be said to have undergone radical transformation as a result of exposure to the humanities. Shorris (1997) noted:

Ten of the first sixteen Clement Course graduates were attending four-year colleges or going to nursing school; four of them had received full scholarships to Bard College. The other graduates were attending community college or working full-time. Except for one: she had been fired from her job in a fast-food restaurant for trying to start a union. (para. 131)

Noting similarities to my experiences with offenders making changes in their lives, I linked the transformative success of Shorris (1997) to the work of Mezirow (2000) about which I had been informing my career in adult education.

Although there are many learning theories that focus on adults, the learning theory presented by Mezirow (2009) embraced the "recognition of a critical dimension of learning in adulthood that enables us to recognize, reassess, and modify the structures of assumptions and expectations that frame our tacit points of view and influence our thinking, attitudes, and actions" (p. 18) that has been exemplified by the work of Shorris (1997). Mezirow's (2000) theory of transformative learning saw adults gaining knowledge, but also changing their personal perspectives about themselves, which in turn, influenced their future action—something I aspired to also do as an adult educator of offenders. At the core of his theory, Mezirow claimed that due to events taking place and past experience no longer being harmonious with a current perspective, self-reflection could result in the construction of a new reality (Jarvis, 2010).

Mezirow's (2000) theory drew strongly on the constructivist world view or the view that people participate in the construction of reality as they perceive it (Cranton, 2006). Reality is a product of interaction with others, the context in which the activity occurs, and the meaning assigned to it by the individual (Cranton, 2006). Though cognitive processes of the individual appear dominant to his theory, interaction socially is also important. Communication is integral to discovering and expressing that reality to

and with others. It is the complexity and richness of each individual's reality that creates

a complex, socially constructed view (Creswell, 2009).

In his preliminary study of 83 women returning to school in 12 different

programs, Mezirow (1978) identified 10 phases that delineated the process by which the

women changed their perspectives on a personal level in preparation for a new way of

considering their situation (see also Cranton, 2006). In most instances, a crisis or

disorienting dilemma is theorized to begin the process whether that process is epochal or

gradual. Summing up the process, Mezirow (2000) stated,

> Transformative learning refers to the process by which we transform taken-for-
> granted frames of reference . . . to make them more inclusive, discriminating,
> open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate
> beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action.
> (pp. 7-8)

Mezirow's (2000) theory truly spoke to my own assertion that learning is the only

means by which a person can grow, develop, or change. However, in its original form, in

my view, it fails to embrace the inspirational challenge given by Lindeman (1989), which

invokes a less rational approach to change. More recent developments of the theory of

transformative learning have moved from the exclusive focus on a cognitive and rational

process to include "imagination, intuition, soul and aspect" (Cranton, 2006, p. 2). With

this expansion of focus, space is made for different ways of knowing, learning, and

developing. It is by this expansion that the possibilities of the impact of fiction, the

epitome of imagination, may be considered a potential catalyst for transformation.

In his later writings, Mezirow (2009) admitted that "because transformation is

often a difficult, highly emotional passage; a great deal of additional insight into the role

of imagination is needed and overdue" (p. 28). Mezirow acknowledged that being able to

imagine how things could be different is critical to the process of transforming. Also, critical and speaking to Cranton's (2006) call for soul and aspect is emotion.

In his presentation on the current major theses arising from his extensive research into emotions, Izard (2009) indicated that imagination is based in part on cognition and in part on emotional feeling. Izard went on to identify emotion as not only important in motivation, but as also playing a critical role in critical thinking, making of decisions, and taking action. Thus, exploring transformative learning without seeking implications of both imagination and emotion would be incomplete. Fiction, being built on both imagination and emotion, seems a natural arena in which to explore transformation. Personal reflection and professional experience united to spark my research into *fiction as a catalyst for transformative learning*.

Purpose of the study

I had heard the phrase "That book changed my life." It was most frequently stated in conjunction with non-fiction self-help books that take the reader step-by-step through a series of activities that, when followed exactly, could aid in change. In light of my own experiences of being influenced by fiction, the profound changes in the lives of Shorris's (1997) students upon exposure to the humanities and Cranton's (2009) assertion of the potential of fiction to foster transformative learning, I was drawn more and more to the possibility that reading fiction could catalyze change. The purpose of this study was to determine if reading works of fiction can change a life.

Research Questions

The core research question for my inquiry was: Can the reading of fiction catalyze a transformative experience? Supporting questions included:

1. Does a fictional account catalyze a transformative experience? If it does, then:

   (a) What type of narrative prompted transformation?

   (b) Were there trends revealed in linking transformation to demographic data (age, gender, level of education etc.)?

   (c) When it occurred, was it an epochal or gradual transformation?

   (d) To what extent was the process rational or integral?

   (e) How was the transformation sustained?

2. Do emotion and motivation have a role in this very personal self-directed learning experience? If so what is this role?

Research Approach

Using narrative methodology, my research was based on intimate conversations with nine individuals who felt that change in their lives was launched by reading fiction. I respected and honoured not only the work undertaken, but also the storytellers who allowed me to travel alongside them for a brief time. As Cole and Knowles (2001) recognized, it is the intimacy and authenticity of the relationship that created a strong, honest foundation for the research.

Studying the impact of fiction on the reader by investigating the stories they generated from the experience was a natural fit. As identified by Merriam (2009), "stories are how we make sense of our experience, how we communicate with others, and through which we understand the world around us" (p. 32). Connelly and Clandinin (1990), leaders in narrative educational research, stated that "narrative is both phenomenon and method" (p. 2). Even more, narrative methodology allows both researcher and participant to explore a life experience holistically. Narrative inquiry knits together the personal and

11

social, making them not only pertinent but also memorable (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), which strongly links to the broadened theory of transformative learning that moves beyond emphasis of cognitive and rational approaches to embracing different ways of learning and developing. The consideration of both the personal and social aspects of an event was central as I modeled Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional inquiry space based on temporality (i.e., past, present, and future), sociality (i.e., relationship), and place.

Embracing my strong interest in the topic, the exploration of story and narrative methodology influenced the style with which I wrote my thesis. Rather than a presentation of facts and findings, I chose to use story and personal reflection to engage the reader in an unfolding experience modeling recent writings by Clark (2012), Kasl and Yorks (2012), Tisdell (2012), and Tyler and Swartz (2012). My goal has been to engage the reader in the experiences shared, as those I interviewed did me. Echoing the use of story by presenting my analysis in a similar fashion, I strove to make the reading experiences more readily understood and more memorable. The result was a circuitous development of ideas more organically than temporally arranged. It has become a spiralling exploration engaging the senses and imagination rather than a straight-forward path uncovering of fact.

Researcher Perspective and Assumptions

I brought significant experience and understanding of adult education and a strong personal interest in fiction to the current study (Hunt, 1987). I love reading, especially fiction. To say it is a hobby is, perhaps, mildly stating how often I indulge. As mentioned earlier with my experiences reading about Jasper Holt and Trixie Belden, I know I have

learned many important life lessons from reading fiction. Influenced by my personal experiences, it is not a far stretch to suggest that fiction can act as a catalyst for change, a perspective that could bias research in this area. I contend, however, it was that deep interest generated from my personal experiences that fueled this research and enabled me to more thoroughly understand and analyze the experiences of those I interviewed. By dealing openly and transparently with my thoughts and experiences, I mitigated the negative effects of my personal biases while embracing the enthusiasm I had for exploring the transformative possibility of fiction. I sought participants that felt their lives had been changed by fiction in order to better understand the change event. I acknowledged with each volunteer that I too loved fiction, stressing that I would assuage that personal bias by not reading the books that changed their lives and focussing only on their version of the work of fiction. I was interested in the readers' experiences and resulting journeys, not my own interpretation of each story. I embraced how intense each volunteer's change experience was and explored that change rather than simply noting its occurrence. My receptivity to any and all details of that journey provided a rich and detailed discussion of the spectrum of change experienced whether it be consuming or slight, challenging or re-affirming, life-long or for a mere period of time. Outlier experiences provided intriguing twists to uncovering patterns in their stories regarding change.

The level, significance, and direction of the change experienced were determined by the participant, not by the researcher. I recognized that the use of the term transformation in Mezirow's (2000) learning theory had biased me toward expecting all-encompassing change in a transformative event—a dramatic, obvious change. The

terminology used in my research scripts and the resulting discussions deliberately made use of the word *change* and not *transformation,* in order to minimize bias regarding the delineation and quantification of any change.

Given the focus on of the study on fiction, I wanted the resulting sample to be made up of all nature of fiction lovers. Different ages, interests, and backgrounds would add to the depth and breadth of the characterization of the experience and, thus, understanding of the event. I chose a modified Patton's (1990) snowballing technique on Facebook[©] to reach as many different types of fiction lovers as possible.

Significance of the Study

Purposefully changing oneself is not for the faint of heart. It takes motivation to begin and persistence to continue, especially in the face of challenge. Further understanding transformative learning to encourage and support change may allow greater success in encouraging and maintaining change, both personally and professionally.

Fiction draws heavily on the imagination for inspiration, linking this research directly to other ways of knowing that are being recognized as important to transformative learning. It also links directly to narrative and story methodology, which are critical to providing depth and breadth to the understanding of transformative learning. These approaches move from a former concentration on rational and cognitive explanation into the more complex and unexplored nature of who we are and how we achieve. Though due consideration was given to the design and undertaking of this research, there were limitations and delimitations that influence the final direction of the study and thus the results.

14

Limitations

Using unstructured interviews and encouraging storytelling as part of conversations, I asked adults who experienced a transformation as the result of reading fiction to share their experiences with me. The recounting of the experience by the participant relied on a relationship of trust, respect, and understanding so that the experience I recorded was an authentic, mutually created history that both the participant and I created together (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). That the event was not observed as it was *lived* influences the accuracy of the story, but at the same time, may focus the recollection to the most important aspects of the event. Overall, the research concerned a limited sample size, rich in detail that while informative, cannot be generalized to a larger population, but can readily be applied to similar situations (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

Initially, interviews were to take place in person, but when responses were obtained from across North America, that became physically and financially impossible. I decided that though I could readily interview some of the participants face-to-face because they lived in the same area as I did, I would interview all participants in the same manner to minimize any biases different interview methodologies could introduce. I further minimized bias by only conducting oral/aural and not video-supported conversations. This contributed to the creation of a safe and authentic environment and minimized visual bias. These represent the main external constraints to this research; I also imposed restrictions on the study that also affected its scope.

Delimitations

Taylor (2009), in seeing critical reflection as characteristic of adult learning, posited that a certain level of maturity in thinking and learning is required for critical

reflection associated with transformative learning. I do not claim that transformative

learning is limited to adults; however, I thought that to more clearly articulate and

understand the experience, and to manage the possible strong emotional states

exploration of a transformative experience could provoke, an adult audience was more

appropriate for my research.

Sampling via Patton's (1990) snowballing technique enabled contact with several

very different adult readers of fiction from across North America. Using this method in

conjunction with Facebook$^{©}$ delimited the sample to adults with knowledge of and access

to computers and social media. It may also explain the college level of education of all

participants.

I also made a conscious decision not to read the books each of my participants

claimed to catalyze change in their lives. I surmised that had I read the books, I might

concentrate on the details of the story from my perspective and not the details and

connections those I interviewed felt critical to their change experience. I have a good list

of fiction to read at the successful completion of my thesis.

Summary and Overview

In this chapter, I have provided background information essential to establishing

the nature, importance, and direction of inquiry of this thesis. A review of the relevant

literature is presented in Chapter Two. This literature includes the foundational

underpinnings of transformative learning theory and its movement toward inclusion of

alternate ways of knowing as a framework for the possibilities of fiction catalyzing

transformation. Hitting the highlights, my journey started with a visit to andragogy,

delved into self-directed learning, looked at critical reflection, explored how we learn

from stories, and discussed the importance of emotions in personal change. The narrative qualitative methodology used in this study is presented in chapter three, which concludes with the details of how I invited nine participants to share their transformative experiences with me.

My findings, upon close and repeated examination of the stories shared, are presented in chapter four. In the following chapter, number five, I discuss the findings with particular emphasis given to exploring the core research questions in more detail through the use of a set of interview questions. In the final sixth chapter, I present my conclusions and recommendations for further investigation in the area of transformative learning as catalyzed by fiction.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In my introduction, I described how the fiction I read had influenced my personal and professional development. To introduce the literature review, I turn to a story of a colleague who deliberately chose fiction to foster learning. Through her story, I draw connections to various sources to explore how fiction is supported throughout the research literature as an effective learning resource and to build foundational support for fiction as a possible catalyst for transformative learning. Story gives context and richness to the research and continues to honour the voice of the storytellers, which was key to this research and similar to the style of recent writings by Clark (2012), Kasl and Yorks (2012), Tisdell (2012), and Tyler and Swartz (2012).

My research was influenced by many authors, experts, and learners. While not an exhaustive presentation of the literature, I document the connections that enabled me to pose and research the question: *Can the reading of fiction catalyze a transformative experience?* I have included glimpses into self-directed learning, transformative learning, and the importance of imagination with bonus excursions into the other ways of knowing via the exploration of emotions. I was not limited to educational research, but was challenged to investigate resources in psychology, behavioural sciences, religious studies, library science, and the arts.

Purposefully Learning Using Fiction: An Example of Andragogy

In their andragogical model, Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (1998) distinguished learning of adults from that of children based on six key assumptions. The first is that adults seek knowledge for specific reasons often related to incidents or situations in their lives stemming from work, relationships, or even curiosities. Second, adults desire to

have responsibility for the decisions they make and directions they take in the events occurring in their lives. Adults have significant previous life experiences that are brought to bear in decisions they make and directions they take. The final three assumptions made by Knowles et al. combined are that adults often approach learning ready for the experience because they have judged it something that they need to move forward or which will benefit them in their current situation. As it is an identified need, motivation to undertake the learning is present.

The following is a wonderful example of how my colleague purposefully undertook learning using fiction—an example I initially looked at through the lens of andragogy, as defined by Knowles (as cited in Knowles et al., 1998), to concretely explore it as adult learning.

> When I begin to prepare to travel to a new place, part of the anticipatory process is to find a novel that takes place in my new locale. For me it is a wonderful way to get into the texture of the place—the geography, the people, the sounds, the smells, whatever nuggets I can glean before I show up. In 2007 I had a paper accepted for a conference in South Africa. While I knew bits and pieces about South Africa from the news and other typical sources—apartheid, Afrikaans, Nelson Mandela, safaris—I wanted more nuanced impressions. I asked around and my cousin told me about *The Syringa Tree* by Pamle Gien. This book actually started out as a one person play focused on one little white girl's experience of living through the beginning of apartheid in Johannesburg, South Africa in the 1960s. I won't tell you much about the story, but the daily feeling of living in terror under the regime of apartheid was palpable. Indeed the feelings that emerged for me in the book came roaring back as I stood in the Hector Pieterson Memorial in Soweto a few months later. Suddenly I understood that a key part of the story line in *The Syringa Tree* was based on the actual student uprisings that occurred in Soweto in 1976. Finally, I needed to see a syringa tree. It was such an important part of the book as it was a place of refuge and play for Lizzy, the main character. When it was in bloom its branches were heavily laden with perfumed purple flowers, allowing Lizzy the chance to play and day-dream for hours. The syringa tree was in bloom during my trip. (J. E. Groen, personal communication, July 28, 2011)

If we reflect on the learning undertaken by my colleague, it typified these six assumptions associated with adult learning. She directed her learning by choosing to learn about a country to which she was travelling in a format that she found engaging and memorable. Based on previous experience, she knew if she explored the culture of a country prior to arriving, the travel experience would be more meaningful. She chose to read the book prior to arriving in South Africa in a specific period of time she had available and in a space where she could enjoy the experience. Based on the foundation set by Knowles et al. (1998), reading a work of fiction in this instance could be categorized as following his andragogical model. While this model can be contested as applying to adults only, it remains indicative of, in my opinion, more mature approaches to learning that continue to be associated with adults. It is learning moving beyond the banking model that Freire (2006) criticised in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* with students meekly accepting educational deposits given to them by teachers. Instead, it is part of the "intentional or tacit learning in which we engage either individually or collectively without direct reliance on a teacher or an externally organized curriculum" (Livingstone, 2006, p. 204). Reading fiction based this perspective can be broadly categorized as adult education.

What is also very significant about this example of adult education is the way in which the learning was undertaken by my colleague. While meeting the six assumptions proposed by Knowles et al. (1998), my colleague also undertook purposeful, informal learning—a type of learning that was coincidentally recently documented by Livingstone (2007) as continuing to increase in frequency and study in Canada, which has coincided with increasing accessibility to the internet.

Intentional, Self-Directed, Informal Learning

My colleague, knowing her learning preferences and styles, chose to explore an unfamiliar region of the world by selecting a reputable, fictionalized account of the history of that area. Without reliance on an instructor or a set curriculum, her learning could also be described as informal (Boucouvalas, 2009; Guglielmino, 2008; Livingstone, 2006; Marsick & Watkins, 2001; Schugurensky, 2000; J. E. Taylor, 2008). In a study of adult learning in Canada, Rubenson, Desjardins, and Yoon (2007) shared a broad definition of informal learning as:

> learning that results from daily life activities related to work, family, community or leisure. It is not structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and typically does not lead to certification. Informal learning may be intentional but is often non-intentional (or "incidental"/random). (p. 11)

Rubenson et al. (2007) proposed that informal learning may be undertaken when learners:

> 1. Visit fairs, conferences, or congresses
> 2. Read manuals, reference or other materials
> 3. Learn by being sent around an organization
> 4. Attend lectures, seminars or special talks
> 5. Go on guided tours (museums, galleries, etc.)
> 6. Use computers or the Internet to learn
> 7. Use video, television, tapes to learn
> 8. Learn by watching, getting help from others
> 9. Learn by [themselves] trying different ways. (p. 33)

In Canada, based on data from 2002 (as discussed in Rubenson et al., 2007), 93% of Canadians reported taking part in informal learning opportunities. My colleague is part of the 65% of Canadians who partake in informal learning by reading manuals, references, or other materials to learn.

Schugurensky (2000) suggested that there are three forms of informal learning if classified based on intentionality and awareness at the time of the experience. *Incidental*

is informal learning that is not intended, but the learner eventually becomes aware of learning. An example he described is touching a hot iron; learning is not intended, but oh so painfully undertaken. My realization that I learned so much from reading Trixie Belden could be categorized as incidental.

The second type of informal learning is what Schugurensky (2000) referred to as *socialization* or learning that is not intended nor realized. This type of learning, he stated, is associated with learning of everyday values, beliefs, and attitudes. He cited the example of racism as an internalized belief system that one is often not aware of learning and may never personally acknowledge.

The final type of learning suggested by Schugurensky (2000) is *self-directed*. This is learning that one undertakes intentionally and is aware of the lessons being learned. The example of self-directed learning he shared is when "a person wants to learn more about a historical event, and to do so reads books and archival documents, watches movies and videos, goes to museums and talks to people who participated or witnessed those events" (p. 3). In the instance of my colleague, her learning from reading *The Syringa Tree* (Gien, 2006) would be considered self-directed, as she was intentional in her approach to learning and was aware of learning taking place.

Foundational work in the area of self-directed learning was undertaken by Tough (1971), which lead to a linear model in which he saw learners moving through a series of steps they had planned for themselves in order to attain their learning goal (see also Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Concurrently, in the research was Knowles' assertion that as they mature, adults become more self-directed—foundational to his andragogical model as previously discussed in this chapter (Merriam et al., 2007).

Since their preliminary descriptive studies, significant research stemming from Tough and Knowles et al. (1998) has established that adults do undertake learning on their own.

Returning to and building upon Schugurensky's (2000) definition of informal learning is the recognition that:

> Informal learning, as any other type of learning, can be additive or transformative. Additive learning refers to the addition of knowledge, the improvement of skills and the development of values that expand and strengthen existing knowledge, skills and values. In other words, we continue operating within the same paradigm. Transformative learning refers to learning experiences that lead us to challenge our assumptions and values, and to radically change our existing prior knowledge and approaches. (p. 6)

Schugurensky's (2000) assertion that self-directed learning can be transformative was supported by E. W. Taylor (2008), who stated that there are "many steps that educators can take to facilitate both self-directed learning and transformative learning simultaneously" (p. 24), which led him to conclude there was a connection between the two. Merriam et al. (2007) added to this leaning in the literature by stating that one of three goals of self-directed learning found in their literature review was to encourage transformative learning as core to self-directed learning. In the example shared by my colleague, support from the literature would characterize her learning as self-directed adult learning and would suggest that such learning under the right circumstances can be transformative. To further support the position that self-directed, informative learning is transformative requires a thorough exploration of the literature on transformative learning.

Early Transformative Learning Theory

Returning to Mezirow's (1978) initial study of 83 women going back to school, his work identified 10 stages making up the overall process by which women changed

23

their personal perceptions to meet the new challenge on which they embarked (see also

Cranton, 2006). Stage one was a crisis or disorienting dilemma whether epochal (i.e.,

sudden) or gradual. Though the order of the other nine phases can occur in a variety of

sequences, Mezirow (2000) placed them in the following order: (a) self-examination with

feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame; (b) critical assessment of assumptions;

(c) recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared;

(d) exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and action; (e) planning a course

of action; (f) acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans;

(g) provisional trying of new roles; (h) building competence and self-confidence in new

roles and relationships; and (i) finishing with a reintegration into one's life on the basis of

conditions dictated by one's new perspective (p. 22).

In Mezirow's (1997) model of transformative learning, he theorized that we create

frames of reference by which we define the world around us. These frames allow us to

move somewhat automatically throughout daily experiences by matching them to the

understandings we have constructed. A transformative experience, however, occurs when

"learners move toward a frame of reference that is more inclusive, discriminating, self-

reflective and integrative of experience" (p. 5). The frame of reference undergoes change.

Both social and individual constructivist viewpoints were reflected in Mezirow's

transformative learning theory (Merriam et al., 2007). Cranton and Taylor (2012)

recommended:

> Rather than holding a dualistic viewpoint of "individual versus social"
> transformative learning, in a more unified theoretical stance, we would think
> about how people engage in both ideology critique and individual transformation
> and how these processes complement each other. (p. 25)

To construct, or in this case re-construct, frames of reference, Mezirow (2003) called on communicative learning as described by Habermas: "Communicative learning refers to understanding what someone means when they communicate with you. This understanding includes becoming aware of the assumptions intentions and qualifications of the person communicating" (p. 59) and using this understanding to become more open to new ideas. Some termed this ability theory of the mind—or mentalizing (Bering, 2011; Mar, Oatley, Hirsh, dela Paz, & Peterson, 2006). The learner usually discusses new ideas with others in order to further explore and develop frames of reference (Cranton & Roy, 2003). Also important is the skill of abductive reasoning—moving from concrete to abstract ideas (Mezirow, 2003) with regard to the frames of reference. The goal is not to arrive at truth, but to weigh "rightness, sincerity, authenticity and appropriateness" (p. 59) in constructing new personal frames of reference.

The ability to critically reflect on foundational assumptions was identified by Mezirow (1998) as essential to changing personal frames of reference. This, to Mezirow was very different from reflection, simple recall, or revisiting of an assumption. For example, we can objectively reflect which characterizes task-oriented problem solving, or we can undertake self-reflection of our ideas and beliefs in order to subjectively reframe our foundational assumptions. It is subjective reframing that can lead to personal transformation that takes place suddenly (i.e., epochal) or as the result of a series of transformations of view point (i.e., gradual) (Mezirow, 1997, 1998, 2000).

Mezirow (1998) identified six common forms of critical self-reflection (CSRA): "Systemic CSRA involves critical reflection on one's own assumptions pertaining to the economic, ecological, linguistic, political, religious, bureaucratic, or other taken-for-

granted cultural systems" (p. 193). CSRA in this area often leads to social reform and permeates social action in, for example, women's movements. The second CSRA is "organizational" (p. 193) or dealing with the effect of the culture and history of the workplace on the individual. Third is "moral-ethical" (p. 194) CSRA, which involves critique of how one makes ethical decisions. Next, Mezirow identified "therapeutic" (p. 194) CSRA that concentrates on "feelings and related dispositions, and their action consequences" (p. 194). "Epistemic" (p. 195), the fifth form of CSRA, has at its core discovering why a person thinks in a certain way or wants to achieve certain goals. Epistemic CSRA, Mezirow suggested, may be at the core of specific kinds of life history investigative methodology.

Key to this thesis, however, and intersecting with the previous five CSRA forms, is that which Mezirow (1998) termed "narrative" (p. 193) CSRA. This type of CSRA "involves critically examining the validity of the concepts, beliefs, feelings or actions being communicated to you (in speech, books, paintings) by assessing the truth or justification of taken-for-granted assumptions" (p. 192) and applying them personally. This suggests that reading a book can be a potentially transformative experience if critical self-reflection on any challenges to personal assumptions is undertaken.

While it is possible to conclude my colleague learnt about South Africa in her reading, there was not enough information to determine if narrative critical self-reflection on assumptions she held was part of her experience. However, it is important to our continued exploration of the literature to note that she turned to fiction to have a "more nuanced" understanding or, as I interpreted it, the addition of feeling or emotions to her

previous cognitive understanding. Space for the addition of emotion to the rational is provided via new directions being suggested to transformative learning theory.

Developments in Transformative Learning

E. W. Taylor (2008) proposed there are "factors often overlooked in the dominant theory of transformation (Mezirow's) such as the role of spirituality, positionality, emancipatory learning and neurobiology" (p. 7). These factors result in several views beyond the "psycho-critical" (p. 7) focus proposed by Mezirow. Two more recent views, "psycho-analytic" (p. 7) and "psycho-developmental" (p. 7), like Mezirow's psycho-critical perspective, emphasize the individual as the unit of analysis. However, where Mezirow concentrated on critical reflection, the psycho-analytic approach considers psychic structures such as "ego, shadow, persona, collective unconscious, and so on" (E. W. Taylor, 2008, p. 7) and their role in deeper understanding of the inner self. Building on this train of thought, Cranton and Roy (2003) suggested the process of individuation undertaken consciously and using imagination develops the sense of self and prompts the development of the soul. For them, "transformation is the emergence of soul" (p. 92).

An additional view, psycho-developmental, acknowledges the lifespan of the individual and how the making of meaning changes as part of continuous, incremental growth. Baumgartner (2001) described this transformative view as "intuitive, holistic, and contextually based. It is a mythical procedure during which a mentor guides students in a learning journey affected by the student's social environment, including family dynamics and social class" (p. 17).

The psycho-analytic and psycho-developmental views, in contrast with a "social-emancipatory" (E. W. Taylor, 2008, p. 7) view, do not devote much deliberation to

27

context or social change. Social-emancipatory embraces ideas of improving the world

and creating an equitable social existence. It is a view shared by Freire (2006) when he

claimed that "to surmount the situation of oppression, people must first critically

recognize its causes, so that through transforming action they can create a new situation,

one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity" (p. 47).

More recent research led to views that are "neurobiological, cultural-spiritual,

race-centric, and planetary" (E. W. Taylor, 2008, p. 8). The neurobiological perspective

begins with evidence that the "brain structure actually changes during the learning

process" (p. 8), particularly in periods where the learner is seeking answers or finds

solutions. Gunnlaugson (2008) saw movement toward a neurobiological perspective as

part of what he called a second-wave of contributions to transformative learning theory,

in which the emphasis turns to holistic approaches and the focus is on integrating

influences.

Williams (2003) discussed the race-centric transformative experience by moving

the experience from a concentration on the white, middle-class, student by including the

Afrocentric voice as part of the ongoing exploration. The race-centric view places race at

the centre of the analysis, with special consideration to the social and political aspects of

the transformation.

By seeking to reorganize the entire system—political, social, and educational—

one is using a planetary view toward transformation. O'Sullivan (2002) challenged that

"we must articulate a planetary context for learning that can effectively challenge the

hegemonic culture of the market vision and that can orient people, in their daily lives, to

create an environmentally viable world in our present time" (p. 7).

A cultural-spiritual view examines the relationships between culture and the positions held due to social structures and spiritual awareness while emphasizing a narrative approach through storytelling. Tisdell (2008b) identified that:

> Openness to the spiritual embodies and represents openness to human affectivity in general and to learning that touches the heart. In learning that hopes to be transformative, this kind of attention to and respect for the knowledge of the heart is crucial whether one identifies it as spirituality or not. (p. 164)

Broadening of views with regard to transformative learning opens significant possibilities for research and exploration that, as E. W. Taylor (2008) suggested, moves transformative learning from within the classroom to a multitude of opportunities outside the classroom and into other ways of exploring transformation. Cranton and Roy (2003) summarized:

> There are many facets to the human psyche and many contexts within which human beings live, love, reflect, and dream. To try to describe the way people transform or open up their perspectives, grow and develop as persons and learn to live according to their authentic selves, we need to honor the complexity of human life and its social setting. (p. 97)

E. W. Taylor (2008) echoed the need for this approach, labeling it holistic or bringing the entire person to the learning experience. For Kaya (2009), the whole person included aspects of the unconscious stressing:

> Because of the powerful role the unconscious plays in influencing our sense of self, our interpretations of the external world, and our daily actions, we are unable to transform our beliefs and to act into new perspectives of ourselves and the world without relating to these unconscious materials. (p. 209)

Kaya (2009) also emphasized that including emotions and imagination with rationality through creative and artistic activities like sculpting, drawing, and dancing could aid learners in finding and using the unconscious and, thus, move them closer to achieving transformation. Simpson et al. (2009) added "dreams, fantasies, or other

29

imaginative outlets . . . [as] integral to the process of significant and transformative

change" (p. 322), further delineating components of the unconscious or imagination.

Kokkos (2009) continued on this theme by exploring aesthetic experiences and

their possible role in transformative learning. Concentrating on art as providing

alternative perspectives for the learner, he claimed that artistic experiences are more

encompassing than reality:

> [Aesthetic experience] offers the participants the possibility to process a variety of
> symbols through which it is possible to articulate holistic and delicate meanings,
> to draw on emotional situations, to use metaphors and in general to express
> different perspectives of reality—leading thus to the awareness of issues which
> may not be easily comprehended through rational argumentation. (p. 215)

Kokkos's aesthetic experience as generated from art included what he described as right

brain activities, such as "pictures, allegories, parables, similes, analogies, variants,

ambiguities, puns, paradoxes etc." (p. 216), a significant portion of which are the basic

building blocks of fiction.

Guided by these writings, a holistic approach to transformative learning including

emotion and other ways of knowing, especially imagination, can play a significant role in

transformative experiences. Fiction, as an expression of imagination and stimulant of

emotions, could be a vehicle for catalyzing transformation.

Linking Stories to Transformative Learning

As previously quoted in this thesis, Cranton (2009) called attention to the

important influence stories—products of imagination—can have on the reader as it did

my colleague who read *The Syringa Tree* (Gien, 2006). Recall that Cranton (2009)

challenged:

If we can learn to recognize ourselves and position ourselves in stories, we can identify beliefs, assumptions, and social norms that shape the way we see ourselves and the world around us. This has the potential for fostering transformative learning. (p. 78)

My colleague, at the close of her reading experience, felt the need to really see the syringa tree while in South Africa. That the tree was blooming when she saw it had special significance to her. It enhanced her ability to imagine and relate to Lizzy's experiences playing and daydreaming under the tree as a shelter from the uprising. It alluded to a deeper link between story and imagination that I turn to next in the literature review.

