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I Never Thought About Thinking: Experiences of Participants in a Reflective Learning Group

Donal Martin Crosse
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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Donal Martin Crosse entitled "I Never Thought About Thinking: Experiences of Participants in a Reflective Learning Group." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Education.

Carol E. Kasworm, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

John Peters, Lawrence Coleman, Howard Pollio

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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I NEVER THOUGHT ABOUT THINKING: EXPERIENCES OF PARTICIPANTS IN A REFLECTIVE LEARNING GROUP

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Donal Martin Crosse

May 2001

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife Ellie who supported me throughout this long dissertation process, and to little Briana Sorcha who has brought great joy to our lives. It is also dedicated to my parents, Ted and Monica Crosse, and to Ellie's parents, William and Catherine Dorgan, for all their sacrifices in bringing us up, and for their prayers and support.

Finally, this work is also dedicated to the great Spirit within all of us. May I always be true to this Spirit, and persist in learning to be in the Spirit's flow.

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I also owe much to the participants in this study. The group of people who participated in the reflective practice class that I studied were a truly special group of people. In agreeing to participate in biographical and phenomenological interviews, they gave me a rare window into the dynamics of their lives. Each and every one of them has truly been my teacher.

A special thanks also to Marcus Keyes and Glenda Struss-Keyes for their friendship; for their support of Ellie, Briana and me during this dissertation process; for all the good food and conversation; and for helping with the editing of this manuscript. Thanks also to Tina Smith for her help in transcribing the tape-recorded interviews with participants.

I am also indebted to the staff at the Center for Literacy Studies for supporting me throughout this study; for introducing me to a vision of adult education for social change, equality, and justice; for persisting with the grand experiment of a participatory workplace; but mostly for being a place where I really felt at home, where I felt we were working for something bigger than ourselves.

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the underlying dynamics of a reflective practice class taught as a graduate level course at a large southeastern state university. Specifically this research explored: (i) how participants in the class made meaning of their experiences; and (ii) what were the underlying processes of the class. The data collection methods employed in this study included a biographical interview with each participant in order to get a sense for what they brought to the class, a phenomenological interview with each participant on his or her experience in the class, participant observation in class meetings, and collection of participants' writing assignments.

Analysis of the data suggested that participants' everyday way of making meaning represented a subconscious, interpretive, projective, uncritical and non self-aware way of making meaning which was biographically and culturally informed. The data further suggested that the philosophical assumptions and underlying processes of the class fostered a transformation of meaning making on the part of participants to a new and arguably more authentic way of making meaning. This new way of making meaning was described as a conscious, receptive and critically self-aware way of making meaning.

Based on an analysis of participants' experiences of the class, the underlying processes of the class were grouped under two main headings: interpersonal relationship processes - which described the evolution of positive interpersonal relationships within the class and the development of the class as a group; and learning processes - which included a foundational process of learning from lived experience and four different dialogical learning processes (effective communication, self-reflection, reflection on a phenomenon, and problem solving), each based on its own distinct purpose and each following its own distinct pattern of interaction. The data also suggested that a symbiotic relationship existed between the interpersonal relationship processes and the learning processes. The dialogical learning processes fostered positive interpersonal relationships

(trust, respect and a sense of community) within the group, and the positive interpersonal relationships within the group in turn facilitated the group's successful engagement in the dialogical learning processes. Overall, the interpersonal relationship processes and the learning processes within the class are presented as parallel interacting spirals - a 'spiral' of interpersonal relationships tending towards a sense of cohesion and community among participants; and a 'spiral' of learning tending towards increased awareness and understanding for participants of self, others, the world around them and the problem situations that they found themselves in.

The findings of this research are discussed in terms of ongoing discourses in the literature. The conclusions of this research with regard to meaning making and the underlying processes of the class are discussed within the broader frameworks of human consciousness and pedagogy, respectively. Implications of this research for adult education practice, for future research and for the evolution of human consciousness are also discussed.

Truth is within ourselves; it takes no rise

From outward things, what'er you may believe.

There is an utmost centre in us all,

Where truth abides in fullness; and around,

Wall upon wall, the gross flesh hems it in,

This perfect, clear perception - which is truth.

A baffling and perverting carnal mesh

Binds it, and makes error; and to know

Rather consists in opening out a way

Whence the imprisoned splendor may escape,

Than in effecting entry for a light

Supposed to be without.

Taken from Paracelsus by Robert Browning, 1835.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

We live in an increasingly complex and dynamically changing world. In this complicated and fast-changing world we seem to be inundated with many problems and challenges. In our personal lives, it appears that the ways of experiencing and behaving we learn when we are young become our ways of experiencing and behaving for the rest of our lives. Quite often we fail to get rid of dysfunctional views from our youth and we repeat such dysfunctional patterns of experiencing and behaving throughout our lives. On a personal and societal level we seem to be slaves to our history. We encounter situations where old conflicts are senselessly perpetuated and we do not seem able to escape from the pattern of letting past infractions dictate our behavior. We find people with little control over their minds, who analyze only the external dimensions of their problems, never questioning the role of their own perspective, and never realizing their power to change their own perspective. Many seem powerless and unable to solve their problems because they lack the skills or insights to do so. We seem to be mindlessly drifting through our lives with default thinking patterns dictated by our biography and culture.

Based on the pervasiveness of the scientific or positivist paradigm there is also an implicit assumption that we all live in a universal reality, and we assume we understand the reality of the others. This leads to situations where there is a breakdown of communication between individuals and between groups which in turn leads to a deterioration in relationships and a breakdown of community. We have also lost our connection with our lived experience. We learn what a feather-covered little creature is when we are young, that is a bird, and then scarcely see the bird thereafter. Instead we

cling to and operate from our abstract concept of the bird. In our obsession with the concepts and categories of language we seem to mistake the map for the territory. We have gotten lost in the conceptual and have forgotten the real. Overall we seem alienated from the world and each other which is the cause of much human suffering.

There is also much injustice and oppression in the world which also causes much human suffering. Reality is presented as fixed and given. Many accept their reality with resignation and adapt to it in an uncritical way. This reality, however, is maintained by the dominant culture which grants privileges to some, while denying them to others. Our culture also includes many prejudices and stereotypes which while imbedded in the culture subconsciously become part of how people operate. Overall, we have mastered facts about the world, we have learned to predict and control aspects of our environment; however, we can't understand or control our feelings, communicate effectively with each other, and live in peace with each other.

In our professional lives as adult educators, we tend to teach the way we were taught ourselves. Having been schooled from a positivist paradigm, we believe in a universal reality that exists out there and separate from us. We operate from a default view of teaching where the teacher as expert is charged with the task of communicating a pre-defined curriculum to students who must internalize this information. As educators, we focus on the knowledge to be transmitted to the neglect of making processes of learning explicit that would foster the empowerment of learners to create their own knowledge. We also tend not to value self-awareness and not to value the lived experiences of our students. As educators, we are also oblivious to what Boles and Gintis (1976) call the hidden curriculum of our pedagogy and the consciousness it fosters. We also see formal teacher-centered and curriculum-centered schooling as the only valid form of learning. Consequently, we promote a concept of lifelong learning as participation in formal educational opportunities where one can have access to approved experts and curricula.

What I have presented here is a pretty bleak (albeit one sided) story of the numerous complex challenges we face in our personal and professional lives. However, the challenges presented are real. Overall, as we move into the new millennium, we are ill-prepared to live flexibly and creatively in the unique situations we encounter in our everyday personal and professional lives. Kegan (1994) suggests that there are greater demands on us today than ever before. He goes on to suggest that we are "in over our heads" lacking the skills and attitudes necessary to live effectively in this increasingly complex world. As we move into the 21st Century, the complexity and problems of modern life challenge us to develop new more sophisticated ways of being and acting. Reason (1988, 2000) and others suggest that we are also in the midst of a paradigm shift which will likewise call on us to develop new more sophisticated ways of being and acting. Becoming a reflective practitioner represents one way by which we might develop such new and more sophisticated ways of being and acting. This study focused on exploring the underlying dynamics of a reflective practice class which was established with the explicit purpose of helping participants learn how to become reflective practitioners.

Reflective practice is described in the literature as reflecting on one's practice with the aim of improving that practice. Susan Imel (1992) suggests that reflective practice "involves thinking about and critically analyzing one's actions with the goal of improving one's professional practice" (p. 1). The term reflective practice was first coined by Donald Schön who has contributed greatly to our understanding of this phenomenon. Schön (1983) describes professional competence as professional artistry which he characterized as ongoing engagement in reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action. Schön also proposes the reflective practicum as a model for how to teach practitioners the artistic dimensions of practice. Schön's concept of reflective practice will be described in more detail in Chapter 2: Review of Selected Literature.

The reflective practice class which was the focus of this research was taught as a graduate level class at a large state university in the southeastern part of the United States. Like Schön's concept of the reflective practicum, this class embodied a very different pedagogical model. The class followed a group discussion approach. There were no lectures as such, but at each class meeting, participants essentially gathered around in a circle and talked. Class meetings were structured mainly around a learning autobiography activity and a critical incident activity. These activities involved each participant taking turns sharing his or her learning autobiography and critical incident in the class after which group discussion followed with all participants interacting. This case study will explore the underlying dynamics of this reflective practice class.

Purpose of the Study

We frequently hear the admonition that we all need to become reflective practitioners in our chosen fields of practice and in our lives in general. To be a reflective practitioner is held up as an ideal way of being. However, we have not been able to clearly articulate what exactly it means to be a reflective practitioner. It is also not clear how one should facilitate experiences to help adults become reflective practitioners. Although there is an expanding literature base on reflective practice and the facilitation of reflective practice groups, we still have much to learn in order to build a coherent knowledge base to support this phenomenon. In particular, little is known about how people make meaning in their everyday lives, or how people make sense of the situations they find themselves in. Also, little is known about the underlying processes of a reflective practice group especially one based on a group discussion approach. The purpose of the study was to conduct a detailed investigation of one class which was engaged in a reflective practice in

order to better understand the ways of making meaning of participants, and to better understand the underlying processes of the class.

Research Questions

This study addressed two basic questions:

1. How did participants in the reflective practice class make meaning?
2. What were the underlying processes of the reflective practice class?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this research was interpretivism. Interpretivism holds that reality is not out there and separate from us. This view does not separate a person from the world, but describes the person and world as together co-constituting one's lived experience of reality. Subject and object exist in interaction with each other. Guba (1990) in his text *The Paradigm Dialogue* distinguishes between different paradigms in terms of ontology (the nature of reality) and epistemology (the nature of the knowable, the relationship between the knower and the known, and/or the relationship between Subject and Object). Guba describes the ontological position of the interpretivist paradigm as relativist. According to Guba "realities exist in the form of multiple mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific, dependent for their form and content on the persons who hold them" (p. 21). Guba describes the epistemological position of the interpretivist paradigm as monist or subjectivist. The monist or subjectivist epistemology of the interpretivist paradigm suggests that person and world are fused into a single entity. Lived experience is the creation of the process of

interaction between the two. The interpretivist paradigm thus describes a connected way of knowing and a connected way of being. The philosophical underpinnings of the interpretivism are shared by existential-phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) and constructivism (Goodman, 1984; Guba, 1990, McNamee and Gergen, 1998), although interpretivism does not share the idealist leanings of constructivism.

The interpretivist paradigm also informed the selection of the research methods and approaches to data analysis employed in this research. Merriam (1991) describes interpretivist research as follows:

> This paradigm seeks to replace the scientific notions of explanation, prediction and control, with the interpretive notions of understanding, meaning and action. ... In this paradigm, reality is not an object that can be discovered and measured but rather a construction of the human mind. The world is a highly subjective phenomenon that is interpreted rather than measured. Beliefs rather than facts form the basis of perception. ... Meaning is embedded in people's experiences and mediated through the investigator's own perceptions. ... Rather than testing hypotheses, researchers using the interpretivist method often build abstractions, concepts or theories inductively. In contrast to researchers oriented towards deduction (positivists), who hope to find data to match a theory (hypothesis), inductive researchers hope to find a theory that explains their data (experience). (p. 48-49)

Significance of the Study

The findings of this research hopefully will provide some insights to adult educators who are themselves facilitating reflective learning or reflective practice groups

aimed at helping adults become reflective practitioners. It was suggested that becoming a reflective practitioner would enable us to develop more sophisticated ways of being and acting. This research attempted to explore what that might mean in practice. Specifically, this research explored how participants who took part in a reflective practice class made meaning of the situations they encountered. Gaining a better understanding of how people make meaning should enable adult educators to more effectively facilitate reflective learning groups. This research also explored the underlying processes of a reflective practice class which embodied a pedagogy (based on a group discussion approach) quite different from the more didactic traditional pedagogy model. This study will hopefully shed some light on the nature of this alternative pedagogy. Overall, this study hopes to shed some light on the underlying dynamics of a reflective practice group and contribute to the literature in this area.

The concept of reflective practice was very popular when Schön first introduced the concept in his book *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think In Action* in 1983, and which he built on in later works (Schön 1987, 1991). There has been some research and writing on the concept of reflective practice since then with valuable contributions by Osterman (1990), Peters (1990, 1991), Brookfield (1995) and others. Overall, the concept of reflective practice still holds much promise. The hope is that this study will extend the understanding of reflective practice and foster renewed and sustained interest in this area.

Limitations of the Study

One clear limitation of this study is that since this was a case study of one particular reflective practice class, the findings will be confined to an in-depth understanding of this one group. This reflective practice class was perhaps quite unique in

the combination of learning activities employed and in the skills and backgrounds of the participants that made up the group. One may question if the findings of this research will be useful to others. However, this study of this one reflective practice class did address some universal themes, and should shed some light on the dynamics of adults engaged in reflective learning in other situations. In qualitative case studies such as this, the intent is not to generalize to other cases, but rather the reader must interpret the findings of this study from his/her own particular perspective, and adapt them to his/her own particular context.

Another limitation of this study relates to the focus of the study. This reflective practice class was a complex phenomenon to study and this research focused on just two dimensions: the underlying processes of the class and how participants in the class make meaning. There were many other aspects of the class that could have been explored (for example, the role of the facilitator in the class, or the role of a participant in a class). These other dimensions of a reflective practice group will hopefully be addressed by future research.

Overview of this Report

This report is divided into seven chapters. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 presents a review of the discourses in the literature which serve as background for this study. Chapter 3 includes a description of the research methodology employed. In Chapter 4, I describe the reflective practice class which was the focus of this research. The findings of the first research question relating to how participants in the class made meaning are presented in Chapter 5. In Chapter 6, I present the findings of the second research question relating to the underlying processes of the class. Finally, Chapter 7 presents the overall conclusions and implications of this study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE

In this chapter, I present a snapshot of current discourses in the literature on key topics that relate to this research. The research questions of this study guided the selection of these key topics. The topics which are presented here include: reflective practice; learning from experience; meaning making from a interpretivist perspective; and dialogue. These broad areas informed my thinking as I approached this study and provide a background to contextualize this study.

Reflective Practice

The class studied as part of this research was a reflective practice class taught as a graduate course in a university setting. The title of the course was "Reflective Practice in Education and Psychology." This class aimed at exploring concepts of reflective practice and helping class participants become reflective practitioners. (See Course Syllabus, Appendix A). In this section, I introduce the basic concept of reflective practice along with the related concepts of self-reflection and critical reflection.

Basic Concepts of Reflective Practice

Donald Schön (1983, 1987, 1991) is generally credited with coining the phrases *reflective practice* and *becoming a reflective practitioner*. In his research, he studied the

performance of competent professionals in a variety of different fields. His work highlighted the inadequacies of the traditional model of professional competence based on technical rationality which assumes that the practitioner is a technician who applies scientific knowledge to problems of practice. Based on his research, Schön outlined an alternative model of professional competence which he described as professional artistry. Schön's model of professional competence as professional artistry involved two key concepts: knowing-in-action and reflection-on- and in-action. Each of these terms will be described in brief.

When Schön studied the practice of competent professionals, he found that there was a "subconscious" intelligence underlying the artistry which he observed in their practice which he referred to as "knowing-in-action." This is similar to Polanyi's (1966) concept of tacit knowledge. Schön (1987) describes this concept of knowing-in-action as follows:

> I have used the term professional artistry to refer to the kinds of competence practitioners sometimes display in unique, uncertain and conflicting situations of practice. ... Their artistry ... is a variant of the more familiar sorts of competence all of us exhibit every day in countless acts of recognition, judgment, and skillful performance. ... What is striking about both types of competencies is that they do not depend on our being able to describe what we know how to do or even to entertain in conscious thought the knowledge our actions reveal. As Gilbert Ryle observed ..."When I do something intelligently ... I am doing one thing and not two. My performance has a special procedure or manner, not special antecedents" (1994, p. 22). ... I shall use the term *knowing-in-action* to refer to the sorts of know-how we reveal in our intelligent action. (p. 25)

Schön (1987) suggested that occasionally our tacit knowing-in-action is not sufficient to help us in a particular situation. In these situations we may engage in reflection-on-action (reflection after the fact) or reflection-in-action (reflection during or in the midst of action) to raise our knowing-in-action to a level of conscious awareness. Once we raise our knowing-in-action in a given situation to a level of conscious awareness, we can then examine the beliefs and assumptions underlying our knowing-in-action to ensure that they are appropriate for the situation at hand.

> Our spontaneous knowing-in-action usually gets us through the day. On occasion, however, it doesn't. ... All such experiences ... contain an element of surprise. ... We may reflect *on* action, thinking back on what we have done in order to discover how our knowing-in-action may have contributed to an unexpected outcome. We may do so after the fact, in tranquillity. ... Alternatively we may reflect in the midst of action without interrupting it ... [in which case] our thinking serves to reshape what we are doing while we are doing it. I shall say, in cases like this, that we reflect-*in*-action. (p. 26)

Schön appears to be somewhat biased in favor of reflection-in-action as this allows one to affect the immediate situation. Schön outlines "a pattern of inquiry ... described as a sequence of "moments" in a process of reflection-in-action," as follows:

- There is to begin with, a situation of action to which we bring a spontaneous, routinized response [based on our tacit knowing-in-action].
- Routinized responses produce a surprise - an unexpected outcome, that does not fit the categories of knowing-in-action.
- Surprise leads to reflection within an action-present (reflection-in-action).

- Reflection-in-action has a critical function, questioning the assumptional structure of knowing-in-action.
- Reflection gives rise to on the spot experiment. (1987, p. 28)

Central to Schön's view of professional artistry is that practitioners come to realize that tacit knowing-in-action is a principal dynamic underlying their practice. Schön suggests that we can help practitioners become reflective practitioners by helping them understand what they already tacitly know. We can assist them to take the self-reflective turn and engage in reflection-on- and in-action as they raise their subconscious knowing-in-action to a level of conscious awareness, and critique the beliefs and assumptions underlying this knowing-in-action. The insights gained can then lead to experimental courses of action and ultimately to more effective practice. In the context of a reflective practice group, Schön (1991) suggests that we can help practitioners engage in reflective practice by observing, describing, and trying "to illuminate the things practitioners actually say and do, by exploring the understandings revealed by the patterns of spontaneous activity that make up their practice" (p. 5). Schön suggests that when we work with practitioners in this way our "primary concern is to discover and help practitioners discover what they already understand and know how to do" (p.5).

When we examine the philosophical assumptions of Schön's work, we see that the epistemology of practice (theory of behavior) he proposes departs from the established paradigm of positivism. Schön's work is based on a new paradigm, what he refers to as constructionism (or what I have referred to here as interpretivism). Schön distinguishes between two epistemologies of practice which lead to two models of professional competence: (i) professional competence based on the objectivist/positivist paradigm - what he refers to as technical rationality (practitioner as technician); and (ii) professional competence based on a constructivist/interpretivist paradigm - what he refers to as professional artistry (which involves subconscious knowing-in-action and reflection-in-

action). This discussion allows us to situate Schön's work squarely within the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm. Schön (1987) outlines his model of professional artistry, a view of professional competence based on the constructionist paradigm, as follows:

> Based on the alternative epistemology of practice ... professional artistry is understood in terms of reflection-in-action. ... Underlying this view of the practitioner's reflection-in-action is a constructionist view of reality with which the practitioner deals - a view that leads us to see the practitioner as constructing the situations of his practice ... In the constructionist view, our perceptions, appreciations and beliefs are rooted in a world of our own making that we come to accept as reality. Communities of practitioners are continually engaged in what Nelson Goodman (1978) calls "worldmaking." ... They have, in short, a particular, professional way of seeing their world and a way of constructing and maintaining their world as they see it. When practitioners respond to indeterminate zones of practice by holding reflective conversations with the materials of their situations, they remake a part of their practice world and thereby reveal the usually tacit processes of worldmaking that underlie all of their practice. (p. 35-36)

Schön suggests that we are not consciously aware of the meanings or knowing-in-action that guide our actions from moment to moment. These meanings are not in our heads but are embodied and thus subconsciously or tacitly held. Because of the tacit nature of this knowing-in-action, the challenge is to raise this tacit knowing to a level of conscious awareness. Reflection-on and -in-action leads to a critical exploration and questioning of the presuppositions which underlie our knowing-in-action, which in turn leads to experimental courses of action. In his epistemology of practice, Schön also seeks to get away from the positivist notion of an all-knowing ego which guides all our actions.

This view of an all-knowing ego is also central to the positivist notion of practitioner as technician applying (scientific) theory to practice. Schön also highlights the inadequacy of a competency-based model of professional education as a means to prepare professionals to work in what he called "the indeterminate zones of practice" (1987, p.36). He proposes the reflective practicum, based on the architectural design studio, as a model for teaching professional artistry.

Reflective practice gained much popularity in the late eighties and early nineties. A spate of articles appeared in educational journals expounding the merits of reflective practice as a basis for educational reform. The principal goal of this movement was for teachers to view themselves not as technicians but as reflective practitioners engaged in professional artistry. This led to an increased emphasis on teacher inquiry (Wellington, 1991; Wildman & Niles, 1987) and action research (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, Reason, 1981, 1988, 2000) which involved teachers taking a reflective stance towards their practice. The concept of reflective practice has also become an important aspect of teacher education and professional development for teachers (Regan, 1993).

Engaging in Reflective Practice Involves Elements of Self-reflection and Critical Reflection

Schön suggests that his concept of reflection-in-action "has a critical function, questioning the assumptional structure of knowing-in-action" (1987, p. 28). Schön thus saw *self-reflection* and *critical reflection* as integral parts of his concepts of reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action. Schön conceived of self-reflection and critical reflection in the context of his constructionist model of meaning making. Using Schön's terminology, *self-reflection* refers to the process of raising both one's tacit knowing-in-action, and the tacit beliefs and assumptions underlying one's knowing-in-action, to a level of conscious awareness. *Critical reflection* refers to the process of questioning the justification for the

beliefs and assumptions underlying one's knowing-in-action and correcting any distortions or inaccuracies.

There is a growing body of knowledge in the adult education literature on the topics of self-reflection and critical reflection. Brookfield, one of the leading writers on critical reflection, holds a broad view of critical reflection that embraces both traditional/positivist and interpretivist perspectives. According to Brookfield:

> Being a critical thinker involves more than cognitive activities such as logical reasoning or scrutinizing arguments for assertions unsupported by empirical evidence. Thinking critically involves our recognizing the assumptions underlying our beliefs and behaviors. It means we can give justifications for our ideas and actions. Most important, perhaps, it means we try to judge the rationality of these justifications. (1987, p. 13)

On the nature of the assumptions that make up the knowing-in-action that guides one's practice, Brookfield (1991) suggests that "assumptions can be defined as comprising those taken-for-granted ideas, common sense beliefs, and self-evident rules of thumb that inform our thoughts and actions" (p. 177).

There are a couple of different perspectives in terms of how one goes about raising the tacit knowing-in-action that guides one's actions to a level of consciousness awareness. Schön (1987), based on his concepts of reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action, suggests that "it is ... possible by observing and reflecting on our actions, to make a description of the tactic knowing implicit in them" (p. 25). Brookfield (1991) suggests that a learner's assumptions can be detected by examining the learner's descriptions of their experiences. He suggests that "learners' general assumptions are embedded in, and can be inferred from, their specific descriptions of particular events" (p. 179-180). He outlines a group process which he uses to help learners engage in critical self-reflection as

follows: "Learners are asked to produce richly detailed accounts of specific events and then move to collaborative, inductive analysis of general elements embedded in these particular descriptions" (p. 180). These two perspectives together suggest that we can raise our tacit knowing-in-action in a given situation to a level of conscious awareness by reflecting on both descriptions of our experience and behavior (actions and reactions) in that situation.

Mezirow (1984, 1991a, 1991b, 1998) has also contributed significantly to the discourse on critical reflection. He also sees the world in interpretivist terms. According to Mezirow (1991b), "critical reflection [refers to the] assessment of the validity of the presuppositions of one's meaning perspective, and examination of their sources and consequences" (p. xvi). Mezirow emphasizes the critically self-reflective and validity testing function of critical thinking.

> [Critical self-reflection involves] challenging the validity of presuppositions in prior learning. ... Becoming critically aware of our own presuppositions involves challenging our established habitual patterns of expectation, the meaning perspectives with which we have made sense out of our encounters with the world, others and ourselves. (p. 12)

Mezirow (1991b) goes on to suggest that the process of critical self-reflection involves purging one's meaning perspective of three common distortions. According to Mezirow, "meaning perspectives are transformed through a critically reflective assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, and psychic distortions acquired through a process of introjection, the uncritical acceptance of another's values" (p. 14). The process of critical reflection on one's tacit presuppositions is central to Mezirow's work on transformative learning. He suggests that transformative learning is precipitated by a perspective transformation which in turn can be seen as a product of the process of

critical self-reflection. Mezirow (1991b) describes the process of perspective transformation as follows:

> Perspective transformation is the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our presuppositions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; of reformulating these assumptions to permit a more inclusive, discriminating, permeable, and integrative perspective; and of making decisions or otherwise acting on these new understandings. (p. 14)

From a constructionist or interpretivist perspective, the presuppositions we hold form the basis of our world making and inform our choices, decisions, and actions. The overall task of critical self-reflection is to identify, and then critique these heretofore unexamined (uncritically assimilated) beliefs and assumptions. The attitude of critical self-reflection is therefore to question or problematize the presuppositions (beliefs and assumptions) underlying our ways of being and acting.

In the somewhat artificial environment of a classroom the critical incident activity provides a very effective way of bringing situations from practice to a group for closer scrutiny (reflection-on-action after the fact). According to Brookfield (1991) "critical incidents are brief descriptions written by learners of significant events in their lives. ... [Critical incidents can be used] as a means of probing learners' assumptive worlds" (p. 179). The critical incident activity was one of the key activities of the reflective practice class studied as part of this research.

Learning from Experience

The reflective practice class in this study was not based on lectures by the professor, rather it followed a group-based experiential learning format. Class participants learned by reflecting on their own personal experiences and also by reflecting on experiences shared by other members of the class. Class participants also learned by reflecting on their real-time (here-and-now) experiences in the group. Given the emphasis placed on learning from experience in the reflective practice class, the literature on learning from experience was analyzed. In this section I will first describe two paradigmatically different ways of viewing experience and two corresponding ways of learning from experience. I will then review some of the key models of learning from experience from the literature.

Two Paradigmatically Different Ways of Learning from Experience

Experience is viewed differently depending on whether one is viewing the world from within a positivist paradigm or from within an interpretivist paradigm. Positivists, holding a realist ontology and dualist/objectivist epistemology, believe in a static reality that is out there and separate from us. What is real is what we perceive to be out there separate from us. Experience is seen as sense experience or that which is observable and verifiable by others (third person experience). Interpretivists, holding a relativist ontology and a monist/subjective epistemology, believe that reality or what is real is inherent in personal lived experience brought about by the interaction of a person and his or her world. For the interpretivist, reality is given by the continuous dynamic flow of lived experience which is personal or subjective and always continuously changing. Experience is seen as lived experience which includes everything presented to us in our streams of

consciousness. Lived experience includes sense data along with one's thoughts, feelings and intuitions. This is the world of first person lived experience and is sometimes referred to as the lifeworld (or Lebenswelt) (Ihde, 1986; Pollio, Henley & Thompson, 1993; Valle & Halling, 1989).

Based on these paradigmatically different ways of conceiving of experience, we can identify the following two paradigmatically different ways of learning from experience. Learning from experience within the positivist paradigm engages our reflective capacity under certain methodological constraints (objectivity) and ontological and epistemological assumptions, to look at a world which is seen as out there and separate from us. The model of scientific inquiry can be seen as a model of learning from experience within the positivist paradigm. It involves learning from third person objective observations of the world. Learning from experience within the interpretivist paradigm refers to the process of learning from reflection on first person accounts of lived experience. The phenomenological research model can be seen as a model of learning from experience within the interpretivist paradigm. The phenomenological research model is based on reflection on rich pre-reflective descriptions of lived experience and inductively identifying themes or patterns from these accounts of lived experience (exploring the lifeworld). Phenomenologists seek to get at a participant's meaning of a given phenomenon through rich descriptions of his or her lived experience. By inductively learning from lived experience (excavating meanings from the lifeworld), the phenomenologist arrives at themes or a thematic structure depicting the essence or meaning of the phenomenon being explored. Any phenomenologically-based approach to learning from lived experience assumes the primordial nature of lived experience. It assumes that our lived experience contains the meaning of our existence from moment to moment.

Both models of learning from experience have merit. Learning in an objective way from observable sense experience can teach us about how the natural world works,

whereas learning from lived experience can teach us about what things mean to us. In the literature on learning from experience, we see models where learning from experience is understood as scientific inquiry, and models where learning from experience is seen as reflection on lived experience. Although the earlier proponents of experiential learning advocated the use of the scientific method in learning from experience (observable sense experience), more recent models of experiential learning are beginning to advocate learning from lived experience. Models of experiential learning that advocate learning from the affective dimension of experience are based on the interpretivist notion of learning from lived experience.

Review of Key Models of Learning from Experience

A number of writers have examined how we learn from experience (Dewey, 1933, 1938; Lewin, 1951; Kolb, 1984; Jarvis, 1987, 1999; Boud, 1993, 1994). In this section I will briefly review some of the key models of experiential learning. These models will reflect the progression of ideas in the literature on experiential learning and how the process of learning from experience has been conceived.

John Dewey's 1938 book *Experience and Education* is a classic in this area. Dewey suggests that "education in order to accomplish its ends both for the individual learner and for society must be based upon experience --- which is always the actual life-experience of some individual" (p. 89). Dewey, in his writings on experiential learning, has contributed several interesting ideas including: his discussion of the principle of the continuity of experience and the principle of interaction; the concepts of educative and non-educative experiences; the notion of collateral learning; his conception of learning as a continuous process of restructuring experience facilitating the growth and expansion of experience; his model of how impulses are transformed into purposeful action along with

his discussion of the use of the scientific method as a way of exploring and exploiting the potentialities inherent in experience. Dewey's ideas were the focus of much attention during the progressive education era. His ideas concerning experiential learning, which became known as 'inquiry learning,' were implemented in many schools across the country. In *Experience and Education*, Dewey compares traditional and progressive education. Of the new progressive education he says:

> To imposition from above is opposed expression and cultivation of individuality; to external discipline is opposed free activity; to learning from texts and teachers, learning through experience; to acquisition of isolated skills and techniques by drill, is opposed acquisition of them by means of attaining ends which make direct vital appeal; to preparation for a more or less remote future is opposed making the most of the opportunities of present life; to static aims and materials is opposed acquaintance with a changing world. (p. 19)

To support his philosophy of education, Dewey outlined "a coherent theory of experience affording positive direction to selection and organization of appropriate educational methods and materials" (p. 30). Dewey posits two principles on which his theory of experience is based, the principle of continuity of experience and the principle of interaction. He describes the principle of continuity of experience as follows:

> Every experience enacted and undergone modifies the one who acts and undergoes, while this modification affects, whether we wish it or not, the quality of subsequent experiences. For it is a somewhat different person that enters into them. ... From this point of view, the principle of continuity of experience means that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after. (p. 35)

Dewey's principle of interaction suggests that experience is not something which goes on inside the person in isolation from the world.

> [The principle of interaction] assigns equal rights to both factors in experience - objective and internal conditions. Any normal experience is an interplay of these two sets of conditions. Taken together, or in their interaction, they form what we call a *situation* . ... The statement that individuals live in a world means, in the concrete, that they live in a series of situations. And when it is said that they live *in* these situations ... It means, once more, that interaction is going on between an individual and objects and other persons. The conception of *situation* and of *interaction* are inseparable from each other. An experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment. (p. 42-43)

The principles of continuity and interaction are not separate from each other. "They intercept and unite. They are, so to speak, the longitudinal and lateral aspects of experience" (p. 44). The principle of continuity of experience and the principle of interaction were posited as a way for a teacher to discriminate between experiences that are worthwhile educationally and those that are not. Dewey suggests "continuity and interaction in their active union with each other provide the measure of the educative significance and value of an experience" (p. 44-45). Dewey's theory of experience is similar to the way in which the interpretivists view of the world of lived experience. The principle of interaction is similar to the interpretivist concept of subject and object existing in interaction (intentionality). Dewey's concept of "a situation" very nicely captures this sense of interaction and this terminology also appears in the interpretivist or phenomenological literature. The principle of continuity of experience also has a parallel

idea within interpretivist thinking. The principle of continuity of experience is similar to the interpretivist belief in the temporal nature of lived experience - that lived experience should be viewed as continuous.

Dewey endorses the scientific method as a model of learning from experience. He suggests that "the scientific method provides a working pattern of the way in which and the conditions under which experiences are used to lead ever onward and outward" (p. 87). For Dewey the process of learning from experience begins with problems found in the conditions of present experience and leads on to "the formation of ideas, acting upon ideas, observation of the conditions which result, and organization of facts and ideas for future use" (p. 87-88). Dewey elaborates on his process of experiential learning as follows:

> That the conditions found in present experiences should be used as sources of problems is a characteristic which differentiates education based upon experience from traditional education. ... Growth depends upon the presence of difficulty to be overcome by the exercise of intelligence. ... It is part of the educator's responsibility to see equally to two things: First, that the problem grows out of the conditions of the experience being had in the present, and that it is within the range of the capacity of students; and, secondly, that it is such that it arouses in the learner an active quest for information and for production of new ideas. The new fact and ideas thus obtained become the ground for further experiences in which new problems are presented. The process is a continuous spiral. (p. 79)

Dewey's overall model of learning from experience can be summarized as follows: it is problem-based (real-life based); it is based on the model of scientific inquiry; it emphasizes the need to articulate facts and abstract concepts and ideas from experience; and then acting on these ideas.

Kurt Lewin was another key contributor to the literature in the area of experiential learning. Lewin is considered the founder of American social psychology and is well known for his work on group dynamics and the methodology of action research. A unique aspect that Lewin brought to the discourse on experiential learning was an understanding of how participants could learn from their here-and-now experiences in a group. In his model "immediate personal experience is the focal point for learning, giving life, texture, and subjective personal meaning to abstract concepts and at the same time providing a concrete, publicly shared reference point for testing the implications and validity of ideas created during the learning process" (Kolb, 1984, p. 21). Also noteworthy were the feedback processes incorporated into Lewin's model. Lewin conceived of learning from experience as a four-stage cycle, as follows: concrete experience (here-and-now); observations and reflections; formation of abstract concepts and generalizations; and testing the implications of these concepts in new situations (Kolb, 1984). A consistent theme in all Lewin's work was his concern for the integration of theory and practice. He suggests that "learning is best facilitated in an environment where there is a dialectical tension and conflict between immediate concrete experience and analytic detachment" (Kolb, 1984, p. 9). Lewin's views on learning from experience are summarized as follows:

> In the Lewinian techniques of action research and the laboratory method, learning, change, and growth are seen to be facilitated best by an integrated process that begins with the here-and-now experience followed by collection of data and observations about that experience. The data are then analyzed and the conclusions of this analysis are fed back to the actors in the experience for their use in their modification of their behavior and choice of new experiences. Learning is thus conceived as a four-stage cycle ... Immediate concrete experience is the basis for observation and reflection. These observations are assimilated into a "theory" from which new implications for action can be deduced. These

implications or hypotheses then serve as guides in acting to create new experiences. (Kolb, 1984, p.21)

From Lewin's research at the National Training Laboratory came the laboratory training method and T-groups (where T- refers to training). Lewin's concept of T-groups is interesting in the context of the current study. Since the reflective practice class studied as part of this research was conducted in a group-based format, issues related to group dynamics and interpersonal relationships came into play. The emphasis in the reflective practice class on self-reflection, learning from experience (including here-and-now experience in the group), the use of feedback, the role of interpersonal relationships, and the emphasis on facilitating individual learning, growth and development all suggest some strong parallels between the reflective practice class and Lewin's concept of T-groups. Yalom (1995) provides an overview of Lewin's work with T-groups as follows:

> [T-groups employ] a powerful technique for human relations education: *experiential learning*. Group members learn most effectively by studying the very interactional network in which they are enmeshed [in the here-and-now] ... They profit enormously by being confronted, in an objective manner, with on-the-spot observations of their own behavior and its effects on others; they may learn about their interpersonal styles, the responses of others to them, and about group behavior in general. ... These groups value interpersonal honesty, exploration, confrontation, heightened emotional expressiveness, and self-disclosure ... The participants are not generally labeled "patients," and the experience is considered not therapy but "growth." ... From the beginning, research has been woven into the fabric of the T-group. I refer not only to formal research but to a research attitude on the part of the leader, who collaborates with the group members in a research inquiry designed to enable participants to experience, understand, and

change their behavior. This research attitude, together with the concept of a T-group as a technique of education, is essential. ... The use of such cognitive aids as lectures, reading assignments, and theory sessions demonstrates that the basic allegiance of the T-group was to the classroom rather than the consulting room. The participants were considered students: the task of the group was to facilitate learning for its members. (p. 487-488)

David Kolb is an other key figure in the literature on experiential learning. Kolb's (1984) text, *Experiential Learning: Experience as a Source of Learning and Development*, is also a classic. The underlying thesis for all of Kolb's work is that all learning involves learning from experience and that learning from experience is the process whereby human development occurs. Kolb suggests that "learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (p. 38). Kolb's ideas build on and integrate ideas from the foundational models of experiential learning of Dewey, Lewin, and Piaget. Kolb suggests that the foundational models of experiential learning "all suggest the idea that learning is by its very nature a tension- and conflict-filled process [and that] new knowledge, skills and attitudes are achieved though confrontation among four modes of experiential learning" (p. 30). Kolb outlines his model of experiential learning as follows: "The process of experiential learning can be described as a four-stage cycle involving four adaptive learning modes - concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation" (p. 41). Kolb's structural model of experiential learning is illustrated in Figure 1. According to Kolb, learners need various skills in order to be effective in learning from their experiences:

Learners, if they are to be effective, need four different types of abilities - concrete experience abilities (CE), reflective observation abilities (RO), abstract conceptualization abilities (AC), and active experimentation (AE) abilities. That

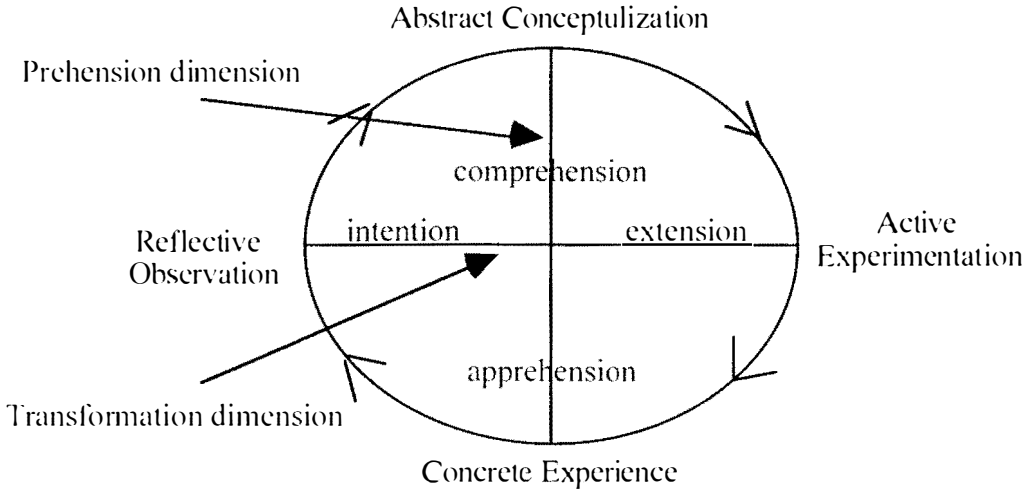


Figure 1: Kolb's Model of Learning from Experience.

is, they must be able to involve themselves fully, openly, and without bias in new experiences (CE). They must be able to reflect on and observe their experiences from many perspectives (RO). They must be able to create concepts that integrate their observations into logically sound theories (AC), and they must be able to use these theories to make decisions and solve problems (AE). (Kolb, 1984, p. 30)

Kolb (1984) also identified the following characteristics of experiential learning which are fundamental to his view of the learning process and which he suggests are also shared by the three major traditions of experiential learning (namely Dewey, Lewin and Piaget):

1. Learning is best conceived as a process, not in terms of outcomes.
2. Learning is a continuous process grounded in experience.
3. The process of learning requires the resolution of conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of adaptation to the world.

4. Learning is a holistic process of adaptation to the world.

5. Learning involves transactions between the person and the environment.

6. Learning is the process of creating knowledge. (Kolb, 1984, p 26-38)

An interesting aspect of Kolb's model are the structural dimensions of learning (the prehension dimension and the transformation dimension) and the dialectical tensions between the adaptive modes of learning that they represent. The prehension dimension includes the apprehension - comprehension dialectic, while the transformation dimension includes the intention - extension dialectic. These presents a very interesting way of looking at learning and knowledge. Kolb suggests that "the prehension dimension describes the current state of our knowledge of the world - the content of knowledge, if you will - whereas the transformation dimension describes the rates or processes by which that knowledge is changed" (Kolb, 1984, p. 101-102). Kolb further suggests that "both content and process are legitimate aspects of structure, [however] it is the content of knowledge and its form that have been the primary concern of epistemology" (Kolb, 1984, p. 102).

In reviewing the models of learning from experience of Dewey, Lewin and Kolb, it seems that these models exhibit a common process of learning from experience which involves a four step cyclical process beginning with concrete experience, moving on to reflection, and abstract conceptualization, followed by action. Each model also involves the underlying process of reflection and action and a concern for the relationship between experience and abstract ideas. Kolb talked about these in terms of two dialectical processes, the intention-extension dialectic and the apprehension-comprehension dialectic. Freire (1970) and others use the term praxis to refer to the action-reflection dialectic.

Moving to more recent work, David Boud has been a significant contributor to contemporary theory of experiential learning. Boud and colleagues (Boud, Cohen and

Walker, 1993) present five propositions of experiential learning encapsulating their perspective on learning from experience, as follows:

> Proposition 1: Experience is the foundation of, and the stimulus for, learning
>
> Proposition 2: Learners actively construct their experience
>
> Proposition 3: Learning is a holistic process
>
> Proposition 4: Learning is socially and culturally constructed
>
> Proposition 5: Learning is influenced by the socio-emotional context in which it occurs. (p. 8-16)

Building on many of the ideas presented above, Boud (1994) outlined a model of learning from experience which he says is "designed to aid thinking about learning from experience and how it can be facilitated" (p. 49). Boud suggests that his model "has been formulated to emphasize the culturally-embedded nature of learning, the potential scope of agency on the part of the learner and the internal and external barriers to learning which exist and which may be able to be addressed" (p. 53). Boud outlines two assumptions on which his model is based:

> The basic assumption of the model is that learning is always rooted in prior experience and that any attempt to promote new learning must in some way take into account that experience. The second assumption behind the model is that the process of learning from experience is necessarily an active one which involves learners in engaging with and intervening in the events of which they are a part. This engagement and intervention is with what is termed the *learning milieu* - i.e. the social, psychological, and material environment in which the learner is situated. (Boud, 1994, p. 50)

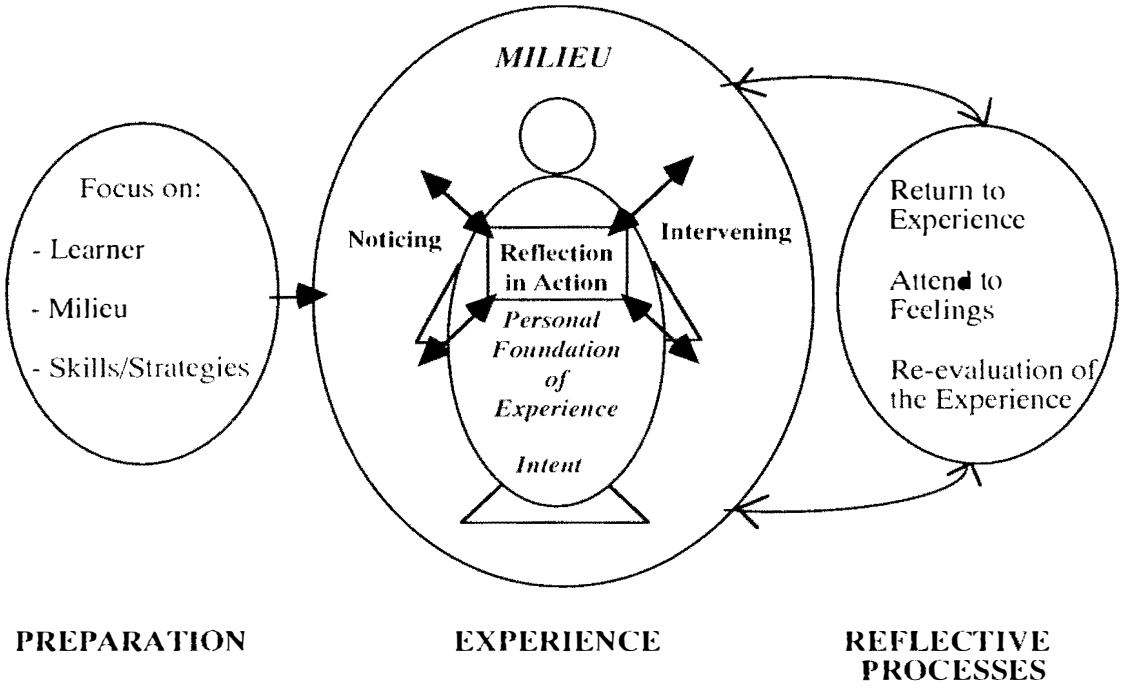
Boud elaborates on the role played by the learner's prior experience (his first assumption above), as follows:

> Learners bring with them to any event their *personal foundation of experience*. This is a way of describing the influence of all their previous experiences on them now. We all bring our embodied life history with us on every occasion and this will profoundly affect our perceptions of what does and does not count as important, it acts to sensitize us to some features of our world and blind us to others and it shapes the *intent* we have which guides our priorities. Normally our personal foundation of experience is not readily accessible to us and can only be inferred with difficulty from our actions and our intent. (Boud, 1994, p. 50)

Boud's concept of an individual's personal foundation of experience is very similar to Dewey's principle of the continuity of experience. Both emphasize the interpretive and biographically rooted nature of our present experiences.

Boud's model of learning from experience (see Figure 2), addresses three aspects of the experiential learning process or "three stages of engagement in the learning event" (Boud, 1994, p. 51) namely, preparatory activities, activities and experiences during the learning event, and reflective processes that occur after the learning event. Boud's model is also interesting because in his concept of experiences and activities during the learning event and reflective processes after the learning event he integrates Schön's concepts of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action respectively.

With respect to preparation prior to the learning event, Boud (1994) suggests that "the emphasis here is on what preparation may be required to enhance the possibility of the event being one from which a given learner can learn fruitfully" (p. 51). The model suggests three considerations: the learner; the learning milieu; and skills/strategies. With regard to the participant's experience during the learning event, Boud suggests that "it is



(Adapted from Boud, 1994, p. 51)

Figure 2: Boud's Model of Learning from Experience.

the learner's engagement with the milieu which constitutes the particular learning experience. Learners create a learning milieu through their presence and interaction with it. Through noticing, intervening, and reflection-in-action, they steer themselves through the milieu in accordance with their intents and what is available for them to use in this process" (p. 51). Finally, with respect to the reflective processes following the learning event, Boud suggests that "much important learning can occur following an event as the distractions of the milieu and the lack of opportunity to stand aside from the dynamics of the action limit what it is possible to do at the time. Some aspects inevitably take time and the ability to view particular events in a wider context" (p. 52). According to Boud, reflection after the event has three elements: return to the experience, attending to feelings, and a re-evaluation of the experience.

Orlando Fals Borda is another contemporary writer who discusses the process of learning from experience. Fals Borda has written extensively in the area of participatory action research (1988, 1991, 1998). Writing from an interpretivist worldview, he draws

heavily on the work of Gadamer in his description of the process of learning from experience. He describes learning from experience as a three step process involving: life experience, interpretation, and application. In his discussion of the application phase of the process of learning from experience, Fals Borda (1998) introduces the concept of phronesis. Fals Borda points out that for Gadamer "application was not blind technology or simple expertise but political reason. ... [Application involved] 'practical astuteness or wisdom' which was how Gadamer interpreted Aristotle's ethical concept of phronesis" (p. 234-235). Thus for Fals Borda the application or action phase of learning from experience should be driven by ethical and practical considerations.

Meaning Making from an Interpretivist Perspective

An understanding of the processes by which people make meaning is foundational to understanding and facilitating a reflective practice class. This fundamental nature of meaning making and the basic need to better understand the process of meaning making informed the selection of the first research question of this study - How did participants in the reflective practice class make meaning?

In terms of the literature, to understand the processes of meaning making one must turn to philosophy and to issues relating to ontology and epistemology. Meaning making refers to how we come to know or understand, or how our experience and behavior get structured as they do, or how we make sense of the world around us. In my discussion of meaning making, I will first explore the positivist and interpretivist paradigms as different ways of making meaning or different ways we have of making sense of the world. I will also explore existential-phenomenology as an example of an interpretivist model of meaning making. I will conclude this section with a brief review of conceptions of the process of meaning making within the adult education literature.

Comparing the Positivist and Interpretivist Paradigms

The different ways of viewing meaning making or knowing may be clarified by looking at the foundational ways we have of viewing the world. The two principal paradigms are the positivist paradigm and the interpretivist paradigm. Meaning making happens in the context of our paradigmatic beliefs, thus this discussion of paradigms is very relevant. These two paradigms represent alternative ways of viewing and understanding the world. Each is deeply rooted in specific beliefs about the nature of reality and the nature of knowledge.

Guba, in his book *The Paradigm Dialogue* (1990), distinguishes between the various paradigms in terms of ontology (What is the nature of reality?) and epistemology (What is the nature of the knowable? What is the relationship between the knower and the known? What is the relationship between Subject and Object?). The positivist paradigm represents a dualistic perspective where the knower is separate from that which is known, person as subject is separate from world as object. Guba suggests that the positivist paradigm is based on a realist ontology (reality exists "out there" separate from us) and a dualist/objectivist epistemology. The interpretivist or constructivist paradigm, on the other hand, represents a monistic perspective which does not separate the person from the world, but which describes the person and world as together co-constituting our lived experience of reality. From this perspective the knower and the known are not separate but are parts of one complete whole. Person as "subject" and world as "object" exist in interaction with each other. Guba suggests that the interpretivist paradigm represents a relativist ontology and a monistic/subjectivist epistemology. The relativist ontology of the interpretivist paradigm suggests that "realities exist in the form of

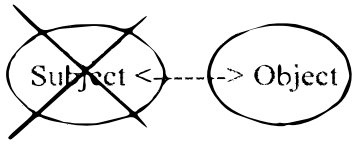
multiple mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific, dependent for their form and content on the persons who hold them" (p. 27).

Subject-Object Relationship

One of the key differences between the positivist and interpretivist paradigms is how the relationship between subject and object (person and world) is defined within each paradigm. Within the positivist paradigm we are ambivalent about the role of our subjectivity. We say that our subjectivity contaminates knowledge. We insist that to create valid knowledge one must take an objective stance and take into account only those aspects of reality that are observable and verifiable by others and that can be formed into a predictive theory. The positivist paradigm is based on an objectivist view of the relation of the knowing person to the reality he or she knows. All valid knowledge is based on the application of reason and logic in reflection on these objective observations of the world. The only valid knowledge is scientifically derived knowledge. There is no place for personal opinions or personal perceptions. Within the interpretivist paradigm however, it is accepted that our subjectivity plays an inherent role in our experience of reality and in how we interpret or structure our experience (in how we make sense of the world). This represents a monist/subjectivist epistemology where the knower and the known, subject and object (person and world) exist in interaction and co-constitute our experience of reality (see Figure 3).

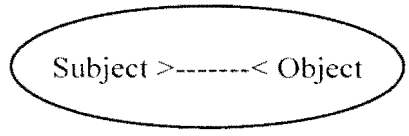
The positivist and interpretivist structures of consciousness are radically different. The positivist paradigm fosters a "separated consciousness." It fosters a belief in a universal static reality that is out there and separate from us. The interpretivist paradigm suggests that we co-create our reality. Reality is not static, but dynamic and subject to transformation. The interpretive paradigm fosters an "interactive or connected consciousness."

Positivist Paradigm
(Dualist/Objectivist Epistemology)



Subject and Object separate
(Knower and Known separate)
To know reality we take an objective stance denying the role of our subjectivity in the project of knowing.

Interpretivst Paradigm
(Monist/Subjectivist Epistemology)



Subject and Object are One
(Knower and known are one)
Subject and object exist in interaction and co-constitute our expereience of reality

Structure of consciousness given by S --- ● relationship

Figure 3: Different Structure of Consciousness for Positivist and Interpretivist Paradigms.

Existential-phenomenology Provides Some Insights Into the Nature of Everyday Meaning Making from an Interpretivist Perspective

The philosophical assumptions of the interpretivist paradigm are shared by phenomenology and existential-phenomenology (Ihde, 1986; Heidegger, 1962; Gadamer, 1975; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). The philosophical position of phenomenology or existential-phenomenology exemplifies some of the basic principles of the interpretivist paradigm. Existential-phenomenology can give us some insights into the nature of the person-world relationship and the nature of human experience (or human consciousness) which underlies the interpretivist paradigm. Pollio, Henley and Thompson, (1993) suggest that:

> [Phenomenology or existential phenomenology] does not view experience (or consciousness in more technical terms) as a consequence of some internal set of events such as mind or brain but as a relationship between people and their world.

> ... Consciousness is viewed ... as a relationship between the living subject and his or her world. (p. 12)

Valle and Halling's (1989) account of traditional psychology (especially cognitivist psychology) and existential-phenomenological psychology supports the notion that these fundamental paradigms ultimately translate to different ways of being and acting.

> The existential-phenomenological psychologist speaks of the total, indissoluble unity or interrelationship of the individual and his or her world. ... In the truest sense, the person is viewed as having no existence apart from the world and the world as having no existence apart from persons. Each individual and his or her world are said to *co-constitute* one another. (p. 7)

Valle and Halling use the "vase and faces" drawing to illustrate the notion of how person and world are interdependent and co-constitute one's experience of reality. From an existential-phenomenological perspective the knower is not separated from the known, person as subject is not separate from world as object. Rather the knower and known (subject and object) are parts of one indivisible whole. Subject and object in interaction co-constitutes one's experience of reality.

The nature of human experience from an existential-phenomenological perspective provides some insight into the process of meaning making. We do not "make sense" of our experience as some writers suggest, but rather meaning is inherent in one's lived experience. As Merriam suggests in speaking of the interpretivist paradigm "meaning is embedded in people's experiences ..." (1991b, p. 49). Thus to explore the nature of meaning making from first principles is to explore the nature of human experience.