Llosa (2010), who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2010, stated,

From the cave to the skyscraper, from the club to weapons of mass destruction, from the tautological life of the tribe to the era of globalization, the fictions of literature have multiplied human experiences, preventing us from succumbing to lethargy, self-absorption, resignation. Nothing has sown so much disquiet, so disturbed our imagination and our desires as the life of lies we add, thanks to literature, to the one we have, so we can be protagonists in the great adventures, the great passions real life will never give us. The lies of literature become truths through us, the readers transformed, infected with longings and, through the fault of fiction, permanently questioning a mediocre of reality. . . . Because ours will always be, fortunately an unfinished story. That is why we have to continue dreaming, reading, and writing, the most effective way we have found to alleviate our mortal condition, to defeat the corrosion of time and to transform the impossible into possibility. (para. 30)

I included this excerpt from Llosa's Nobel Lecture as it spoke not only to the passion of a learning experience in a depth similar to Lindeman's (1989), but also suggested a perspective of why fiction may be effective in fostering transformation. Llosa made a subtle reference to narratology, referring to our lives as being continuously unfinished stories. Frank (2010) defined narratology by stating that "being human, especially being social, requires the competence to tell and understand stories" (p. 13).

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) built on this definition by claiming that we are stories in what we say and how we live our lives. By looking at stories, they indicated we are studying what it means to be human: "People are both living their stories in an ongoing experiential text and telling their stories in words as they reflect upon life and explain themselves to others" (p. 4). Nelson (2009) concurred, but saw it as a natural ability that we all possess; telling stories exists in all cultures of the world. Lau (2009) went so far as to suggest that studies of the brain indicate that story is part of our evolution, linking us back to E. W. Taylor's (2008) inclusion of a neurobiological perspective and cultural-spiritual views of transformative learning.

Continuing in this theme regarding the importance of stories in our lives, Leonard and Willis (2008) challenged us to consider beyond facts, as facts are "mediated by history, memory, imagination, and cultural construction. We never know 'just the facts,' for they are mediated by myriad versions and visions" (p. 1) or what I would term the personal stories we create surrounding the facts. No one person's version or vision of an event is identical to another. Understanding this, storied existence is necessary in critically reflecting on who and what we are and what we become.

For Clark (2010), not only do we live in a narrative world, but we also make sense of that world by telling stories—by learning narratively. Clark identified three levels of learning via stories. The first level of narrative "learning is by hearing" (i.e., reading, experiencing) stories (p. 5). Clark compared examples such as parables in the Bible to the stories of survival of individual Haitians during the earthquakes. Her second level was "telling stories" (p. 6). In this level, we are not the receivers of information, but the person organizing thoughts and experiences into coherent tales imparting meaning. Clark

32

felt that by telling a story, we come to learn its true meaning to our own life. Clark's third

level of learning by story is the "inner recognition" (p. 6) of the roles that stories play in

our interpretation of life:

> Seeing this narrative enables people to examine and critique it, identify its
> underlying assumptions and what is served by those assumptions, and thus learn
> not only how their own identities are narratively constituted, but also how they
> can choose to think differently. (p. 6)

It is within this third level of learning that we see a link back to critical self-reflection on

our assumptions and its strong presence in transformative learning theory. Rossiter and

Clark (2010) added the perspective that like transformative learning, the intent of

narrative is to promote change, stating that "good stories take us to new places in our

head, hearts, and narrative learning uses that power to create highly effective, compelling,

and meaningful teaching" (p. 91).

It is important to note that unlike the recitation of facts, the telling of a story is a

linking of the heart of the storyteller to that of the listener (Nelson, 2009). Stories move

beyond the literal to include metaphors and symbols that invoke emotion. Stories move

into the non-rational and unconscious, thus embracing other ways of knowing that can

actually hasten transformative learning (Nelson, 2009). If, as reported by Nelson, only

10% of the human brain is involved in conscious thought, the potential of tapping into the

unconscious for learning is immense.

The literature supported narrative as important in understanding and interpreting

events in our lives. With fiction's use of metaphors and symbols, it can also, via other

ways of knowing, help move us beyond just fact tapping into emotion to modify our

personal conscious and unconscious stories. It is into the lessons readers associate with

stories that I move to next.

The Complexity of Learning from Stories

Nelson (2009) documented 11 purposes of storytelling that she stated may help

readers attain psychological stability because stories aid in humans knowing from

whence they came or find the path leading them to where they will go. Stories, according

to Nelson, also play a part in emotional resiliency. It is through the packaging of stories

that the struggles and conflicts of life do not end up overwhelming a person. In that

limited view, they give hope and can be modelled. The 11 purposes for storytelling

Nelson identified are:

1. Respect for all of life, including respect for self, family, community, tribe and planet.
2. The interconnectedness of all life.
3. The coherence in one's life from the past and the hope in one's life for the future.
4. The awareness that adversity will come in life.
5. The goals of building a life in harmony and balance with nature.
6. The ability to laugh at pitfalls.
7. How to stay safe.
8. Identification with a group or tribe.
9. Character traits such as courage, perseverance, ability and bravery.
10. Role modeling by characters of withstanding negative forces and overcoming adversity.
11. Acceptance of one's role or destiny in life. (p. 210)

Reviewing the above list, I was suddenly struck how childhood stories exemplify

these lessons. For example, the *Lion King* (Ferguson & Disney, 1994) definitely touched

on interconnectedness, respect for all life, acceptance of one's destiny, overcoming

adversity, and so many others from the above list. In *Bambi* (Grant, 2004), his mother's

death illustrated adversity coming in life, but the scene of Thumper slipping on ice

embraced the ability to laugh at the pitfalls of life. There are so many moments in childhood stories that are reflected in the above list written in a non-overwhelming fashion. We can link those lessons to Schugurensky's (2009) incidental learning—not realizing what we learnt from those stories the time we first saw or heard them. We could also consider it socialization as we purposefully share those same stories with our children. In the lessons learned, we can see evidence beyond mere fact to emotion in promoting change (Nelson, 2009; Rossiter & Clark, 2010).

This movement beyond fact to emotion was evident in a study conducted by the University of Oklahoma (Strothmann & Van Fleet, 2009) as part of their annual event *Books That Inspire*. Specifically, 298 statements from the academic community were analyzed to try to understand why the books that were chosen made the list. This was a unique study that looked at the impact of reading fiction on those who read it and, as such, merits a closer look, in my opinion. Twenty-six resulting themes were organized into seven major concepts or categories. The first concept, perhaps foundational, was that there was a "direct connection between the text and the reader's own life—a book that spoke to its reader personally" (p. 166).

The second concept of inspiration emerging from this study was a book's ability to provide insight into relationships between individuals, especially those relationships that were unfamiliar to the reader (Strothmann & Van Fleet, 2009, p. 169). In this category were stories that called for empathy, revealed minority cultures, or explored interpersonal relationships. One favourite named by a contributor was *From Slavery to Freedom* because of its explanation of the struggle of black Americans in a way that illustrated why it should be of importance to all Americans (p. 169).

The third concept was also connected to relationships, but concentrated on those between the individual and society (Strothmann & Van Fleet, 2009, p. 170). Core storylines dealt with independent, anti-authoritarian thinking or social critique. One reader in Strothmann and Van Fleet's (2009) study revealed how Woody Guthrie's *Bound for Glory* still influenced his thinking with regard to social justice and treatment of the poor 45 years after reading it (p. 171). My colleague's reading of the *The Syringa Tree* (Gien, 2006) was representative of this concept. For her, it provided a very real and personal understanding of the political struggles of South Africa that the mere reading of historical facts could not.

The fourth concept revealed in the University of Oklahoma study was related to self-improvement and living righteously (Strothmann & Van Fleet, 2009, p. 172). Readers claimed that books they were inspired by helped them to be better people through role models, positive life lessons, and shaping good morals and values. Readers were challenged to live better lives by reflecting on the examples, not merely facts, provided in fiction. Bennetts (2010) supported this idea in stating, "Relationships with mythical figures take place in the realm of imagination whilst relationships with role models may also occur 'in dreams', but both can affect our developing self-image" (p. 459). I think my interaction with Grace Livingston-Hill's (1916/1984) book would fit in this category. The heroine's stance against a judgemental society and belief in the ability of a person to change for the better was a significant influence in my moral development.

Next in the Oklahoma study was the influence of readers' perspectives of the world by reflecting on human nature or presenting issues that were unfamiliar

(Strothmann & Van Fleet, 2009, p. 173). One contributor spoke to Kafka's writings about Communists in Czechoslovakia in *The Castle* (p. 173) in this regard.

Concept six covered books that present intellectual information—teaching the reader about interesting topics or in modeling exemplary practice in the reader's chosen profession (Strothmann & Van Fleet, 2009, p. 174). Several readers nominated *Grapes of Wrath* (p. 175) under this theme, as it was instructive regarding the history and societal contexts of the time in which it was set.

While the first six concepts focussed on the content of the books, the final concept was slightly different in that it embraced the experience of reading itself (Strothmann & Van Fleet, 2009, p. 175). In this concept, major considerations were aesthetic and literary value, such as one reader's thoughts on James Joyce's *Ulysses* (p. 175). Other themes were emotional response, fame, re-readability, and inspiration to read even more on a topic or in pursuit of lifelong love of reading. *Where the Red Fern Grows* was chosen by one reader because it resulted in tears (p. 176). *Gift from the Sea* was recommended by a reader because it spent 47 weeks on the best sellers list in 1955—an astonishing feat (p. 176). One reader's first journey into the Civil War was inspired by *Reflections on the Civil War* by Bruce Catton—a journey that grew to embrace more than 100 titles on the subject (p. 176).

I noted that the concepts shared by *Books That Inspire* (Strothmann & Van Fleet, 2009) and the list provided by Nelson (2009) that dealt with the 11 purposes of storytelling both dealt with much more than simple fact. The manner in which the stories were told and the emotional connections to the stories themselves were also important. Words describing the concepts used in the Oklahoma study were emotive, such as

connection, inspiration, relationships, and living righteously to name a few. The study

linked to claims made by Lawrence and Dirkx (2010) that:

> [In] transformative learning, we connect deeply with both our personal stories and ageless stories of humankind . . . .
>
> In transformative learning, we "re-story" our lives in ways that allow us to be more authentically present to ourselves and in our relationships with others and the broader world. In doing so, we come to differentiate and discern the qualities that make up the selves that we are and how timeless stories of humanity are lived and expressed through the qualities that make up who we are as individuals. (p. 145)

Contributing to this train of thought was work by Oatley and Olson (2010). When

discussing imagination and fiction, they surmised that fiction is a type of simulation

centring on the way in which the social world functions. Through a story, Oatley and

Olson found a reader better understands society and personal roles within it. As they read,

a reader can become so involved that she or he can imaginatively assume the thoughts,

ideas, goals, and dreams of the fictional characters. The reader ends up experiencing the

emotions of the characters as if the emotion were his or her own. To Oatley and Olson,

imagining the goals of others as presented in fiction is a skill we utilize in combination

with our past experiences and behaviours to envision our own future. In doing so, Oatley

and Olson argued that one was taking on the "psychological quest of reflecting on our

own lives" (p. 63).

Note the linkages to the literature I have previously reviewed. We can definitely

learn from fiction (Nelson, 2009), but those situations most memorable are when we

move beyond simple fact to the emotions of the characters, settings, and situations

(Rossiter & Clark, 2010). Those stories take us from merely searching and learning facts

to the linking of learning with the emotions that make us human—non-rational ways of

knowing (Nelson, 2009). Oatley and Olson (2010) claimed involvement in a story can be as impactful as real life and with imagination can lead to narrative critical self-reflection (see also Mezirow, 1998) about changing. This path through the literature advances the possibility of fiction catalyzing transformative learning. Moving into understanding the role of emotions and imagination in this process continues that advancement.

The Role of Emotions in Transformative Learning

As mentioned in the introduction, Izard (2009) concluded that imagination is based both on cognition and feeling. Izard (2009) identified emotion as "the primary motivational component of mental operations and overt behaviour" (p. 3) and as playing "a significant causal role in ordinary as well as critical thinking, decision making, and action" (p. 17). Emotions play critical roles in reflection, but also in making and taking a course of action. Immordino-Yang and Damasio (2007) agreed emphasizing that "hidden emotional processes underlie our apparently rational real world decision making and learning" (p. 5). Izard (2009), in his exploration of emerging issues in emotion theory and research, also suggested that cognition and emotion "though often treated correctly as having functionally separate features and influences, . . . are interactive and intergraded or mingled in the brain" (p. 3). In his opinion, emotion has considerable effect on cognition and action when "the stimulus or situation is a personally or socially significant one" (p. 3).

From Izard's (2009) summary, feeling emotion is the adaptive product of evolution and neurobiological development and is central to conscious thought. There has been much debate regarding which emotions are primary (i.e., emotions that are considered genetically based) and secondary (i.e., combinations of primary emotions and

39

as a result more susceptible to conscious thought and control) (Fuller, 2006). Izard listed

interest and joy as positive primary emotions and sadness, anger, disgust, and fear as

negative. For him, combinations of these primary emotions as influenced by perceptual

and cognitive processes result in a schema of emotion that influences how we think and

behave. If emotional schemas recur frequently, they can become stable patterns that

become part of personality (i.e., frameworks). Effective use of emotional schema is a

combination of feeling/motivation and previously learned cognitive, social, and

behavioural skills that provide the impetus for quick action to ensure survival and

wellbeing.

Izard (2009) effectively presented research describing the interdependence of

emotion and cognition, which, in turn, re-establishes, to my mind, the need to approach

my research question regarding fiction as a catalyst for transformation using the whole

person, non-rational perspective. I also noted a similarity of Izard's emotional schema to

the frameworks referred to as part of the concepts of transformative learning theory

(Mezirow, 1997, 1998, 2000). Both researchers spoke to frameworks of repetitive

responses guiding our behaviour, with those frameworks being malleable. Further linking

the emotional and cognitive frameworks of Izard and Mezirow has been found in the

work of Fuller (2006).

Fuller (2006) summarized emotions as

part of complex, circular feedback systems that connect people with the
environment. It is assumed that stimulus events, either environmental or
physiological, trigger an emotional program whose purpose it is to mobilize the
organism for an appropriate response to this stimulus. (p. 25)

From infancy, we learn to evaluate stimuli. Unfamiliar or unexpected stimuli likely

generate the strongest emotional response. This led to the designation of emotions as the

primary motivational system of the human (Fuller, 2006). At the simplest level, one must

be motivated to undertake transformative learning, thus emotions, in Fuller's line of

reasoning, play a significant role.

However, upon further analysis, as a result of the motivational aspect of emotions,

research has concluded that emotions also play significant roles in "goal setting,

information gathering, selective perception, utilization of goal-specific conceptual

frameworks, activation of goal-specific memory, structuring of attention, regulation of

physiological processes, communication of intention, and shifts in energy levels" (Fuller,

2006, p. 26). If we compare Fuller's (2006) list with the 10 phases of transformative

learning originally proposed by Mezirow (2000), there are intersections such as gathering

information, setting goals, and communication of intent. These intersections would

indicate motivational aspects of emotions do play a role in transformative learning. More

specifically, Izard (2009) stated,

> The emotion of interest is continually present in the normal mind under normal
> conditions, and it is the central motivation for engagement in creative and
> constructive endeavors and for the sense of wellbeing. Interest and its interaction
> with other emotions account for selective attention, which in turn influences all
> other mental processes. (p. 4)

Interest is the emotion that spurs humans to "explore their environment, seek out

novelty, or proactively initiate contact with their surroundings" (Fuller, 2006, p. 96). My

conclusion is that interest shapes that which we pay attention to at any point in time—say

in the selection of a particular work of fiction we chose to read. That interest may arise

from several sources, for several reasons, but influences the actions we take. "Emotions

arise in the face of unexpected or uncertain stimuli. Discrepancies between past

expectations and seemingly anomalous new stimuli create uncertainty. This uncertainty

activates the brain's emotion programs designed to mobilize the organism for appropriate

response" (p. 118). This specific example of emotion mirrors the premise of the

disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 2000) and motivation to change as the seeking of an

appropriate response.

Izard (2009) found that interest most often occurs in situations where there is also

joy (see also Fuller, 2006). It has been suggested that joy is the brain-generated reward

for continued interest in an event or object in the environment. Together, the combination

of joy and interest is termed by some as wonder. Fuller (2006) devoted an entire book to

wonder and an organism's

> strategic capacity to imbue the world with an alluring quality. Affectively it leads
> to increased openness and receptivity rather than utilitarian action. Cognitively, it
> promotes contemplation of how the parts of life fit into some larger whole rather
> than analysis of how they can be broken down into still smaller (and ostensibly
> more manipulable) parts. To this extent wonder functions in ways that express
> uniquely human potentials for growth and intelligence. (p. 38)

Thus, interest and joy interacting can potentially lead to growth and change—an

idea to which I will return later in exploring catalysts. Here, I will simply link Fuller's

(2006) summary of the magic of wonder back to Lindeman's (1989) challenge of the

modern quest to find life's meaning as they key to adult learning. Increased openness and

receptivity (Fuller, 2006) as well as making sense of experience and thought are attributes

of wonder that are closely connected to the transformative learning experience if one is to

modify mental frameworks (Mezirow, 2000). Too, wonder is the combination of thought,

emotion, and imagination of a well-told story that holds us enthralled. However, some would still question the effectiveness of fiction as a resource for learning as it is not real.

Coming Full Circle—Transformative Learning, Emotion, and Fiction

The recently reviewed literature has effectively linked the importance of stories as sources of learning to the emotions involved in learning, and the importance of emotion in transformation. It is important at this juncture to explore the emotions experienced and lessons learned from them by returning to a focus on fiction as the medium. I begin with the role of emotion in the choice of fiction.

Mar, Oatley, Djikic, and Mullin (2011) cited three emotional aspects to a choice of fiction. The first is the "mood" (p. 819) of the reader at the moment the choice is made, the second is what "emotions the reader anticipates" (p. 819) experiencing during the reading, and third is the "emotional goals" (p. 819) the reader has for the experience. Mood management theory suggests that the choice made is most often to maintain a positive mood or to prevent or reduce negative moods, though sometimes, a good cry or a fright is also a goal. Emotion is involved in what fiction is chosen for reading.

In their research, Mar et al. (2011) discussed five types of narrative emotions. As I present the work of Mar et al., note the strong links that can be made to the seven categories in which memorable books were categorized in the study conducted by the University of Oklahoma (Strothmann & Van Fleet, 2009). I had previously suggested that the works of fiction listed in *Books That Inspire* are emotive. The work of Mar et al. identified the narrative emotions; they further developed this concept by explaining that how the reader experiences narrative emotion is no different than feeling real emotion.

The first of the narrative emotions are emotions of "sympathy" that result from a recognition of events or situations in the text that evoke sympathy for the character (Mar et al., 2011, p. 822). Mar et al. (2011) likened these emotions to those one might experience at the scene of an accident; you can understand the situation from the point of view of the driver responsible for the crash and be fascinated by the events, but are not affected the same as being or having a loved one in the car. The second set of emotions is of identification, where we imagine we are the driver in the accident (p. 823). Next are emotions of empathy, which Mar et al. described as having emotions for but not identifying as the driver (p. 823). We use imagination to anticipate what emotions the driver is feeling. "Relived [emotions are] . . . elicited by a narrative in the form of affect that accompanies the recollection of personal experience (emotions of the personal past)" (p. 824), and Mar et al. likened them to post-traumatic stress disorder. The experience is relived, but without total understanding of the narrative that led to them. The final type of narrative emotions is termed "remembered". These are emotions similar to "Jung's collective unconscious" (p. 825) or emotions that are familiar, but not necessarily ones we experience directly. From our accident example, if we are watching a mother grieve the death of her son—the driver, it may elicit emotion in the observer and provides new contexts and ranges of emotional experience.

Of the *Books That Inspire* (Strothmann & Van Fleet, 2009), the categories concentrating on exploration of familiar and unfamiliar relationships between individuals and society correspond with the narrative emotions of sympathy, identification, empathy, and remembered. Identification and relived emotions link closely with the first category that showcased books that spoke to people on a very personal level. The other categories,

44

such as inspiring righteous living and explaining human nature, can be linked across more than one of the narrative emotions described by Mar et al. (2011), depending on the perspective and depth of the interaction of the reader with the work of fiction.

Note that in every situation where emotion is elicited from fiction, the emotion is either a new, freshly experienced emotion, or one evoked from memory, but all are comparable to emotions experienced of everyday life. Palencik (2008) summarized that "emotional responses to fiction feel the same and are processed in the same way as our other responses" (pp. 262-263). Oatley (1999) concluded:

> If, therefore, emotions of reading are one's own, not just pale reflections of emotions of fictional characters, insight would be more likely when such emotional experience is combined with context of fictional simulations that allow it to be understood better than is often possible in ordinary life. (pp. 115-116)

I return to Oatley's (1999) work mentioned earlier in which he suggested that fiction is, in fact, the earliest type of simulation just run in the human mind and not on a computer. Building on this in his later work with Mar and Djikic (Oatley, Mar, & Djikic, 2012), Oatley advocated that:

> Just as if we were to learn to pilot an airplane, we could benefit from spending time in a flight simulator, so if we were to seek to understand better and ourselves in the social world, we could benefit from spending time with simulations of fiction in which we can enter many kinds of social worlds and be affected by the characters we meet there. (p. 239)

A fictional simulation could allow the reader to better understand people's mental state or behaviour without direct access. Fiction also aids in navigating complex interactions, where "characters interact with each other and react to the repercussions of plans and the intrusions of accidents" (Mar & Oatley, 2008, p. 175). This concept of simulation linked directly with Nelson's (2009) references to emotional resiliency and stories not overwhelming those who read them.

Fiction tends to provide a simpler version of reality by concentrating on the elements key to the story and not the extraneous events that end up distracting us from the really important events in our daily lives (Mar & Oatley, 2008). As a result, "fictional literature abstracts, summarizes and compresses complex human relations by selecting only the most relevant elements. This abstracted level of comprehension also enables one to see how these principles apply elsewhere and how they may be generalized" (p. 177), including across past, present, and future.

Mar and Oatley (2008) claimed that the function of narrative simulation has two general purposes. The first is to enable "enhancement of sympathetic and empathetic growth" (p. 180) and become better able to understand others, their beliefs, and emotions and in doing so better understand ourselves, which was similar to the claims of emotional resiliency referred to by Nelson (2009). The other purpose is the communication of information that aids in the development of social skills. "The abstraction of social knowledge achieved by literary fiction can be also understood as the presentation of human relations and their outcomes in a compressed format" (Mar & Oatley, 2008, p. 183). It also allows for the vicarious self-evaluation of what we might do given the same situation similar to what Jarvis (2012) described:

> One effect of popular fiction is its capacity to engage us intensely with characters who face conflicts of character and situation that we share but cannot resolve. This may lead to a continued revisiting of the dilemma and the gratification of a fantasy solution, in which case it acts only as a temporary respite. It may also provide us with progressive insights into those dilemmas and eventually with the courage to seek to resolve them in reality, as a result of the psychic and metaphorical rehearsal, in which case they have served a transformative function. (p. 507)

An added bonus is that if the story becomes too emotional, a book may be set aside for a period of time, giving the reader control of or self-directing the intensity and speed of learning (Oatley et al., 2012).

In summary, although fiction is not real, the emotions it invokes, empathetic and sympathetic growth it promotes, and the social information it presents based on its abstracted representation of reality can provide a safe learning environment for the self-directed learner even though it is based on unreal imaginings. Linking back to *Books that Inspire* (Strothmann & Van Fleet, 2009), it could be argued that this tie to emotions and simulation lies at the core of those books named as the most important each year.

While the emotion felt while reading fiction can be described as real, and the reading of fiction can support learning—affording a safe and effective practice medium for understanding social reality, the question remains: Can the reading of fiction catalyze a transformative experience? In this next section, the limited research on the role of catalysts in transformative learning is explored.

The Catalysts of Transformative Learning

If we return to Mezirow's (2000) framework for transformative learning, the first phase, stimulating critical reflection, is the disorienting dilemma (Cranton, 2006; Fuller, 2006; Mezirow 2000). Mezirow stated,

> A mindful transformative learning experience requires that the learner make an informed and reflective decision to act on his or her reflective insight. This decision may result in immediate action, delayed action, or reasoned reaffirmation of an existing pattern of action. (p. 24)

The triggering event—the disorienting dilemma—is generally thought of as a negative or distressful experience that begins critical reflection leading toward change.

Pasquariello (2009) submitted that if we better understand the nature of the catalyst that initiates a mindful transformative learning experience, it might be possible to better predict, stimulate, and support meaningful change. Based on the transformative learning of adult graduate students and using grounded theory, Pasquariello surmised that the catalyst of transformation was a "cumulative-composite triggering event . . . intersecting themes of cognitive engagement with new ideas and perspectives . . . combined by a visceral, affective response" (p. 86). In this event, cognitively new ideas, perspectives, and/or understandings intersect with contextual information, including support from and interaction with others, in a favourable environment. Cognitive and contextual together intersect with existing frames of reference or "(focused trajectory) which triggers a profound sense of self-realization (transforming awareness)" (p. 76). A transformative catalyst, according to Pasquariello, is cognitively, contextually, and affectively based. This description could apply to arguments made earlier that fiction experienced as real emotion and promoting learning could act as a catalyst for transformative learning.

Pasquariello (2009) went on to suggest that transforming awareness was not solely realized from negative experiences, but can be linked to joy, surprise, excitement, curiosity, and situations termed energizing. Recall that Fuller (2006) earlier in this thesis was quoted as linking interest and joy as promoting change and growth. Pasquariello saw from his research that if students have willingness or receptivity to transformation, it can positively affect the transformation taking place. Factors affecting receptivity of students were willingness to challenge understanding, desire and expectation of transformation, and positive thoughts toward discovering possibilities. For Pasquariello, this suggested

48

that rather than a moment being a catalyst, the combination of cognitive and affective

produced a sense of self-awareness that was actually the triggering event with cognitive

engagement (i.e., the ability to critically reflect) being primary.

While I was perhaps searching for fiction being a discrete catalyst, the evidence

from Pasquariello's (2009) research, and indeed the works covered in this literature

review, have suggested that multiple factors influence transformation. Contrary to the

initiating event being negative or distressing (Mezirow, 2000), Pasquariello expanded the

nature of the catalyst to include positive events and emotions. Again, the linkage of

cognitive and affective in fiction with the reader's deliberate critical self-reflection

identified strong possibilities for fiction as a catalyst for change.

Pasquariello (2009) saw students' willingness to challenge understanding along

with desiring as well as expecting to transform as affecting the likelihood of

transformation. This lead to exploring what other information the literature provides

about enhancing the possibility of a transformative experience and how it links to the

nature and content of fiction. I begin with Mezirow's (1997) influences of

transformation: specifically those involving imagination and metaphors, as key content in

fiction.

Influencing Transformation

Mezirow (1997) indicated that in order for transformation to take place, the

learning opportunity must stimulate thinking critically. He added that this could be

accomplished by the posing of imaginative problems. As stated previously in this thesis,

imagination is a cornerstone of fiction, and as has been shown in the literature review as

also potentially stimulating critical self-reflection. In addition, Mezirow summarized that

"learning takes place through discovery and the imaginative use of metaphors to solve and redefine problems" (p. 10). Metaphors are frequent inclusions to fiction, strengthening arguments for the potential of fiction to influence transformation.

Cranton (2006) spent considerable time discussing aspects of learning opportunities that enhance the likelihood of transformative learning. Cranton identified the importance of authentic educators with significant practical and theoretical experience in designing the learning experience as well as the importance of content selection. She also stressed the need for interactive and collaborative opportunities built into the learning. Learners need to be empowered in the learning experience and use critical questioning techniques to look at themselves as well as the people and organizations in which they work. Finally, the environment must be supportive of the positive or negative emotions surrounding the learning experience (pp. 115-116).

Cranton's (2006) influences are associated with traditional learning, but their intent can be applied to the informal fiction-based learning opportunity as well. To be transformative, the fictional content must be trusted and valued; the reader must really interact with the content and undertake critical self-reflection on what is being read, and all should be done in a supportive environment.

Berger (2004) had an interesting way of discussing how one approaches transformation. She called it 'being at the edge' and advocated the best way of supporting a person at the growing edge was to allow them to explore it or "push against it" (p. 345), which could then act as a facilitator on the journey. Defining the role more precisely, she advocated:

1. helping students find and recognize the edge,

2. being good company at the edge, and
3. helping to build firm ground in a new place. (p. 346)

If we apply fiction to Berger's three major responsibilities as listed above, it would seem that as a simulation, fiction also has the potential to help the reader recognize the edge, can guide them through it in a non-threatening safe manner and provide a picture of the outcome on the other side. While not a person playing the role described by Berger, fiction, in the hands of a persistent, motivated self-directed learner, could be excellent company at the edge.

The factors that researchers claimed can positively influence transformative learning taking place can be seen as present in fiction and the reading experience. It becomes more and more clear that fiction could not only catalyze transformative learning, but also, by its very nature, positively support it occurring. That is exactly what Levitt, Rattanasampan, Chaidaroon, Stanley, and Robinson (2009) found.

Fiction's Influence on Transformation

I wonder how often it is the case, when beginning a journey that you realize that what you thought was unique and new was suddenly a journey already travelled by someone else. As I continued my literature review, I came across a study by Levitt et al. (2009) that appeared to resolve my research question: Can the reading of fiction catalyze a transformative experience? I admit that I was initially disappointed, but rather than discard my interest in the role fiction could play in transformative learning, I drew on the importance of bringing a different perspective to similar research, and also the importance of building and expanding the initial research.

The study by Levitt et al. (2009) looked at the "processes by which personal change unfolds when reading structured fictional narratives" (p. 327). Their approach stemmed from the effectiveness of written narrative therapy in helping clients review deeply held personal beliefs and the need to consider alternatives to problematic situations. Often times, in written narrative therapy, clients are encouraged to read stories similar to the situation in which they find themselves. Levitt et al. found little research in psychotherapy that explored the effect of reading fiction as part of the therapeutic process, and they chose to explore the role of stories in helping their clients change.

Using grounded theory, Levitt et al. (2009) explored the strong effect reading a work of fiction had on each of their six participants. Five clusters identify the influences of fiction on the change that unfolded.

1. Identification with characters triggers attitude change as it increases self-awareness and inspires dedication to values.
2. Books can be transformatory [*sic*] as they bring artistic joy and interpersonal connection.
3. People use stories to give them hope to deal with frightening problems: They broaden one's sense of possibility in a safe venue.
4. Insights arise from adopting new perspectives and evaluating one's beliefs.
5. Communication changes in relationships to be more honest, as you know what you want and better appreciate what you have. (p. 334)

The core finding from Levitt et al.'s (2009) study was that written narrative appeared to "enable readers to overcome anxieties that otherwise may limit their exploration of problems and recognition of possible response" (p. 345). Levitt et al. summarized the value of the study as moving past the evidence of improved self-awareness, positive emotional adjustment, and self-control by exploring *why* the fiction was effective.

Again, note the ties from Levitt et al. (2009) back to previously reviewed literature. Prize fiction, as noted by Strothmann and Van Fleet (2009) and the Mar et al.'s (2011) work on narrative emotion both supported the importance of the identification of the reader with a character in the story. Pasquariello (2009) concurred with Levitt et al.'s (2009) identification of positive events spurring change. Oatley et al. (2012) predicted one value in using fiction for learning was the opportunity to regulate when and where it is read, thus giving the reader a sense of security. Strothmann and Van Fleet and Oatley's (1999) research supported the Levitt et al. findings that fiction can lead to insight into new perspectives and evaluation of one's belief. While not focussing on honesty, the work of Mezirow (1997) touched on the importance of communication in the transformative learning process. A strong case has been made for fiction acting as a catalyst for transformative learning. My study for this thesis continues that exploration. I used a narrative methodology with a focus on the catalytic nature of fiction, and how the event transpired and was maintained—work not fully explored in current transformative learning literature.

Summary

To my mind, one of the fascinations in studying adult education is the access to a broad research base in order to explore learning. This was seen in the variety of materials presented here, setting a stage for the serious consideration of the transformative impact fiction may have on its readers. I began by situating this study as a focus on the self-directed nature that adult learning can embrace, noting that such informal learning can have a transformative effect (Schugurensky, 2000) thus linking it firmly with Mezirow's (1997, 1998, 2000) transformative learning theory.