Pollio, Henley and Thompson (1993) provide an overview of the nature of lived experience or human experience from an existential-phenomenological perspective. They

suggest that human experience or human consciousness can be described as being intentional, contextual and temporal.

Intentional

The essential connectedness to the world (being-in-the-world) that Valle and Halling describe earlier was described more formally by Husserl in his concept of intentionality. The principle of intentionality describes the nature of everyday human consciousness or the basic structure of everyday human experience. According to Ihde (1986) "within philosophy, intentionality is taken to imply that experience [consciousness] and world co-constitute one another for some person. ... Intentionality [describes] a basic configuration of person and world. [It is the] fundamental structure of human experience [or human consciousness]" (p. 17). Intentionality describes our being-in-the-world, or our connection to the world in everyday lived experience. "The concept of intentionality ... is meant to capture the descriptive insight that every experience has its reference or direction towards what is experienced, and, contrarily, every experienced phenomenon refers to or reflects a mode of expression to which it is present" (Ihde, 1986, p. 42-43). This basic relatedness to the world in general implied by the principle of intentionality is formalized as (I) noesis - noema, where "noema" refers to that which stands out in an experience, "noesis" refers to how it is experienced, and "I" refers to the self which is described by this experience (the phenomenal self). This principle of intentionality describes the basic structure of human experience or human consciousness.

Contextual

Phenomenologists suggest that lived experience also adheres to a contextual or figure/ground structure.

> All figural aspects of (perceptual) experience always emerge against some ground or other which serves to delineate its specific experiential form ... For this reason,

> it is never experientially valid to talk about an isolated figure of experience, perceptual or otherwise; rather, we must always talk about the figure/ground structure of experience to emphasize that human experience is a patterned event defined by focal and background aspects. ... Whatever we take as figural is always grounded by both a near ground that is directly related to the figure and by a variety of other grounds that serve to provide the core figure/ground event with its initially more vague grounding. This latter set of limits to the core figure/ground pattern is called the *horizon* sometimes even the fringe of experience. (Pollio, Henley & Thompson, 1993, p. 25-26)

Thus accounts of lived experience can be described in terms of a figure/ground structure. That which stands out in our consciousness (noema) is 'figural', with the other things which we are conscious of forming the 'grounds'. Figure/ground refers to the context and provides more elaboration on the contexts of a particular experience.

It is clear that phenomenologists acknowledge that experience is co-constituted by subject and object in interaction. However, I have not yet discussed the role of our subjectivity in co-constituting our experience. Pollio, Henley and Thompson (1993) suggest that there are in fact two sets of figure/ground patterns that interact in experience through a fusion of horizons in the figural event. More specifically they suggest that the grounds of our subjectivity serve as a second set of grounds which co-constitute our experience of some phenomenon. There are thus two sets of grounds which co-constitute what stands out as figural for us. Pollio et al. elaborate on this notion of a dual set of grounds :

> We seem to have left out a significant aspect of the situation, the person for whom the object, event or idea is figural. The concept of intentionality has already dealt with this issue, since experience is always structured as a relation between some

> experiencer and something experienced. Transposing this insight to the language of figure/ground, part of the ground for any figure is the person for whom it is figural. Under this rendering, the concept of figure/ground implies that the personal perspective is, itself, always a significant aspect to what is perceived. When we consider perceptual experience more completely from the side of the person, it is clear that all experience, perceiving included, is always situated, i.e. contextualized in some ground. ... Person and situation always co-constitute each other, and it is always the relevance of the situation for me that is crucial in its role as ground for my experience and/or behavior. ... The focal event in any experience is thus grounded by two different sets of events: one, by the multiple grounds surrounding it as object, and two, by the multiple grounds surrounding the person, including his or her experiences of the present situation, the language he or she speaks, the culture in which he or she lives, and so on. The facts of figure/ground lead us to view the focus of experience - the figural event as comprised of a double figure/ground/horizon pattern, with the focus of experience serving as the nexus connecting the relevant aspects of this dual structure. All experiencing is relational, and the field of experience -- the phenomenal field -- is grounded as much by the world of nature and things as those of culture, history, and situation. All events experienced as figural emerge only against the multiple grounds of everyday reality comprised of its worldly and sociopersonal aspects. (Pollio, Henley and Thompson, 1993, p. 27-29)

Pollio et al.'s account of the dual set of grounds (see Figure 4) most clearly articulates how a person in interaction with his/her world (or subject in interaction with object)

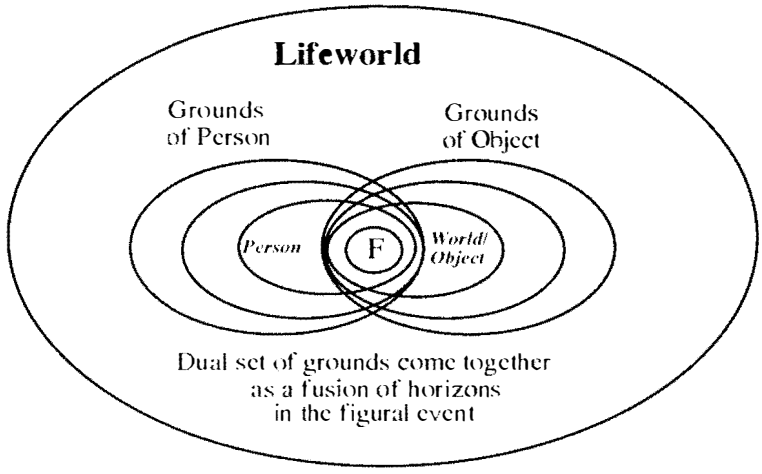


Figure 4: Dual Set of Grounds Underlying Every Figural Event.

co-constitutes his/her lived experience of reality. It suggests that much of what one brings to a situation shapes (or serves as a ground for) one's experience in that situation.

Temporal

The third characteristic of human experience (or human consciousness) suggests that human experience (lived experience) is characterized by the temporal concerns of continuity and change.

> If we consider our own first-person experiences of the world we are struck by its mobility and change: we seem unable to stay continuously rooted to a single figure and although each focal event may be accurately described as a coherent, intentional, figure/ground/horizon structure, the fields of our experience come and go in a more changing way. No one has better captured this aspect of human experiencing than William James in his description of the *stream of consciousness.* (Pollio, Henley and Thompson, 1993, p. 24)

Experience and Behavior are two Inseparable Aspects of Human Existence

Pollio, Henley and Thompson (1993) also suggests that experience and behavior are two inseparable aspects of our existence.

> Behavior exhibits many of the same properties as experience: both are intentional, both are centered on certain focal events, both are situated and context sensitive and both take place within the framework of time considered as continuous. ... It is often possible to describe an individual's first-person world on the basis of what he or she does as well as in terms of what he or she talks about. ... It is incorrect to separate behavior and experience: rather both are better construed as aspects of a reversible figure in which both participate dialectically. As Merleau-Ponty (1958) noted, this dialectic is quite properly called existence. ... Under this rendition, a description of the first-person field may be attained by emphasizing behavior and/or experience according to the possibilities of the situation. (Pollio, Henley and Thompson, 1993, p. 243)

Overall Structure of Human Consciousness (or Human Experience) from an Existential-Phenomenological Perspective

In summary we can say that from an interpretivist perspective, or an existential-phenomenological perspective, the structure of human consciousness is such that it is person as subject in interaction with world as object that co-constitutes our experience of reality. Thus the S --- O in interaction is an important aspect of the structure of consciousness from an interpretivist perspective. This relates to the principle of intentionality and to the interpretive nature of the process of meaning making. We also saw that from an interpretivist perspective, time is viewed as continuous (also reflecting the longitudinal impact of past experiences, and the historical rootedness of human consciousness). Finally, we also saw that experience and behavior are two inseparable

aspects of our existence. One's personal grounds and the grounds of the world co-constitute one's experience and/or spontaneous behavior in a given situation. Figure 5 summarizes these important dimensions of human consciousness or the structure of human consciousness from an interpretivist or existential-phenomenological perspective.

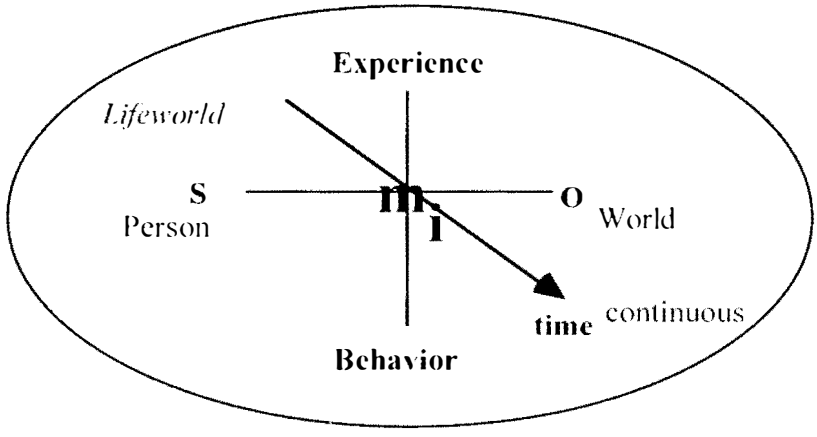


Figure 5: Structure of Human Consciousness or Human Experience from an Interpretivist Perspective.

Theoretical Model of Meaning Making from an Interpretivist Perspective

This section presents a theoretical model of meaning making based on a synthesis of the phenomenological and existential-phenomenological literature. Table 1 presents a broad overview of a theoretical model of meaning making from an interpretive perspective. From an interpretivist perspective it is accepted that our subjectivity plays an inherent role in shaping our experience of reality. The interpretivist paradigm proposes that subject and object together co-constitute one's lived experience of reality (Valle and Halling, 1989; Pollio, Henley and Thompson, 1993). Thus, the process of meaning making in everyday life is given by the interaction of the person with their world. The

Table 1: Theoretical Model of Meaning Making from an Interpretivist Perspective.

Meaning is inherent in the structure of one's lived experience (and behavior) from moment to moment. The structure of one's lived experience is given by person as subject in interaction with world as object co-constituting one's experience of reality. Since everybody brings something different to a situation, everybody's experience is somewhat different. Thus, this process of meaning making yields subjective personal meanings (Guba, 1990). A theoretical model of meaning making could be presented as follows:

subjective personal meanings, m_i, are given by $(S \text{ --- } O)t_i$

where:

S (the subject pole of the S --- O relation) represents aspects of one's subjectivity or personal grounds which affect how one structures one's experience in a given situation, and

O (The object pole of the S --- O relation) represents one's current environment, one's present situatedness in the world, the object with which one presently interacts.

meaning a person assumes in a given situation is inherent in their lived experience (and behavior) in that situation. The personal meaning of one's experience in a given situation is given by the structure of one's experience in that situation (Valle and Halling, 1989).

How do we get at the personal meaning inherent in one's lived experience (and behavior)? Phenomenologists suggest that personal meaning in a given situation is conveyed by the nature of one's lived experience (and behavior) in that situation. Phenomenologists talk about eliciting rich descriptions of one's lived experience of a given phenomenon from a participant and by analyzing this description of the individual's lived experience, they uncover the meaning of that phenomenon for him/her. The meaning a person attributes to a particular situation is inherent in, or conveyed by, his/her lived experience (or behavior) in that situation. By an analysis of rich descriptions of lived experience, phenomenologists can excavate these meanings from the lifeworld. Valle and Halling suggest that the meaning of one's experience is given by the structure of one's experience.

> Recalling that structure is made present to us as meaning, one can now rephrase the task of the existential-phenomenological psychologist as one of disclosing the nature of structure in the form of meaning. That is, through description, the prereflective life-world is brought to the level of reflective awareness where it manifests itself as psychological meaning. (Valle & Halling, 1989, p. 14)

The meaning of an individual's experience in a given situation is given by the structure of his/her experience in that situation. The structure of an individual's lived experiences can be described in terms of the figure/dual set of grounds structure. The way we experience a given situation inherently communicates the meaning of that situation for us. When something stands out as figural, or we experience something in a particular way, this makes sense given the configuration of our personal grounds and the grounds of the phenomenon in question. Also when describing the meaning of a given phenomenon to a particular individual, phenomenologists identify themes from that individual's lived experience of that phenomenon, and construct a thematic structure to convey the meaning of that phenomenon for that individual. For a phenomenologist, a theme represents a continuity or pattern in an individual's (or group's) lived experience of some phenomenon. Thus, the meaning of a person's lived experience in a particular situation is given by the structure of his/her lived experience in that situation, where structure can be taken to refer to the figure/dual set of grounds from which a thematic structure can be inductively derived based on an analysis of the individual's lived experiences.

Another characteristic of lived experience referred to in the literature (Pollio, Henley and Thompson, 1993) was continuity and change. Our lives are a continuous stream of lived experience generated by subject and object in interaction. This can now be seen as a continuous flow of personal meanings inherent in the flow of lived experience that makes up our stream of consciousness. Our stream of consciousness represents the flow of lived experience and the flow of lived experience in turn embodies our personal

meanings. Therefore we can say that our stream of consciousness represents the flow of our lived experience, which in turn can be characterized as a flow of personal meanings.

Thus, lived experience can be seen as a patterned and meaningful event. To uncover the personal meanings inherent in our lived experience in a particular situation we need to excavate these meanings from our lifeworld. The meaning of one's experience in a given situation is given by the pre-reflective description of one's experience (and behavior) in that situation. We can examine these tacit personal meanings inherent in lived experience by examining the structure of lived experience. From a description of an experience we can get the structure of the experience in terms of what is experienced (what is figural - neoma) and how it is experienced (noesis). We can also reflexively get at the configuration of the dual set of grounds of the experience (the grounds of the person and the grounds of the object/world). The grounds can be elaborated as much as necessary by asking for further description from the experiencer. Since each individual is unique and has his/her own unique background and biography, the configuration of figural events from the grounds of the person and the grounds of the object will be different in every case. Everyone experiences reality or makes sense of the world in their own unique way. Therefore, the interpretivist paradigm suggests that we live in a world of personal meanings and multiple realities.

The Interpretive Nature of the S --- O relationship

Phenomenologists such as Valle and Halling (1989) refer to the nature of the S --- O relationship as one of co-constitution. They suggest that Subject and Object in interaction co-constitute our experience of reality, that the grounds of person and the grounds of object come together in a fusion of horizons in the figural event. Heidegger and Gadamer applied the concept of interpretation to the nature of the S --- O relationship.

They reframed the co-constitutive relationship between Subject and Object as an interpretive one:

> Martin Heidegger, and Hans-Georg Gadamer have applied the term "hermeneutics" to a philosophy of human existence as a whole. Understanding, they argue, is more than a mental process. It is not just something we do but the way we are. We are beings who understand, and understanding underlies all our activities. Moreover, such understanding fundamentally is a process of interpretation. ... For Heidegger, people are beings who seek to fulfill their possibilities. As a human being, he says, I regard what I encounter (people, processes, things) in light of my purposes, authentic or otherwise. Of my very nature, I try to make sense of things. Thus, I live in the world "understandingly." This basic disposition Heidegger calls "primordial" understanding. In what sense is this disposition interpretive? To understand something is to grasp its meaning or significance. To interpret something is to apprehend what it signifies for a certain standpoint or situation. According to Heidegger, I understand things in the light of my purposes, and hence from the standpoints or situations those purposes define. Thus understanding at heart is interpretive. ... Every apprehension of meaning is a finite apprehension from within the pretheoretical givenness of man's historical situation. (Kneller, 1984, p. 67)

Heidegger and Gadamer propose that meaning making is an interpretive process and they speak of the interpretive nature of the S --- O relationship. They suggest that the interpretation we glean from something (things, people or acts) is also dependent on time - it is an interpretation for that moment in history. Each person understands the world from his/her own interpretive perspective (his/her own hermeneutic situation), or in light of his/her own purposes. Based on Heidegger and Gadamer's work, we can present

the subject --- object interaction as one's interpretive perspective in interaction with one's context (interpretive perspective --- context). In this presentation the term interpretive perspective is used to refer to the subject pole of the S --- O relation, and the context is used to refer to the object pole of the S --- O relation.

Meaning Making in the Adult Education Literature

Several adult educators (Mezirow, 1991; Schön, 1987; Senge, 1990; and Covey, 1989) have also embraced an interpretive or constructivist model of meaning making. These educators generally agree that we each have our own unique interpretive perspective and we interpret the situations we find ourselves in from this perspective. The terminology varies a lot however. Some common synonyms for one *interpretive perspective* found in the adult education literature include: "frame of reference" or "meaning perspective" (Mezirow, 1991), one's personal "mental models" (Senge, 1990), "paradigm" (Covey, 1989), mind-set, vantage point, or perspective.

Mezirow is one adult educator who writes from an interpretive perspective. He (1991) suggests that when we make meaning or make sense of a particular situation "we make an interpretation of it. ... What we perceive and fail to perceive and what we think and fail to think are powerfully influenced by habits of expectation that constitute our frame of reference, that is, a set of assumptions that structure the way we interpret our experiences" (p. 1). To clarify his term "frame of reference", Mezirow uses a more technical term "meaning perspective" to describe an individual's interpretive perspective. Mezirow suggest that our meaning perspective is an important determinant of how we make sense of our experiences.

> Meaning perspectives refer to the structure of assumptions within which new experience is assimilated and transformed by one's past experience during the

> process of interpretation. They involve the application of habits of expectation to objects or events to form an interpretation. ... Most meaning perspectives are acquired through cultural assimilation, but others ... may be intentionally learned. Others are stereotypes we have unintentionally learned. (Mezirow, 1991, p. 2-3)

In conclusion, from an interpretive perspective, the process of meaning making can be described as a co-constitutive or interpretive process. Further we interpret or co-constitute the situations we find ourselves in a personal subjective way. Everybody interprets the situations they find themselves in differently. We live in a world of personal meanings and multiple realities.

Dialogue

The reflective practice class which was the focus of this research was very different from a traditional class in which the professor delivers lectures and class participants internalize the information presented. The reflective practice class was based on a group discussion or dialogical format whereby the professor played the role of facilitator, and class meetings consisted of class participants sitting in a circle and sharing and learning from and with each other. Given the emphasis placed on dialogue within the reflective practice class, this section will highlight some key themes from the literature pertaining to dialogue.

Dialogue as a Special Way of Communicating and Relating

When we examine the literature we find two uses of the word dialogue: dialogue as special way of communicating, and dialogue as a special way of relating. Dialogue as a

special way of communicating refers to a two-way conversation which involves partners taking turns in the conversation. Each partner in the dialogue is given the chance to speak. Thus it implies that we not only speak but that we also listen and allow for the free expression of the other. Thus, being receptive and expressive are both part of dialogue - neither one can be excluded for it to be a true dialogical conversation.

Dialogue as a special way of relating refers to holding an open, appreciative, and respectful stance towards one's partner in the dialogue. It implies the emergence of a sense of trust and respect between or among the interlocutors. It refers to a relationship of mutual positive regard. Van Manen (1990) points out that "Socrates in the *Meno* likens the dialogical relation to friendship" (p. 98). It implies a sense of equality and reciprocity among participants. Martin Buber (1958, 1965) has written extensively about the concept of dialogue as both a special way of relating and a special way of communicating. Buber, a religious man, describes this special dialogical way of interacting as an "I-thou" way of relating. Kneller (1984) describes Buber's perspective on dialogue as follows:

> According to Buber, I may interact with people and things in two ways, the "I-Thou" and the "I-It." The paradigm of an I-Thou relation is when two people meet in genuine appreciation. Each welcomes the other for the other's sake; neither uses the other for his or her own purposes. Buber calls this relation "dialogue" or "communion." ... The I-It relation tends to be self-interested and practical. I use the other person (or thing) for some purpose outside of himself (itself). (p. 46-47)

These two uses of the word dialogue are also interrelated. Dialogue as a special way of communicating with another also implies relating to the other in a special way. Buber's conception of dialogue involved both dimensions. "The dialogue relationship is a mutual meeting of persons, each accepting, speaking out, and most important, listening to the other. This is the I-thou relationship of which Martin Buber spoke. It is the deeper,

more satisfying aspect of relationship between persons in society" (Progoff, 1992, p. 125).

Dialogue and the Process of Understanding

Dialogue is inherently related to the process of interpersonal communication, and interpersonal communication in turn brings us to a consideration of the nature of the process of understanding. If we can assume that we live in a world of personal meanings and multiple realities, the challenges of interpersonal communication are apparent. In this section I will briefly discuss different perspectives on the nature of the process of understanding. In this discussion I will draw on the literature in the area of hermeneutics. Hermeneutics refers to a body of philosophical literature which views the process of understanding as essentially an interpretive process. According to Kneller, hermeneutics is based on the belief that "interpretation is at the heart of understanding" (Kneller, 1984, p. 95). In the hermeneutical literature there are two major schools of thought on the nature of the process of understanding represented by the work of Dilthey and Gadamer respectively.

Dilthey's Concept of Empathic Understanding

Dilthey saw the process of understanding as achieving empathic understanding of another person by bracketing all our presuppositions and "really listening" to the other. We come to know the other by assuming the perspective of the other, seeing the world through his/her eyes. This perspective emphasizes the reconstructive or reproductive nature of the process of understanding. Dilthey describes understanding, what he calls empathic understanding or *verstehen*, as the process of identifying with the other and attempting to take on the interpretive perspective of the other, or to reconstruct the

interpretive perspective of the other. Dilthey saw the process of understanding as essentially *a reconstructive process*. Kneller (1984) describes Dilthey's concept of empathic understanding as follows:

> According to Dilthey, ... understanding it is like reading a text. In each case we aim to find out what the authors or agents are seeking to accomplish. To do so, we take their place, assume their prejudices, look through their eyes - in short, identify with them. Then we are ready to intuit what the author sought to do. Dilthey called this entire process "*empathic understanding*" (*Verstehen*). Verstehen includes interpretation because it involves recovering a meaning that is not immediately obvious. This meaning, said Dilthey, is identical with the author's or agent's *intention*. (p. 66)

Dilthey suggests that to understand the other we need to see as they see. We need to bracket our own presuppositions and really listen to the other. Linge (1976) refers to Dilthey's view of the nature of the process of understanding as traditional hermeneutics.

Gadamer's Notion of Understanding as Interpretation Within a Tradition

Gadamer suggests that interpretation or meaning making always occurs within a tradition. That we can never entirely suspend all our assumptions and the frameworks from which we perceive. In fact Gadamer suggests that these are necessary for meaning making or understanding. He further suggests that when listening to another we cannot bracket all our presuppositions, and that to understand is always to understand differently. Thus, Gadamer saw the process of understanding as a productive process. Gadamer's perspective also points to the dialectical nature of the process of understanding. Gadamer's view of the nature of the process of understanding is referred to as philosophical hermeneutics.

Linge (1976) suggests that the difference between traditional hermeneutics of Dilthey and the contemporary hermeneutics of Gadamer is that "one regards understanding as a repetition or duplication of a past intention - as a reproductive procedure rather than a genuinely productive one that involves the interpreter's own hermeneutical situation" (p. xvi). Linge articulates Gadamer's concept of understanding as follows:

> The event of understanding can now be seen in its genuine productivity. It is the formation of a comprehensive horizon in which the limited horizons of text and interpreter are fused into a common view of the subject matter - the meaning - with which both are concerned. ... The concept of understanding as a "fusion of horizons" provides a more accurate picture of what happens in every transmission of meaning. (p. xix)

Gadamer suggest that, if we can enter into the dialectical process of understanding, the process has a mysterious element of buoyancy and we experience the sense of being borne along by the subject matter. Gadamer suggests that "the process of understanding has more in common with a dialogue between persons or with the buoyancy of a game in which the players are absorbed than it has with the traditional model of a methodologically controlled investigation of an object by a subject" (Linge, 1976, p. xix-xx). Gadamer's conception of the process of understanding emphasizes "the intrinsically dialectical nature of understanding that transforms both text and interpreter" (p. xx). Gadamer thus suggests that once we enter into dialogue, the dialogue itself takes ascendancy and has a certain buoyancy about it. Linge (1976) describes this process in the following terms:

Like all genuine dialogue, the hermeneutical conversation between the interpreter and the text involves equality and active reciprocity. It presupposes that both conversational partners are concerned with a common subject matter - a common question - about which they converse, for dialogue is always dialogue about something. Gadamer focuses his attention squarely on the subject matter of the text itself, that is, on what it says to successive generations of interpreters. ... The dialogical character of interpretation is subverted when the interpreter concentrates on the other person as such rather than on the subject matter - when he looks *at* the other person, as it were, rather than *with* him at what the other attempts to communicate. ... The interpreter must recover and make his own, then, not the personality or the worldview of the author, but the fundamental concern that motivates the text - the question that it seeks to answer and that it poses again and again to its interpreters. ... [Gadamer suggests that] one must be open to be questioned *by* the text, to be provoked by it to risk involvement in a dialogue that carries him beyond his present position. ... In real understanding, as in real dialogue, the interpreter is engaged by the question, so that text and interpreter are both led by the subject matter - by the *logo*, as Plato said. We speak therefore of having "gotten into" a discussion, or of being "caught" in a discussion, and these expressions serve to indicate the element of buoyancy in understanding that leads the conversational partners beyond their original horizons into a process of inquiry that has a life of its own and is often filled with developments that are unanticipated and unintended. "The real event of understanding," Gadamer contents, "goes continually beyond what can be brought to the understanding of the other person's words by methodological effort and critical self-control. It is true of every conversation that through it something different has come to be." (p. xx - xxii)

Gadamer suggests that, since we interpret the world from our own hermeneutical situation, we cannot hope to understand another exactly. Rather, to understand is always to understand differently. Linge (1976) summarizes Gadamer's conception of understanding as a productive dialectical process as follows:

> The meaning of a text surpasses its author not occasionally, but always. Thus understanding is not a reproductive procedure, but rather always also a productive one ... It suffices to say that one understands *differently* when one *understands at all*. ... The subjective intention of the author is an inadequate standard of interpretation because it is non-dialectical, while understanding itself, as Gadamer shows, is essentially *dialectical* - a new concretization of meaning that is born of the interplay that goes on continually between past and present (p. xxv-xxvi)

Two Concepts of Dialogue From the Literature on Hermeneutics

These two perspectives of the nature of the process of understanding also point to two perspectives on the nature of the process of dialogue, as follows: dialogue as empathic understanding, and dialogue as interpretive understanding. Dialogue as empathic understanding, based on Dilthey's conception of understanding, can be described as a process of empathically understanding one's partner in dialogue. This focuses on dialogue as the reconstructive process of understanding another person. This perspective portrays dialogue as a non-dialectical process. Dialogue as interpretive understanding, based on Gadamer's conception of understanding, can be described as participation in a free-flowing conversation which has a dynamic of its own aimed at gaining a better understanding of the particular subject matter under discussion. In this case, the partners become drawn into, or are caught up in, a dialectical back and forth movement of free flowing dialogue which has a magical creative aspect leading the dialogue partners to places they had not anticipated.

Dilthey and Gadamer appear to be talking about different aspects of understanding. With dialogue as empathic understanding (Dilthey), the focus is on understanding another person and their perspective. With dialogue as interpretive understanding (Gadamer), the focus is on the exploration of a particular subject matter about which the participants converse (and not on understanding another person per se). Dialogue as interpretive understanding refers to the process of exploring a particular subject matter with another person. Dialogue as empathic understanding is also very analytical in nature and is typically under the participants' conscious control. However, dialogue as interpretive understanding (or participation in free-flowing conversation) seems to be non-analytical in nature and is not under the participants conscious control - something greater than the participants themselves takes ascendancy in the dialogue.

Use of Dialogue as a Format for Learning

The idea of learning through dialogue is not new. Philosophers as far back as Plato and more recently Buber (1965) and Gadamer (1976) have talked about 'education as dialogue'. Pedagogical models which are conducted in a group format, where the teacher takes on the role of the facilitator rather than lecturer, are often described as dialogue-based models of teaching and learning. For example, Burbules, in his 1993 book *Dialogue in Teaching: Theory and Practice*, uses the term dialogue to refer to "to a particular kind of pedagogical communicative relation: a conversational interaction directed intentionally towards teaching and learning" (p. x). In the field of adult education, dialogue or group discussion has been a significant aspect of many models of adult learning from Lindeman's (1926) "discussion method," to Knowles' (1987) ideas on group learning, to Moses Coady's (1939) ideas on "study circles," and Freire's (1970) "culture circles." In this section I will describe various pedagogical models based on dialogue described in the

literature. This discussion illustrates the many different applications of dialogue and the different ways that the process of dialogue has been conceptualized.

Martin Buber was one of the first to see the educational possibilities of dialogue. He saw dialogue as entering into an I-thou relationship with his students and achieving effective communication (empathic understanding) with them. According to Buber the aim of dialogue is for each participant to become aware of the lifeworld of the other. In dialogue we attempt to hold our own and the other' perspective simultaneously. If a teacher can become aware of the lifeworld of his/her student then he/she will better know what learning experiences need to come next for that particular student (Kneller, 1984, p. 46-51).

Although he did not use the term "dialogue", Lindeman (1926) was a strong advocate of group discussion as a basic model of adult education. He suggested that the appropriate method for adult education is a discussion method where adults come together to learn from their experience together as a group. Lindeman's discussion method of adult education could also be described as a problem-centered model of adult education.

> Lindeman's discussion method of adult education or his situation-approach to learning involves, then, (a) recognition of what constitutes a situation; (b) analysis of the situation into its constituent problems; (c) discussion of these problems in the light of available and needed experience and information; (d) utilization of available information and experience for purposes of (e) formulating experimental solutions; (f) acting upon experimental propositions with a view of testing, and if necessary, revamping the assumptions which the discussion has revealed. (Lindeman, 1926, p. 193)

According to Lindeman, "discussion is more than talk. ... discussion is organized talk. When two or more people exchange experiences for the purpose of throwing light upon a

situation, and when the confronting of the situation is itself regarded as an educative opportunity, a tacit recognition to the effect that certain rules are to be followed, is present" (p. 188). Lindeman clarified the role of discussion in his model of adult education as follows:

> Rules for discussion will consequently be compatible with the fundamental purpose of conference which is not to defeat any one, but rather to arrive at a joint conclusion. ... One of the more important rules to bear in mind is this: discussion does not solve situations: it reveals experimental roads to action: real solutions are behavioristic not intellectualistic. After we have recognized a situation, analyzed its involved problems and sought for relevant information and experience, we are prepared to envisage the consequences of various lines of action. Ensuing activities are functions of personalities: each person who sets forth to experiment in the light of the direction provided by preceding discussion will experience unique qualities. Education has been forwarded by the group process. (Lindeman, 1926, p. 189-92)

The notion of dialogue is also central to Mezirow's more contemporary theory of transformative learning. Mezirow (1991) sees dialogue in a group setting as a means for facilitating critical self-reflection and transformative learning. Mezirow suggests that critical self-reflection is essentially a social process, and is rightly done in a group context using a form of discourse he calls rational discourse or dialogue. He describes this concept of rational discourse or dialogue as follows:

> Because critical reflection is a process of testing the justification or validity of taken-for-granted premises, the role of dialogue becomes salient. It is through dialogue that we attempt to understand - to learn - what is valid in the assertions

> made by others and attempt to achieve consensual validation for our own assertions. Consequently, education for adults may be understood as centrally involved in creating and facilitating dialogic communities to enable learners to engage in rational discourse and action. From this vantage point, adult education becomes the process of assisting those who are fulfilling adult roles to understand the meaning of their experience by participating more fully and freely in rational discourse to validate expressed ideas and to take action upon resulting insights. (p. 354)

Mezirow (1991) makes the connection between his concept of dialogue or rational discourse and perspective transformation, as follows: "A perspective is transformed by the resolution of a dilemma through exposure to alternative perspectives and participation in critical discourse with others to verify one's new reality. Transformative learning is not a private affair involving information processing; it is interactive and inter-subjective from start to finish" (p. 364).

There is also a growing body of literature on dialogue within the field of organizational learning and organizational development (Bohm, 1989; Hargrove, 1995; Isaacs, 1993, 1999; Marsick, Kasl & Dechant, 1992; Schein, 1993; Senge, 1990). In looking at the literature on dialogue from the organizational learning field, we find that organizations have an interest in fostering shared understanding or shared mental models so that members of the organization will come to act in consistent and coordinated ways. In an organizational context, the interest in dialogue is primarily to foster group learning and only secondarily to foster individual learning and/or individual growth and development. In an academic context, like this reflective practice class, this emphasis would be reversed. In spite of this somewhat different emphasis, this research provides some valuable insights into the underlying nature of the process of dialogue.

Senge (1990) in *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* writes about how the workplace is being transformed, and how work teams that are expected to learn and work together are becoming the norm in the new 'learning organizations' of the twenty-first century. Senge points out that teams are popular within the workplace because there is a need to think insightfully about complex issues and for innovative coordinated action within organizations. According to Senge, "teams must learn how to tap the potential of many minds to be more insightful than one mind" (p. 236). Senge uses a jazz ensemble and a championship sports team as metaphors for acting in spontaneous yet coordinated ways. Senge suggests that effective team learning requires a shared vision, talented and skilled individuals, and most importantly, the team must learn to play together like a jazz ensemble or a championship sports team. Senge also makes very clear that team learning also requires practice but suggests that this is exactly what teams in many organizations lack. In discussing the skill needed to be able to 'play together', Senge suggests that "the discipline of team learning involves mastering the practices of dialogue and discussion, the two distinct ways that teams converse" (p. 237). Senge distinguishes between these two different types of discourse as follows:

> In dialogue, there is the free and creative exploration of complex and subtle issues, a deep "listening" to one another and suspending of one's own views. By contrast, in discussion different views are presented and defended and there is a search for the best view to support decisions that must be made at this time. Dialogue and discussion are potentially complementary, but most teams lack the ability to distinguish between the two and to move consciously between them. ... A learning team masters movements back and forth between dialogue and discussion. The ground rules are different. The goals are different. Failing to distinguish them, teams usually have neither dialogue or productive discussions. ... A unique relationship develops among team members who enter into dialogue regularly.

> They develop a deep trust that cannot help but carry over to discussions. They develop a richer understanding of the uniqueness of each person's point of view. Moreover, they experience how larger understandings emerge by holding one's own point of view "gently." They learn to master the art of holding a position, rather than being "held by their positions." When it is appropriate to defend a point of view, they do it more gracefully and with less rigidity, that is without putting "winning" as a first priority. (p. 237-248)

Senge suggests that a group can build shared mental models that makes coordinated action possible by consensus. Senge (1990), however, distinguishes between two approaches to reaching consensus as follows.

> [We can] distinguish between two types of consensus: a "focusing down" type of consensus that seeks the common denominator in multiple individual views, and an "opening up" type of consensus that seeks a picture larger than any one person's point of view. The first type of consensus builds from the "content" of our individual views - discovering what part of my view is shared by you and the others. This is our "common ground," upon which we can all agree. The second type of consensus builds more from the idea that we each have a "view," a way of looking at reality. Each person's view is a unique perspective on a larger reality. If I can "look out" through your view and you through mine, we will each see something we might not have seen alone. (p. 248)

William Isaacs, director of 'The Dialogue Project' at Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Center for Organizational Learning, has also written extensively on this subject (Isaacs, 1993, 1999). Isaacs views dialogue "as an emerging and potentially powerful mode of inquiry and collective learning for teams" (Isaacs, 1993, p. 39). He

emphasizes open inquiry, not just on a personal level, but inquiry into the beliefs and assumptions in the collective culture, and into the social pressures that shape our ways of being and acting. In situations of conflict in a group, participants tend to identify with their positions and interact from that perspective. Isaacs helps a group self-reflexively see these traditional patterns of interaction in a situation of conflict – where participants are defending their own positions and blaming one another. By getting a group's commitment to suspend these patterns of interaction and engage in inquiry into these patterns, a different quality of communication and collective inquiry can be achieved. Isaacs does not rely on a sense of cohesion and community that may evolve within a group to overcome natural tendency to interact from one's individual perspective. Instead, he helps the group become consciously aware of these entrenched patterns and asks group members to suspend these patterns of interaction and to engage in a process of collective inquiry. According to Isaacs, dialogue aims to build a group that can think generatively, creatively, and most importantly, together. Isaacs draws heavily on the work of David Bohm (1980, 1989) who has also written extensively about dialogue. Bohm, a physicist, compared dialogue to electron superconductivity. Based on Bohm's analogy of superconductivity, Isaacs (1993) articulates the ideas of "cool inquiry" and "hot inquiry" within a group as follows:

> Based on his work in quantum physics, David Bohm has compared dialogue to superconductivity. In superconductivity, electrons cooled to very low temperatures act more like a coherent whole that as separate parts. They flow around obstacles without colliding with one another, creating no resistance and very high energy. At higher temperatures, however, they begin to act like separate parts, scattering into a random movement and loosing momentum. Depending on the environment in which they operate, electrons behave in dramatically different ways. The field in which the electrons operate changes. (p. 32) ... When

> confronting tough issues, people act more like separate, high-temperature electrons. Their associations are unstable and incoherent, in the sense that they collide with one another at times. Dialogue seeks to alter this by producing a "cooler" shared environment, by re-focusing the group's shared attention. When this takes place, people can spend time in high energy interactions with reduced friction, without ruling out differences between them. ... In dialogue the aim is to produce a special, "super cooled" environment in which a different kind of relationship among the parts can come into play. Traditional forms of inquiry focus on the nature of the parts of the system and their causal interrelationships. Following the analogy here, this might be called "hot inquiry." Dialogue can permit the emergence of a form of inquiry that requires a new repertoire of collective attention called "cool inquiry." Cool inquiry focuses people's attention on collective thought and shared assumptions, and the living social processes that sustain them. (p. 32)

Proponents of liberatory pedagogies such as Freire (1970, 1973), Shor (1992), Weiler (1991), and Lather (1991) are also strongly committed to dialogue. These educators advocate a dialogue-based, learner-centered, and participatory pedagogy aimed at helping participants engage in critical reflection on reality leading to action to transform reality. Freire (1970), in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, articulates clearly the nature of a liberatory pedagogy based on dialogue. He distinguishes between traditional pedagogy (what he refers to as the banking model of education) and the dialogue-based problem-posing pedagogy he advocates. Freire suggests that "banking education resists dialogue; problem-posing education regards dialogue as indispensable to the act of cognition which unveils reality" (p. 66). Freire advocates a dialogue-based problem-posing pedagogy aimed at helping participants discover the true nature of reality and helping them see that they can act to transform that reality. Freire associates dialogue with engaging in praxis in

the lifeworld. According to Freire, a liberatory pedagogy is a dialogue-based, problem-posing pedagogy which engages participants in the humanizing process of praxis.

> Apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other. ... Authentic liberation – the process of humanization – is not another deposit to be made in men. Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it. ... Those truly committed to liberation must reject the banking concept in its entirety. ... They must abandon the educational goal of deposit-making and replace it with the posing of the problems of human beings in their relations with the world. "Problem posing" education, responding to the essence of consciousness – intentionality – rejects communiqués and embodies communication. ... Problem posing education involves a constant unveiling of reality... and strives for the *emergence* of consciousness and *critical intervention* in reality. ... Problem posing education affirms men and women as beings in the process of becoming – as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality. (p. 53-65)

In addition to dialogue as a means for people to engage in praxis, Freire emphasizes another aspect of dialogue. He suggests that there must be a dialogic relation between teacher and students. He describes the dialogic relationship between teacher and student as a peer relationship or one of solidarity. In terms of authority and power relationships, the problem-posing method of education resolves the contradiction between teacher and student through fostering dialogic relations between them.

> The practice of problem-posing education entails at the onset that the teacher-student contradiction be resolved. ... Dialogical relations [are] indispensable. ... Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is not longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. ... Authority must be on the side of freedom, not against it. ... The students - no longer docile listeners – are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher. (p. 61-62)

Through dialogue the problem-posing model of education helps participants realize the true nature of reality (that it is person in interaction with the world and co-constitutes reality), and that both play a role in shaping reality. By helping participants engage in praxis in problem situations that challenge them, this dialogical process empowers and fosters agency on the part of participants.

In summary, this chapter reviewed current discourses in four key areas of the literature relating to this study: reflective practice, learning from experience, meaning making from an interpretive perspective, and dialogue. As part of this research a detailed investigation of a reflective practice class was conducted. This review of the literature provides some background to contextualize the findings of the empirical part of this study. In the next chapter I will provide an overview of the research methodology used in studying the reflective practice class that was the focus of this study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted as a qualitative case study of a group engaged in a reflective practice class in a higher education setting. The purpose of the study was twofold: to explore how participants in this reflective practice class made meaning, and to explore the underlying processes of the class. Data collection methods included phenomenological and biographical interviews with class participants along with the collection of ethnographic data within the group (observations of class meetings and collection of archival data or documents). The phenomenological interviews conducted with class participants were the main source of data for this study and were the main focus of attention during the data analysis phase. Data analysis involved thematic and categorical analysis of the data using a grounded theory approach culminating in the development of substantive theories of: (i) participants' ways of making meaning, and (ii) the underlying processes of the class. According to Strauss and Corbin (1994) "a substantive theory [as distinct from a formal theory] is grounded in research on one particular substantive area ... [and can] be taken to apply only to that specific area" (p. 281). In the development of this substantive theory a constructivist approach to the interpretation of the data will be used. According to Denzin (1994) "a good constructivist interpretation is based on purposive sampling, a grounded theory, inductive data analysis, and idiographic (contextual) interpretations" (p. 508).

Research Participants

The participants in this study were students who were enrolled in a graduate-level course taught by the Psychoeducational Studies Unit within the College of Education of a large state university in the southeastern part of the United States. The title of the course was "Reflective Practice in Education and Psychology." This was a 3 credit hour class and was offered over the Fall semester in 1994. The objectives of the class were to help participants learn about reflective practice and to learn to become reflective practitioners. This was to be accomplished by learning together in a group setting. Two sections of the reflective practice class were offered in the Fall semester 1994, one meeting on Wednesday afternoons and the other meeting on Wednesday evenings. Although I attended and collected data on both sections, the afternoon section was the focus of this case study. The afternoon section had eight participants (five female and three male) who were masters and doctoral students majoring in adult education, human resource development, and/or educational psychology. Most of the participants were adults who had worked for years in various fields and therefore brought much life and professional experience to the group. A brief profile of each of the eight participants in the class is included in Chapter 4: Setting the Context.

Research Design

This study was conducted from an interpretivist perspective using a combination of phenomenological and ethnographic approaches. Data collection methods included phenomenological interviews, biographical interviews, participant observation of class meetings, tape-recordings of class meeting, and the collection of archival data or documents. Phenomenological interviews provided a first-person account of the

experiences of class participants. Biographical interviews with participants provided a detailed picture of the background that each participant brought to the class. The participant observation data provided a third-person account of what happened during class meetings from the researcher's perspective. The archival data or documents collected as part of this research (i.e. copies of learning autobiographies, critical incidents and reflective letters written by participants) provided rich views of the life context of participants and were also used to corroborate and extend information participants provided in their phenomenological interviews. Having the phenomenological interview data, the archival data or documents, and the data from observations of class meetings also served to "triangulate" the findings of this research.

Gaining entry to this research site was not problematic. In the first class meeting, the group was also informed that two doctoral students (another graduate student and myself) were pursuing research on the reflective practice class. We were introduced as observers and co-facilitators of the class. Participants gave their permission for the class sessions to be tape-recorded. Participants also agreed to participate in at least two individual interviews. They also voluntarily agreed to sign an Information and Consent Form (see Appendix B) formalizing their agreement to participate in this research. Participants were assured that the data generated as part of this research and also the names of participants would be held confidential. In order to maintain the anonymity of participants, pseudonyms are used throughout this report when referring to individual participants.

Phenomenological Interviews

A phenomenological interview was conducted with each of the eight participants at the end of the semester. These interviews, lasting between 60-90 minutes, dealt with

each participant's overall experience in the class. The attached Interview Schedule (see Appendix C) served as a guide for these interviews. Participants were asked to provide pre-reflective accounts of their lived experiences in the class. Kvale (1983) describes the phenomenological interview as an interview "whose purpose is to gather descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena" (Kvale, 1983, p. 174). Kvale summarizes twelve aspects of the phenomenological interview as follows:

> It is 1) centered on the interviewee's life-world; 2) seeks to understand the meaning of the phenomena in his life-world; it is 3) qualitative, 4) descriptive, and 5) specific; it is 6) presuppositionless; it is 7) focused on certain themes; it is open for 8) ambiguities, and 9) changes; it depends upon the 10) sensitivity of the interviewer; it takes place in 11) an interpersonal interaction, and it may be 12) a positive experience. (Kvale, 1983, p. 174).

Biographical Interviews

A second interview was also conducted with each participant at the end of the semester to get at their personal background. This interview, lasting around 45-60 minutes, focused on the participant's past life experience. The question used as the basis of this interview was as follows:

> Can you tell me about your personal background, your personal life history? This will help me get a sense for what you brought to the reflective practice class.

These biographical interviews provided some information on the backgrounds and past experiences that participants brought to the class. Seidman (1991) suggests that in seeking to understand a participant's way of being and acting, it is important to gain an appreciation for the participant's broader life experience. Seidman argues that "people's behavior becomes meaningful and understandable when placed in the context of their lives" (1991, p. 10). This background interview provided information on the unique background of each participant and the unique contexts from which they came.

Ethnographic Techniques

Three methodological elements of ethnographic research were also employed in this case study, namely participant observation, audio tape-recording of class sessions, and the collection of archival data or documents.

Participant Observation

Throughout the semester, I sat in as a participant observer on each meeting of the class. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) describes the role of a participant observer as falling somewhere on a continuum ranging from a complete onlooker or outsider; to a partial participant (one who participates to some extent, but also observes); to a full participant. My role in the class was largely that of an observer, although on occasions I did participate in the class discussion. Field notes were compiled during these classroom observations.

Audio Tape-recordings of Class Sessions

Since it was impossible to capture the complexity of the dialogue within the group as a participant observer using field notes alone, each meeting of the class was also audio tape-recorded. Some 45 hours of classroom discussion (3 hrs x 15 classes) were tape-

recorded. Unfortunately, the technology used to audio tape-record the class meetings proved inadequate to the task, and although we went through the motions of tape-recording all class sessions, the quality of the tapes was not very good. The one microphone we had in the center of the room was unable to pick up clearly what everybody around the room said. Some sections of the tapes were of reasonable quality however much of the group conversation on the tapes was barely discernible and long sections of the tapes were completely inaudible. Consequently, the audio tape-recordings of the conversations in the group were not used extensively as part of this study.

Archival Data or Documents

A range of archival data or documents (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993, p. 196) were also collected as part of this research. These consisted largely of written assignments turned in by class participants. The following archival data or documents were collected: (i) educational autobiography - each participant was asked to write a brief educational autobiography and distribute copies to the class; (ii) critical incident - each participant was also asked to write an account of a critical incident from his/her personal, educational or professional lives copies of which were also distributed to the class; and (iii) 'open letter to the class' at the end of the semester - at the end of the semester each class member wrote a open letter to the other members of the class describing their overall experience of the class.

Data Analysis

Given that this was an interpretivist study, the analysis conducted as part of this research followed inductive interpretivist approaches. In preparing the data for analysis, all field notes were transcribed and all hand written documents were typed. The audio tape-recordings of the phenomenological and biographical interviews were transcribed

using the services of a professional transcriptionist. The transcriptionist signed a 'Certificate of Confidentiality' to maintain confidentiality and preserve the anonymity of the participants. Because of the poor quality of the tapes, the audio tape-recordings of all the class sessions were not transcribed. Only a couple of excerpts of classroom dialogue were transcribed. In the data analysis phase I attempted to develop substantive theories inductively from the data using a grounded theory approach. In the sections which follow I outline the analysis used in order to address the two research questions of this study.

How Did Participants In The Reflective Practice Class Make Meaning?

An intriguing aspect of this research from the very beginning was that, although all participants sat through the same class experience for a whole semester, (except for occasional absences), each person experienced the class differently. This suggested that participants' process of meaning making was unique for each participant. In order to get an empirical understanding of how participants made meaning in their everyday lives, I decided to take participants' experiences of the reflective practice class itself as an instance of meaning making and an example of how they make meaning in their everyday lives. My assumption was that if I could come to understand the dynamics of how participants made meaning of the class experience itself, the same dynamics (the same process of meaning making/understanding) might apply in other situations.

The account of meaning making in the literature prompted me to take a unique approach in my analysis of the data to address this first research question. Meaning making was described in the literature as an interpretive process whereby meaning is co-constituted by person as subject in interaction with world as object. The existential-phenomenological literature (Pollio, Henley and Thompson, 1993) suggested that what a person brings to a situation (their personal background) plays an integral part in informing how his/her experience gets structured. The literature suggested that the meaning inherent

in a participant's account of his/her lived experience in a given situation is given by the structure of his/her experience. The structure of a participant's experience is given by *figure/dual set of grounds* structure. This prompted me to investigate participants' everyday process of meaning making by conducting an analysis of figural events, with a view to identifying broad patterns in terms of how participants' experiences got structured in the way that they did. This analysis proceeded in two steps.

First I conducted an analysis of each participant's experience of the class as provided in his/her phenomenological interview. For each individual, I identified all the events that stood out as figural for that person in his/her phenomenological interview and mapped these out graphically on a sheet of paper. The end result was a constellation of figural events that stood out for each individual in the class. This analysis resulted in eight different diagrams showing the figural events for each of the eight participants in the class. Figure 6 depicts the figural events based on one participant's (Angela's) experience of the class.

Given that each participant reported a very different experience of the class the list of figural events was different for each individual. More specifically the lists of figural events (noema) and how these figural events were experienced (noesis) by each participant were different in each case. In looking across the lists of figural events for all eight participants, it was interesting to note that there were several events during the class which stood out as figural for more than one participant. However, even on those occasions when the same event stood out as figural for several participants (i.e. the noema was the same), how each individual participant experienced that event was very different (the noesis was different).

The second part of this analysis involved analyzing the figural events for each participant in the context of their biographical interview data. I analyzed participants' accounts of their experience of the class (as given in their phenomenological interviews) in

Following is a list of figural events (what stood out) for Angela in her experience of the reflective practice class (based on a phenomenological interview with Angela). The size of the ellipses indicate the relative time Angela spent describing each aspect of her experience.

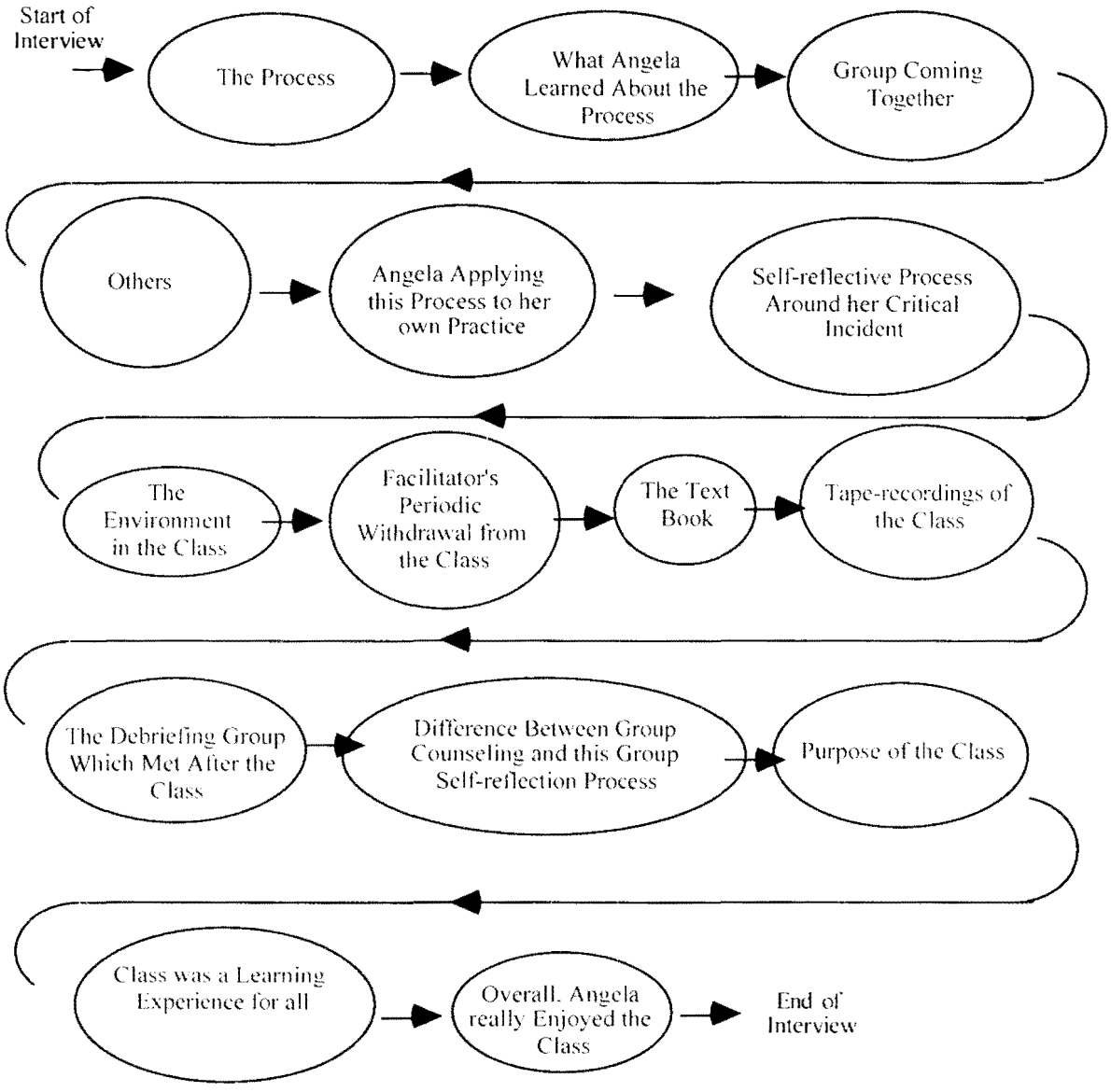


Figure 6: Figural Events for Angela in her Experience of the Class.

the context of their biographical interviews, with the objective of identifying patterns with respect to how or why each participant's experiences of the class got structured as they did. The biographical interviews provided information on the background of each participant or what each participant brought to the class. Each participant's background represented one of the dual grounds which came together in a fusion of horizons in the figural events of his/her experiences of the class. In order to understand participants' ways of making meaning, I did not look at the specific content of participants' experiences but at patterns in terms of how their experience got structured in the way that they did. The two questions which guided this analysis of figural events across all phenomenological interviews were as follows: Why did this particular event/situation stand out as figural for this particular person? and Why did this particular person experience this event/situation in the way that they did?

From this painstaking analysis of figural events in the context of biographical data, a number of themes emerged relating to how/why participants' experiences of the class got structured in the ways that they did. The findings of this analysis are presented in Chapter 5: Meaning Making Within the Reflective Practice Class.

What Were the Underlying Processes of the Reflective Practice Class?

In order to address the second research question of this study, I focused almost exclusively on participants' experiences of the class itself as given in their phenomenological interviews. The conventional way (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992) to proceed with an analysis of qualitative interview data is as follows: First, each individual interview is analyzed and a thematic structure arrived at for each individual's experience of some phenomenon (idiographic analysis). Secondly, "common themes" are identified across all protocols (nomothetic analysis) and a thematic structure arrived at representing the entire group's experience of the phenomenon under study. In presenting such research,

common themes are often presented as a matrix with participants' names listed on one axis and common themes on the other.