Further, given the emotional and creative nature of narrative, I reviewed the broadening of transformative theory to include a holistic and less rational approach and then further supported the importance of stories to transformative experiences by delving into the storied nature of human existence. Concerns that fiction is not real were challenged via the writings of Oatley (1994, 1999, 2004), Oatley and Olson (2010), Palencik (2008), and others who have stated that the emotions evoked, as well as the social replicas presented, provide a learning arena that is the same as reality, only safer.

Pasquariello (2009) established that catalysts in his study were multi-faceted and could arise from positive feelings, rather than the preponderance of more negative situations seen in the literature, which led beautifully into the review of works, such as Berger (2004) and Cranton (2006), to get a better understanding of how to positively influence the occurrence of a transformative experience—all of which can be applied to critically reflective reading of fiction. I ended the literature review with reference to Levitt et al. (2009), who looked at personal change via fiction from the perspective of narrative psychotherapy and grounded theory.

While my thesis was of similar intent—that fiction can catalyze change, my research has travelled a significantly different path of analysis than that of Levitt et al. (2009), and I delved further into the *means* by which transformation occurs from the perspective of transformative learning. In the next chapter, I outline my approach from both the theoretical and methodological perspectives to the research conducted as the core of this thesis.

Chapter 3: Methodology

As I was growing up, conversations around the dinner table often centred on biology, chemistry, and physics. My mom was a pharmacist, and my dad, a master carpenter. Their encouragement and influence saw me entering science as I began university. At that time, I wanted to work in the health profession and perhaps do medical research. As part of that journey, I spent time in a research lab one summer manipulating the diets of mice to determine the effects of high fat diets on their brown adipose tissue. It was during that summer I realized I was not really suited for pure quantitative methodology; not that I wasn't capable of the myriad of experiments, precise measurements, and objective observations. I eventually realized, through my experiences teaching and via adult education, that the quest for deeper understanding through the interaction of the subject (people) with the world was more my research style. I was more interested in people who could share the nuances of their experiences with me rather than with mice. However, throughout this thesis, there are lingering signs of a love of science and an appreciation for research from a different perspective—a quantitative milieu.

Given my personal journey, I gained further appreciation for and understanding of my own preference for qualitative research through the research of Pinnegar and Daynes (2007). I begin this chapter by describing my personal position regarding qualitative methodology and then review the four 'turns' that Pinnegar and Daynes described as being required if one is to move from doing quantitative to qualitative research.

Arriving at a Qualitative Methodology

Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) held that those who choose narrative as a research methodology make four turns in the direction of their thinking as they move from a

quantitative toward a qualitative methodology. It was not until reading the work of

Pinnegar and Daynes for this thesis that I connected the dots and realized I had made a

huge philosophical shift from pure to social science. I moved from researching in biology

and nutrition to teaching biology and chemistry, with the emphasis on influencing the

learning of students. My science degree and subsequent immersion in traditional research

had strongly influenced me positivistically. It was quite some time until my studies in

adult education enabled me to value qualitative research, which I embrace in this thesis. I

was influenced via my own experiences to move beyond "acceptance of much more than

direct conclusions from sense-data" (Crotty, 1998, p. 30) and separating reality from

knower (Merriam & Kim, 2012). My philosophical lens, though still influenced by a

positivist foundation—measurable, stable and observable—has been nuanced by reality:

"*contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between*

human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially

social context [emphasis in text]" (Crotty, 1998, p. 42) or the constructionist/interpretivist

view. In this context, "research is a meaning-making activity in that the research

constructs an understanding of the phenomenon of interest from the perspectives of those

who experience it" (Merriam & Kim, 2012, p. 70), which coincides with Merriam's

(2009) description of a basic qualitative study as one that seeks to understand: "1. how

people interpret their experiences, 2. how they construct their worlds, and 3. what

meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 23).

There was a strong link between a constructivist and interpretivist perspective of

transformative theory, as identified by Fenwick (2000):

56

The learner reflects on lived experience and then interprets and generalizes this experience to form mental structures. These structures are knowledge, stored in memory as concepts that can be represented, expressed, and transferred to new situations. Explanations in this perspective inquire into ways people attend to and perceive experience, interpret and categorize it as concepts, and then continue adapting or transforming their conceptual structures. (p. 248)

The nature of my research mixed some basic sense-data (Crotty, 1998) collection in order to establish reading fiction did catalyze transformation. However, I also sought to understand the nature of that event by collecting and analyzing participant narratives of the event, which Merriam and Kim (2012) noted as supporting constructivist/ interpretivist approaches in order to fully comprehend how participants understand their own experiences. Certainly, by simple reflection on the importance of fiction, or stories, in my research question, a strong argument was made for the use of narrative inquiry. However, I asked, "Did my research travel all four turns identified by Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) that led specifically to the methodology of narrative inquiry as the type of research methodology exemplifying my constructionist view?

Making the Four Turns

Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) suggested that one of the turns to be made, though no particular order was necessary, was the researcher moving "away from a position of objectivity defined from the positivistic, realist perspective toward a research perspective focussed on interpretation and the understanding of meaning" (p. 9). While my first turn began by moving away from studying mice, it continued in this research by moving beyond the objective establishing of a transformative occurrence via fiction to questions that sought to understand the nature of the event. Equally vital to the understanding of meaning was to move past the focus of distanced objectivity of researcher and researched

to exploring the context in which the parties interacted, grew, and learnt together on the journey. As mentioned in the introduction, focus on context supported the approach proposed by Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional inquiry space of temporality (i.e., past, present and future), sociality (i.e., relationship), and place. At the same time, I linked to Hunt's (1987) encouragement toward bringing my own humanness and involvement to the study as a holistic approach to a complex subject. I submit the first turn away from the positivist and toward understanding was evident.

The second turn identified by Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) was the deliberate movement from a concentration on numbers to one of words as data. While I did gather some demographic data, the core of my work concentrated on the stories shared. By survey, I identified participants who claimed to have experienced a transformative event catalyzed by fiction. My goal was not to physically count those experiences, but to marvel in the event: something that quantification did not begin to fully describe. Thus, the second corner toward effectively using narrative was turned.

The next corner turned was from the general to the particular in terms of setting, experience, and people (Pinnegar &Daynes, 2007). Rather than generalizing to many, my research questions focused on a few stories shared in depth, which provided a deeper understanding of an event as a result.

The final turn, as proposed by Pinnegar and Daynes (2007), was toward multiple ways of knowing and understanding our humanness. Movement past measureable, observable, and stable research results to accept constructed understanding allows space for narrative as a source of sharing knowledge. The general public, in forums such as blogs, podcasting, and the stories of reality television, indicate that people are embracing

58

the importance of stories in research once again. However, as discussed in the literature research, other ways of knowing such as E. W. Taylor's (2008) neurobiological and intuitive ways of knowing were also cornerstone to this research on transformative learning. The turning of all four corners, including this last, supported narrative methodology for this research. As a final important note, Clark (2010) tied the use of narrative back to transformative learning theory and stated, "In [narrative] perspective we see meaning as both constructed through and mediated by narrative, a type of learning that addresses major changes [transformations] in understanding the self in a world that offers rich possibilities for narrative theorizing" (p. 7).

Core Research Question and Supporting Questions

Qualitative methodology, a narrative approach in particular, became the mechanism by which I could effectively explore my questions regarding the linkages between fiction and transformative learning. My core research question was: Can the reading of fiction catalyze a transformative experience? Supporting questions included:

1. Does a fictional account catalyze a transformative experience? If it does, then:

    (a) What type of narrative prompted transformation?

    (b) Were there trends revealed in linking transformation to demographic data (age, gender, level of education etc.)?

    (c) When it occurred, was it an epochal or gradual transformation?

    (d) To what extent was the process rational or integral?

    (e) How was the transformation sustained?

2. Do emotion and motivation have a role in this very personal self-directed learning experience? If so what is this role?

59

Narrative Inquiry

Having successfully navigated the four corners of turning toward narrative inquiry (Pinnegar &Daynes, 2007), review of the common features of stories by Goodson and Gill (2011) helped set the context for this research as the two are, as discussed in the literature review, inexorably linked. The common features identified by Goodson and Gill are:

1. temporality—all narratives encompass a sequence of events;
2. meaning—personal significance and meaning are externalised through the telling of lived experiences;
3. social encounter—all narratives are told to an audience and will inevitably be shaped by the relationship between the teller and the listener. (p. 4)

These features of stories were reflected in the methodological design of Clandinin and Connelly (2000) chosen for this research. Central to the work of Clandinin and Connelly was the need to simultaneously explore what they termed three commonplaces in order for the qualitative work to be considered narrative inquiry. The first is *temporality*. By seeking to understand over time (i.e., past, present, and future), the resulting description of an event or person is one in transition. The key is knowing "what happened the day before, the day before that, the month before that and so forth" (p. 480).

Consideration of both the personal and social conditions of the event comprised the second commonplace. Personal conditions include the "feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions of the person" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480). The context of the person as influenced by other people, nature, and the relationship with the inquirer is the social condition.

A final important addition to this research, according to Connelly & Clandinin (2006), was noting where the event took place. It could be argued this is a continuation of

Goodson and Gill's (2011) meaning and social encounter. Narrative inquiry should note the place or places where the event happened, as it will have an impact on the person. The temporality of the event may mean that it took place in several locations, each affecting the person and event in different ways.

In addition to the three commonplaces, I paid attention to the seven considerations Connelly and Clandinin (2006) had identified. The first consideration was to pay close attention to the multi-dimensional, shifting life space of the participants and incorporating it into the inquiry. Cole and Knowles (2001) identified, however, that as much as a researcher attempts to present an authentic description, it will always be the researcher's portrayal of the event.

My study told of the participant's life experience as it was remembered, and as it provided the context for their interpretations of what they read. I did not live the experience alongside him or her, which was an important consideration, as it dramatically changed the nature and result of the inquiry journey. Randall (2010) concurred with this second consideration of Connelly and Clandinin (2006). Randall stated,

> [In] the mere act of remembering a past event, the memory itself is changed. As we shift from recalling to recounting, the activity of telling the memory to someone else changes that relationship again, depending on who our listener is, of course, and the intent behind our telling. (pp. 32-33)

This led to incorporation of Connelly and Clandinin's third consideration of clearly identifying the time, place, and sociality of the study. This was an attempt to mitigate negative effects of changing relationships, thus enabling the study to become researchable.

Next on the list of recommendations by Connelly and Clandinin (2006) was investing in the research, but at the same time, monitoring the depth to which a relationship developed between me as the researcher and the participants for the duration of the study. The balance between investing and developing a relationship was a delicate one. Goodson and Gill (2011) advised, however, "to maintain distance and objectivity, is in effect both unrealistic and impossible" (p. xii). Instead, as they advocated, I embraced the challenge of ensuring an open, transparent discussion of the uncertainty inherent in narrative inquiry.

As my study was focussed on describing or recounting the experiences of others, the length of involvement with the participants was not long, but the personal nature of the sharing and interaction did influence the nature and direction of the study: Connelly and Clandinin's (2006) sixth consideration. This was balanced, however, with the need for a close relationship between researcher and participant if the research was to be considered authentic (Cole & Knowles, 2001). For authenticity, it was necessary to have "foundations of mutuality and common purpose, including trust, respect, acknowledgement of roles, appropriate experience for the task at hand, willingness to reveal, and time and energy to put into the activity" (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 69). The development of authenticity required the development of relationship.

As the seventh and final consideration of Connelly and Clandinin (2006), I placed the relational ethics of the narrative inquiry over and above the legalistic requirements of the University of Calgary in undertaking this personal research and sharing the stories of the participants. Goodson and Gill (2011) noted that it is very difficult to set standard ethical rules and guidelines for narrative research due to the very "messy subjectivity

62

which comprises human being-ness" (p. 30). Martin (2011) responded to this challenge when she drew on the standard of ethics used in counselling and psychotherapy that advocates "a commitment to participants' well-being, autonomy, fidelity, justice and self-respect" (p. 155) or continuously developing ethical mindfulness based on trust and respect.

One practical suggestion to demonstrate ethical mindfulness from Dominicé (2000) that I used as part of this thesis was to obtain permission from the participant to quote directly from the material, which I received from all my participants. Martin (2011) added other topics for discussion regarding research ethics in my opening conversations with each participant, such as: informed consent, full disclosure of the intent of the research, opportunity for the participant to question, provision for dealing with strong emotions, privacy, confidentiality, and opportunity to withdraw. The result was not a prescriptive ethical guideline, but research that was mindful of needs of the individual as they participated.

Invitations to Explore: Interviewees

The core of my research was based on the question: Can the reading of fiction catalyze a transformative experience? Though transformation could be experienced by younger learners to explore the event as it unfolded over time, space, and sociality, I chose to explore the experiences of adults. While most studies of transformation involve adult-oriented learning environments, my concentration on fiction delimited my study to those adults who read and enjoy fiction as a group from which to select participants.

Identifying adults who read and enjoyed fiction who have also experienced a transformative event as part of the experience was a challenge. A review of the literature

indicated that work by King (2009) had established a series of surveys that appeared to effectively identify individuals in a variety of learning environments that had transformative experiences. Pasquariello (2009) modified King's survey to select candidates for his study regarding transformative catalysts. As a result, I chose to employ a similar model.

My survey, based on the learning activities survey (LAS) by King (2009), assisted in the identification of adults who claimed to have experienced a transformation, the key catalyst of which was fiction (see Appendix A). King used the original version of the survey in over 13 studies in a variety of adult learning contexts. In her 10th anniversary handbook, King provided a thorough review of how and why the survey was designed and provided a resource that serves as an operational manual for the survey. Consistent means for scoring and analyzing responses toward the identification of persons who experienced a transformative learning event, based on Mezirow's (2000) 10 stages of perspective transformation, was provided. Validation of the instrument was accomplished by use of pilot studies, repeated sampling, and review by a panel of experts, including Mezirow and E. W. Taylor as cited in this paper. Modifications to the original LAS used in this study were influenced by King's 1998 ESL format (as presented in King, 2009), as well as a version of the instrument used by Pasquariello (2009) when he studied the catalysts of transformative learning. Also incorporated to an extent were the categories of the effects of books on readers as discussed by Gordon and Patricia Sabine (1983) in *Books That Made the Difference.* Again, the resulting survey is found in Appendix A.

The survey was launched via a Facebook[©] page entitled "Has a Book Changed Your Life?" as "online research can be a powerful instrument to improve the scope of the

studies, maximise the time-cost trade off and increase the size of the sample" (Baltar &

Brunet, 2012, p. 59). I relied on a modified version of Patton's (1990) snowball sampling

to identify participants who read fiction, experienced a transformative change as a result

of their reading, and were willing to share details of their experience with me. To launch

the site, I contacted colleagues, friends, and family using social media, asking those who

saw my survey to "like" and share the site (see Appendix B). As is the nature of social

media, my hope was that the "likes" would grow larger and larger and would identify a

series of information-rich contacts for interviewing.

Snowball research techniques were noted by Atkinson and Flint (2001) as "used

most frequently to conduct qualitative research, primarily through interviews" (p. 1) and

to "locate those on the ground who are needed to fill in the gaps in our knowledge on a

variety of social contexts" (p. 2) as was the intent in this thesis. Researchers do caution

against using the snowball because of data quality and selection bias (Atkinson & Flint,

2001) due to the subjective nature of those first contacted for survey. Coupling the LAS

with the use of snowball sampling aided in non-probable, purposeful sampling. By

carefully screening for participants who felt they had experienced a transformative

experience as a result of a particular work of fiction, I selected "information-rich cases . .

. from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance [to my

inquiry]" (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). In the end, the snowball technique was used more as a

method of contact than a true sampling technique (Atkinson & Flint, 2001).

The welcoming information on Facebook[©] described the nature and purpose of the

thesis research. To personalize the Facebook[©] link to the survey, I stated,

My Graduate Thesis focuses on the power and wonder of a well told story. Though my life's direction has definitely been influenced by fiction, I am exploring if fiction can more than influence, but in fact, transform a life by triggering a shift in thinking that causes a person to change the direction, meaning or purpose of their life. The survey only takes a short time to complete.

Calling on common ground was intended to begin the building of the common relationship between researcher and participant, but also allowed me to situate myself in the experience of the study. A link to the survey hosted by FluidSurveys[©], where the survey was hosted, followed the introductory text.

In addition to the invitation to participate on Facebook[©], I sent invitational emails to colleagues, friends, local bookstores, local book clubs, and family members to ask for their support in advertising my project via a link to Facebook[©] or my survey (see Appendix B). For example, the Edmonton Public Library agreed to "like" the Facebook[©] page and made reference to my study on their website. An invitation to participate in my research was sent via the University of Calgary's Graduate Programs in Education Office to their members on my behalf. The direction and impetus of emails generated by these requests has remained unknown to me, but sufficient cascading contacts resulted in an adequate number of volunteers for my research.

Participants were made fully aware of the opportunity to participate anonymously or to, if interested, participate further by entering into a more detailed discussion of their fiction-catalyzed transformation (see Appendix A). Appreciation for their time and effort in completing the survey was crucial in laying the foundation for building the personal relationship and, thus, an authentic inquiry. As part of the initial survey, it was noted that not all volunteers would be contacted for further conversations regarding their personal transformative experiences, but results of the study would be made available should they

be interested. Approval from and a means of contacting Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board were provided. Survey responses regarding the 10 stages of a transformative experience and demographics suggested by the field of transformative learning are presented (King, 2009) in Appendix C of this thesis.

Capturing Their Stories

Participants whose responses to the survey indicated a transformation from reading a piece of fiction did occur and who also self-identified as willing to share more information regarding their experiences were sent an invitation to participate in an interview. The invitation provided further detail about the research project, including an outline of the research and questions (see Appendix D), the number, length, and nature of meetings, request for personal artefacts, the ethics approval documents from the University of Calgary, that the participant could withdraw at any time from the study, but that their responses up until that point would be retained for use in the data, and finally, the availability of the final results of the research project.

Because responses to the survey and invitation to be interviewed were received from across Canada and the United States, in-person interviews for all participants were not feasible. To maintain consistency, all participants were interviewed by Skype[©] using a prepared set of questions sent to the participant in advance (see Appendix D). One participant had a video link for the interview, but as not all participants had access to video, this too was not included as part of the methodology. While the lack of access to visual body language could be argued as a weakness to the full analysis of the conversations, the freedom inherent in the anonymity of participant and researcher may have contributed to the rich, detailed, and personal experiences shared.

The participants were interviewed twice and were offered the opportunity to review the transcripts of each of their conversations for comment prior to any analysis of them. Each initial session began by exploring the expectations of both the participant and researcher. I disclosed the importance of the research, my interest in the research, my deep appreciation for the sharing of such an intimate experience, and the benefits I hoped we would experience as part of the research. Participant expectations were explored by the research addressing any additional questions or concerns that they expressed. The ethics approval from the University of Calgary allowed for verbal confirmation of permission to record the session, to use quotes from the interviews in the thesis, and a clarification of the level to which identity would be kept private, as requested by the participant. All but two of the participants allowed for use of their first names, but I decided, for consistency, to use an identifier based on title of the work of fiction they chose to discuss. My intent was to assist readers of this thesis in identifying with each participant and his or her respective journey. All participants indicated their acceptance of the nature of the interview, their understanding of its purpose, and their willingness to being recorded and quoted.

As mentioned earlier, the participants were encouraged, if they chose to, to discuss and share any documents that would assist in describing their transformative experience. This included any writing they had done, such as a story, poem, song, or any creative project that coincided with the transformation they had experienced as a result of it, such as a drawing, painting, or even a photo. Several participants referred to diary or journal entries made at the time when they read the stories or in the months and years following. One participant provided an electronic copy of a story she wrote, as she felt it

connected to her experience. As identified by Creswell (2009), "these unusual forms create reader interest . . . and can capture useful information that observations and interviews may miss" (p. 181). However, as pointed out by Merriam (2009), such documents can also indicate what the participant thinks is important regarding the event. Allowances to embrace the telling of the story in a very personal fashion promoted authentic inquiry.

Every effort was made to focus the interview to the transformative experience, but as is the nature with personal storytelling, the journey was not always succinct and direct. That allowance for personality, however, strengthened the relationship between interviewer and interviewee as well as authenticity of the experience related. Interviews ranged from 45 minutes to approximately three hours, with a general length of 75 minutes.

Each interview began with the invitation to describe the influential book in the words of the reader, as I had purposefully chosen not to read their chosen work. This prevented me from forming a picture or an understanding about the book myself that was separate from the experience of the participant. It also allowed the participant to concentrate on the section(s) of the book that most influenced their transformative experience. Thus, the concentration of and personalization of the experience was enhanced. My bias regarding the book, its meaning for me, and potential focus on different characters, incidents and messages was also minimized.

Again, to minimize my bias regarding fiction as a catalyst, I adhered to the interview questions as outlined in Appendix D. Deviation from the questions with each volunteer would have introduced my interpretation of their experience and may have

swayed responses toward what the volunteers thought I was seeking. It was the freedom of each volunteer to respond in any manner they wished that enabled patterns to emerge suggesting a spectrum of change experiences rather than a sterile single event. In the nuances of the conversation, differences and similarities of response were revealed that more clearly explore the nature of transformative learning.

The interview was ended when all of my proposed questions had been addressed and when lagging discussion suggested there was nothing more to add. The participant was reminded that I would be sending them a transcript of the first interview for review and that time would be allowed for clarification during the second interview. I also provided an approximate timeline for arranging the second interview and requested that the participant consider providing or referencing any additional artefacts they considered important to their experience of the story they had chosen at that time.

During the second interview, the transcript resulting from the first session was discussed and any additional comments or changes the participant wished to make were added. I took the opportunity to explore the initial findings, asking the participant to share any other concepts, ideas, and impressions that they had. Part of that discussion was the effect that the interview had had on the experience—what they were taking away from the research experience.

The second interviews ranged from 30 to 75 minutes in length. Three questions were added to those in the initial set provided to each participant in advance of the first session (see Appendix D).

1. Why do you read?

2. How would you describe yourself as a reader?

3. What one word would you use to describe the book you chose to discuss with me?

I closed each session, again encouraging contact to discuss concerns or questions and a further conversation of the role of their experience in my thesis, should they express interest. All participants expressed interest in the thesis findings.

A personal notebook assisted me in exploring my journey alongside those of the participants, and also allowed me to chart thoughts, ideas, insights, and memories as I experienced them during the sessions. Recording of the sessions provided the details from the session, allowing me to focus on listening during our conversation. Special care was taken to document information regarding the interview setting and place (Creswell, 2009).

While Goodson and Gill (2011) suggested it might be more comfortable for me as a researcher to remain non-interventionist and "allow[ing] the participants to share their lived experience or life stories, without necessarily leading to any further consequences" (p. 45), I was more interested in an exchange involving both researcher and participant and delve deeper into the experience. As so well noted by Martin (2011):

> If I engage with another in authentic, equal partnership without judgment, if I maintain and communicate the attitude that the person is the authority in his or her own world, this will foster trust and encourage further exploration of the experience. If I am willing to pay close attention to her/his subjective experience, and to check out my understandings of each person's frame of reference, then this will enable the telling of stories that often untold: stories which go beyond the culturally sanctioned discourses of illness, social myths of heroism, of "being positive", or "not giving in" and give voice to alternative stories. (p. 153)

I withheld judgement of any aspect of their story or experience of it, recognizing the authority of the person in her/his experience, paid close attention to that experience,

and questioned for understanding. I was partnered with the participant to obtain their real story of transformation. I invited the participant to review the thoughts and ideas that resulted from the interviews (Merriam, 2009) and hoped that by doing so, would help them learn from their own experience (Goodson & Gill, 2011) and the experience of sharing their story with me.

Undertaking My Data Analysis

I used the results of my modified LAS survey (King, 2009; see also Appendix A) to verify which of the responders had, as claimed, experienced a transformative experience as the result of reading a book of fiction, which helped me to determine if they met the criteria for being interviewed. I anticipated speaking to eight participants, but the final number of interviews was dependent on the emergent nature of analysis. I was going to suspend interviews when the saturation of categories of information and an overall sense that the maximal emergence of themes and ideas were reached (Merriman, 2009). Practically, 15 of the 100 respondents who completed surveys volunteered to be interviewed, and of those 15, nine met the criteria as corroborated by the LAS results and could be contacted. I decided to invite all of their stories despite exceeding saturation to some extent, as it added to the breadth and depth of the inquiry.

I used the traditional approach to coding—letting the trends surface from multiple readings of the transcripts (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009) and jotted down the interesting, useful, unusual, and relevant pieces of information. The data mined revealed interesting similarities and differences in interviewee experiences that added new insight to the description of the transformative event from onset to the existence of sustaining effects of memories of the event.

From the collected information, I created categories that were not only responsive to the research, but were also sensitive, exhaustive, mutually exclusive, and conceptually congruent (Merriam, 2009). I created units of meaning that "reveal[ed] information relevant to the study and stimulate[d] the reader to think beyond the particular bit of information" (p. 177). Patterns and significance in the experiences of the participants that I identified stood alone in meaning as important to the study.

I ensured the validity of my research by discussing the resulting themes with the participants via follow-up interviews. I used thick description, presented ideas and concepts that differed from the majority as they arose, and triangulated different data sources as they became available during the study. I also critically self-reflected on my work and asked colleagues to debrief my work with me (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). As discussed earlier in this thesis, my study was delimited to adults and concentrated on self-reported transformative experiences associated with reading fiction. As the survey was conducted by social-media for self-identification of participants, the resulting group interviewed were limited to adults with access to a computer and knowledge of how social media networks function in order to participate. As the survey was presented only in English, though alternate language responses were not discouraged, it may have limited responses to English regarding fiction written in English. The small sample size may suggest trends and lead to the generation of questions to drive research, but are not generalizable to any other populations, but as suggested in the introduction, can readily be applied to similar situations (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Ultimately, in attempting to answer my research questions, a deeper and richer understanding of the transformative

experience, its catalysts, and how it is sustained is invaluable in assisting adult educators better understand and, therefore support, learning as summarized below.

Summary

I chose to share my call to social research as an introduction to this methodology section as it aptly clarified the constructivist/interpretive lens with which I approached the core of this research, but there were still shades of the measurable and stable positivist approach via a modified LAS survey used in determining the participants in this study. That my literature review strongly linked to constructivist theory was also a strong factor in my appreciation for this topic.

In exploring fictionally catalyzed transformative experiences, I was interested in the stories of those interviewed. The use of narrative research seemed a natural fit. I used Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional inquiry space as a model for my interview questions and embraced Hunt's (1987) encouragement to acknowledge my love of fiction and true interest in the topic.

Receiving ethics approval, I began an interesting journey exploring the life-changing experiences of nine wonderful and giving people over two interviews each, with opportunities for personal feedback. Transcription was time-consuming and wrought with frustration, but in the end, rewarding, as it brought me in close contact with each conversation and began the process of seeing and hearing the messages contained within the stories—findings that are shared in the next chapter of this thesis.

Chapter 4: Presentation of Findings

> I absolutely loved it. I did not find you judgemental. I found you to be curious which made me feel good that you liked my situation and story. You are a good listener. (CK)

The responsibility resting with me regarding the stories shared was not lost on me. The participants trusted me with insights and feelings without really knowing how they would be represented in the final product, and for that, I thank them. Without their certainty of experiencing a transformative change by reading fiction, their generosity, and trust, I would not have findings to share.

In this fourth chapter, I will begin with a brief look at the demographic information from the nine participants interviewed, as provided by their responses to the modified learning activities survey (LAS). Many different works of fiction were claimed as life-changing. I wonder at the depth and breadth of the adventures read. As part of the collection of preliminary information, an alphabetical list of all the fictional works identified in the survey responses is provided in Appendix F. Non-fictional titles, including self-help books and religious works, were removed from the list.

I followed the general description of all of the volunteer participants by an in-depth profile of each person who shared their personal story with me, who are called participant from this point forward. In each profile are my impressions of that participant's transformative journey gathered through our conversations. I invited the participants to describe the work of fiction that had had such an influence on them, and the learning or change they undertook due to that influence. I paid close attention to each participant's lived experiences, including why and when they underwent transformation, and the connection they felt to the protagonists in their selected story.

While the main purpose of the survey responses ($N = 100$) was to assist in the identification of potential interview participants, demographic data such as age, gender, and level of education were also collected. These data are presented for all those who completed the survey ($N = 31$) in Appendix F.

Interview Participant Demographics

Of those interviewed, there were five females and four males making up the total nine participants interviewed. The average age of the participants was 50 years, and ages when change was experienced ranged from childhood to late adulthood. All of the participants had some post-secondary level education, with eight possessing a Bachelor degree at minimum. Significant life events (e.g., death, marriage, etc.) were not generally reported as coinciding with the change experienced. Rather, change was associated primarily with the work of fiction itself, and for three took action such as by personally reflecting on how what was read played a role in the change experienced. That said, eight of those interviewed indicated that they think back over previous decisions or past behaviours, and all of those interviewed reflected on the meaning of the fiction they read. Reflection and action are important factors in the experience of change (Cranton, 2006; Mezirow, 2000).

Impressions of the Books by the Participants

As previously discussed, story was central to this thesis. To honour the experiences shared and to enable the reader to connect to both the participant and the resulting analysis, I am including a brief description of the book read from the perspective of the participant and my understanding of their story of transformation—

again from their perspective. The descriptions are presented in alphabetical sequence by book title.

While permission was granted to identify all but two of the participants by first name, I have chosen to instead use a portion of the title of each work of fiction to identity each participant, in hopes that this reinforces the link between fiction, participant, researcher, and you, the reader. I did not, as mentioned previously, read any of the books put forward by the participants, which enabled me to limit my impressions of the story and instead focus on participant's highlights and insights. However, it is my intention at the conclusion of my thesis journey to read the works that so moved those sharing their experience with me.

Bend Sinister by Vladimir Nabokov as experienced by Ben

"The novel immersed me in the nightmare of totalitarianism" (Ben). With that statement, I was led on a journey with Ben, a 67-year-old horticultural writer and photographer who introduced me to the writings of Nabokov (1947/1990) and a story of a father protecting the child he loves as society "slides[s] all too easily into tyranny" (Ben).

Ben's summary of the story tells of a

cultivated man, a philosopher, [who] by accident of history finds himself living in a country that has become horribly totalitarian in the throes of a stupid philosophy—stupid and brutal—invented by a guy who now runs the whole place. Our philosopher has a more-or-less normal life while he tenderly raises his nine or 10-year-old boy single-handedly. Little by little, his life turns nightmarish. The state ends up with his boy. Dad dies at the hands of the state police. In the last moments of his life, he sees the ruler across the square. Dad has a gun with him, and his idea is to get close enough to shoot this idiot. Instead, the guards shoot and kill him [Dad], and the reader dies with him so to speak. As his conscious state ends, we are with him.

Ben saw the central character as "all of us lost in a heartless world" interacting with characters that portrayed how "people can become animals if they are treated badly or if they live in a totalitarian state." Wordplay is used throughout the book as in the title of Nabokov's (1947/1990) book beginning with the use of *sinister,* which alludes to the "dark side—the side that is associated with evil", as opposed to the dexter or the right side, toward which the whole country is bending. Ben also noted that in the middle of the story, the reader, by design, ends up confused without knowing what has really happened or what is coming—a state that mimics the world of the protagonist and his child.

In his first response to the survey, Ben indicated that the book had changed his life, but he did not connect with any of the 10 stages of perspective transformation outlined by Mezirow (2000). When questioned on this in the interview, Ben claimed it to be an "internal change" resulting in a "harrowing, a deepening compassion for all the oppressed souls of the earth" and an understanding of state oppression, which he has continued to use in political discussions to help others understand the fragility of freedom. Ben minimized the change, stating it was not very big, just adding to his "growing compassion for suffering people of the planet, . . . resulting in me being very slightly more verbal, more visible in protesting about injustice and oppression" and battling fear to speak out against what he sees as the possible deterioration of democracy in his United States.

Erudite is the word that springs to mind when discussing his passion for the art of fiction. To Ben, Nabokov (1947/1990) was a true artisan, but one who used fiction as his artistic medium. "I think that the great artists write about life. They write reality better than we write reality and they open our eyes to what is real. Nonfiction by contrast is a

kind of blunt instrument." Ben's experience was such that he stated, "You see yourself; you emerge from the book knowing exactly what it would be like to be the protagonist were you in that system. You feel it in your soul."

Though Ben did not identify with any of 10 stages of perspective transformation (Mezirow, 2000), it was clear from his narrative that he felt a change had taken place. His connection with the author's main character and the book's message was undeniable. He respected the main character in the novel who was a father protecting the child he loves. Ben used the word "cruelty" as his one-word summary for Nabokov's work.

Cutting for Stone by Abraham Verghese as experienced by Stone

Introduced to *Cutting for Stone* (Verghese, 2010) as a selection in the book club he began about 17 years ago, 71-year-old retiree Stone summarized the book as the story of an unprivileged, minority doctor who, by being one of a few doctors in a small centre, has the opportunity to become a surgeon. On arrival in America, the doctor struggles for acceptance as a surgeon not having had the same privilege or opportunity as U.S.-trained physicians. Stone admired the doctor's "courage and fortitude—his ability to keep learning", which enabled him to deal with difficult patients, moments of prejudice, and the personal trials and challenges of being a physician. For Stone, it "celebrates the achievement of hard work . . . and what it is to be a physician" and "should be part of the science curriculum."

Stone's responses to the survey indicated that as a result of reading Verghese's book, he began to question the way he normally acted and ideas he had about social roles, specifically the plight of minority immigrants. Central to the experience was the context in which the story existed as created by the author. "You see from the way the book is

written, in the way the character is developed, how important it is to understand a

person's situation by putting it into context." Context has renewed importance to Stone's

own writing and presentations. He said,

> Reading *Cutting for Stone* drove home for me the power of context and storytelling. If you want to make point you can make your point in a PowerPoint[©] presentation, but if you really want to make your point it is better to put it in a story and let somebody see the context. The context of this particular story was that you've got to appreciate—what it is to be a minority in a position in really backward circumstances. Life is tough and you get that and you appreciate it.

Stone has shared his love for Verghese's book by recommending it to two young adults

who expressed a desire to go into the medical profession. His advice to them was:

> You should read this book because it is going to inspire you. I studied chemistry. No one ever pulled me aside and said, "Here read the life of Louis Pasteur; it'll inspire you!" I wish somebody had because it probably would have helped me study chemistry more.

> Not everybody has that vision or drive to push them in a certain direction.

Allowing them to see beyond the barriers is an important contribution that one can make

to a young person—giving them the inspiration to try to do it.

> *Cutting for Stone* (Verghese, 2010) has helped reinforce Stone's understanding of

social justice and his efforts to help others act by changes he has contributed to through

his community work and writing.

> The book didn't really completely change my life. These are all things I knew, but when you read about it, it kind of reminds you of these things. Just like when your mother tells you study hard and do your homework—that's great. Also don't stereotype—your mother probably told you that, but then in the book you see how it's important and those points were driven home to me by reading this book.

> The one stage of Mezirow's (2000) perspective transformation that Stone claimed

to experience was the first—the disorienting dilemma. He indicated that the book caused

him to question the way in which he normally acted. Several factors regarding the central

character may have contributed to the transformative experience, as Stone not only respected the main character, but also related to the character overcoming difficulty, showing courage, offering hope, and in general making him felt better. His one-word description was "inspirational."

I Know This Much is True by Wally Lamb as experienced by Truly

Truly's late-teenage journey through this work of fiction, gifted to her by her mom because it was one of Oprah's recommended reads, enabled her to better understand decisions made by her parents regarding her upbringing. While she now realizes that the same message was being discussed all around her at that time, *I Know This Much is True* (Lamb, 1998), through the main character Dominic, enabled her to hear that message, seek and enact new ideas about social roles that better suited who she desired to be, and how she wanted to continue in her future relationship with her parents.

> It is about a pair of identical twins boys, and it's narrated by the one brother, Dominic. . . . It's about how his identical twin brother is schizophrenic. A lot of the book is an exploration of self, what [Dominic] goes through, why was it Thomas who ended up being schizophrenic [with Dominic questioning] how did I escape this?

Truly commented that though the story focuses on the exacerbation of Thomas's condition to the point where Dominic becomes the caretaker of his brother, several other relationships were integral to the story in her mind. Dominic speculated on the effect on his life of his mother's cleft palate, his father being out of the picture before his birth, having a strict disciplinarian as a step-father (Ray), his brother (Thomas) being effeminate and sensitive as well as displaying socially less desirous behaviour, and his own relationship to his ex-wife and current common-law partner. It was, however, the relationship of the boys to their stepfather that catalyzed an epochal change in Truly.

81

[Ray] didn't feel like Thomas was growing into the type of boy that he wanted him to be. There was a scene in the book where Thomas, as a boy, would chew the sleeves of his shirt when he got nervous. This really made Ray mad. So to try and stop [Thomas] from doing this, he duct-taped [Thomas's] hands, and he made Thomas keep the duct tape on his hands most of a full day. Dominic talked about how . . . Thomas had to sit at the kitchen table and eat his supper like a dog because he wasn't able to have the use of his hands. Through this narrative, you see how much resentment Dominic ha[d] for his stepfather, for the way that [his stepfather] treated his brother and to a certain extent I think [Dominic] want[ed] to blame Ray for what . . . happened in Thomas's life, and [for Thomas] being schizophrenic.

Truly reflected on the ease with which she initially saw Ray "as this horrible

monster who abused these boys and [was] a bad guy." As the book progressed, however,

Truly saw more evidence of another point of view—Ray's—and began questioning who

he really was as a character in the book.

I came to this realization . . . he didn't mean to be hard on the boys. He didn't do it to be a terrible person; he did it because he honestly thought that's what was going to be best for the boys in the long run. He did care about them. He just didn't know how to show that he care[d]. It was the same with the baby [Dominic's child who died in infancy]—[Ray] cared about the baby, but he didn't know how to openly care about the baby, so he did it on his own when no one was looking.

Truly revealed that about three quarters of the way through the book, Dominic

went to visit his child's grave. On it, he finds a bouquet of flowers for which he credits

his ex-wife. She denies it was her doing, identifying Ray as the source. Truly said for her

it was like a light going off.

I had to actually take some time away from the book and think about it before I could finish the book because it was such an important lesson I needed to take out of that. I was a young person when I read the book. I had a lot of conflict with my parents when I was a teenager. It was really easy for me to say, "My mom is a jerk!" or "My dad is a jerk!" and to just label them that way and move on.

Truly suddenly saw her parents in a new light stating, "What I saw from them was

not what made up the whole picture of who they were." Over about a two-week period of

reflection on what she read and her situation, she constructed a new vision regarding the

decisions her young parents made for and about her. Sometime later, with her new

framework of ideas in place, she instigated a conversation with her parents and shared her

perspective of the decisions they made—not to be confrontational or judgmental about

the decisions, but to feel heard.

Even though she credited the book as making a significant positive impact on her

relationship with her parents, she never recommended it to others or really shared her

experience with the book until our conversations. This was an experience she kept

private.

> I am a very big thinker. I like to think I write things down, but I really don't. I like
> to think that I talk to people, but I really don't. I feel like when I have [an]
> experience. . . . I don't necessarily want to talk to anybody about it, but I do have
> a 45-minute commute to work. If something big has gone on at work, I will shut
> off the radio, and I will spend 45 minutes driving home totally reflecting on
> whatever. Then once I am over it, three or four days later, then I will tell my
> husband. I feel it needs to be personal first, and then when I'm done with that,
> then I can share it with somebody.

Truly still sees evidence of the book's influence in her life 10 years after she first

read it. The example she shared was how she deals with her stepson's biological mother

with whom she must be positive despite the relationship being less than ideal. She

candidly shared:

> I do not like the way she handles herself, and I don't like the way she deals with
> us and she deals with my son, but she has a side of the story too. It is possible . . .
> that in some crazy way, she believes that what she is doing is what's best for her
> son and for the situation.

Truly has also used her personal learning in her career. She tries to help parents

understand and reach their children or reminds herself to see their parental perspective of

a situation. She also tries to help her students realize when they judge other people that everyone has their own story and it should be considered.

Truly experienced three of the 10 stages of perspective transformation outlined by Mezirow (2000). The stages she identified were the first and second—a disorienting dilemma followed by self-examination regarding feelings of fear, guilt, or shame. The third stage she experienced was well described in how she has applied her new perspective to her life. She related to the main character, saying, "He allowed me to see someone else's view." Her one-word summary of the book by Lamb was "grounding."

Ishmael by Daniel Quinn as experienced by Male

Trusting recommendations from a university professor during his master's studies in education, Male, then 27, knew the philosophical novel *Ishmael* (Quinn, 1995) would be "something worthwhile getting engaged in." Indeed, he described reading it and the events of that time in his life as "the beginning of re-perceiving my interpretation of the world around me." The following was his take on the heart of the novel:

> Paul is responding to a classified ad that says, "Teacher seeks pupil. Must have an earnest desire to save the world." When I saw that on the book cover, I thought that is kind of how I felt—that the world needs saving, and I just don't know how to go about doing it. Paul is at first affronted by the classified [ad] because he, like many people in life, have been exposed and inundated by a number of people who profess to claim to have the solution to man's ills and woes on this planet.
>
> Then he wants to confront whoever the pollster was, and he goes to meet this person. He arrives at the allotted place at the allotted time, and he walks into the room. There's nobody there other than a chair facing a very large window, but not to the outside—just a window on the inner wall. When he sits down, he is kind of wondering what is happening—where is this teacher that he is looking for?
>
> He begins to realize that he is actually looking at a two-way mirror. He pushes his gaze past the initial reflection and sees that there are two eyes looking back at him. He's shocked to realize that they are not human eyes. They are the eyes of a gorilla. He is at first shocked; he's in wonder, and then . . . [a] form of communication begins, where it's all telepathic, and the gorilla very calmly asks a

question or two and engages the character Paul.

> The meat in the heart of what the dialogue was getting to was Ishmael [the gorilla] was trying to help Paul realize that his perspective and interpretation of the events of his life and of life around him was a story—it was a cultural story. Paul had, in the socialization of the young, been encultured in the story and had never questioned it. Ishmael was trying to ask him, "Is this the only story?" In their dialogue, they would refer back to other times with other cultures and say, "What's the story being told there?"

In a series of Socratic dialogues, Ishmael helps Paul explore his unquestioning acceptance of the current Western-type "taker" culture, emphasizing man's dominance over the ecosystem rather than a more "leader" culture that recognizes man's thoughts and actions within the laws of nature.

Male characterized his life at the time as an unpleasant state of flux or malaise, in which he struggled to define and find meaning in his life. He described himself as a faker with a good façade, who was attempting to avoid making decisions, but also avoiding the depression and suffering that had him "rolling like the marble on an infinite plane going nowhere."

Male found himself ready for the message of this book. It helped Male realize he was not the only person in such a situation, and using his curiosity, hope, and ability to understand the "big picture", Male began questioning his own social culture. In doing so, he claimed, "I'm going to give up all my preconceived expectations of what I'm supposed to be, and I am going to decide what I want to be—what I can be." Male turned from being what he described as "Nietzsche's superman" to "focusing only on what [he] had control over in [his] life and not focusing on some societal expectation. [He] just lived [his] life day to day or week to week only focusing on what [he] could do."

Male has allowed his emotional personal journey to mold him as a father and guide his philosophy and methodology as a teacher. He encourages questioning of the cultural story with his children and his students. Gently, he guides them to question more than the surface explanation of a situation.

Male identified with five of Mezirow's (2000) 10 stages of perspective transformation. He experienced the first three stages: (a) disorienting dilemma; (b) self-examination with feelings of fear, guilt, or shame; and did a (c) critical assessment of his assumptions. His experience followed with what Mezirow had identified as stage five, consisting of exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions, and stage six focused on planning a course of action. He did not identify with the character descriptions provided for the protagonist as part of the transformative experience. His one word summary of the book was "unveiling."

Medicine by Lu Xun as experienced by Cin

Cin, a 52-year-old doctoral student who immigrated to Canada 17 years ago from China, identified her influential book was written by an author facing a corrupt society held hostage by a belief in and reliance on superstition. At first, the author Lu Xun (1972) sought to contribute to the modernization of China by bringing modern medicine to the country as a doctor, but he realized that "[t]he root of the problem is not just science, the root of the problem is people's mind—the dark side of their mind," explained Cin.

> To him, the writer's pen is sharper than the surgeon's knife—that is what he always said. That is why he gave up medicine and came back to work as a writer with magazines—to go everywhere to tell the young people that it [was their] responsibility, obligation to launch the reform.

In this one of many stories and articles written by Lu Xun (1972), parents of a small boy were anxious for their son to be healed of his tuberculosis. Their belief was that if a bun was anointed with the fresh blood of reformers being beheaded by the Qing dynasty and fed to a sick child, it would hasten recovery. The public was not allowed near the execution site, so bribes to the executioners ensured that the blood was obtained. Of course, the bloodied bun when fed to the son had no effect, and within a year, the boy passed away. The story closes with the son buried next to the reformer whose blood the son ate in hopes of continuing his life—ironic as the bloodshed by the reformer was given in effort to save the Chinese who had him executed.

Cin related that Lu Xun was saddened by the continued reliance of his people on superstition, but also angry at the examples of corruption enmeshed in the way of life in China. Writing was Lu Xun's attempt at freeing his readers from their complacent acceptance of their circumstances, calling them to use critical reflection to drive change.

When she read this book in her 20s, Cin was a full-time employee of the Chinese government as a translator. She was given a rare opportunity to take night courses at university, but ended up with little life outside school and work. Her colleagues and family constantly questioned her motive to pursue education that would not improve her career or social life. Her quest was made more difficult by her past educational experiences.

In her high school years, only the very top approximately one percent of students entered university. To accomplish that type of ranking, students undertook verbatim memorization of textual material that was regurgitated on qualifying exams. While a very successful student, Cin was not of that top tier leading to a prestigious career. Instead,

with her training in English, she was able to get a job with the government as a translator. Eventually, she was granted the opportunity to continue her studies by her employer, and she chose to major in translation and minor in a combination of English and Chinese literature.

Unfortunately, neither her "spoon feeding" undergraduate education nor her job as a translator prepared her for a university education that required questioning, creativity, and the ability to think both abstractly and critically. "[There was] nothing in the textbook—there was no clue to help me answer professor's questions. You had to sit down and think. I felt bad because I usually got low marks."

Exposure to this book as part of her course marked the beginning of an incremental change toward understanding, embracing, and continuously seeking the opportunity to critically think and reflect. Cin personalized the ridicule the author directed at his Chinese characters, realizing she was one who was "commit[ing] those mistakes or [that] greediness." She challenged herself to think beyond the everyday search for superficial enjoyment toward deeper societal needs. In that consciousness, Cin realized she had moved beyond the importance family and friends put on career, success, and money and could not ever relate in the same, shallow way to her civil service position because "once you step into that critical thinking mode you can't go back to unwind it to make it go back to before."

Around that time, in response to the threat of confiscation by the communist regime as they reclaimed Hong Kong, Cin emigrated. Canada was the family's world of opportunity, or so they thought. Unfortunately, most were unable to find the good paying work they had obtained in Hong Kong—obtained because of what was considered

excellent English skills there. In Canada, menial work was the fate of many immigrants in a similar position. With tenacity, Cin got a slightly better paying position as a clerk in a trucking company, but it was not a job requiring her new-found critical thinking and reflecting skills or one that recognized her degree due to what was now a lack of proficiency in English. To support herself and family financially, she returned to school to obtain certificates in accounting, which she likened to the spoon feeding of her childhood education, albeit at a more complex level. With perseverance, she worked her way up through several levels and companies to a better paying job. It was not enough though.

In the back of her mind, she continued to critically reflect on all her experiences as an immigrant and concluded that though she had obtained education, she was limited in her career because she did not know the right people, who were mostly white, and would always be seen as non-proficient in English due to her accent.

> What if [I] try to eliminate all [my] group differences, try to speak exactly the same as the Caucasian or other people so that they can't recognize my accent? My accent will always be the same because I came here after I turned six years old according to a linguist.

It was reliance on that introduction to critical thinking introduced by Lu Xun (1972) that had her returning to doctoral education and the opportunity to expose injustices perpetrated on immigrants from Asia. Cin wanted to continue the call to change that Lu Xun identified and sparked in her all those years ago.

> There are all kinds of social injustices and group differences, and we cannot recognize those differences; we cannot accept those differences. What Lu Xun said 100 years ago is to ask ourselves honestly to see what is in our mind, what is happening, and if we are not aware there is no change; there is no social change. We follow the footsteps of the wrong doers.

Cin hesitated, however, and said, "I always think that maybe I should go back as a clerk. Clerical work routine fits me better. I don't want to think any more."

Cin's survey responses indicated that she related to seven of the 10 stages of perspective transformation outlined by Mezirow (2000). She had a disorienting dilemma, followed by self-examination with feelings of guilt, fear, or shame, and as a result made a critical assessment of her assumptions. From here, she moved to stage seven by obtaining skills and trying on new roles as she strove to build competence and confidence in those new roles so she could integrate them into her new life, thus honouring her new perspective. Though it has been a definite struggle, Cin continues on this new path. Her journey was not linked to the central character of the story, but rather the story itself, which she summarized as "classic."

Paddle to the Sea by Holling Clancy Holling as experienced by Del

It was a delight to journey back with 56-year-old Del to a time in her childhood, around 11 years of age, when she explored the Indian pathways that led through the forest on the family farm. She often pretended she was an Indian girl trying to dye cloth using herbs and berries and recounted how she pretty much chose to dress up as a Native Indian each year for Halloween. *Paddle to the Sea* (Holling, 1980), well known by some as an Oscar[©] nominated National Film Board[©] vignette, was a significant memory within the First Nation-related childhood experiences that continue to influence Del today.

> The story presented a young Native boy as a carver and in a very positive role, which influenced the development of my interest in First Nations in particular First Nations art and my close friendships with some people who were Aboriginal. I think it helped create a respectful curiosity and appreciation of First Nations people and issues. Also, it introduced me to the magical adventures of traveling and opened up the world to me as a kid who knew little about the world beyond my farm.

A young Native boy, Del explained, carved a canoe with its passenger all from one piece of wood. The boy placed the sculpture on a snowy bank next to a creek and patiently waited for the snow to melt and carry the canoe and passenger into the waterway. The passenger's journey began near the head of Lake Superior, through the Great Lakes, down the St. Lawrence River, to the sea. With "My name is Paddle to the Sea, please write where I am at, or something like that" carved on the canoe, each person interacting with the boy's sculpture was encouraged to participate in the journey, and to Del's amazement, not only did they write locations, they often helped the canoe on its way by carrying it or placing it back in the water. Del's voice almost became childlike as she remembered the sketched maps and diagrams in the book that cleverly illustrated the canoe's travels—a geography lesson relevant to her experience, as she lived near the lakes and towns the canoe travelled. Other diagrams were included, such as the time when the canoe was passing through a lock. There were illustrations of the locks and how they worked. The story taught and entertained Del for hours and hours as she accompanied the canoe over and over on its journey to the Grand Banks.

Del's fascination with and love of First Nation people was not the norm as she was growing up. She remembered an uncle saying,

> "Oh, did you know that your great, great, great grandmother was a squaw?" To me, at that time, the word didn't hit me as offensive, but I remember I said, "Oh, she was an Indian." I was so excited. Then when he saw my reaction, he got upset and said, "No she wasn't. I was just kidding!" like it was a terrible thing to be. I knew they had used the Indians as hunting guides and that then there was quite a class difference.

Then, when she had a Native girl as her best friend the summer she was 13, she knew her father was not comfortable with it:

He would talk kind of derogatorily of Natives. He had worked in the lumber industry in BC when he was younger, and he would say they were drunks and kind of be derogatory about that.

Despite the influences around her, Del remained interested in and respectful of the First Nation people, calling many of them friends today. During our conversation, she wondered if it might be due to the fact that she suffered incredible shyness as a child and often felt misjudged and not appreciated for who she was, similarly in her mind to the Aboriginal community. Despite or in spite of the opinions of others, Aboriginals were seen by Del as adventurous, wonderful people she wanted to know.

Del also attributed this book as sparking her fascination with travel. Though there were other influences in her life that contributed to her being able to leave home as a young professional and her continued love of voyages to other countries and cultures, she holds tight to this book being instrumental in opening her mind to the "magical adventures". As for the fate of the small canoe and its passenger, both Del and I encourage you to revisit her childhood experience by reading or watching *Paddle to the Sea* (Holling, 1980).

Del's survey responses indicated that she related to half of Mezirow's (2000) 10 stages of perspective transformation. She related to a disorienting dilemma followed by stage four or recognition of her discontent and stage five, where she explored her options for new role relationships and actions. She moved to stage eight, where she tried out those roles and stage ten, which incorporated changes into her life dictated by her new perspective. In her journey, she claimed that the central figure in the work of fiction greatly influenced her by helping her understand herself better, sparking her desire to be like him, changing the way she looked at things, offering her hope, making her feel

better, and helping her appreciated another culture. She respected the central character. Her one-word summation of the reading experience was "wonder".

Sir Henry by Robert Nathan as experienced by Henry

When the voice on the computer introduced the main character by saying, "He's an Eeyore," I couldn't help but be drawn in to his interpretation of *Sir Henry* (Nathan, 1956). Henry, now 71, read *Sir Henry* at about age 16 as one of the offerings of a science-fiction/fantasy mail order book club to which he had subscribed. When his teacher discovered he read the book, she asked to borrow it, and after finishing it, he remembered she talked to him "like an adult" helping him understand the book and, in particular, the main character's quest around which the book is centred.

His teacher's interest in Henry, a bit of a recluse and friendless child, and their discussion of the tale was instrumental to the effect the book had on Henry. At 16, Henry was bored and unchallenged by his schooling. The rest of his teachers were painted as "dull and uninteresting", while Ms. M. had somehow "escaped being desiccated, and she had a lot of spirit."

> Most of the other teachers, what they tried to teach us, was that we would never be able to do anything right. They were all spinsters and burned out. They should have been retired—some of them hated children.

This story put into writing the feelings that Henry had about his life in small town, located in the rural US. *Sir Henry* (Nathan, 1956) told the tale of a woebegone knight searching for meaning as analyzed for the reader by animal compatriots who, unbeknownst to Sir Henry, discussed his escapades with cheeky humour and wistful fatalism. Any good befalling the knight was unrecognized or minimized. Sir Henry avoided making decisions, letting whatever befell him dictate his fate. With an absence of

93

belief in self or guiding purpose, Sir Henry died an aged knight at the hand of his greatest

foe, himself. Henry saw himself in the main character:

> I liked Sir Henry. He's kind of a sweetheart and I want to be like him, but I also don't want to be like him because he never finds whatever it is he's looking for. He never even realizes what he's looking for . . . this little book is as moving and as instructive as anything I've ever read as a good example or a bad example or combination of examples as I say how to live or how not to live—an attitude to take.

> Spending little time detailing Sir Henry's story, our conversation really became a

description of the journey Henry embarked on over his lifetime by fighting the pull to be

as passive as Sir Henry. When his career working in a car factory, though well paying,

did not fill him with passion or excitement, Henry charted a new course by studying

education and eventually moving to England to teach. When Henry realized that teaching

was not his forté, he boldly began a very successful career in publishing, using both his

technical experience from the factory and his university education. Over the course of

several years, he added his love of music into the mix and authored several notable books

on music.

> The older I got, the more I realized that I could have done this; maybe I should have done that. I don't remember if the actual message I got from the book was that I should have been making decisions. I think the message that I got was about the attitude that I should be taking toward whatever it was it didn't matter what I was doing: Did I find any satisfaction in it? Was I doing it well, or should I have gone and looked for something else to do?

> While personally satisfied, Henry is not living a life of physical riches, which he

sometimes laments, but it is a life rich in personal satisfaction and accomplishment.

"When the situation was not to my liking, I did something about it. . . . [I] have things

that I could piss and moan about, but [I] don't have the right to be unhappy."

Henry has continued to prefer stories about the lives of singular characters that "might as well exist" because they epitomize the real life struggles and choices associated with being human. "There is not much progression or drama. They are very much their own stories and yet you get the feeling of a whole lifetime as you read." *Sir Henry* (Nathan, 1956) was a person for Henry to avoid modeling his life after.

Henry began his journey with a disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 2000), as the majority of those interviewed, and in fact, those completing the survey claimed to have experienced. His experience also included a critical assessment of his assumptions (i.e., stage three) and acquiring of skills and knowledge (i.e., stage seven). Henry learnt a significant amount from the central character of the story, seeing him as a reverse role model of sorts. Henry indicated he had a better understanding of himself, who he wanted to be like, the importance of courage, a difference in how he looked at things and a sense of hope after reading about the errant knight. Clearly, he respected the character on some level. It was interesting that his one-word summary of the book was "resignation."

The Mountain and the Valley by Ernest Buckler as experienced by Val

I found it interesting that Val, like Henry, also sought to avoid modeling her life after her chosen work's central character. At 25, having read *The Mountain and the Valley* (Buckler, 1970/2010) four years previously as part of her university studies, Val spoke of a character who, despite seeking a life off the family farm as a writer, was corralled by circumstances and perhaps fear to never leave Nova Scotia and never author any work for sharing.

> It's one of those novels where it's not hugely plot driven—no kind of exciting plot details. It calls on David's perspective growing up and daily life on the farm. I am making it sound really boring, but it is not. It is actually a coming-of-age

story, is probably the best way to describe it, because it deals with how he changes from a young boy to an older man. He deals with things like what he wants to do in his life, experiences from the past that affect him, in the future especially his relationship with his sister, because they are really close, and then his sister ends up going off to school in the city. It is interesting to see what that does to their relationship because David is then the one stuck at home, and he's always kind of resented living isolated and on the farm. He wants to be a writer. He always has things he wants to do, but never does them. He has an opportunity to leave at one point, and he chooses to stay. I thought that was interesting. Also, he feels often in the shadow of his older brother—that dynamic [is] there. I am trying to think of any climactic moments. I think it ends in his death. Actually, he ends up by out-living his parents, I think, ends up taking over the farm. It is the story of a character who wanted to change so much, but he never really did, and that's about all I can say.

Val related to David's position as the middle child "wanting to find your own mark in the world and not in relation to any older sibling or a younger one." However, she was also drawn in by characteristics she and David had in common, such as a penchant for reflection, desire to be a writer, and closeness to siblings, and as the book was told from his perspective, the descriptive style of writing. For Val, David was fictional, but she asserted that he was a character who could have been real.

Immediately the style of writing just drew me into it, and it was very poetic. The author, in this book, I just loved the way he wrote. He made ordinary every day little things seem so poetic and beautiful—the way he described it. I remember thinking, "If I ever were to write a story, I would want to write one like that." So, it wasn't just the content, it was the style of writing. The characters were just so convincing, and I could relate to David in a way. It all just kind of drew me in.

Though she loved the book, she felt that she was better able to understand the complexities of David's character and drew even more meaning from the novel with the guidance of her professor.

Approximately one year after reading *The Mountain and the Valley* (Buckler, 1970/2010)*,* Val was faced with making the decision of whether or not to study in

England for a term. She definitely associated the book with the decision she eventually made.

> I was debating if I should go or not, and then this book came back to my memory, and it was like: "Yes, I should because I don't want to be like David." He never went anywhere. That's what I mean when I said it had influenced me. I still see the book as how I don't want to be like this character David. This character had such influence on me, and because I can relate, he's kind of like this motivation for me to take risks when I might not otherwise.

Val continued to consider coming-of-age stories among her favourite, though this story is in a way its antithesis: David never did seem to come of age, even though he physically grew older. Still, Val reads coming-of-age because "it interests me from a human nature perspective. What you can learn from fiction applies so much to real-life if not more than in actual real-life because people don't dissect things in the same way or it's not as well said."

Val shared that since she read the book, she has referred to it in her journal at least six times, noting that it really has been a significant number of entries. For her, journaling is a view back on her life to see where she has been, accomplished, and a means of continuing to challenge herself. She speculated, "I think it is a book I will always remember and it may come back in future times too."

In her survey responses, Val related to three of the 10 stages of perspective transformation suggested by Mezirow (2000). She recognized her discontent and shared her experience with others (i.e., stage four), planned a course of action (i.e., stage seven), and then made the appropriate changes in her life (i.e., stage 10). She linked her transformative experience to the central character of the story because he was in a similar situation to her, helped her better understand her own situation, and inspired her to act.

97

She ended up knowing who she did not want to be. Her one-word summary of "change" fit the journey she embarked upon and shared.

The Shack by William P. Young as experienced by CK

"If I cry, you have to ignore me" (CK). With those words CK invited me into a world deeply influenced by *The Shack* (Young, 2008). CK stated,

> The book itself is about a man and what he calls the great sadness. The great sadness has come over him because he has lost his daughter. His daughter was kidnapped while they were on a family camping trip. He was actually saving his other two children when she was kidnapped. They found out eventually that she was killed. The great sadness came over him. He was very close, is very close to his wife, and they are quite religious. He has a faith in God, but he started to question his faith when he lost his youngest daughter. One day, he goes to the mailbox, and there's a letter in there. It's basically, "I'm going to be at the shack" which is where they found the little girl's bloody dress. They never did find her body. He was questioning why someone would send him this note that said, "I'll be at the shack" and then it was basically signed God. He actually went up to the shack. Initially, he feels like he's made a mistake in showing up there because it all looks the same and brings back bad memories. Then as he's walking away to leave—everything changes. It becomes beautiful. It goes from winter to summer and everything is green and lush and beautiful. He ends up meeting these three entities that represent the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He is able to question these three entities in whatever capacity they are there for him. Their words and their situation and example really gave me hope.

CK, a mother of three who turned 40 a month following the loss of her mother, was searching for a means of more effectively dealing with the great sadness she had fallen into as a result of losing a woman she respected, admired, and missed. Intertwined in her sorrow was dependency on inappropriate behaviour that prevented her from being there for her children and husband, but also kept her from a general fullness of life. She was searching for the type of hope and contentment her mother exhibited—one CK linked to the strong spiritual connection upon which her mother relied. CK had tried to

turn to those she would consider authorities in the church, but was left wanting and

sought more answers to her questions via reading.

Key to her experience with *The Shack* (Young, 2008) was how it arrived in her

sphere. CK was searching in a used goods store for a religious book that had been

recommended to her when she met up with a customer also perusing the stacks. They

greeted one another, and as strangers amongst books sometimes do—they started a

conversation. CK ended up sharing some details regarding the book she was hunting. The

woman replied,

> All that sounds very similar to *The Shack*—that this man gets to spend time with
> these entities. I said, "Oh wow, I'll have to look for that book because it sounds
> really good." [The woman] pulled it out of her basket. She was going to buy it,
> and she gave me the copy, and she said, "I hope that this is a good book for you."
> I'm not kidding. I couldn't put it down. I took so many lessons from this book—
> examples of what our world is really supposed to be like. It renewed my faith.
> There are so many things that are so scary and bad and hurtful, so many things
> that bring us down. I needed something to give me hope and to renew my faith.

The reason for the book's import, explained CK, was her ability to relate to the

central character. She grieved with him, understanding his sorrow at losing a loved one.

CK understood the need to question God and His plan, but as she made her way through

the book, revelling in the questions and responses, she witnessed a change coming over

the central character and was able to allow similar changes affect her own life.

> It was like he was able to see my needs and to have things explained to him.
> Through those explanations and this work is fiction, I was able to change my life
> and become more. I was able to see the hope. I was able to see a light. I was able
> to appreciate my family again and to appreciate little things in life. This story is so
> real—it felt like it was real. I don't even know how to explain that, but it was
> amazing!