Consistent with this conventional approach to analysis of phenomenological interview data, each individual's experience was analyzed and a thematic structure arrived at for each individual's experience of the class (idiographic analysis). I decided, however, to depart from the convention of identifying common themes across all protocols (nomothetic analysis) and instead weaved the experiences/perspectives of each individual on a given aspect of the class together into an overall portrait of that aspect of the class. In this way, I attempted to construct an overall portrait (thematic structure) that was reflective of all eight participants' experiences of the underlying processes of the reflective practice class. This overall portrait did not consist only of common experiences or perspectives, but also contained any experience/perspective that fit into the overall portrait (thematic structure) in a coherent way.

The decision not to focus only on identifying common themes across participants experiences of the class deserves some elaboration. The notion of identifying "common themes" in the nomothetic analysis was a cause of some concern. The notion of "common themes" requires one to exclude all but experiences/perspectives that were common/shared among a group of people. This requirement to include only common themes was reminiscent of positivist attempts to achieve objectivity or some standard of universality and this appeared to be somewhat at odds with an interpretivist perspective of this research. In reading through participants' accounts of their experiences in the reflective practice class, I found that the eight participants had very different experiences of the class. Given the different backgrounds of each participant, different aspects of the class stood out for each of them. These accounts of experience were personally meaningful for each participant from their own particular perspective or vantage point. Thus, with the wide range of people in the class, I had accounts of experiences of any given phenomenon from an educator's perspective, from a counselor's perspective, from a minister's

perspective, and from an industrial trainer's perspective. Some dimensions of the class did not stand out for all participants. For example, interpersonal relationships processes in the class stood out for some participants but not for others. If I focused only on common themes then those experiences which were not experienced by everybody would have to be excluded. This was my chief concern. I felt that to exclude experiences shared by two or three participants but not shared by all participants would not communicate the richness of participants' overall experiences of the class.

The concept of the hermeneutic circle was also particularly important in this process of weaving participants' experiences of the class into a comprehensive portrait of the underlying processes of the class. The principle of the hermeneutic circle suggests that "one considers the whole in relation to its parts and vice versa" (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p. 121). As each participant's experience or perspective was woven together into a comprehensive picture of the whole, each participant's experience was interpreted in the context of the whole and vice versa. Thus, as each protocol was read, analysis proceeded in a dialectical fashion from part to the whole, whereby meaning units of particular segments were interpreted in the context of the current understanding of the underlying processes of the reflective practice class overall. This approach yielded a more authentic and comprehensive picture of the underlying processes of the class.

A categorical analysis of participants' overall experiences of the underlying processes of the class was also conducted. This process involved identifying themes in participants' experiences and then later grouping these themes into larger categorical areas representing distinct types of processes. For example, all experiences of learning processes where self-reflection was figural were grouped together. Similarly, all experiences of learning processes where problem solving was figural were grouped together.

King (1996) presents a nice metaphor for this process of weaving the perspectives of different participants on some particular phenomenon together - that of creating a

patch work quilt. In this metaphor, each of the patches that made up the quilt are equated to the experiences/perspectives of each individual participant. In the process of creating the quilt these pieces are woven together, not in any old way, but into the overall creative organic pattern of the quilt. Illustrating the concept of the hermeneutical circle, the resultant overall pattern of quilt is taken into account (the whole) as individual patches (individual experiences/perspectives) were woven together (and vice versa). And finally, the end result in the case of quilting at least, is a thing of beauty.

Overall, the analysis required to answer this second research question took a considerable amount of time and painted a complex picture of the underlying processes of the reflective practice class. The findings of this detailed analysis are presented in Chapter 6: The Underlying Processes of the Reflective Practice Class.

Researcher's Interpretive Perspective

In qualitative research studies the researcher is an integral part of the research process. The researcher decides on the focus of the study and during the research process is intimately involved in collecting and interpreting the data and reporting the ultimate findings. This being the case, during various phases of the research, the researcher must be able to bracket the presuppositions that he/she holds about the phenomenon under study (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Valle and Halling (1989) elaborate on the need to be able to bracket one's presuppositions with respect to the phenomenon under study as follows: "In order to understand a given phenomenon, one attempts to suspend or put in abeyance one's preconceptions and presuppositions. In phenomenology this practice is called *bracketing*. In order to bracket one's preconceptions and presuppositions, however, one must first make them explicit - one must "lay out" these assumptions so that they appear in as clear a form as possible to

oneself" (Valle and Halling, 1989, p. 11). Kvale (1983), speaking in the context of conducting a phenomenological interview, suggests that "the interviewer should be ... sensitive to his[/her] own presuppositions and hypotheses during the interview ... [the interviewer should possess] a critical consciousness of his/her own presuppositions" (p. 175). By being explicitly aware of the ideas, values and beliefs the researcher holds about the phenomenon they are studying, the researcher is better able to suspend or bracket these ideas/beliefs/values when conducting phenomenological interviews and interpreting the resultant data.

The standard way for the researcher to raise his/her presuppositions with respect to the phenomenon under study to a level of conscious awareness is by conducting a "bracketing interview" (Valle and Halling, 1989; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). Pursuant with good research practices a colleague, Mary Kay Kramp, conducted a (60 min.) bracketing interview with the researcher. This interview was audio tape-recorded and subsequently transcribed and analyzed in the same way as the other phenomenological interviews. The themes from this interview provided insight into my presuppositions with respect to the phenomenon under study. One key presupposition that I had coming into this research was that the class was all about collaborative learning. However, when in the process of analyzing the data and being open to the data I realized that perhaps I needed to frame the class in terms of reflective practice and not in terms of collaborative learning. Another important presupposition that was detected from my analysis of the data from my bracketing interview was that I still held a positivist view of knowledge and reality. It was only through exploring the first research question of this study relating to meaning making from an interpretive perspective, that I really began to understand the interpretivist paradigm and really came to appreciate its general significance in our lives.

Beyond the bracketing interview which addresses one's presuppositions with respect to the specific phenomenon under study, the researcher's personal biography also sheds some light on the interpretive perspective that the researcher brings to a study. As

with anybody, my general presuppositions and perspectives are informed by my status as a white male, aged late 30s, married with a family. The fact that I was born and raised in Ireland also brings a cultural background which may impact my interpretive perspective in some ways. My interest in philosophical/epistemological issues based on past coursework perhaps also comes across in this research.

In the next three chapters I present the findings of this research. Chapter 4 sets the context by presenting an overview of the reflective practice class studied. Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 address the findings of the first and second research questions respectively.

CHAPTER 4

SETTING THE CONTEXT

This chapter provides an overview of the reflective practice class, and also an introduction to the class participants and what they brought to the class. This chapter will thus attempt to "set the context" for the discussion in subsequent chapters.

Overview of the Class

The title of the class was *Reflective Practice in Education and Psychology* and the course was offered by the Psycho-Educational Studies unit within the College of Education. This was a graduate-level course carrying 3 credit hours and offered over the fall semester (15 weeks) 1994. The syllabus for the course is presented in Appendix A. The purpose of the class was to "increase our knowledge of reflective practice and improve our abilities to learn and practice reflexively." (Course Syllabus, Appendix A). The class met on Wednesday afternoons from 2:15 – 4:55. The textbook for the course was the text edited by Jack Mezirow entitled *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood: A Guide to Transformative and Emancipatory Learning* (1991). This text describes exemplary techniques and programs which foster critical self-reflection and transformative learning. It also documents various approaches to uncovering and mapping one's personal presuppositions and perspectives.

There were four activities prescribed in the syllabus which provided a structure for the class. As an initial activity, each participant was asked to write a brief educational

autobiography and distribute copies to the class. Participants were referred to a chapter by Dominicé (1990) in the course text entitled *Composing Educational Biographies: Group Reflection Through Life Histories*, and an article by Brady (1990) entitled *Redeemed from Time: Learning through Autobiography*, as guides in developing their educational autobiographies. The next class activity was centered on participants' critical incidents. Each participant was asked to write an account of a critical incident from his/her personal, educational or professional lives; copies of which were also distributed to the class. Participants were referred to a chapter by Brookfield (1990) in the course text entitled *Using Critical Incidents to Explore Learners' Assumptions* as a guide to selecting and thinking about their critical incidents. The overall function served by the critical incident activity was that it provided real life situations or cases where the group could explore (and critically reflect on) the assumptive worlds and thinking processes of the participants (critical self-reflection). Some participants also used the critical incident activity to bring problem situations to the class to be examined by the group. The third activity in the class asked participants to select a chapter from Mezirow's text to study, and then to make a presentation on that chapter to the class. The chapters which could be selected addressed various tools for critical self-reflection and perspective analysis. As a final activity at the end of the semester, each class member was asked to write a letter to the other members of the class describing their overall experience of the class. This letter was distributed to all class participants and served as an evaluation of the class overall.

The learning autobiographies and critical incidents were interesting in that they were occasions when participants shared their stories and their lived experiences in the class. The data suggested that these activities played a dual role in the class. Firstly, they helped class participants to get to know each other which contributed to the building of trust, respect and positive interpersonal relationships; and secondly, they provided content for critical self-reflection.

Techniques Used in the Class

In the early part of the class there was a great deal of emphasis placed on participants learning how to conduct a phenomenological interview with one another; or more specifically learning to take on the phenomenological attitude and ask non-leading phenomenological-type questions. Participants practiced conducting phenomenological interviews with other participants in the group and spent a lot of time learning how to ask non-leading phenomenological-type questions. Indeed, a very strong norm developed in the class around not asking leading questions. Kvale's (1983) model for conducting phenomenological interviews was employed. A handout was given to class participants on Kvale's phenomenological interview process. The general ideas from phenomenology such as taking on the phenomenological attitude, the concept of bracketing, and asking non-leading phenomenological-type questions had a major impact on the class. I will refer to this topic again later in my discussion of meaning making.

Another technique which was used in the class was Peters' (1981, 1988, 1990, 1991) Action Reason Thematic Technique (ARTT). The ARTT process represented a technique for uncovering the assumptions a person holds that underlie his/her actions or practice. The ARTT was originally conceived of as a method to get at the structure of an expert's knowledge in a particular area. According to Peters (1990), "the roots of ARTT are based in phenomenology ..." (p. 316). Peters outlines the basic structure of the technique as follows:

> The basic structure of the technique is an interview-analyze-interview cycle. The interview component is an open-ended, probing yet structured procedure designed to identify the actions and the reasons for actions taken by a person engaged in an actual problem-solving event. The identification of actions and reasons is strictly from the problem solver's point of view and is accomplished by asking the person

> what they did to solve a problem and why each action step was taken. It is from this account that assumptions guiding the interviewee's problem solving experiences can be identified and described. Uncovered by the analysis component of the technique, these assumptions become the focus of critically reflective learning. (Peters, 1990, p. 314-315)

The logic behind the ARTT technique is that any conscious or purposeful action can be articulated in terms of a string of reasons leading to a particular conclusion which formed the basis for one's action or actions. In addition, underlying one's reasons there is also a network of implicit beliefs and assumptions. The ARTT process provides a way to uncover these reasons and underlying beliefs and assumptions so that they can then be subjected to critical analysis. The ARTT interviewing process is described in Chapter 16 of the course text (Mezirow, 1991).

Chronological Summary of the Major Events of the Class

In the first class meeting, the professor proceeded to introduce the class and to explain the requirements for the course as outlined in the syllabus. A number of ground rules were also discussed, such as: participants must have respect for other members of the group; participants would be expected to listen and to think; participants should respect each other's views (each person's perspective is unique and valuable); and participants should not judge. Also, the phenomenological interviewing process and the ARTT process were introduced and described.

Based on a review of fieldnotes, class participants experienced some frustration in the early meetings of the class. This class was different from any other class they had previously experienced. Participants were expected to play a different role, a role which

was still unfamiliar. The frustration that participants experienced was probably because they were presented with a different way of being in the class. There was some adjustment and discomfort as they figured out their new roles. Their new roles were also different from their expectations. In early class meetings, participants still deferred to the professor as authority figure and source of knowledge in the class. It took participants a little while to figure out what was going on in the class and to become more comfortable with their new role as participants in the class.

Soon after the second class meeting began, one participant (David), reading from a type-written sheet of paper, began to raise a long list of concerns about his reaction to the first class meeting. This was a major event in the life of the class as a group. The subsequent discussion around these concerns took up almost the entire class. As we will see, this event stood out for several participants when they were interviewed about their experience in the class. The facilitator addressed the participant's concerns by acknowledging them and then turning the concerns raised over to the group to be addressed by the group. As a direct result of this student's interaction in the class an additional ground rule was proposed. This ground rule was that voicing of concerns is legitimate and encouraged in the group (Fieldnotes, p. 4).

In subsequent class sessions, the class moved into the formal activities of the course. The following weeks were occupied by participants sharing their learning autobiographies, critical incidents and then chapter presentations. Each of these were memorable and significant in their own way. Time was allocated to each activity throughout the semester as follows: during class meetings 1 -- 6 (approximately) participants shared their educational autobiographies in the class; from class meetings 7 – 12 (approximately) participants shared their critical incidents; during class meetings 13-14 (approximately) participants made their chapter presentations; finally, during the last class meeting participants discussed the reflective "letters" they had written. Thus we can

say that the sharing of the learning autobiographies and the critical incidents by class participants took approximately 80% of the class time.

The last assignment in the class was the "letter to the class" which gave participants an opportunity to share their overall reactions to the class. Prior to the last class meeting, participants composed a letter to the facilitator and other class participants. These were distributed at the next to last class meeting. For the final class meeting, the class met for approximately 60 minutes in the usual classroom to discuss these "letters", and then for the remainder of the class, participants went to a local restaurant for drinks and appetizers. Participants expressed a sense of regret that the class was over and many expressed a keen interest in continuing to meet as a group if there was any way that this could be arranged.

Environment and Cultural Norms Within the Group

When class members came into the reflective practice class they were confronted by difference. Firstly, they were seated in a circle. There was a ritual before every class meeting to reorganize the tables and chairs in the classroom from a traditional classroom arrangement to a circle. In this arrangement participants could see and interact with each other. Being seated in a circle helped to foster a participatory environment within the class. Secondly, different ground rules were established which in turn shaped the norms of behavior within the group. These ground rules were very different from what participants were accustomed to in other classes (indeed ground rules were rarely discussed in other classes). Thirdly, the role that the professor played and the roles that they as participants were expected to play were somewhat different in the reflective practice class. The facilitator did not lecture in a didactic fashion but facilitated conversation within the

group. Participants were not expected to internalize what the professor said, but instead they were expected to share and reflect together as a group.

The class was very informal. Participants got to know each other and addressed each other by first names. There was a lot of humor in the class. Sharing a joke or making a pun was accepted and even encouraged. Also there was not a sense of rigidly sticking to a schedule. If there was a topic on someone's mind, then it might become the topic of discussion for a portion of the class.

There was a sense that a distinct culture evolved within the reflective practice class over the semester. The culture which evolved within the class included norms and values relating to interpersonal relationships and also norms with respect to the dialogical learning processes. The norms relating to interpersonal relationships that evolved within the group included a sense of trust and respect, an accepting and non-judgmental stance, equality and inclusion, authentic sharing and reciprocity. These cultural norms and values promoted positive interpersonal relationships and facilitated the development of a sense of cohesion and community within the group. The cultural norms that evolved within the group related to the dialogical learning processes, included the norms of asking non-leading questions, the norm of challenging each others ideas, the norm of listening and the norm of acknowledging that others are the experts on their own experience. The norm of asking non-leading questions relates to the emphasis placed on asking phenomenological-type questions. The norm of challenging each others' ideas relates to the sense of critical reflection fostered within the class. There was a sense in the class that it was OK to challenge each other's ideas and also the facilitator's ideas. Critical reflection was encouraged. Another norm that the facilitator fostered was that class participants were responsible for their own learning. According to Rosalyn, "It's our learning, he's put the responsibility on us for our own learning" (Rosalyn, l. 1114). Yet another norm in the class was that everyone was responsible for maintaining the process - "Everybody has the responsibility of maintaining it. ... And I think that's cool. ... Everybody is facilitator,

by the second time, or third time or later on. ... I think the whole class takes more initiative to begin the process" (Xiaopei, l. 1142-1635). As these new ways of behaving were learned by participants they became established as cultural norms within the group. Interestingly, as time progressed, the group began to police adherence to these new norms. An example of the group policing new behavior norms within the group relates to the practice of asking non-leading questions. It became a strong norm in the group not to ask leading questions, so much so that members of the group would correct people who violated this behavior norm.

Overall a reflective culture evolved within the group. Critical self-reflection was a major focus of the class. On a personal level, participants were urged to be self-reflective – to "look at their assumptions" and to engage in "thinking about their thinking." The class also engaged in self-reflection as a group. After an interesting episode of dialogue had come to an end, the facilitator would stop the group and ask participants to reflect back on the interaction that had just occurred within the group. Also, when a question was posed to a participant in the class, it was understood that a pat answer would not suffice. A reflective answer was expected. As the level of trust grew in the group, participants took the time to give reflective answers and to almost think aloud in the group.

Another interesting aspect of the culture of the class was the language used by participants. In some respects, elements of a distinct language evolved within the group. For example, class participants talked about how the group had come together and someone used the word "jelled" to describe this phenomenon. Thereafter the word "jelled" was used frequently by participants and took on special significance for this group.

The Participants: Who they Were and What they Brought to the Class

I am forever indebted to the participants in this study. In the reflective practice class were some of the most talented people I have met while at graduate school. Each and every one of them has been my teacher, each in his or her own way. Overall, there were five women and three men enrolled as participants in the reflective practice class. The majority of the class participants were in their 40s-50s with just one participant in her mid 20s. Thus, most of the participants were in their mid-life with a lot of life experience and a lot of learning and wisdom to share. As mentioned in Chapter 3 - Research Methodology, biographical interviews were conducted with all eight participants in order to get a sense for who they were and what they brought to the class (their background and life contexts). A brief profile of each participant is included in this section based on data from these biographical interviews. The names used are fictitious to protect each individual's identity.

Angela

Angela identified herself as a Southern Appalachian woman. She was in her late 50s, married with 3 children and 3 grand children. Angela's biography traced an intriguing story of a commitment to helping others and a long personal struggle against all sorts of abuse and oppression. While working at a nuclear plant, Angela was pushed into a situation of becoming a whistleblower after highlighting several safety violations and management's attempts to silence her. Angela went on to become a nationally recognized advocate for nuclear safety. Angela had worked with the General Accounting Office (GAO) and chaired Congressional sub-committee meetings on nuclear safety. She had also received much media attention for her work. At the time of the class, Angela was still working for the same agency as a manager in the Human Resources Department. There

had been costs to Angela for her activism - "Taking on the system does not make for a comfortable place in your community, church or family" (Biographical Sketch, p. 2). In addition to being an advocate for nuclear safety, Angela became a social activist and adult educator working for social, economic and environmental justice with any individuals or groups who were being abused or oppressed. She had worked with abused women, black communities, Native Americans and others. From her experience working with these groups, Angela had developed her own process for empowerment. As an adult student, Angela had earned an undergraduate degree in education and had also just completed two masters degrees, one in adult education and the other in gerontology.

Bill

Bill was in his mid 40s and married. He was born and raised in a small town in the rural deep South, the oldest of four children. Both of his parents graduated from college. Bill grew up in the sixties and admitted that he was very much influenced by what was going on at that time. Towards the end of high school, Bill went through a stage of not knowing what he wanted to do with the rest of his life. It was in this time of despair that he began what was to become a lifelong search for purpose and meaning in his life. Bill decided to major in English literature in college, because it had potential as "a philosophical intellectual search for meaning in life" (Bill, AB, I, 418). After graduating from college Bill went into teaching. Dissatisfied with his teaching experience and needing to make some money for his family, Bill switched careers and, after he passed the CPA exams, he worked with a public accounting firm for 3 years and later worked as a comptroller at a local university for several years. However, for Bill, working with people and relationships were what gave him satisfaction and some purpose and meaning to life. Bill left the comptroller job, transitioned into the student services area, and studied for a masters degree in counseling. At the time this research was conducted, Bill was a full-time

student working towards his doctoral degree in Education and Counseling Psychology. In the last few years, he had had a sense about his life that "it's all kind of converging" (Bill, AB, l. 669). It seemed that he was just now finding his vocation or calling. "In getting into counseling it seems like nothing of my life was wasted, it all applies" (Bill, AB, l. 732). Bill was also interested in spirituality and this was part of the purpose and meaning he had come to see in his life.

David

David was in his late 40s and also married. He was born and raised in the mid-south. He was a Presbyterian Minister with many years of experience. He also worked as a consultant in the area of adult learning and organizational development, building on his extensive experience with group learning and community building. In his biographical interview, David discussed two broad areas of his life which he said had influenced his views on group learning enormously: his experience with the Foundation for Community Encouragement (FCE), a non-profit organization which has pioneered a community building workshop; and his profession as a minister and related training. David was hired as the president of the Foundation for Community Encouragement (FCE) in 1988 after a national search. He spent almost four years working with the Foundation. The Foundation offered workshops based on the work of Dr. M. Scott Peck, author of numerous books including *The Road Less Traveled* (1978), and *A World Waiting To Be Born* (1993). The other major area of David's life experience that he chose to talk about relates to his profession as a Presbyterian Minister. David had studied theology, counseling, spiritual growth and had an earned doctorate in divinity. "My other experience that I brought into that room was quite a number of years in ministry and spiritual growth, and then my previous doctoral work in that area and my own struggle really to make sense of life over a number of years" (David, AB, l. 185). It was David's

rich appreciation for the spiritual dimension that made his perspective so unique and valuable in the class. David was also an avid fan of Jungian psychology. At the time he participated in this research David was working on a doctoral degree in adult education.

George

George was in his mid 40s and also married. He was born in Africa. George's parents (U.S. nationals) went to Africa from the United States as missionaries. George's family moved quite a bit. They lived and worked in different countries in Africa and also in Europe before returning home when George was fifteen years old. George felt that being exposed to so many different cultures had a tremendous effect on him. After completing high school in the U.S., George went on to University and completed a B. A. in Psychology. He also earned his teaching certification. He then joined the VISTA program, a community building program which placed volunteers with local agencies and community organizations. George later went on to study for a masters degree in counseling and then worked for two years as a therapist in a sex abuse treatment clinic. After that he worked for five years with a state agency dealing with families where children had been removed because of abuse. George then started to work at an Alternative Center for Learning within the local school system. This center applied principles of positive reinforcement with high school students who were at-risk of dropping out of school. When George left the Alternative Center for Learning, he returned to school full-time to teach and work on his Ph.D. At the time he participated in this research, George was completing his dissertation in educational and counseling psychology. He was also teaching a class on emotions and was in the process of writing a text book on emotions. He still practiced counseling and had his own private practice. George was also very interested in spirituality and meditation.

Nikki

Nikki was in her late 30s and had a warm and involved personality. She was a second generation Italian-American, born and raised in north eastern part of the United States. "All my grandparents were born in Italy and I'm really proud of that, and I come from a really close knit, loving Catholic home, where the men are overly protective and the women make good pasta" (Nikki, AB, l. 14). Nikki had a strong background in both education and counseling. It seemed that working in the human services area ran in her family. Nikki's father worked in human services all of his life. Nikki held a masters degree in counseling and had worked as a counselor/therapist for several years. She also spent some time in the VISTA program and worked with inmates in prisons in North Carolina as a teacher and counselor. Nikki was a strong advocate for promoting basic mental health through education. She believed that there are a number of basic mental health skills which were really important skills for effective living and yet these skills were not taught anywhere. Nikki suggested that the teaching of these skills could be achieved through changes in teaching methodology. Nikki was also a very spiritually aware person. She pointed out that this area of her life, her spiritual journey, was resulting in some of the most profound learning in her life. At the time she participated in this research, Nikki was working on completing her doctoral degree in educational and counseling psychology.

Rosalyn

Rosalyn was in her mid 50s. She was born and raised in the midwestern part of the United States. Rosalyn's parents were farmers and she grew up in a farming community. Rosalyn had a great intellect and appetite for learning. She told an extraordinary story of many transitions and great accomplishments in her life. She began her career with a degree in medical technology, later got a masters degree in fine art, and later still graduated with Ph. D. in special education with a dissertation that won a major

national award. A theme that ran throughout Rosalyn's description of her life was that of "exceeding expectations." Rosalyn had an incredible sensitivity to and understanding of being on-the-outside-looking-in, and a keep appreciation of how our culture can subconsciously set very real boundaries of possibility in our lives. Because of her own transitions from one field of study/work to another, Rosalyn had incredible insights into what it takes to transition from one culture to another. She was very self-reflective and self-aware which she attributed to her background in art. Rosalyn also had extensive experience working with at-risk students. At the time Rosalyn participated in the reflective practice class, she was working on two books. One book was on "Why art is important in public school education" and the other was on "Children at-risk of dropping out of school and how art can change their lives." Both of these books were based on her work experience and dissertation research.

Sylvia

Sylvia was in her mid 40s. She was also born and raised in the midwestern part of the United States. Sylvia was a very independent-minded woman. She was very perceptive and also had an incredible memory. At the time of this research, she worked as an industrial trainer and human resources professional with a large energy/defense contractor. In her job, Sylvia conducted a variety of different training classes including management and supervisory training, safety training, and team building. She also served on a peer review panel which dealt with personnel issues. Sylvia was highly motivated both in her career and her academics. She had earned a bachelors degree in business administration and had just completed the requirements for a masters degree in technological and adult education. Sylvia had gone through a divorce a couple of years earlier. This divorce was a major event in her life. She had been married for 20 years and she and her husband had two children. Sylvia said that going through the divorce and the

post-divorce period were very tough times for her. Sylvia choose to talk about her divorce as her critical incident in the class.

Xiaopei

Xiaopei was a young Taiwanese-American woman in her mid 20s. Xiaopei told a fascinating story of growing up in Taiwan and then emigrating to the United States. She was born in Taiwan and moved to U.S. with her parents and sister when she was 14. She spoke of the culture and language change that this move entailed. She had a very close relationship with her parents, who had made a lot of sacrifices for her and her sister. When Xiaopei's family moved to United States, her father kept his job in Taiwan and commuted to and from the US four times a year. Xiaopei's mother worked very hard, learned the Chinese restaurant business, and then started her own restaurant. Her mother promoted a strong valuing of education and insisted that Xiaopei and her sister work very hard at their school work. When Xiaopei first moved to the United States, she recalled feeling isolated and different. Xiaopei also talked about the different expectations people had of her and her sister: "They expect us to win the math competition. They expect us to lead the science team" (Xiaopei, AB, I. 1824). Xiaopei went through the citizenship process with her sister in 1992. At the time she participated in this research, Xiaopei was a graduate student beginning work on a masters degree in adult education. The reflective practice class was her very first course in her masters program. She was very involved in student affairs and worked as a Residence Assistant in one of the residence halls on campus. Xiaopei was very sociable, friendly, and involved. Having come from another culture, she was also very interested in multi-cultural issues.

In summary, this chapter provided an overview of the reflective practice class which was the focus of this research, and also a brief description of the background of

each of the participants in the class. This chapter was intended to set the context for the discussion of findings in subsequent chapters. The findings of this study relating to the first research question are presented in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

MEANING MAKING WITHIN THE REFLECTIVE PRACTICE CLASS

This chapter explores the first research question of this study, namely "How did participants in the reflective practice class make meaning ?" There were two models of meaning making evident within the reflective practice class. First, I describe participants' everyday way of making meaning (or how class participants made sense of, or structured, their everyday experiences). The data also suggested that the philosophical assumptions and underlying processes of the class fostered a shift on the part of participants to a new (and arguably more authentic) way of making meaning. This chapter describes participants' everyday way of making meaning and the new way of making meaning fostered by the class. Some implications of the new way of making meaning are also discussed.

Participants' Everyday Way of Making Meaning

In order to gain an empirical understanding of the process of how participants made meaning of the situations they encountered in their everyday lives, I looked at participants' experiences of the class itself and examined how they structured or made sense of their experiences in the class. I treated participants' experiences of the class (described in their phenomenological interviews) as an instance of meaning making. My assumption was that if I could come to understand how participants made meaning of the class experience, the same dynamics (the same process of meaning making) might apply in other situations.

I analyzed participants' accounts of their experiences of the class in the context of their biographical interview data, with the objective of identifying patterns with respect to how and why participants' experiences of the class got structured as they did. More specifically, I undertook an analysis of the figural events which stood out in participants' experiences of the class. Through this analysis I identified patterns in terms of how and why these figural events stood out as they did for these particular individuals. In essence, this analysis allowed me to identify a range of personal factors which informed how and why participants structured or made sense of their experiences of the class as they did. These personal factors can be considered as aspects of participants' interpretive perspectives and are described in the section entitled "Dimensions of Participants' Interpretive Perspectives."

In the literature review, I summarized a theoretical model of meaning making based on the interpretive paradigm. This theoretical model of meaning making presented the process of meaning making as a co-constitutive or interpretive process where personal meanings are co-constituted by Subject and Object in interaction (or S --- O). In this model, Subject referred to aspects of one's subjectivity or the personal grounds that one brings to every situation one encounters, and Object referred to one's current environment, one's present situatedness in the world. Since the literature suggested that everyday meaning making is an interpretive process, we could write the S --- O relationship as the interaction between an individual's interpretive perspective and his or her context (interpretive perspective --- context). The word "context" is used to refer to the current situatedness of the participant, the environment with which he or she interacts, or the object pole of the S --- O relationship. Nikki described this use of the word context as follows: "I think context means, to me, where you're situated ... environment ... it's used to mean those things from outside of you" (Nikki, AB, l. 1063). Further, if we take the data-informed personal factors that made up participants' interpretive perspectives (see "Dimensions of Participants' Interpretive Perspectives")

and insert them into the theoretical model of meaning making, we arrive at a Model of Participants' Everyday Way of Making Meaning as shown in Table 2.

Characteristics of Participants' Everyday Way of Meaning Making

In looking at the overall model of participants' everyday way of meaning making, the following key characteristics of this way of meaning making were identified:

Participants' Everyday Way of Making Meaning Represented an Interpretive Process

The data from this study affirmed that participants' everyday way of making meaning could be described as an interpretive process. Each participant had his or her own interpretive perspective and, thus, his or her own unique experience of the class. Nikki, a counselor, seemed to have intuitively grasped the interpretive nature of the everyday process of making meaning. She suggested that we each bring a "framework from which we perceive" to every situation we encounter which informs our experience and behavior in that situation. Speaking of another class participant she said: "Almost everything that she puts out is tinged with the framework from which she perceives, like all of us, all of our frameworks effects everything that we share" (Nikki, I. 242). Elsewhere Nikki adds: "We were all contributing from our own positions. And everybody gets something different out of the same experience" (Nikki, I. 298).

Aspects of Participants' Interpretive Perspectives Functioned Like Filters Through Which They Perceived The World

A participant's interpretive perspective played a key role in determining how they made sense of their experience in a particular situation. The various dimensions of a participant's interpretive perspective functioned like filters through which they perceived the world. (See Figure 7)

Table 2: Model of Participants' Everyday Way of Making Meaning.

Participants' everyday way of meaning making could be described as a co-constitutive process whereby person as subject in interaction with world as object co-constituted the meaning of a participant's experience of a particular situation. This co-constitutive process of subject and object in interaction can also be seen as an interpretive process. Participants interpreted the world from their own unique interpretive perspectives. The model of participants' everyday way of making meaning can be represented as follows:

participants' everyday personal meanings, m_i, are given by (S --- O)t_i or (interpretive perspective --- context)t_i

where:

interpretive perspective refers to the subject pole of the S --- O relationship, the constellation of implicit and explicit mental models and presuppositions (beliefs, assumptions, values, fears and expectations) informed by the participant's past experiences, professional training, cultural background, individual personality, theoretical perspectives/philosophical views, what others had said to the participant, what the participant had read, the participant's life or work context, the participant's role, the participant's purpose or interest, the participant's gender and possibly many other factors,

context refers to the participant's current environment, the participant's present situatedness in the world. Context refers to the object pole of the S --- O relationship, (the object with which the participant presently interacts), and

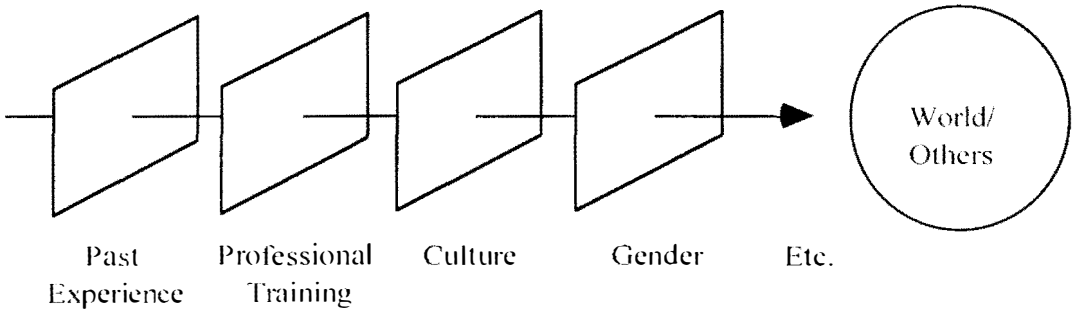
time is included since meanings were time dependent. Meanings were inherent in participants' lived experiences from moment to moment, making up a continuous flow of meanings in their lives.

S ———————— O

Person World

Interpretive Perspective --- Context

A participant's interpretive perspective functioned like a series of filters through which a participant perceived the world



Some of the personal factors that shaped a participant's interpretive persective

Figure 7: The Role of a Participant's Interpretive Perspective.

Participants made sense of the world based on the many different factors that made up their interpretive perspectives. For example, in describing what she brought to the class, Nikki summarized many of the factors which made up her interpretive perspective.

> Right off the top of my head ... I think that ... just like everyone, there's a lot that I bring to any situation. What I'm very aware of is the impact that my gender has on everything - on what I think, and how I speak, and how I interpret what I hear. I think that the same can be said of my ethnic background. I'm only a second generation American. All my grandparents were born in Italy and I'm really proud of that, and I come from a really close knit, loving Catholic home. ... I think another thing that I bring to every situation is my education. I have always been a veracious reader, a thinker and a talker, and I think that's kind of stylistic - an

educated person. So let me see, you know clearly my training as a counselor [is another dimension of my perspective that I bring to every situation]. (Nikki, AB, l. 2)

The personal factors that played a role in co-constituting how participants' made sense of their experience of the reflective practice class are discussed in more detail in the section entitled "Dimensions of Participants' Interpretive Perspectives". All of the factors that informed participants' interpretive perspectives can be condensed into a constellation of mental models and presuppositions (beliefs, assumptions, rules, values, fears, and expectations) through which they perceived the world. Also, certain mental models and presuppositions that made up participants' interpretive perspectives were informed by social and cultural norms and expectations. They were acquired by socialization or acculturation and were not derived from the direct lived experiences of participants.

The Interpretive Process of Meaning Making Yielded Subjective Personal Meanings

Given that the personal backgrounds of participants were not the same, no two participants structured (or made sense of) their experience of the class in the same way. Each participant structured his or her experience of situations within the class in his or her own personal or idiosyncratic way. A couple of class participants explicitly acknowledged the subjective and personal nature of the process of meaning making. They noted that they each experience the world differently. Angela suggested that, "It was my perception, but my perceptions are my individual perceptions, I don't try to pass them off on anybody else" (Angela, l. 780). Nikki conveyed a similar understanding of her process of meaning making, "I'm not saying that my experiences are suppose to be his experiences" (Nikki, l. 203). George also grasped the interpretive nature of meaning making and thus the idiosyncratic way we each make meaning, "I am reminded of Rosalyn's connotation of lens as a delimiter for interpreting experience and how we all

come to this process with incredibly different views of the universe" (George, Letter to the Class, p. 1). Thus, this everyday way of making meaning suggested that we live, not in a universal reality (as the positivists believe), but in a world of personal meanings and multiple realities.

Participants' Everyday Way of Meaning Making Pointed to the Perspectival and Contextual Nature of Participants' Everyday Meanings

Participants' everyday way of meaning making emphasized the perspectival and contextual nature of everyday meanings. Angela was very much aware of the importance of her own perspective and context in how she made sense of the world. In the excerpt which follows she described her understanding of the "educational process" and how it was understood from different perspectives and in different contexts (from the perspective and context of a professor in a university versus from the perspective and context of a social activist and adult educator working in the streets). Her account also suggested that we each have our own words or our own language indigenous to our contexts.

> So you and I may think, that you know, you talk about education, I talk about streets. To me they're the same process, you talk about what's going to work in the classroom with fifty people, and I talk about what's going to work out in the workplace with ten people that come to me. So, we both are in an educational process. So, this helps me to define what works for me in my space and what works for you in your space (Angela, l. 486) ... And learning the process and what it means itself. I may not have exactly the right words to suit you in the classroom, but I feel like that if I put it in perspective for myself, I have learned. Because I'm the one that has to carry out of the classroom what I need. You can carry out what you need. (Angela, l. 689)

Dimensions of Participants' Interpretive Perspectives

From the analysis of the figural events which stood out for participants in their experiences of the class, personal factors were identified that shaped participants' interpretive perspectives and informed how/why they experienced the class in the way that they did. These personal factors give us some insight into the personal side of the person-world interaction that underlay participants' interpretive process of meaning making.

The data from the biographical interviews provided a broader context for understanding participants' everyday process of meaning making. This supports the notion that an individual's experience in a given situation can be better understood by understanding the larger context of his or her life. However, a significant finding of this research was that technically the biographical interviews were not necessary for this analysis. On occasions when an aspect of a participant's biography informed how they interpreted their experience in a particular situation, this was evident in the description of the experience itself. The personal grounds that co-constituted the figural event for a participant in a given situation were typically made explicit by the participant in his or her description of his or her experience in that situation.

The personal factors which informed how participants' experiences of the class got structured as they did are now described in turn.

Participants Structured or Interpreted their Experiences of the Class Based on their Purpose or Interest

Participants' purposes or interests informed how they made meaning of, or structured, or interpreted their experiences of the class. Thus, when a participant came to the class with a purpose, this purpose informed how they structured their experience in

the class. In other words, this purpose played a role in determining what stood out as figural for them. Rosalyn provided an example of this. Rosalyn was not taking the class for credit. Her expressed purpose for being in the reflective practice class was to learn the reflective learning process because she was interested in starting her own self-reflective practice group with teachers. This interest or purpose played a role in informing how Rosalyn structured or made sense of many of her class experiences. In particular, facilitation of the reflective practice process was in the back of her mind throughout the whole semester. She was viewing the class from the perspective of her future facilitation of a reflective practice group. In the excerpt that follows (taken from her phenomenological interview), Rosalyn articulated her purpose for being in the class.

> I don't know if you're aware that I want to start a group of teachers doing self-reflective practice. (Rosalyn, l. 48) ... I'm in there not to just help myself, in terms of understanding my own assumptions about things, but I'm also in there trying to see how the group operates, to try and get a little bit of experience before I jump in. (Rosalyn, l. 103)

This purpose informed how Rosalyn experienced the class. For example, from about mid way through the semester onwards the facilitator would occasionally leave the room for extended periods of time and the group would continue its work in his absence. Rosalyn interpreted this experience from the perspective of her purpose of facilitating a reflective learning group with teachers.

> One of the things that changed dramatically was [the professor's] willingness to leave the class and let the class take over for itself. And of course I've been looking at that with some fear and trepidation too in terms of getting a group going with school teachers. ... I realize that you have to get a group to a certain place before

you could assume that progress would continue. (Rosalyn, l. 1092) ... So the parallels now for me are how would I have dealt with this if I was the facilitator. (Rosalyn, l. 1232)

Thus, purpose played an important role in shaping participants' experiences of the reflective practice class. A participant's purpose influenced what he or she paid attention to and disposed him or her to structure his or her experience in the class in a particular way.

Participants Structured or Interpreted their Experiences of the Class Based on their Past Experiences

Participants' past experiences played a major role in shaping how they structured or interpreted their experiences in the class. Several participants explicitly pointed to their past experience as providing a rationale for why something stood out for them, or why they interpreted a given situation in a particular way.

One way in which a participant's past experience informed how they interpreted their experience of the class relates to occasions when an event stood out as figural because it was contrary to their expectations and values (which were based on their past experience). David was one of the few people in the class who had extensive experience in group learning processes. David spent a number of years working with the Foundation for Community Encouragement (FCE) which offers a Community Building Workshop. One of his profound learning experiences was his realization that his past experience with FCE shaped his expectations about how a reflective learning group ought to be conducted. It was because he held these strong expectations and values which resulted in David reacting so strongly to the different way the reflective practice class was being conducted. This dissonance led him to raise his list of concerns in the second class meeting. David's experience with the FCE model of reflective learning came up again and again throughout

the interview on his experience of the reflective practice class. It was as though he was making sense of the reflective practice class in terms of his past experience with the FCE model.

> Well it was memorable. You know for me the learning was several fold. You know, I learned something about what I really valued in terms of groups, and that became very clear because it contrasted. I had no idea that I valued it that strongly until I got into a situation where I was perceiving that it wasn't being done. So, ah, that's important to me. (David, l. 297) ... [So it was your value for the other way, that was partly the reason why you may have reacted so strongly?] Yah. Which is my experience. See the other way is everything which I had done up to that moment ... [And that was being contradicted sort of?] Or, somehow, am, ah I'm not sure contradicted, that might be too strong, but I certainly felt a certain dissonance. OK. (David, l. 308) ... When I was at FCE I was part of a total of 50 to 60 of those workshops over a period of 3 to 4 years and it was exhausting. (David, l. 852) ... As part of that I learned by experience a form of reflective learning that has become a part of me. It became a part of me such that sometimes I can't even separate it. (David, l. 98).

Another way in which past experience played a role in informing how participants interpreted their experience of the class was when a present situation in the class triggered a fear rooted in a participant's past experience. Angela provided an example of this by her reaction to the audio tape-recording of class meetings. Angela was the only one for whom the audio tape-recording of the class meetings stood out as figural. This was understandable when we take Angela's past experience as a whistle-blower in the nuclear industry into account, and especially in light of all the harassment she suffered as a result.

> It threw me at first that the class was being recorded, because I did not know the significance of that. Actually, I think you would do well to tell why the recordings are being done and what will happen to those tapes long-term. There are some things that I said in that classroom that are not public information by any stretch of the imagination. ... So I was hesitant. I mean it'll come out some day but - maybe never. (laughter) ... [Interviewer assures Angela of the confidentiality of the tapes] Well, I don't have a problem with it now. But, in the beginning, you have to understand, that someone who's been so trapped, so pursued, wire taps on the telephones, you know, it's been difficult for me ... but I think that should be talked about up front in any other classes. (Angela, l. 252).

Participants Structured or Interpreted their Experiences of the Class Based on their Professional Training

Participants' professional training also affected how they made sense of, or structured, their experiences of the class. Participants' professional training instilled in them a range of values, beliefs and assumptions about the nature of reality, along with expectations about how things should be, and an awareness of, or sensitivity to, certain phenomena. These factors in turn played a role in informing how they made sense of their experiences in the reflective practice class.

George and Nikki both had professional training and years of experience in counseling and psychotherapy before coming to the class. It was no surprise that certain aspects of the class stood out as figural for them. George explicitly admitted that his background and his psychological training affected how he structured or interpreted his experience in the class and what he was aware of in the group.

> I mean there are things that happen that most people don't see, am, or that I think people aren't aware of, that go on in groups. Like when there's a topic, people

respond to the topic in different ways. (George, AB, l. 1975) ... And so it's that kind of thing that you notice as a therapist. (George, AB, l. 2018)

Personalities, particularly the emotional well being of participants, were figural for both George and Nikki. They also had a keen awareness when individual class participants were projecting their own meanings into what someone else was saying. Further, they had an uncanny ability to recognize patterns in participants' ways of being and acting (personal issues). For George and Nikki, it seemed that everything a participant said and did in the group was interpreted in terms of what it said about that individual's personality. George and Nikki also had strong expectations about how a group should be facilitated. The facilitation of the class was the cause of some dissonance for Nikki, when her expectations about how a group should be facilitated were not being met. In her phenomenological interview, Nikki made several suggestions with respect to how the class should be facilitated, especially concerning the need to pay attention to "group process." These suggestion were rooted in her extensive experience working with counseling groups. The emotional dimension of experiences also stood out for both George and Nikki. They were interested in the emotional dimension of experiences and they would frequently ask the person sharing - "How do you feel about that?" Another important perspective that the counselors or therapists brought to the class was a strong "sense of responsibility" for not causing any emotional upset or harm to group participants. Nikki raised this issue and related it to her training as counselor and the professional responsibilities that go with that: "As a clinician, I have an ethical responsibility not to ask a question that's going to rip open a wound and have somebody trailing blood as they leave the room" (Nikki, l. 307).

Other examples of how a participant's professional training played a role in informing how they structured their experience of the class were David's background in spirituality and Rosalyn's background in art. David was a Presbyterian minister and held a

doctorate degree in divinity. Based on his training in spirituality, he had a strong spiritual awareness, and thus, the spiritual dimension of experiences stood out for David in his experience of the class. Rosalyn's professional background in art also affected how she structured her experiences of the class. She brought up art many times and drew parallels and connections between the perspective of the artist and the process of self-reflection. Rosalyn said that the reason she liked the reflective practice class so much was that she enjoyed listening to other participants describe their experiences of engaging in self-reflection. She said she was already familiar with these self-reflective processes because of her introspective art background: "About the art ... it's more introspective than all the rest, and it's reflective - art and reflective practice isn't that different" (Rosalyn, AB, I. 538).

After years of study and practice in a particular profession, it appeared that participants had a sophisticated awareness of particular aspects of experience that shaped their experience of the class. Professional training also impacted the skills that participants brought to the class. Professional training functioned much like a participant's past experience, in that it endowed the participant with expectations, values, beliefs, and a constellation of assumptions about the nature of reality.

Participants Structured or Interpreted their Experiences of the Class Based on their Cultural Background

Participants' cultural backgrounds affected how they structured their experiences of the class. For Xiaopei in particular this influence was evident. Xiaopei was Asian-American and spent the first fourteen years of her life growing up in Taiwan. Her cultural background became apparent many times as she recounted her experiences in the class. Xiaopei also related many Confucian proverbs and concepts as she shared her experiences of different aspects of the class. One incident in particular which stood out sharply for Xiaopei was when another class participant appeared to challenge the professor. This

stood out for Xiaopei because, for her, it was inconceivable for a student to challenge a teacher.

> Remember our second class when David brought a sheet of paper with a list of things? ... It stood out for the reason that the way he presented was almost as a challenge to [the Professor] ... And I'm not used to that kind of challenge against an authority figure so to speak in a classroom. I came from a very strict or structured classroom learning style before I came to the United States. ... And to elevate myself to be equal with the facilitator or the teacher in the classroom is a very foreign concept for me. So the way David did it, at first, I really thought it was disrespectful. (Xiaopei, I, 305)

Culture need not necessarily relate to the culture of a different country. Culture can also be associated with a specific ethnic group or socioeconomic group or even geographic region. A less obvious example of how a participant's cultural background influenced how he/she interpreted or structured his/her experience in the reflective practice class was given by Bill. When Bill gave his personal reasons as to why he allowed others to dominate the conversation in the class, and why he was reluctant to insert himself into the conversation, he talked about being raised in the South. Through socialization in the South, he learned courtesy and the ethic of not interrupting someone when they were speaking.

Participants Structured or Interpreted their Experiences of the Class Based on their Present Life or Work Context

Participants' present life or work contexts informed how they structured their experiences of the class. Participants' life or work contexts referred to their job, their family, and other roles that they played in their lives, or the issues that they were dealing

with in their lives at that time. The very first meeting of the reflective practice class stood out for Xiaopei in many ways because of her own life situation - it was her first class at the university, her first class meeting of the semester, and her first class in her graduate program.

> And I still remember the very first class ... It was the very first class of the semester that I went to. And being the first class as a full-time graduate student, I was a little bit intimidated going into the class. Especially looking around the class, with so many people who were so much further into the program than myself. (Xiaopei, l. 17)

Participants structured or interpreted their experiences in the reflective practice from the perspective of what was going on in their lives at that time, or, where a participant was in his or her life at that particular time.

Participants Structured or Interpreted their Experiences of the Class Based on their Individual Personality

Another theme from the data suggested that a participant's personality played a significant role in determining how he or she structured his or her experience of the reflective practice class. There were events in the class that stood out for individual participants because of their unique personality structure. There were two aspects of participants' personalities which affected how they structured their experience of the class: their personal issues, and their tendency to project.

On occasions, a participant's personal issue(s) caused him or her to structure his or her experience of a particular situation in the class in a particular way. Personal issues can be understood as patterns in one's ways of being and acting. Two participants stood out in a somewhat negative way for Nikki in her experience of the class. Nikki self-

disclosed that she had two issues - she avoided condescending types of people and fear-driven types of people, and she admitted that these two participants fit these profiles. This was why they stood out so strongly for her. "I don't like people that talk down to other people. I almost always will give them wide berth and get a distance from them. I also usually avoid people who are fear-driven. So they just touched a couple of my personal black and blue marks" (Nikki, I. 245).

Another aspect of personality which impacted how participants structured their experience of the class was the tendency of some participants in the class to project their own meanings into what another participant had said. Their experience of a given situation related more to their own issues and personality traits, than to the meaning inherent in the situation at hand. For example, the time when George shared his critical incident stood out as figural for both George himself and for Xiaopei. George was born in Africa of missionary parents. For his critical incident he shared a story from his youth of the first time he noticed being different from the other kids in the village. This occurred when his father showed him a photograph of one skinny white boy in the midst of all these black kids. George (a psychologist) was trying to communicate his own meaning for this experience, which was fairly complicated as it had to do with this experience marking the beginning of his own self-differentiation. However, Xiaopei experienced George's story as having to do with the sadness and loss of innocence associated with being different. Upon close examination, George did not perceive any pain as part of his experience, in fact, there was some excitement at his discovery. The pain that Xiaopei talked about was rooted in her own past experience of being different when she first came to the United States. The uncomfortable feelings of being different was something Xiaopei had a sensitivity to based on her own past experience, and she projected this onto George's experience. Following is Xiaopei's experience of George sharing his critical incident.

> I was really happy that he was willing to share with us as much as he could. And in a way I identify with that loss of innocence. And I think I saw a certain sadness when he saw himself in that picture. ... Because I try to think that if I am to have a kid like George ... when he was six years old. When he was among so many different kids. ... Did you feel he was disappointed to see himself? Or there was a certain. ... I don't want them [her own kid] to be different so they don't get different treatment from other kids, or from teachers, or anybody else in school. I don't want the kid to experience the same thing that I experienced when I came to the United States. (Xiaopei, I. 708)

From her biographical interview we learn that when Xiaopei first came to the United States she experienced feelings of being isolated, finding it hard to establish friends, and was picked on by other kids.

> I remember even when I transferred to a regular high school from my own district, I was still picked on. There would be students who would jump in front of me and try to do Kung Fu and challenge me. I would just scare them right back. ... It wasn't funny at the time. (Xiaopei, AB, I. 1529)

Participants' Experiences of (and Actions in) the Class Were Informed by how they Perceived their Role in the Class

How a participant perceived his or her role in the class informed how that individual participant structured his or her experience and behavior in the class. Sylvia, reflecting on her roles in the class, illustrated this phenomenon.

> As a student if I have something to say, you will listen, because I'm not one for idle prattle. ... I will contribute something very direct and then that's it. I don't

say anything else. I've always been like that because I, I feel like if everybody has to say all these things and it's going to take them an hour to say it, then nobody's going to get to say anything except that one person (Sylvia, I, 1907). ... As an instructor I'm just the opposite. As an instructor I'm extremely wordy, I'm very friendly, I tell lots of funny little stories, I get real personable. Yah, just entirely the opposite. (Sylvia, I, 1919)

Participants Structured or Interpreted their Experiences of the Class Based on their Theoretical Perspectives or Philosophical Views

The theories participants held about various aspects of the world played a role in informing how they structured their experience of various situations in the class. This theme is closely related to the theme above concerning participants' professional training. It was typically from their education or professional training that participants acquired certain theoretical perspectives and philosophical views. David, for example, in his biographical interview, described himself as one who subscribed to the theoretical perspectives or philosophical views of Jungian psychology. In his phenomenological interview, these Jungian concepts informed David as he structured his experiences and actions in the class, and he used Jungian terminology to describe various aspects of his experience in the class. Participants' views of reality, their views of the world, formed a basic foundation underlying how they structured or interpreted their experience of the class. Thus, the ideas participants held played a role in shaping their experiences of the class and in shaping their ways of being and acting in the class.

Participants Structured or Interpreted their Experiences of the Class Based on the What Others Had Said to them

In making sense of their experiences of particular situations or events in the class, participants occasionally listened to what other participants said and then adopted the

other's meaning as their own meaning for this particular situation or event. This meaning could be described as a received meaning or a borrowed perception.

Sylvia provided an example of incorporating a meaning from someone else into her way of structuring her experience of a particular situation in the class. When Sylvia shared her critical incident in the class relating to her divorce, the reaction of the class was somewhat cool. People were uncomfortable, very few questions were asked, and after a while the conversation went dead. In talking with other women in the class at break time, Sylvia heard how two other participants (Angela and Rosalyn) had structured their experience of Sylvia sharing her critical incident and the class's reaction. Lacking any other way to make sense of the reaction of the class to her critical incident, Sylvia accepted Angela and Rosalyn's meaning of this situation as her own. Following is Sylvia's account of her experience.

> I thought it was very interesting as far as the reaction from the other members of the class, because I mean they were very uncomfortable. ... There were very few people that asked questions. They all just looked at me like --- are you from out of space? And the men were so uncomfortable because it was such an emotional issue. And the women they weren't uncomfortable with it, they ploughed into it - I think they were kind of like - we know how you're thinking and how you're feeling, because we've been through similar situations in a relationship. (Sylvia, I. 439)

Later in her phenomenological interview, Sylvia explained that her understanding of the class's reaction was based on a conversation she had at break with two of the other female participants in the class (Angela and Rosalyn).

> They shared it with me and I was glad that they did. ... The women felt that the reason that the men ... reacted to me the way they did was because they, the men, were very uncomfortable as far as dealing with those kinds of feelings in that subject matter. They said, you put every man on the spot in the room, because of the subject that you chose and because of the fact that in your critical incident you were dealing strictly with feelings. ... They said, you threw every man in that class because of what you - I mean she [Angela] said you had every man in there squirming. (Sylvia, l. 194)

These received meanings or borrowed perceptions were used to structure or make sense of the participant's experience in particular situations. Thus, the conversations or discourses that a participant had participated in on a personal level served as a source of meanings.

Participants Structured or Interpreted their Experiences of the Class Based on the What they Had Read

Participants also used meanings or constructs from what they had read to structure or language their experiences of different class situations. They used ideas and constructs from books they had read, when these meanings or constructs helped them structure their experience of the class in a sensible way.

One of the things that stood out for Rosalyn was the diversity of perspectives in the class. Rosalyn stated that she really valued the diversity in the class. The reason she valued diversity so strongly was partially because she had read research findings which suggested that diversity of experience and perspectives is very necessary for creative thinking in a group. "My strong response to diversity ... comes out of some research papers on creativity, and the fact that diversity is so important to a creative thoughtful atmosphere" (Rosalyn, l. 1375).

The esoteric phenomenon of energy in the class, and the energy fields that can be established between participants in the class stood out as figural for Sylvia. Upon further probing it transpired that some of Sylvia's ideas were informed by her having read John Redford's book *The Celestine Prophesy*, which was a national bestseller at the time.

> I don't know how you feel about it, but I really think there's really something to this as far as what I read about the energy fields and the electricity that can take place between a group of people or two people. (Sylvia, l. 1098) ... I think it has to do with energy fields and I think it has to do with the transference from one person to another person. (Sylvia, l. 1156) ... See supposedly if you can really get in tune with it, you are supposed to be able to almost even see it, it's almost supposed to be like a glow. (Sylvia, l. 1498) [Researcher: Have you read the Celestine Prophesy?] I read two or three chapters of it. And I tell you what, I'm serious though, I really think that there is something there. (Sylvia, l. 1505)

Through reading books participants participated in discourses which served as a source of meanings, which they then used to structure or make sense of their own life situations.

Participants Structured or Interpreted their Experiences of the Class Based on their Gender

Another theme from this research was that participants structured their experiences of the class based on their gender. Nikki made explicit reference to the fact that her gender affected how she structured all of her experiences and actions.

> I think that ... just like everyone, there's a lot that I bring to any situation and am what I'm very aware of is the impact that my gender has on everything, on what I think, and how I speak, and how I interpret what I hear. (Nikki, AB, I. 8).

In summary, this analysis identified the personal factors which affected how/why participants' experiences of the class got structured as they did. This list of personal factors which informed participants' interpretive perspectives is undoubtedly not an exhaustive list. The personal factors informing participants' interpretive perspectives discussed here were factors which were evident from the data-set for this study. There are potentially many other factors such as age/generation, race, religious beliefs, developmental level, socio-economic status, political beliefs, which may also inform one's interpretive perspective and play an important role in how one structures or interprets one's experiences.

Key Role of Past Experience in a Participant's Everyday Process of Meaning Making

A participant's past experience or biography played an important role in his or her process of meaning making. Participants' past experiences served as an important ground in co-constituting their experience of specific situations within the class. Several of the factors identified above that made up participants' interpretive perspectives (such as past experiences, professional training, cultural background) can be considered aspects of their interpretive perspectives informed by their past experiences or biographies. In exploring the role of a participant's past experience in particular, the data suggested that a participant's past experience or biography with respect to a particular phenomenon informed his or her beliefs and assumptions and rules about that phenomenon. In addition a participant's past experience with respect to a particular phenomenon also taught him or her certain values and fears about that phenomenon. Positive past experiences left

participants with a value or preference with respect to similar situations in the future, whereas negative past experiences left participants with a fear or aversion with respect to similar situations in the future. The sum total of a participant's past experience or his/her biography endowed him/her with tacit presuppositions (beliefs, assumptions, values and fears) about the world, and these presuppositions in turn informed his/her expectations and disposed him/her to experience the world and act towards the world in a certain way in the next encounter. George intuitively recognized the significant impact of one's biography or past experience on the process of meaning making. "In regard to the class on reflective practice, I found it fascinating that what I come with, my experience, my background, determines what I'll be able to contribute, and also take out and learn" (George, AB, L 2233).

Given that the sum total of a participant's past experience endowed him/her with tacit presuppositions about the world, it is interesting to note that the mental models and presuppositions (the beliefs, assumptions, values, and fears) that made up a participant's interpretive perspective were largely informed by ongoing subconscious learning from his or her lived experiences. This suggests that not all learning was conscious. Based on this ongoing process of subconscious learning from lived experience, participants formed the beliefs, assumptions, rules, values, and fears that made up their interpretive perspective. Further, given that this ongoing process of learning from lived experience was largely a subconscious process, the beliefs, assumptions, rules, values and fears that made up a participant's interpretive perspective were typically subconsciously or tacitly held.

The data also suggested that all of the experiences that a participant had undergone over the course of his or her life, based on subconscious learning, had continuously changed him or her by shaping and reshaping his or her interpretive perspective. The ongoing process of subconscious learning from lived experience can be represented as a continuous cyclical process. This ongoing cyclical process is represented graphically in Figure 8. In this process, every experience that a participant had undergone changed them

Experiences Over the Course of a Participant's Life Continuously Changed that Participant by Continuously Shaping and Re-shaping his/her Interpretive Perspective

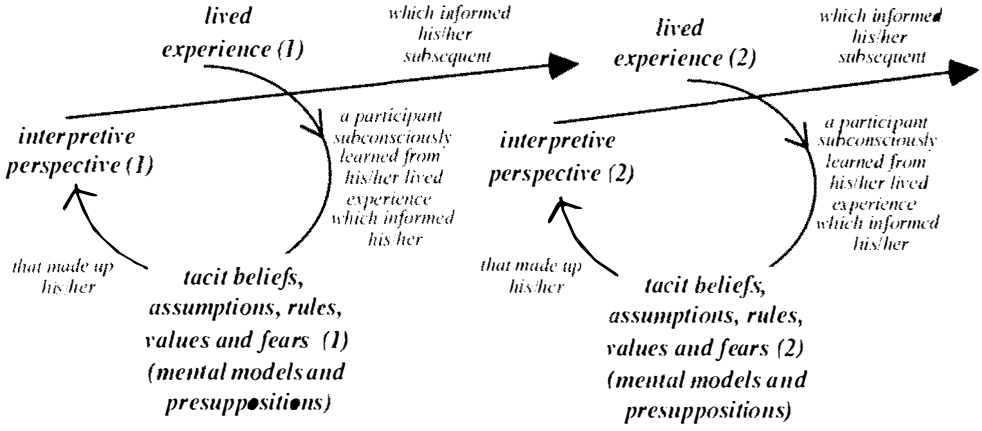


Figure 8: The Role of a Participant's Past Lived Experiences in Shaping and Re-shaping their Interpretive Perspective.

forever by shaping and reshaping their interpretive perspective. This changed interpretive perspective in turn changed the nature of all their subsequent experiences and behavior.

Supporting this notion of ongoing subconscious learning from lived experience, Nikki suggested that each of the events or experiences in her biography changed her forever by shaping and reshaping her interpretive perspective. Speaking of her interpretive perspective today she said:

> It means all the stuff that I am as a result of everywhere that I've been. (Nikki, AB, I, 1056) ... And every place where I've been, when I say place I mean that metaphysically, I mean the relationships that I've been in, the books that I've read and even the conversations that I've had, and music that I've listened to. All that stuff with which I interact, with whom I interact, it changes me forever. And I'm never the same person. (Nikki, AB, I, 1063)

Thus we can say that participants' biographies or past experiences shaped their interpretive perspectives and impacted the character of their subsequent experiences.

The findings of this chapter so far point to the subconscious, interpretive, subjective, biographically and culturally-rooted nature of participants' everyday process of meaning making. Each participant interpreted the situations of the class from his or her own interpretive perspective (from his or her own hermeneutic situation).

The Distorted Nature of Participants' Everyday Way of Meaning Making

The analysis of data on how participants structured their experiences of the class provided a much better awareness of the underlying dynamics of participants' everyday process of meaning making. However, the data also suggested that some inherent flaws existed in participants' everyday process of meaning making. In this section I describe some of the limitations of participants' everyday way of meaning making.

Participants' Everyday Interpretive Way of Meaning Making Represented Largely a Subconscious Automatic Process

Few participants were aware of the interpretive and also the biographically and culturally-rooted nature of their process of meaning making. Participants were not aware that what they brought to a situation impacted so significantly their experience and behavior in that situation. Participants existed in subconscious auto-pilot guided by their default interpretive perspectives. For example, George suggested "Most of us are unconscious most of the time, just walking around doing what we do on automatic pilot" (George, AB.1. 906). Thus, a participant's everyday process of meaning making was largely subconscious and automatic, and was not typically under the participant's conscious control.

Participants were Programmed and Conditioned by their Biography and Culture

The model of participants' everyday way of meaning making suggested that participants were programmed and conditioned by the many subconscious factors that made up their interpretive perspectives. They were programmed and conditioned by their past experiences, professional training, cultural backgrounds, and the discourses that they had participated in. Thus, Angela reacted to the tape-recording of the class sessions from the perspective of her past experiences as a whistleblower and the harassment that she suffered as a result (her phone at work was tapped). Xiaopei experienced David raising concerns about how the class was structured from her Asian cultural background which held a teacher in such high regard that one should not appear to question. Several of the factors that made up their interpretive perspectives were received meanings which were socially and culturally defined, (i.e. acquired by socialization and acculturation). Participants lived on auto-pilot, their lives following a programmed script based on their past experience and culture. In essence, participants operated from interpretive perspectives that were theirs by default. In their subconscious ways of being and acting, they were slave to their history and culture. George, for example, discovered, when he began to engage in critical self-reflection, that he subconsciously held culturally informed prejudices against gays. Participants' interpretive perspectives were shaped by their biography and culture. Because of the subconscious nature of these dynamics, participants led a narrow programmed and conditioned existence. Given that participants' process of meaning making was a non-reflected subconscious process, its default way of operating was to be programmed and conditioned by each individual's past experience and culture and the other personal factors that subconsciously made up his or her interpretive perspective.

Given that every experience a participant underwent changed him or her by shaping and reshaping his or her interpretive perspective, a participant's way of being and acting was largely dictated by their past experiences. Participants were left with many

beliefs and assumptions, fears and preferences, which were informed by their past experience. Participants encountered the present in terms of the past, rather than being firmly rooted in the present.

Participants' Everyday Way of Making Meaning Represented an Unexamined Process

Since participants' everyday process of meaning making was subconscious, it was largely unexamined. Participants' everyday way of meaning making represented an uncritical and non self-aware way of making meaning. Participants were operating based on presuppositions (beliefs and values) that they were not aware of. As we have seen, these beliefs and values were not all wholesome. In the following excerpt, Nikki described the process of self-reflection when she first became aware of the dynamics of her subconscious process of meaning making.

> And I never even really tuned in to what I was thinking. And once I started listening to my thoughts, I was appalled by what I was thinking. I was, I had racist thoughts, I was ungenerous and unkind, I was sometimes cruel - It was like meeting a person that I didn't even know, I didn't even know that she existed. And then I said, "Oh my Lord, look at all this unseemly stuff in there. And so, then I thought ... Ha, ha, ha. I took a second challenge and I said, well I've gotta clean this up, and I'll change this. ... I became aware for example that I had some, absolutely unknown to me, am, kind of am, unkind thoughts about foreigners. ... I hadn't realized for example, that I shared some of my country's, some of our popular kind of distrust of Arabs. ... And I mean I know that it's on the news and I know that they're associated with terrorism, but I didn't know I had it. Didn't know I thought it or felt it. But, once I really tuned into my thoughts I realized that my first, you know my first reaction to somebody that was maybe Arabic, or in a sheet or something like that, would immediately be unkind. Once I really listened

closely. I realized that my first reaction to them would be unkind. (Nikki, AB, I. 419)

The Model of Participants' Everyday Way of Meaning Making Represented a Projective Way of Knowing

Given the subconscious, interpretive, biographically and culturally-rooted nature of the participants' everyday way of meaning making, what participants brought to a situation played a major role in their process of meaning making. The way participants structured or made sense of their experience was largely influenced by the subject pole of the S --- O pair. This represents a projective (or one-sided) way of making meaning. Participants structured their experiences based largely on the presuppositions that they brought to a situation, rather than being receptive to learning from the uniqueness of that situation. Their biography and culture informed their subconscious presuppositions about the world, and these were projected into the new situations that they encountered.

Because the interpretive process of meaning making was a subconscious process for most participants, their default way of being was to project meanings from the past. Until they came to appreciate the dynamics of this subconscious interpretive way of making meaning, they would not have grasped the notion of bracketing one's own presuppositions or operating in a receptive mode. George, an experienced counselor and psychotherapist, understood the subconscious interpretive process of meaning making, and understood the process of bracketing or suspending his presuppositions. Most of the other participants did not.

> There were times when I would say something and another member of the group would reply to that something I meant personally. When they were projecting their own stuff into it. Even though, we had made it pretty clear that we were going to suspend our own material....but that continued to happen. (George, I. 29)

If a participant's interpretive process of meaning making was still operating on a subconscious level, then its default way of operating was to operate in a projective way, programmed and conditioned by the individual's biography and culture.

Participants' Everyday Way of Making Meaning Represented a Distorted Way of Making Meaning

Participants' everyday way of making meaning represented a distorted way of making meaning, because lived experience is dynamic not static. When we form some abstract conceptualization of the world, we are essentially taking a snapshot of reality at that time. In order to get a more authentic picture of reality, participants needed to constantly return to learn about the world from their lived experience. Their typical way of operating was to form some abstract concepts and to operate from these thereafter. The positivist paradigm fostered a belief in the primordial nature of abstract ideas rather than lived experience. Under a positivist spell, we learn that a little feathered creature is a bird, and thereafter we cling to our concept of the bird and never really see the bird again. This relates to the projective nature of participants' everyday way of making meaning. In terms of their everyday meaning making, participants tended to project the abstract concepts they had in their heads. If we operate based on presuppositions informed by past experience, we are not being receptive or present to the dynamic world of lived experience.

Overall, the model of participants' everyday way of making meaning can be seen as a distorted way of making meaning. The many factors that made up a participant's interpretive perspective distorted his/her perception of the world. Every participant had his or her own idiosyncratic and distorted way of perceiving the world. deMello (1990) captured the distorted nature of this everyday way of meaning making very succinctly

when he suggested that in everyday life, "We see the world and others not as they are but as we are" (p. 88).

In summary then, the model of participants' everyday way of making meaning represented a subconscious, interpretive, projective, uncritical and non self-aware way of making meaning which was biographically and culturally informed. Participants structured or made sense of phenomena in the world around them in a subconscious, automatic and distorted way based largely on their default interpretive perspective.

New Way of Meaning Making Fostered by the Reflective Practice Class

In the previous discussion, I outlined a model of participants' everyday way of making meaning. This model attempted to describe class participants' way of making meaning in their everyday interactions. However, the data for this study suggested that the philosophical assumptions and the underlying processes of the class fostered a transformation of meaning making for participants to a new and arguably more authentic way of making meaning. The class fostered a shift in meaning making from a subconscious, uncritical, non self-aware, projective way of making meaning; to a conscious, critically self-aware, and receptive way of making meaning. This transformation of meaning making is illustrated in Figure 9.

Model of the New Way of Making Meaning

The philosophical assumptions of the reflective practice class included an appreciation for the interpretivist paradigm and an embrace of ideas from phenomenology. These philosophical assumptions were embodied in the class and informed the nature of the underlying processes of the class. The key underlying

The philosophical assumptions and the underlying processes of the reflective practice class fostered a new way of making meaning

Participants' Everyday Way of Making Meaning

(A subconscious, projective, uncritical and non self-aware way of making meaning. Participants existed on auto-pilot and were programmed/ conditioned by their biography and culture. Overall this represented a distorted way of making meaning)

Philosophical Assumptions:

(i) An appreciation of the interpretivist paradigm - Participants came to appreciate the interpretive nature of their process of meaning making, and that we live in a world of personal meanings and multiple realities.

(ii) Embrace of ideas from phenomenology - This led class participants to value a receptive way of meaning making. Participants came to value taking on the phenomenological attitude and engaging in listening and learning from lived experience. Overall, ideas from phenomenology fostered a shift from a projective way of making meaning to a receptive way of making meaning.

Key Underlying Processes:

(i) Listening - The process of listening called on participants to empty their minds and really listen to the other.

(ii) Learning from Lived Experience - The process of learning from lived experience called on participants to empty their minds and learn about phenomena in the world around them by reflecting on their lived experience.

(iii) Self-reflection - Self-reflection or critical self-reflection helped participants to raise many different aspects of themselves to a level of conscious awareness and then to critically reflect on them. Participants gained awareness of their underlying process of meaning making and the presuppositions that made up their interpretive perspective.The end result was a heightened sense of critical self-awareness.

New Way of Making Meaning

(A conscious, receptive and critically self-aware way of meaning making. An open receptive way of interacting wit the world and others. This new way of making meaning represented a way of making meaning not driven by one's default interpretive perspective but by being present to others ar to one's lived experience.)

Figure 9: Transformation of Meaning Making Fostered by the Philosophical Assumptions and Underlying Processes of the Reflective Practice Class.

processes of the class which impacted how participants make meaning were the processes of critical self-reflection, learning from lived experience, and listening. These philosophical assumptions and key underlying processes fostered a new conscious, receptive and critically self-aware way of making meaning. This new (and arguably more authentic) way of making meaning fostered by the reflective practice class is illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3: Model of the New Way of Meaning Making Fostered by the Reflective Practice Class.

The data suggested that the philosophical assumptions and the underlying processes of the class fostered a new way of making meaning. The new way of making meaning called on participants to interact with the world and others from a stance of conscious reflective presence. The new way of making meaning can be represented as follows: **authentic meanings, m'_i, are given by (conscious reflective presence --- context)t_i** where **conscious reflective presence** refers to participants coming to appreciate the interpretive nature of their process of meaning making, taking on the phenomenological attitude (bracketing their presuppositions or emptying their minds), engaging in self-reflection (pursuing critical self-awareness), and then coming to understand phenomena in the world around them by consciously learning from their lived experience and coming to understand others by mindfully listening to them. Conscious reflective presence is similar to the concepts of mindfulness or being in-the-moment, and **context** refers to a participant's present situatedness in the world, the object/person with which/whom they presently interact

The new way of making meaning may be characterized as a conscious, receptive, and critically self-aware way of making meaning. This new way of making meaning represented a way for participants to make meaning that was not so strongly dictated by their language, their history, and their culture. As such, it represented a shift to a receptive way of understanding the world and others.

This new way of making meaning may be described as an authentic way of making meaning. Participants were reconnected with their lifeworlds by bracketing their

presuppositions and learning from their lived experiences. The awarenesses and understandings they derived by reflecting on their lived experience were authentically rooted in their lifeworld.

Elements of the New Way of Meaning Making

The new way of making meaning called on participants to take on a stance of conscious reflective presence towards the world and others. Conscious reflective presence meant recognizing the interpretive nature of their process of meaning making, taking on a phenomenological attitude, consciously learning from their lived experience, and consciously listening to others. In order to take on a phenomenological attitude and bracket all their presuppositions, participants were also encouraged to engage in self-reflection to raise their subconscious presuppositions to a level of conscious awareness. Each of these elements of the new model of meaning making will be described in turn below.

Grasping the Interpretivist Nature of the Process of Meaning Making

The new way of making meaning required participants to have a grasp of the interpretivist nature of their process of meaning making. I describe this understanding of one's underlying process of meaning making as "logoic self-awareness", where *logos* is the Greek word for meaning. Based on their experiences in the class, participants came to appreciate the interpretivist nature of their process of meaning making. Becoming aware of their underlying interpretive process of meaning making was probably one of the most transformative experiences for participants. Actually, it was learning to ask phenomenological questions in the reflective practice class that helped to precipitate this shift to an interpretivist view of the world. Participants came to realize that everyone had

their own unique experience and they were the experts on their own experience. Coming to appreciate that we live in a world of personal meanings and multiple realities impacted the seriousness with which participants listened to others. The focus on the methodology of phenomenology essentially affected a paradigm shift for participants. By embracing phenomenological questioning, participants were essentially embracing a new paradigm of interpretivism. The shift to interpretivism also marked a shift away from positivism which recognizes the primordial nature of mental constructs (ideas and concepts) and only secondarily sense experience, to interpretivism which recognizes the primordial nature of lived experience. In becoming aware of the interpretive nature of their process of meaning making, participants also came to realize that they participated in the shaping or creation of their own personal realities.

Taking on the Phenomenological Attitude

Besides helping to precipitate an appreciation for the interpretive nature of the process of meaning making, ideas from phenomenology had a major influence on the class. The new way of making meaning called on participants to take on the phenomenological attitude, to empty their minds and take on an open, appreciative, non-judgmental stance towards the world and others. Acceptance of ideas from phenomenology lead participants to value an open, receptive way of relating to the world and others. Participants came to appreciate and value the notion of bracketing everything one thinks one knows (bracketing one's presuppositions) in order to be present to the other while listening, or in order to be present to one's lived experience when learning from one's lived experience. This was the attitude that participants were asked to strive for when listening, or learning from their lived experiences. In the excerpt which follows, Bill reflected on a situation in the class where he noticed that he was asking leading questions of another participant. He came to realize that he was not being open to this individual's description of her lived experience. He was not really taking on the phenomenological attitude; he was not really

listening to the other; he was not bracketing his presuppositions. Bill arrived at the conclusion that "taking on the phenomenological attitude" is a good attitude to have in one's life overall.

> And then of course, I started saying oh yah, and ah. And what does that say about the attitude I had. Was it an attitude of "you tell me", or was it an attitude of "let me tell you" what your experience was. ... [It's like] you're trying to extract knowledge from experts. [It] was helpful to see that that was the attitude to adopt or try to develop. Really I think it's a good attitude to have period, toward life and people not just for phenomenological interviewing purposes, but just as a way to live. I kind of equate it to humility. (Bill, 1.667)

Based on this underlying influence of phenomenology, the new way of making meaning represented a humble, loving, and profoundly respectful way of making meaning and relating to the world and others. Taking on the phenomenological attitude referred to the way in which participants attempted to bracket their presuppositions or "empty their minds" and be receptive to their own or another's lived experience. Taking on a phenomenological attitude also fostered a recognition of the primordial nature of lived experience and fostered a disposition among participants to inductively learn from prereflective accounts of their own and other's lived experiences. Ideas from phenomenology helped participants to reconnect with their lifeworld. Ideas from phenomenology also played a major role in shaping the underlying processes of the class, in particular the processes of listening and learning from lived experience.

Consciously Learning from their Lived Experience

The new way of making meaning called on participants to abandon the stale concepts, categories, or constructs in their heads and to return again to consciously learn

about phenomena from their lived experience. Participants learned to treat the abstract concepts in their heads as fiction and to be receptive again to their lived experience. The new way of making meaning suggested that participants re-languaged their world again and again by inductively reflecting on their ever-changing lived experiences. By learning about the world from their lived experiences, participants' meanings were grounded in their own reality. Learning from lived experience involved bracketing all they thought they knew about a given phenomenon and being reflectively present to their lived experience of that phenomenon. For a participant to more accurately perceive some phenomenon, they had to bracket everything that they thought they knew about that phenomenon and return again to his or her direct lived experience of that phenomenon. [See Chapter 6 for a detailed account of the foundational process of learning from lived experience].

Consciously Listening

This new way of making meaning called on participants to be open and receptive to others, to really listen to and hear the other's experience, rather than being focused on their own ideas and opinions. In order to really listen, a participant needed to bracket what he/she thought he/she knew so that he/she could be open to the experiences and perspectives of the other. Based on participants' experiences of the class, listening involved focusing on the other, imagining and visualizing his/her experience. If a participant was really listening, the other's background became apparent. Listening involved coming to understand the other, coming to understand his or her background and perspective. Participants were encouraged to treat every encounter with the other as if they were encountering them for the very first time. The data suggested that to come to understand another, one must perceive them from "emptiness", having bracketed one's presuppositions and interests. One must perceive them from a humble, loving stance. By emptying his/her mind and listening to the other (holding an open appreciative stance), a

participant could come to a new understanding of the other's lifeworld. [See Chapter 6 for a detailed account of the process of listening/effective communication].

Based on this research, I propose that learning from lived experience and listening are parallel processes that go together. Learning from lived experience represents an open receptive way of relating to and learning about the world in general. Listening represents an open receptive way of relating to and learning from other people.

Engaging in Self-reflection

The new model of meaning making called on participants to engage in critical self-reflection (to pursue critical self-awareness). In order that participants could effectively learn from their lived experiences and in order that participants could effectively listen to each other, it was necessary that they bracket or let go of their presuppositions, (or empty their minds). However, for participants to be able to bracket or let go of their presuppositions, they first had to raise them to a level of conscious awareness. Thus, self-reflection was an integral part of the processes of listening and learning from lived experience. The better a participant knew him or herself, the more he or she could bracket or let go of his or her presuppositions. A greater level of self-awareness also enabled participants to avoid subconsciously projecting their own presuppositions onto the current situation, rather then being present to that situation. George understood the interpretive nature of meaning making and recognized the need for critical self-awareness.

> I am reminded of Rosalyn's connotation of lens as a delimiter for interpreting experience and how we all come to this process with incredibly different views of the universe. ... It seems that we are all destined to contaminate each others' learning by our own imposing views. Hence, the need for a truly self-reflective practice. (George, letter to the class, p. 1)

Through self-reflection, participants strived to achieve increasingly higher levels of critical self-awareness. Overall, the self-reflection component of the class fostered self-awareness on many different levels. [See Chapter 6 for a comprehensive and detailed account of the self-reflection process in the class.]

Implications of the New Way of Making Meaning

This new way of making meaning presented a number of implications for participants' ways of being and acting. The new way of making meaning enabled participants to approach clarity of perception, fostered a greater sense of freedom, and represented a basis for authentic action. The new way of making meaning also called on participants to strive to become perpetual beginners in terms of knowing and to strive to exist in a dialogical relationship with the world and others.

The New Way of Making Meaning Enabled Participants to Approach Clarity of Perception

The new way of making meaning enabled participants to approach clarity of perception. George suggested that one of the aims of the group was to achieve a certain level of clarity. "We have, of course, a group of people who come from lots of backgrounds .... And we were shooting for some clarity" (George, AB, l. 2337). A participant could achieve clarity of perception by bracketing his or her presuppositions (emptying his or her mind) and keenly listening, or learning from his or her lived experience. Clarity of perception involved participants seeing the world as it really was and not as they themselves were. In order to let go of their presuppositions, they first needed to become aware of them; they needed to engage in self-reflection. Clarity of perception is born of self-awareness. The extent to which one can achieve clarity of perception is directly proportional to one's level of self-awareness.

The concept of clarity of perception closely approximates what Houston Smith (1991) has called "veracity" which he defined as seeing the world and others unobstructed by one's personal biases or prejudices. Clarity of perception implied seeing the world and others with an unprejudiced eye. A participant could achieve clarity of perception and approach veracity when they had learned to see the world and others unobstructed by their biases and prejudices. This represents a loving way of making meaning and relating. It is to perceive the world and others from emptiness.

The New Way of Making Meaning Brought Participants a Greater Sense of Freedom

In their everyday lives participants seemed to act based on habit and convention. They were encumbered with habits of perception and distorted interpretive perspectives that handicapped them. These habits of perception and distorted interpretive perspectives did not enable them to be fully present to the situations they found themselves in. They were programmed and conditioned by their biographies, their cultures, and the discourses they had participated in. The reflective practice class helped participants to explore their underlying processes of meaning making and to escape from this conditioning to live freer and more creative lives. The new way of making meaning thus brought participants a certain degree of freedom. Participants were no longer operating in auto-pilot conditioned by their history, culture and the many factors that made up their interpretive perspectives. Instead the new way of making meaning helped participants to escape from these conditioning influences, to become more critically conscious, mindful, and self-aware. The new way of making meaning fostered a conscious, receptive way of relating to the world and others. It involved perceiving the world and others from emptiness (or with as few presuppositions as possible). The new way of making meaning represented a sort of rebellion against the fixing nature of language, it involved being present to lived experience. The new way of making meaning enabled participants to approach clarity of perception, to see things as they are rather than as

they themselves were. The new way of making meaning helped participants strive for a more authentic awareness (an uncluttered awareness) of the world and others. Authentic awareness implies groundedness in the lifeworld.

The New Way of Making Meaning Represented a Basis for Authentic Action

The new way of making meaning suggested that grounded meanings could be a new starting place for participants' assertions and actions. Rather than engaging with the world solely based on the pre-existing concepts and categories in their heads, participants' actions and assertions could now be based on reflection on their lived experience and listening. Authentic action is action based on reflection on lived experience and listening. Authentic action is based on authentic awareness. This essentially clarifies the reflection and action components of the concept of praxis.

The New Way of Making Meaning Called on Participants to Strive to Become Perpetual Beginners in terms of Knowing or Making Meaning

The new way of making meaning involved participants bracketing or letting go of all their concepts or categories (emptying their minds) and experiencing the world and others afreshly by consciously learning from their lived experiences and by listening. The new way of making meaning suggested however that participants should not cling to their newly-found meanings. They must be prepared to let these understandings go to be present to the world and others again in the very next moment. The class encouraged participants to always return again and again with an open appreciative stance to learning from their lived experience and to listening. The class encouraged participants to strive to become *perpetual beginners in terms of knowing or making meaning*. Participants were encouraged to continually let everything go and encounter the world and others from emptiness. This notion of striving to become perpetual beginners in terms of knowing is

similar to the concepts of being-in-the-moment or mindfulness where one strive for a presentness of perception.

David commented on how this new receptive way of making meaning affected how he interacted with the world and others. "I see the world as if it is new. And part of it is seeing people as if they are uniquely new people" (David, I. 459).

The new way of making meaning recognized the primordial nature of lived experience and proposed a new relationship between abstract ideas (language) and lived experience. From an interpretivist perspective, abstract ideas are frozen in time and lived experience is what is real. Since lived experience is continuously changing, we must always return to lived experience. The new way of making meaning is informed by a re-emphasis on learning from lived experience and listening. It assumes that what participants had learned (accumulated in their heads) sometimes gets in the way of or distorts their present perceptions and understanding. The new way of making meaning suggested that participants not dwell among the constructs and concepts in their heads but that they always return to learn from their lived experience about phenomena in the world around them, and always strive to understand others by carefully listening to them.

The data also suggested that we learn from lived experience in a tacit way on an ongoing basis. We seem, however, to use our ability to learn from our lived experience sparingly. When we experience something for the very first time we learn from that experience and we form beliefs, assumptions, values and fears about that phenomenon. Once we have formed these "mental models", we tend to stick with them and never really look at or reflect on that phenomenon or person again. Thus, most of the time, we tend to operate out of our existing concepts and constructs and rarely engage in "conscious learning from experience". We interpret situations we find ourselves in based on the existing concepts and ideas in our heads. We have bought into the positivist illusion of a relatively fixed universal reality, and we believe that once we have come to know this reality, there is no need to go back and re-learn anything new about it. The interpretivist

paradigm tells us that human reality is not static, and, in order to come to an appreciation of reality, we need to return again and again to re-language lived experience. The challenge in the reflective practice class was to return to learning from lived experience and to make this process of inquiry based on lived experience a more conscious and deliberate process.

The New Way of Making Meaning Called on Participants to Strive to Exist in a Dialogic Relationship with the World and Others

As humans, there are essentially two modes we can operate in - one is expressive and the other is receptive. When participants engaged in learning both from lived experience and from listening, they were operating in a receptive mode (conscious reflective presence). However, when one acts or speaks, one is operating in an expressive mode. In order to act one needs to form some conclusions which means that one is no longer operating in a receptive mode. Participants in the class recognized that it may not be easy nor perhaps even possible to operate in a receptive mode at all times. It may not be possible to hold the stance of conscious reflective presence towards the world and others at all times. In fact, David dealt with this very issue as the central theme of his critical incident.

> In reflective practice, how can I maintain a creative tension between having some ... purpose and understanding on the one hand, and being open to the process of reflection and where it may lead on the other? In my life, this paradox has presented itself over and over again. ... It is the paradox between holding on and letting go, the messy intersection between questions and answers. (David, Critical Incident, I. 40)

The new way of making meaning suggests that it is acceptable to form conclusions and make judgments only because it is necessary to do so in order to act. In the very next

moment, however, one needs to bracket all that one thinks one knows and go back to an open, appreciative and receptive mode again. One needs to become a perpetual beginner in terms of knowing or making meaning. One needs to be in a dialogic relationship with the world and others. Being receptive and expressive are both part of dialogue -- neither one can be excluded for it to be a true dialogic relationship. The new model of meaning making suggested that participants strive to exist in cycles of being receptive and expressive. It proposed that participants speak and act, but that they also listen and learn from their lived experiences. The new way of making meaning called on participants to exist in a dialogical relationship with the world and others.

Comparing the Everyday and the New Models of Meaning Making

In this section, I compare participants' everyday way of making meaning and the new way of making meaning, and summarize the key differences between them. Participants' everyday way of making meaning and the new way of making meaning are represented graphically in Figure 10.

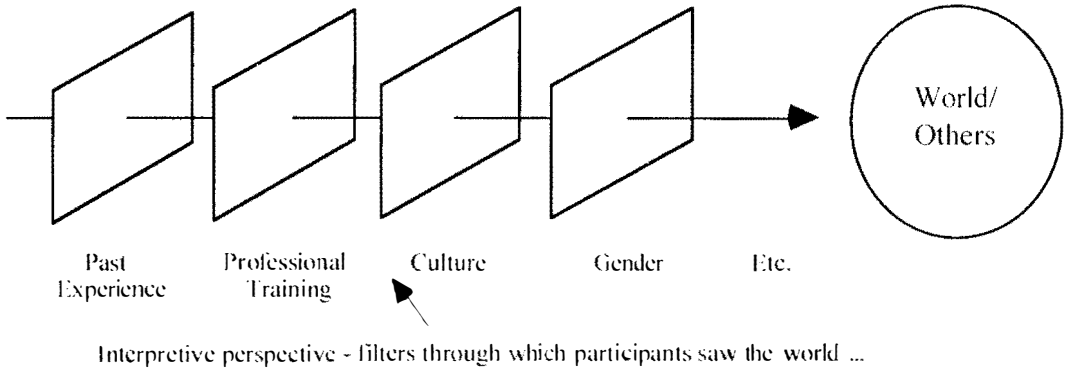
Participants' everyday way of meaning making represented a distorted way of seeing the world and others. Participants' perceptions were filtered by the presuppositions that made up their interpretive perspectives. Participant's everyday way of meaning making was characterized as a subconscious, projective, uncritical and non self-aware way of making meaning. As mentioned earlier, the essence of participants everyday way of making meaning is captured succinctly by deMello (1990) when he says that "We see things and people not as they are, but as we are" (p. 88).

The new way of making meaning suggested that participants be open and receptive to the world and others. Participants could be open and receptive by bracketing the presuppositions that made up their interpretive perspectives and then learning from lived experience about phenomena in the world and by really listening to others. This new

(a) Participants' Everyday Way of Making Meaning

everyday personal meanings, mi, were given by (interpretive perspective --- context)ti

(A subconscious, projective, uncritical and non self-aware way of making meaning)



Note: This can represent a distorted way of making meaning given that participants were in essence conditioned by their biography and culture, and the many factors that make up their interpretive perspectives.

(b) New Way of Making Meaning Fostered by the Class

new authentic meanings, m'i, were given by (conscious reflective presence --- context) ti

(A conscious, receptive and critically self-aware way of making meaning)

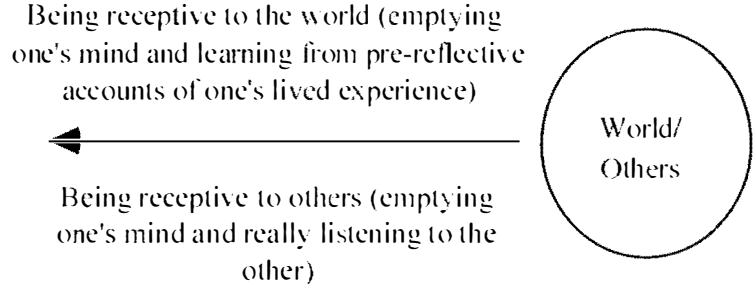


Figure 10: Comparing Participants' Everyday Way of Making Meaning and the New Way of Making Meaning Fostered by the Class

way of making meaning could be characterized as a conscious, receptive and critically self-aware way of making meaning. In essence, this new way of making meaning helped participants to come to see the world and others as they really are, rather than as they themselves were. This new way of making meaning helped participants to come to see the world and others more directly.

Overall, the shift from the everyday way of meaning making to the new way of making meaning also represented a shift from a subconscious, projective, uncritical and non self-aware way of making meaning, to a conscious, receptive, and critically self-aware way of making meaning. Switching from the everyday way of meaning making to the new way of making meaning essentially amounted to switching from a projective way of understanding the world and others to a receptive way of understanding the world and others.

This chapter addressed the first research question of this study regarding how participants in the class made meaning. In summary, the data suggested that participants everyday way of making meaning represented a subconscious, interpretive, uncritical and non self-aware way of making meaning. Participants were programmed and conditioned by their biography, culture and the discourses in which they had participated. The data suggested that this represented a distorted and projective way of making meaning. The data further suggested that the philosophical assumptions and underlying processes of the class fostered a shift to a new way of making meaning. This new way of making meaning represented a conscious, receptive and critically self-aware way of making meaning. The new way of making meaning called on participants to strive to become perpetual beginners in terms of meaning making, and to strive to exist in dialogic relationship with the world and others. In the next chapter, I will turn to the second research question of this study which focused on the underlying processes of the class.

CHAPTER 6

THE UNDERLYING PROCESSES OF THE REFLECTIVE PRACTICE CLASS

This chapter explores the second research question of this study: What were the underlying processes of the reflective practice class? From the very beginning, it was apparent that the underlying processes of the reflective practice class were very different from those of the traditional didactic model of instruction. The reflective practice class was conducted in a group format. In the reflective practice class, students sat in a circle and most of the talk in the classroom consisted of participants talking to each other with the professor playing the role of facilitator and co-participant.

A detailed analysis of participants' experiences of the reflective practice class suggested that the underlying processes of the class could be divided into two main areas: interpersonal relationship processes and learning processes. The interpersonal relationship processes referred to the evolution of positive interpersonal relationships within the class and the development of the class as a group. The learning processes consisted of a foundational process of learning from lived experience (which describes how participants learned from their lived experience throughout the class), and four different dialogical learning processes (effective communication, self-reflection, reflection on a phenomenon, and problem solving). Figure 11 presents an overall framework describing participants experiences of the underlying processes of the class in a graphical format. This represents a grounded conceptual framework woven together from the experiences shared by all participants in the class.

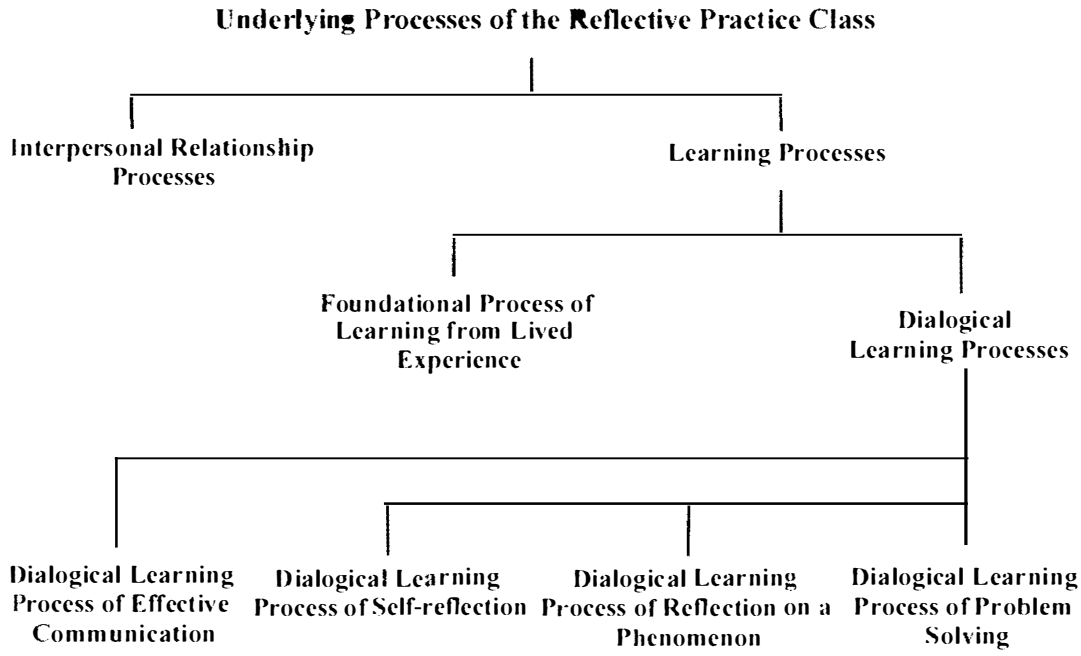


Figure 11: Participants' Experiences of the Underlying Processes of the Reflective Practice Class.

Given the approach taken to data analysis (my decision not to focus only on common themes, but to weave all participants' experiences or perspectives together to get a more comprehensive picture of the underlying processes of the reflective practice class), not every participant experienced all of these processes. Some participants saw the class as focusing mainly on the dialogical learning processes of self-reflection and the dialogical learning process of problem solving. Others saw the class as focusing on the dialogical learning process of reflection on a phenomenon. Some were aware of the interpersonal relationship processes, while others were not.

This chapter describes and elaborates on each of the underlying processes of the class. The interpersonal relationship processes are described, followed by a discussion of the foundational process of learning from lived experience. Then the dialogical learning processes of effective communication, self-reflection, reflection on a phenomenon and problem solving are described.

Interpersonal Relationship Processes

The interpersonal relationship processes of the reflective practice class refer to the evolution of positive interpersonal relationships within the class and to the development of the class as a group. This section describes aspects of the class which facilitated the emergence of class cohesion, cultural norms and values which promoted group cohesion, key experiences within the class which facilitated the group coming together, and times when participants did not feel part of the group.

The Growth of Positive Interpersonal Relationships Within the Class and the Development of the Class as a Group

One of the most figural aspects of the class for participants were the positive relationships that developed among participants. Participants reported that they experienced wonderful feelings of kinship, symmetry, and understanding with other members of the class. Bill suggested, "I feel I've enjoyed developing some relationship with other people in the context of these class meeting, which will be carried on at least in the foreseeable future" (Bill, l. 14). Positive relationships in the class also stood out for Nikki, "I remember ... relationships that developed. I experienced some real wonderful moments of symmetry and understanding and kinship with [list of class participants]" (Nikki, l. 229). Because of these strong relationships, participants hated to see the class come to an end. For example, Xiaopei stated "I think that, in a way, I developed a bond, a linkage with people in a class, in a way that I'm scared that it's going to be over, like we're never going to do it again" (Xiaopei, l. 569).

Over the course of the semester, a sense of cohesion or community emerged within the group. Participants talked about the group "coming together" or "jelling." Indeed the word "jelling" became part of the group's shared language. Participants identified with the group, and noted a sense of belongingness to the group. This sense of cohesion and community was apparent in participants' use of the word "we" (versus "they") when they referred to the group. The most figural event for Angela out of the whole class was her perception of the group coming together or "jelling."

> Am, probably the overall coming together. Am ... the idea, the first couple of sessions I wasn't really sure, because I didn't know the personalities, but as the class went along and as we became more involved with each other. ... I think we started out, you know, very separate but I think we've come together. I think it has just jelled, it has made real Jell-O for me, you know (laughter). ... I can see that some groups ... would never jell and I feel like that this group has. (Angela, l. 649)

A sense of community gradually evolved among participants within the class. David described this sense of community as follows: "Being in community is a functions of feelings, ... [feelings of] connection with others" (David, l. 941). This research suggests that the level of group cohesion or community achieved by the group had a lot to do with the nature and quality of the interpersonal relationships between participants in the group.

Aspects of the Class Which Facilitated the Emergence of Class Cohesion

Based on participants' experiences of the class, the following aspects of the class facilitated the class coming together as a group, or the emergence of a sense of cohesion or community within the class:

Just Getting to Know Each Other

Positive relationships evolved among participants in the class in part because they got to know each other. Angela suggested that just getting to know each other fostered a sense of trust in the group. "There just seems to be more trust because we got to know each other and found out that none of us are ax murderers or ah, that's not a good analogy probably but, there's just that common trust that's come" (Angela, l. 89). Bill suggested that getting to know other participants helped him to connect with other members of the class. He also pointed out that the two principal learning activities used in the class, the learning autobiographies and critical incidents, served as great ways for participants to get to know each other and for participants to connect with each other.

> Well, just I think by being in the class with people as happens always you get to know them a little bit, ah, you do things together, like have lunch or work on something, whatever, outside of class, and those tend to create or foster a relationship. And also hearing some of the critical incidents and autobiographical things that others have shared have definitely done that. And you know, it's always a true cliché - You just don't realize ... everybody has a story, you know, they're not just a face and notebook and a pencil, but they're people who things have happened to, and they've had problems, and they've accomplished things and it just makes everybody more real and more, ah. It helps you connect, I guess is a good way of saying it. You get that emotional connection with people that way. (Bill, l. 507)

Spending Time Together

Relationships were fostered among participants in the class because they spent a considerable amount of time together. David suggested that time was critical in terms of coming to know or understand another person.

> And see time is so critical in that learning ... And in the group there's a quantity and quality of time. There's no substitute for that. In order for me to know, begin to know, begin to have any sense of another person, requires some time. And that's quantity, but it's also quality of time. (David, I. 491)

Spending time together was critical for the growth of interpersonal relationships and for the development of the class as a group.

Self-disclosure

Self-disclosure was viewed as a key aspect of the class that facilitated the class coming together as a group. Angela used the metaphor of "revealing one's warts" to illustrate this notion of self-disclosure. "We've all poured out quite a large number of warts in the security of that room, and that made a big difference I think" (Angela, I. 76). Overall, there appeared to be a symbiotic relationship between the level of self-disclosure in the group and the level of cohesion or community within the group. The evolving sense of community in the group lead to increased self-disclosure, and this self-disclosure in turn lead to a greater sense of community. The extent of self-disclosure occurring within the group also served as a sort of barometer of the sense of trust or security and community within the group.

Willingness to Risk in the Group

The willingness of participants to take risks in the class also facilitated the group coming together. Participants risked when self-disclosing in the group context. To participate in the dialogical learning process of self-reflection and the dialogical learning process of problem solving also involved a fair degree of risk. Risking in the class stood out for Nikki. "You see when I saw us all together in that first group. I know we were all at different places, but ... we had all made one decision, you know, to come together wherever we are to risk" (Nikki, l. 715). Later Nikki remarks "What's been very figural for me is the bravery, and the courage of the people who really worked within the group to share and to risk" (Nikki, l. 1327). Rosalyn also talked about taking a risk specifically in terms of sharing her critical incident in the class. "I had so many issues that I wrote in a page and a half that I couldn't tell what it was about. And that's when I took the risk to bring it to class with some fear and trepidation I suppose because it was pretty close to home" (Rosalyn, l. 205).

Sharing a Common Goal

Another aspect of the class which facilitated the group coming together was that class participants shared a common goal. Angela suggested that the class jelled, or came together, because participants bought into the classes' overall purpose or goal. Angela saw that participants shared a common goal to learn about and promote the processes of reflective practice and critical thinking.

> We seem to be commonly focused on what we all want out of it, more so than in the beginning. ... We all want to promote this type of learning and we think it can be successful (Angela, l. 94). ... You see, I don't see where any of us are really that different from each other, because we all want to learn. And I think that's a key to

it, is that we all want to learn ... the reflective practice process, the critical thinking, that overall process (Angela, l. 170).

Focusing on What Participants had in Common

Focusing on what group class members had in common provided a foundation for a sense of cohesion and community to emerge within the group. In sharing their trials and tribulations in the class, participants recognized that in their humanity they were all much the same. They were also all involved in the educational process, albeit in different contexts, and they were all very interested in learning the processes of reflective practice. This issue of focusing on what participants had in common versus focusing on differences between participants was the topic of discussion during one class session. The consensus was that if a group focused on the differences between group members then this could lead to a sense of fragmentation and dissonance within the group. If, however, a group focused on what group members had in common, this emphasis on commonality could lead to a sense of unity and cohesion within the group. Xiaopei suggested that "Sometimes we focus too much on the differences among us we make it so impossible to overcome and overlook them" (Xiaopei, l. 637). Rosalyn suggested that "If everyone could change their assumptions about difference and likeness, that would be the most exciting way that barriers could come tumbling down. ... If [we could focus on]... all of these things that we share, rather than looking at the differences, then there would be a lot more hope about things" (Rosalyn, l. 661).

Humor

Humor and jokes also played a role in fostering closer relationships and a sense of cohesion or community within the group. Nikki described the role of humor in the class as follows:

> When somebody can say a joke, as long as it's a joke that is furthering where we're going, it's even more close then. When somebody can develop a joke that is in keeping with what we're doing, it bonds us, and it connects us and I almost get a physical sense that we all come closer together, that we almost kind of leaned in more, that the circle got smaller rather than expanding. (Nikki, l. 1028)

The Facilitator

The facilitator played a very important role in facilitating the development of a sense of cohesion and community within the group. The facilitator established a physical environment (circle of chairs) that was conducive to community. The facilitator also played an important role in shaping the culture of the group by establishing ground rules with the group that created a foundation of positive norms relating to interpersonal relationships. These norms of respect and trust, not making judgments, equality and inclusion, and authentic sharing, became part of the culture of the group and helped foster a sense of community within the group. The facilitator also promoted practices in the class which facilitated the strengthening of these norms. For example, the facilitator encouraged participants to address each other using first names, in order to promote mutual respect, trust, and a sense of community.

Cultural Norms and Values Which Promoted Group Cohesion

A culture evolved within the reflective practice class which included norms and values relating to interpersonal relationships, and also norms and values with respect to the learning processes. This section focuses specifically on the norms and values which emerged within the reflective practice class relating to interpersonal relationships. Cultural norms and values evolved within the group which promoted positive interpersonal relationships and facilitated the development of a sense of cohesion and community

within the group. These norms and values included respect and trust, accepting and non-judgmental stance, equality and inclusion, authentic sharing, and reciprocity.

Respect and Trust

The development of norms of respect and trust within the group were very important in terms of the fostering a sense of cohesion and community within the group. Angela highlighted the importance of a sense of trust and how this sense of trust facilitated the group coming together. "I think that this class has come together, that maybe it's because we trust one another ... and that made a big difference I think" (Angela, l. 76). The qualities of respect and trust go hand in hand. When a sense of respect was fostered among participants, then a sense of trust followed. Rosalyn described this connection between respect and trust as follows, "I'm saying that we have respected each other ... And that seems to have built our level of trust very quickly, more quickly I think than anyone could ever assume that trust level could be built" (Rosalyn, l. 734). Rosalyn also suggested that the norm of mutual respect remained an important part of the class even in the face of disagreements among participants. "That's almost the essence of our group - respect for each other. Even in the highest form of disagreement about what a person is saying, there's still respect for the person and what comes out of that person's mouth. So, the argument becomes depersonalized. There are lots of arguments" (Rosalyn, l. 933). Overall, the sense of respect that existed among participants lead to a sense of trust within the group, which in turn facilitated the emergence of positive interpersonal relationships within the group.

Accepting and Non-judgmental Stance

The accepting and non-judgmental character of the group points to another norm which evolved within the class which facilitated the group coming together. Class participants held an open, appreciative, non-judgmental stance towards other participants

in the group. This accepting and non-judgmental stance facilitated the development of a sense of trust among participants and a sense of safety and security within the group. Angela suggested "I see a lot more comfort in knowing that even if there is pain in a question, or in reflection upon yourself, that the expectations are that nobody's going to think any differently about you ... there's just that common trust that's come" (Angela, l. 89).

Equality and Inclusion

Another norm that evolved within the class facilitating the development of the class as a group was the sense of equality and inclusion within the group. Angela described this sense of equality and inclusion among members of the group with her metaphor of the pie. This metaphor suggests that each participant's contribution was valued and everyone participated in the group on an equal basis.

> I see this class as a pie, you know, a typical round circular pie, and everybody is a slice of the pie, and no one person has the whole pie ... I would not have missed the class for anything because. ... everybody in there to me has added, whether it's been good, bad, or indifferent; it's their slice of the equal pie, to make the pie taste. ... [Further] to make the pie work and taste good, and for everybody to enjoy it, it's got to be cut up into pieces and everybody's got to have a slice. ... There's almost an equality in that ... [an] equality that consummates the process in my mind. (Angela, l. 608-614)

Authentic Sharing

Participants authentically sharing was yet another norm which evolved within the class that facilitated group cohesion. Authentic sharing is sharing honestly or expressing one's experience with authenticity and integrity. When a participant authentically shared,

the group was able to get behind the participant's persona (their masks), and he or she became more real. David described what it meant to share authentically in a group. "I'm able to express the feelings that I really have inside me, in such a way that another can understand or see that those feelings and expressions correspond to what they perceive, or how they know me to be or something like that. ... The goal is to be present in a conversation with authenticity and integrity" (David, I. 169). David suggested that all participants should model this authentic way of sharing in the group. "And modeling that even to the point of saying I don't really know, and to the extent that that happens, it opens up space for other people to be real in the group. And the more people that can do that then the more space there is for genuine or deeper understanding" (David, AB, I. 371).

Reciprocity

The norm of reciprocity in the class also facilitated the emergence of positive interpersonal relationships and the class coming together as a group. The class was most certainly a give and take situation (especially in the dialogical learning processes of self-reflection and of problem solving). Participants received some insights that were valuable to them, and they also helped other class participants by providing them with insights. Angela suggested that: "When you talk about participation, I think you look to see what you can add to, or take from the other participants. How you can help them, [and] how you can absorb from them. This has got to be a give and take of major proportions" (Angela, I. 649).

Key Experiences Within the Class Which Facilitated the Group Coming Together

There were three key experiences in the class which facilitated the emergence of positive interpersonal relationships and a sense of cohesion within the group.

Authentic Sharing and Risking Modeled by a Respected Figure in the Class

In one of the early class meetings, one class participant who was a respected figure in the class was willing to risk and share openly in the class. It was significant that this happened early in the semester. It set an example for other participants in the class and encouraged greater authenticity in sharing and self-disclosure in the class.

> One of the things was something that Rosalyn did - Dr. Smith [Rosalyn's last name]. I can't give you specifics on it, but it was early on in class when she was talking about what her background was. And I realized that this is a woman that holds probably a fairly important position in this college, and she's in here opening up her world which could create havoc for her, and she's opening up to students in the hierarchy of the college - it's just not done. And if she's willing to take that chance, she set an example to me at least, that that's OK to do. And to feel that sense of comfort that was the beginning of creating that trust, knowing that there was somebody there that ... That was the basic dividend to me - Someone in a position of authority that would open their self up as she has. ... Just the idea that she was willing to trust, throw that out for herself, was highly significant to me. And I thought ... here's a woman, she's willing to throw her warts out there, what's your problem? (Angela, I. 706).

Crisis in the Group Which Subsequently Led to a Greater Sense of Cohesion and Community

Another event which facilitated group cohesion was 'the crisis' which occurred within the group. In the second class meeting, one participant (David) precipitated a crisis in the group by challenging what was going on and sharing a list of concerns about how the class was being conducted. This 'crisis' had a significant impact on the participants in

the class and on the development of the class as a group. This incident, which occurred very early in the semester, helped to foster the important norms of respect and inclusion within the group. Rosalyn summarized the impact of this incident within the group, noting: "I think probably David did everyone a great favor by David perceiving himself to be outside the group and sharing his personal pain ... when he did his presentation; I think it made every single one of us more sensitive to personal needs and pulling people into the group" (Rosalyn, I. 784).

Learning To Engage in the Dialogical Learning Processes

The early work of the class focused on mastering the skills of effective communication, the dialogical learning process of effective communication. This greatly facilitated the growth of positive relationships and facilitated the development of the class as a group. The dialogical learning process of effective communication fostered behaviors and dispositions such as paying attention, listening, bracketing one's presuppositions, holding a open, appreciative, non-judgmental stance towards the other, remaining non-judgmental, and asking non-leading phenomenological questions. These behaviors and dispositions promoted the development of positive interpersonal relationships and the development of a sense of cohesion and community within the group. In addition engaging in each of the other dialogical learning processes (self-reflection, reflection on a phenomenon and problem solving) also facilitated the growth of positive interpersonal relationships and the development of a sense of cohesion and community within the group.