In helping me to understand some of the lessons she learned, CK shared an

amazing analogy about not judging others, but instead trying to understand where they

are coming from.

> [The book] tells us our expectations of others are a way of judging them. Every
> day I can meet up with someone, a friend of mine or whatever, and I can expect
> them to act in a certain way. In a way, I'm judging them, because if they don't act
> the way I expect them, I either interact with them or I don't. Basically, I was able
> to take from that that everybody has their own stuff going on.
>   I get frustrated with drivers, but I'm thinking you know what, I'm driving
> with this big bowl of water in my van, and I'm turning corners really slow[ly].
> People are probably freaking out because I'm not going the speed limit. Well, I
> got this bowl of water in my van and nobody can see it—for them to be judging
> me, thinking I'm an idiot driver, when the truth is that I have a bowl of water here
> that just cannot spill.
>   Nothing is what it appears to be. Nothing is what it seems.

During her experience, CK wrote very personal letters to Jesus expressing her

feelings and asking her own questions. The missives helped her identify areas she needed

to work on and change. Now, further from the intense experience, she does not write as

frequently, nor has she revisited those letters. She has put the past behind her. For this

interview, though, re-reading the novel provided new and different insights to add to her

past learning.

As she noted the positive changes in her life, she wished the same for her brother,

also deeply affected by the loss of their mother and dealing with his own behavioural

dependencies. He too found solace in *The Shack* (Young, 2008), and CK marveled at the

positive changes he has experienced.

When asked where she would be if she had not read this book, CK responded that

she thought she might eventually have come across one or two books that could have

"done the same for me. I doubt it. This was all encompassing. This one had everything

[for] me." CK picked up pointers from other books she read, but her "experience with *The Shack* was a unique life-changing experience . . . so far."

Like Cin, CK also related to seven of the 10 stages of perspective transformation (Mezirow, 2000), but their experience, like each book read, was very different. CK indicated she experienced a disorienting dilemma and examined her feelings of fear, guilt, or shame as a result. She moved from stages one and two to three where, in recognizing her discontent, she shared it. Next, in stages six through ten, she planned a course of action, acquiring knowledge and skills to implement that plan. She then tried out new roles, building competence and confidence in those roles and finally integrated her new perspective into her life. Unlike Cin, CK very much related to her central character, who was in a situation similar to her own. The character helped her in understanding herself better, showed courage to overcome a difficult situation, and as a result, offered hope and a chance to feel better about herself. She respected the central character and attributed him in changing the way she looked at her situation. By the end of her journey she was "enlightened" by chosen work of fiction.

Stages of Perspective Transformation by Participants

Having introduced you to each of the story tellers, their chosen work of fiction, and a description of their journeys, in Table 1, I have summarized each reader's responses to the LAS (King, 2009) regarding stages of perspective transformation. As different as each journey was, so too was the perspective transformation they experienced, in relation to the 10 perspectives of transformation as identified by Mezirow (2000, p. 22). As mentioned previously, Ben did not identify with any of the stages of perspective transformation but was insistent that he experienced change.

101

Table 1

Interviewees' Identifying with Each Stage of Perspective Transformation

Perspective Transformation Stage	Participants								
	Ben	Stone	Truly	Male	Cin	Del	Henry	Val	CK
1. Disorienting dilemma	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
2. Self-examination with feelings of fear, guilt or shame			✓	✓	✓				✓
3. A critical assessment of assumptions				✓	✓		✓		
4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared						✓		✓	✓
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships and actions					✓	✓			
6. Planning a course of action					✓			✓	✓
7. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans					✓		✓		✓
8. Provisional trying of new roles					✓	✓			
9. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships					✓				✓
10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective		✓			✓	✓		✓	✓

No one person related to all of the stages of perspective transformation outlined by Mezirow (2000). To summarize, the number of stages identified with by participants ranged from none to seven, with an average of five stages seen as part of the change experienced. None of those interviewed identified with all 10 stages of perspective

transformation, though all self-identified as having changed as a result of reading their work of fiction.

Via information presented in the Table 2, I focus on the actual statements used in the modified LAS (King, 2009) in the order in which they appeared. Note that Stage 3 and 8 are not in the same sequence usually noted of Mezirow's (2000) stages of perspective transformation.

Table 2

Number of Participants Responding to Each Stage of Perspective Transformation

Stage	Survey Item	Participants
1	Reading the book caused me to question the way I normally act.	5
	Reading the book caused me to question my ideas about social roles (e.g. what a mother or father should do or how a child should act).	6
2	As I thought about these things, I realized I no longer agreed with my previous beliefs or role expectations.	3
	Or instead, as I questioned my ideas, I realized I still agreed with my beliefs or role expectations.	1
4	I realized that other people also think about their beliefs.	3
5	I thought about acting in a different way from my usual beliefs and roles.	2
3	I felt uncomfortable with traditional social expectations.	3
8	I tried out new roles so that I would become more comfortable or confident in them.	2
6	I tried to figure out a way to adapt these new ways of acting.	3
7	I gathered the information I needed to adopt these new ways of acting.	3
9	I began to think about the reactions and feedback from my new behaviour.	2
10	I took action and adopted these new ways of acting.	5
	I do not identify with any of the statements above.	1

The disorienting dilemma (Stage 1) from both a personal and social perspective, as well as taking action (Stage 10), were the most frequent stages experienced by the group, Though not all stages are present, personal testimony, which King (2009) stated should be considered strongly in determining if a transformation has occurred, clearly indicated personal change. I begin with Ben who stated, "The book persuaded me that nations and societies slide all too easily into tyranny." Cin claimed that *Medicine* (Xun, 1972) set her free: "Fiction can plan an emancipative role in adults. Critical thinking can still be fostered in the latter part of one's life." CK was able to reframe the death of her mother:

> It made me realize the feelings and emotions I was having regarding my mom's death could be actual for someone else and it made me feel like what I was going through was normal. It helped me see death differently.

Paddle to the Sea (Holling, 1980) began Del's exploration of First Nations and travel: "I think it piqued my curiosity about life as a native youth . . . The events in the journey were synchronicities that intrigued me and made me want to travel."

Each reader changed because of what they read, as demonstrated by Henry's comment regarding his love of literature: "It was actually many years before I put things together, but Sir Henry was the first book that opened my eyes and mind to the power of literature." Male credited *Ishmael* (Quinn, 1995) with changing his perspective on his personal story: "It caused me to re-evaluate the underlying story of my existence that had been fed to me." Stone had better understanding of the immigrants coming to Italy and stated, "The book gave me a renewed appreciation for the immigrant experience." Truly was finally able to hear messages in her life calling for change: "The book was the thing that caused me to change. But after I reflected on it, I realized that I had been hearing the

message all around me before but wasn't listening to it." For Val, the direction her life would not go became clear: "The book—or character in the book—just became my new image of someone I didn't want to become as I would go through life."

These statements from the free response section of the survey fall strongly within Mezirow's (2000) categorization of frames of reference being altered, with a focus on subjective reframing via "applying a reflective insight from someone else's narrative to one's own experience" (Mezirow, 2012, p. 99). None of these transformative events encompassed all 10 stages that Mezirow (2000) identified.

The fourth question in the LAS asked the readers whether or not a character in the story influenced the change experienced. Seven of the interviewees associated their change in whole or part with a central character as discussed in each summary of their transformative experience, with the exception of Cin and Male. Cin related more to the author of her work. Male did not relate to the main character—an ape. The characteristics each reader associated with is represented in Table 3.

In addition to common characteristics identified by the participants, they also mentioned some characteristics only applicable to their perspective of their book of choice. Ben identified with a father protecting the child he loves. While Truly did not identify with the phrases provided in the survey, she commented that she felt the experience allowed her to see someone else's point of view. Del identified that her book of choice helped her appreciate another culture. Finally, Val, felt she learned who she did not want to be like.

A strong majority of the participants (78%) indicated that it was a character in the story who influenced the change they underwent. The most influential characteristics of

the protagonist identified in completed surveys, with multiple choices possible, are listed in Table 4 with respect for the character and self-understanding chosen most frequently.

Table 3

Interviewees Identifying with Main Character

Characteristic of Main Protagonist	Participants						
	Ben	Stone	Truly	Del	Henry	Val	CK
In a situation similar to your own						✓	✓
Helped you understand yourself better				✓	✓	✓	✓
You wanted to be like				✓	✓		
Overcame difficulty		✓					✓
Showed courage		✓			✓		✓
You respected	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
Who inspired you to act						✓	
Who changed the way you looked at things				✓	✓		✓
Who offered a ray of hope		✓		✓	✓		✓
Who made you feel better		✓		✓			✓

Analysis of the LAS pointed out some interesting aspects of those surveyed and interviewed and their experiences. It was as though a rough sketch was done in preparation for the addition of depth and tone that built toward the complete picture—the picture details coming from rich, thick discussion of the experience as discussed in the themes emerging from the interviews.

Table 4

Number of Respondents Who Identified with Main Character

Main Character	Story Tellers
Helped better understand self	4
Overcame difficulty	2
Showed courage	3
Was respected	5
Changed the way one looked at things	3
Offered a ray of hope	4

Themes Emerging from Reader Interviews

Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional inquiry space based on temporality, sociality, and place influenced the interview questions I posed to explore the reader's interaction with the content of each story as well as influences outside the story that may have affected its catalytic effect (see Appendix D). The result was a conversation full of thick and rich description that circled back to provide answers to the key and supportive research questions of this thesis. This information has been organized into seven overarching themes that I have presented in a roughly temporal fashion, beginning with the first four: (a) commitment to reading, (b) the reader's knowledge of the author, (c) how the reader came to choose his or her story, and (d) the physical details of reading of the work of fiction. For me, these set the background to the main event, which I have used to explore the final three themes. These themes delve into aspects of each change experience, with special attention to when the change occurred, the impact it

had on the reader's overall life, and beyond to affecting the lives of others. The final trend I present reflects each participant's personal understanding of fiction as a catalyst of their change.

Theme one: Commitment to reading

There is with little doubt for me that all of those interviewed embrace reading fiction as a significant part of experiencing life. These findings are linked to the role motivation plays in this self-directed learning experience. Their love of fiction increased the likelihood that they would make a powerful connection with a particular work of fiction. In turn, the prospect that fiction might act a catalyst for change increased.

Many participants attributed their love of reading to key people in their lives as well as accessibility of a library. Henry noted that his mom frequently took him to the library as a child because she loved reading. CK shared that her love of reading stemmed from daily summer walks to the neighborhood library as a child. The library was also key to Del's experience. She considered the local librarian her "guardian angel" who unlocked the local community library so that, even if it was only Del searching the stacks, books could be experienced.

Regarding his draw toward reading, Stone spoke of the influence of his mother who read all of her life and his own recollections of reading *Time*$^{©}$ magazine while his first grade cohort delved into Dick and Jane. Val credited her parents as encouraging her reading habit: "They always encouraged reading to enlarge your world and imaginations. It has always been a part of my life and my hobby."

None of those interviewed mentioned just one book as they shared their insights and experiences. All conversations suggested that reading was a continuous past time at

the root of which was enjoyment and often learning. Discussions covered fiction to non-fiction, but most, like me, had a predilection for fiction as a means of relaxing.

Theme two: Knowledge about the author

I found it curious that some participants were drawn or connected to their chosen work of fiction based on their knowledge of the author. This area, as did the previous, provides some insight into the motivation for this self-directed learning experience. In some instances, lengthy portions of the interview delved into the life, experience, and position of the author, especially as they related to the work of fiction. Other participants never mentioned the author beyond a name—as if it was simply an additional identifier of the book. This theme presents findings linked to the effect knowledge of the author had, if any, to the catalytic effect the work of fiction had on its reader.

As part of their formative change, neither Del nor Henry when questioned knew much about the author of the work they read at the time they experienced it. Both rather haphazardly chose their titles from a selection of what was at hand, concentrating only on content. Henry seemed to gather knowledge about his author as a part of his later journey into various types and forms of literature. Del only became curious about her author when I asked her what she knew of the background regarding *Paddle to the Sea* (Holling, 1980) going so far as to watch a National Film Board of Canada feature of it and exploring websites devoted to the book by the time of our second interview.

CK and Truly made little mention of who wrote the books that changed their lives. The author was of little to no import. Instead, they concentrated on and related to the message relayed via the writing—thankful that the author effectively affirmed personal experiences, feelings, and thoughts. Neither CK nor Truly really considered

researching the author until questioned as part of this study. Unlike Del, neither CK nor Truly looked up their author over the course of our discussions. Again, the circumstances of the author, how he wrote, and why were not critical to the journey of the reader.

The readers introduced to their books as part of an educational recommendation had some base knowledge of the author. That knowledge was cursory for Male and Val and was not presented as a part of their change experience. Again, the content appears pivotal to the experience. For Cin, however, the author Lu Xun (1972) was well known as was the intent behind his work, *Medicine*. Her experience was enhanced as she linked the story to the political and cultural experiences being exposed by Lu Xun in writing *Medicine*.

> He gave up medical studies and went back to China to dedicate his life to education and encourage you people (writers, translators, columnists) to think critically and speak out about social injustices. I am no longer the young people described by Lu Xun, but I still think I have the social responsibility as a global citizen to understand and reflect.

Though the story appears central to her personal journey, the affect was enhanced by knowledge of the author.

Knowing the motivation and background of their authors also appears to have affected the experience of Ben and Stone. Stone attributed the influence of *Cutting for Stone* (Verghese, 2010) on his life in part to the exceptional ability of the author to create context. Knowing that Verghese (2010) drew on personal experiences as a minority, surgeon, and immigrant gave a dimension to the story that had Stone saying, "Because he's a physician, he can get really detailed in his explanations of medical procedures. It was really riveting."

Ben's knowledge of Nabokov (1947/1990) was considerable as evidenced by the details he shared during his first interview. Then, having pondered the transcript of our first conversation, Ben added two key points to our discussion about the author. The first was that he considered Nabokov a true literary artist, claiming of such artists that "they write reality better than we [experience] reality, and they open our eyes to what is real." Ben's second note of the author was that *Bend Sinister* and several of his other novels "re-enacts in a distant way the death of Nabokov's father." While this information was not critical to understanding the narrative, for the reader it added nuances that enhanced the overall experience. For both Ben and Stone, knowledge of the author augmented their appreciation for the work they read.

All participants appeared to connect to the story that factored first and foremost to the change they experienced. Only in a few instances did knowledge of the author, his circumstances, purpose, and expertise add to the reading experience. In those situations, however, it would appear that had the story not been compelling, no knowledge of the author would likely have catalyzed a transformative experience.

As a brief aside regarding authors, it was not until I began interviewing that I noted all of the interviewees had chosen books by male authors and that the protagonist in each work of fiction was male. Because this seemed so unique, I went back to all the books shared in the survey to determine if this was a trend. Thirty-two of the 48 titles have male protagonists (66%). Fourteen of the chosen authors were female (29%). Two female authors used male protagonists; both were in children's stories. Two male authors wrote fiction centring on female main characters. Females were exclusively the readers of the books with female protagonists in this survey. All of the fiction named in the survey

are contained in Appendix F, with Canadian authors being highlighted simply to reflect my nationality and pride.

Theme three: Meeting the book that changed their life

I was intrigued as I compared the tales of the participants regarding the many different reasons that brought them to open the cover of the book that changed their lives. Some were spontaneous choices, others were recommendations, and others were moments declared almost serendipitous. How the book was chosen, in my mind, relates to categorization of what type of fiction catalyzes change. I have created three general categories that encompass how or why novels entered the participants' lives. The first category is pursuit of an enjoyable reading experience either by self-selection of a work of fiction or based on a recommendation. The second category I termed an education-based suggestion, and the third deals with those individuals deliberately seeking assistance.

Turning to the first category, with the goal of enjoyment first and foremost in their minds, some readers self-selected a work of fiction they simply thought they would enjoy, never anticipating the profound effect it would have on their life. Del chose *Paddle to the Sea* (Holling, 1980) because she was excited by the idea of a boy travelling the great lakes, but her attention was first caught by the wonderful drawings throughout the book: "I don't know how many times I read it, but . . . that first time it was probably the cover picture of the canoe that might have caught my attention." Ben had previously read works of Nabokov, and when he came across another, quickly signed it out of the library. "Nabokov can't do anything wrong by me. From the first paragraph, I am in it."

Others were still seeking reading enjoyment, but their books were recommended as part of a book club or by a person. Stone's book club has been meeting every month for over 17 years. He attends regularly, whether in person, online, or by submission of opinions, even though he has since moved more than 65 miles away. "One of the members has to have read [the book] first and recommend it, and that person is a champion for the book." Oprah's book club was the source of Truly's book. She admitted going through a "phase where I needed to read all of Oprah's book club books," but there was another dimension to Truly's experience:

> I had this problem with my parents, and we were conflicting and not getting along. So that was the energy I was putting out into the world. It doesn't surprise me that I happened to stumble across this book.

For Henry, it was a combination of self-selection and a book club that brought him to experience *Sir Henry* (Nathan, 1956). Henry remarked that though he loved to read and his mom took him to the library because she loved to read, he often had trouble finding something in the library that would interest him. In the end, he joined a book club that catered to his particular interests. "It was a mail-order club. Every month they would send you a selection—like the book of the month club, only this was science fiction and fantasy." He simply sent back the books he didn't like—*Sir Henry* wasn't one he sent back; in fact, he has kept his original copies all these years.

Regardless of how these participants selected books to read, there was no concentrated thought to learning or changing associated with the selection process. Each of these readers was, however, still changed as a part of reading their chosen work.

Moving to the second category we turn to Cin and Val. The books they read were part of the curriculum of university courses they were attending. Books that were

required reading for them became favourites under the guidance of their professors. Both Val and Cin were asked to read what their professors would categorize as important theoretical examples, and though they sought the learning pathway typical in the role as student, they ended up internalizing learning on a personal level that challenged them beyond the classroom. An external educational suggestion turned into an internal personal journey of change.

Like the last two readers, Male's novel was recommended as part of the readings his professor suggested as part of a university course he was taking. Unlike Cin and Val, he chose his life-changing book *Ishmael* (Quinn, 1995) from a long list of books provided by his professor: "He provided us a reading list and it was up to us to decide which one we wanted to approach." Male may never have come across *Ishmael* had it not been for his schooling, and yet, there was a personal component that played a part in his selection. On the back cover were words that struck a chord: "You will view your life as being before reading this book and after reading it."

As an example of the third category, deliberately seeking assistance, CK chose her book very differently from the rest. She described herself as searching: "I thought of helping myself and I turned to books. I knew that if I found what I needed in a book, I could change myself and become happier and have a more joyful life." As previously described, *The Shack* (Young, 2008) was recommended to her by what CK termed "an angel" when she could not find the particular book she was looking for. She was seeking assistance via reading material in order to understand her state of sadness.

Despite the three different types of introductions to transformative fiction, the similarity of experience comes back to the content of the story and the relationship the

114

reader formed with the work. Guidance from a trusted source, however, did enhance the likelihood of actually reading the book.

Theme four: The reading experience

In exploring each reader's journey through Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional inquiry space (i.e., temporality, sociality, and place), I noted that no two physical reading experiences were the same for this group in terms of time, sociality, or place. Ben alluded to being at home between writing assignments when he read *Bend Sinister* (Nabokov, 1947/1990). He focussed more on describing his timeline than location. He was able to adjust his timeline to enable full understanding of what he was reading:

> I think I read it in three gulps, but I can't remember the sequence. In truth, somewhere in the middle of the book, I got very confused by it. That's characteristic of Nabokov because he's tough to stay with. I won't try to describe why I think that is. At any rate, I probably put the book down for a couple of days until I puzzled out what was going on, but I don't remember any of that very clearly—just an impression.

Stone was traveling through Italy when he read *Cutting for Stone* (Verghese, 2010). He and his wife read the book separately, may have briefly discussed it, and then sent their opinions back to their book club in the U.S. electronically. "I was particularly sensitized to the plight of minorities because there were a lot of Africans fleeing into Italy." While he likely would have paid attention to the immigrant situation in Italy, "[Verghese's] book maybe helped me explain and encouraged me, if you will, to put it into terms of stories rather than just facts and statistics" in his own writing. Stone read and related the content to the situation in the world where he was at, making it all the more valuable.

Truly shared that she read her book at home in bed. It took about a week of nightly reading to reach what for her was the climactic moment of Ray putting flowers on the baby's grave. At that point, she felt she needed to digest what happened and did not approach the book for about two weeks: "I went back and finished the rest of the book; though to me, when he put the flowers on the baby's grave—that was the end for me. I didn't feel like I needed to finish the book." Truly rushed her reading, appearing engrossed in learning what she needed, and then gave herself the space to internalize and reflect. Truly finished the book to see the experience through to the end, but was also motivated to cross another Oprah book off her list.

Male was attending university as he read *Ishmael* (Quinn, 1995). He was being encouraged by a psychologist at the time to become aware of his feelings and thoughts, so he often made notes in the margins when he came across ideas that resonated with him. He associated writing notes with either reading the book while on campus or while he was in his basement suite. Male's experience related to both his work at school and his sessions with his psychologist. He read in snippets as time allowed, reflecting with notes as he went.

For Cin, the reading of *Medicine* (Xun, 1972) was part of the demanding schedule she kept in balancing school and her work as a translator. Immediately after work, she caught the first of two buses to a remote section of the city to attend university classes one hour later. Following class, she had a 45-minute ride to the family home, a 400 square foot apartment shared among six adults. After supper, she would retreat to her bunk bed, keeping her light low to avoid disturbing her sleeping family roommates as she read late into the night. Her weekends were spent catching up on homework assignments.

Flexibility allowed her to read whenever she had time and in the limited space to which she had access.

Perhaps one could argue that Del's love of travel and adventure really started when she would make a special trip with her mom to the little two-room house near their farm that held mystical treasures called books. In her description, I can feel the anticipation and excitement that drew her to reading:

> I picture myself with that book, and I know I loved it. There [was] a little kind of seat—the windowsill—as wide as the bookcase. They were padded with a plasticky kind of upholstery. I would sit there between the bookcases and read it.

Henry was bullied at school. He attributed it to being tongue-tied and perhaps a bit autistic: "My impression of myself was as part of the wall paper." As a result, Henry sought out his book to stave off boredom: "There were never enough books to read (that I wanted to read), there was never enough music, and I always seemed to be puzzled about what was up with other people." Henry needed an immediate, solitary activity to help him exist in his childhood. Books were that opportunity.

Val was also taking part in a solitary and accessible activity in reading *The Mountain and the Valley* (Buckler, 1970/2010). She was introduced to it as part of a university summer course she was taking. Having returned to the family farm for the summer, Val enrolled in a professor-led course that had been videotaped the previous year. Instead of discussing the book directly, Val watched her screen classmates ask questions of the professor:

> I never thought it made a huge difference actually. When I remember that book, I don't remember it as that's the book I didn't talk about with anyone. It's not like that at all. Probably because I felt I got so much out of the prof's lecture and because I overheard a discussion that was on the DVD in that class. I still feel like I have gotten some discussion even though I wasn't physically participating in it

myself. No, I don't feel like it's less rich in [any] way. Like I said, most often it enhances to a have a discussion, other times, I don't know, it's like I need to have a book to myself or something like that too.

CK read her book, *The Shack* (Young, 2008) while in bed:

I was in my pajamas in my bed in the most comfortable place I could possibly be to allow myself to feel the feelings of the book. There was no way that I could take this book to a coffee shop and read it because of the emotions that it brought out in me. I had to read it in a place that was safe for me to express myself however I needed to express it. Most of the time, it was when my kids were either at school or in bed at night because I didn't want them to see me experience the pain of going through this process.

Reading in bed helped CK remain safe throughout her transformative experience.

That each reader was able to access what they chose to read, where they were, and when they could, with the comfort and security needed, appears to have been important in the background of the catalytic experience. Concentrating on the three-dimensional space of the experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) helped me focus on the background events supporting the catalytic event: specifically, the relationship with the author, the influences in book choice, and the reading of the book—motivation and emotion. The three dimensions also led to a robust exploration of the main event—reading their chosen work of fiction.

In this next portion of the results, I delve into themes that arose from what was read through the lens of temporality, sociality, and place. The first is that the changes experienced by the participants occurred over differing timelines, which, in turn, influenced the magnitude of the experience at any moment in time.

Theme five: Temporality and the change experienced

One of my supporting research questions centred on the types of change that the literature described as gradual or epochal. Careful attention to time and magnitude during

the interviews provided further detail regarding the type of change experienced. After careful consideration of each participant's tale, it became clear that the type of change experienced could fall into one of four categories, which I have labelled formative, incremental, influential, and epochal.

Formative change. The first type of change, formative, was illustrated in the stories shared by Henry and Del about what were essentially childhood experiences that helped form who they would become. When they were children, 16 and 11 respectively, they enjoyed reading adventure stories that, in these cases, informed their development from youth to maturity. Their personal thoughts and ideas were forever influenced by fictional characters introduced to them as children. For Henry, his personal standard became to make decisions and take action, unlike the character of Sir Henry. Del, although shy and perhaps misjudged incapable by society, strove to travel and explore mimicking the central character in *Paddle to the Sea* (Holling, 1980). She claimed that "the events in the journey were synchronicities that intrigued me and made me want to travel." The experiences recounted by both Del and Henry were of a lifetime of choices and decisions they linked back to their formative childhood reading.

Henry claimed of his book about the hapless knight, "Sir Henry was the first step on a rewarding journey. It's the quality of the journey that matters. The work of art is the life." Del recently shared her experience as a short story that will soon be published, but in general, neither deliberately shared their experience with another person until our conversations. Though both credited their reading experiences as having changed their lives, in the next breath, they minimized the experience.

Incremental change. The next category of change described by readers Val and Cin was that which I categorize as incremental change. In this category, a transformation over a period of time beyond childhood was revealed by readers. It was a change introduced during adulthood (between the ages of 20 and 30) that has persisted and become the basis of a new direction in thinking and approach to living in general. An example is Cin's reflection on the parable *Medicine* (Xun, 1972) as impetus for her pursuit of further education as a means of improving skills in critical thinking. Regarding her development, she stated, "Once you were introduced to a way of critical thinking, there is no way back. You don't see things as straightforward and as simple as before." The change experienced was pervasive to her life, and Cin has continued to seek opportunities via further studies to live up to the words of Lu Xun.

For Val, *The Mountain and the Valley* (Buckler, 1970/2010) was "a good book that really shaped my thinking. [It] is the impetus in my life to change and try new things if I don't like the direction some things are going." Val did hesitate to suggest the change was encompassing, rather stating, "It has influenced my thoughts, not so much led to this radical transformation." For both readers, the new message they received was gradually incorporated into their lives, altering how future decisions were made and reflected upon. Their experience was very personal and in general not shared with others until they spoke of it with me.

Influential change. Changes identified by Ben and Stone were also gradually realized, but appeared to add substance to or modify ideas already a part of their personal perspectives as mature adults (51 and 71 respectively). For this reason, I termed their identified change as influential. *Cutting for Stone* (Verghese, 2010) further influenced

Stone to employ context as a part of educating others via his own writing and his

mentoring of young adults: "Context makes you understand and appreciate a story. It

makes a story memorable and then I learned to appreciate what it is to be a doctor, what it

is to be a minority, what it is to be a surgeon." Similarly, Ben had previous experience in

understanding tyranny and totalitarianism, but of *Bend Sinister* (Nabokov, 1947/1990), he

said,

> This is the novel that gave me the deepest understanding of living in a totalitarian
> world. Let me tell you, you don't really have that understanding because to know
> that human societies are capable of sinking to that state is horrifying. It comes to
> me often when our politics turn[s] nasty that we are not immune. Then I think of
> the novel, and I don't want to be there.

While the concept of totalitarianism was not new, his experience and truth of that

state was strengthened such that Ben has become more vocal regarding his personal take

on its possibility in today's society. Both Ben and Stone have drawn on what they

consider well-written examples to fortify their personal frameworks, and as a result, these

books continue to influence the ways in which they share their knowledge and experience

with others. Ben and Stone saw that their reading has added to their roles as mentors, but

they minimized the effect of the change.

Epochal change. The fourth type of change evident in this study is of a sudden,

all-encompassing transformation often described as epochal. In this instance of change,

the readers described an unexpected understanding of a situation. As it is similar to the

original type of change described by Mezirow (2000), his title has been retained. These

epochal experiences occurred between 18 and 44 years of age following intensely

emotional, somewhat negative experiences. All three were pivotal personal experiences

that have been selectively shared with other people in particular situations.

A "light went off" for Truly about her relationship with her parents and family as she learned the twins' story in *I Know This Much is True* (Lamb, 1998): "I don't know why, I just came to this totally new realization about people and relationships and especially about relationships with parents and how things aren't quite so black and white." Her understanding enabled her to release childhood anger at her parents' mistakes in her life and move forward more positively. She indirectly shares her very personal experience by encouraging young people she comes in contact with to seek the other side of the story whenever possible. It is through sharing that she has supported the change.

CK's intense experience reading *The Shack* (Young, 2008) followed her mother's death from cancer and CK's fall into a deep, paralyzing depression.

> I needed something just for me back in my life—this book. That as painful as the experience was that he went through, it was like [the central character] was able to see my needs and to have things explained to him. Through those explanations and this work, I was able to change my life and become more. I was able to see the hope. I was able to see a light. I was able to appreciate my family again and to appreciate little things in life. This story is so real—it felt like it was real. I don't even know how to explain that but it was amazing.

CK was able to conquer her depression and re-establish more healthy and positive relationships with her family and friends. She recommended and discussed the book with her brother who has also been positively affected as a result. Sharing with her brother has helped sustain her change efforts.

Male too experienced an epochal change. His depression and what he termed a general malaise led him to a critical moment of questioning his very existence:

> It started off with me saying there's something wrong with me. I am insecure. I am fearful, but when I read the book, the main character Paul had the same feeling that I did. When he, through the conversation with the gorilla, Ishmael came to realize that his feeling was this niggling inside that said there is something just not quite right here. When he came to realize that it was because

he felt that the cultural story that he had been told had put blinders on him, he just knew that there was something on the other side of the blinders that he just couldn't put his finger on. Paul was also feeling [my] malaise. Once he came to realize the story that had led him to think the way he did and now he could think about it differently, he had a greater sense of self-awareness, but also a sense of, "Okay, I know where I am now because I know how I got here. Because I know how I got here, I can take more control as to where I want to go from here. I am no longer in a sense led by the nose or buffeted by the winds of my cultural story. I am aware of it. Now when I make decisions and make choices I am doing it in awareness." I guess that is what kind of turned the page for me, becoming aware of why I think the way that I do, and this is where that niggling inside my gut has been bothering me because I just thought something wasn't right—just like Paul. Now I've come to a better sense of it. It's not exactly the same, but it was the start.

The result was, in facing the ultimate choice of life or death, Male decided to live: "It was almost like a light switch that said, 'Okay, I'm going to give up all my preconceived expectations of what I'm supposed to be and I am going to decide what I want to be, what I can be.'" Male was able to move out of his malaise by "re-perceiving my interpretation of the world around me." It is a skill that he tries to pass on to his students by encouraging them to question the truth of their cultural stories; this action helps him maintain the change he has undertaken.