Times When Participants Did Not Feel Part of the Group

In the above sections, I have outlined the positive side of interpersonal relationships within the class. Although this group did tend towards a sense of cohesion and community, there were occasions when individual participants did not feel part of the group. These occasions of disjunction threatened to push the group in the direction of fragmentation, dissonance and distrust. However, overall the positive experiences within the class far outweighed the occasions when participants did not feel part of the group. This sense of fragmentation or dissonance also needs to be understood as part of the processes of the class. In this section I discuss these occasions of fragmentation or dissonance within the group.

Focusing on Differences

Some participants perceived themselves to be on the outside of the group, because they focused on how they were different from other members of the group. For example, Sylvia saw herself as different from other participants in the group. She was the only one who worked full-time in a corporate setting, and she saw herself as different from the masters and doctoral students in the group.

> The only thing I guess I felt kind of out of place about was I think I was the only one who worked a full time job that was away from the University setting. ... You know I was the only "corporate," "government" whatever. But it didn't bother me, in fact I enjoyed it. ... I sometimes though wondered. Don't get me wrong about this, but I sometimes sort of wondered about how much some of the doctoral students were really deriving from it. Because you know a lot of times they would come out and talk about certain things ... they would use a lot of big words, they made a lot of references to things. And to be perfectly honest with

you, I sort of felt like ... now, are you really feeling that way or are you trying to impress Dr. P and these other doctoral students and graduate assistants that are sitting here? (Sylvia, l. 925)

Individual Participants Being Put on the Spot or Perceiving that they Were Being Attacked by the Group

Participants felt that they were not part of the group when they felt that they were being put on the spot. They also felt excluded when they felt that they were being attacked by the group. At one point during the semester there was a discussion in class about certain individuals not participating in the conversations in the group. Bill was one participant who tended to be a little quiet in the group. Bill indicated that he certainly didn't feel part of the group at this particular time. "I was sitting there and it seemed like the more they were talking about people not participating, the more I was inclined to clam up" (Bill, l. 345).

Interpersonal Relationship Conflicts Within the Class

Another factor which contributed to fragmentation within the group was when interpersonal relationship conflicts flared up within the group. The excerpt which follows is Nikki's account of a conflict which arose between David and her.

> I was really am ... unhappy with the first class. ... David came with a prepared long typewritten sheet that had delineated professionally all of the criticisms that he had about the way the class had been formatted, or according to him how it had not been formatted. ... I saw the fact that he that he went to all this trouble to type write it all up. I mean I saw that as, you know, as compulsive and am ... And I experienced it as, almost as though he was grand standing. ... I was aware of David as pontificating. You know he became to me, he was an image of all the

> priests that I had known and all of the headmasters, and all of the arrogant people that are not sensitive to anybody else's needs, but really focused on their own. ... I generally close myself off to people who come from David's kind of, Oh, what's the word, from his scaffolding. I don't like people that talk down to other people. I almost always will give them wide berth and get a distance from them. (Nikki, l. 45)

The data from the class suggested that the cohesiveness of the group was directly proportional to the quality of interpersonal relationships within the group. Interpersonal relationship conflicts within the group thwarted the development of a sense of cohesion or community within the group. Interpersonal relationship conflicts thus represented a barrier to the development of group cohesion.

Competition

Competition was another source of disjuncture in terms of interpersonal relationships in the class. It was also a barrier to a sense of cohesion and community emerging within the group. Bill suggested that some members of the class were behaving in a competitive and dominating way, and this caused him to back out of the conversation in the class.

> It seemed like to me some people were doing all the talking or most of the conversation was between maybe just 2 to 3 people of the group ... And I kind of interpreted that as a competitive dominating kind of situation ... Sometimes when that happens I withdraw ... if they don't want to give me a chance to speak, then I don't have to say anything. I'm not going to force myself in on the conversation. So I just sort of sat and watched with my opinions running through my mind and I didn't chip in for a good while. (Bill, l. 36)

Competition within the group was seen as antithetical to positive interpersonal relationships and group cohesion. Participants' perceptions of being in a competitive situation also altered the nature and flow of the conversation within the group.

Foundational Process of Learning From Lived Experience

The second major area underlying the reflective practice class concerned the learning processes. This section will speak to one of two components, the foundational process of learning from lived experience.

Experience and learning from experience stood out for a number of the participants in the reflective practice class. David talked about "how important experience is to learning" (David, I, 9). George also viewed experience as central to learning. "Probably in reflecting on learning, I started looking at learning and how it happens, and I began to see experience as central" (George, AB, I, 399).

The process of learning from lived experience refers to the process by which participants in the class reflectively learned from their own and each other's lived experiences. I describe this process as a foundational process because it was prevalent throughout the class, and was the underpinning for several of the dialogical learning processes.

In *Chapter 2: Review of Selected Literature*, I described two views of learning from experience, from a positivist and an interpretivist perspective respectively. Based on participants' experiences of the class, the interpretivist model of learning from lived experience was the predominant model of experiential learning evident within the class. From an interpretivist perspective, learning from experience is based in learning from lived experience, where lived experience refers to the thoughts, feelings, and intuitions that

make up one's stream of consciousness. Participants learned by reflecting on their own lived experiences, and/or by reflecting on accounts of lived experience shared by other participants in the class. This notion of learning from lived experience is rooted in phenomenology and could be described as a phenomenology-based model of experiential learning.

Phenomenology played a major role in the reflective practice class. The class embraced ideas from phenomenology and these ideas informed both the concept of listening or effective communication, as well as the concept of learning from lived experience described in this section. Soliciting phenomenological descriptions of experiences from group members was the modus operandi of members of the class especially in the early part of the semester. Participants spent a lot time in this part of the class practicing asking non-leading, phenomenological-type questions and taking on the phenomenological attitude. The process of asking these phenomenological-type questions got descriptions of participants' lived experiences out on the table in the group. This section describes how participants then went the next step and reflectively learned from these accounts of lived experience. The process of learning from lived experience is summarized in Table 4.

Getting at Pre-reflective In-the-Moment Descriptions of Lived Experience

Given the emphasis on phenomenological questioning in the reflective practice class, participants were encouraged to ask each other to describe their in-the-moment lived experiences in a particular situation (their pre-reflective accounts of their lived experience), rather than sharing what they thought about that particular situation (which would represent a reflective account). This notion of participants soliciting pre-reflective in-the-moment accounts of lived experience from each other involved bracketing what one

Table 4: Summary of the Foundational Process of Learning from Lived Experience.

The process of learning from lived experience involved:

- **Getting at pre-reflective in-the-moment descriptions of lived experience**
  Getting at pre-reflective accounts of lived experience involved participants consciously experiencing with an open, appreciative, non-judgmental stance, bracketing or letting go of all their presuppositions and describing their in-the-moment lived experience in a particular situation.

- **Reflecting on these accounts of lived experience**
  The process of reflecting on accounts of lived experience could be described as an inductive process of identifying themes or patterns by consciously reflecting on one's lived experiences. There were two ways in which participants learned from their lived experiences:
    - Participants reflected on their lived experiences to learn about themselves (or the self of another).
    - Participants reflected on their lived experiences to learn about a particular phenomenon.

thought about a particular situation and describing one's in-the-moment lived experience in that situation. Working with pre-reflective accounts of lived experience involved taking on the phenomenological attitude towards one's lived experience (being open and receptive to one's lived experience). Participants were encouraged to bracket their presuppositions in order to learn from their lived experience. Learning from phenomenological accounts of lived experience could be described as exploring the lifeworld. Participants reflected on their past lived experiences through their autobiographies and critical incidents. They also reflected on their ongoing lived experiences in the reflective practice class itself (their here-and-now experiences in the group).

One of the most significant aspects of the interpretivist notion of lived experience is that emotions and feelings represent an important dimension of lived experience. Rosalyn valued the emotional dimension of experience and suggested that it brought in another whole layer of information for consideration, "I feel very strongly that ... if we

monitored our gut level feelings, that we'd get a different layer ... of information ... You would get a better reading of what's happening with people, if you ask them to monitor their own gut level feelings" (Rosalyn, l. 1277). George suggested that emotion was key to understanding one's subjective personal meanings in a particular situation. Thus, part of the process of learning from lived experience involved developing an awareness of, and an ability to work with, the emotional dimension of experience.

Educators traditionally have not dealt with the emotional aspects of lived experience. Psychologists and counselors, on the other hand, regularly work with emotions and have recognized their importance as a significant dimension of everyday experience and meaning making. Interestingly, three members of the reflective practice class, George, Nikki and Bill, had counseling backgrounds. One of their common traits was that they would ask someone to describe their experience with "How did you feel about that?" For them, the emotional tone of an experience held valuable information about the nature of the person's lived experience. George, who had done a lot of research in the area of emotions, suggested that feelings represent the primordial structure of our experience or the primordial structure of our existence.

> For me, emotions exist, you know, at the point where people engage in reality and have the experience of reality. Emotions tell us about our experience ... so it's sort of at that point where we interface with reality. ... [Emotion] is primordial. It's the moment of experience. It's where experience happens. ... It's kind of like the text, you know, if this page was sitting here with no text on it, you could say it was blank, but if it's filled with text it has some meaning. OK, emotion is the text. Emotion gives it the meaning. ... I mean with this analogy, metaphorically we could say the page, a blank page has no meaning except in it's own existence. But as soon as you add some text to it, it has, that gives it meaning. ... Emotion is the meaning of existence. It's the way we interpret the meaning of existence. ...

> Actually when I say emotion is meaning, what I mean is emotion is personal meaning. ... Emotion is a primordial language of existence. ... Emotion is that place and that's why it's so exciting to me, and why I think it needs to be in education. (George, AB, l. 794)

Several participants talked about keeping a journal or just writing things down as an aid to recording their lived experiences. David suggested that keeping a journal made it easy for him to focus on and record his lived experience. "And for me, one of the ways I pay attention is to keep a journal, because then I write it down and I keep some record of it" (David, l. 1013). Bill suggested that writing down his experience in a number of different situations over time aided in the process of reflection. Speaking of his process of reflection on his lived experiences, Bill suggested that "I wrote some things in a notebook and just thought about it" (Bill, l. 182). This suggests that keeping a journal containing descriptions of one's lived experiences across many different situations over time could be a valuable resource for reflection on one's lived experiences.

Reflection on Accounts of Lived Experience - Two Possible Directions of Analysis

In examining how participants described learning from their lived experience in the reflective practice class, I discovered that reflection on accounts of lived experience could go in one of two possible directions. Participants could reflect on accounts of lived experience and behavior in order to learn about themselves or the self of another. Alternatively, participants could reflect on accounts of lived experience and behavior in order to learn about a phenomenon. Thus, when a participant shared a description of their lived experience in the class, and the other class participants had understood the experience shared, the conversation or dialogue in the group then proceeded in one of two possible directions. The class looked at this experience either in terms of what it said

about the experiencer, or the class looked at this experience in terms of what it said about the phenomenon being described. Based on the reflective interest of the individual they engaged in either a phenomenology-based approach to self-reflection or a phenomenology-based approach to the exploration of a phenomenon.

Participants Reflected on Accounts of Lived Experience in Order to Learn About Themselves (or the Self of Another)

This type of learning from lived experience addressed the implicit question: What does the structure of one's lived experience and behavior say about oneself (or the self of the experiencer)? This type of reflection was employed by participants as a way to learn about themselves (or the self of another). This notion of class participants reflecting on their lived experiences in order to learn about themselves was really an important finding of this research. The process of participants reflecting on their lived experience and behavior to learn about themselves, represented an innovative and authentic approach to self-reflection. This can be characterized as a phenomenology-based approach to self-reflection.

Participants engaged in two aspects of self-reflection. Participants reflected on their lived experience in order to learn about their personality in general, and participants reflected on their lived experience in order to learn about their presuppositions with respect to a particular phenomenon.

Learning about their personality in general. By reflecting on their lived experiences across many different situations, participants were able to inductively identify themes or patterns with respect to their self or their personality in general. The implicit question driving these analyses was "What does the way I have structured my experience and behavior in these situations say about myself or my personality in general?" Angela found the notion of reflecting on her lived experience and identifying themes or patterns a very

helpful aspect of the class. She felt these reflections helped her to come to authentically know her self.

> I think the day ... when we talked about themes. I never themed or I never dealt with putting it together in that manner, but that helped me a great deal. ... Am, it will make it more valuable to those people ... that I work with, to help them see patterns in their lives. It's seeing patterns is what we're looking for here. ... Is this the way you act today Angela? Is this the way you will act tomorrow Angela? What did you do last week Angela? OK, what do you see that's consistent throughout that? What themes came out in all three of them? So that was a big deal to me. (Angela, l. 805)

Bill used his critical incident which was based on his experience of disruptive students in his class, as an opportunity to engage in this phenomenology-based approach to self-reflection. He described the process of learning about his personality as "putting the pieces of a puzzle together" (Bill, l. 195). He suggested that part of this process of reflection was comparing his experiences and behavior in different situations, and looking for a common pattern in terms of his own ways of being and acting. (Bill's critical incident is included in Appendix D).

> It [Bill's critical incident] reminded me of some things to do with conflict avoidance, things about, you know, wondering about myself, in terms of, do I do too much avoiding of conflicts? Am I too (clears throat) afraid or what? ... And so I thought about just some past incidents in my life. ... And so, it reminded me of some other times I've thought about that. (Bill, l. 157) ... It happened real time in the class. And then afterwards I wrote some things in a notebook and just thought about it. (Bill, l. 182). ... And so when I think about my own behavior ... Just

kind of playing with those pieces in my mind, trying to configure them into some kind of pattern ... something that formed a new pattern that made sense or that fit into another pattern that already existed, you know, of my own conceptual framework of things. But ah - How did I do that? Ah, it's sort of a process of comparison I think. (Bill, l. 203) ... This theme of conflict avoidance, or this issue, ah, has been something that from time to time I've questioned myself on. ... Yah, there's a thread running way back on that one. (Bill, l. 245).

Learning about their presuppositions. By reflecting on accounts of their lived experience, participants were also able to learn about their presuppositions with respect to a particular phenomenon. Participants presuppositions referred to their beliefs, assumptions, rules, values, fears and expectations about a phenomenon. By reflecting on their past lived experience of a particular phenomenon, participants were able to identify the tacit themes or patterns in their experience of that phenomenon. From these themes or patterns, they were able to infer what their presuppositions were. In this case, the implicit question driving participants' analysis of their lived experience was "What does the way I have structured my experience of this particular phenomenon say about my presuppositions with respect to that phenomenon?" Rosalyn, for example, in exploring her presuppositions with respect to teachers, reflected on her past experiences of teachers. Thus, participants were able to get a more authentic and in-depth understanding of their presuppositions or interpretive perspective with respect to some phenomenon when they reflected on their significant past lived experiences of that phenomenon.

In general, the process of reflecting on one's lived experience in order to learn about oneself did not appear to be something that participants typically did on a day to day basis. Rather, this type of self-reflection was a learned skill. Participants were also generally conscious and mindful of what they were doing when they engaged in this

phenomenology-based approach to self-reflection. They were engaged in this self-inquiry purposefully.

Participants Reflected on Accounts of Lived Experience in Order to Learn About a Phenomenon

Participants learned about a particular phenomenon through a process of reflecting on their lived experience of that phenomenon across a number of different situations and identifying patterns in their lived experience. In this case, the implicit question driving participants' analyses of their lived experience was "What does my experience of this particular phenomenon across a number of different situations over time tell me about that phenomenon?" This could be characterized as a phenomenology-based approach to learning about a phenomenon.

Angela provided an example of this phenomenology-based approach to exploring and learning about a phenomenon. About half way through the class, Sylvia shared her critical incident in the class which had to do with her experiences going through her divorce. Sylvia described some very emotional experiences in the class. When Sylvia was sharing her critical incident, Angela monitored the reaction of class members. Angela perceived that the men reacted differently to this critical incident than did the women because it dealt with such emotional issues. According to Angela, the men were "squirming in their seats" and the women "just ploughed through it." Angela began reflecting on the differences between men and women's handling of emotional situations. Angela pointed out that she had observed this same pattern elsewhere and had formed the suspicion that men were not as comfortable with emotional situations as were women. This experience in the class confirmed her suspicion that men did indeed react to emotional situations differently from women, and suggests that Angela's suspicion was upgraded to a belief.

> It made me very aware that there is a massive difference between male and female. And see I found that to be true, but I thought maybe that was just something that was just my perception, that, I watched it from somewhere else, so it made my suspicions and my perceptions true. ... I've always in my mind, I thought there was a clear difference in the [way males and females handle the emotional side. this was] my perception ... But that day. thinking back on it. I felt it supported my mentality about my own thinking. (Angela, l. 750)

The data suggested that this process of reflecting on one's lived experience in order to learn about a phenomenon appeared to happen regularly in participants' everyday lives. Participants monitored their lived experience on an ongoing basis. When something happened that suggested a certain pattern, then they formed a suspicion that such a pattern existed. Then they continued to monitor their lived experience, and based on subsequent experiences, this earlier suspicion was either confirmed or refuted. If a suspicion that such and such a pattern existed was confirmed, then the participant formed some beliefs with respect to that phenomenon.

Overall, the process of reflecting on lived experience in order to learn about a phenomenon could be referred to as the process of forming beliefs, assumptions, rules, values and fears about that phenomenon based on one's lived experience of that phenomenon. The data also suggested that this process of learning from lived experience about a phenomenon could be either conscious or subconscious. It appears that participants often learned from their lived experience about some phenomenon in a subconscious way. The data suggested that when participants underwent certain experiences they subconsciously formed beliefs, assumptions, values and fears about certain phenomena based on these experiences. This could be referred to as subconscious learning from lived experience about various phenomena.

In summary, the process of learning from lived experience can be described as a reflective and inductive process of pattern finding. Participants reflected on their lived experience across different situations and perhaps over time, and inductively identified themes or patterns about themselves or about a phenomenon in the world around them. The insights that participants gained about themselves or about a phenomenon were regarded as valuable. These insights were grounded in reality or grounded in their lived experience. Rosalyn recognized the strong parallel between learning from lived experience and the processes employed in qualitative research. She suggested that "When I self-reflect, I think that it's been a tremendous asset to have qualitative researchers ... in our class" (Rosalyn, I. 137).

Outcomes of the Process of Learning from Lived Experience

There were a number of potential outcomes for participants engaged in the process of learning from their lived experience. If a participant was monitoring his or her lived experience in order to learn about a phenomenon, then the end result was a heightened awareness or understanding about that phenomenon. If a participant was monitoring his or her lived experience in order to learn about themselves, then the end result was heightened self-awareness or self-understanding. If a participant was reflecting on another's lived experience in order to learn about the self or personality of the other, then the end result was heightened awareness of the self or personality of the other, or a heightened awareness of the interpretive perspective of the other.

Dialogical Learning Processes

Overview

The reflective practice class was taught in a group format using an instructional conversational approach involving dialogue. In looking at the underlying processes of the reflective practice class, a significant finding was that there was not just one form of dialogue. An analysis of the data revealed four different types of dialogical learning processes which were taking place within the reflective practice class. Each of the dialogical learning processes served a particular purpose and dictated the nature of the conversation in the group. Aligned with the purpose of each dialogical learning process was a specific focus for the conversation, specific types of questions that participants asked of each other, and specific outcomes that were achieved as result of dialogue. The definitions and characteristics of each of these dialogical learning processes are summarized in Table 5.

Each of these dialogical learning processes is rooted in an interpretivist view of the structure of consciousness, or an interpretivist view of meaning making. Each of these processes is rooted in the belief that it is the person in interaction with their world, or subject in interaction with object (S --- O) that co-constitutes one's experience of reality. We can distinguish between the different types of dialogical learning processes based on the reflective interest in each case. In the case of effective communication, the interest was simply to come to an empathic understanding of a particular experience shared by the other. This experience was the result of subject and object in interaction. The interest was in coming to understand the overall experience (S --- O) and to some extent coming to understand the interpretive perspective of the person (the S-pole of the S --- O relation). In the case of self-reflection, the reflective interest was in coming to better understand the self - the S pole of the S --- O relationship. In the case of reflection on some phenomenon, the reflective interest of participants was in coming to better understand a phenomenon in

Table 5: Overview of the Dialogical Learning Processes.

	Dialogical Learning Process of Effective Communication Dialogue as a means of understanding another participant.	**Dialogical Learning Process of Self-reflection** Dialogue as a means of coming to a better understanding of oneself (or the self of another).	**Dialogical Learning Process of Reflection on a Phenomenon** Dialogue as a means of coming to a better understanding of a particular phenomenon.	**Dialogical Learning Process of Problem Solving** Dialogue as a means of exploring the problem situations that individual participants brought to the class.
Purpose of this type of dialogue	To understand what another participant had shared. To reach empathic understanding of the other. To see the world as they saw it.	To enhance one's level of critical self-awareness.	To increase one's level of awareness or understanding of a phenomenon.	To help an individual participant gain a better understanding of their problem situation.
Focus	The experience and interpretive perspective of the other. S --- O ↑	●ne's own self, or the self of another participant. S --- O ↑	The specific phenomenon under discussion. S --- O ↑	Another participant's overall problem situation. S --- ● ↑ ↑
Type of Questioning	Non-leading phenomenological-type questions. Describe your experience of such and such?	In the case of individual self-reflection: Self-questioning - Why am I feeling like this? What does my lived experience across several different situations tell me about myself? In the case of group self-reflection: Asking another participant counseling-type questions, questions which challenged their beliefs and assumptions, or asking ARTT-type questions.	●uestions focused on the phenomenon under discussion. What does my lived experience across several different situations tell me about this particular phenomenon? What does our collective experience tell us about this particular phenomenon?	Self-reflective questions and questions which explored aspects of the participant's world. What is it about my own personality or my own interpretive perspective that may be contributing to this situation being problematic? What is it about my environment may be contributing to my situation being problematic?

Table 5: Continued.

	Dialogical Learning Process of Effective Communication Dialogue as a means of understanding another participant.	**Dialogical Learning Process of Self-reflection** Dialogue as a means of coming to a better understanding of oneself (or the self of another).	**Dialogical Learning Process of Reflection on a Phenomenon** Dialogue as a means of coming to a better understanding of a particular phenomenon.	**Dialogical Learning Process of Problem Solving** Dialogue as a means of exploring the problem situations that individual participants brought to the class.
Outcomes	Increased understanding of the other, empathic understanding, possibly mutual understanding. A sense of connection and community among participants. Understanding the other also broadened one's own perspective.	Increased self-awareness or self-understanding, critical self-awareness, logoic self-awareness, mindfulness, freedom, clarity of perception, improved interpersonal communication and relationships.	Increased awareness or understanding of a phenomenon. Sense of connection or community among participants in the group from having built something new together.	Greater awareness or understanding for a participant of their problem situation and ideas for possible courses of action. Increased understanding of personal and environmental factors that may have been contributing to a situation being problematic.
Metaphors that participants used to describe this process	"Venturing into the plane of another's reality." (David, AB, I. 110)	"Becoming more consciously aware of my own behavior, thoughts and actions" (Xiaopei, I. 823) Getting "tuned in to my thinking" (Nikki, AB, I. 420)	Construction crew "building a house." (George, I. 135)	Getting the group's help to "sort out" what's going on in a particular problem situation (Rosalyn, I. 217).

their world which relates to the object pole of the S --- O relationship. Finally, in the case of problem solving, the reflective interest was in participants coming to better understand a problem situation they found themselves in. In this case, both poles of the S --- O relationship were explored - aspects of self (S) which may have been contributing to the situation being problematic, and aspects of their environment/world (O) which may have been contributing to their situation being problematic.

Flow of the Dialogical Learning Processes

When a participant first started to share an account of their experience in the class, the dialogical learning process of effective communication was evident. Group participants sought to empathically understand the experience of the participant sharing. This dialogical learning process of effective communication typically got the participant's lived experience out on the table in the group. Based on the reflective interest of individual participants, the conversation then took on any one of the other three dialogical learning processes. The conversation may have gone in a self-reflective direction, in the direction of reflection on a phenomenon, or a problem solving direction. (See Figure 12)

These different dialogical learning processes applied to one interaction at a time. The intent or purpose of the initiator of a dialogical learning exchange, in effect, selected which dialogical learning process was employed. Each interaction in the class tended to have a specific underlying purpose, and this purpose defined the type of dialogue employed. The purpose may have changed from moment to moment as different members of the group participated in the conversation.

Participants were comfortable with the dialogical learning process of effective communication. They fully understood the purpose and patterns of interaction of this first dialogical learning process. The dynamics of this dialogical learning process had been

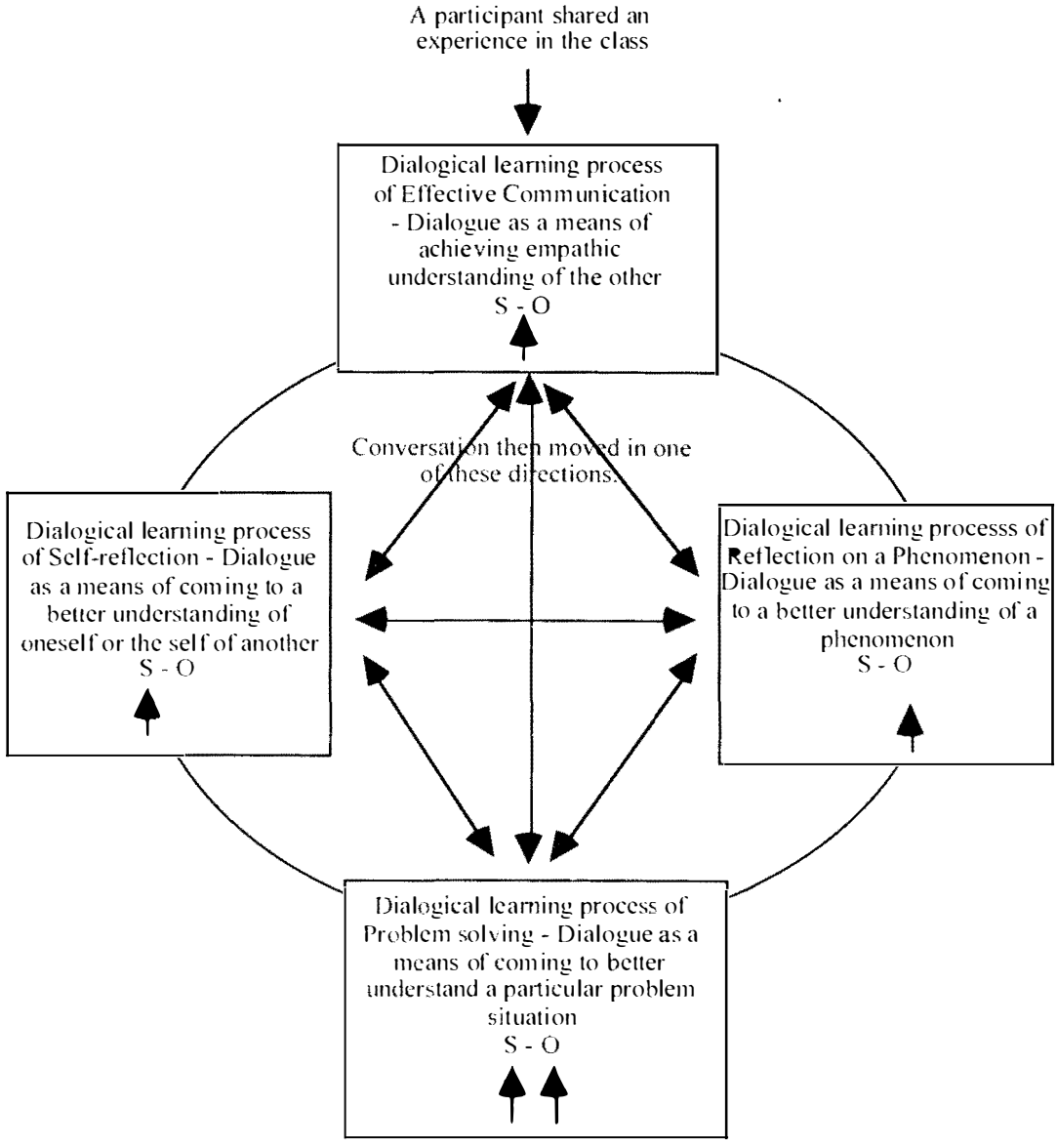


Figure 12: Flow of Dialogical Learning Processes within the Class.

made explicit and participants had the opportunity to practice engaging in this type of dialogue. However, once the participant's experience was out in the open, there was some confusion about what the group's next purpose would be. Each participant perceived the purpose of a particular dialogical learning process in his or her own way. Participants were sometimes engaged in dialogue, but not all perceived the dialogue to be of the same type. Sometimes, participants participated in different dialogical learning processes at cross purposes with one another. After one participant shared his or her critical incident in the class, a second participant may have engaged in the dialogical learning process of problem solving, and still another participant may have engaged in the dialogical learning process of reflection on a phenomenon within the same conversation. Overall, it appeared that participants needed to develop a greater awareness of the different types of dialogue, the purposes of each, and the patterns of interaction appropriate to each.

Dialogical Learning Process of Effective Communication

The dialogical learning process of effective communication refers to the use of dialogue by participants as a means of communicating with, and understanding other participants in the class. The objective or purpose of this type of dialogue was for one participant to come to understand the experience of another. The focus in this type of dialogue was on the lived experience and interpretive perspective of the other. In *Chapter 5: Meaning Making Within the Reflective Practice Class*, I proposed that meaning making was an interpretive process yielding subjective personal meanings. Each participant in the class made sense of the world in their own unique way. This section explores the process by which class participants came to understand the subjective personal meanings and personal realities of other participants in the class. Table 6 summarizes the different component parts of the dialogical learning process of effective communication based on

Table 6: Summary of the Dialogical Learning Process of Effective Communication.

The dialogical learning process of effective communication consisted of underlying processes of **listening, questioning, and reflecting back** which culminated in an empathic **understanding** of the other's experience where **listening** referred to the process of participants paying attention to the other: closely monitoring the other: holding an open/appreciative stance towards the other: suspending their tendency to judge: bracketing their presuppositions; keeping their own experiences out: being on guard against their tendency to project: focusing on the other, imagining and visualizing their experience: **questioning** the other referred to the process of asking non-leading phenomenological-type questions; also recognizing that the everyone has their own unique experience and they are the experts on their own experience; **reflecting back** referred to the process of repeating back one's understanding of the other's experience to ensure that one has understood the other's experience correctly: and where **understanding** the other referred to the process of seeing the world through the other's eyes: getting a sense for their background and interpretive perspective.

participants' experiences in the class. Each of the four parts of the process of effective communication -- listening, questioning, reflecting back and understanding -- are described in turn.

Listening

When a participant began to share an experience or story as part of sharing his or her learning autobiography or critical incident, this was the cue for the other members of the class to attentively listen to what was being shared. Listening stood out for most participants and proved to be a principal focus of the class. Sylvia saw honing her listening skills as one of the key things she derived from the class. "If everybody was

paying attention in that class and if they were truly trying to learn something, they would have learned to listen" (Sylvia, l. 1751). Based on participants' experiences of the reflective practice class, the following themes were identified with respect to the process of listening.

Listening Involved Paying Attention

Class participants reported that listening required that a participant give their full attention to the other. They needed to focus on what the other participant was saying. According to George, "There is a responsibility to be awake in class and that means being prepared to really put your full attention into this" (George, l. 63).

Listening Involved Closely Monitoring the Other

According to participants, listening involved closely monitoring not only what another participant was saying, but also their facial expressions, their body language, and their actions and reactions. The interpretive perspective holds that meanings are literally embodied within an individual. Thus, participants were able to get a lot of information about how another participant was feeling, or how they were experiencing some event simply by monitoring that person. For example, Sylvia described monitoring the facilitator and being able to tell from his (re)actions and his demeanor how he was experiencing one particular episode within the class: "That very first night when both classes were together and all that discussion started ... Couldn't you tell how Dr. P., couldn't you tell from his whole demeanor and everything, I mean he was just, it was just like he was on top of the world ... this was great ... I mean he didn't want the class to end" (Sylvia, l. 1387).

Listening Involved Holding an Open Appreciative Stance Towards the Other

Based on participants' experiences, there were two stances that one could take towards others in a group. One stance was where one was closed and judgmental, and the other stance was where one was open, receptive, and appreciative.

> Another way to look at it is to use the Jungian terms in psychology - perception and judgment. Sometimes in life I feel the need to judge, that is to act, to have an attitude, whatever, toward someone else, and other times I'm much more perceptive, which has to do with being open and appreciative, accepting ... And then often sort of a mix, but that's a very interesting balance. (David, l. 372). ... [Being receptive] is seeing people as if they are uniquely new people. ... (David, l. 480) ... Very often life gets so busy, pressured and stressed that I go the opposite extreme of objectifying things and trying to force them into something that appears to give more order and structure and control to my life and in that case I tend to diminish people more into little objects. (David, l. 460)

Class participants reported that to really listen to another participant required that one hold an open and appreciative stance towards them.

Listening Involved Suspending One's Tendency to Judge

Closely related to the preceding theme, participants suggested that listening involved suspending their tendency to make judgments about other participants.

> So, you must be open to other views without editing, without judging, without trying to interpret what's happening in the immediate. And I think that it's very difficult to do, because we're very good at making judgments very quickly, and assuming what other people are thinking. (George, l. 423) ... There is always that

voice that comes in from yourself saying, 'I bet he was thinking this,' or 'I bet this was happening,' you know, my own judgments wanting to come in, and I'm making a conscious effort to push out my own noisy mental chatter, my own judgments about this. (George, l. 539)

Listening Involved Bracketing One's Presuppositions

This theme is closely related to the preceding themes of suspending judgment, and holding an open appreciative stance towards another participant. In this theme, class participants suggested that listening involved bracketing everything one thinks one knows about what the other was describing, or bracketing one's presuppositions. If one could bracket what one thinks one knows, and relate to another participant in an open, appreciative, and non-judgmental way, then one would encounter the other participant as if he or she was a uniquely new person. Thus, participants suggested that listening involved a type of self-control where one attempts to get to the other's experience while keeping one's own experience out. According to George, "[I'm] making a conscious effort to try to get to his experience, and keep my experience out, so that I can really hear what he's trying to say. Really trying to see his view of what's going on. So, when I'm actively engaged, I'm constantly pushing myself out of the picture and trying to focus in on his and that's a continuous process" (George, l. 539). Rephrasing this idea of bracketing one's presuppositions, David suggested that an aspect of listening was "turning loose" of one's existing ideas about some phenomenon, a letting go, or emptying one's mind, and then "taking in" that phenomenon. "[Important aspects of listening are] to be able ... to pay attention, you know, to attend to something, or to become more aware of it, to listen to it, whatever it is, to take in that phenomenon. And then a piece of that is the process of turning loose of various other views of it, long enough to see something different. So there's a letting go if you will, of it" (David, AB, 191).

Listening Involved Being on Guard Against One's "Projections"

Class participants acknowledged that occasionally, in interactions in the class, a participant may have introduced his or her own meanings onto what another participant was saying. When a participant did this he or she was effectively handicapped in his or her ability to understand the other and communicate effectively with him or her. Thus, according to participants, an important aspect of listening and effective communication involved being on guard against projecting one's own meanings into what another participant was saying. George talked about how some participants in the group were projecting their own issues and presuppositions into what the other was saying. "There were times ... when they were projecting their own stuff into it. Even though we had made it pretty clear that we were going to suspend our own material ... but that continued to happen" (George, I. 37). Nikki also suggested that "there's stuff that you have that always resonates on some level with what they're talking about, so you've gotta like filter that through" (Nikki, I. 1155). The data suggested that in order for one not to project one's own meanings into what the other was saying, one needed to understand one's underlying process of meaning making, especially how projections occur. And one needed to become sufficiently self-aware to notice when one was projecting.

Listening Involved Imagining, Visualizing and Trying to Re-Live The Other Participant's Experience

This theme suggested that listening involved focusing on the other participant and imagining and trying to visualizing what his or her experience was like. According to George, "When I'm listening to David, he's over there and he's telling us his story. I'm focusing on him. ... I'm not aware of anything else. I'm looking at David, and in my mind, I'm imagining and trying to re-live his experience ... visualizing" (George, I. 515).

Listening Involved Becoming Aware of the Other's Background or Interpretive Perspective

In this theme, class participants suggested that if one was really listening to another participant, one would get a sense for his or her background, one would get a sense for where he or she was coming from. George suggested that "When you hear a ...[person] talking about a certain experience and if you're listening really carefully you can almost get a sense of his or her background, and the way they've interpreted their experience" (George, l. 911).

Listening Involved a Major Investment of Energy

Participants also suggested that the process of listening takes energy. One must consciously focus on listening. It takes energy to hold an open appreciative stance towards the other, to bracket one's own meanings and to be really present and receptive to the other's experience. According to George, "It takes energy ... You have to be doing it on purpose. You have to remind yourself. OK now, is this the mode to be in? ... So, the actual listening takes conscious effort and it's not his words with my views. Listening is something that takes effort. You know I can sustain it for only so long" (George, l. 568).

Listening Involved a High Degree of Self-Awareness

Self-awareness was an important aspect of listening. Many of the themes already mentioned implicitly implied a high degree of self-awareness. Self-awareness involved awareness of one's stance or attitude towards another individual. Self-awareness was needed by participants to monitor and suspend their tendency to judge. In order for a participant to bracket his or her presuppositions, he or she needed to be aware of them; therefore, self-awareness was a necessary part of the process of bracketing. Self-awareness was also implied in participants being on guard against projecting. Participants

needed to be aware of their own issues and sensitivities in order to be aware of when they were projecting their own meaning onto what another participant was saying.

Questioning

The second part of the dialogical learning process of effective communication was questioning the other. The class focused heavily on participants learning how to ask non-leading phenomenological-type questions. This had a profound impact on participants. It precipitated an awareness that each participant had his or her own unique experience and that he or she was the expert on his or her own experience.

Class Norm of Asking Non-Leading Phenomenological-Type Questions

As participants shared their learning autobiographies and critical incidents, the predominant type of questions being asked in the class were phenomenological-type questions. The class placed special emphasis on understanding how to ask such questions. These were questions designed to solicit rich description of a participant's lived experience and behavior. One of the most valuable things from the class was learning how to ask non-leading phenomenological-type questions. Participants also valued learning how to take on the phenomenological attitude in their interactions with others. According to Bill, "I think I've learned some things about the techniques, how to do questioning and so on, phenomenological-type questioning, so it's been beneficial for me in several ways" (Bill, l. 11).

Much of the early work of the class involved class members learning the skills required to ask these non-leading phenomenological-type questions. Indeed, the class became a 'how-to-ask-non-leading-questions' class. It became a norm in the group not to ask leading questions and in fact the group policed adherence to this norm, correcting participants who violated this new behavior pattern. In the excerpt which follows, what I

refer to as his "whoops-wow" experience, Bill described how he learned to ask phenomenological-type questions.

> Being questioned in the class, and in asking some questions myself, and finding myself asking leading questions and so on, I became aware of some of those aspects. You know that was another sort of ah ha, another, whoops-wow, you know, hey. Because I, it was when Xiaopei was doing her ... I guess her autobiography, ... I was asking her some questions and then somebody said something like - "Go ahead and tell her the answer you want her to give you" or something like that. I mean it was a leading question or two that I was asking. I was suggesting what she should say. And I didn't even know that I was doing that. You know that was shocking and enlightening and everything. ... I thought about it. I said wait, I see, you know, I am, I was doing that. I was telling her what to say, so to speak. And I just, I said, well I'm surprised that I didn't realize I was doing that. I thought that I knew better and I thought I understood the kinds of questions to ask or how to word things and how to approach things. (Bill, l. 649) ... Well the fact that somebody helped me to realize what I was doing, the way I was doing it, you know, that helped me understand. First, it helped me see how it's so against the grain, or so abnormal to do that. So much of the questioning or conversation that goes on is not from that approach. And I'm just like everybody else, I'm doing it too. Well, well, well. (Bill, l. 702)

<u>The Phenomenological Questioning Process Helped Participants Recognize that Everyone has Unique Experiences</u>

As part of the process of learning to ask non-leading phenomenological-type questions, there was a shift in attitude among participants. Participants came to realize that each individual's experience was unique, and that each individual was the one and

only expert on his or her own experience. This shift in attitude essentially amounted to participants grasping the interpretive nature of the process of everyday meaning making. Following on the heels of his awareness that he had been asking leading questions, Bill also realized that the other person was the expert on his or her own experience. Bill came to believe that in listening to another participant, one should try to maintain an open, appreciative and humble stance towards them.

> And then of course, I started saying oh yah, and what does that say about the attitude I had. Was it an attitude of "you tell me," or was it an attitude of "let me tell you" what your experience was (laughter). Sort of a - who's the expert here sort of question. And that was enlightening too ... the idea that ...you're trying to extract knowledge from experts. It was helpful to see that that's the attitude to adopt or try to develop. Really I think it's a good attitude to have period, toward life and people (laughter) not just for phenomenological interviewing purposes, but just a way to live (laughter). I kind of equate it to humility. But anyway that was good. (Bill, l. 676)

In terms of questioning, it seems that fostering a different style of questioning -- asking non-leading phenomenological type questions -- actually helped participants grasp the interpretive nature of the process of meaning making. They learned that we live in a world of personal meanings and multiple realities. Mastering this new style of questioning, and its related attitudes, effectively precipitated a shift in how participants viewed their own and each other's realities. Learning to engage in open-ended phenomenological questioning was a "way in" for participants to the interpretivist paradigm.

Reflecting Back

Class participants also suggested that part of the process of understanding involved reflecting the other's experience back to them. This action ensured that one had understood the other's experience correctly. George described the process of reflecting back: "And when he's through, I ask him more questions about his experience. And ah, those ones where I don't get a clear picture, I try to reflect what I see to see if he's seeing the same thing, or if his experience is the same ... I would try to get him to clarify his expressions by reflecting what he said back to him. And ah, you know to try to get him to talk more about this experience" (George, l. 449).

Understanding

The ultimate aim of the dialogic process of effective communication and the processes of listening and questioning was for one participant to understand another participant's lived experience. Following are the themes which stood out from participants' experiences of the class relating to the process of understanding the other.

To Understand Another Participant Involved Listening, Bracketing One's Presuppositions, and Holding an Open Appreciative Stance Towards the Other

Class participants suggested that understanding of the experience of another required a deep sense of respect for the other and a profound listening. One participant described understanding as engaging with the other's experience from a stance of humility until "it presents its own meaning." This involved participants listening to the phenomenon another participant was describing with an open appreciative stance, bracketing whatever they thought they knew about it, and being receptive to the meaning in the other participant's lived experience.

And for me understanding ah, I like the image that I believe Parker Palmer uses, and Polanyi, and others, "standing under," you know, literally standing under some phenomenon until it either makes sense or becomes real in some way or another. So, there's a profound sense of humility that goes with that. ... Standing under it, which is sort of a stance of humility and openness - perception. (David, AB, l. 60)

To Understand Another Participant is to View the World Through His or her Eyes

The data from this study suggested that for one participant to understand another, he or she must metaphorically step into the other's shoes. They must change positions with the other and see the world as they see it, see the world from their interpretive perspective. George suggested that "If you're really listening, you know, you get to change positions, and that's sort of exhilarating" (George, l. 911). In the same vein, David described the process of understanding as follows: "I mean the idea is that you are whatever it is that is very different from me no matter what, and understanding is sort of ... venturing into the plane, if you will, of another's reality" (David, AB, l. 110). Thus, understanding could be defined as bracketing one's own interpretive perspective and taking on the interpretive perspective of the other.

To Understand Another Participant's Experience Required Getting a Sense for his or her Background and Past Experience

Consistent with an interpretivist view of meaning making, participants suggested that understanding another participant required that one also get a sense for his or her background or where he or she was coming from. David recognized that having an appreciation for a person's background helped enormously as he attempted to understand what a person was saying. "I want to know why you say what you say, I want to understand the experiences out of which you come" (David, AB, l. 90). George also

recognized that coming to understand where another participant was coming from was an important part of the process of understanding. "You know you're not putting your own stuff in front. You're just saying, "OK, where are these people coming from?" and "How do they see it?" (George, I. 304). This theme quite profoundly suggested that knowing the background and past experiences of another participant was almost essential if one was to really understand their experience or perspective.

To Understanding Another Participant's Experience Can Have Cognitive, Affective And Spiritual Dimensions

The data suggested that when one participant came to understand another participant's experience they came to understand it not just in a cognitive way but in an affective and spiritual way also. David suggested:

> Well, as I said, it's like you stand under a phenomenon, until it becomes real. Now, what do I mean by that? I mean that I'm trying to get around the idea that it's simply a cognitive understanding of its structure and how it fits together and so forth, that's a part of it. But when something becomes real, it not only becomes intelligible in terms of the way we measure it and that sort of thing, but it touches my own heart if you will too. ... There is a feeling dimension, I guess is the way I would say it, that goes with that in its best sense. ... Understanding is sort of ... venturing into the plane, if you will, of another's reality and when that is shared, it's shared intellectually, but I also want to say that it's shared emotionally and perhaps spiritually too. (David, AB, I. 105)

To Understand Another Participant is to Perceive them With a Loving Perspective

Participants suggested that the open appreciative stance and the deep sense of respect implied as part of the process of authentic listening and understanding could be

described as a form of love or a loving way of relating to the other. Thus, participants suggested that to really understand another required that one relate to them in a loving way. David articulated this idea as follows: "So, in a sense what I'm talking about is form of love, even though I hesitate to use that word, because it's so emotionally laden with romantic notions. But the point is that if I am, in a profound sense, if I'm going to respect you enough to want to know you then there is a dimension of the relationship there that is loving, if you will" (David, AB, l. 154).

Key Outcomes of the Dialogical Learning Process of Effective Communication

There were a number of key outcomes of the dialogical learning process of effective communication. These outcomes included an understanding of another participant's experience, a sense of connection with the other, and a broadening of one's own perspective.

Understanding

Based on the data from this research, the dialogical learning process of effective communication culminated in one participant understanding the experience of another. Understanding referred to the situation where one participant came to appreciate the experience and interpretive perspective of another participant in some particular situation. The notion of understanding described here is equivalent to Dilthey's notion of empathic understanding (See Kneller, 1984, p. 66).

Understanding Creates a Sense of Connection and Community Among Participants

On an individual level, when one participant came to understand another participant's experience, both experienced a sense of connection with one another. David described how he felt a sense of connection with George as he shared his learning

autobiography. "George told some of his story ... his own experience ... [and] I do recall feeling ... I mean he was talking about Africa, he was talking about places I'd never been and things I had never done, and yet there was a point at which I could feel a real connection with him, even though I never had that particular experience" (David, I. 585). David further suggested that understanding, and the sense of connection that it implied could also lead to a sense of bonding or a sense of community within a group. "Well I was just with a group last weekend and the word that they used to describe it ... is bonding ... [or] community" (David, AB, I. 120).

Understanding Another's Perspective Broadens One's Own Perspective

Another outcome of the process of understanding another participant was that it broadened one's own perspective. George suggested: "You have to make adjustments in your own understanding, that's what makes it such a rich experience. Because it opens your mind to views you've never seen. ... Particularly, as you're actually opening your mind to other perspectives, being truly reflective" (George, I. 300).

Dialogical Learning Process of Self-Reflection

The objective of the dialogical learning process of self-reflection was to increase the level of self-awareness or self-understanding of individual participants in the class. The focus in this type of dialogue was on the self of participants in the discussion (the S pole of the S --- O relationship).

For the most part, participants in the class had a low level of self-awareness except for those participants with a counseling background. Participants were typically unaware of their personal issues and personality traits. They were typically unaware of

the underlying dynamics of their everyday process of meaning making, and they were typically unaware of the presuppositions that made up their interpretive perspectives.

Participants in the class valued the self-reflective process. George commented, "It's the self-reflective process that essentially is so instructive, and that's where we learn about ourselves" (George, AB, l. 899). Bill saw self-reflection as an integral part of the class. "There have been some moments for me that were - ah, where I did think about my self and my reactions and my actions in the group and why I was doing what I was doing. ... Ah, some of the self-reflective moments where I was pondering my own actions and assumptions about things, and so on" (Bill, l. 32).

There were two broad approaches to self-reflection employed by participants in the reflective practice class: there was a direct introspective approach to self-reflection, and a phenomenology-based approach to self-reflection. Participants used the direct introspective approach to self-reflection to come to know aspects of themselves by direct introspective questioning. Participants used the phenomenology-based approach to self-reflection to come to know aspects of themselves by engaging in reflection on their lived experience. Suppose a participant was engaged in self-reflection in order to come to understand his or her personality in general. If he or she took a direct introspective approach to self-reflection he or she would pose and answer the question "What am I like in general?" If he or she took a phenomenology-based approach to self-reflection he or she would pose and answer the question "What does the way I have structured my lived experience across multiple situations say about my personality in general?" Using the direct introspective approach to self-reflection, participants accessed what they consciously knew about themselves. The phenomenology-based approach to self-reflection helped participants uncover both conscious and subconscious (pre-reflective) aspects of themselves. [Note: The phenomenology-based approach to self-reflection was described in detail in the section addressing the Foundational Process of Learning from Lived Experience.]

In looking at participants' experiences of the class, many of their experiences clustered around the self-reflection that occurred in a group context in the class. Through the phenomenological interviews however, there were other findings to suggest that in addition to the self-reflection that occurred within the group (which I will refer to as group self-reflection), participants were also engaged in self-reflection in the privacy of their own minds (which I will refer to as individual self-reflection). The individual or private self-reflection occurred during and between classes. A lot of individual or private self-reflection was not shared in the group. There were also some distinct differences between individual self-reflection and group self-reflection. The self-reflection that went on in private was more in-depth and personal. There was a lot of discussion of tools for critical self-reflection in the group and this probably enhanced participants' individual or private self-reflection. A summary of the various aspects of the dialogical learning process of self-reflection is presented in Table 7. Each of these aspects of the group and individual self-reflection will be described in turn.

Group Self-reflection

Engaging is self-reflection in a group context had obvious advantages for participants. According to participants, one of the main benefits was that other participants could provide an individual participant with feedback. George suggested "You know there are some things I can't see about myself, but other people can see" (George, I. 185). The group context had some positive advantages in terms of helping individual participants raise the subconscious or prereflective aspects of themselves to a level of conscious awareness, and in terms of helping participants critically reflect on these aspects of themselves.

Table 7: Summary of the Dialogical Learning Process of Self-reflection.

The dialogical learning process of self-reflection involved participants coming to a greater awareness of themselves in general. The process of self-reflection involved a two step process. It involved participants raising subconscious aspects of themselves to a level of conscious awareness, and then critically reflecting on them.

The data suggested that participants engaged in self-reflective together in the group (what I refer to as group self-reflection) and participants also engaged in self-reflection in the privacy of their own minds (what I refer to as individual self-reflection).

Group Self-reflection

- **"thinking about thinking" at a macro level** - Participants strived to understand their overall thinking process or how they made meaning. (logoic-self-awareness)

- **group assisted individual participants in learning about aspects of their personality** - The group helped individual participants identify their personal issues or personality traits;

- **"looking at one's assumptions"**
  - looking at assumptions as the group assisting an individual participant raise the subconscious presuppositions he or she held with respect to a specific phenomenon to a level of conscious awareness;
  - looking at assumptions as the group assisting an individual participant engage in critical reflection on the presuppositions he or she held with respect to a specific phenomenon;

- **"thinking about thinking" at a micro level**
  - thinking about thinking as the group assisting an individual participant raise the thinking processes underlying his or her actions and assertions to a level of conscious awareness;
  - thinking about thinking as the group assisting an individual participant engage in critical reflection on the thinking processes underlying his or her actions and assertions.

Individual Self-reflection

- **self-awareness through an encounter with difference** - participants came to appreciate their own ways of being and acting simply by encountering others with different ways of being and acting;

- **dissonance as a call to self-reflection and an opportunities for participants to learn about themselves** - as a result of engaging in self-reflection in moments of dissonance participants became aware of their presuppositions with respect to a particular phenomenon, and they became aware of aspects of their personality in general;

- **by purposely engaging in self-reflection participants became aware of many different aspects of themselves** - participants became aware of their stance/attitude towards the other/world; participants became aware of the role of their biography in shaping their interpretive perspective; participants became aware of the subconscious process of learning from lived experience; participants became aware of their subconscious motives and purposes; participants became aware of their tendency to project.

"Thinking About Thinking" at a Macro Level

At a macro level, participants saw group self-reflection as a process of "thinking about thinking." It involved participants reflecting on their overall process of meaning making and raising their subconscious process of meaning making to a level of conscious awareness. Xiaopei shared her experience of thinking about thinking and how the class fostered a greater awareness of her thinking processes. "I guess ... I never thought about thinking, how I'm thinking, and worry about how I'm thinking before I got to the class. And ever since the class started, I learned to be paying attention to ... not only what I'm thinking, but to how I'm thinking" (Xiaopei, l. 936). The process of thinking about thinking at a macro level was essentially about participants looking for patterns in their own overall ways of being and acting. Thinking about one's thinking was essentially about participants identifying their own underlying process of meaning making.

Thinking about thinking at a macro level thus implied participants grasping the interpretive nature of their everyday process of meaning making. Learning how to engage in phenomenological questioning precipitated a shift for participants towards appreciating the interpretive nature of their personal process of meaning making. Learning to conduct a phenomenological interview was effectively the "way in" to the interpretive paradigm for participants. Participants came to appreciate that we live in a world of personal meanings and multiple realities - that everyone has their own unique experience of reality.

Coming to appreciate their underlying process of meaning making, was a major outcome of the class and a transformative experience for participants. I refer to this awareness of the dynamics of one's underlying process of meaning making as "logoic self-awareness" where *logos* is the Greek word for meaning. Logoic self-awareness implies an awareness of one's process of meaning making, an awareness of one's relation with the world, an awareness of the relation of Subject and Object in one's own life, an awareness of the configuration of one's consciousness.

Logoic self-awareness is different from the concept of critical self-awareness. Critical self-awareness implies that we already appreciate our interpretive or co-constitutive relation with the world. Critical self-awareness then addresses an awareness of aspects of our subjectivity that we bring to this relation. Critical self-awareness addresses an awareness of the S pole of the S --- O relation. Logoic self-awareness is a broader concept than critical self-awareness. It refers to an awareness of the overall configuration of the S --- O relation in our lives. Logoic self-awareness also implies reflection on other possibilities of how we might configure our consciousness (for example, a spiritual paradigm might imply a very different structure of consciousness).

Group Assisted Individual Participants Learn About Aspects of their Personalities

As part of the process of group self-reflection, group members helped individual participants identify the characteristics of his or her personality such as his or her personal issues and/or personality traits. A personal issue could be described as a pattern in a participant's way of being and acting, and such a pattern was typically a subconscious aspect of the individual's personality. Angela saw the self-reflection process as a group process whereby the group helped an individual participant identify his or her issues or his or her strengths. "I think, sharing the thoughts, why and how you think, from your own perspective, so that we can share that with others and that they can figure out your warts, or why that was such a great job that you did. I think that was extraordinarily helpful to me" (Angela, I. 524).

Participants came to know the personalities and personal issues of other participants in the group by observing them in the group. They observed what they said, what they did, even their physical reactions and identified patterns in their ways of being and acting. As participants monitored other participants, they asked themselves, "What does the way that the other structures his or her experience and behavior in this situation say about his or her personality in general?" The counselors in the group were very

skilled at learning about the personalities of participants in the group. Nikki described her process of coming to know the personality of another participant in the group as "a combination of thinking and feeling when somebody begins to talk" (Nikki, I. 396). By monitoring all aspects of what a person says and does, participants were able to identify patterns in an individual participant's ways of being and acting. In the excerpt which follows, Nikki described how she came to know the personality of one particular participant in the group, who she perceived had an issue around fear.

> Poor X's fear is so crippling, you know. I experienced it in almost all of her interactions with everyone. ... Almost everything that she put out is tinged with that, you know, with the framework from which she perceives, like all of us, all of our frameworks effects everything that we share. ... I detected it in her body language, in her voice and in the content of her words. It seemed to me that there was a fear in almost anything that am ... Even when she would ask someone else to examine something there would be some tacit or stated fear in that. Weren't you afraid of such and thus? (Nikki, I. 261)

Thus, the data suggested that for one participant to come to know the personality or personal issues of another participant he or she had to monitor his or her experience of the other. It involved observing the other's behavior in different situations, looking for patterns across situations, pulling together everything one knows about the other, and finally, drawing a conclusion about patterns in his or her ways of being and acting.

A principle which became apparent from this analysis was that, if a participant had a particular subconscious issue or personality trait, it was typically all pervasive in his or her life. Thus, one could observe the participant in a variety of situations and notice the same patterns of behavior and meaning making. Given this sense of continuity, the way an individual behaved in the class could be taken as typical of the way he or she

behaved in other areas of his or her life. Thus, reflection on their here-and-now experience in the group provided participants with an authentic way of learning about the personality of other people.

Once a participant had come to an insight about the personality of another participant, or what he or she thought the other's issue was, he or she communicated this to the other as feedback. An important observation from the data was that participants did not typically give feedback in a direct way. Instead, participants typically gave feedback to other participants about aspects of their personality by asking what I refer to as a "counseling-type question." This type of question represented a way of presenting feedback to another participant in a tentative and unthreatening way. In coming up with a counseling-type question, participants attempted to inductively assimilate everything they knew about the other and his or her situation into a question. Participants attempted to identify themes or patterns with respect to the personality or presuppositions of the other, and then to frame these insights as questions. Participants attempted to identify the essence of the other's issue and/or his or her presuppositions and then embodied them in a question. In the excerpt which follows, Nikki described the process of coming up with a counseling-type question for Rosalyn when she shared her critical incident.

> I knew that Rosalyn wanted to know and I knew she was capable of hearing. (Nikki, I. 690) ... And so now I could frame myself just for, the question. And so then it becomes a challenge not unlike counseling. It becomes the challenge of asking the right question, that's really where the skill comes in. It's not ever coming up with the answer it's coming up with the right question. ... There's nothing harder, you know, in keeping you out of the question, and just asking her for the answer in such a way that she can examine it without any of the emotion that comes from it being somebody else's stuff. (Nikki, I. 694) ... I was engrossed in the generation of "the question" ... that really has the essence of her issue, that

keeps out my stuff, that is not leading, that is not dichotomously phrased, so it's not yes or no, but it's rather open ended. You know there's a lot to remember when you're generating such a question. (Nikki, l. 789)

"Looking At One's Assumptions"

In the class there was the frequent admonition to "look at one's assumptions." Based on the data from participants' experiences of the class, there were two aspects to this process of looking at one's assumptions. Looking at one's assumptions involved the group assisting an individual participant with raising their subconscious presuppositions with respect to a particular phenomenon to a level of conscious awareness; and looking at one's assumptions involved the group assisting an individual participant engage in critical reflection on his/her presuppositions. These two aspects of group self-reflection go hand-in-hand. For participants to critically reflect on their presuppositions, they first had to raise them to a level of conscious awareness. This was one of the more significant findings of this research. Because of the subconscious nature of participants' everyday way of making meaning, the process of critical self-reflection involved a two step process. Participants first had to raise subconscious aspects of themselves to a level of conscious awareness, and only then could they reflect on them critically.

Raising tacit presuppositions to a level of conscious awareness. Participants used a variety of methods to help raise another participant's subconscious presuppositions with respect to a specific phenomenon to a level of conscious awareness. Some participants helped other participants raise their subconscious presuppositions to a level of conscious awareness by asking them about their beliefs and assumptions directly. For example, an individual might be asked "What are your beliefs and assumptions about such and such?" Participants were also able to infer what an individual's presuppositions were with respect to some phenomenon by closely observing them. As one participant suggested, others convey what their beliefs and assumptions are by what they say and

do. For example, Nikki said of David, when he raised his list of concerns in the class, "I think that David clearly conveyed what he believes about how a class should be structured and how a professor should behave, and how a good student should behave when he has a disagreement" (Nikki, I. 730).

A technique used by the group to reflect on participants' presuppositions was the ARTT (Action-Reason-Thematic-Technique) interviewing process. The ARTT interviewing process represented a way for participants to examine their behavior and practice in order to identify the beliefs and assumptions that underpinned their practice. Using this interviewing process, participants elicited from an individual participant an account of his or her actions, and then asked the participant to account for the reasons for these actions and finally through a process of thematization over actions taken and reasons given, they identified the presuppositions held by that individual. The ARTT interviewing process was especially useful in identifying a participant's presuppositions in situations where the participant had engaged in purposeful action.

Critical reflection on presuppositions. Once the group had helped a participant raise their subconscious presuppositions with respect to a specific phenomenon to a level of conscious awareness, the next step was to critically reflect on them. Critical reflection can be thought of as the process of critiquing one's presuppositions and unlearning certain unwanted presuppositions. One way in which this sense of critical reflection manifested itself in the class was in the norm which evolved in the class of participants challenging or questioning each other's ideas and presuppositions with respect to particular phenomena. Xiaopei suggested that "the whole class feels really good about challenging each other throughout the term" (Xiaopei, I. 333). Having other participants challenge one's ideas was very helpful, since such a challenge helped participants critically analyze heretofore unexamined beliefs and assumptions. Bill also talked about the notion of challenging one's beliefs and assumptions. Bill recognized however, that these beliefs and assumptions were typically tacitly or subconsciously held. He saw a purpose of the reflective practice

class as uncovering and challenging the tacit assumptions and habits of mind that make up one's interpretive perspective.

> I think ah, one of the big things for me that has been generated this semester, is the whole idea of how our tacit assumptions are unexamined. ... Why is it that these tacit beliefs, assumptions, habits of mind are so powerful? I mean they seem to have power from remaining unexamined. ... habits are powerful, perhaps because they're just unchallenged. ... And so ... I've surmised that reflective practice is about getting at tacit assumptions, and therefore behavior change, ah, perspective change, you know, all of that. (Bill, l. 590)

George highlighted the benefits of participants challenging each other's ideas and assumptions.

> Before learning occurs, you have to have challenges to your assumptions, you have to have challenges. I mean you have to have dissonance to your ideas, you have to have cognitive dissonance, otherwise you're not going to move. And your ideas are always going to be the same. And we could all sit around in a group and all talk about the same thing and all agree and all be good buddies but we would never learn anything. We could have great discourse if we challenge each others ideas. ... For learning to move ... we have to be willing to take risks and challenge each others ideas, without feeling that we're challenging the person. (George, l. 21)

The group setting was particularly effective as a context for critical reflection. Participants in the group critically reflected on an individual participant's presuppositions from a number of different perspectives as the following two examples illustrate. In the first example, participants questioned the empirical validity of a participant's

presuppositions. In the second example, participants questioned the age-appropriateness of another participant's presuppositions.

Critical reflection as examining the empirical validity of a participant's presuppositions involved assessing whether a participant's presuppositions corresponded to the observable and intersubjective reality in which he or she lived. Participants examined the beliefs and assumptions held by an individual participant and asked if he or she had sufficient evidence to accept these beliefs and assumptions or if he or she had jumped to a conclusion in forming these beliefs or making these assumptions. Xiaopei illustrated this basic sense of critical reflection. "I find myself ... wanting to help other people think critically in terms of - Hey, wait a minute, what you just said suggests to me that you think so under the assumption of so-and-so. And what if those assumptions are not there?" (Xiaopei, l. 851)

Critical reflection as examining the age-appropriateness of a participant's presuppositions involved assessing the appropriateness of a participant's beliefs and assumptions in terms of his or her age and life situation. Rosalyn described an instance when she helped another participant in the group critically reflect in terms of the age-appropriateness of her beliefs.

> It appeared to me, all the way through it appeared to me that she was more concerned about pleasing her parents and their image for what she should be, than making any kind of decision about who she was as a person separate from that. (Rosalyn, l. 83) ... For [this participant] the question in my head was - She's a big girl now, when is she going to grow-up, but at the same time my own parallel was, what was the time frame in which I quit worrying about what my parents thought and I took on my own sense of responsibility for myself. (Rosalyn, l. 1211)

The notion that participants challenged each other's ideas suggests that the group was engaged in an open inquiry into the presuppositions underlying the experiences shared by participants in the group.

"Thinking About Thinking" at a Micro Level

A participant's thinking process could be described as the line of thinking or rationale a participant followed in reaching a conclusion which formed the basis for his or her actions or assertions in a particular situation. Based on the data from participants' experiences of the class, there were two aspects to this process of thinking about thinking. The first type of thinking about thinking involved the group helping an individual participant to raise the thinking processes underlying his or her actions and assertions to a level of conscious awareness. The second type of thinking about thinking involved the group helping an individual participant to critically reflect on the thinking processes underlying his or her actions and assertions. Again, these two aspects of group self-reflection go hand-in-hand. In order for participants to critically reflect on their "thinking processes," they first had to raise them to a level of conscious awareness.

Raising tacit thinking processes to a level of conscious awareness. The first group self-reflection process of coming to understand one's thinking process or raising one's thinking process to a level of conscious awareness was evident to most participants. In the excerpt which follows, Angela described how she engaged in this process of self-reflection with another participant. This excerpt also illustrated the mutual benefit for both participants engaged in this process of group self-reflection.

> The process to me, is ah, [that I] can ask those general open-ended questions to see where your thinking process is. For you to identify how you think or why you think certain things ... I will still ask the questions, but at the same time, some

of your questions that you ask may help me define some of my thinking processes. (Angela, l. 815)

The group assisted individual participants to raise the thinking processes underlying their actions and assertions to a level of conscious awareness by asking Why-type questions and by using the ARTT interviewing process. When a participant made an assertion or described taking a particular action, group members often asked them "Why?" "Why did you say such and such?" "Why did you do such and such?" In asking these why questions, the group helped the individual uncover the implicit thought process underlying his or her actions or assertions. The ARTT interviewing process was also used to help raise a participant's subconscious thinking processes to a level of conscious awareness. The ARTT interviewing process not only helped to uncover the tacit presuppositions which formed the basis of a participant's actions (as described in the section on "looking at assumptions" above), it also helped in laying out the reasons for his or her actions, and thus uncovered the tacit thinking process underlying a participant's actions. Having analyzed a participant's action in a particular situation using the ARTT process, the data could be used to map out the participant's thinking process as a formal argument structure similar to a simple syllogism one finds in logic. An example of an argument structure representing a participant's thinking process is shown in Figure 13. The premises correspond to the reasons the participant gave for his or her actions and certain beliefs and assumptions underpin these reasons. The conclusion represents the basis for the participant's actions. Thus, an argument structure can be used to map out or document the thinking process or rationale a participant followed in reaching the conclusion which formed the basis for his or her actions or assertions.

Critical reflection on thinking processes. Once the thinking process underlying a participant's action or assertion was raised to a level of conscious awareness, the next step was to critically reflect on this thinking process. The group helped individual

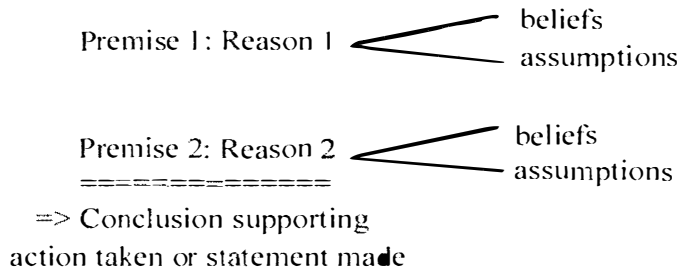


Figure 13: Mapping a Participant's Thinking Process.

participants critically reflect on the thinking processes underlying his or her actions or assertions in specific situations by assessing the rationality and validity of his or her thinking processes and also by critiquing the supporting presuppositions. In assessing the rationality of a participant's thinking process, the group implicitly examined the rationality of the argument structure representing that thinking process. The criterion of rationality suggests that the rules of logic must apply, and that, above all, one avoid committing fallacies. The rules of logic assert, for example, that for an argument to be valid, a participant's conclusion must follow from his or her premises, and all of a participant's premises must be true for his or her conclusion to be true.

Individual Self-reflection

It became apparent from the data that not all self-reflection occurred publicly in the group. Many participants engaged in self-reflection when away from the group. This private self-reflection went on during and between class meetings. These occasions of private or individual self-reflection were often precipitated by events in the class. In looking at participants' experiences of the class, the following themes emerged relating to individual self-reflection: participants became aware of their own ways of being and acting

in an encounter with others who were different in the group; dissonance served as a call to individual self-reflection and an opportunity for participants to learn about themselves; and by purposefully engaging in self-reflection, participants became aware of many different aspects of themselves.

Self-awareness Through an Encounter With Difference

Participants' own ways of being and acting came into view in an encounter with other participants in the class with different ways of being and acting. These encounters caused participants to self-reflect even though it was not intended. When they encountered another participant in the class with different ways of being and acting, participants couldn't help but notice how they themselves were. Many times this self-reflection happened automatically when participants were surprised by others. Thus, in an encounter with otherness, participants' own ways of being and acting were thrown into relief. For example, Xiaopei's own way-of-being became apparent to her in an encounter with Nikki who represented a different way-of-being.

> One [significant event which] comes to my mind immediately was the time Nikki was talking about her critical incident. ... She just said that, well she is not the kind of person who will regret or rethink her decisions. That sort of stuck to my mind for several days. (Xiaopei, l. 109) ... It was just hard for me to grasp the concept of living totally comfortable without any regret on a very significant event whatsoever. (Xiaopei, l. 119) ... I don't think it upset me. It was hard for me to understand ... (Xiaopei, l. 145) ... I mean [that some] people just simply live their life from one moment to another. And once they live it, they just don't go back and think about "Oh - What would I have done differently?" (Xiaopei, l. 236) [Researcher: And you would?] Yes, I would. So, that's why it was hard for me to grasp the concept that Nikki demonstrated in class. I don't think I was upset - I was surprised. (Xiaopei, l. 243)

Dissonance as a Call to Self-Reflection and an Opportunity for Participants to Learn About Themselves

This was the most dramatic of the themes relating to individual self-reflection. A number of participants described situations where they experienced dissonance in the class. Someone else in the group was saying or doing something that they didn't like, and it typically evoked a strong negative reaction from them. A participant's typical ego-defensive way of reacting in times of dissonance or conflict was to be critical of the other and to adamantly believe that his or her own perspective was correct. In such moments of dissonance, however, some participants had the insight to engage in self-reflection. They began to investigate what it might be about themselves that disposed them to experience the situation in this particular way. It was very powerfully illustrated that an occasion of dissonance was actually a gift to a participant; it presented a prime opportunity for them to learn about themselves.

For some participants, the individual self-reflection during a moment of dissonance lead to an awareness of the subconscious presuppositions they held with respect to a particular phenomenon. The example which follows describes how one participant (David), through an experience of dissonance, learned about his subconscious presuppositions with respect to how a reflective learning class ought to be facilitated. In particular, he discovered that he really valued a particular way of conducting a reflective learning class. This became apparent to him upon self-reflection because he found himself in a situation where what was happening in the class was at odds with what he thought should happen.

> I attended the very first class and found myself increasingly uncomfortable in reflection on our class. ... And I wasn't quiet sure why. And then reflecting on it and reflecting on it and that sort of led me to ... (David, I. 42) Well actually in

> retrospect, there was a dissonance between what was happening and what I thought should happen ... (David, I. 53) [This reflection occurred] during that week or so after the meeting. I mean, it was ongoing (David, I. 324) ... You know and for me the learning was several fold. You know, I learned something about what I really valued in terms of groups, and that became very clear because it contrasted. I had no idea that I valued it that strongly until I got into a situation where I was perceiving that it wasn't being done. So, that's important to me. (David, I. 297) ... [Researcher: So it was your value for the other way that was partly the reason why you may have reacted so strongly?] Yah. Which is my experience. See the other way is everything which I had done up to that moment ... (David, I. 308)

George also experienced some dissonance about how the class was being conducted. By engaging in self-reflection following this experience of dissonance, he too learned about subconscious aspects of his own interpretive perspective.

> In searching for the cause of the dissonance, I am forced to look at my own character and to the ethics of my practice and to the language that I use. I think the repulsion that I felt at times was a reflection of my own dogmatism and prejudice. That the group could throw these things into my view is probably the most useful outcome of this experience for me. (George, Letter to Class, p. 2)

For other participants, the individual self-reflection on occasions of dissonance lead to an awareness of aspects of their personality. An occasion of dissonance in the class for Bill was when he perceived that a couple of people were dominating the conversation in the class in a competitive way. Because Bill perceived these people to be dominating the conversation, he essentially stepped out of the conversation and "didn't

chip in for a good while" (Bill, l. 80). Bill's self-reflection led him to explore patterns in his own personality, and in particular, if he had an issue around conflict avoidance. In the following excerpt, Bill recounted his self-reflective process as he investigated his possible issue around conflict avoidance:

> It [this experience of dissonance] reminded me of some things to do with conflict avoidance, things about, you know, wondering about myself, in terms of, do I do too much avoiding of conflicts? Am I too (clears throat) afraid or what? What is behind my tendency to avoid barging in to this kind of thing. And so I thought about just some past incidents in my life. ... And so, it reminded me of some other times and things I've thought about that. (Bill, l. 157) ... It happened real time in the class. And then afterwards I wrote some things in a notebook and just thought about it. (Bill, l. 182). ... This theme of conflict avoidance, or this issue, ah, has been something that from time to time I've questioned myself on. ... Yah, there's a thread running way back on that one. (Bill, l. 245).

Bill provided a detailed account of how he had the insight to engage in self-reflection and focus on looking at himself and his own behavior, rather than being critical of and focusing on the inconsistencies of others. He became engaged in two very important skills for individual self-reflection: self-monitoring and self-questioning. He began to monitor his experience (how he was feeling), and then he began to question himself (Why am I feeling this way?).

> I already talked about that, during the early first few classes, when I felt myself feeling some resentment or irritation about people, sort of I felt like you know, [others were] dominating the conversation, and, then it occurred to me to ask myself the question, Why does it bother me that they're doing that? I just never

had thought of it that way before, that, you know, I never had thought before to question why it bothered me that they were doing that. And so that led to a whole string of thoughts about maybe I'm competitive and they're winning and I don't like it. Or what is that? So I began to question myself along those lines, you know. (Bill, l. 273). How did it occur to me to question myself? Well I think, I remember reading either one of the articles that we had as a handout or from another class. ... I think it may have been in fact from an article on dialogue and the idea that ah, (clears throat) how we tend so much to sort of be critical of other people and look at their, we see other's inconsistencies etcetera and we fail to examine ourselves a lot of times. ... There was a suggestion that the process of dialogue is furthered as we learn to sort of say - Why am I doing this? ... So somehow as I was listening to the conversation and feeling some irritation or whatever, that idea came to my mind. (Bill, l. 296).

Thus, in situations of dissonance, participants learned about themselves by looping backwards and inquiring into what their experience in a particular situation said about themselves. "What does his or her lived experience says about his or her personality in general or what does it say about his or her presuppositions with respect to a particular phenomenon?" Engaging in self-reflection implied a sense of participants switching from straightforward lived experience to self-reflexively looping back and looking at one's lived experience to ask what the structure of one's experience said about oneself. The process of engaging in self-reflection in moments of dissonance involved participants self-reflexively noticing that they were feeling some dissonance, and then through self-questioning, they explored why they might be feeling that way. It was interesting to note that <u>self-questioning</u> played a significant role in participants' private self-reflection. Some questions participants posed to themselves served to shift the focus of their attention and reflection towards themselves. Why am I feeling like this? Then as

they got into the self-reflective process and reflected on their lived experience, they asked more specific questions of themselves such as, Am I competitive? Do I have an issue with conflict avoidance?

By Purposefully Engaging in Self-reflection, Participants Became Aware of Many Different Aspects of Themselves

Once participants came to value self-reflection and once they had learned the self-reflection process, they engaged in self-reflection very often and learned about many different aspects of themselves. By purposefully engaging in self-reflection (by taking the self-reflective turn), participants became aware of their stance or attitude towards other participants; their motives and purposes in different situations; their tendency to project their own meanings; the subconscious presuppositions they held which were culturally informed; and the role of their biography in shaping their personal issues, personality traits, and the presuppositions that made up their interpretive perspective. These different ways in which participants learned about themselves by engaging in self-reflection are described in turn.

Participants became aware of their stance or attitude towards other participants. Recall that, in the discussion of the dialogic process of effective communication above, holding an open appreciative stance (vs. a closed judgmental stance) was one of the key ingredients of listening and effective communication. David presented an example of engaging in individual self-reflection while participating in the group. By engaging in individual self-reflection David realized that he was operating from a closed judgmental stance towards another participant. This awareness precipitated a shift in stance for David from being closed and judgmental to being open and appreciative of another person.

> I can remember in the class, I can't remember the specifics, but certain individuals would speak and I would watch the room and notice other body language saying

exactly what I felt - that like, I'm bored, I'm ready to get out of here, this thing is just rambling on forever and not making any sense. And then I would find myself saying - Now why are you feeling bored? (David, l. 344). [So occasionally I would monitor the group like that] and then I would monitor myself (David, l. 355). And I would say why are you feeling that way? Why, where do you have to go? Why do you demand that person to be able to tell their story like you want to hear it, instead of letting them tell their own story? (David, l. 355). What is their story anyway? Oh, gee, and then I would begin to listen to the nuances of the words a little bit, and sometimes there's a shift then. A shift away from being more reactive, to being appreciative at a deeper level. And occasionally then to some ... what I would feel would be a really significant insight into the humanness of that person. (David, l. 359)

Participants became aware of their motives and purposes in different situations. In any given situation, a participant's purposes or motives were an important part of his or her interpretive perspective which informed how he or she structured his or her experience. Angela used the self-reflective process to come to know her motives and purposes.

I have learned how to question myself [on] my motives, what is my purpose. ... Learning how to ask myself hard questions, things that make me uncomfortable. Why and how are two really tough questions. Why are you doing that Angela? What is it you're looking for? Do you have an ulterior motive, or have you stated clearly what your agenda is? ... I found that, if I ask myself those questions ... then things become much clearer. (Angela, l. 673)

Participants became aware of their tendency to project their own meanings. The data suggested that when a participant did not bracket his or her own presuppositions, he or she tended to "project" some of his or her own meanings into what other participants said. George suggested that "There were several people in there that I thought were ... they were projecting their own stuff into it, even though we had made it pretty clear that we were going to suspend our own material ... but that continued to happen" (George, l. 33). Several participants showed an awareness of this tendency and acknowledged that, in interactions with others, they generally needed to be on their guard against projecting their own meanings. Nikki suggested that: "It's not an easy thing to really listen to what somebody said ... because there's stuff that you have that always resonates on some level with what they're talking about, so you've gotta like filter that through" (Nikki, l. 820). This tendency of some participants to subconsciously project their own meanings into what others were saying was one of the most significant barriers to effective communication in the class. There were three different types of "projections" evident in the data. One type of projection which occurred in the class was when a participant had a subconscious personal issue (like fear, conflict avoidance) and he or she tended to project this issue in all his or her interactions. Another type of projection was when one participant was listening to another participant telling a story. The participant listening occasionally imagined how he or she would feel in that situation and subconsciously read that into what the other participant was saying. This situation happened especially when there was some ambiguity around what the other participant was trying to communicate. Finally, there were also occasions in the class when participants may have been projecting subconscious characteristics of their own personalities onto others. The characteristics they complained about in others (like others being competitive) may actually have been characteristics of themselves that they were failing to acknowledge. (This is similar to the Jungian notion of projection – that we tend to project the shadow side of our personalities). Such projections distorted participants' perception and hampered

interpersonal communication. The problem of projection was addressed by self-awareness. Overall, it was observed that a participant's tendency to project was inversely proportional to his or her level of self-awareness.

Participants also became aware of the subconscious presuppositions they held which were culturally informed. Culture played a role in shaping each participant's interpretive perspective. Bill made a very insightful connection between the tacit assumptions that made up a participant's interpretive perspective and his or her culture. "Maybe it's our tacit assumptions that are most tied to the cultural norms some way. Cultural norms tend to be hidden to our eyes, but they are some of the most powerful influencers of our behavior it seems" (Bill, I. 590). Culturally informed presuppositions were not grounded in a participant's lived experience but represented received presuppositions or received meanings. Some culturally informed presuppositions had a negative impact on participants' lives, such as culturally informed prejudices or stereotypes. An aspect of critical self-reflection in the class involved participants raising their culturally informed presuppositions to a level of conscious awareness. They then purged any culturally informed prejudices or stereotypes from their interpretive perspective. This suggests that on occasions the process of critical self-reflection involved unlearning. George described how through self-reflection he discovered that he unknowingly held a culturally informed prejudice with respect to homosexuals.

> Prejudice is an interesting word because you make up your mind about something before you have any experience with it - you pre-judge ... I remember in college, my first year in college ... I had in my mind based on the culture that I grew up with, a notion that homosexuals were you know bad, or ... it was very negative and all my assumptions were that there was something wrong with these people. And then I found out that my friend was gay and some of the things I had said had

> really hurt him. And I had said them out of no knowledge you know, and so for me that was another awakening. (George, AB. I. 90)

Nikki by closely monitoring her lived experience also made a similar discovery. She unknowingly held a culturally informed prejudice against foreigners. This example illustrates that once participants began to monitor and reflect on their lived experience or tuned into their thoughts, they discovered much new information about themselves.

> And I never even really tuned in to what I was thinking. And once I started listening to my thoughts ... I became aware for example that I had some, absolutely unknown to me, kind of am, unkind thoughts about foreigners. ... I hadn't realized that I shared some of my country's, some of our popular kind of distrust of Arabs. And I mean I know that it's on the news and I know that they're associated with terrorism, but I didn't know I had it. Didn't know I thought it or felt it. But, once I really tuned into my thoughts I realized that my first, you know my first reaction to somebody that was maybe Arabic, or in a sheet or something like that, would immediately be unkind. Once I really listened closely, I realized that my first reaction to them would be unkind. (Nikki, AB. I. 446)

<u>Participants also became aware of the role of their past experiences in shaping their personality and their interpretive perspective.</u> Participants in the reflective practice class came to appreciate that their present presuppositions with respect to a particular phenomenon were partially informed by their past experience with respect to that phenomenon. Thus, an exploration of their past experience with respect to a particular phenomenon could give them a deeper understanding of their presuppositions. They would pose questions like "What has been my experience of this phenomenon in the past?" "What beliefs, assumptions, values, fears and expectations would those

experiences have left me with?" Likewise, participants came to appreciate that their present personal issues and personality traits were also partially informed by their past experiences. Thus, an exploration of their past experience could give them a deeper understanding of their present personal issues and personality traits. In this case, participants would ask themselves questions like "What are some key experiences in my past life?" "What personality traits or personal issues would these experiences have left me with?" Sometimes a participant's personal issues could be traced back to some traumatic event in his or her past life. Based on these new insights, participants came to believe that one of the tasks of self-reflection was to examine their past experiences and biographies to understand how the events of the past may have shaped their present personalities and interpretive perspectives.

Angela was one participant who seemed very much aware of the role of her past experience and her upbringing in shaping her current personality and interpretive perspective. One of the goals of self-reflection from Angela's perspective was to foster an awareness of how her biography contributed to the shaping of her current interpretive perspective and her current personality. Angela found the learning autobiography activity to be a particularly useful tool to aid in her exploration of the role of her past experience in shaping her current ways of being and acting.

> The ah, the educational autobiography, see that brought things up to speed instantly. To me that was a very significant portion of the overall course content. ... Why do you do these things? Why do you give? What - Where did you learn how to do that and why? What generated, you know, where did you develop that thinking from and why? ... What was the learning process in this particular period of your life? (Angela, l. 187)

Raising participants' personal issues and personality traits to a level of conscious awareness, and raising the presuppositions that made up their interpretive perspective to a level of conscious awareness, was but one level of self-awareness. For participants to become aware of the role of their past experience in shaping their personal issues and personality traits and the presuppositions that made up their interpretive perspective represented another deeper level of self-awareness. By becoming aware of the role of their biography in their process of meaning making, participants also became aware of the underlying dynamic of their ongoing process of subconscious learning from lived experience.

Difficult Nature of the Dialogical Learning Process of Self-Reflection

The dialogical learning process of self-reflection was one of the most difficult parts of the reflective practice class overall for participants. Engaging in group self-reflection was one of the most risky and potentially traumatic aspects of the class. To have one's personal issues, one's presuppositions with respect a specific phenomenon, and one's thinking processes publicly examined and challenged in a group context required a lot of courage and risk taking. Angela recognized that this kind of self-reflective class would not be easy. "I think most of us recognize it's going to be hard as hell, but I don't think that there's anybody in there that doesn't feel it can't work. ... I think that people have to understand that this is not an easy course. This is not a class that you would come into just to have three hours credit then hit the streets" (Angela, I. 634). Angela also recognized, however, the transformative potential of the class and suggested that "If this class would not change your life, then there ain't nothing gonna do it" (Angela, I. 637). Group self-reflection was indeed a very risking phase of the overall process. One of the counselors in the group suggested that much care must be taken to ensure that nobody gets hurt.

Key Outcomes of the Dialogical Learning Process of Self-reflection

The key outcomes of the dialogical learning process of self-reflection were logoic self-awareness, critical self-awareness, an increased sense of freedom, and improved interpersonal communication and relationships.

Logoic Self-awareness

A very significant outcome of the dialogical learning process of self-reflection was that participants became conscious of their interpretivist way of making meaning. By engaging in thinking about thinking, and through the process of learning to conduct a phenomenological interview, participants came to recognize that we each experience the world differently. Participants came to appreciate that we live in a world of personal meanings and multiple realities. Participants came to appreciate the subconscious nature of their everyday process of meaning making. Participants also came to appreciate the biographically and culturally informed nature of their everyday process of meaning making. Participants became conscious of their participation in the creation of their own reality. This changed the effort they put into understanding other participants. They recognized that the other participant was the expert on his or her own experience.

Critical Self-Awareness

Another significant outcome of the dialogical learning process of self-reflection for participants was increased critical self-awareness. There were many dimensions of critical self-awareness fostered by the reflective practice class. Participants gained increased critical awareness of aspects of their personality. Participants also gained increased critical awareness of the presuppositions that made up their interpretive perspective. They gained increased critical awareness of the thinking processes underlying their actions

and assertions. They also gained increased critical awareness of their stance towards another participant. Participants became aware of their motives and purposes and their tendency to project their own meanings. They also became aware of culturally informed stereotypes and prejudices which they held, and the role of their past experience in shaping aspects of their personality and interpretive perspective.

Xiaopei in an overall verbal assessment of the class talked about gaining increased self-awareness, being more consciously aware of her own thoughts and behavior. "Am, a very positive, ... comforting, ... challenging, way of learning, am, through the discussions, reading, interactions with people in the class, both formally and outside the class, informally, ... am, helped me to be more aware, consciously aware of my own behavior, thoughts, and actions" (Xiaopei, l. 823). Angela also talked about the self-awareness she has achieved and how she valued this self-knowledge. "The best part of my education, at this point in my life, is how I have come to know myself and be able to have self-respect with that knowledge" (Angela, Critical Incident, p.2).

Through the dialogic process of self-reflection, participants raised their tacit presuppositions and thinking processes to a level of conscious awareness, and then critically examined them. As a result, participants became more conscious and mindful of their presuppositions and thought processes and could justify or defend them. Participants came to hold their presuppositions and perspectives consciously. Critical self-reflection occasionally resulted in participants letting-go of or unlearning certain dysfunctional or inappropriate presuppositions.

Sense of Freedom

One profound benefit of self-reflection was that it freed participants from being enslaved by the controlling and conditioning influences of their past experience, their culture, their personal issues, personality traits, and the presuppositions that made up their interpretive perspective. For example, as participants became aware of their

personal issues and personality traits, these issues and traits no longer subconsciously controlled their lives. Highlighting the freeing nature of posing the right question to a participant, a question that would help raise a subconscious issue to a level of conscious awareness, Nikki suggested: "Oh, a question is a wonderful gift. The right question that you ask someone is a wonderful freeing gift" (Nikki, I. 1144). Freedom was the reward of greater levels of self-awareness. In attaining new levels of critical self-awareness through self-reflection, participants no longer lived their lives in subconscious auto-pilot. Instead, they lived in a more conscious and mindful way.

Improved Interpersonal Communication and Relationships

Logoic self-awareness or awareness of the interpretive nature of one's underlying process of meaning making made a big difference to participants in terms of interpersonal communication and relationships. Participants paid much more attention to the process of interpersonal communication when they came to realize that we do not live in a universal reality, but we live in a world of personal meanings and multiple realities. Critical self-awareness also improved interpersonal communication by allowing participants to effectively be aware of and bracket their presuppositions, and to be on guard against projections. Critical self-awareness allowed participants to keep their own issues and presuppositions out when they were listening to and seeking to understand others. Participants could also monitor their stance towards the other through self-reflection. Overall critical self-awareness improved interpersonal communication among class participants. As critical self-awareness helped to improve participants interpersonal communication, it also in turn improved interpersonal relationships among participants. Thus, a high level of critical self-awareness lead to improved interpersonal communication and improved interpersonal relationships.

Dialogical Learning Process of Reflection on a Phenomenon

The dialogical learning process of reflection on a phenomenon views dialogue as a means of exploring and achieving a greater awareness and understanding of a particular phenomenon. The objective or purpose of this type of dialogue was to explore the meaning of some phenomenon and thus increase participants' level of awareness with respect to that phenomenon. The focus of this type of dialogue was thus the phenomenon under discussion (the object pole of the S --- O relationship).

In this section, I describe how class participants learned about various topics by reflecting on accounts of lived experiences shared by participants in the class. A summary (based on participants experiences of the class) of the various aspects of the dialogical learning process of reflection on a phenomenon is presented in Table 8.

When the class became engaged in a discussion around a specific phenomenon, it was as if an implicit question now guided their work. This implicit question might have read something like this: What do we know about this phenomenon from our collective experience? Or, what can we learn from each other about this phenomenon?

Conversation Moved From a Listening Phase to a Phase of Mutual Dialogue

The process often began with a participant sharing his or her learning autobiography or critical incident. Or, it may have begun when some topic came up which the group was interested in exploring. When an individual participant was sharing an experience, the group typically entered a listening phase where other participants in the group were listening to what that individual was sharing. As we have seen, in the description of the *Dialogical Learning Process of Effective Communication*, the phase of listening to another share his or her experience involved a sense of self-control. Participants were consciously trying to pay attention to the other and bracket their own

Table 8: Summary of the Dialogical Learning Process of Reflection on a Phenomenon.

The **dialogical learning process of reflection on a phenomenon** consisted of class members sharing and reflecting on their lived experiences of a phenomenon together as a group, and then inductively weaving their different experiences into a more comprehensive portrait of the phenomenon.

Key themes to this process were as follows:

- Conversation moved from a listening phase to a phase of mutual dialogue
- Experiences shared resonated with other participants
- Identifying themes and weaving them together
- Framing the phenomenon under discussion
- Conversation tended towards the essence of the experiences shared
- Self-reflection and critical reflection were part of the process
- Diversity of experiences in the group was advantageous
- Each participant took away their own unique meanings of the phenomenon
- Occasional experiences of magical free-flowing conversation occurred within the group

presuppositions so that they could come to understand the other's experience. As the group listened to a participant's experience, they implicitly identified the themes or the main points of the experience. Then following this phase of listening, the group seemed to focus on one theme from the participant's experience (what could be referred to as a *generative theme),* and this became the topic of discussion in the group. The conversation then moved into a phase of mutual dialogue about this theme where other group members shared their experiences. George described this transition from listening to mutual dialogue as follows:

> So ... at some point, it, the conversation moves or becomes a conversation and I lose sight of my self-control. And I enter into a mutual dialogue about ideas or maybe one of the constructs or concepts that he [raised], and we talk about it from an intellectual point of view, or from an experiential point of view in which I

allow my own experience to come in. ... Yah, [then we consider] what have we both got. (George, l. 560)

Experiences Shared Resonated With Other Participants

Often reflective dialogue involved the sharing of similar experiences. When one participant shared a particular experience, this experience would resonate with other participants in the group. They would then share an experience of their own that was similar. For example, when Nikki shared in her critical incident about a car wreck she had had, Xiaopei shared a similar experience of a car wreck. This natural disposition to share related experiences was part of what made the process of group reflection on a phenomenon move forward or take off. The notion of experiences resonating may also have been a factor in selecting the generative themes.

Identifying Themes and Weaving them Together

As the mutual dialogue on a particular phenomenon proceeded, the conversation moved from the sharing of experiences and perspectives on the phenomenon under discussion, to a discussion at a more intellectual and abstract level. Class participants moved into a more reflective mode, inductively identifying themes across participants' experiences and weaving them together into an overall conceptual or thematic structure encompassing each individual's experience in a coherent way. This structure represented the overall meaning of the phenomenon under discussion based on the collective experiences of all the participants. George described this inductive process of weaving together. "And in a group situation, we listen to somebody's story and we get some themes out of it, and we start talking about those themes or constructs or whatever. And we end up weaving this sort of external construct" (George, l. 502). Through the process

of weaving together the different experiences and perspectives present, the group constructed a new and richer understanding of the phenomenon. There was also a sense that some synergy had been achieved and the new understanding of the phenomenon was greater than the sum of the individual experiences. Participants engaged in constructing new understanding about a particular phenomenon based on the diverse experiences and perspectives shared by participants in the group. George suggested that "Everybody brings something in. So what you've done is you've created ... a meaningful construct or way of seeing reality ... [or a] constructed meaning in the sense of how you understand the reality. ... I think we did come up with some interesting things in terms of the constructivist approach" (George, AB, l. 1763).

George presented a metaphor of "a construction crew building a house" to describe this process of weaving themes from participants' experiences into an overall structure. In George's metaphor, the lumber or boards that each participant brought to the construction site can be taken as their experience of and perspectives on the phenomenon under discussion.

> OK if we're going to build a house together, we have to communicate, we have to respect each other's stuff, and we all bring our different stuff to the site. ... Say that we all bring a batch of lumber to the house site. ... Say my boards are 10 feet long and 8 feet long. My boards are going to be the ones that tie the 8 footers together - you know you build the rafters around it. And you know, we both bring a different set of experiences, and when you put them together you can create something that's unique. But, I have to respect what he has as being valuable before I'm going to integrate anything to make something. So there's that sense of honoring what you have. A mutual respect. But there's got to be a willingness also to have your boards cut up by someone else. (George, l. 438)

This metaphor suggests that the process of working with different experiences and perspectives was not to choose one experience or perspective as the right one, nor to look for commonality across participants' experiences, but rather to build something new which integrates all of the experiences and perspectives shared.

Class members who participated in the discussion around a particular phenomenon also had a sense of ownership in the overall process and in the resultant conceptual or thematic structure. George suggested, " Before the structure is meaningful to me, some of me has to be in it. If I didn't contribute to it, then it's not going to mean a whole lot to me. But if I can see that I've added something, and J has added something, and David has added something. Then we've built this really sort of wonderful thing out there" (George, I. 741).

Framing the Phenomenon Under Discussion

The dialogic process of reflection on a phenomenon also involved two processes related to the notion of "framing" which were employed by participants. These included framing as presenting something from a particular perspective, and framing as summarizing or synthesizing.

Framing as presenting something from a particular perspective. The first sense of framing referred to those occasions when a participant would make a statement that presented or framed the phenomenon under discussion from a particular interpretive perspective. If everyone was listening to this person they would see the phenomenon from this interpretive perspective, then taking it into account, the conversation would move on. George illustrated this sense of framing as an extension of his metaphor of the construction crew building a house. "We might have built a room for instance and then somebody would come and cut out a window and we'd all be looking out that window all of a sudden. You know, and [then] we'd be moving to the next space" (George, I. 312).

Actually, whenever a participant shared his or her perspective on a particular phenomenon, he or she was essentially framing the phenomenon from their own interpretivist perspective. In this way, each individual participant contributed to the overall learning process in the group.

Framing as summarizing or synthesizing. The second sense of framing was the concept of framing as summarizing or synthesizing the various strands of a conversation into a whole. This sense of framing typically came into play towards the end of an episode of group reflection on a phenomenon. In the following excerpt, George illustrated this sense of framing through his metaphor.

> And ah. I think it worked real well, occasionally when ... You know, like we may be having a real interesting dialogue back and forth - What do you call a dialogue going on between a group of people - a multilogue ... Yah, a pollylogue. We were having a pollylogue that was going in lots of different places, then J would sort of summarize it, you know, put a frame around it. (George, I. 253) ... [These comments] tended to tie things together ... I mean it wasn't only J that did that. Other members of the group would do it too. Like you know when you have a thought and somebody would come in and put a string around all of it and tie them up together. And we would go somewhere else. (George, I. 290) ... And it was interesting because in a way it was like, using that same building metaphor, you've got the foundation built, and you've got some of the uprights in place. Then everybody starts hauling lumber onto the site, hammering up the walls and you start building ideas. Then somebody comes in and drops the top plate on which holds it together. And then you go from there to the next level. (George, I. 277)

This notion of framing as summarizing or synthesizing communicates a sense that the class moved to a new level of abstraction in building an overall conceptual or thematic

structure of all the experiences. This notion of framing as summarizing and synthesizing is also important because it represented one way in which the class consolidated the new meanings that were being constructed in the group.

Conversations Tended Towards the Essence of The Experiences Shared

Towards the end of a episode of reflection on a phenomenon, class conversations gravitated towards the essence of the shared experiences. Although conversations typically started out focused on fairly detailed accounts of lived experiences, as the inductive process proceeded the conversation became more abstract. Ultimately, such conversations culminated in a statement of the essence of the shared experiences. Following is an example of an episode of the dialogical learning process of reflection on a phenomenon.

> In one particular class session, as her critical incident one participant shared her experience of her company sponsoring her to participate in a study-abroad trip. As the participant shared her experience, she addressed three themes: her advance planning for trip; her positive relationship with her boss; and her belief in the benefits of a bi-cultural experience. After the participant had shared her story, the group seemed to have spontaneously latched onto the second theme regarding the nature of employee-boss relationships. This, then, became the topic of discussion in the group. With regard to the participant herself, her experience of her relationship with her boss was very positive - she had a high regard for her boss who was instrumental in the decision of her company to sponsor her trip to Germany, and she had a very good relationship with him generally. Other class participants spontaneously proceeded to share their experience of employee-boss relationships. Several of these sharings, however, were negative experiences.

Ultimately, from these descriptions, the group weaved together a more comprehensive picture or understanding, including both positive and negative experiences of employee-boss relationships. The group then went a little further in their discussion. The group concluded this episode of group reflection with a statement of the essence of these experiences. They suggested that respect was key in an employee-boss relationship. That as an employee one needs to feel respected by one's boss, and likewise one needs to feel respect for one's boss. (Adapted from Fieldnotes, p. 12).

Self-Reflection and Critical Reflection Were Part of the Process

Self-reflection and critical reflection also played a role in this dialogical learning process. With an interest in ensuring the rigor of the meaning making process and in the quality of the meanings constructed, the group critically reflected on the contributions each participant made to the conversation. The data suggested that the group critically reflected on the experiences shared by participants before they were incorporated into the overall portrait or thematic structure being constructed of the phenomenon under discussion. George suggested that participants must be "willing to have their boards cut up" as they were integrated into the overall structure of the house. This notion of "having one's boards cut up" or George's earlier suggestion that "you have to have challenges to your assumptions" (George, I. 9) implicitly involved processes of both self-reflection and critical thinking. Participants critically reflected on the presuppositions underlying the experiences shared in the group, and on the thinking processes underlying the assertions made about the phenomenon under discussion.

Having a Diversity of Experiences in the Group was Advantageous

When the group was engaged in the dialogical learning process of reflection on a phenomenon the more experiences or perspectives represented in the group the better. Because of the different interpretive perspectives that each of the participants brought to the class, each participant had a different experience of practically every phenomenon. For each topic that was discussed, there were examples of experiences shared from an educator's perspective, a counselor's perspective, a minister's perspective, an industrial trainer's perspective, and an Asian-American's perspective among others. Each participant shared his or her "truth" (little "t") from his or her own interpretive perspective. The greater the diversity of experiences that a group incorporated into its learning about a phenomenon, the more comprehensive and sophisticated the group's newly constructed meaning structure would be.

Angela recognized the importance of having a diversity of interpretive perspectives represented in a group. She suggested that "Probably what has made it work well is the overall diversity of the people that are in the classes, their backgrounds. ... If you get the diversity, it's what makes the class work" (Angela, l. 499). Rosalyn also recognized the value of diversity within the group, especially in terms of the creativity that this diversity can bring. "Diversity is what makes this possible. If everybody came from the same background, the same thought process, we'd loose it all ... Diversity is the greatest thing we have going for us ... Diversity is so important to a creative thoughtful atmosphere" (Rosalyn, l. 1375). George too valued the diversity of backgrounds and cultures present in the group. "I think everybody comes from a culture and that's a definite factor in the fabric that you [can weave together]. Yah, all those things sort of design where you are going to go" (George, l. 288). Nikki suggested that, "I think that we all gain by understanding the different places that we each come from" (Nikki, l. 1149). Thus having a diversity of experiences or perspectives in the group was highly valued in

terms of the sophistication, comprehensiveness, and creativity of the new meanings or understandings that were collaboratively constructed within the group.

Each Participant Took Away His or Her Own Unique Meaning of the Phenomenon

By engaging in the dialogical learning process of reflection on a phenomenon, class participants collaboratively constructed new meanings. They inductively wove together the experiences and perspectives shared by all participants on a particular phenomenon into a comprehensive portrait of that phenomenon. Since each participant viewed the world from his or her own unique perspective at the end of this dialogical learning process, each participant took away his or her own unique meaning of the phenomenon. For example, G suggested:

> OK, so the idea of meaning. ... In a group situation we listen to somebody's story and we get some themes out of it, and we start talking about those themes or constructs or whatever. And we end up weaving this sort of external construct, which, in some ways is unique for me, because it reflects on everything I've already got, and it's probably unique to them. ... My meaning is going to be different than J's meaning, or different than David's meaning. But maybe it's possible that we have a shared meaning, I don't know. (George, l. 580). ... [I]t's like building a house, we can't all stand at the same place and look at the house. I may be looking at the north face. And J is over here looking at the south face and we can see each other across the room, but what each of us sees is a whole different house. I see a house that I've built with all these guys. J sees a house that he's built with all these guys. And we see different sides of the house. And ah, we've got a virtual construct. (George, l. 785)

Angela also suggested that even though each individual's perspective is enriched by the process of group reflection on a phenomenon, what each participant ultimately took away was again unique based on each individual's unique interpretive perspective and context. Here, Angela described how she translated the ideas about the underlying processes of the reflective practice class to her own setting related to her work as a social activist.

> So you and I may think that, you know, you talk about education, I talk about the streets. To me they're the same process, you talk about what's going to work in the classroom with fifty people, and I talk about what's going to work out in the workplace with ten people that come to me. So we both are in an educational process. So this helps me to define what works for me in my space and what works for you in your space. ... And learning the process and what it means itself - I may not have exactly the right words to suit you in the classroom, but I feel like that if I put it in perspective for myself, I have learned. Because I'm the one that has to carry out of the classroom what I need, you can carry out your needs. (Angela, l. 484).

The meanings that participants took away were still personal and unique, but their interpretive perspectives had been much enriched by their exposure to the experiences and perspectives of the other class participants.

Occasional Experience of "Magical Free-Flowing Conversation" within the Group

Occasionally, when the group was engaged in conversation about a particular phenomenon, participants became engaged in a magical free-flowing conversation. It

seems that these conversations happened only once in a while. When they did happen, they were occasions participants recalled as highs within the group. Nikki suggested that these moments of magic would occur spontaneously and for only a short period of time out of the overall class time. "Sometimes ... it would only be 5 minutes or 15 minutes out of the hour" (Nikki, l. 982). Nikki described her experience of these magical free-flowing conversations as follows:

> It's suddenly everybody paying attention ... everybody is giving their attention to the group. And sometimes that would happen just by accident. ... And something interests somebody else ... Suddenly there would be, like spontaneity, is something I notice so, attention - like from all the group members, spontaneity - that people would feel things strongly, and maybe even interrupt, you know, say something. Variety - when we, there was more than one person participating more than two or three people participating. (Nikki, l. 1009) ... I remember many times when that occurred, but they were more like 15 minutes in the 2 hours. And it happened spontaneously. And all of a sudden we were there in the group. And very often it would be broken up by any variety of things. You know, by somebody saying - Let's change the subject - or somebody throwing a ball, you know, by somebody maybe making a joke that didn't have anything to do with what we were talking about, so maybe we went off on a whole other topic. ... [and] I experienced that as a shift. (Nikki, l. 1179)

Nikki described participating in these discussions as being almost effortless. These magical moments of free-flowing conversation were the easy and fun part.

> [During this] period of goodness. ... I experienced it as, I see it as - it's fluid, it's easy, it's comfortable, am, it's conspirital, collegial. (Nikki, l. 1189) ... That's the

fun part, is that I'm experiencing. So I'm not thinking so much as experiencing. (N, l. 1200) [I'm contributing] but my contributions are - it's easier. It's not so much - it's not so hard as in the process that I described to you earlier [generating a counseling-type question]. It's not arduous. It's not wrestling it out of the muscle. You know it's a lot easier. (Nikki, l. 1205)

David described these moments of magic when the group was participating in free flowing conversation as follows:

> I know in the class we had some of those experiences too but not every moment of the class by any means. ... Those moments when I perceived that individuals were investing more than just an intellectual curiosity level with each other, then there was a phenomenon there that was palpable. And at those moments where that was obviously not being done, it was like we were sort of playing this game, and both were present for me. (David, AB, l. 463)

David suggested that these moments of magic in the group were characterized by moments of heightened authenticity and sense of synchronicity in the group.

> This is just difficult to put into words. When a group, at some moments, one can almost sense a level of authenticity which is powerful, palpable, and indefinable. Now that doesn't mean that everybody is not being authentic at other times. ... [Also] there is a synchronicity in the group, which is sort of like, maybe it's a phenomenon of the group if you will, at that moment, and you sense that, and everybody, you go back later and people say, yah sure that happened at this time. Yah, yah I knew that. We had some of those moments in our group. ... I do remember that we did have those moments. More toward the end of the class than

at the beginning. Which would go with the way groups develop too. (David, I. 533)

Key Outcomes of the Dialogical Learning Process of Reflection on a Phenomenon

The principal outcome of this process of group reflection on a phenomenon was the development of a greater awareness and understanding of a particular phenomenon through group discussion or dialogue. David defined awareness as "a high level of consciousness about someone or something" (David, I. 1101). Participants created new meaning and understanding together in the group by weaving together the experiences and perspectives of all participants. This new meaning was typically quite rich since it was constructed by integrating the experiences of all participants. The group wove the experiences of each individual participant into an overall conceptual or thematic structure. This conceptual or thematic structure represented the meaning of the phenomenon based on the collective experience of the group. By engaging in the group process of reflection on a phenomenon, participants gained a richer way of structuring their experience of a particular phenomenon.

Dialogical Learning Process of Problem Solving

The fourth type of dialogue was the dialogical learning process of problem solving. This process refers to dialogue as a means of helping an individual participant come to a better understanding of their problem situation. The focus of this type of dialogue was an individual participant's problem situation.

The critical incident activity played an important role in this dialogical learning process of problem solving. Participants were given an open choice with regard to what to

present in class as their critical incident. The types of critical incidents shared in the group fell into two categories. About half the participants used their critical incident activity to describe important events in their past lives from which they learned a significant lesson or which shaped their lives. These were typically events in their lives which were important because of the turning point that they represented. Although these critical incidents still have some effect on the person today, there was a sense of the situation having been resolved. The other half of the class, however, saw the critical incident activity as an opportunity to bring a present problematic situation from their lives to the group for examination. These problematic situations were typically not yet resolved. The participants felt that the group could help them gain some insight into their problem situation. In this respect, this later group of participants saw the class as a problem solving group.

Problems arose many times for participants because of how they made meaning of a particular situation. The group helped an individual participant explore or think through his/her problematic life situations in terms of personal meaning making. Problem situations were ultimately resolved by understanding them better. It's almost as though participants understood their way through their problems.

Characteristics of Problem Situations: Situations of Not Knowing

The problem situations that participants brought to the class as their critical incidents were situations in which they were unsure and uncertain about the particular situation they found themselves in. They did not understand all the dynamics of what was happening in that situation, or they were having difficulty making sense of the situation. They had a sense of frustration and a feeling of uncertainty, of being "on mushy ground" with their decisions in that particular situation. Participants expressed a sense of "not knowing" - of not knowing what the problem was and of not knowing what they

should do. Overall, these concerns might be characterized as a sort of crisis of meaning making for the individual.

Rosalyn was one participant who brought a problematic situation to the class. Rosalyn's critical incident described a drive-by-shooting in a predominantly poor black community in which a young child was shot. The school principal organized an evening meeting at the school in an attempt to get parents involved. Rosalyn pointed out that she had made the decision not to go to the evening meeting at the school. But, for whatever reason, she was still uncomfortable and unsure about the basis for her decision. Indeed, her decision was still haunting her, so she chose to bring it to the class as her critical incident. Rosalyn's problem was typical of other psychological problems or crises of meaning: when something isn't resolved, it just won't go away. It was like there was an elastic band stretching back to this particular event for Rosalyn which continuously pulled her attention back to that particular event.

> When I talked about, when I brought in my own critical incident, I started with a child being shot and the community's response to that, and the principal's response to that, and my unwillingness to go to the meeting at night. (Rosalyn, l. 185) ... I had so many issues that I wrote in a page and a half that I couldn't tell what it was about. ... But the reason why I chose it was because I couldn't let it rest, it kept coming back to haunt me and I didn't know what the haunt was about. (Rosalyn, l. 214) ... And ... it wasn't a big deal except in my own mind. It kept coming back. I didn't know whether I made the right decision or not. (Rosalyn, l. 407)

Angela described a similar experience of people coming to her for help with problem situations but 'not knowing' the nature of their problems. "People ... come to me and say Angela I'm in big trouble and I need some help now. And I don't know what my

problem is, but I know I'm in pain. And I know that I'm being done, you know deda, deda, deda, and I have to help them. I have to draw out of them - them doing their thinking about what the real problem is" (Angela, l. 329).

Process of Problem Solving

There were two broad ways that the group helped individual participants to better understand the problem situations that they brought to the class: (i) the group helped an individual participant gain a better understanding of how aspects of his or her own personality or interpretive perspective may have been contributing to his or her problematic situation; and (ii) the group helped an individual participant gain a better understanding of how aspects of his or her environment may have been contributing to his or her problematic situation. The two approaches helped participants understand either the personal dimension of their problem situation (subject pole), or the environmental dimension of their problem situation (object pole). A summary of the key aspects of the dialogical learning process of problem solving is presented in Table 9.

When a Participants Shared their Problem, They Were then Subjected to a Barrage of Questions

The format of the class was such that each participant typed up their critical incident and distributed it to the class. When their turn came to share in the class, they would verbally describe their problem situation to the group and then their problem situation became the focus of discussion in the class. Class participants then proceeded to ask many questions and there was some discussion around particular issues. Rosalyn, describing her experience of sharing her critical incident, noted the volume and variety of questions posed by the group which helped her sort out the issues in her problem situation.