Theme six: Sphere of influence

As part of the three-dimensional lens suggested in Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) narrative approach, it is important to also consider the relationships in the lives of the participants. Specifically, I noted that participants chose to use their change experiences in various relationships in their lives. I link these findings to provide an understanding of the means by which the change has been sustained, but details are also revealed regarding the emotive, personal nature of the event. In some instances, the change that was experienced by the participants remained solely with the reader. Such

was the case for Val. She used the example of the character in her narrative as impetus to take on new challenges in her life. She did not share this experience previous to discussing it with me, and thus, the sphere of influence was limited to her personal reflection as is noted in Figure 1. That is not to say that changes she made did not make a difference in the lives of others, but Val chose to internalize her change.
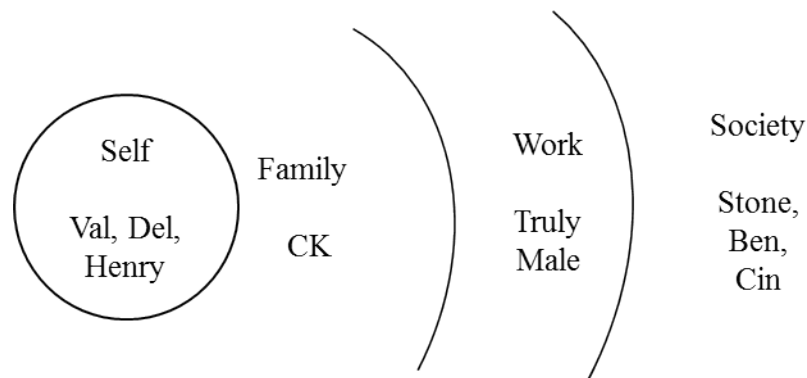
Figure 1. Sphere of influence

As children, Del and Henry also limited the experience to their personal situation. Until speaking with me, they did not discuss their experience with anyone, thus limiting its direct influence to the personal sphere. For Del, though, her experience has just recently expanded to a much greater audience through her writing. What influence that may have is to be determined.

CK shared her life-changing narrative directly with her brother, who used it as motivation to make changes in his life. Her sphere of influence moved past herself to be used successfully with her family. Truly and Male moved slightly further afield to share their experience in their work setting by indirectly teaching their new-found insights to others. Stone, Ben, and Cin have all taken their experiences toward larger, society-level audiences in hopes of affecting instances of social injustice. For Stone, he has chosen to

warn of the political possibility of totalitarianism. Ben, writing with his wife, has broached the subjects of minority immigration, health care, and prejudice. As part of her doctoral studies, Cin has been exposing the continued plight of minority immigrants whose professional certification is not recognized in Canada.

Theme seven: Fiction as a change agent

As part of the interview, I queried whether or not it made a difference to the change each participant experienced that the character was fictional. Responses were often quick and emphatic in defense of fiction. Though not as evidence-based or scientifically supported as reference to authors in my literature review (Mar & Oatley, 2008; Mar et al., 2006, 2010; Oatley, 1994, 1999, 2004; Oatley & Olson, 2010; Palencik, 2008), their comments reflected the general summation that fiction is a representation of someone's reality.

I think I would have believed it was possible. (Del)

But, I totally related to this guy. I was soaking up everything I possibly could—all I could see even if all of these things that he went through weren't real. (CK)

CK identified with the character because she was experiencing what Mar termed relived emotions—emotions she had been through before (Mar et al., 2011).

In the following comment, Val is also relating to sympathetic emotions or recognition of events in the work of fiction that she had experienced herself (Mar et al., 2011; Oatley, 2004):

I am just thinking that a psychologist analyzes people as a job, but reading is open to anyone in any profession, and you encounter characters in stories a much wider variety of people then you sometimes would in real life. Stories can be completely transferred over into real life because often the authors are describing people that are based on a real characters and life. Maybe not. That's probably why we love story so much because there are elements of that you really could relate to or don't want to.

For Male, though fictional, the central figure, the gorilla, was a composite of

human thoughts, experiences, and emotions that evoked combinations of sympathetic,

empathetic, and identified emotions (Mar et al., 2011; Oatley, 2004). Not all Male's

emotions while reading his chosen book arose from recognizing situations and events, but

in this case more from imagining he was the central character (i.e., identification

emotions) or in this case what he represents (i.e., empathy).

> He is [fictional], but wouldn't all characters be based on some degree of truth? The authors intend this. Often, you'll find with any character in any novel, whether it's fiction and fiction in particular, you're finding the author trying to expose to other people, certain trains of thought, and certain ideas. Obviously, Quinn is using Ishmael as his foil to get some thoughts out to the readership, and by choosing a gorilla—that was the genius part. He chose a gorilla to be his character because it sort of jars your sense of well, wait a minute, if it was just another person talking would I have perceived it differently? (Male)

> Truly, in her claim that fiction was a huge impact to the changes in her life,

related directly to the central character. Her emotion was what Mar et al. (2011) referred

to as lived emotions.

> All fiction is somewhat based in reality, because it is meant to be written as a realistic book. Somebody has had this experience and maybe it wasn't specifically the author who had this eye-opening experience about his relationship with his stepfather that he perceived to be abusive. Maybe that's not his specific story, but that's somebody's story. That's a lot of people's story and to a certain extent that's my story. (Truly)

This was similar to Henry's experience, who stated,

> Actually, I know that I am reading fiction, or I know that I am reading nonfiction, but I relate to the characters in the same way. If it is a good book, then the character comes to life for me. He might as well exist. That makes it interesting. (Henry)

> Cin confessed to not comprehending the potential for fiction to stimulate critical

thinking. Her experience can be likened to remembered narrative emotions. In reading the

story *Medicine* (Xun, 1972), Cin more effectively related to the goals of Lu Xun, which

gave her new contexts and breadth of emotion to experience (Mar et al., 2011).

> In the past, fiction is to listen to stories and that is it and how you feel about the story. I didn't even know that fiction can examine me on critical thinking which reflect the society at that time. I read it as a story something interesting—just like watching a movie after the movie is done, one hour or two hours it is gone. I have forgotten everything. (Cin)

> Stone's analysis of fiction as a possible catalyst for transformative change

concentrated on the argument that fiction enables the reader to concentrate on the core

ideas, emotions, and acts without distractions of real life (Mar & Oatley, 2008).

> We are much more forgiving with a fictional person. With a real person, you're going to find something in that person—he cheated on his wife, like Jack Kennedy. Fictional heroes can hold up much better because real people are just too real. They are imperfect, and there's always going to be something negative that you are going to find, whereas you can't find anything negative about Atticus because he's not a real person. The same thing with Dr. Stone—he's not a real person. . . . We just love tearing down heroes, and with real people, you can do that. With an Atticus Finch or Dr. Stone, it's impossible to find dirt about them because it doesn't exist. (Stone)

> In this final support for fiction as a catalyst, Ben passionately argued the art of

Nabokov (1947/1990) in helping the reader see his or her own life.

> My wife and I are in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, I think it was. There's a bunch of Rembrandt's self-portraits, and I'm taking my time walking by slowly. There is one that grabs me, and I stand there probably half an hour. It's just this guy looking out at, you think a mirror to paint himself, but after a while, I realized that he was looking at me, and he was painting me. That was me on the canvas, but it was also everybody—everybody. That's supreme art to give you that moment. Nabokov does that in all his novels. You see yourself. You see your own life. You see everybody's life. (Ben)

Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications

Having had such robust and intriguing conversations with people all walking different paths, it was a delight to find common threads and ideas that not only helped further our understanding of self-directed, transformative learning, but to witness live examples of Lindeman's (1989) impassioned description of adult learners on a quest for life's meaning. For those I interviewed, the intricacies of what they have accomplished in their lives, and how, were simply part of their inherent journey. This made the focus of this research all that more important to understand. In that understanding, perhaps we can also encourage others to engage in this type of influential learning experience.

In this chapter, I interweave the themes identified in Chapter four and confirm or contradict information provided in the literature review. However, I also present links to additional literature that support new ideas revealed from analysis of the interviews in this study. Organized around the temporal experience of reading a book of fiction, rather than strictly by theme, I analyze and synthesize the participants' change experiences more deeply. I begin this analysis before the book was chosen by the participant, looking at the readers' love of fiction and how they read fiction, and then discuss where they chose to read their selection. Next is the type of fiction chosen, a brief re-visiting of the type of informal learning experienced as defined by Schugurensky (2000), which provided evidence of a change taking place and the role passage of time played in the experience. Demographic trends are referred to throughout where they link, in my thoughts, to the specific portion of the participant's experience discussed.

However, as questions arose from the direction and content of the findings of my research, I was led to works beyond the initial literature search into new areas of

consideration regarding the changes experienced. These areas included adult development, complex catalysts, the roles of emotion and motivation in the transformative event, our storied pasts, neuroplasticity, and how each reader sustained the change made in his or her life. In the final portion of this thesis, I look at change via the lens of seeking wisdom and justice through wonder and inspiration, linking this work to some of the current trends and future directions that could assist in these areas of research. I close with a brief reflection on my personal journey before moving into the final chapter, which contains my conclusions and thoughts for further study.

Underlying Support for Change

> **Love of fiction**. Evident in the stories told was the importance and love of reading by those interviewed, which I presented as my first theme: Commitment to Reading. Alone, love of the activity enhances the likelihood of fiction fostering learning. Not only was it an enjoyable activity for each reader, all of the interviewees actively reflected back on what they read. This suggests a key element of transformative learning, critical reflection, is ingrained as part of their reading experience. While enjoyment might be the first or primary consideration when choosing a work of fiction, these readers, no matter what they read, thought about the meaning of that fiction. With such thought and concentration given to the reading experience, changing frameworks to include new ideas is more likely to occur. Building on this idea, careful choice of fiction for those who love reading it may potentiate transformative learning.

> **Supportive environment**. The differences of when, how, and where reading took place seemed unimportant at first, but the very flexibility and accessibility of the experience again spoke to the increased likelihood of the reader engaging in and relating

129

to the work of fiction, which was reflected in Theme Four: The Reading Experience. As mentioned in the literature review, Cranton's (2006) writings on the promotion of transformative learning advanced a supportive emotional environment. Consider that those interviewed, in some instances, enhanced their feeling of safety as they read by carefully choosing the environment in which they read. Recall that CK made sure she was in her bed, sequestered from her children because she knew what she was reading would affect her emotionally: "I had to read it in a place that was safe for me to express myself however I needed to express it." Truly also read her book, one emotionally charged for her, in the comfort and safety of her room. Both readers chose to protect themselves physically in the experience of reading—further enhancing the discourse experienced and movement into the non-rational side of transformative learning.

For Oatley et al. (2012), the non-rational side is further allowed when readers are free to set emotional reading aside in the face of discomfort. Readers thus self-direct not only the speed, but also the intensity of their learning. Setting aside reading was part of Ben's experience when he needed time to puzzle over the difficult material of *Bend Sinister* (Nabokov, 1990). In instances of seeking either safety or distance, the reader dictated the rate of learning, which resulted in a very personalized discourse.

Looking further, fiction as a representation of human thoughts, feelings, motivations, actions, and solutions unconditionally accepts its reader, unlike real life humanity. If one of the primal needs of humanity is to belong (Mezirow, 2000), fiction includes its reader without fear of failure, poor appraisal, or rejection. In the depths of fiction, the reader can seek out opposing views and evaluate them in the safety of that non-judgemental experience. It becomes a means of practicing collaborative thinking

rather than the societal norm of adversarial thinking, again important to critical thinking

and transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000). Also key to effective discourse, according

to Mezirow, are:

1. More accurate and complete information
2. Freedom from coercion and distorting self-deception
3. Openness to alternative points of view: empathy and concern about how others think and feel
4. The ability to weigh evidence and assess arguments objectively
5. Greater awareness of the context of ideas and, more critically , reflectiveness of assumptions, including their own
6. An equal opportunity to participate in the various roles of discourse
7. Willingness to seek understanding and agreement and to accept a resulting best judgment as a test of validity until new perspectives, evidence or arguments are encountered and validated through discourse as yielding a better judgement. (pp. 13-14)

Admittedly, the ideal environment for discourse as described above is rarely

found in any setting (e.g., fiction may not always be historically accurate), but may be

well approximated within fictional reading experiences. As one of those interviewed

observed, because it doesn't have to be analyzed for factual truth, fiction may be better

received than fact (Ben). Nelson (2009) noted it is the movement beyond text, fact, and

prose that moves the learner into non-rational ways of knowing, which supports

transformative learning via fiction. The strength of fiction lies in the reader's conviction

of and trust in the message conveyed by the author, free from external influences.

Readers can take the time and space to consider alternate views and weigh what is read at

their own pace, free from pressure often found part of other communicatory exchanges.

What story should they read? Though a factor, it is the reader's interaction with

the subject of the story in the supportive environment rather than the type of fiction (e.g.,

romance, mystery, etc.) or the identification of the author that is important to the change

experience. There was not one clear type of fiction identified as life-changing by those interviewed, as discussed in Theme Two: Knowledge of the Author. That the work was fiction seemed to be the common denominator. Each reader described their choice as being well written, but determining the validity of their claims was not part of this thesis, nor was it considered a factor in commonality.

Content versus genre driving the choice of fiction was also supported in the variety ways each reader came to meet the book that changed his or her life, as discussed in Theme Three. Some of the readers interviewed were pursuing reading for enjoyment and either self-selected a book they thought would provide pleasure or were provided an opportunity to read a book recommended by a trusted peer as part of a book club or by a fellow shopper with a keen interest

Further analyzing these choices, the two childhood books chosen by Henry and Del were based on preference of content—something of interest captured the two readers as they skimmed titles or book covers. The adults in their book clubs, at a very different learning point in their lives, were likely pre-disposed to the possibility of discourse with the author (Mezirow, 2000) though not purposefully seeking it. Stone's book club had past experience with Verghese's (2010) work as did Ben with Nabokov's (1947/1990). Both anticipated a good reading experience based on recommendation and past experience, but it was the content of the story that became central to their change experience.

The same predisposition could be anticipated in those reading fiction as assigned during educational endeavours. By the very nature of participating in a class, the students were more apt to anticipate the possibility of learning than if simply reading for pleasure.

132

The trust in a combination of the professor's credentials or perhaps his or her affability may have positively influenced the reader to seek and eventually read a recommended title. Male suggested that he knew any book suggested by his professor would be good. Val may not have chosen *The Mountain and the Valley* (Buckler, 1970/2010) had it not been part of the class required reading. For both, other books on the course reading list were not cited as changing their lives. Nor was the course they were taking really part of the discussion of their change experience. The nature of the educational experience seemed incidental as did the genre of book chosen. Again, the personal interpretation of the content of the book was key.

Those seeking reading to assist them in undertaking change were purposefully selecting a book that then primed them for transformative learning. In seeking, there may have been general topics of consideration, but again, no one common genre of fiction was sought. For example, CK sought a book she felt would help her re-establish her lost faith. It was a particular idea central to her search. When she could not find the particular book she had been seeking, another work of fiction she felt would move her toward her goal was readily substituted. No specific fictional formulae could be said to affect her personal transformation. What was more important was her personal reaction to content.

Additional support for content importance was the connection of the majority of readers to a central character within the work of fiction. Readers found something in the writer's portrayal of the main character that spoke to them. From the survey, the majority of readers defined part of that connection as respect or "a feeling of deep admiration for someone or something elicited by their abilities, qualities, or achievements" ("Respect," 2013, para. 1). From the descriptions shared by each reader, protagonists were as varied

133

and multi-faceted as the stories read. Content, again, remained more important than type of fiction in which the main character dwelt.

Rather, what seemed important to their choice of story, in addition to being able to respect the central character, was the ability to personally connect with the story being told. Returning to CK's quest for a book, she was seeking a story based on faith that dealt with answers to life-long questions. Her conversation with "her angel" enabled her to make a connection with her chosen book. For Ben, it was both his interest in Nabokov (1947/1990) the author and the subject of totalitarianism that drew him into *Bend Sinister*. Henry was looking for a book dealing with science fiction when he happened upon *Sir Henry* (Nathan, 1956). Male found the jacket description on *Ishmael* (Quinn, 1995) interesting when he chose it from his professor's recommended list.

While initial interest connected the reader with the work of fiction, learning from that work moved beyond simply initial curiosity and the potential for positive discourse. Those who told their stories for this research made a move toward incorporating what they read into meaningful self-directed and informal learning.

Types of informal learning. The three types of informal learning as discussed by Schugurensky (2000) earlier in this thesis were evident in the stories of those interviewed. The informal learning experienced in childhood by Henry and Del was not intended nor realized at the time, or what Schugurensky referred to as socialization. However, they began forming a system of personal values, beliefs, and attitudes that were foundational into their adult lives. As noted by Schugurensky, until the time of their discussions with me and with deliberate reflection, they were not personally aware of what they had learned.

CK's experience exemplified Schugurensky's (2000) self-directed learning, in that she intentionally sought and was aware of what she was learning. She was struggling to move past the deep sadness she was feeling as a result of the death of her mother. Through the experiences of the central character in *The Shack* (Young, 2008), she learned change her own life by making changes similar to those made by the central character in his experiences. She deliberately chose *The Shack* for that reason.

The rest of those interviewed learned incidentally; they were aware of learning, though it was not intended as the goal of reading. For example, Stone and Ben read recommendations from their respective book clubs simply to indulge in reading good stories. That Stone learnt about racism from the perspective of a struggling doctor and Ben the horrors of totalitarianism was a fortunate circumstance. Both incorporated that learning into their lives.

Schugurensky (2000) noted that these types of informal learning can be additive or transformative, both of which were evident in responses to the in-depth interviews. The learning of Henry and Del, Stone and Ben, while differing in the type of informal learning, demonstrated Schugurensky's additive learning, in that the reading strengthened their knowledge, skills, and values. Reading her book of choice, CK had her challenging assumptions to radically change her prior knowledge and approaches. They all maintained that their reading experiences, categorized based on Schugurensky's work as informal learning, did contribute to changes in their lives. The question that I chose to explore next was how that change related to the work of Mezirow (2000).

Reading the Book DID Change Their Lives

While aspects of the 10 stages of perspective transformation presented by Mezirow (2000) were represented across the survey responses, inclusion of all 10 stages in each transformative learning event was not seen. This did not support Mezirow's (2012) statement that they "often follow some variation" of the 10 stages (p. 98). What was clear is that each of these people experienced a change unique to them as influenced by their personal situations and contexts (Cranton & Taylor, 2012) wrought by a similar catalyst—a work of fiction in this instance.

In completion of the survey, Ben and CK did not identify with the first of Mezirow's (2000) stages, disorienting dilemma: a stage he considered critical to a transformative experience. Research by Tisdell (2008a) proposed that catalysts may move beyond disorienting dilemmas associated with negative experiences such as pain to pleasant occurrences such as watching TV or videos. Such experiences may not be considered disorienting or dilemmas. This was echoed in Pasquariello's (2009) study of catalysts that focussed on the ability to reflect on the context and effect of a situation, thus not limiting one to a disorienting dilemma.

The concept of differing catalysts speaks to the uniqueness of each transformative experience to a particular person. However, some generalities within contexts and situations came to light in my thesis using Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional inquiry space (i.e., temporality, sociality, and place).

Temporality of the Change

In Theme Five of the results section, I grouped change experiences into four different categories that appear directly influenced by time. The time of life in which

each change took place was a factor, but so too was the time taken to change or time when a particular reference frame became important in a reader's life. These change experiences were similar to the temporality seen in Erikson's (1968) theory of adult development.

Formative. The first category of change experience I termed formative because the frame of reference transformation took place in childhood and appeared foundational to what became a general approach to life. It is interesting to note that the creation of the formative reference frame was seen from the reflective hindsight of a mature adult. Discussions of Del's and Henry's experiences would suggest that they were not fully aware of the direction their life had taken at the time, but came to the realization later in life and perhaps in participation as part of this research. Del did not seem to fully understand how her mental journey reading about the boy in the canoe affected choices she made over a lifetime. Henry did not, until into our interviews, really relate his life choices to wanting to avoid being like Sir Henry.

Incremental. The second change I labeled incremental, which coincided with the descriptor used by Mezirow (2000) because the change for these interviewees involved an insight into life experiences developed over time into a new direction in thinking and approach to living. One event in the not-too-distant past appeared to initiate a new frame of reference that, with self-reflection, informed a future decision and gradually became a fully integrated frame of reference. For me, it is separate from foundational change, the initial building block of a child, as it was integrated into the reader's developing frameworks as a young adult. Val and Cin were well into their educational experiences when struck by insights about the lives they were currently leading. Over time, Val used

137

her insight to choose to pursue her then dream to head to England, but it has continued to play an integral role in her approach to life. Cin has continued to contemplate the teachings of Lu Xun as she studies qualification exams as part of her doctorate.

Influential. The next series of changes I identified as influential, as they reflected a modification or refining of a mature adulthood frame of reference, which developed over the course of a lifetime. Neither Stone nor Ben undertook a complete revamping of a frame of reference, but felt that their reading experiences evoked new insight and understanding, context and totalitarianism respectively, the result of which they termed life changing. Part of their experience appeared to be further impetus in investing time in others by sharing their new understandings. Both took on a mentoring type of relationship that has positively influenced the behaviour of others (see Theme Six).

Epochal. For the final type of change I categorized, I used Mezirow's (2012) original term of epochal. Truly, CK, and Male had with new ideas and ways of perceiving life that occurred in a sudden or dramatic fashion. This change took place, I noted, in middle adulthood as part of a restructuring of frames of reference stemming from intense emotional situations. Each turned quickly to what appeared to be new approaches to life that replaced old habits or dysfunctional frames of reference. Truly changed how she thought about and approached her relationship with her parents. CK emerged from her depression, and Male chose not to commit suicide.

Time is a factor in the period over which the frames of reference were changing as noted in each of the four types of change, but time was also significant in relation to the phases of development of the person involved, which were found to span across a person's development as suggested by psycho-developmental view of transformation

described earlier in this thesis (Baumgartner, 2001). Closer analysis linked that view to mirror the stages of adult development theory.

Temporality and adult development. Erikson's (1968) stages of adult development appear to correlate to the type of transformative change experienced in my four temporal change categories: formative, incremental, influential, and epochal. Erikson's work focused on the psychosocial development involving both inner instinctive dispositions and the external cultural and social demands faced by a person. "Each stage revolves around a key psychosocial task or dilemma that requires a choice between opposites, one positive and one negative and individuals advance to the next stage only when they resolve the task positively" (Clark, Merriam, & Sandlin, 2011, p. 20), though Erikson allowed for re-visiting of previous stages to solve problems arising anew from changes in personal situations.

Henry and Del were adolescents when living their transformative experiences, having self-identified on the survey as being between the ages of 12 to 18. According to Erikson (1968), adolescents move past people doing to them and begin doing for themselves as they begin to establish and find their identities. Both experiences by Del and Henry suggested a beginning of a frame of reference that guided a portion of their development into adulthood (i.e., formative). Their choices were independent from those of parents and siblings and marked the first forays into a personal identity. Their sphere of influence at this stage of their life concentrated upon themselves.

However, their stories were shared as part of the late adult stage (age 55 or 65 to death), which Erikson (1968) characterized as a stage involving reflection on their life. While Del seemed to do so from a feeling of contentment and fulfillment (i.e., integrity),

139

Henry seemed to focus more on what he did not accomplish (i.e., despair). Their perspectives coincided with the opposites as described by Erikson. Development across a lifespan was displayed in their two interviews.

As young adults (age 18 to 35), Cin and Val were part of what Erikson (1968) identified as the midst of developing intimacy and solidarity versus isolation. Cin and Val's current states spoke to the paired opposites that were characteristic of the adult development in Erikson's model. Val, using her book's central character as a foil, worked to understand where she would fit in terms of her goals and relationships. She is well set to achieve intimacy, love, and significant positive relationships. Unfortunately, Cin's journey has led her into a type of isolation that sees her struggling to find meaning in her life and relationships. It is possible that her isolation is delaying Cin's movement to the next phase of her adult development.

Career, work, and family were all notable factors in the changes described by Male and CK as part of their middle-aged experiences (age 35 to 55 or 65). Seeking purposeful and meaningful work was central to Male choosing his new life story and breaking from the malaise in which he was trapped. His successful solving of this crisis in mid-life, or what Erickson (1968) had term "generativity" (p. 138), was seen in his successful career choice and loving family.

CK was struggling with the meaning of her life in light of her mother's passing. She seemed to struggle at points with addictive behaviours, suggesting possible stagnation, but with time and an inward focus, she has turned her situation around instead of resigning herself to a less than positive fate.

Ben and Stone, like Del and Henry, are currently in Erikson's (1968) late adult stage. Also reflective regarding the journey of their lives, both Ben and Stone appeared to see themselves as having contributed valuably to society. Their experiences have continued to add to their wisdom—something they seek to share with others. Their sphere of influence reflected this movement toward externalized concern for those around them at the society level. In the next section, I draw further on similarities to Erikson's (1968) theory of adult development, but from the perspective of what leads to change.

Catalyzing Change

Erikson's (1968) theory noted a choice between positive and negative—a dilemma ultimately moving an individual in a direction of growth if successfully, positively navigated. However, in my research, the initiating event or catalytic realization was not limited to a negative or positive choice. The term dilemma refers to "a situation in which a difficult choice has to be made between two or more alternatives, especially ones that are equally undesirable" ("Dilemma," 2013, para. 1). This definition does not necessarily apply to the experiences shared in this research, as distinct choices were not always made. I suggest the term event, which has been defined as "a thing that happens or takes place, especially one of importance" ("Event," 2013, para. 1), replace the term dilemma to enable inclusion of positive catalysts as well as change situations that do not revolve around the choice between positive and negative.

I return to the definition of the disorienting dilemma provided by Mälkki (2012): "a real-life crisis or more moderate growing of dissatisfaction with one's old meaning structure" (p. 208). It does not encompass Tisdell's (2008a) catalyst arising from pleasant experiences as previously described in this thesis. Hill and Johnston (2003) asserted that

141

careful attention to terminology choices as educators of adults, while simplistic, are in themselves transformation as well. Cranton and Taylor (2012) claimed that lack of clarity in terminology used with regard to transformative learning is problematic in creating a unified theory. To move from negativity toward inclusion of all moments of questioning (i.e., the spectrum from negative to positive), I suggest that the following three terms building on the term orient: "guide (someone) in a specified direction" ("Orient," 2013, para. 1) be considered: orienting event, reorienting event, disorienting event.

Orienting event. Orienting events would refer to a new idea that begins a frame of reference, such as in the case of Del's interest in travel via *Paddle to the Sea* (Holling, 1980) or Val's new point of reference in respect to the type of person she would avoid being. These events, though significant, did not serve to alter a course so much as set one. This too ties to previously suggested terminology that the resulting change could be formative or integral in nature.

Reorienting event. With regard to reorienting, consider Ben's further understanding of tyranny and society's susceptibility to it. For Ben, it was a significant addition to his thoughts, but was more of an enhancing of ideas or an adjustment of the journey to find true north again—reorienting. Ben's experience supported Jarvis's (2012) thoughts on fiction affecting change as a reader begins to unravel taken-for-granted ideas and frameworks, realizing that there is no one truth or reality.

Disorienting event. Disorienting in my line of thinking fits those situations epochal in nature that do at first confuse a person, but eventually assist a person in fully changing course in a new direction. Male and CK both had life experiences that confused them or had them questioning the direction in which they should move in their lives.

Intense relation to the characters or situations in their chosen fiction had them working toward an overall positive change within their lives. Note that disorienting coupled with event allows for the catalyst to span the positive to negative spectrum.

Broadening the event considered catalytic then also embraces Pasquariello's (2009) idea that rather than a particular moment acting as a catalyst, it is self-awareness arising from reflection on the cognitive and affective elements of the contextually based experience that together direct the resulting change. An example of the cumulative-composite nature of the triggering event has been shown in part by further examining the thoughts and insights seven of the readers shared about the central character of their chosen book.

Complex catalyst. The connection of the interviewee with a character, central to their reading experience were identified in Table 4. As previously discussed in the analysis, each reader's choice was unique with regard to context; genre was not a factor in either choice or effectiveness of catalyst. It was the context of the story that helped develop a complex, life-like character with whom each reader related. It was affect for that character that enhanced catalytic qualities of the fiction.

Reviewing the choices made by readers, as shown in Table 3, a small sample of both the cognitive and the affective interface was revealed. For example, CK identified with her character affectively through respect, feeling better, familiarity, and showing courage, and her cognitive side was tapped when the character had her exploring her situation and in the end changing how she looked at things. While CK's relationship with her character reflected the most facets from the given list, the other readers readily

attributed both learning cognitively and emotionally to their central characters and the change they experienced.

Recall the reasons that books inspire shared by Nelson (2009). So much more than fact influenced the reader. Like those I interviewed, through the central character the readers connected and better understood relationships and events in their lives and the lives of those around them. I noted that so many of the words used to describe the books in the Oklahoma study (Strothmann & Van Fleet, 2009) were also emotive. The words in Table 5 are a re-presentation of the summary words used by my readers regarding their books illustrating the emotive quality supporting the affective nature of a transformative fictional catalyst.

Table 5

One-Word Summaries

Ben	Stone	Truly	Del	Henry	Val	CK
cruelty	inspirational	grounding	unveiling	classic	wonder	resignation

Influencing Change

Interested in further exploring the affective and cognitive components of the complex catalyst as proposed by Pasquariello (2009) and supported by the results of my research, I turned to Staats's (2012) work on the emotion-motivation repertoire. In this next section, I link emotion and frameworks by further exploring what E. W Taylor (2008) identified as the neurobiological perspectives of transformative learning. Changes of cognitive and emotional frameworks together are further explored from the point of view of physical changes in the brain.

Emotion-motivation repertoire. Staats (2012) stated that the human animal is evolutionarily wired toward recognition of the emotions of pleasure or displeasure at birth, but that humans are also gifted with the ability to learn emotions, which Staats contended arise via language—an "emotion-learning machine" (p. 186). This learning is often accomplished indirectly without physical contact due to association with emotionally positive or negative words already present in a person's vocabulary. Through life experiences, each person develops a repertoire of such responses unique to them, but centred on the idea of attraction to the positive and avoidance of the negative. Note the similarity here with Erikson's (1968) premise for adult development. The emotion-motivation repertoire, according to Staats, determined such facets of personality as attitudes, interests, values, preferences, and needs, which Erickson posited form the base of all human behaviour. Staats proposed that the large and intricate repertoires resulting from learning over years of life, direct an individual's behaviour in any given situation. Those repertoires are also the foundation for the significant individual differences in people we see over time. Learning repertoires are recorded in the brain causing changes in brain structure. Staats asserted that the mere observation of behaviour will never reveal the total complexity of the learning repertoires because some repertoires are never physically demonstrated. His example was that adults know words that they never express. In the discussion of Staats's repertoires and references, I noted a similarity to the frames of reference by Mezirow (2000).

Staats (2012) made the case that through association, emotion can be linked to words. He stated,

One can hear or read about places, things, events, and activities in great abundance—impossible to experience personally—and learn emotional responses to them. One can, through language, learn emotional responses to things that can never be directly experienced, like God, framers of the Constitution, foreign political leaders, sexual encounters, government and terrorists. (p. 188)

This again sets the stage for fiction—things that are not actually experienced—as a mechanism by which we learn and change. At the same time, I found that it spoke to orienting, re-orienting, and disorienting events based on the emotional repertoire being affected at any given time and resulting in changes within the brain of varying complexity and magnitude.

Fiction as a change agent. When the fictional nature of character was previously discussed, interviewees all concluded that it did not matter that the story was not technically real (see Theme Seven); it approximated what could happen or had happened in real life. In their quoted excerpts CK, Male, Henry, and Truly pointed out that they felt the fictionalized experiences were based in truth—in someone's reality. Their experiences spoke to work of Oatley (1999) and Mar and Oatley (2008) regarding the emotions generated by fiction and Staats's (2012) description of emotional repertoires. To the participant readers, there was no discernible difference between the characters in fiction or how they reacted to those characters than if they had been real people.

In reviewing the experiences shared with me, it is more than just the possibility of the story being real that moved the story tellers. It was the realness of story that enveloped the readers in an experience that created meaning for them, thus influencing change. Fiction allowed a closer interaction building on implicit thoughts, feelings, emotions, and actions of the central character. These ideas traced back to Llosa's (2010)

146

Nobel Lecture and narratology meriting further exploration of links between emotions, stories, and how as well as what we remember.