Table 9: Summary of the Dialogical Learning Process of Problem Solving.

The dialogical learning process of problem solving referred to the process by which class participants helped an individual participant come to a better understanding of a problem situation that that individual had brought to the group.

- When participants shared their problem situations in the class they were subjected to a barrage of questions by the group.
- The group helped individual participants better understand their problem situation in two ways as follows:
  - Group members helped individual participants better understand their problem situations by giving them feedback or insights about aspects of their own personality or their interpretive perspective that may have been contributing to their situation being problematic (focus on S pole of S --- O relationship).

    S --- O

    ↑
  - Group members also helped individual participants better understand their problem situations by giving them insights about aspects of their context/environment that may have been contributing to their situation being problematic. (focus on O pole of S --- O relationship).

    S --- O

    ↑

And my perception was that for an hour and a half my classmates hammered me with questions. (Rosalyn, l. 190) ... And they were pretty difficult because they had to do with black and white prejudice, they had to do with power plays between bosses and workers, it had to do with neighborhoods that were in the highest form of poverty, it had to do with police issues versus parents. (Rosalyn, l. 192) ... And people asked me if my critical incident wasn't anger between myself and my father. And I monitored my inside gut feelings and every question that was asked in a really short amount of time, I could tell if the question was a credible one in terms of my own working through what my critical incident was. (Rosalyn, l. 200) ... So as my class members asked me for an hour and a half all of these different levels of questions I sorted out what I felt the issues were.

(Rosalyn, l. 217) ... And I realized that I had made a major change in the way I looked at that big picture. (Rosalyn, l. 198) ... There isn't any other group where I could have had the barrage of, the barrage and the variety of questions that was asked of me in order to sort that out. (Rosalyn, l. 233)

Some of the questions asked were non-leading phenomenological-type questions, soliciting further detail on the participant's problem situation. Many of the questions asked, however, were counseling-type questions where group participants would assimilate all that they knew about the individual and his or her problem situation into a question. A group member asking a counseling-type question would frame the experience of the person speaking in a way that they thought might be helpful to them. Posing counseling-type questions was the way in which group members gave the individual feedback.

Participants Received Feedback or Insights About Aspects of Themselves That May Have Been Contributing to their Situation Being Problematic

The group helped participants in two ways: they helped participants identify subconscious personal issues which may be at play in their problem situation; they helped participants identify their subconscious presuppositions with respect to an aspect of their problem situation.

Subconscious personal issues. When a participant brought a problem situation to the class, one way the group helped was to identify a participant's subconscious personal issues that may have been contributing to his or her situation being problematic. The group helped the individual address the implicit question "What is it about my own personality that may be contributing to this situation being problematic?"

Xiaopei brought a problematic life situation concerning a relationship to the class so that the group could help her think through it. Like the other problem situations

brought to the class as critical incidents, Xiaopei had a feeling of uncertainty about what she should do in this particular situation. [Note this incident was mentioned earlier as an example of the group engaging in critical reflection on the age-appropriateness of an individual participant's beliefs.]

> Of course, there was that time when I was telling about myself.... I was telling the class about this guy I sort of was interested in, who happens to be a resident in the building. And I wasn't quite sure. And as I was trying to figure out, his girlfriend called and they had just broke up. ... It was important because I feel like my emotions, my feelings, were heard and respected by people in class. And the class helped me in that process of interview, thinking, then re-evaluating my thinking process. (Xiaopei, l. 369)

In the course of listening to Xiaopei share her problem situation, Rosalyn identified a possible subconscious issue that Xiaopei may have had. Rosalyn suggested that Xiaopei may be more concerned about pleasing her parents and living according to their expectations, rather than growing up and fostering her own sense of identity and independence.

> It appeared to me, all the way through, it appeared to me that she was more concerned about pleasing her parents and their image for what she should be, [rather] than making any kind of decision about who she was as a person separate from that. And the way in which I asked the question was not threatening to her, but it assumed that she had a relationship with her parents that was rather immature. (Rosalyn, l. 83) ... For Xiaopei the questions in my head was - She's a big girl now, when is she going to grow-up? But at the same time my own parallel was, what was the time frame in which I quit worrying about what my parents

thought and I took on my own sense of responsibility for myself. (Rosalyn, l. 1211)

According to Rosalyn, Xiaopei's personal issue was that she was "over-dependent" on her parents. This presentation by Xiaopei and Rosalyn's sharing is an example of how the group assisted in problem solving by pointing out the issues a person may have had that they could not see themselves.

Subconscious presuppositions. Group members also helped individual participants to identify their subconscious presuppositions (beliefs, assumptions, rules, values, fears and expectations) with respect to an aspect of their problem situation. Occasionally, participants subconsciously held presuppositions with respect to their problem situation which contributed to the situation being problematic. The group assisted with problem solving in these cases by raising the individual's presuppositions to a level of conscious awareness. They could then change or let go of any inappropriate presuppositions. The group helped the individual address the implicit question: What is it about my presuppositions with respect to my problem situation that may be contributing to this situation being problematic?

An example of the group helping an individual participant identify subconscious presuppositions was when Rosalyn shared her critical incident in the class. Rosalyn's critical incident described a complex situation from Rosalyn's practice relating to the drive-by shooting. Rosalyn struggled to make sense of this overall situation. The class discussed Rosalyn's critical incident for approximately an hour and a half. By the end of this time, Rosalyn had come to a much clearer understanding of her situation. The principal insight which Rosalyn gained from sharing her problem situation related to the challenges of understanding other cultures. Following a discussion in the class around culture and cultural differences, Rosalyn came to the profound realization, that no matter how long she spent in poverty schools, she would never really understand the culture of

poverty and poverty schools as those who have lived in that context all their lives. She realized that she could never be part of another culture no matter how hard she tried. Rosalyn explained that the reason she perceived that she could never really understand the culture of poverty schools, with minority and Native American populations, was because she had not had those experiences. This led to Rosalyn changing her assumptions about poverty school cultures.

> My excitement was about my own learning. Am, the major thing that I learned was that I would never be a part of this culture no matter how hard I try. (Rosalyn, l. 433) I am not poor nor would I ever be. (Rosalyn, l. 453) ... And so if I make an assumption that I can never be poor, well I can be poor but I haven't experienced poverty in the way that these people have. ... (Rosalyn, l. 499) I haven't experienced a minority culture in the way that these people have. (Rosalyn, l. 501) ... I'm not informed about Native American culture. (Rosalyn, l. 508) ... So by changing my assumptions that I can never be part of that culture. I can only look into that culture from the outside and try to be as open and accepting as I know how to be. That changes my frustration level. (Rosalyn, l. 524)

This was a truly transformative experience for Rosalyn. In the except which follows she described her experience before this insight.

> Before I had this insight? Am, we've talked about multiples of issues that were part of my critical incident, and because there were so many multiples of questions, I couldn't tell where my frustrations came from. I knew I was doing my job the best way I knew how to do it. But I perceived myself to be on the inside of the school's culture. I'm there almost every day. I go into the classroom,

> I know the teachers. I watch them teach the kids. They trust me enough so that I can say, 'Well am, don't you think you might use this over here, that over there?' I try to do it in a really supportive way. But I perceived myself to be on the inside of each school's culture. ... So even though, as I looked at myself doing my job, my perception was that I was the best person to do the job. There was still a lot of frustration. I felt like I was on mushy ground making my decisions. And I realized when I came out of class that that's not going to change. I can never be on solid ground because I'm always on the outside of the culture. I'm not inside the school's culture, because I'm not inside the South, inside poverty and all the rest (Rosalyn, l. 536). ... I'm never going to understand that culture anyway like somebody can from within. (Rosalyn, l. 565)

This was a truly profound insight. Rosalyn recognized the near impossibility of completely understanding another culture. She also realized that to get close to understanding another culture, she needed to be as open and accepting as she possibly could be. Rosalyn recognized that to really understand another person or group, one must almost live their lives, experience their reality. This insight precipitated a major perspective change for Rosalyn. The impact that this change of perspective had in her life was equally powerful. By changing her presuppositions, Rosalyn also changed her affect, her frustration level. This example powerfully suggests that by changing one's presuppositions, one can change one's experience, and in this way one can change one's reality.

The transformation that Rosalyn experienced is actually the same transformation that the reflective practice class sought to foster in terms of how participants viewed each other. In the dialogical learning process of effective communication, the class encouraged participants not to assume they understood the experience and reality of others. In order

to understand another person, one needed to be as open and appreciative as possible and really listen to him or her.

Participants Received Insights About Aspects of their Environment that May Have Been Contributing to their Situation Being Problematic

The group also helped individuals by giving them insights about aspects of their environment that may have been contributing to their problem situation. In this way, the participant sharing his/her problem situation gained a better understanding of how a particular aspect of his/her environment worked.

When Rosalyn shared her problem situation in the class, George gave her an insight about the personality of one of the players in her problem situation. Based on Rosalyn's description of her critical incident, George suggested that the principal appeared to be acting from a victim stance. This way of framing patterns in the principal's behavior was enormously helpful to Rosalyn.

> George talked about how the principal's stance was a victim stance. Now ... that was an answer that really, really helped me. That probably more than anything else, helped me. Because she is from another country. (Rosalyn, l. 244) ... I had heard myself say, sometimes that principal acts like the at-risk student that I used to work with. But I never made the connection between at-risk students acting out of a victim stance and this principal acting out of victim stance. I didn't know that this principal was ever a victim. I found out later that she sued in order to get that position. And so I know for a fact there's a lot of resistance between the teachers and this principal, and a lot of resistance between Central Office downtown and this principal. ... And am, it's almost this fighting stance, it's like her adrenal is always too high, and there's always a fight about something. (Rosalyn, l. 603) ... Well you see that helps me change my assumptions. ... Things really switched for

> me. My perspective changed in terms of just trying to look at my critical incident. (Rosalyn, I, 290)

The victim stance insight was really about helping Rosalyn understand her world better. George helped Rosalyn understand a particular aspect of her problem situation better. This insight did not change how the principal acted. It just gave Rosalyn a way of understanding the principal's behavior which removed the source of dissonance.

Characteristics of the Participants Who Brought Problem Situations to the Class

In this section I present some key characteristics of participants who brought problem situations to the class. The data suggested that these participants took a lot of risk, they occasionally experienced sharing their problem as painful, but they were open and ready to learn.

Participants Took a Lot of Risk

Participants chose to bring their problem situation to the class because they were searching for answers. They were searching for feedback or insights about their problem situation. They were thus willing to take the risk to bring their situation before the group. Rosalyn described her experience of bringing her problem situation to the class as follows:

> I had so many issues that I wrote in a page and a half that I couldn't tell what it was about. And that's when I took the risk to bring it to class with some fear and trepidation I suppose because it was pretty close to home. You know, I'm two floors up and most everybody knows who my boss is. ... And so, I think that I took a lot of risk. And it was a sensitive issue for me. (Rosalyn, I, 205)

Some Participants Experienced Sharing their Problem Situation as a Painful Process

Sharing one's critical incident or problem situation in the group was actually quite trying for some participants. Sylvia pointed out that the experience of reflecting on and sharing her critical incident/problem situation relating to her divorce was difficult. "I felt like I learned a lot from sharing the critical incident. And although it was very, very painful for me, I'm still glad I did it" (Sylvia, l. 885).

Participants Were Open and Ready to Learn

Participants who brought problem situations to the class were open and ready to learn. When class participants brought problematic situations to the class they were searching. Searching for new insights or a new perspective that would help them process through their problem situation. They were searching for workable ways of framing their situation. They were open to feedback about their own ways of being and acting, and were searching for insights about aspect of their environment that might help them better understand their problem situation. Nikki remarked on Rosalyn's readiness to learn.

> And she really wanted to know, you know she really wanted to know (Nikki, l. 757) ... I could see from my time in counseling that she was in the groove. She was thinking, she was ready, she had asked the question, she was ripe. You know what I mean? She was ripe. If only someone could have the question there on time for her to hear it. (Nikki, l. 766) ... People only stay in a state of readiness for a short time. They don't stay ready to hear, you know, wanting to think about things. They don't - you know they don't stay that way. They ask the question and the books say and it's been my experience that that's when they're ready to hear. And so like on a dime, they're ready. (Nikki, l. 942)

This highlights a significant difference between occasions when the group was engaged in the dialogical learning process of problem solving, and occasions when the group was engaged in the dialogical learning process of self-reflection. In the dialogical learning process of problem solving, participants typically brought up an issue or problem themselves. This implied a certain readiness to hear feedback. With the dialogical learning process of self-reflection, however, it often happened that someone else in the group pointed out an issue that a participant supposedly had. When this happened, the participant was not always ready to deal with or accept this feedback.

Key Outcome of the Dialogical Learning Process of Problem Solving

The principal outcome of the dialogical learning process of problem solving was that the participant gained an increased awareness or understanding of his or her problem situation. They also gained increased awareness or understanding of the personal and environmental factors that may have been contributing to their situation being problematic. Participants then established their own course of action.

Summary: The Underlying Processes of Class Can Be Represented as Two Parallel Spirals

In this section, I present a summary model of the underlying processes of the reflective practice class as two parallel interacting spirals. The underlying processes of the class divided into two main areas, interpersonal relationship processes and learning processes. These two main processes are depicted as two parallel interacting spirals - a spiral of interpersonal relationships and a spiral of learning. This summary model was

arrived at by simply taking the themes identified throughout this chapter and presenting them as elements of each spiral respectively. This model is helpful because it communicates the interconnectedness of the interpersonal relationship processes and the learning processes. It also communicates the role of time in the development of both interpersonal relationships and learning within the class. Figure 14 depicts these parallel interacting spirals graphically.

I chose to depict these processes as spirals because a spiral represents an ongoing and ever expanding process. This describes the nature of the interpersonal relationship processes and the learning processes within the class. One of the class participants (Rosalyn) also used the term "learning spiral" to refer to the process of learning in the reflective practice class. "That our class is working and we're somehow on a learning spiral that seems to be very positive" (Rosalyn, I. 708). The word "spiral" also communicate the teleological nature of these processes.

The interpersonal relationship processes within the reflective practice class are represented as a "spiral of interpersonal relationships". This spiral addresses the progression of relationships within the group over time. In the case of this particular group, the spiral of interpersonal relationships tended towards a sense of cohesion and community within the group.

The learning processes within the reflective practice class are represented as "a spiral of learning." The learning processes included the foundational process of learning from lived experience along with the four dialogical learning processes (effective communication, self-reflection, reflection on a phenomenon, and problem solving). The outcomes of the learning process varied depending on which leaning process participants had used. Regardless of the type of learning process however, the end result was increased awareness or understanding. If the focus was on self-reflection, the result was increased self-awareness or self-understanding. If the focus was reflection on a phenomenon, then the result was increased awareness or understanding about that

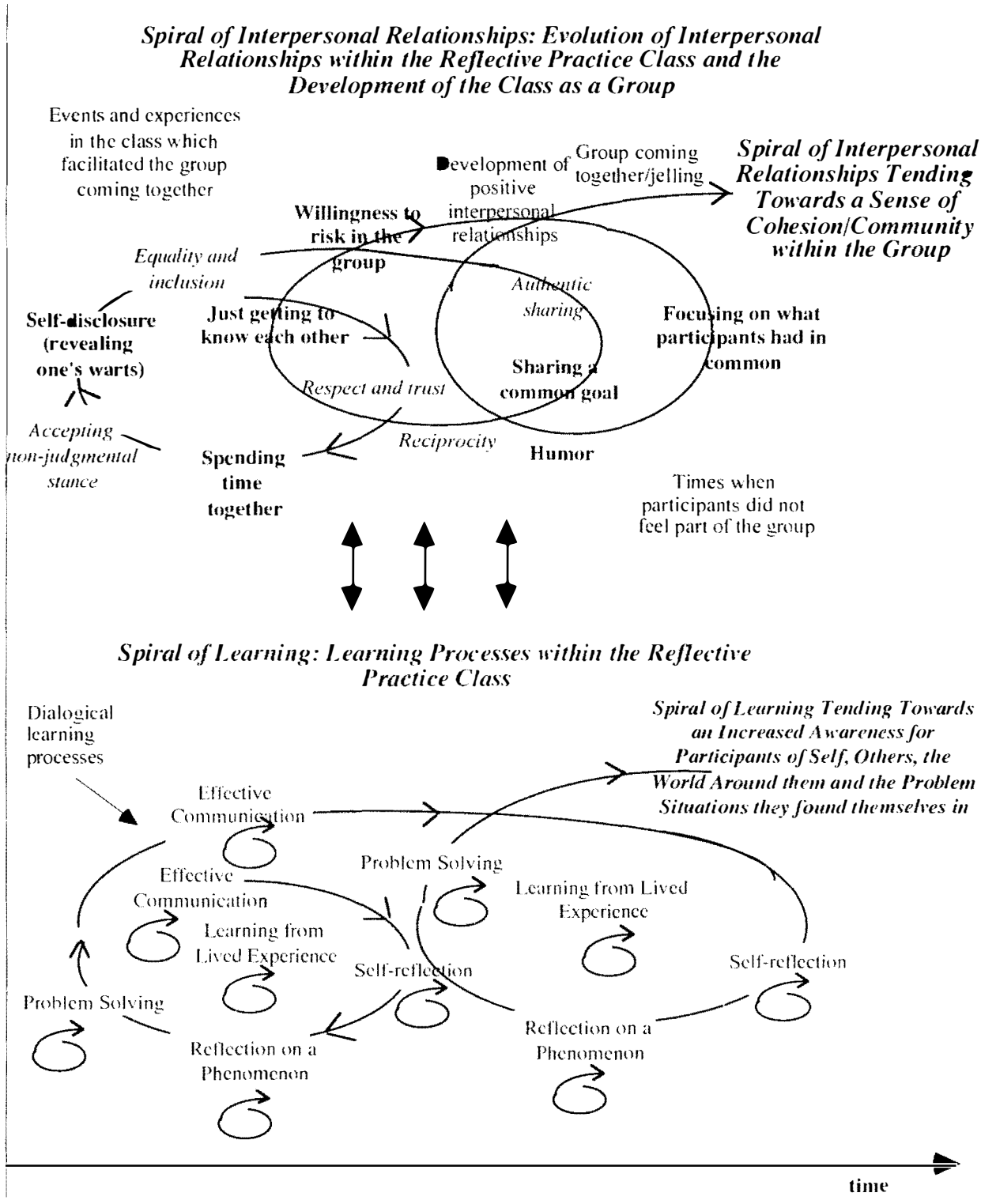


Figure 14: Summary of the Two Key Processes Underlying the Reflective Practice Class.

phenomenon. If a participant's focus was problem solving, then the result was increased awareness of understanding of their overall problem situation. Thus, we can say that the spiral of learning tended towards increased awareness for participants of self, others, of the world around them, and of the problem situations they found themselves in.

Three elements of this summary model are discussed. These include the interrelationship between the spiral of interpersonal relationships and the spiral of learning; the critical role played by interpersonal relationships within the class; and the need for sufficient time for both the interpersonal relationships processes and the learning processes to mature.

Interrelationship Between the Spiral of Interpersonal Relationships and the Spiral of Learning

The data suggested that there was a symbiotic type of relationship between the learning processes and the interpersonal relationship process within the class. As the group learned to engage in the dialogical learning processes (particularly listening/effective communication and self-reflection), this promoted positive interpersonal relationships and a sense of cohesion and community within the group. As the class successfully developed a sense of trust, respect and group cohesion, this in turn facilitated the class successfully learning together as a group (group cohesion facilitated the success of the dialogical learning processes).

Critical Role Played By Interpersonal Relationships Within the Class

The relationships in the group served as a container for the dialogical learning processes. The relationships served as the conduits or the medium for learning in the class. The various dialogical processes of self-reflection, reflection on a phenomenon and problem solving all depended on an environment of positive interpersonal relationships

and a sense of cohesion and community within the group. Positive interpersonal relationships and a sense of cohesion or community within the group were necessary elements for the group to learn effectively together. According to George, a sense of trust and respect were necessary ingredients for a group to engage in dialogue. "It occurs to me that for learning to move, that we have to, we have to have a foundation of established trusting of each other as a persons" (George, l. 21). Elsewhere George suggested that "at the beginning the group has to struggle with a sense of itself as a group, before the learning can begin" (George, AB, l. 2087).

For some of the dialogical learning processes, the nature of the underlying interpersonal relationships within the group were critical. For example, for the dialogical learning process of self-reflection, the underlying relationships were of critical importance. Bill recounted an experience in the group which highlights the critical importance of the underlying relationships as a context for group self-reflection. He described an incident in the group when another participant (Nikki) made a statement about the fact that Bill wasn't speaking much in the group. In this example, we see that the very same statement from one person to another could be interpreted as a helpful feedback or as criticism, depending on the nature of the relationship that existed between these two participants. "I really wondered about ... whether she was trying to give me some kind of message about my lack of participation or whatever, or rather, more, not give me some kind of message, but sort of criticize, you know, hm" (Bill, l. 398).

In the case of reflection on a phenomenon (dialogue as a means of exploring a particular phenomenon), a sense of group cohesion and community was seen as a necessary ingredient for the group be able to learn effectively together. In terms of self-reflection and problem solving, a sense of group cohesion (a secure and safe environment) was necessary because of the personal nature of the issues and problems discussed. Thus, a sense of cohesion and community within the reflective practice class created an

environment conducive to effective communication, self-reflection, reflection on a phenomenon and problem solving.

Sufficient Time is Necessary for Both Interpersonal Relationships and Learning Processes to Mature

The data also suggested that time was also a crucial ingredient in the success of a reflective practice experience. The class needed to have adequate time together to allow participants to master the dialogical learning processes and for positive interpersonal relationships to develop. In the section addressing interpersonal relationship processes, it was suggested that positive interpersonal relationships emerged by participants spending time together and just getting to know each other. The class needed adequate time for a sense of trust and respect to emerge within the class, and for the class to develop as a group. Time stood out for George who highlighted the disadvantages of conducting a group like this within the traditional time-frame of a semester. The group gets to a spend only a relatively short period of time together before it disbands at the end of the semester. George suggested that there is insufficient time within a semester structure for relationships and for the quality of the dialogue to develop to a reasonable level of maturity.

> You can develop a quality of dialogue that can only go so far, with each new engagement. You know, like you meet a person … and you could create the beginning of a quality relationship, but then it ends, and so you can only develop to a certain level of maturity. (George, AB, I. 2094) ... And when you start this I-thou relationship, it has to go through certain transformations of trust, and give and take (George, AB, I. 2111) . ... And it's sort of like, what can I know about you: and you tell me your life story, I tell you my life story. We get familiar, we

> start to like each other; we begin to share common ideas and goals, we begin to trust each other, I begin to open up to you and then the semester ends. (George, AB, l. 2116) ... And so before I can even develop a level of mature communication, then I'm cut off. And I see that as a major flaw in education. (George, AB, l. 2118)

The length of time participants spent together enhanced both the quality of the interpersonal relationships and also the quality of the learning processes within the group.

In conclusion, the answer to the second research question, regarding the underlying processes of the class, was complex to say the least. This chapter attempted to capture the many processes and sub-processes of the class which were evident from participants experiences. Conclusion and implications of the overall findings of this research will be presented in the final chapter.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In this case study, I have taken a detailed look at one particular reflective practice class, a 500 level graduate class entitled "Reflective Practice In Education and Psychology." This course was offered for students in adult education and educational psychology within the college of education of a large state university in southeastern United States. This study explored two research questions: How did participants in the reflective practice class make meaning of their experiences? and What were the underlying processes of the reflective practice class? Based in a phenomenological research process, a variety of data were collected. Two separate interviews were conducted with each of the eight participants in the class. A biographical interview was conducted with each participant in order to get a sense for what each brought to the class. A phenomenological interview was also conducted with each participant to get at his or her experience of the class. All class meetings were also observed and fieldnotes maintained during these observations.

In delineating key categories and themes for the first research question (How did participants in the reflective practice class make meaning?), the way participants made sense of the class experience was examined as an instance of meaning making. Participants' experiences of the class, as given in their phenomenological interviews, were analyzed in the context of their biographical interviews, and patterns were identified in terms of how participants made meaning. For the second research question (What were the underlying processes of the reflective practice class?), the focus was mainly on participants' experiences of the class as given in their phenomenological interviews. Participants'

experiences of the various processes of the reflective practice class were inductively woven together into an overall portrait of the underlying processes of the class.

Summary of Findings

How Did Participants in the Reflective Practice Class Make Meaning?

A model of participants' everyday way of making meaning was delineated. Participants' everyday way of meaning making was described as a subconscious interpretive process. A participant's interpretive perspective in interaction with his or her context in a given situation informed how he or she structured or made sense of his or her experience in that situation. Each participant's interpretive perspective was informed by a variety of personal factors. These factors included his or her past experience, professional training, cultural background, individual personality, theoretical perspectives and philosophical views, the discourses he or she had participated in, prior reading, life context, role, purpose, and his or her gender. These various factors served like filters through which the participant perceived the world. Participants' past experiences played a major role in shaping their interpretive perspectives. Overall, this analysis pointed to the subconscious, interpretive, biographically and culturally rooted nature of participants' everyday process of meaning making. This everyday way of meaning making was also described, however, as a projective, uncritical, non self-aware, and, in many cases, distorted way of making meaning.

The data also suggested that participants' interaction with the course fostered a shift to a new (and arguably more authentic) way of making meaning. This new way of making meaning was fostered by the philosophical assumptions and underlying processes of the class. The philosophical assumptions of the class included an interpretivist view of

the process of meaning making and an embrace of ideas from phenomenology. Key underlying processes of the class that helped foster this transformation of meaning making included the processes of listening, learning from experience, and self-reflection. The new way of making meaning required participants to interact with the world and others in a more open and receptive way. It required participants to consciously appreciate their interpretivist way of making meaning. It also required participants to let go of the factors that made up their interpretive perspectives, and to encounter the world and others not from their default interpretive perspectives, but from a stance of conscious reflective presence. This stance of conscious reflective presence involved a number of factors. It required that participants gain an appreciation for the interpretivist nature of the process of meaning making. It required that they take on the phenomenological attitude which meant bracketing their presuppositions or emptying their minds. This process of bracketing also required participants to engage in self-reflection in order to raise their subconscious or tacitly held presuppositions to a level of conscious awareness so that they could be bracketed. Finally, the stance of conscious reflective presence required participants to come to understand phenomena in the world around them by consciously learning from their lived experience, and to come to understand other people by mindfully listening to them.

Overall, the reflective practice class fostered a transformation of participants' way of making meaning from a subconscious, projective, uncritical and non self-aware way of making meaning to a conscious, open, receptive, and critically self-aware way of making meaning.

What Were the Underlying Processes of the Reflective Practice Class?

Based on the data, I delineated two major processes that were evident within the reflective practice class. The first major process related to the interpersonal relationship processes within the class. This addressed the evolution of interpersonal relationships within the class and the development of the class as a group. The second major process related to the learning processes which took place within the class. The learning processes consisted of a foundational process of learning from lived experience and several dialogical learning processes. These dialogical learning processes were based in effective communication (dialogue as a means of understanding the other); self-reflection (dialogue as a means of achieving greater self-awareness or critical self-awareness); reflection on some phenomenon (dialogue as a means of exploring a particular phenomenon); and problem solving (dialogue as a mean of exploring the problem situations that participants brought to the class). Each dialogical learning process had its own distinct purpose and this purpose guided the conversation in the class, especially in terms of the types of questions that were asked.

In looking at the underlying processes of the class, the interpersonal relationship processes and learning processes were mutually intertwined in a symbiotic relationship. On the one hand, the growth of positive interpersonal relationships within the group, which included trust, respect, and a sense of cohesion or community, facilitated the group's successful engagement in the dialogical learning processes. On the other hand, participation of class members in the dialogical learning processes (especially dialogue aimed at effective communication and listening) fostered positive interpersonal relationships (trust and respect) and a sense of community within the group. A summary model describing the interpersonal relationship processes and the learning processes as parallel interacting spirals was presented as Figure 14 on page 247. These spirals represented a 'spiral of interpersonal relationships tending towards cohesion and

community' and a 'spiral of learning tending towards increased awareness and understanding for participants of self, others, phenomena in the world, and their problem situations.' Overall, it could be said that participants in the reflective practice class came together as a "community of learners."

Conclusions

In this section, I will discuss the conclusions of this research in relation to the research questions of this study. I will outline conclusions relating to meaning making and conclusions relating to the underlying processes of the class.

Conclusions Relating to Meaning Making

The first research question of this study focused on exploring how participants in the reflective practice class made meaning. It seems more fruitful to discuss the conclusions relating to this research question within the broader framework of human consciousness, of which patterns of meaning making are an integral part. One's consciousness is defined here as pertaining to how one sees oneself in the world and one's relation with the world. It relates to how one conceives of, and concretizes the person---world relation in one's life.

The research reported here informs our understanding of human consciousness on two levels. On one level, this research speaks to participants' everyday way of making meaning and their everyday consciousness. On a second level, however, participants were engaged in learning processes within the class which altered their ways of making meaning and thus altered their consciousness. The data suggested that the class fostered a new way of making meaning and a thus new quality of consciousness on the part of participants.

Participants' Everyday Consciousness

Participants' everyday consciousness was quite intriguing. The data suggested that participants exhibited a type of schizophrenic or split consciousness. Based on this research, participants' everyday consciousness can be described as having three characteristics. Firstly, most participants exhibited a lack of logoic self-awareness, that is, they exhibited little awareness of their underlying process of meaning making, and little awareness of their underlying structure of consciousness. Secondly, on a subconscious level participants interacted with the world in an interpretivist way as per the model of participants' everyday way of making meaning outlined in this research. Finally, the data suggested that participants' default consciousness was a positivist consciousness.

Participants exhibited a lack of logoic self-awareness. Logoic self-awareness was defined as awareness of one's process of meaning making. It refers to an awareness of one's relation with the world. It implies an awareness of how the person-world relation is defined for oneself. Logoic self-awareness in essence refers to an awareness of the structure of one's consciousness. On a very basic level logoic self awareness implies an awareness of the interpretivist nature of one's underlying process of meaning making. It implies an awareness of one's participation in the shaping of one's reality. An awareness that it is subject and object in interaction that co-constitutes one's experience of reality. For the most part, when participants first came into the class they displayed little awareness of their underlying process of meaning making. The self-reflexive process of "thinking about thinking" was unfamiliar to them. Participants commented on never having thought about how they think as distinct from what they think. "I never thought about thinking, how I'm thinking, and worry about how I'm thinking before I got to the class" (Xiaopei, l. 935). The exceptions were the psychologists or counselors in the class who did seem to be consciously aware of their interpretivist way of making meaning.

On a subconscious level participants exhibited an interpretivist consciousness. The detailed analysis of how participants made sense of the class experience revealed that

on a subconscious level participants interacted with the world in an interpretivist way. Their interpretive perspectives in interaction with the world co-constituted their experiences of reality (interpretive perspective --- context). The model of participants' everyday way meaning making described a subconscious, interpretive, projective, uncritical and non self-aware way of making meaning. This model suggested that participants structured or made sense of phenomena in the world around them in a subconscious automatic way, based largely on the factors that made up their interpretive perspectives. Class members participated in the creation of their reality but they were largely not aware of this dynamic. Since this was mostly a subconscious process, it was also mostly an unexamined process. Overall, in their everyday lives, on a subconscious level participants exhibited an interpretivist consciousness.

Participants' default consciousness represented a positivist consciousness. The data from the class also suggested that, when participants first came into the class, the default way in which they behaved and interacted in the class conveyed positivist beliefs about the nature of reality. This suggests that participants, when they first came into the class, interacted with the world in a positivist way.

Participants' positivist beliefs about the nature of reality were evidenced by their pattern of questioning when they first came into the class. When questioning each other, they typically asked leading questions or multi-option questions which assumed that they understood the experience and reality of the other but they just needed some confirmation as to the exact situation. This conveyed a belief in a universal reality. Bill's "whoops, wow" experience when he realized he was asking leading questions and assuming he knew the reality of another participant was indicative of the positivist beliefs that pervaded participants' everyday consciousness as they came into the class. He suggested that his default attitude was "let me tell you" what your experience was rather that "you tell me" what your experience was.

Participants also operated from abstract concepts in their heads, and once participants learned something, or conceptualized it in abstract terms, they saw no value in going back again to relearn from their experience. This conveyed a belief not only in a universal reality but also in the static nature of that reality.

Participants' tendency to give reflective or conceptual accounts of their experience also conveyed a sense that they held positivist beliefs about the nature of reality. Participants were operating from a positivist consciousness which is based on a belief in the primordial nature of abstract ideas, and only secondarily valuing observable sense experience. This tendency could be traced to idealist positivist beliefs.

Participants also rarely paid attention to their pre-reflective lived experience. In learning how to conduct phenomenological interviews, it was a novelty for participants to be introduced to their own pre-reflective lived experiences. Participants also did not focus on the emotional dimension of lived experience. The lifeworld was thus alien to most participants. Participants typically gravitated to their reflective accounts of reality and operated from the abstract ideas they held about an objective reality perceived to be out there and separate from them. When asked to describe their experience, they would describe it in reflective versus pre-reflective terms. They would describe it in terms of what they thought about it, rather than sharing their in-the-moment lived experience.

Thus, overall the data suggested that participants' default consciousness was a positivist consciousness. Participants exhibited a separated consciousness believing in a reality that was out there and separate from them. They interacted with the world and others from a positivist idealist perspective, believing that we all live in a universal static reality, and treating abstract ideas as primordial. The exceptions here again were the counselors who had a good appreciation for the interpretive nature of their processes of meaning making. They valued lived experience, especially its emotional dimensions.

Participants also exhibited a dependence on the professor as a source of knowledge when they first came into the class. They expected the professor to play the

role of oracle in the class. This dependence on experts for valid knowledge could also be seen as a symptom of a positivist consciousness and having been schooled under a traditional pedagogy model structured based on positivist assumptions.

Discussion. The data thus suggested that while participants' default consciousness represented a positivist consciousness, on a subconscious or tacit level participants interacted with the world in an interpretivist way. It seems contradictory to suggest that participants exhibited this split or schizophrenic consciousness in their everyday way of making meanings, yet this is what seemed to be the case. How are we to understand this phenomenon?

Existential-phenomenologists believe that the principle of intentionality describes a basic incontrovertible fact of our existence. The principle of intentionality defines our essential relatedness with the world. It describes our co-constitutive or interpretive relationship with the world. That it is the person in interaction with their world that co-constitutes his or her experience of reality.

The positivist consciousness that participants displayed may be accounted for by the dominant positivist culture. Having been schooled from a positivist perspective, the realist ontology and objectivist epistemology seems to have become ingrained in all our lives. Thus, we can probably attribute the default positivist consciousness exhibited by participants to the dominant positivist meta-narrative within our culture.

It appears that the positivist meta-narrative has the effect of suppressing our awareness of our essential connectedness to the world. Although the positivist meta-narrative can suppress our awareness of our essential connectedness to the world, it can not undo this fundamental relation. Thus, even though a positivist perspective represented participants' default consciousness, the principle of intentionality still operated, but now in a subconscious way. Participants co-constituted their world whether they were aware of it or not!

This idea that in these modernist times we are unaware of our true relation to the world is central to Freire's (1970) ideas. Freire, like the existential phenomenologists, believed in the principle of intentionality as a basic fact of our existence. However, he argued that people do not perceive their true relation with the world. They have been mislead by the dominant positivist meta-narrative and its associated banking method of education into an objectivist relation to the world. Freire, however, suggests "the dialectical relations of women and men with the world exist independently of how these relations are perceived (or whether they are perceived at all)" (p. 64). One of the goals of Freire's problem-posing pedagogy is to work with people to bring this essential relation with the world to conscious awareness through dialogue. Freire also suggests that the nature of a person's default consciousness defines how he or she will act in the world. According to Freire "the form of action they [people] adopt is to a large extent a function of how they perceive themselves in the world" (Freire, 1970, p. 64). A significant part of Freire's pedagogy involved helping the oppressed to realize their true relation to the world - their participation in the creation of their own reality. This was a major part of his empowering and liberating pedagogy.

Given that the interpretivist relation to the world is suppressed and operating subconsciously, the whole process remains unexamined. Freire (1970) and others (Gaventa, 1982) refer to this suppressed, subconscious, interpretive way of making meaning as "uncritical consciousness."

New Quality of Consciousness Fostered by the Class

The reflective practice class represented an unique and valuable opportunity for participants to explore the fundamental structure of their personal consciousness and to strive for a new quality of consciousness. The new quality of consciousness fostered by the reflective practice class had a number of different dimensions. It involved participants

coming to a conscious awareness of their interpretivist relation to the world and the interpretive/co-constitutive nature of their underlying process of meaning making (logoic self-awareness); their pursuit of critical self-awareness; their engagement in a new conscious, receptive and critically self-aware way of making meaning based on listening and learning from lived experiences (rooted in the lifeworld); their commitment to stay rooted in the lifeworld as perpetual beginners in terms of knowing; and their commitment to strive to exist in dialogic relation with the world and others. This new quality of consciousness points to a more conscious or mindful way of being and acting.

The reflective practice class led participants through several different steps in order to shift them from their everyday split consciousness to this new quality of consciousness. The sequence of steps in this transformation of consciousness were:

- Becoming aware of the interpretivist nature of their process of meaning making (logoic self-awareness).
- Being released from their schizophrenic or split consciousness.
- Recognizing the distorted nature of their everyday way of making meaning.
- Engaging in critical self-reflection.
- Embracing a new more conscious and receptive way of making meaning.
- Striving to become perpetual beginners in terms of knowing (being-in-the-moment), and
- Striving to exist in a dialogical relation with the world and others.

<u>Becoming aware of the interpretive nature of their process of meaning making (logoic self-awareness)</u>. The reflective practice class helped participants raise their subconscious interpretive process of meaning making to a level of conscious awareness. Or, in other words, the class helped participants raise the interpretive/co-constitutive nature of their basic relation with the world to a level of conscious awareness. This was done by fostering 'thinking about thinking on a macro level' in the context of group self-

reflection. Participants also came to appreciate their interpretive relation with the world by learning to engage in the dialogic process of effective communication (for empathic understanding). The process of effective communication required participants to take on the phenomenological attitude, to bracket their presuppositions, to ask non-leading phenomenological-type questions, and to be attentive to the experience of the other. Learning to take on the phenomenological attitude and engage in phenomenological questioning fostered an appreciation for each person's interpretive relation with and to the world. Participants came to appreciate that we each have our own unique experience of the world. We each make sense of the world from our own interpretive perspective. Participants came to appreciate that we live not in a universal reality, but in a world of personal meanings and multiple realities. In becoming aware of their interpretive relation with the world, participants raised their suppressed interpretive/co-constitutive process of meaning making to a level of conscious awareness. Participants became consciously aware of their true relation with the world.

Being released from their schizophrenic or split consciousness. In raising their suppressed interpretive/co-constitutive process of meaning making to a level of conscious awareness participants became aware that it was incorrect to assume that another participant's experience was pretty much the same as their own. They came to realize that we live in a world of personal meanings and multiple realities. This logoic self-awareness cured the schizophrenia which characterized participants' everyday consciousness (representing a default positivist consciousness with an interpretivist consciousness operating subconsciously). They began to consciously appreciate the interpretive nature of their basic process of meaning making. They let go of the positivist paradigm as their default consciousness and came to consciously embrace interpretivism as their default paradigm. They came to appreciate multiple realities. They dropped old patterns of behavior, such as asking leading questions and assuming they knew the experience and reality of the other. The group played an important role in fostering

participants' progress in appreciating an interpretivist way of making meaning by policing adherence to the norm of not asking leading questions, while also promoting an appreciation of the uniqueness of each person's lived experience. Participants also came to appreciate the positivist paradigm for what it is, a heuristic tool, not necessarily a way of being. Participants threw off the positivist perspective as their default way of perceiving the world and consciously embraced the interpretive nature of their relation with the world.

Recognizing the distorted nature of their everyday way of meaning making. Given that participants had now raised their interpretive relation to the world to a level of conscious awareness, they discovered that the subconscious interpretive way they had been operating was flawed in many ways. Because participants' interpretive way of making meaning was subconscious, it was also largely unexamined. The excerpt which follows captures Nikki's reaction when she first uncovered her subconscious process of meaning making. Her sense that this was like meeting another person that she didn't know existed, supports the notion that participants exhibited a type of schizophrenic or split consciousness.

> I never really tuned in to what I was thinking. And once I started listening to my thoughts, I was appalled by what I was thinking. I was, I had racist thoughts, I was ungenerous and unkind. I was sometimes cruel - It was like meeting a person that I didn't even know, I didn't even know that she existed. And then I said, "Oh my Lord, look at all this unseemly stuff in there. And so, then I thought ... Ha, ha, ha. I took a second challenge and I said, well I've gotta clean this up, and I'll change this. ... I became aware for example that I had some, absolutely unknown to me, am, kind of am, unkind thoughts about foreigners. ... I hadn't realized for example, that I shared some of my country's, some of our popular kind of distrust of Arabs. ... And I mean I know that it's on the news and I know that they're

associated with terrorism, but I didn't know I had it. Didn't know I thought it or felt it. But, once I really tuned into my thoughts I realized that my first, you know my first reaction to somebody that was maybe Arabic, or in a sheet or something like that, would immediately be unkind. Once I really listened closely, I realized that my first reaction to them would be unkind. (Nikki, AB, I, 419)

The detailed analysis of the figural events of participants' experiences of the class yielded the model of participants' everyday way of meaning outlined in Chapter 5. The model of participants' everyday way of making meaning highlighted the subconscious, interpretive, projective, uncritical, non self-aware, biographically and culturally rooted nature of participants' everyday process of meaning making. As participants raised this heretofore subconscious way of making meaning to a level of conscious awareness, they recognized the inherent distortions and flaws in this process of making meaning. Their everyday way of making meaning exhibited the "epistemic, psychic, and sociological distortions" discussed by Mezirow (1991). Upon raising this subconscious, and therefore unexamined, process of meaning making to a level of conscious awareness, there was a natural move to critical self-reflection to "clean up" this process of meaning making.

Engaging in critical self-reflection. The next step in the transformation of meaning making or consciousness involved participants engaging in critical self-reflection. The class, especially in the dialogical learning process of self-reflection, helped participants to raise to conscious awareness and critically reflect on many different aspects of themselves. Through group critical self-reflection, and through individual/private critical self-reflection, participants raised to awareness and critically reflected on their heretofore subconscious and unexamined interpretive process of making meaning. In addition to raising their subconscious interpretive process of meaning making to a level of conscious awareness, through critical self reflection participants raised to conscious awareness and critically reflected on:

- the presuppositions that made up their interpretive perspectives;
- the thinking processes underlying their actions and assertions
- aspects of their personalities (personal issues and personality traits);
- a variety of other aspects of themselves, such as
  - their motives or purposes in a particular situation,
  - their stance or attitude towards another participant,
  - their tendency to project their own meanings,
  - the subconscious presuppositions they held which were culturally informed (such as prejudices and stereotypes),
  - the role of their past experience in shaping their personality and their interpretive perspective.

This process of critical self-reflection involved a good deal of unlearning as participants let go of prejudices, inappropriate presuppositions and distorted ways of seeing the world. Overall, the self-reflection component of the class helped participants gain an enhanced level of critical self-awareness.

Embracing a new more conscious and receptive way of making meaning. Ideas from phenomenology fostered a transformation in how participants made meaning. Through an embrace of ideas from phenomenology and the emphasis placed on key processes such as listening, learning from experience and critical self-reflection, the reflective practice class fostered a new (and arguably more authentic) way of making meaning. This new way of making meaning fostered by the philosophical assumptions and underlying processes of the class was outlined in Chapter 5. It represented a more conscious, open and receptive way of making meaning. This new way of making meaning called on participants to interact with the world and others from the critically self-aware stance of conscious reflective presence (conscious reflective presence --- context). This stance of conscious reflective presence called on participants to take on the phenomenological attitude, to empty their minds, and learn about the world by

consciously reflecting on their lived experience, and to learn from others by mindfully listening to them. The class thus fostered a shift from the subconscious, conditioned, projective, uncritical and non self-aware way of making meaning which characterized their everyday way of making meaning, to a conscious, receptive and critically self-aware way of making meaning. The new way of meaning making represented a more conscious, open, appreciative and receptive way of interacting with the world and others.

This new model of meaning making also enabled participants to move towards clarity of perception or veracity. They learned how to see the world and others as they are, not as they themselves were. They learned to see the world and others in a more critically conscious way largely unobstructed by their own biases and prejudices.

This way of making meaning can be referred to as a more authentic way of making meaning since meanings are grounded in lived experience, in the lifeworld. This new way of making meaning was also grounded in a particular individual's lived experience, and so it was also authentic in having a self-affirming quality. Overall, the new way of making meaning reconnected participants with the lifeworld.

This idea of encountering the world from a stance of conscious reflective presence is similar to Heidegger's idea when he calls for a more 'meditative' type of thinking. In order to get more in touch with our Being, Heidegger suggests that we must "practice and encourage meditative thinking. Such thinking often proceeds without logic or concepts. It can allow things to appear as they are rather than in the forms the mind imposes on them. Ultimately, it can let them appear in the light of Being" (Kneller, 1984, p. 71). Heidegger suggests that much of the thinking we do in everyday life is 'calculative' thinking, which "seeks to control ideas and things. It is the essence of science and technology" (Kneller, 1984, p. 72). Heidegger suggests that with a meditative type of thinking "we come upon the truth when things reveal themselves to us as they are. Instead of testing hypothesis about things, we are receptive to them, listening and observing" (Kneller, 1984, p. 72).

The new way of making meaning fostered in participants an openness and a receptivity to the lifeworld, by listening to others, and by learning from their lived experiences.

Striving to become perpetual beginners in terms of knowing. The new way of making meaning also encouraged participants to strive to become perpetual beginners in terms of knowing. This need to become perpetual beginners in terms of knowing stems from the dynamic nature of the lifeworld and the primordial nature of lived experience. The new model of meaning making suggested that, in order to be grounded in reality, participants needed to return again and again to learn from their personal lived experiences. The class fostered a shift for participants from seeing themselves as learning from experience and clinging to their newly discovered concepts and categories, to returning again and again to learn from their lived experiences. This call to become perpetual beginners in terms of knowing is similar to the concepts of "being-in-the-moment" or "mindfulness". It called on participants to be present to their lived experience from moment to moment. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) also talk about how reality is not static but is continuously changing and that we need to return again and again to re-language reality from our lived experiences.

Striving to exist in a dialogical relation with the world and others. The final transformation fostered by the class related to how participants balanced being receptive and expressive. The new way of meaning making represented a receptive way of being. However, one can not stay in a receptive mode all the time. In order to act, one has to form conclusions, and thus, one would no longer be operating in a receptive mode but in an expressive mode. The class encouraged participants to strive to exist in a dialogical relation to the world and others. It suggested that participants should form conclusions in order to act, but then in the very next moment they should return to be present again to their lifeworld through listening and learning from their lived experience. This need to exist in a dialogical relation to the world and others stems from the expressive and receptive

nature of our existence. Both modes are necessary and one can not be emphasized over the other.

Existing in a dialogical relation with the world and others is similar to Freire's (1970) notion of praxis. The poles of the reflection-action dialectic correspond to the receptive and expressive dimension of our existence respectively. The findings of this research suggest, however, that praxis must be based in the lifeworld. Reflection and action need to be firmly rooted on and in the lifeworld. Freire's notion of praxis was indeed rooted in the lifeworld.

Discussion. Overall the reflective practice class sought to help participants become more deliberate and conscious in their ways of being and acting. The class fostered in participants an awareness of their basic interpretive relation to the world. The new quality of consciousness fostered by the class can be described as a conscious, receptive, critically self-aware, interpretive consciousness which treats the lifeworld as primordial and strives to exist in dialogic relation with the world and others. With this new quality of consciousness, a participant would still make meaning, act, and relate to others based on aspects of his/her interpretive perspective. However, now he/she would be conscious and mindful of these processes. Consciously choosing the perspectives which guide his/her ways of being and acting, he/she would no longer operate on auto-pilot, subconsciously programmed and conditioned by his/her past experience and/or culture.

This new quality of consciousness fostered by the class (a conscious, interpretive, critically self-aware, dialogic consciousness) is similar to what Reason calls "critical subjectivity" (1988, p. 11). Reason suggested that "critical subjectivity is a quality of awareness in which we do not suppress our primary subjective experience ... rather we raise it to consciousness. ... The notion of critical subjectivity ... is based on a very high degree of self-knowing, self-reflection, and co-operative criticism" (Reason, 1988, p.12). Elsewhere, Reason writes "because we now see the world as *our* world, rather than *the*

world, we can see clearly through our own eyes" (Rowan and Reason, 1981, pp. 116). This new quality of consciousness fostered by the class, is also similar to what Freire (1970) and others (Gaventa, 1982) refer to as 'critical consciousness.'

Conclusions Relating to the Underlying Processes of the Class

The second research question of this study focused on exploring the underlying processes of the reflective practice class. The findings of this research described two parallel and interacting processes in the class: interpersonal relationship processes and learning processes. The learning processes consisted of a foundational process of learning from lived experience, and four different dialogical learning processes focused on effective communication, self-reflection, reflection on a phenomenon, and problem solving. Again it seems more fruitful to discuss the conclusions relating to this research question (dealing with the underlying processes of the class) in terms of the broader concept of the pedagogy of the class. Based on the detailed findings presented in Chapter 6: The Underlying Processes of the Class, in this section, I draw some conclusions relating to the nature of the pedagogy inherent within this reflective practice class. I also draw some conclusions with regard to the outcomes fostered by this pedagogy.

Pedagogy Inherent within the Reflective Practice Class

The pedagogy inherent in the class had a number of salient characteristics. It was based in lived experiences, in problems, in dialogue, and in group processes. It also focused more on processes and skills rather than traditional curricular content.

Based in lived-experience. One unique aspect of the pedagogy embodied in the reflective practice class was the emphasis placed on learning from lived experience. In this sense, the pedagogy of the class could be characterized as a lived-experience-based

pedagogy. Since the class was based on learning from lived experience, the emotional dimension of lived experience was important. Boud (1984) supports this notion of paying attention to the emotional dimension of experience in our learning process. Boud (1994, p.52), in his model of experiential learning, advocates "attending to feelings" as part of his process of reflection on experience.

Also of interest in this pedagogy are the two ways that participants learned by reflecting on their lived experience. They reflected on lived experience in order to better understand a particular phenomenon, and they reflected on their lived experience in order to better understand themselves. The latter use of learning from lived experience was particularly interesting -- participants engaged in self-reflection by reflecting on accounts of their own lived experiences. Participants raised various subconscious or tacit aspects of themselves to a level of conscious awareness by excavating them from the lifeworld by reflecting on accounts of their lived experience. This proved to be a very authentic approach to self-reflection.

A familiarity with the philosophical beliefs of phenomenology and a familiarity with the phenomenological research techniques were invaluable and, in many ways, indispensable aspects of the class.

Based in problems. Another interesting dimension of the underlying processes of the class was the emphasis placed on problem solving. In this respect, the pedagogy of the class could be characterized as a problem-based pedagogy. Problem solving in the class was mostly centered around the critical incident activity. Some participants used the critical incident activity to bring problem situations to the class for the group to explore and to reflect upon. Real life problem situations proved to be very effective contexts for learning (and transformation) within the class. Participants who brought problems to the class were more open and ready to learn. They were eager for new insights about their problem situations and more open to feedback about how they themselves may be contributing to the situations being problematic. Problems represented what Havighurst

(1972) referred to as "teachable moments" for participants to learn about themselves or their world. This emphasis on problems is consistent with the work of many prominent adult educators (Lindeman, 1926; Freire, 1970) who suggest that learning is most effective when it is based on real-life problem situations. Lindeman's (1926) discussion method of adult education is based on working through problematic life situations. Freire's (1970) liberating pedagogy is based on problem-posing. Freire suggests that educators who wish to be on the side of freedom "must abandon the educational goal of deposit making and replace it with the posing of problems of human beings in their relations with the world" (p. 60).

Based in dialogue. Based on the findings of this research, the reflective practice class embodied a dialogue-based pedagogy. One clear conclusion of this research was that there is not just one form of dialogue. From this research four different types of dialogue were delineated -- effective communication, self-reflection, reflection on a phenomenon, and problem solving. Each individual interaction between participants in the class could be classified into one of these four different types of dialogue. Each type of dialogue had its own distinct purpose, patterns of interaction, focus, and types of questions. Indeed, the differences between the different types of dialogue was most evident by observing the purpose behind the types of questions that were being posed. The existence of different types of dialogue, and the alignment of the purpose of a dialogic episode with the specific types of questions being asked is supported by Burbules' discussion of dialogue.

> One's choice of questions can shape the form and direction of a dialogue. ... [Different] types of dialogue will feel quite different to the participants, are directed towards very different sorts of aims, and will yield quite different patterns of interaction. And while the form of questions is not the only difference among them, it is a *central* difference that gives these types of dialogue their unique characters. (1993, p. 102)

With regard to Dilthey's and Gadamer's concepts of understanding, the dialogical learning process of effective communication was based directly on Dilthey's concept of empathic understanding. There was also evidence of participants experiencing the buoyancy of Gadamer's concept of interpretive understanding, especially when participants talked about "magical moments" of free-flowing conversation within the class. It is important to note that these magical free-flowing conversations occurred when participants were engaged in dialogue focused on a specific phenomenon (dialogical learning process of reflection on a phenomenon).

Based in group processes. The reflective practice class was conducted in a group format. The class functioned more as a group than would a traditional class. The physical arrangement of the classroom space was different with participants seated in a circle. This case study also highlighted the importance of interpersonal relationships within the reflective practice class. Interpersonal relationships served as a context or container for learning within the group. Based on the emphasis placed on the group and the importance of interpersonal relationships, the pedagogy embodied in the class could be characterized as a group-based pedagogy.

The data suggested that positive interpersonal relationships (trust and respect) and a sense of cohesion and community within the group, were essential for the group to effectively engage in the dialogical learning processes. This finding is validated by writers such as McNamee and Gergen (1998) and others. The existence of positive interpersonal relationships and a sense of cohesion and community were particularly important in terms of the dialogical learning processes of self-reflection and problem solving. A significant finding of this research was that when a sense of trust was established, participants were more willing to interpret statements from others as helpful feedback rather than as criticism. This suggested that the quality of the relationship between two participants served as a ground for how one person interpreted what the other person

said. The data suggested that for a group of learners to learn effectively together, they needed to evolve into a "community" of learners.

The data also suggested that a symbiotic relationship existed between the interpersonal relationships within the group and the dialogical learning processes. On the one hand, positive interpersonal relationships, (which included a sense of trust, respect and community within the group), created a positive environment for the group to engage in the dialogical learning processes. On the other hand, participants' engagement in the dialogical learning processes fostered positive interpersonal relationships within the group. Schein (1993) also noted the existence of these two parallel processes within a discourse group such as this class, and the positive impact of the dialogical learning processes on interpersonal relationships. Schein suggests that "the dynamics of 'building the group' occur in parallel with the process of conducting the dialogue. ... In my own experience, the dialogue process speeds up the development of the group and should therefore be the primary driving process in each meeting" (Schein, p. 47-48).

Based in processes and skills rather than content. The pedagogy inherent within the reflective practice class also placed more emphasis on participants learning processes and skills than on a predefined curricular content. The content was essentially the life experiences shared by participants in the class. However, the main focus of the class was to articulate and help participants learn how to engage in the many different learning processes described in Chapter 6. In a sense, learning these processes and skills became part of the content of the class. Participants learned these various skills and processes in the context of working with their real life experiences and problems. This concurs with Lindeman's (1926) view that "if adult education is to produce a difference of quality in the use of intelligence, its promoters will do well to devote their major concern to method and not content" (Lindeman, 1926, p. 179). The reflective practice class was true to Lindeman's vision: it helped participants develop a new quality of consciousness by helping them master learning processes which could be applied in relation to the lifeworld.