Hall (2007) suggested that factual information is characteristic of an explicit understanding of the world that is the product of logical analysis. By contrast, the implicit or narrative understanding of the world focuses on human goals, needs, and wants that are more involved in meaning and believing. This more narrative way of knowing moves beyond the words used (Hall, 2007). Haven (2007) concurred, stating that "story is *not* the information [or] the content. Story is a way of *structuring* information, a system of informational elements that most effectively creates essential context and relevance that engage receivers and enhance memory and the creation of meaning" (p. 15). By context, Haven referred to new information being added to or building onto our prior knowledge and experience. We relate it to patterns, images, and ideas we have seen before. However, important to how we undertake this process is that the information means something on a personal level—it has relevance to us. Context is what makes the information relevant and signals that it is something to remember (Haven, 2007).

Fiction is a multi-dimensional catalyst for change as discussed by Pasquariello (2009) and supported by Staats (2012). Even though not real, fiction is perceived as real. However, Haven's (2007) reference to story as a means of structuring meaning again moves fiction beyond mere catalyst to study of story as that which organizes our thoughts, ideas, and experiences into humanness that bears further exploration.

We are stories. Consider that oral stories have been told for more than 100,000 years (Baldwin, 2005; Haven, 2007; McAdams, 1993)—more than 94,000 years before humans began to read and write. Story replaced our ancestor's reliance on grooming as

147

the means of demonstrating clan bonds (Liepe-Levinsonn, 2008). Haven's (2007) research contended that story came before language—in fact that language was created to express stories. Story has "rewired the human brain to be predisposed before birth to think in, make sense in, and create meaning from, stories" (p. 24). There provided an undeniable link between story and language.

Haven's (2007) summary of research in brain development in children outlined the progression by which stories become the central means by which humans interpret the world around them. Babies at birth discriminate between different faces, voices, and emotions or what is key to recognizing different characters—like in stories. By one year of age, children understand goals and motives of characters. By 18 months the young understand desires and conflict as part of goal pursuit, both of which are central to story structure. As children's language abilities develop, it continues to positively influence the organization of their thoughts into stories. By age two, with the ability to tell they are in "trouble", a child has developed empathy that allows further understanding of characters. They are repeatedly told stories by their parents and those surrounding them, which in turn influences children to strive to create their own stories. It is estimated that parents create an average of 2.2 stories per hour of daily conversation with children aged two-and-a-half (Hall, 2007).

By kindergarten, children know the temporal sequencing of stories' cause and effect regarding "trouble" in stories and can search for hints about what is coming in a story (Haven, 2007). The predisposition toward story sets the stage, but the continued focus on story as an organizational and learning tool reinforces reliance on story. By the age of puberty, neural networks reflect this concentration on story. Our very humanness

148

can be considered the result of thinking and communicating via stories (Baldwin, 2005; Cozolino & Sprokay, 2006; Hall, 2007; Haven, 2007). Short (2012) supported this concept in stating,

> Literature illuminates what it means to be human and makes accessible the most fundamental experiences of life—love, hope, loneliness, despair, fear, and belonging. Literature is the imaginative shaping of experience and thought into the forms and structures of language. (p. 11)

Tying back to the work of Staats (2012), Short called for cumulative learning—the ability of humans to "build upon their learning . . . allow[ing] them to learn new repertoires that provide the basis for learning still newer repertoires and on and on in an accelerating acquisition" (p. 166) in a virtually unlimited manner. For this to occur, changes in the brain itself need to accommodate cumulative learning. The ever-expanding field of neuroscience using advanced technology to look at brain function provides insight and support for such theorizing.

Continuous learning. Cozolino and Sprokay (2006) emphasized the ability of the brain to continuously modify its chemistry and architecture or its neuroplasticity:

> The brain is a social organ innately designed to learn through shared experiences. Throughout the life span, we all need others who show interest in us, help us feel safe, and encourage our understanding of the world around us. Brains grow best in this context of interactive discovery and through the cocreation [*sic*] of stories that shape and support memories of what is being learned. (p. 11)

Neuroplasticity in the brain is present throughout human life, thus enabling continued restructuring of memory. That constant adaptation must be integrated somehow to prevent chaos. "[Story] provides a nexus of neural network integration among left and right; top and bottom; and sensory, somatic, motor, affective, and cognitive processes in all parts of the brain" (p. 16).

Integration, insisted Cozolino and Sprokay (2006), aids in creating memories. The multiple networks required to create a story enhance memory through the increased number of associated neural linkages, which Haven (2007) went on to say increased them being used. Cozolino and Sprokay and Haven spoke to the brain being like a library containing numerous stories, which, like a library, is continuously added to and deleted from, holding some ideas close and tight, while others are more easily changed or released.

Returning to the earlier discussion of orientation, re-orientation, and disorienting events, the number of neural networks involved in each event would determine the magnitude of change undertaken. For example, introduction of an idea, as in the case of Del's interest in travel and Aboriginal people, began a neural network or framework by laying a foundation upon which more and more networks or repertoires would eventually be fashioned. Eventually, such a framework could be strengthened into a frequently used reference as it did for Del. In contrast, re-orientation would see slight changes in the neural network that reinforce and strengthen existing ideas or build new aspects to the network as in Stone's further understanding of racism and the immigrant experience. The disorienting event would create a restructuring of established neural networks to reflect a complete rebuilding of ideas into new networks as exemplified by Male's creation of his new life's story.

In this model, it could be that each type of event, via various integrating of networks into stories, could still arrive at the same final thought. I liken it to different routes on a map leading to the same destination. When considering epochal or incremental change, the number of neural integrations could be identical. The time over

150

which the creation of the final predominant network was created, however, could be different: for example, shorter and more intense regarding an epochal change. The destination of both in terms of perception of a situation or influence on a decision would be the same.

I believe that theoretically, a network could, using this understanding of plasticity, be based solely on cognitive-based neural activity. However, as identified by Cozolino and Sprokay (2006), the integration of neural events of all types (i.e., somatic, sensory, affective, and cognitive) that aid in creation and storing of memory makes it more likely that complex integral experiences affect and could sustain change.

Sustaining influences. Sustaining change is explained based on current understanding of neuroplasticity by building on the idea that neural networks are integral in nature: that is, encompassing a multitude of neural interactions (i.e., somatic, sensory, affective and cognitive) that are continuously strengthened over time by utilization (Haven, 2007). Henry fought the passivity of Sir Henry over a lifetime. An innumerable number of thoughts, feelings, decisions, and events coloured his network, such that what began as a foundational thought has become a sustained change underlying Henry's very character. One might argue that so oft is the network used, it has almost become automatic for Henry, which may explain the difficulty he had in some ways to articulate exactly how he was influenced by his chosen work of fiction. When he shared each major event of his life: for example, how he moved to England, sought new experiences when he was unhappy in his personal life, and continually challenged himself in his career, there were echoes of resisting passivity—the core characteristic of the protagonist of his book. It was a connection he did not seem to realize. This may also explain his tendency

151

toward minimizing the book's influence—it was not epochal. Neuroplasticity allowed for that continuous change over time, but has also sustained and strengthened that change with continuous use.

For Male, the change was more epochal, with a significant number of changes coming in a short period of time. Had he not continued to integrate thoughts and ideas and emotions into this new network, change would not have been sustained. A memory of reading a good book with interesting ideas may have remained, but it was the consistent addition of details to the neural network or repertoire that strengthened the idea and increased its likelihood of use. Male spoke of the change he underwent and how he has sustained that change by adding more experiences to that neural network as he revisits *Ishmael* (Quinn, 1995), uses it with his students, discusses it indirectly with his children, and bases professional workshops on the main ideas discussed in the book.

Ben's experience with his book of choice was also indicative of strengthening neural networks. It was through this reading experience that Ben stated,

> Unless you have lived in such a state, it is very tough to feel how it permeates every part of life—how it turns people into liars, and it turns people inwards so that they no longer care about anyone or anything else. . . . This is the novel that gave me the deepest understanding of living in a totalitarian world.

For Ben, his book of choice provided much to add on several levels to an existing framework in creating a stronger, more integral network. He continued to add to that network by discussing his experiences with others, which sustained and even further strengthened his experience. Again, that reading his book of choice did not result in a tumultuous epochal change may have had Ben describing the change as minimal.

CK mentioned that involvement in my research prompted her to re-read *The Shack* (Young, 2008), which enabled her to:

> take even more from and even different things from it because of where I am emotionally and physically [now]. [I]t is helping me remember having read it the first time—all that I went through. The really nice part is that I'm not reliving those feelings because I was able to deal with them the first time. I read the book, and so now I can focus on other things.

Re-reading the book has reinforced the journey she made, the epochal changes she made to her neural networks, and has enabled her to integrate new thoughts and feelings into the network that will sustain the change. She did not minimize the effect of that change. CK assisted her brother in undertaking a similar journey, discussions of which further sustain them both.

Deciding to Change

Relying on neuroscience for an understanding of plasticity, I have contributed to understanding the underlying factors by which fiction can play a role in catalyzing and sustaining a transformative experience. I have suggested that temporality in the change process affects the overall impression of the change. However, I continue to struggle with the deciding moment of undertaking or tipping point—that thing that is just the additional amount of something necessary to lead to a big effect ("Tipping Point," 2006, para. 2), and I looked to additional literature to explore that challenge.

Taking up the challenge of transformative learning. By our very nature, we have the tendency to avoid new information, but rather choose to hold onto ideas that strengthen the current image we have constructed of ourselves and laid down in our neural networks (Pelowski & Akiba, 2011). Though our brain exhibits extraordinary plasticity for new ideas, we resist them. If we come across an image we do not like, we

"must work against [the] gradient of self-protection that would diminish or dismiss the

novel perception" (p. 88). In the interviews I completed, each person acted on a change in

perspective, a result of which was to overcome that internal resistance that would have

them stagnating in their existing state. Tying this idea back to plasticity and neural

networks, it would appear the more connections that need to be broken or redirected and

then re-strengthened, the more arduous the task. With this line of reasoning, epochal

change would require significant effort for the reader to overcome resistance and enter

the process leading toward transformative change.

However, this was not the case with the three readers I described as experiencing

epochal transformative learning. No matter how daunting the situation appeared from an

external viewpoint, resistance to the new idea was not part of the conversations with

those who undertook epochal transformative learning. CK associated her change with

self-awareness and willingness to look for a new direction:

> I think that there needs to be a certain level of self-awareness. You have to know
> that you want something different than what you have and that takes full
> searching and self-awareness. Not everyone has the ability to search their soul and
> be honest with themselves and look for something different.

Truly associated her epochal change with the ability to think positively and expect

positive outcomes:

> Do you know the book and/or movie *The Secret*? It is about the law of attraction,
> and whatever you put out into the universe is what you get back. At that time in
> my life, it was a big focus in my life, even though I wasn't necessarily sitting and
> thinking, "How am I going to solve this problem?" I had this problem with my
> parents, and we were conflicting and not getting along. So that was the energy I
> was putting out into the world. It doesn't surprise me that I happened to stumble
> across this book. When I say things just work out for me if I sit back—I feel like
> it all has to do with that. It is so hard to explain. To me it is not connected to
> religion or spirituality, but psychological belief. I know that if I think positively,
> then positive things will come. If I think negatively, negative things will come.

For Male, his epochal journey hinged on his ability to turn his curiosity into action:

> When you are in that kind of position where the existential questioning has come [and] you're standing in front of the mirror and you don't like what you see—you can't stand the skin that you live in and you say you've hit the wall, you either deal with it or you don't, and I dealt with it until it was okay. I am maybe still a marble on the infinite plane. . . . At least I'm going to roll my finger in the sand in front of this marble, and it's going to follow that path for now—the path I haven't drawn all the way. I had to make some decisions. I had to do and that was always something that I've struggled with—to get out of my head and do something. [I turned my curiosity] into action. . . . [T]he meaning of life is survival, and survival is doing. In order to survive, you have to be doing something, and doing is choices, and choices are best if they're informed and informed by understanding consequences, and to understand consequences if you understand patterns and then it's all joined together.

Perhaps it is not just the presence of something that sets the journey in motion; it is also the absence of fear that enables action. It was suggested by Kreber (2012) that fear is an underlying barrier to change:

> One of the most pervasive human weaknesses may well be prejudice towards that with which we are unfamiliar. . . . Underlying these attitudes is an unrecognized irrationality and fear of that which is unknown or different from what one is used to, combined with a lack of capacity and willingness to engage in critical thought and, by implication, having one's assumptions challenged. (p. 350)

The three readers did not discuss fear as a part of their experience, suggesting that either it was absent or had, in the process of reading, been surmounted as a barrier. Levitt et al. (2009) concluded that readers of fiction overcome anxieties, thus enabling change. However, the question remains for me: What brought them to the decision to embark on epochal change?

Motivation to change. Staats (2012) asserted that humans are emotion-learning machines based on the attraction to positive and avoidance of negative. Lang and Bradley (2010), in their research using electroencephalograph (EEG) and functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), also concluded that it is the "appetitve [*sic*] and defensive

motivational centre—deep in the older limbic brain and primitive cortex—that are the foundation of human emotion" (p. 448). For Lang and Bradley, the motive circuits increase attention and augment thinking or work to mobilize or prompt motor action. Frijda (2010a) also linked emotions causing decreased attention leading to lack of action and provided the example of a blissful reaction to a beautiful sunset. For Frijda, the emotions leading to or preventing action (i.e., cognitive motivation) as a result of wonder, interest, curiosity, exploration, and fascination were either as a result of pleasant or unpleasant events (note the inclusion here of both positive and negative events). Frijda stated,

> All these processes directly or indirectly serve dealing with emotional contingency by overt action, mental action (attention, thought) or refraining from action. The driving force of the processes appears to be the moment's motivational aim: achieving a change from the present situation, by correcting what bothers, filling up what lacks, obtaining what attracts, enhancing what is remote or weak, or seeking to maintain or enhance whatever is satisfactory. . . . All this is maintained by the perception, thought, or image of the eliciting event as appraised, and with an urgency that reflects the event's appraised importance and the discrepancy between current state and reference state. (p. 573)

In summary, Frijda (2010a, p. 574) drew the following implications from the motivational perspective regarding emotions: (a) emotions promote a state of action readiness, (b) readiness does not always result in action but may affect perception, thought and imagination leaving sentiments that represent facts, issues or people (appraisal), (c) emotion leads to action readiness that may not include any further stages, (d) impulsivity is a state of action readiness automatically following the perception surrounding an event or thought, and (e) the motive state or the state of action readiness is emotion.

Action readiness is "the motive state that underlies feelings of emotional urge or action tendencies, the action tendencies themselves, increases and decreases in activation, overt emotional behavior including expressive behavior, emotional feelings and other components of emotion" (Frijda & Parrot, 2011, p. 406). According to Frijda (2010a), if there is no satisfactory impulsive reaction to a situation or the reaction is seen to place the person at a disadvantage, impulsivity is replaced by "pausing or reflected action" (p. 577) and results in the setting of a goal. The act of "transforming an aim into a goal can occur at once, or it can occur hours or years after the emotional event, if plans have persisted, or if aims re-emerge when recollecting the event or issue" (p. 577). Still, the length of time taken for the change would be affected by the emotional urgency of the importance and the significance of the difference between the current and desired state.

Frijda (2010a) effectively linked emotion, motivation, and the application of reflection to change. Returning to my readers experiencing epochal change, each was in a state of readiness that allowed what appeared as an impulsive decision to change. However, in reality, each reader really achieved that readiness via different summative events. For CK, it was a combination of her level of self-awareness and willingness that she combined to suddenly change. Truly identified her state of readiness as stemming from a belief in the power of positive energy, and for Male, it was turning curiosity into action. Because of a lack of planning and foresight, Frijda (2010a) would term their change as taking impulsive action or action without prior intention. Frijda posited that the action chosen, however, is predicated by the level of readiness, the nature of the event that favors action, and the actions available to the person based on past experiences. Although the decision at the moment is impulsive, the experiences leading to that

decision are based on previous experiences. The question becomes one of intentional setting of a goal.

I do not believe that intentional goal setting is recognized in epochal change. Epochal change is often characterized as all or none, and its new direction is perceived as absolute. This makes it appear impulsive, but I believe that in dire situations, new goals can be quickly set based on strong readiness and desire for change. What appears impulsive is really adaptation at its quickest and most critical moment.

Objectively reviewing the other instances of change for those I interviewed, there was an element of time or pausing prior to action that suggested reflection or consideration of ideas before action. "Reflection proceeds by replacing or augmenting the aim—change from now—by setting a goal: forming a representation of a desired future state, planning and forming some implementation intention, which together characterize goal-directed action" (Frijda, 2010a, p. 577). The choice of response in this situation is deliberate—thoughtful and just a bit longer than with epochal change.

Henry's and Del's experiences with change took place over years spanning a lifetime. However, consciously or unconsciously, Henry set a goal of not being like his errant knight, and Del set a goal of better understanding Canadian Aboriginals and travelling. Using Frijda's (2010a) lens, they were likely primed to a state of readiness by their reading, enabling them over time and as warranted to make decisions reflecting that core belief system and reinforcing its framework. Those I termed as experiencing incremental or influential change could also fit into this goal-setting model. As decisions to implement change were not impulsively turned to, a goal was reflectively set affecting the direction and nature of the change undertaken. Val set herself a goal of not being like

her central character who avoided risks. When given the opportunity, decisions were made in line with this goal: for example, taking her to England. Cin has continued to strive toward her goal of improving her critical thinking skills as seen in her pursuit of her Doctorate.

For Ben and Stone, the moment of goal setting was likely in the past, with their current choices leading toward attaining that previously set goal. Ben had been reading and learning about socialist tyranny, but this book further influenced his journey. Ben indicated he had past understandings regarding the plight of immigrants that were expounded upon. Neither made an impulsive-appearing decision regarding a change in direction of their lives.

What was critical in Frijda's (2010a) model was the reliance on emotion/motivation as an impetus for change. According to Frijda, the moment of decision is dependent on the state of readiness, which for Frijda was synonymous for change. The resulting action, whether intentional or not, was hypothesized by Frijda to be an emotional one. From this work, more support has been given to the role of emotion as an important factor of transformative learning theory as has been suggested by so many others (Baumgartner, 2001; Cranton, 2009; Cranton & Roy, 2003; Cranton & Taylor, 2012; Dirkx, Mezirow, & Cranton, 2006; Jarvis, 2006, 2012; Kaya, 2009; Kokkos, 2009; Lawrence & Dirkx, 2010; Mälkki, 2012; O'Sullivan, 2002; Pasquariello, 2009; Taylor, 2009; E. W. Taylor, 2008; J. E. Taylor, 2008). As they both influence transformative learning, the role of brain function with regard to appetitive and defensive emotion motivation as well as neuroplasticity requires further exploration, and I begin with a brief look at fear and helplessness.

Is it fear or helplessness? Just as I have described fiction as a multi-dimensional catalyst, so too are states of action readiness multi-dimensional. Frijda and Parrot (2011) identified a series of basic emotions or what they termed "ur-emotions . . . [the] source, and thus the most fundamental component, of multi-componential emotion responses" (p. 411). My reason for mentioning this is that earlier in this thesis, it was suggested via Kreber (2012) that fear was a barrier to change. This does not negate that fear may result in defensive action away from a current situation, but does suggest that other multi-componential emotions may also prevent action.

Frijda and Parrot's (2011) description of helplessness, an ur-emotion occurring in many multi-componential emotions (p. 411), may also be apt to transformative learning. Frijda and Parrot defined helplessness as desiring to act, but not knowing how. Such a state would paralyze a learner until provision of an example, such as from real life or fiction, provided a model of a possible solution. In the case of those interviewed, perhaps a component of successful change was the introduction of an applicable model. For Henry and Val, it was in not wanting to be like their central characters and even Ben in his dislike for tyranny. It was a defensive model that aided in moving them away from their current state. For Del and Stone, it was more an appetitive model having them approach their central characters in terms of behaviour or understanding. Helplessness was not an ur-emotion touched upon in any interview, but perhaps its absence was an area requiring further exploration given this description by Frijda and Parrot. Note: all those interviewed acted to change, thus were not helpless.

Frijda and Parrot's (2011) ur-emotion of helplessness is also part of multi-componential emotions, such as:

160

[burnout resulting from] prolonged taxing duties . . . *acedia* "the noonday demon" that afflicted monks who had lost all enthusiasm for performing their spiritual exercises [in medieval times, and] . . . "musulman syndrome" among the prisoners in concentration camps who gave up home hunched against a tree or wall, did not move, and died within a few days. (p. 411)

Each of these resulted from different appraisals, but in the end, all resulted in frustrated motivation stemming from the ur-emotion of helplessness. This suggested that only by reflecting on the underlying components of a resulting state of action readiness involving helplessness or any particular ur-emotion can it be enhanced, overcome, or undone. The brain's plasticity allows for changes in states of action readiness and appraisal, thus enabling changes in response.

Sometimes, emotion is pitted against emotion, which leads to an impulsive response or unclear goal setting. Frijda (2010b) illustrated this battle in several ways. The first example was following impulse in the case of imminent risk, such as firepersons storming the fire to save a life. Another was knowing that smoking is harmful, but choosing to ignore the risks by appraising them as "unreal" in our situation—it won't happen to me. In some instances, knowledge or what Frijda called "vivid cues" (p. 70) may aid in action. On other occasions, an impasse may occur, which is "absence of an action option, failure of a previous action or uncertainty about which among several options to choose from" (p. 71). In this instance, simple reflective processing (Frijda, 2010b), which for some people is a talent, habit, or developed skill, helps navigate the impasse. It could be that by stopping to think, one returns to previously set goals to examine the situation. Internal or external information is used to identify possible novel or familiar actions and via multiple processes collectively termed executive function, including inhibition shifting and updating, overcome the impasse (Marcovitch, Jacques,

Boseovski, & Zelazo, 2008). This is similar in nature to the setting or acting on a goal

discussed earlier and can be associated with foundational, incremental, or influential

changes made by those interviewed.

Self-awareness is moving up one level from the simple reflective processing that

was just described. Self-awareness is a type of reflection that allows for reappraisal of

situations as one studies one's own experiences. Questioning begins to look at personal

feelings, motivations, and actions. By doing so, Frijda (2010b) claimed a person is given

detachment from the immediate allowing the possibility of creating a future.

"Imagination represents detachment from the here and now and from the real world . . .

one faces space and calm and personal warmth and spiritual guidance. One enters a world

that includes the impossible" (p. 72). Including the impossible encourages searching for

any and all options, even those not sought, or serendipitous possibilities that with the

freedom of imagination remain open to consideration. As I included this reasoning by

Frijda, I drew connections to the arguments presented earlier that fiction, in detachment

from reality, can make space for new possibilities. I was also drawn back to Mezirow's

(1998) work on identifying the types of critical self-reflection used by adult learners.

Mezirow (1998) identified six areas of critical self-reflection (CSRA) that while

similar to Frijda's (2010b) understanding of process reflecting and reflection, isolates

consideration of feelings in two of the six areas: (a) therapeutic CSRA and (b) narrative

CSRA, suggesting feelings are not part of all types of reflection. Such separation of

emotion and feelings from cognition was not consistent with the information presented

regarding affective neuroscience. As was stated by Immordino-Yang and Damasio

(2007), "We feel, therefore we learn" (p. 3).

Evidence from studying brain-damaged people has indicated that if emotion no longer operates in conjunction with rational thought, making decisions, reasoning, and ultimately learning are compromised (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007). Instead, emotion is at the base of thinking and acting. Learning enhances our understanding and developing of numerous and different approaches to complex situations, which allows for more "flexible, sophisticated and creative" (p. 7) responses. Immordino-Yang and Damasio (2007) further stated,

> Out of the processes that form the interface between cognition and emotion, emerge the origins of creativity—the artistic, scientific, and technological innovations that are unique to our species. Further, out of these same kinds of processing emerges a special kind of human innovation: the social creativity that we call morality and ethical thought. (p. 7)

Immordino-Yang and Damasio identified that "ethical decision making represents a pinnacle cognitive and emotional achievement in humans" (p. 7), which was in contrast to Mezirow's (1998) isolation of feelings to two types of critical self-reflection. It is to that pinnacle of cognitive and emotional achievement that I turn next.

The Ultimate Goal: Seeking Justice and Wisdom

Building on the idea of Immordino-Yang and Damasio (2007) that being able to make ethical decisions is the ultimate cognitive and emotional achievement of humans, I turn to an Ojibwa Legend (Stewart, 2003) that argued this point from a creationist perspective. The story begins with the Creator deciding to place the Two-Legged among all the creatures existing on Mother Earth. The Creator cautioned the animals that though the Two-Leggeds could cause them much harm, they would also be capable of great compassion. The Creator said,

163

There are two special things that I wish to give the Two-Leggeds, but I do not want to make it easy for them to find them. In fact, they must be very difficult to locate. These new beings will have to find these things before they can use them; but with these gifts, the Two-Leggeds will become whole. The two things I speak of are Wisdom and Justice. These are the things they will need to exist in harmony with all of you and with each other. Where shall I hide these things? (p. 120)

Though many animals made suggestions, it was the Mole (as cited in Stewart, 2003) who provided the solution to the Creator.

Creator, if You wish Two-Leggeds to have great difficulty in finding these virtues, why don't You hide them in the Seventh Direction. Hide the virtues, Wisdom and Justice, inside these Two-Legged creatures. Let them learn to seek within themselves. For, as we know, to look inward is one of the hardest things to do. It sounds to me as if these Two-Leggeds will lack the perception to do this. (pp. 123)

This Ojibwa Legend was summarized by Stewart (2003), who wrote: "The most valuable lessons that Man has to learn are hidden in the most obvious and also the most difficult-to-find place" (p. 120). What we seek is movement beyond survival over others toward meaning, and purpose that is inherent in survival with others (Shaw, 2005). "Indeed, the highest conceptions of justice, dignity, and worth all require highly developed notions of a general order of existence that in some fundamental way lies 'beyond' the observed parts of life" (Fuller, 2008, p. 70). The seeking of wisdom and justice in the Ojibwa Legend represented the continued battle between the animal survival instincts, which can also be perceived as the evolution of the human brain toward that internally achieved pinnacle.

However, as previously discussed, we have the tendency to avoid new information, but rather choose to hold onto ideas that strengthen the current image we have constructed of ourselves and laid down in our neural networks (Pelowski & Akiba, 2011; Staats, 2012). Overcoming this tendency, according to Fuller (2006, 2008), relies

on being open to wonder—that bridge between cognition and emotion that allows for a suitable mixture of elegant and imaginative responses needed to attain the pinnacle of humanness (see also Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007). The question of how we move onward in continuous development begins with further analysis of the work of Fuller (2008) on wonder.

Wonder. Wonder "is elicited by novel or unexpected stimuli that defy assimilation to pre-existing conceptual categories" (Fuller, 2006, p. 28), that "disrupts cognitive equilibrium" (Fuller, 2008, p. 58). The positive emotion—wonder—is the human response to the "intensely powerful, real, or beautiful yet it motivates sustained contemplation and engagement rather than subordination" (Fuller, 2006, p. 28) Wonder takes a human beyond the ordinariness of life enabling "consideration of the more-than-ordinary horizons of life that might reveal to us the meaning or purpose of existence" (Fuller, 2008, p. 69), by providing glimpses of the sacred not necessarily accessible to those without openness to this kind of emotional response. De Pascuale (2003) added to this discussion of wonder in stating,

> The experience of wonder brings the world into relief and makes a person take life seriously. In wonder you realize that this is it. You have the opportunity to swim through the river of life rather than just float on it, to own your life rather than be owned by life. If attended to, the experience of wonder gives birth to self-examination and to a mindful awareness of the world. In time you come to know yourself as you have been and are—and this gives you the possibility of choosing how to be. Through the experience of wonder we become true individuals and true citizens of the universe. (para. 21)

Wonder is a "spiritual emotion . . . [that] motivates egoless contemplation of general orders of existence, permits us to delight in displays of beauty and vitality, foster

165

empathy, and sustain long-term interest in the surrounding world" (Fuller, 2006, p. 34). We move through wonder beyond self to interest in others and the world (Swartz, 2011).

When I asked Del to describe her reading experience in one word, she chose "wonder". Her description of travelling to the library, opened up just for her, and reveling in the journey she took choosing a book and reading of familiar, but distant places in Canada spoke of contemplation of great and intriguing ideas, places, and people. Her emotional connection with *Paddle to the Sea* (Holling, 1980), combined with her cognitive forays into travel and understanding Aboriginal traditions, stemmed from the wonder of that first reading of *Paddle to the Sea* and has moved her throughout her development toward an interest in others. This temporal movement from interest in self toward an interest in others was shown in Figure 1 as well as discussed in Theme Six: Sphere of Influence. From my perspective, this influence is reflected in a movement toward the pinnacle of humanness embracing justice and wonder.

Inspiration. While wonder primes us, inspiration enables expression of that wonder (Thrash, Elliot, Maruskin, & Cassidy, 2010). When inspired, we want to act. May (1975) described inspiration as letting the vision emerge, where Thrash et al. (2010) and Thrash and Elliot (2004) were more detailed, stating that to be inspired was a process of (a) transcendence: awareness of better possibilities or wonder; (b) evocation: the source of inspiration was external; and what was termed (c) approach motivation, or being driven to act on the new idea or vision.

Hart's (1998) exploration of inspiration indicated that to inspire first required a connection that moved one beyond previous awareness of an experience that grew to include an awareness of collective interdependence (p. 13). The second

166

phenomenological characteristic was termed being opened or being available to internal

processes and external influence (p. 15). The third characteristic was clarity of senses that

often culminated in certainty in a clear choice (p. 17). The final of the four characteristics

was energy: an increase in excitement for channelling the new thought (p. 19).

Hart's (1998) definition differed from Thrash et al. (2010) at the point of action.

Hart concentrated on inspiration as coming to know and be with energy and insight for a

task, the result. Thrash et al. included action right in their approach. The result predicted

by both authors, however, appears to be an action that results in change.

It was Stone who used the word "inspirational" to describe his book of choice.

While he personally felt moved by Verghese's (2010) writing, he saw it as a potential

source to encourage action in young adults as they choose directions in which to grow

and develop:

> We are always conflicted about doing the right thing—especially younger people.
> Not everybody has that vision or drive to push them in a certain direction.
> Allowing them to see beyond the barriers is an important contribution that one
> can make to a young person—giving them the inspiration to try to do it. The nice
> thing about being young is that if you make mistakes you can always restart—
> reboot.

In our society, those recognized as having applied galvanizing experiences most

effectively and having learned from them are often called elders or sages. In numerous

traditions, the most highly regarded characteristic of our elders is their wisdom. When

asked what his goal in sharing inspiration with youth was, Stone replied, "I have a certain

amount of wisdom that I am trying to share without imposing."

Wisdom of our elders. Swartz (2011) questioned, "What if wonder is the

beginning of wisdom?" (p. 22). It was Aristotle (as cited in Swartz & Tisdell, 2012) who

labeled "wonder as the beginning of natural wisdom and the ultimate goal of human inquiry" (p. 323). If we return to our Ojibwa Legend (Stewart, 2003), the gift that the Two-Leggeds would need to search for internally was the development of wisdom. Wang and King (2008) concurred, suggesting that the combination of moral thinking and the reflection required for thoughtful action are realized with the age and experience of sagehood—a person of wisdom.

Goldberg (2006) noted that as humans age, the brain, though physically shrinking, becomes more integrated in function. As noted by Swartz (2011), while cognitive functioning is slower and focus is harder to achieve, the aging brain becomes more effective at seeing the

> big picture and solving complex problems of living. Age-related changes manifest as improved comprehension of meaning and the tendency toward storytelling making older adults better at teaching than learning . . . evolutionary selection to assist the transmission of cultural wisdom and advance the ongoing shaping of culture. (p. 20)

Yet again at the pinnacle of the journey of humanness, the attainment of wisdom, we encounter not only the power, but also the necessity of storytelling and learning from a person who "has extensive factual and theoretical knowledge (drawn from science and the arts); knows how to live well; is successful at living well (identifies and responds successfully to dangers and opportunities); and has very few unjustified beliefs" (Swartz & Tisdell, 2012, p. 322).

Bassett (2011) developed a model built on the components of wisdom, which included the cognitive, affective, active, and reflective dimensions as they interact one with another.

1. Cognitive (discernment): objectivity, holistic thinking

168

2. Affective (respect): openness and acceptance, empathy, multiple-perspective taking and generosity of spirit
3. Active (engagement): involvement in the world; sound judgement based on fairness and justice
4. Reflective (integrity): self-transcendence; seeing the self as part of complex systems; tolerate ambiguity and paradox. (p. 38)

In this model, a person practicing objectively with and in these dimensions develops wisdom, suggesting that wisdom is a continuum rather than being present or absent in a person. Just as with any skill or ability, some persons are more adept than others in its development.

While Mezirow's (2000) 10 phases may describe a learning event, Bassett's (2011) model integrated a series of learning events into a life-time of development culminating in wisdom. Note in transformative learning as in seeking wisdom, both the cognitive and the affective, are reflectively linked and result in engagement. It is a journey that is evident across the experiences shared with me by those I interviewed as they began and moved along the wisdom continuum, ultimately sharing their experiences with and for the benefit of others. How far along the continuum lies the journey is up to each to determine, but I suspect that more good stories will factor in the expedition. In fact, Bassett encouraged those seeking and teaching toward wisdom to consider everything a story because it is through the telling of stories, especially their own stories, that objectivity is encouraged and multiple perspectives are explored.

Personal Journey

Having heard the stories of many, I conclude this journey by reflecting on the story of my personal journey. "This storytelling [was] not a performance but a relational, emergent, and nonlinear exchange that depends on both listening and post story

169

conversation" (Tyler & Swartz, 2012, p. 466). As the listener, I was gifted with new

understanding of my own experiences with fiction and the importance of story as a

catalyst for change in my own life—change that I too had minimized because of its

beginnings in fiction, much like Ben, Stone, Henry, and Del. While that is deserving of

further exploration, that denial of the power of fiction, I hope that our post-story

conversations have provided those story tellers, like me, an additional moment of

reflection on how far we have come as a result of reaction to fiction.

Trixie Belden (Campbell, 1948) was a fictional character who assisted me in my

gradual development of frames of reference regarding philanthropy that have remained

central in my adult life. Grace Livingston-Hill's (1916/1984) writing led me to prison,

but remained core to my understanding of hope for the possibility of human kind. The

neuroplasticity of my mind has added new dimensions and appreciation for fiction and

the human need for story to existing impressions regarding what I always knew deep

down were ideas of import.

I shied away from the word transformation as a descriptor for my personal

experiences because they seemed somewhat insignificant to me. However, the simple

definition of transform is "to cause to change or to make different" ("Transform," 2013,

para. 1). Perhaps that simple meaning is really what was at the core of Mezirow's (2000)

constructivist approach to altering frames of reference to make them more inclusive and

better suited to new information intended—change. This description of change coincided

directly with the discussions of Cozolino and Sprokay (2006) earlier in this paper

regarding neural plasticity and integration and the construction of memories as stories in

our brains—to change. However, to me, transformation seems so much larger somehow.

Add the word epochal (Mezirow, 1978) to transformation, and for me, the meaning takes on much larger and more life-altering change. I did not realize until researching this paper that my personal interpretation of the word transformation was causing me difficulty. While the case may be that the epochal change results in a larger manifestation of change in the life of the person, the magnitude of change on a base neurologic level would be identical. This personal reflection was fundamental to Cranton and Taylor's (2012) concern regarding "lack of clarity with the terminology" (p. 27) and why bridging terms across researchers, in line with the revelations in my research, became so important.

In changing my personal frame of reference, I was able to better correlate how we construct stories in our minds to the neurologic processes of transformative learning. I realized the root processes would, of necessity, be identical. As a result, the change resulting from a story, the basis of how we organize our memories, is identical to that of change resulting in transformative learning, whether epochal or incremental. The difference is whether or not we choose to organize that change within the context of a simple or more complex story—utilizing more or fewer neural integrations or emotional repertoires. Rather then, it may come down to the importance of the story by which and through which we integrate all the resulting neural activity (Cozolino & Sprokay, 2006).

Cozolino and Sprokay (2006) revealed that "learning a list [rote memorization] of words is far more difficult as a list than it is when a story is constructed containing associations to the elements remembered" (p. 16). As we age, the area of the brain associated with lists is most susceptible to failure. If story is how we have evolved to create and store memories, then connecting learning to meaningful story to ensure it is

171

more contextually and emotionally relevant would make that learning more apt to be remembered.

Is it possible that the only difference between any type of change in our neural frameworks is a difference in the story with which we associate the resulting change? If so, it is even more critical then that transformation should be undertaken in relation to and in respect of story. Taylor (2009), in referring to the crucial role of reflection in transformative learning, summarized that "critical reflection, a distinguishing characteristic of adult learning, refers to questioning the integrity of deeply held assumptions and beliefs based on prior experience" (p. 7). Building on the idea of neural integrations in respect of reflection, I believe four ideas regarding why reflection as linked to story is so critical to and influences Mezirow's (2000) transformative theory.

The first idea is that sometimes we just do not know what we do not know. It takes introduction of a new idea or concept from an external source in order to be able to see ourselves in the mirror more clearly—to have something upon which we can then reflect. Hellström (2011) stated, "Narrative can explain truths about ourselves, which are not accessible through analytical self-reflection" (p. 330). I return to the concept of the sage, who through the wisdom of experience can supply a wealth of already lived perspectives in their stories, which we can use to first identify with and then reflect upon.

Second, a simple fact is not nearly as meaningful as the hook of a fable, the intricacy of a simile, or the concentration required when following the complexity of a story. By design, a simple fact will not often stimulate much reflection. By creating a story that requires more reflection and introspection, neural connections become more numerous and, with use, more integrated and stable. An increase in time spent on the

172

subject would, again, increase the number of neural networks involved and also permit increased integration into a new neural framework. Story as a mechanism would increase the likelihood of reflection, in turn enhancing the possibility of transformation.

The third concept is that the more emotion or meaning attached to the idea, the more neural activity and, thus, the more neural integration required. By being open to opportunity via wonder and inspiration, reflection is more likely to take place, again increasing the opportunity for transformation.

The fourth and final concept reflects that, if our experience is shared using song, painting, dance, story, or rhyme, the ability to stabilize the learning also increases. Mezirow (2000) considered sharing with and then seeking the opinions of others as an integral part of his transformative learning theory. I include re-living the experience by sharing it as part of reflection, because by seeking the opinions of others, we have that opportunity to layer their meaning with our own and, in doing so, create more opportunity for potentially fresh nuances on which to reflect. Tyler (2009) noted that storytelling is "a social phenomenon that involves listeners whose interpretations of and questions about the story can prompt the teller's exploration of his or her own assumptions" (p. 140). If we consider how we would approach others to seek opinions, we could simply present the facts. I, however, hope we would tell our story adding meaningful detail, which would serve to enhance the understanding of our listeners and ourselves. I revisit the need for consideration of both individual and social constructivism in the effectiveness of storied transformative learning, but the future is not so clear regarding the viability of storied interactions.

Liepe-Levinsonn (2008) made the following statement through a character in a play she wrote. Her character, anthropologist Dr. Evelyn Singleton, stated, "Story made us human—story made us a success as a species. Ironically it will also be the very cause of our demise" (p. 216). After conceiving this statement, Liepe-Levinsonn was drawn into an exploration into the effects of technology on social society.

While Liepe-Levinsonn (2008) contended that "amending and rewriting stories we choose to live by, when faced with new information or discoveries, mirrors how we build daily, rebuild and expand the neural pathways in our brain" (p. 225), she was concerned that our global communication systems have changed the fundamental way in which we communicate. She observed that from unfolding tales we told around the fire, the lengthy lectures we attended, and the debates we had for hours in the coffee shop, we are now consumed by rapid, short, e-mails, and texts. She posited:

> The less detailed and specific our stories become, the more easily they are transformed into black and white, either/or issues that further limit the time we take to think about them. Our current propensity for short-handed communications may even discourage fact-checking and may turn us into less curious, less independent thinkers. . . . If we abdicate our responsibility as human beings to ask the what next?/what if? questions that made us a species in the first place, we may eventually lose that ability. (p. 226)

Final Thoughts

For one year I was privileged to take lessons to learn to speak and write in French. My classmates were two officers of the RCMP—the tales they could tell. I came to the conclusion that year that it is not about money or possessions, but that the person with the best stories wins. It was not so much about the subject, though crime, blood, and murder do catch our interest, it was that each time they told a tale, I was inspired to ask the questions what next?/what if? and explore unfamiliar ideas from the police perspective. I

174

then would attempt to influence their thinking with perspectives from prison by relating

my tales from the other side of the bars. It was taking the time to give, take, and reflect on

our shared stories that resulted in better understanding. We all were seeking wisdom.

Wisdom takes time and personal sharing in the form of stories if we are truly to

understand and learn from one another. Deming (1977) advised us that:

> The longer we listen to one another–with real attention—the more commonality
> we will find in all our lives. That is, if we are careful to exchange with one
> another life stories and not simply opinions. (p. 70)

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

In this final chapter, I briefly summarize the main findings of the research. I then reiterate some of the limitations of the research acknowledged and where possible mitigated during the course of the research. Additional limitations are discussed in light of their influence on the nature and direction of recommendations for future research that are shared at the conclusion of my thesis.

Summary of Research and Results

Can the reading of fiction catalyze a transformative experience? I return to my supporting research questions to summarize the findings of this thesis. No particular genre of fiction could be credited as catalyzing the transformative learning experienced by those interviewed. At most, well-written fiction described the type of narrative prompting transformation. Rather, the key to each transformative experience was the combination of cognitive, affective, and contextual meaning conferred by the reader on what they read. For most interviewees, their reaction to the character, as well as the experiences and conclusions of the central character, played a large role in the catalytic event. That those interviewed were habitual readers of fiction likely predisposed them to the potential of fiction as a catalyst.

The four types of change revealed (i.e., formative, incremental, influential, epochal) coincided with the stages of adult development (i.e., adolescence, young adulthood, middle adulthood, maturity) as proposed by Erikson (1968). It was found that the interviewees were influenced greatly by both emotion and motivation, moving from a purely rational to integral, holistic approach to learning. These findings are finding purchase not only in transformative theory and theory of adult development, but can also

176

be further understood by linking transformative learning research to new areas like neuroscience.

Not all 10 stages of Mezirow's (2000) stages of perspective transformation were associated with the changes explored in this thesis. The lack could suggest that the stages identified by Mezirow are not transferable to all instances of transformative learning or could point to the need for further testing of the LAS (King, 2009) as suggested by Taylor and Snyder (2012) who claimed that the LAS has not been thoroughly critiqued. This criticism of the LAS was an unexpected limitation of my thesis that led to re-examination of limitations especially in light of recommendations for further study.

On a personal note, exploring the impact fiction can have on the readers who love it has made me more appreciative of fiction and the influence it has had on my life. I can now claim, based on the experiences shared with me, fiction has changed my life, where previously I hesitated to categorize my personal changes as important enough to merit the descriptor of transformative learning. As a result, I am more certain of the importance of fiction as learning and teaching resource.

It was the through the conversations with the readers, that I was able to better understand the change experience and now have deeper appreciation of the involvement of emotions, motivation, neuroplasticity and wisdom in what is a complex and important part of evolving toward our full potential as human beings. I am more open to the nuances of life experience that contribute to change. With this broadened understanding, I now consider change to be more attainable as I am better equipped for the journey and more aware of how I can support change in my students and others. That broadening of ideas and understandings is critical to continued work as researcher and teacher.

Limitations Revisited and Expounded

As mentioned in the Introduction, one limitation was that the experiences of those interviewed were not recorded as they were experienced or lived which can affect the accuracy of the event recorded. Such inaccuracies could have come about by selective memory, telescoping, positive attribution and exaggeration (Brutus, Aguinis, and Wassmer (2013). The development of a trusting and open relationship as well as clearly stating the intent and purpose for the research prior to the interview attempted to acknowledge and mitigate positive attribution and exaggeration. Allowing time for reflection between multiple conversations was an attempt to minimize selective memory and telescoping. It is unlikely, however that all instances of inaccuracy were addressed.

A second limitation discussed previously was that the results are not generalizable to a larger population. It is mitigated by the fact, however, that it could, with careful consideration, apply to similarly designed research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012) which reflects the intent of qualitative research and its difference from positivistic studies. Throughout this thesis, care has been taken to ensure the work was credible, dependable, transferable and confirmable (Ryan, Coughlan, & Cronin, 2007). With regard to credibility, conversations with those interviewed were extensive, over two sessions, reviewed by each participant and data was triangulated. The information shared in this thesis was detailed and is auditable thereby strengthening its dependability. That findings can be applied to different contexts speaks to transferability. Confirmability is demonstrated through step-by-step drawing of conclusions and interpretations.

Also previously discussed was that I was unable to interview all participants in person due to the extreme distances involved. I chose to limit our conversations to aural

178

and oral exchanges. This could, however, minimize any negative interviewer effect (Newton, 2010) in particular the visual impact of age, sex, appearance, race and unintended physical reinforcement (positive or negative) of the interviewer on the willingness of the volunteer to divulge information honestly and openly. It too may have minimized bias on my part as the researcher in a similar fashion.

Additional limitations became evident as I undertook analysis of the interviews. I purposefully delimited my study to readers of fiction. My choice of reaching potential volunteers via Facebook$^©$ narrowed my participants to those familiar with that tool and by nature of that choice, participants of a higher level of computer literacy. An unintentional limitation that may have developed due to the higher level of computer literacy was that all volunteers interviewed had post-secondary education. This leads to the recommendation of exploring non-post-secondary experiences of change in adults due to the reading of fiction.

As part of the methodology, following the work of Pasquariello (2009) I chose to delimit identification of interviewed volunteers using the LAS (King, 2009). I interviewed volunteers based on responses to survey questions as well as personal anecdotes in the LAS. In my analysis I noted a deviation from Mezirow's (2012) 10 steps of transformative change as indicated by the survey results, but emphasized the strong anecdotal evidence for transformative change having taken place. Research published after my interviews were concluded (Taylor and Snyder, 2012) called into question the reliability of the LAS that may now further limit this research. While it is my thought that anecdotal reliance alone supports my decisions regarding who I interviewed, I did also rely on the survey responses for final guidance. Call for additional research into the LAS

179

is reflected in my recommendations for future research and should be considered if it is

used for volunteer selection in future research.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are several directions for possible future research building on the work that

I have presented.

1. My personal enjoyment of stories and speculation on its ability to catalyze

    change delimited this work to fiction and those who love reading it. Further

    exploration of other types of work such as but not limited to self-help books,

    non-fiction, or even specific types of literature, for example, autobiographies,

    could provide additional insight into transformative catalysts and in doing so

    open the experience and the application of findings to a wider range of

    readers. Expanding to other media such as music, video, art, continues this

    expansion of possible catalysts and thus our understanding of how to help our

    learners change.

2. As identified by Taylor and Snyder (2012) the LAS (King, 2009) needs

    factorial validation for future use as a reliable tool for exploring the nature of

    the transformative learning experience.

3. Those interviewed all identified books written by male authors featuring male

    protagonists as catalyzing their transformative experiences, which bears

    further investigation.

4. Demographic data collected on those interviewed indicated that all nine had a

    post-secondary-level education. The relationship of further education to

    fiction as a catalyst is of interest in fully understanding transformative

learning, especially as past research has concentrated on post-secondary audiences. In contrast, this study was intended to approach a more varied audience, yet was highly linked to post-secondary education. Exploration of non-post-secondary experiences of fiction catalyzed change would be of interest.

5. Similar to several of the people I interviewed, I tended to minimize the personal influence fiction has had on my life. In order to effectively utilize fiction as a change catalyst, the hesitancy to credit fiction as a catalyst must be understood.

6. While my research has pointed toward wisdom as the goal of continued transformative learning, the relationships between emotion, motivation, and change need further exploration if the tipping point of transformative learning events is to be fully understood and encouraged. A furthering of this research could be with this goal in mind might be to revisit the reported experience of each volunteer having read their chosen work of fiction. Deliberate introduction of researcher perspective regarding the involvement of the reader's emotion, motivation and change may shed light on the tipping point.

7. At the core of furthering research regarding transformative learning is a common language. In this thesis, I purposefully used current terminology, such as orienting, but thoughtfully presented new ideas that better reflected my research results. The result is remaining true to core concepts and ideas, but refinement and progress in the understanding of transformative learning that could be further explored. This sets the stage for the next

recommendation of seeking new lenses for exploring what we hold

transformative learning to encompass.

8. Neuroscience holds many possibilities for understanding emotions,

   motivation, and thus learning as was illustrated in this thesis. Crossing of what

   once may have been research silos to form theoretical partnerships in

   understanding not just learning, but humanness in general, should be

   encouraged.

It is my hope that as a result of my research, the challenge of further

understanding fiction as a catalyst for transformative learning will be undertaken. The

personal stories shared here are but the tip of understanding how appropriately chosen

and guided use of fiction may play a central role in transformative change.

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195

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Appendix A: Survey: Has a Book Changed Your Life?

Kristine Wolski Doctoral Candidate Graduate Division of Educational Research, Faculty of Education University of Calgary

My Graduate Thesis focuses on the power and wonder of a well told story. Though my life's direction has definitely been influenced by fiction, I am exploring if fiction can more than influence, but in fact, transform a life by triggering a shift in thinking that causes a person to change the direction, meaning or purpose of their life. The survey only takes a short time to complete. Responses will be reported as an anonymous aggregate. Data collected is to satisfy a graduate student thesis. Data will be stored under lock and key indefinitely in my residence. You are free to withdraw from this survey at any time by simply closing the survey. You will be asked at the end of the survey to provide contact information if you are willing to be interviewed about your life-changing experience. This information will not be shared not will it be used for any other purpose.

By choosing YES you indicate that you:

* understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and

*agree to participate as a research subject.

○ Yes

○ No

Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has reviewed the study. Should you have a comment or complaint to make regarding their participation in this study please feel free to contact:

Ethics Resource Officer [email address] or [phone #]

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201

1. What is the name of the book of fiction that you found life-changing?
2. Thinking about your experience reading the book you named, check off any statements that may apply.
   a) Reading the book caused me to question the way I normally act.
   b) Reading the book caused me to question my ideas about social roles (e.g. what a mother or father should do or how a child should act).
   c) As I thought about these things, I realized I no longer agreed with my previous beliefs or role expectations.
   d) Or instead, as I questioned my ideas, I realized I still agreed with my beliefs or role expectations.
   e) I realized that other people also think about their beliefs.
   f) I thought about acting in a different way from my usual beliefs and roles.
   g) I felt uncomfortable with traditional social expectations.
   h) I tried out new roles so that I would become more comfortable or confident in them.
   i) I tried to figure out a way to adapt these new ways of acting.
   j) I gathered the information I needed to adopt these new ways of acting.
   k) I began to think about the reactions and feedback from my new behaviour.
   l) I took action and adopted these new ways of acting.
   m) I do not identify with any of the statements above.

3. Briefly describe your experience.
4. Which of the following influenced this change? (Check all that apply)
   Was it a particular character in the story that influenced the change? Yes_ No _
   If "Yes" was it a character: (check all that apply)
   a) in a situation similar to your own
   b) who helped you understand yourself better
   c) you wanted to be like
   d) you no longer wanted to be like
   e) who overcame difficulty
   f) who showed courage
   g) who you respected
   h) who inspired you to act
   i) who had the career you want
   j) who decided to change careers
   k) who changed the way you looked at things
   l) who offered a ray of hope
   m) who made you feel better
   n) other(s)

Was it a particular action you took during/after the experience that influenced the change? Yes___ No ___

If "Yes" was it: (check all that apply)

a)   personal journaling
b)   writing about the experience (other than a personal journal)
c)   deep, concentrated thought
d)   verbally discussing the book
e)   personal reflection on the experience
f)   representing the experience artistically (e.g. painting, sculpting, in song)
g)   other (s)

Was it a significant event in your life that influenced the change? Yes___ No ___

If "Yes" was it: (check all that apply)

a)   marriage
b)   birth/adoption of a child
c)   moving
d)   divorce/separation
e)   death of a loved one
f)   change of job
g)   accident
h)   illness
i)   retirement
j)   loss of job
k)   other (s)

5.   Thinking back to when you first realized that your view or perspective had changed, what did the book have to do with the experience of change?
6.   Would you consider yourself a person who usually thinks back over previous decisions or past behaviour? Yes___ No ___
7.   Would you say that you often reflect upon the meaning of fiction that you read? Yes___ No ___

8. Gender:
   a) Male
   b) Female
9. Marital Status (check all that currently apply)
   a) Single
   b) Married
   c) Divorced/separated
   d) Partner
   e) Widowed
10. Birth Date: mm/dd/yyyy
11. Age when the transformation was experienced?
12. Level of education:
    a) None
    b) Some elementary school
    c) Some high school
    d) Some post-secondary
    e) Completion of post-secondary program
    f) Master's Degree
    g) Doctoral Degree
    h) Other(s)
13. If you are willing to be interviewed about your life changing experience, please fill in the following:

    Name: _____

    Telephone: _____

    Best time to call: _____

    Email: _____

    Comments:

Appendix B: Invitational Emails to Colleagues, Friends, Local Bookstores, and

Local Book Clubs

This email was sent to several Book Clubs in Alberta:

As a book lover, I am hoping that you could help me by encouraging your members to participate in my survey.

The purpose of this research is to determine whether or not reading fiction can catalyze a transformational experience. The research will explore how the transformation is accomplished in regards to the type of narrative, trends linked to demographic data such as age, gender, level of education, the type of transformation (epochal or gradual), whether rational or integral transformation, the means by which the transformation has been sustained, and the roles of emotion and motivation in the experience.

Using a survey developed by King (1998), I ask readers to who feel a book of fiction has changed their life to analyze that experience. If they have had a transformational experience (determined by survey) and are willing, I would love interview them about their experience.

I have posted the survey using Facebook, and was hoping that given your clientele, you would "like" it on your Facebook page -- giving it more exposure.

I have attached links to the Facebook and survey

Facebook: << URL >>e

Survey: << URL >>e

Kristine

This email was sent to 2 Edmonton bookstores

I am a doctoral candidate with the University of Calgary who is interested in the power of fiction to change lives.

The purpose of this research is to determine whether or not reading fiction can catalyze a transformational experience. The research will explore how the transformation is accomplished in regards to the type of narrative, trends linked to demographic data such as age, gender, level of education, the type of transformation (epochal or gradual), whether rational or integral transformation, the means by which the transformation has been sustained, and the roles of emotion and motivation in the experience.

Using a survey developed by King (1998), I ask readers to who feel a book of fiction has changed their life to analyze that experience. If they have had a transformational experience (determined by survey) and are willing, I would love interview them about their experience.

I have posted the survey using Facebook, and was hoping that given your clientele, you would "like" it on your Facebook page -- giving it more exposure.

I have attached links to the Facebook and survey as well as attaching a copy of my ethics review for your information.

Thanks for your consideration!

Kristine Wolski

Facebook: << URL >>
Survey: << URL >>

Email sent to Graduate Programs in Education

This message is being sent on behalf of Kristine Wolski, Doctoral Candidate, Workplace and Adult Learning

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I would appreciate your assistance with my research focusing on the power and wonder of a well told story.

The purpose of my research is to determine how reading fiction can catalyze a transformational experience. I want to explore how the transformation is accomplished in regards to this type of narrative, if there are trends linked to demographics such as age, gender, or level of education, as well as the type of transformation (epochal or gradual; rational or integral) the means by which the transformation has been sustained, and the roles of emotion and motivation in the experience.

Using a survey developed by King (1998), I ask readers to who feel a book of fiction has changed their life to briefly explore that experience via a survey with an invitation to discuss it with me further by interview.

If you have had such an experience and are willing, I would love to hear from you.

To participate please visit:

 Facebook: << URL >>
 Survey: << URL >>

Thanks for your consideration!

Kristine

[email address]

Appendix C: Demographic Results Survey Responders

Of the group of 31 survey responders there was an average age of 46 and 65% identified themselves as female ($\male$ $N = 10$, with one non-disclosure). More women than men responded to the survey. In the same fashion, slightly more women than men also made up the group of those interviewed.

Twenty-eight of responders were 44 years of age or under at the time of the experience with 55% reporting they were under 24 years of age. All those completing the survey had some post-secondary education with 71% having at least an undergraduate degree. Significant life events (death, marriage, etc.) were not generally reported as coinciding with the change experienced ($= 29\%$). Change was associated primarily with the work of fiction itself. Forty-two percent noted that actions taken during or after the reading of their chosen work played a part in making a change with over half relating it to personal reflection on the experience. That said, 90% of responders indicated that they think back over previous decisions or past behaviours and the same percentage often reflect on the meaning of the fiction they read.

In Table D.1 the percentage of survey responses of all 100 volunteers for each of the 10 stages of the transformative process are listed. Table D.1 focuses on the actual statements used in the modified LAS (King, 2009) in the order in which they appeared (stage 3 and 8 are not in the same sequence usually noted of Mezirow's (2000)10 stages). None of the 100 responders experienced all 10 stages of perspective transformation. On average, those completing the survey (eliminating the three participants who did not identify with any of the statements) indicated on average as having experienced five of

the 10 stages of perspective transformation (Mezirow, 2000) with over half acting on the

resulting change.

Table D.1
Percentage Identifying with Each Stage of Perspective Transformation

Stage	Survey Item	Survey Respondents
Stage 1	Reading the book caused me to question the way I normally act.	65%
	Reading the book caused me to question my ideas about social roles (e.g. what a mother or father should do or how a child should act).	45%
Stage 2	As I thought about these things, I realized I no longer agreed with my previous beliefs or role expectations.	32%
	Or instead, as I questioned my ideas, I realized I still agreed with my beliefs or role expectations.	13%
Stage 4	I realized that other people also think about their beliefs.	42%
Stage 5	I thought about acting in a different way from my usual beliefs and roles.	39%
Stage 3	I felt uncomfortable with traditional social expectations.	42%
Stage 8	I tried out new roles so that I would become more comfortable or confident in them.	32%
Stage 6	I tried to figure out a way to adapt these new ways of acting.	35%
Stage 7	I gathered the information I needed to adopt these new ways of acting.	39%
Stage 9	I began to think about the reactions and feedback from my new behaviour.	23%
Stage 10	I took action and adopted these new ways of acting.	52%
	I do not identify with any of the statements above.	10%

A majority of the entire group (52%, N=16) indicated that it was a character in the story that influenced the change they underwent. This rose to 78% of those interviewed. The most influential characteristics of the protagonist identified in completed surveys (with multiple choices possible) are listed in Table D.2.

Table D.2
Percentage of Respondents Identifying with Most Influential Characteristics of the Protagonist

Main Character	Survey Respondents
Helped better understand self	50%
Overcame difficulty	62%
Showed courage	69%
Was respected	75%
Changed the way one looked at things	56%
Offered a ray of hope	56%

Appendix D: Examples of Interview Questions

Please use the following questions as a guide for the type of discussion I hope we have. I am interested in reliving your life-changing experience with you in as much detail as possible. My questions will seek to help uncover the profound change that occurred in your life as a result of reading fiction and then explore your journey to and from that event. The following questions outline the direction I anticipate our conversation will follow. As the experience unfolds, and we gain comfort and enthusiasm for the conversation, I hope we will be guided by the intent of the following questions and not limited to these exact inquiries.

In our first discussion, I want to explore, with you, the life-changing event by encouraging re-counting of the experience.

1. What profound change occurred as a result of reading the book?
   a) What particular characters or events in the book were of the most influence?
   b) Why do you think you related so strongly to the book?
   c) When did you feel yourself beginning to change in relation to reading the book?
   d) What changed in your thoughts as you read the book? (thought process as you read, emotions uncovered)

2. What was happening in your life at the time you read the book?
   a) How did you come to choose the book?
   b) Who were key people to the experience? (friends, family, co-workers)
   c) What do you remember of your physical environment as you experienced the book?
   d) What major events were occurring that affected your life at that time? (directly in your personal life; key events in the lives of your family, friends, community, world)
   e) How would you describe your life in general at this time? (emotionally, physically, in terms of work, play, family)

3. What changes have you taken with you as a result of reading the book?
   a) What milestones or accomplishments do you associate with reading the book?
   b) Where do you think you would be if you had not read the book?
   c) With whom have you shared this experience and why?
   d) What will you continue to take forward into new situations and life events as a result of this experience?

In our second discussion, in addition to reviewing the transcript of our first conversation, I hope to explore the effect sharing this experience with me has had.

1. Having had some time to reflect, what key memories will you take from our conversations?

    a) Were there ideas that had renewed importance?
    b) Did you realize learning you hadn't before considered?
    c) Are there ideas you now remember and wish to comment on further?
    d) How did you find the overall experience?

2. Having had some time to reflect, and consider my first forays into analysis of the interviews, are your thoughts consistent or in opposition to any ideas I am putting forth?

    a) Are there any clarifications, additions or deletions you wish to make to your transcript?
    b) Do you disagree with any directions I am taking?
    c) Are there any observations you wish to add to my current thoughts?

Appendix E: Transformative Fiction

The following alphabetical (by title) list represents the titles identified by survey respondents as having had a transformative effect on their lives. Titles that are not fiction have been removed from this list. Male and female refer, in the case of non-human characters, to exhibited characteristics. Titles in Italics are those identified by the interviewees. Canadian authors are denoted by an asterisk.

Title	Author	Gender of Main Character
1984	George Orwell	M
A Fine Balance (mentioned twice)	Rohinton Mistry*	M
Ask Me No Questions	Marina Budhos	F
Bend Sinister	Vladimir Nabokov	M
Brave New World	Aldous Huxley	M
Cutting for Stone	Abraham Verghese	M
Dubliners	James Joyce	Series of stories with M or F as protagonist
East of Eden	John Steinbeck	M
Emily of New Moon	Lucy Maude Montgomery	F
Harriet the Spy	Louise Fitzhugh	F
Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone	J.K. Rowling	M
I Know This Much is True	Wally Lamb	M
Ishmael	Daniel Quinn	M
Jane Eyre	Charlotte Brontë	F

Title	Author	Gender of Main Character
Kite Runner	Khaled Hosseini	M
Medicine	Lu Xun	M
Memoirs of a Geisha	Arthur Golden	F
Memory and Dream	Charles De Lint*	F
Of Human Bondage (mentioned twice)	W. Somerset Maugham	M
On The Beach	Nevil Shute	M
Paddle-to-the-Sea	Holling Clancy Holling	M
Pillars of the Earth	Ken Follett	M
Pride and Prejudice	Jane Austen*	F
Sir Henry	Robert Nathan	M
Small Changes	Marge Piercy	F
Story of B	Daniel Quinn	M
Tay John	Howard O'Hagan*	M
The Alchemist	Paulo Coelho	M
The Bell Jar	Sylvia Plath	F
The Black Jewels Trilogy	Anne Bishop	F
The Book of Negroes	Lawrence Hill*	F
The Cave	Jose Saramago	M
The Chronicles of Narnia	C. S. Lewis	M
The Divine Comedy	Dante Alighieri	M
The Edible Woman	Margaret Attwood*	F
The Fire Dwellers	Margaret Laurence*	F

Title	Author	Gender of Main Character
The Giver	Lois Lowry	M
The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy	Douglas Adams	M
The Hobbit	J. R. R. Tolkien	M
The Impact of a Single Event	Rod Prendergast*	Couple M/F
The Lord of the Rings	J. R. R. Tolkien	M
The Many Colored Coat	Morley Callaghan*	M
The Mountain and the Valley	Ernest Buckler*	M
The Prophet	Kahlil Gibran	M
The Shack	William P. Young*	M
The Stone Angel	Margaret Laurence*	F
The Tortall Universe	Tamora Peirce	F
The Unbearable Lightness of Being	Milan Kundera	M