In summary, the pedagogy inherent within the reflective practice class represented a lived-experience-based, problem-based, dialogue-based and group-based pedagogy. It was also a pedagogy that emphasized participants learning processes and skills, and treated the participants' lived experiences as the content. It was a pedagogy firmly rooted in the lifeworld.

Outcomes of this Reflective Learning Pedagogy

The principal outcome of the reflective practice class was that the class fostered a new quality of consciousness on the part of participants. This was addressed in detail earlier. Other outcomes of the class were that it: fostered increased awareness; fostered positive interpersonal relationships and a sense of community; helped participants to develop new skills; fostered empowerment; and fostered liberatory learning.

Fostered increased awareness. The reflective practice class helped participants gain increased awareness of self, others, their world, and their problem situations. Participants learned by reflecting on their lived experience and by listening. The new awarenesses that participants came to hold were inductively derived from, and grounded in their lifeworld.

Fostered positive interpersonal relationships and a sense of community. The reflective practice class fostered positive interpersonal relationships including a sense of trust and respect among members of the class. Overall, a sense of cohesion and community emerged among participants. The data suggested that the learning processes of the class (especially the dialogical learning process of effective communication) played a major role in fostering the sense of community which evolved within the class. Peck (1987) recognized the role of effective communication in promoting a sense of community within a group. Fostering effective communication is one of the key principles underlying his community building workshops.

Helped participants to develop new skills. Participants learned valuable new skills in the class. These skills have traditionally not been taught elsewhere or are taught differently elsewhere. These skills included listening and effective communication, learning from lived experience, critical self-reflection, and problem solving. In examining these skills, many were defined differently from our everyday understanding of these skills. Given the dominance of the positivist paradigm within our western culture, our everyday understanding of these skills is from a positivist perspective. In the reflective practice class, however, these skills were defined from an interpretivist perspective. Each of the skills and processes that participants learned within the class assumed that a person in interaction with his or her world co-constituted one's experience of reality and that we live in a world of personal meanings and multiple realities.

The skill of effective communication, for example, was defined differently within the reflective practice class. From a traditional positivist perspective, we assume that we all live in a universal reality and that experiences of the world are more or less the same for all individuals. The process of communication is seen as quite simple. The meaning is in the message. The message is pretty much self-contained. From an interpretivist perspective, however, we assume that we each have our own experience of reality. We live in a world of personal meanings and multiple realities. Therefore, our approach to communication is quite different. This was evident from participants' descriptions of the dialogical learning process of effective communication. Participants recognized that one must really listen to others to understand their experience. One must bracket one's assumptions and attempt to enter into the plane of the other's reality. Effective communication within the reflective practice class involved participants emptying their minds and really listening to the other in order to come to empathically understand them. A unique aspect of effective communication reported by participants in the class was that in order to understand another person empathically, one had to try to get a sense for his/her background or interpretive perspective. One had to try to get a sense for where the

other person was coming from. The historicity of an individual's perspective is acknowledged.

Another example of a skill redefined from an interpretive perspective is that of learning from experience. The traditional understanding of learning from experience involves assuming the stance of a scientist and learning from observable sense experience. Learning from experience within the reflective practice class was redefined from an interpretivist perspective as learning from lived experience. Learning from lived experience was the focus of the foundational process of learning from lived experience. Learning from lived experience involved participants inductively learning about themselves and about aspects of their environment by reflecting on accounts of their lived experience.

The skill of problem solving was also defined differently. Problem solving is traditionally seen as a process of analyzing a particular problem perceived as being out there and separate from us. The process is presented as analyzing the objectified problem, identifying possible solutions, evaluating each solution and then choosing the best course of action. Problem solving within the class did not view problems as being situated in an objective world. Rather, problem solving within the reflective practice class acknowledged our own involvement in the co-creation of our problem situations. Problem solving within the reflective practice class acknowledged that one's experience of a situation as problematic is shaped by one's personal perspective in interaction with the world in that situation. Problem solving presented within the reflective practice class, the dialogical learning process of problem solving, thus involved a participant engaging in an analysis of the subjective (personal) and objective (environmental) dimensions of a problem situation.

With regard to the skills of self-reflection and critical reflection, from a positivist perspective self-reflection and self-awareness are hardly valued at all. One's subjectivity is seen as having only a negative role in the project of knowing. From a positivist perspective, critical reflection is seen in terms of logic as reflection on one's thinking processes to ensure the rationality and validity of the argument structures underlying

ones' actions and assertions. Within the reflective practice class, however, critical self-reflection was seen as a crucial skill. Critical self-reflection involved a two step process of participants first raising subconscious or tacit aspects of themselves to a level of conscious awareness and then of critically reflecting on them. Critical self-reflection for participants in the reflective practice class involved exploring their personalities, their processes of meaning making, and the presuppositions that made up their interpretive perspectives. Critical self-reflection within the reflective practice class was critical self-reflection defined within a world that participants had a role in creating.

Thus, overall, participants in the reflective practice class learned some new skills which were really some old skills redefined within an interpretivist frame. These skills can be considered as necessary skills for survival in a post-modern world.

Fostered empowerment. The reflective practice class facilitated the empowerment of participants in two main respects. Participants were empowered with a more authentic awareness of themselves both as knowers and as learners.

Participants were empowered with an authentic awareness of themselves as knowers, by being helped by the class processes, to raise their subconscious interpretive process of meaning making to a level of conscious awareness (logoic self-awareness). Participants came to realize their true relation with the work and their participation in the creation of their own reality. Participating in the class also helped them become aware of a new way of making meaning.

Participants were empowered with an authentic awareness of themselves as learners, by coming to appreciate the skills and processes of learning within an interpretivist frame. Participants learned how to learn by listening and through reflection on their lived experience. More specifically, participants learned how to engage in effective communication, critical self-reflection, reflection on a phenomenon, and problem solving. Participants gained a sense of independence and self-sufficiency in their learning. Participants discovered that they could learn from their lived experiences without being

dependent on experts. They learned that authentic learning is learning by reflecting on their lived experience, not learning as internalizing abstract concepts ladled out by a teacher viewed as expert. Authentic learning is learning rooted in the lifeworld and consists of praxis centered in the lifeworld. Authentic learning is not internalizing abstract concepts, but engaging in world making and re-making. Participants also were empowered to engage in reflective learning either alone or in dialogue with others. There were certain advantages to learning in a group context, in terms of the dialogical learning processes of critical self-reflection, reflection on a phenomenon, or problem solving. The class also identified a useful process participants could use to learn from their lived experience on an individual basis, that is, reflective journal writing. By recording descriptions of pre-reflective lived experience over time, participants could have a rich resource particularly useful for self-reflection. Participants also came to appreciate that learning is not something that happens only in the school house, but something which should characterize their very life. Overall, the reflective practice class fostered lifelong reflective learners. Participants were encouraged to allow reflective learning to pervade their lives. This seems to be consistent with Lindeman's view that "If then the meaning of life is to be discovered in becoming, education can serve as revealor only insofar as the learning process is continuous. ... Education is superficially conceived when viewed as a preparation for life. Education *is* life" (1926, p. 197).

Fostered liberatory learning. The reflective practice class fostered a form of liberatory learning for participants. The class helped participants achieve a greater level of freedom. The freedom fostered by the underlying processes of the reflective practice class was mainly defined in personal psychological terms. Three aspects of the class in particular fostered a greater sense of freedom for participants: fostering logoic self-awareness; fostering critical self-awareness; and adopting the new way of making meaning. Each of these liberatory aspects of the class are described in turn.

By fostering ***logoic self-awareness*** the class helped participants experience a sense of freedom. Logoic self-awareness was defined as an awareness of one's underlying process of meaning making, an awareness of the structure of one's consciousness, an awareness of one's relation with the world, an awareness of the configuration of S – O which characterizes one's consciousness. Developing logoic self-awareness helped participants raise their everyday subconscious interpretive process of meaning making to a level of conscious awareness.

Firstly, by raising their subconscious interpretive process of meaning making to a level of conscious awareness, participants freed themselves of the schizophrenic consciousness that characterized their everyday consciousness. Participants were freed from their default positivist consciousness. Participants became consciously aware of their interpretivist way of making meaning. Their interpretivist relation with the world, which was heretofore suppressed, was now raised to a level of conscious awareness. Participants became consciously aware that they co-created their own reality. Participants were freed from the schizophrenic consciousness and empowered with an awareness of their true relation with the world. It helped them recognize the dynamic and changeable nature of reality and their own participation in its creation and re-creation. The class helped participants to recognize their own participation in the making of their world, and introduced the possibility that they could also re-make it.

Freire (1970) considered conscious awareness of one's true relation with the world to be one of the major milestones towards liberation. A conscious awareness of one's true relation with the world is critically important to the empowerment of an individual and their sense of agency. Freire suggested that the banking model of education fosters a separated consciousness and the myth of a universal fixed reality out there and separate from us. In doing this, it misrepresents the true nature of reality and suppresses the intentionality of human existence. It misrepresents and hides the fact of people's participation in the shaping of their reality.

> Banking education attempts, by way of mythicizing reality, to conceal certain facts which explain the way human beings exist in the world; problem-posing education sets itself the task of demythologizing. ... Banking education inhibits creativity and domesticates (although it cannot completely destroy) the *intentionality* of consciousness by isolating consciousness from the world, thereby denying people their ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human. (p. 65)

Freire advocated a dialogue-based problem-posing pedagogy aimed at helping participants discover their true relation with the world, the true nature of reality, and helping them see that they can act to transform their reality.

> In problem-posing education people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation. ... Problem posing education affirms men and women as beings in the process of becoming – as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality. ... A deepened consciousness of their situation leads people to apprehend that situation as an historical reality susceptible of transformation. Resignation gives way to the drive for transformation and inquiry, over which men feel themselves to be in control. (p. 64 - 66)

Freire further suggested that helping people see that they co-create their reality brings the insight that reality is not preordained, and is neither fixed nor unchangeable. People come to appreciate the constructed nature of their personal reality, and the socially constructed nature of their shared reality. This insight may inspire people to act

individually and collectively to transform their reality. According to Freire, a liberatory pedagogy is a dialogue-based, problem-posing pedagogy which engages participants in the humanizing process of praxis. "Authentic liberation – the process of humanization – is not another deposit to be made in men. Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it" (p. 60).

The reflective practice class fostered liberatory learning only on a personal psychological level. Participants came to appreciate their participation in shaping their own reality, and some came to recognize their power to transform it. The full significance and implication of this realization, that our shared reality is socially constructed, was neither addressed nor recognized by the class at that time. This is the type of realization that Freire would have hoped to foster. In addition, Freire's problem-posing pedagogy included a political analysis which also goes beyond what was addressed in this class. The personal transformation fostered by the class is, however, an important first step on the way to helping participants recognize their power to participate in collective transformation of social reality. Many people who participate in grassroots social change organizations talk about a personal transformation of this kind as a result of participating in grassroots change initiatives. By being involved with these grassroots change organizations they realized their individual and collective power to transform their reality (see Bingman, 1995).

Freedom was also fostered in the reflective practice class by helping participants gain enhanced levels of ***critical self-awareness***. The everyday way of making meaning suggested that participants existed on subconscious auto-pilot, programmed and conditioned by their biography and culture. Through engaging in the process of critical self-reflection participants were freed from the control of the subconscious dynamics of their everyday ways of making meaning. Participants were freed from the subconscious control and conditioning influence of their biography, language, and culture.

Awareness of their personal issues and personality traits represented a significant level of freedom for participants. The following adage illustrates the sense of freedom gained with greater levels of self-awareness: *Either you have your complexes or your complexes have you.* Another adage further illustrates this point: *Knowing your chains will set your free.*

Participants' increased awareness of their interpretive perspectives also fostered a sense of freedom. In addition, the unlearning involved in the process of critical self-reflection also freed participants from distorted presuppositions (including prejudices, stereotypes, and patterns of behavior they learned in their youth) that made up their interpretive perspectives. This enabled participants to achieve freedom from dysfunctional ways of seeing the world.

The notion of adult education as a means for fostering freedom can be traced back to early writers in the field. Lindeman (1926) in *The Meaning of Adult Education* talks about a fundamental purpose of adult education as helping adults achieve greater levels of freedom.

> Freedom is an achievement, not a gift. We do not acquire freedom - we grow into freedom. ... The first step towards liberation is taken when an individual begins to understand what inhibits, frustrates, subjugates him. We learn to be free when we know what we desire freedom for and what stands in the way of our desire. Psycho-therapy has taught us that the first look must be within, not without. Most of the barriers to freedom have been self-constructed, self-induced. We already know, empirically at least, that many of our desires and wishes are validated and many obstacles dissolved by means of bringing our submerged conflicts to the level of consciousness. In one sense, freedom is conscious conduct. The psycho-therapeutic specialist does not "cure" his patient; he merely assists

> the patient in learning the methods of self-recovery. And the method is self-knowledge. (Lindeman, 1926, p. 71-72).

Higher levels of critical self-awareness gives one choices and the freedom to shape one's own reality. With freedom born of heightened critical self-awareness, one can consciously choose the perspectives from which one views the world. Mezirow suggests that "in this way we control our experiences rather than being controlled by them" (1991, p. 375). Mezirow, in his discussion of emancipatory education, also touches on this sense of freedom. Mezirow describes emancipatory education as being based on critical self-reflection and transformative learning.

Another aspect of the freeing nature of the class is to be found in the spirit of critical reflection in general. The group was a great context for critical self-reflection and the basic intention of the spirit of critique implied in critical self-reflection is emancipatory. The critical theory literature suggests that a critical perspective can enable the citizen to be enlightened and emancipated. Writing from an academic perspective about critical theory, Geuss suggests that "agents are enlightened and emancipated by a critical theory. The critical theory induces self-reflection in the agents; by reflecting they come to realize that their form of consciousness is ideologically false and that the coercion from which they suffer is self-imposed" (1981, p. 60). Habermas emphasizes the self-affirming spirit of critical reflection, recognizing the integrity of the individual and reconstructing self-affirming meanings from the lifeworld which may have been suppressed because of oppression. Habermas, in his discussion of 'knowledge constitutive interests', describes the 'critical paradigm' as being motivated by an interest in 'emancipation' from false consciousness. "In self-reflection knowledge for the sake of knowledge attains congruence with the interest in autonomy and responsibility.... The unity of knowledge and interest proves itself in a dialectic that takes the historical traces of suppressed dialogue and reconstructs what has been suppressed" (1968, p. 310).

The ***new way of meaning making*** fostered by the philosophical assumptions and underlying processes of the class also fostered a sense of freedom for participants. The new way of making meaning called on participants to bracket everything they thought they knew, and to learn afresh about the other by consciously listening to them, and to learn about phenomena in the world by consciously reflecting on their lived experience. The new model of meaning making called on participants to encounter the world and others from emptiness. Phenomenologists believe in the primordial nature of lived experience. Thus, when participants inductively languaged their lived experience, they were in a sense rebelling against the fixing nature of the existing categories and concepts of their language and culture. In this way, they were freed from the constraining and sometimes coercive influence of established language and culture.

This was also a dimension of freedom for Freire (1970). Freire's liberatory pedagogy is based on a phenomenological model of learning from lived experience. This rebelling against the concepts and categories of language is similar to the process of cultural criticism that Freire described. Freire talks about leading peasants in "culture circles" through an unique process of cultural criticism. He talks about peasants getting rid of the language of the oppressor, or undoing the colonization of the mind, by relanguaging their reality authentically from their own lived experience. Freire suggests that the dominant language and culture can serve to disempower certain groups in society. Kolb (1984) describing Freire's work suggests that "The means for changing this system is by fostering the active exploration of the personal, experiential meaning of abstract concepts through dialogue among equals" (p. 16). If the dominant language and culture is not authentic to a group's lived experience, and if it is not self-affirming, then it serves as a "false consciousness" which dehumanizes and disempowers them. The true vocation of a person is to read his or her world, learn from his or her lived experience, inductively name his or her world in authentic terms, and then act based on these new authentic understandings. An aspect of Freire's concept of "critical consciousness" involved a

human consciousness animated by authentic grounded meanings, that is, self-affirming meanings derived from reflection on that individual's lived experience. The process of emptying one's mind, or bracketing the concepts and categories of one's existing language, and learning inductively from one's own lived experience is referred to by the critical theorists (Giroux, 1993) as a process of knowledge or culture production. It implies a relanguaging of one's reality, and so rebelling against the constraining influences of our existing language. A common characteristic of the radical or liberatory pedagogies is that they all involve some element of knowledge or culture production (Shor, 1992; Weiler, 1991; Lather, 1991; and Freire, 1970).

Implications

This study of the underlying dynamics of a reflective practice class suggests a number of important implications. These include: the implications for adult education practice, for future research, and for the evolution of human consciousness.

Implications for Adult Education Practice

This research has implications for several different aspects of adult education practice including: implications for how we define the purpose of adult education, implications related to fostering this new quality of consciousness in professional practice, and implications related to the design of reflective learning groups.

Implications for How we Define the Purpose of Adult Education

The purpose of adult education according to Lindeman (1926) is to helps adults to develop their personality, to help adults learn to live free and creative lives. True adult

education, according to Lindeman, necessarily involves a liberating and empowering pedagogy appropriately focused on life. Much of adult education today, however, is focused on teaching instrumental skills relating to one's job. Lindeman suggested that "adult education more accurately defined begins where vocational education leaves off. Its purpose is to put meaning into the whole of life" (Lindeman, 1926, p. 7). True adult education must be bigger than the teaching of skills for work. True adult education must foster liberation and empowerment.

The purpose embedded in the reflective practice class was true to this noble purpose of liberation and empowerment which is a strong part of the tradition of adult education in the United States. Indeed, the purpose of the reflective practice class was quite similar to Lindeman's vision of the purpose of adult education. The reflective practice class helped to foster a new quality of consciousness for participants. This new quality of consciousness had a liberating and empowering character which promised to help improve the quality of participants' lives.

One implication of this research is that it encourages us to re-examine what we see to be the purpose of adult education. Do we see adult education as bigger than the teaching of instrumental skills related to one's work? Do we see adult education as fostering empowerment, liberation, and new/higher levels of consciousness? If we endorse this vision for adult education we need to foster these values in all of the learning experiences we facilitate. We need to begin practicing this liberating and empowering pedagogy in everything that we do. We need to create learning experiences where others can experience the transformation of consciousness fostered by the reflective practice class. Remaining committed to this vision of adult education will be difficult when much of adult education is focused on teaching workplace skills. The challenge will be to figure out how we can integrate this vision into existing adult education activities.

In order to illustrate how this vision of fostering this new quality of consciousness plays out in a specific area of practice, I will take the area of continuing professional

education and describe the implications of this research for fostering this new quality of consciousness in professional practice.

Implications for Fostering this New Quality of Consciousness in Professional Practice

Many adult educators work in providing ongoing professional development activities for professionals already well established in their practice. The process of reflective learning can be applied to continuing professional education in any field including with physicians, lawyers, police officers, and K-12 teachers, or with adult basic education practitioners. If we are to foster this new quality of consciousness in professional practice, we need to help practitioners come to view their practice from an interpretivist perspective. Our challenge will be to foster with professional practitioners a transformation of consciousness similar to that experienced by the participants in the reflective practice class studied here. Modeled on the sequence of steps that seemed to facilitate the transformation of consciousness for participants in the reflective practice class, we can outline some steps for the re-framing of professional practice.

- The first step is that we need to help professional practitioners come to consciously appreciate that they co-create the situations of their practice. This might be achieved by engaging in "thinking about thinking at a macro level", perhaps in a group context. An understanding of phenomenology and employing phenomenological research techniques would be invaluable in order to reconnect the practitioner to the lifeworld of his or her practice.
- The next step is to help professional practitioners engage in critical self-reflection to "clean up" their practice. Since their practice was perhaps heretofore subconscious, it is likely to be largely unexamined. Practitioners need to engage in critical self-reflection to raise the subconscious presuppositions of their practice to a level of conscious

awareness, and then to rid themselves of unwanted beliefs and assumptions that have been informing their practice. This research suggests that the most authentic way to raise these presuppositions to a level of conscious awareness is to engage in a lived-experience based model of self-reflection. Working with problem situations from practice as critical incidents can also be particularly potent.

- Another step is to foster the new open, receptive way of making meaning to help practitioners come to authentic meanings or authentic awareness in their practice. This means that the practitioner needs to engage in inquiry based in the lifeworld, based in the pre-reflective world of their lived experience. They need to engage in learning from their lived experience and listening. Here again, a familiarity with phenomenological research techniques will be invaluable. If participants can achieve authentic awareness by reconnecting with their lifeworld then this can lead in turn to authentic practice.
- We need to help professional practitioners become committed to learning from their lived experiences on an ongoing basis. We need to help them develop a commitment to return again and again to their lived experience in order to ground their practice in the reality of the lifeworld of their practice. Because of the dynamic nature of lived experience, no two situations of practice are the same. They should not grow content with their awarenesses or understandings of their practice, but should strive be ***perpetual beginners in exploring the lifeworld of their practice.*** We also need to help professional practitioners recognize that upon reflection on their lived experience, they can make up their minds about a particular situation in order to act, but in the next moment, they should be attentive to their lived experience again. They should strive to exist ***in dialogic relation with the situations of their practice and with the people that they work with.***
- This process of reflective learning or inquiry needs to become part of each professional's way of being. Each practitioner in order to engage in authentic practice

needs to engage in reflective learning on an ongoing basis. He or she needs to engage in reflective learning rooted in the lifeworld.

- Based on the experience in the reflective practice class, it can be very beneficial to bring practitioners together in practice-based reflective learning groups. The group context can be very helpful in facilitating the transformation of consciousness described here. A group would also be invaluable in terms of engaging in critical self-reflection, as a context where practitioners can explore and come to better understand common problems in their practice, and in terms of creating new understanding based on the collective lived experience of participants in the group. Working as a group, practitioners can reconstruct the world of their practice working inductively from the lifeworld. Like George's construction crew building a house, they can construct and re-construct a practice world authentically rooted in their lifeworld. Ideally, these practice-based reflective learning groups would meet on an ongoing basis. In order to ensure authentic practice, practice must be rooted in authentic awareness, awareness rooted in the lifeworld. Given the dynamic nature of the lifeworld, if we ever stop this process, then our practice becomes distorted and no longer rooted in the dynamic lifeworld. This must be an ongoing endeavor.
- Overall, these practice-based reflective learning groups could work to shape and reshape their practice ensuring that it is conscious, critically self-aware, and always authentic to the dynamic world of lived experience. These practice-based reflective learning groups could evolve as "learning communities" where practitioners learn together on an ongoing basis in order to foster conscious, critically self-aware, and authentic practice.

An implication of this transformation of consciousness is that this new quality of consciousness will help make practitioners more conscious, mindful, and critically aware of their practice. It will also help practitioners work towards authentic practice. It asks professional practitioners to dedicate themselves to inquiry in their practice based in the

lifeworld. This research suggests that practitioners can develop more authentic practice through praxis rooted in our lifeworld. Their practice must be based in cycles of reflection and action, where reflection is understood as listening and reflecting on one's lived experience, followed by action based on this reflection.

This research has implications for how we view professional development for practitioners. It suggests that we bring practitioners together as practice-based reflective learning groups, which meet on an ongoing basis, where practitioners engage in reflective learning and inquiry in their practice. These practice-based reflective learning groups would help practitioners raise their practice to a level of conscious awareness and develop a more conscious and critically self-aware practice. By engaging in praxis rooted in the lifeworld, these practice-based reflective learning groups could work towards authentic awareness and authentic practice. Through learning from their collective lived experience, they shape and reshape their practice world.

Professional development for practitioners, say for example, in Adult Basic Education (ABE), has already moved away from one-shot workshops towards practitioner inquiry. This is a move in a very positive direction. This research helps clarify some issues around how practitioner inquiry is conceived. Some critical questions we can ask ourselves about practitioner inquiry initiatives are: Have we really changed our paradigm? Do practitioners consciously recognize their participation in the creation of the situations of their practice? Is the inquiry conducted based in the lifeworld? Is there a commitment to critical self-reflection? Practitioner inquiry should also not be considered as just a professional development activity. This commitment to inquiry (praxis in the lifeworld) needs to become part of everyday professional practice.

The challenge, therefore, is to bring practitioners together in practice-based reflective learning groups which will meet on an ongoing basis to build these learning communities. The findings of this study, in terms of the underlying processes of the reflective practice class has implications for the design of these reflective learning groups.

Implications for the Design of Reflective Learning Groups

In this section, I will outline some specific implications of the research findings on the underlying processes of the reflective practice class for the design of reflective learning groups for professional practitioners.

Employ a new pedagogy. This research suggests that reflective learning groups can not be based on the traditional teacher-centered and curriculum-centered model. So we need to employ a new pedagogy designed to lead practitioners through the steps towards the new quality of consciousness described here. We need to employ a pedagogy designed to lead practitioners through the transformations of meaning making and commitments to learning from experience, listening, and critical self-reflection that foster this new quality of consciousness. This research suggests that we need to employ a pedagogy based in lived experience, based in problems, based in dialogue, based in group processes, and focused on participants mastering learning processes and skills rather than a predefined curriculum.

One of the things that may be helpful to know as we convene such reflective learning groups is that, because this represents such a different pedagogy, practitioners may express some dissonance and frustration in the beginning. Because the format of the reflective practice class was so different from other classes, class participants experienced some dissonance and frustration early on in the class. This dissonance and frustration may be traced to the transition from the more didactic approach of the traditional pedagogy model to the alternative pedagogy model embodied in the reflective practice class. The format of the class was counter to their expectations and it took participants some time to figure out their new roles in this atypically formatted class.

Grasping one's interpretive relation with the world. One of the first and most significant transformation for practitioners will be to grasp the interpretive nature of their

relation to the world (logoic self-awareness). Since intentionality is a basic fact of our existence, we need to make this explicit. We need to help practitioners become aware of how they each create their own realities. We need to help practitioners raise their subconscious process of meaning making to a level of conscious awareness. One observation from the class was that the experience of learning to conduct a phenomenological interview (as part of the dialogical learning process of effective communication) helped to foster this paradigm shift for participants from a positivist world view to an interpretivist world view. This experience with conducting a phenomenological interview was a "way in" to the interpretivist paradigm for this class. Phenomenological research techniques in general are invaluable as a way to reconnect practitioners to the lifeworld.

Need to teach new skills. This research also suggests that professional practitioners need to learn new skills, skills defined from a interpretivist perspective, such as effective communication, learning from lived experience, critical self-reflection, and problem solving. These skills can be explicitly taught and practiced by professional practitioners in these practice-based reflective learning groups. We need to help professional practitioners become lifelong reflective learners who are empowered to learn from their lived experience alone and with others. Perhaps, when a group of professional practitioners come together, this can be the focus of much of their early work together – learning the skills of reflective learning. Once a group has mastered these skills and matured, then exciting generative learning can occur.

Different types of dialogue. One of the main difficulties that a reflective learning group of professional practitioners will encounter relates to the group's ability to engage in the different types of dialogue. This study highlighted the need for participants in the reflective practice class to become more consciously aware of the different types of dialogue, the distinct purpose of each, and the types of questions appropriate to each. Participants in the reflective practice class did really well with the dialogical learning

process of effective communication, but they did not have a good grasp of each of the other dialogical learning processes which lead to some confusion. Also, it seems that participants did not share a common aim or purpose for a particular episode of dialogue. Rather, each individual pursued his or her own type of dialogue consistent with his or her own aims and purposes. Thus, in a given dialogic episode, in moving from one participant to another, the conversation would jump from one dialogical learning process to another. On occasions, participants could engage in dialogue at cross purposes with each other. A strong implication of this research is that participants in reflective learning groups need to develop a basic literacy with respect to the different types of dialogue and the dynamics of dialogue within a reflective learning group. If this were the case, then the group as a whole could pursue specific types of dialogue and move seamlessly as a group between the different dialogical learning processes. Again, this is part of the skill set that a group of professional practitioners can learn in the early part of their time in a reflective learning group. The different dialogical learning processes can be explicitly taught, modeled and practiced in the reflective learning group.

Facilitation. Another implication of this research for how to conduct reflective learning groups with practitioners relates to the challenges of facilitation. This research suggests that a facilitator of a reflective learning group can not be a transmitter of knowledge, but has to be skilled in facilitating a lived experience-based, problem-based, dialogue-based, and group-based pedagogy. Facilitators need to be a skilled with respect to group dynamics, and in facilitating the dialogical learning processes within a group. Schein (1993), writing about facilitating dialogue groups, also notes that the facilitator must attend to interpersonal relationship processes and to dialogical learning processes. Schein (1993) suggests that "The facilitator should, therefore, be skilled in group facilitation as well, so that the issues that arise can be properly sorted into two categories: issues that have to do with the development of the dialogue, and those that have to do with the development of the group as a group" (p. 47-48). This research also suggests

that the facilitator needs to become familiar with using a group as a medium or context for learning. In order to be able to build a "community of learners" the facilitator needs skills in establishing ground rules, and in establishing and managing positive norms with respect to interpersonal relationships processes and learning processes within the group. Another implication with respect to facilitation is that the facilitator needs to model this new quality of consciousness in his or her own practice and life. As facilitators, we teach as much by how we are ourselves, as we do through the learning experiences we create.

Time. The issue of time will also be significant. Based on this research in the reflective practice class, time will be essential in two ways. Time will be essential for a sense of trust, respect, and cohesion or community to emerge within a group of practitioners. This research suggests that these positive interpersonal relationships and sense of community are indispensable for an effective reflective learning group. Time will also be significant for a group to learn the many new skills that they need to effectively engage in reflective learning in their practice. Sufficient time will also be needed for a group to learn and to practice the various dialogical learning processes. This is a lot of time for professional practitioners to commit, but the payoff in terms of personal development and in terms of improvements to one's practice should make this investment of time very worthwhile.

Building on what already exists. In many cases, "communities of practitioners" already exist. Practitioners already get together for meetings and conferences on an ongoing basis. Also in many cases practitioners are participating in email-based discussion groups via the Internet. Much of the infrastructure is in place to transform these "communities of practitioners" into practice-based reflective learning groups and ultimately into "learning communities." Conducting ongoing reflective learning groups with practitioners raises many challenges: How much face-to-face time is needed? How do we sustain these practice-based reflective learning groups remotely over time?

Assuming a group had mastered the different dialogical learning processes in face-to-face meetings, can these be continued via email discussion groups?

Implications for Future Research

This research took a broad brush stroke look at two dimensions of a reflective practice group: how participants made meaning; and what were the underlying processes of the class. In focusing on these two aspects, this study addressed only the tip of the iceberg. Much still needs to be understood. More research is needed to hone this model of reflective learning.

Dialogical Learning Processes

More research is needed on the underlying dynamics of dialogue within the class. I suggested that each individual interaction within the class could be classified as one of the different dialogical learning processes; however, the flow among these four dialogical learning processes was not explored as part of this research. Recall that the tape-recordings of the class sessions were unsatisfactory and yielded little useful data for analysis. Questions remain about how the conversation within the class flowed between the different types of dialogue. If we could build a mature group where participants had mastered all the different dialogical learning processes, what would the patterns of conversation look like? This would be a fruitful area for further research.

Self-reflection for Personal Development

Another area for future research relates to a dimension of the class that had to be excluded because of the need to limit the scope of this research. There was evidence in the data to suggest that there was a fifth dialogical learning process focusing on self-reflection

for personal development. This fifth dialogical learning process was related to the existing dialogical learning process of self reflection. The dialogical learning process of self-reflection, described in Chapter 6, was concerned mainly with meaning making and focused on self-reflection for logoic self-awareness and critical self-awareness. The data suggested that there was another dialogical learning process of self-reflection which focused more explicitly on self-reflection for personal development. This dialogical learning process of self-reflection for personal development focused on fostering a strong sense of self, along with a sense of independence, autonomy and self-determination on the part of participants. For example, the group suggested to Xiaopei that she may need to develop a greater sense of independence from her parents. Participants talked about helping others realize their ability to think for themselves; to look at situations from different perspectives; to set goals for themselves and to strive to meet those goals; and to be proactive versus reactive. The data suggested that this dialogical learning process of self-reflection for personal development fostered a shift for participants from a dependent, unthinking, unfocused, and reactive way of being, to an independent, self-thinking, goal-driven, and proactive way of being. The data also suggested that, if an individual did not have a strong sense of self, they were likely victims of abuse or oppression by others in say a marriage or even at a place of work. This dialogical learning process of self-reflection for personal development would seem to be a fruitful area to explore in future research.

Overall, this research identified four or five different types of dialogical learning processes. These were types of dialogue which together were aimed at fostering the new quality of consciousness described here. As we come to understand this process better, other types of dialogue may be identified.

Spiritual Dimension of the Reflective Practice Class

Another aspect of this research which had to be excluded concerned the spiritual dimensions of the reflective practice class. The group that participated in this particular reflective practice class were unique because several members had a deep spiritual awareness. They described many phenomena in the class in spiritual terms. Participants talked about a Big Self as opposed to their little self, about Self-reflection as meditation, about the concept of a group mind, about being moved to speak, about wisdom, about developing a loving way of relating to the world and others. However, because these ideas represented a different paradigm and because of the need to place a boundary around this already large project, these descriptions were set aside and a description of this spiritual dimension of the reflective practice class was not included in this report. Again the spiritual dimension of reflective practice would seem to be a very fruitful area to explore in future research.

Dynamics of Action Within an Interpretivist Frame

Learning from experience involves cycles of reflection and action, referred to as praxis. The reflective practice class was strong on the reflection side, but it did not address the action side very much. In emphasizing reflection on lived experience, the class emphasized developing an authentic awareness grounded in the lifeworld. We can only assume that authentic awareness will lead to authentic action or practice. This dimension of the class needs to be explored further. The dynamics of our actions or practice need to be raised to a level of conscious awareness. What are the dynamics of practice in real life? Do we act based on the ideas in our heads, or do our perceptions form the basis of our actions? The data suggested that spontaneous reactions are isomorphic to the structure of lived experience. Also, the fifth dialogical learning process of self-reflection for personal development talked about fostering a shift from being reactive to being proactive. How do

things change when we engage in purposeful action? We need to revisit Schön's (1983, 1987, 1991) work in this area. Dewey (1938) also talks about the transformation of impulse to purpose which then guides intelligent action. Fals Borda's (1998) concept of phronesis, which suggests that action should be guided by ethical and practical concerns is also relevant to this discussion. We need a better understanding of the dynamics of spontaneous action and purposeful action within the lifeworld.

Human Consciousness

Another fruitful area for further research is the area of human consciousness. Through this research, we have discovered that the structure of our consciousness is not preordained, and, further, that it is under our conscious control. This starts us thinking about other possibilities of deliberately structuring our consciousness. We have seen a couple of different configurations of consciousness in this research. We have seen that the positivist paradigm defines person as subject existing separate from the world as object (s / o). The interpretivist paradigm defines person as subject in interaction with world as object (s --- o). The spiritual paradigm introduces the notion of a Big Self within each of us, sitting behind our little selves, which defines yet another structure of consciousness (Ss ---o). One perspective of the spiritual paradigm suggests that our vocation is to dis-identify from the little self and identify with the Big Self. (Articulating the details of the structure of consciousness from a spiritual perspective could be the focus of future research as suggested earlier). Yet another perspective on the structure of human consciousness denies that we should consider the world as object at all. Berry and Clark (1991) in their book *Befriending the Earth: A Theology of Reconciliation Between Humans and the Earth*, suggest that "the universe is a community of subjects, not a collection of objects" (p. 96) and so the relation is conceived of as s --- s. Berry and Clark's perspective emphasizes the need for us to strive to exist in dialogic relation with the world (in particular that we strive to exist in dialogic relation with what we have

heretofore conceived of as the inanimate physical world). I have identified just three or four structures of consciousness, no doubt there are others.

Also, the issue of how we view the self raises other complications. The principle of intentionality may be a basic principle of our relatedness to the world. How we define the self (the S pole of the S --- O relation), however, and where we draw the boundaries of the self, shapes how we make sense of our lives. How the self is defined is also not preordained. Across cultures there is much variation on how the self is defined. These range from the group-defined sense of self of some African tribes, to the individuality of Western cultures. Wilber (1979, p. 10) identified several different structures of consciousness based on where the boundaries of the self are drawn. He outlines a "spectrum of consciousness", with consciousness defined on different levels depending on whether the self is defined at the level of the persona, the ego, the total organism, up to the transpersonal level and what he calls unity consciousness. How do these different configurations of self affect how people make sense of the situations of their lives? The research on the fifth dialogical learning process of self-reflection for personal development is also interesting for this same reason. Speaking from our individualistic Western sense of self, how does an individual with a strong and healthy sense of self (someone who is independent, a self-thinker, goal-driven and proactive) make sense of their world versus someone who has a very poor sense of self (someone who is dependent, not a self-thinker, unfocused, and reactive). Many adult educators work with welfare recipients who may come with a very poor self-image and this handicaps them in leading effective lives.

Now that we realize that the structure of consciousness, and indeed the structure of self, are not preordained, this raises many questions: What is the ideal structure of self and consciousness that we ought to be fostering? Much conflict and suffering is caused by the structure of self and of consciousness. As educators, through our pedagogy, we have a profound impact on shaping the self and the consciousness of participants who we work

with. We face the urgent task now of figuring out what the ideal way of being is! More research is needed on the structure of self and the structure of consciousness which we can point to as an ideal model for human development.

Implications for the Evolution of Human Consciousness

One of the principal findings of this research was that the reflective practice class fostered a transformation of consciousness for participants. The class fostered a new quality of consciousness described as a conscious, interpretive, critically self-aware, and dialogic consciousness. In this final section, I will address three implications of this finding as it relates to the evolution of human consciousness.

New Quality of Consciousness Has Potential to Improve the Quality of Human Life

This research suggests that the new quality of consciousness fostered by the reflective practice class has the potential to help improve the quality of human life. Our consciousness has been shaped by what has been the dominant paradigm in our culture – the positivist paradigm. We have all been schooled from this positivist paradigm, which dictated its own pedagogy described as a teacher-centered and curriculum-centered model. As Freire (1970) pointed out, this pedagogy (banking method of education) in turn has shaped our consciousness in innumerable ways. Most significantly, this pedagogy has had the effect of suppressing our true relation with the world, the fact that we co-create our reality (the intentionality of consciousness). Many of the problems we experience today can be perceived as paradigm-related problems, symptom of our being schooled from a positivist paradigm and living in a culture dominated by the positivist paradigm. More specifically, this research suggests that many of the problems we experience today

can be traced to the type of schizophrenic or split consciousness that participants in this study exhibited.

Our default consciousness was described as a positivist consciousness. This positivist consciousness explains our belief in an universal reality which leads to all sorts of communication problems, which in turn leads to relationship problems. Our lack of self-awareness, and our alienation from each other and from the world around us, can all be traced to our modernist upbringing. Our dependence on experts and our lack of any disposition to pay attention to or connect with our lived experience (our alienation from the lifeworld) are also rooted in a positivist meta-narrative. Meanwhile our essential relatedness to the world continues to operate in a subconscious way. Left to itself, it operates in a projective way rather than a receptive way. Consequently, we live our lives in auto-pilot, programmed and conditioned by our past experience and culture, rather than being firmly rooted in, and living creatively in the present. On a personal level, we live out dysfunctional patterns of experiencing and behaving that we have learned when we were young. On a personal level and as communities, we encounter the world and each other in terms of the past rather than being present to each other in the present. We exhibit an inability to escape from our history which means that old conflicts are senselessly perpetuated (for example, Northern Ireland). The combined effect of our schizophrenic consciousness (representing our default positivist consciousness and an interpretivist consciousness operating subconsciously) has been the source of much human conflict and suffering on a personal level and societal level.

The pedagogy inherent within the reflective practice class promises to help address many of the problems associated with this schizophrenic consciousness. By fostering ***logoic self-awareness***, the class fostered an awareness for participants of their implicit interpretive process of meaning making. In so doing, the positivist consciousness was unseated from its position as our default consciousness. Participants changed from believing in a universal reality to coming to appreciate that we live in a world of personal

meaning and multiple realities. Apparently this one change can have incredible impact on many aspects of our lives. Since we now appreciate that we live in a world of personal meanings and multiple realities, this raises the value of listening. It empowers us to communicate better which suggests that, in turn, our relationship might improve. We also understand ourselves and others better. We understand where our actions and reactions come from. By fostering ***critical self-awareness***, participants were able to "clean up" their heretofore subconscious interpretive process of meaning making. This empowered participants to let go of subconscious stereotypes and prejudices they held. They were empowered to unlearn dysfunctional patterns of behavior learned in their youth. In gaining a enhanced level of critical self-awareness, we could free ourselves of prejudices, stereotypes and dysfunctional patterns of behavior and, in so doing, eliminate much unintended violence and confusion from our lives. Finally, by fostering a ***new receptive and critically self-aware way of making meaning***, participants also learned that they don't have to react from the presuppositions that made up their interpretive perspective. Participants learned how to bracket their presuppositions and take on an open appreciative and receptive way of encountering the world and others. This was characterized as a loving way of relating to the world and others. This adoption of a receptive stance towards the world and others would not be possible without first raising one's subconscious interpretive process of meaning making to a level of conscious awareness. By adopting an open, appreciative and receptive way of relating to the world and others, participants learned to strive for clarity of perception. Participants learned to see the world and others more authentically as they are rather than as they themselves were. The process of bracketing enabled participants to let go of the past and forgive. Participants learned to be present to the world and others by encountering the world and others from emptiness.

Overall the personal and social implications of attaining this new quality of consciousness fostered by the reflective practice class are enormous. The quality of our

lives should improve. We should be able to live free and creative lives. We should be able to choose our perspectives and control our own experiences rather than being controlled by them. We should have better communication with those around us, thus, better relationships and a greater sense of community. We should be able to live more consciously. We should be able to live in the present rather than reacting from the past. In Freire's terms, this new quality of consciousness would enable us to consciously write our own history.

New Quality of Consciousness is Supported by Accounts of the Evolution of Human Consciousness in the Literature

The transformation of consciousness fostered by the class seems to be supported by accounts of the changes in human consciousness found in the literature. Reason (1995) describes a similar progression of human consciousness.

> Human consciousness has evolved (and is evolving) through three broad phases. In the first phase human consciousness is undifferentiated from the natural world and people live in deep unconscious communion with their surroundings. In the second phase human beings progressively differentiate themselves from their environment, developing a separate sense of self, and of community; in an extreme of this phase (which characterizes much of Western consciousness at the present time) participation is denied and people live in an alienated consciousness. In the third stage the sense of participation is regained but in a new way so that human beings participate intentionally and awarely in the creation of their world. This last phase is on the whole more potential than realized. (Reason, 1994, p. 17)

Barfield (1957) refers to these three phases as *original participation*, in which humanity is deeply embedded in their world, consciousness is undifferentiated, there is no distinction between subject and object and little reflectiveness; *unconscious participation* which develops as the self is differentiated and separated from other and the world and participation is denied; and *final participation* in which participation is regained but in a new way so that human beings participate intentionally and awarely in the creation of their world. (Reason, 1995, p. 2)

It is particularly important to note that the worlds of original participation, loss of participation, and final participation are literally different: different worlds are created because the forms of interaction between human consciousness and the primal givenness of the cosmos are different. In particular the world of final participation is not the same as the world of original participation -- it is more conscious, more choiceful, more self-reflexive. (Reason, 1994, p. 17).

In its descriptions of "participants' everyday consciousness" and the "new quality of consciousness" fostered by the class, this research provides some data-based descriptions of the levels of consciousness that Barfield and Reason describe as *unconscious participation* and *final participation* respectively.

Freire also talks about similar levels of consciousness. He talks about *submersion* in reality, and *emergence* through recognizing our true relation with the world, moving towards *critical intervention* in reality: "Humankind *emerge* from their *submersion* and acquire the ability to *intervene* in reality as it is unveiled. *Intervention* in reality - historical awareness itself - thus represents a step forward from *emergence*" (p. 90). Freire clarified the role of pedagogy in creating and maintaining these different levels of consciousness: "Whereas banking education anesthetizes and inhibits creative power,

problem posing education involves a constant unveiling of reality. The former attempts to maintain the *submersion* of consciousness: the latter strives for the *emergence* of consciousness and *critical intervention* in reality" (p. 62).

New Quality of Consciousness Provides a Foundation for Fostering Collective Action to Transform Social Reality

This research suggests that the new quality of consciousness fostered by the class leads naturally on to collective action to transform social reality. The transformations of consciousness fostered by this reflective learning class promoted transformation on an individual psychological level. The class fostered the conscious recognition of each individual's co-constitutive relation with the world. Recognizing our co-constitutive relation with the world, we are empowered to shape our personal reality. The next logical step is that we come to realize the socially constructed nature of our shared reality and to recognize that likewise we are empowered to collectively shape our shared reality. The transformation of consciousness on an individual level is a step in the direction of helping adults to work together to change social reality. The agency and power this model suggests has the potential to foster greater social engagement. This realization of our relation with the world can help revive the ideal of democracy, and help us work towards a true participatory democracy (Shotter and Harre, 1993; Thomson, 1990).

When social reality is perceived as fixed and immutable, the response is resignation and hopelessness. When we recognize our role in co-creating reality, everything changes. Freire (1970) suggests that "Individuals begin to behave differently with regard to objective reality, once that reality has ceased to look like a blind alley and has taken on its true aspect: a challenge which human beings must meet" (p. 87).

This realization of our co-participation in the creation of our shared (social) reality can foster solidarity and comradeship between people who wish to work to make

a better world. Our social reality, just like the creation of our personal reality, while subconscious and unexamined, results in unseemly patterns of behavior and contradictions. We need to bring the process of the social construction of reality similarly under critical examination and conscious control (see Berger and Luckman, 1966; Shotter, 1993; McNamee and Gergen, 1998). This way, we can correct distortions and contradictions in our worldmaking that lead to many injustices and inequalities. We could build conscious communities where we are deliberate about the shared realities we create. Conscious communities working for a sustainable lifestyle and for social, economic and environmental justice.

These aspirations are all consistent with the traditions of adult education. Lindeman (1926) who spoke at length about first fostering the freedom of the individual personality, continues to a discussion of collective action to foster social change.

> Orthodox education may be a preparation for life but adult education is an agitating instrumentality for changing life. ... Adult Education will become an agency of progress if its short-time goal of self-improvement can be made compatible with a long-time, experimental but resolute policy of changing social order. (Lindeman, 1926, p. 165-166).

For the general populace to attain a higher level of consciousness (equivalent to the *new quality of consciousness* described here, or to what Reason calls *participative* consciousness, or what Freire calls *critical consciousness*) is, perhaps, the next step in the evolution of human consciousness. Freire suggests that this is our "true vocation." We, as adult educators, need to strive to realize these higher levels of consciousness. We need to help adults attain these higher levels of consciousness, so that they might become as Freire (1970) suggests, "more fully human."

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Course Syllabus

Course Syllabus
PES 513: Reflective Practice in Education and Psychology

To be a reflective practitioner means to engage in a study of one's own practice with the intent to improve that practice. Reflective practice is rarely a solitary activity, and usually involves people in some form of collaborative effort. Insofar as reflective practice involves collaborative learning, anyone interested in studying reflective practice will also study collaborative learning. Collaborative learning is best understood by actively engaging in collaborative learning. Collaborative learning is thus the principal mode of learning in this course, in which we will increase our knowledge of reflective practice and improve our abilities to learn and practice reflexively. We will from time to time, take time to observe ourselves and reflect on what we see.

Requirements:

1. Write an educational autobiography, distribute copies to all class members, and engage in a discussion/dialogue with class members about the autobiography. One page, and see Chapter 10 in Mezirow for ideas.
2. Write a description of a critical incident, distribute copies to all class members and engage in a discussion/dialogue about the critical incident. One page, and see Chapter 9 in Mezirow for ideas.
3. Choose one of the reflective learning "tools" in Mezirow, and help the rest of us learn more about how to use that tool. By "tool" is meant the topic of one of the following chapters in Mezirow: 8, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, & 17. You may choose to team with one or more others in class for this purpose.
4. At the end of the course write a letter to the class as a group, and say what this experience has meant to you.
5. Attend all class sessions. If this becomes problematic for you, please discuss with J. Peters. Please try to limit your "misses" to one or two at most, otherwise consider taking the course in another semester.

Appendix B: Information and Consent Form

This research project entitled "Case Study of Learning to become Reflective Practitioners in Collaborative Learning Setting," involves case study method research with students engaged in two sections of a graduate-level course "PES-513 Reflective Practice". It is designed to describe the nature of the process of how participants learn about reflective practice in a collaborative learning setting. More specifically, this project aims to describe how and what people learn about reflective practice, both individually and as a group, in a collaborative learning setting.

Participants will be asked to permit the tape-recording of all class meetings. Selected class sessions will subsequently be transcribed by the researcher or by a professional transcriptionist. Participants will also be asked to take part in one group interview and a number of individual interviews outside of class time. This is expected to involve one or more individual interviews but not more than five individual interviews in total. Each interview will last up to one hour and will take place over a period of six months from the date of your signature on this form. The interviews will also be tape-recorded and subsequently transcribed by the researcher or by a professional transcriptionist.

In relation to the tapes of the class meetings and the group interview, any class member will be free to hear these tapes and to read the associated transcripts. However, with regard to the tapes of the individual interviews, only the person interviewed and the researcher will have access to these tapes and the associated transcripts. Excerpts from the hard-copy transcripts of class sessions or individual interviews may be included in the final research report, but the transcripts will be purged of all matters which would identify you as the class participant or interviewee. References to you in the transcripts and in the report will be made by using a pseudonym only. Audio recordings of the class sessions and the interviews may be heard once by a professional transcriptionist and, thereafter, immediately returned to me. If a transcriptionist is engaged he/she will sign a "Certificate of Confidentiality." I will retain the audio-tapes and their corresponding identification-keyed hard-copy transcripts until this study is completed. At that time, the tapes will be erased and the identification-key destroyed. The signed 'Informed Consent' forms will be retained in a locked filing cabinet in my office for a period of three years after the study is completed. All participants will be free to read the final report upon its completion.

Your participation in this study will be greatly appreciated, as it will contribute to research on the practice of collaborative learning, and possibly to your understanding of your own practice. However, your participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time during or between interviews without penalty or loss of benefits. Verbal accounts of your experiences are completely at your own discretion and their breath and depth are totally under your control.

Your signature on the attached form below indicates that your understanding of and willingness to participate in this project. Thank you for your contribution to the project. Any questions prior to, during, or after your participation may be directed to me at the following address: Donal M. Crosse, c/o Center for Literacy Studies, 2046 Terrace Avenue, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN 37996-3400. My phone number is (615) 974-4109.

Donal M. Crosse

CONSENT FORM

I, _____ _____, agree to participate in the aforementioned study. I give my consent to the tape-recording of the class sessions and I also agree to participate in individual interviews which will also be tape-recorded. In the individual interviews I understand that I am free to verbalize my experience at my discretion. I also understand that I may interrupt or terminate, my participation in this project at any time.

_____	_____	_____
(name, please print)	(signature)	(date)

Appendix C: Interview Schedule for the Phenomenological Interview

1. Think back to your recent experiences in the Reflective Practice class. What stood out most for you in the class? Choose one experience and tell me about it (repeat for each experience mentioned).

2. Think back to when you were sharing your learning autobiography or your critical incident in the class. Please describe this experience.

3. Think of a time when someone else was sharing their learning autobiography or critical incident. Please describe this experience (repeat for each experience mentioned).

4. Think of a time when you were particularly engaged in the group discussion. Please describe this experience (repeat for each experience mentioned).

5. Think of a time when you were not engaged in the group discussion. Please describe this experience (repeat for each experience mentioned).

6. Think of a time when you were aware of another group members participation in the group. Please describe this experience (repeat for each incident mentioned).

7. Think of a time when you were aware of the facilitator in the group. Please describe this experience (repeat for each experience mentioned).

8. Think of a significant learning experience you had in the class. Please describe this experience (repeat for each learning experience mentioned).

9. What was your experience of learning in this class? Describe this experience. How does it differ from other classes you have taken?

10. Do you think differently about what you know and how you come to know as a result of having participated in this collaborative learning class?
(With this question I will try to get at participant's views on knowledge and learning, and how the collaborative learning experience has changed their perspectives if at all).

Appendix D: Sample Critical Incident

PES 513. Fall 1994
2 p.m. Section

Description of A Critical Incident (of the "failure" type) By: Bill

I was teaching a course for college students entitled "Academic Skills 1010" at a medium-sized southern university in the spring semester of this year. I had been teaching this course for 5 or 6 semesters and had had what I considered to be fairly successful experiences in it. (I could see definite improvement from the first time I taught it.)

The class numbered approximately 25 students, and we met on Mondays and Wednesdays from 10:00 - 10:50 a.m. We used a textbook called Becoming a Master Student by Dave Ellis, which covered such topics as time management, mnemonics, note-taking techniques, reading textbooks for enhanced comprehension, test-taking strategies, etc. The course was worth one hour of credit, although I tried to stress the inherent benefits of the class as being much more important than whatever grade or credit was earned.

Many of the students who had taken the class previously had attested to its beneficial effect, and I was happy to be part of helping students succeed in college.

I was aware, however, that some of the students who enrolled in the class evidently did so because they thought they could get an easy "A," and not for the sake of the content or the chance to improve their study habits, etc. As the semester progressed, it became obvious to me and to others in the class that some students, maybe 5 or 6, were not really interested in what we were doing. In fact, they engaged in side conversations and other distracting behaviors on a regular basis and seemed to want to try to provoke me to anger, which they succeeded in doing on several occasions.

Near the end of the semester, with approximately 2 weeks left, I dismissed the class after assigning them several projects to work on, telling them that we would not meet again until the day they were to turn in these assignments, which would be the last day of class. After the class, several students approached me and expressed disappointment that the class would stop meeting. They felt that I was allowing the disrupters to ruin things for the rest of the class. My intent was to put a stop to the power struggle and game-playing that was going on.

I realized, upon reflection, that I was indeed surrendering to the disruptive students in a way, and I was quite upset with myself for doing so. I probably should have told them to leave class and not return, but I was too concerned about problems this might cause and I took the easy way out rather than facing a possible fight.

VITA

Donal Crosse was born in Tipperary, Ireland on October 28, 1962. He attended the Christian Brothers School in his home town of Cashel, Co. Tipperary. Upon completing secondary school in 1980, Donal went to study at the University of Limerick, receiving a Bachelor of Science degree in Applied Mathematics in 1985. After graduating from college, he worked for a number of years in the area of education technology. In 1990, he and his wife moved to Knoxville, Tennessee so that he could pursue his lifelong dream of studying in the area of adult education. Donal graduated from the University of Tennessee in 1993 with a Master of Science degree in Technological and Adult Education. He enrolled in the doctoral program at the University of Tennessee in the Fall semester 1993. During his graduate work, he was employed at the Center for Literacy Studies at the University of Tennessee, first as a graduate research assistant, and later as a full-time employee. From exposure to the work of the Center for Literacy Studies and the nearby Highlander Education and Research Center, he developed a keen interest in participatory and empowering approaches to adult education. Upon completing his doctoral program, Donal and his family plan to move back to Ireland where he will teach personal development courses within a new college that has opened in his native Co. Tipperary.