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Adult Learning in the Context of Interreligious Dialogue: A Collaborative Research Study Involving Christians, Jews, and Muslims

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ADULT LEARNING IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE:

A COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH STUDY

INVOLVING CHRISTIANS, JEWS, AND MUSLIMS

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PREFACE

This project addresses two different dimensions of research and practice in the field of adult education. First, it is an account of what we have learned about the nature of adult learning in the context of interreligious dialogue. This was the anticipated outcome of this research as conceived and developed in the initial stages of the research process. The purpose of the study was to consider the question: "What is the nature of adult learning that occurs in the context of interreligious dialogue?" From this central question emerged the particular questions we addressed in our interviews and analysis process: "What motivates adults to begin and sustain involvement in interreligious dialogue?" and "What elements characterize the knowledge that participants believe that they acquire as they consciously and purposefully engage in interreligious dialogue?" The findings gleaned from our research are metaphors and stories that describe the nature of the learning in the context of interreligious dialogue in response to these and other, related, questions.

Second, it is an account of both the development and impact of the various kinds of collaborative processes, in which we engaged, to learn about adult learning in the context of interreligious dialogue. A highlight of this dimension of the project is a thick description of a new Collaborative Inquiry Metaphor Creation and Analysis Method (CIMCAM) focus group activity we developed especially for data collection and analysis, which we introduce in

chapter three and elucidate in chapter five. While we always knew these aspects of our collaborative research were important, we did not anticipate the importance of writing and sharing this dimension of the study at the start.

Chapter Overview

Throughout this project, we share our reflections about both the interreligious dialogue process, and the collaborative research process on ourselves as individuals, as educational leaders in our own religious communities, as adult education researchers, and as adult education practitioners operating in the larger American milieu. Embedded deeply in both dimensions of the research project are reflections on our experiences as fellow students who met in the context of a doctoral cohort at National-Louis University who then became collaborative learning partners, interreligious dialogue partners, and ultimately, collaborative inquiry research partners.

We wrote each chapter so that it could stand on its own. Starting with chapter one will provide readers with a helpful overview. However, if you are interested in one particular dimension of this research, you can read the chapters of interest out of order, with the help of the outline below.

Chapter one introduces us as individuals and as collaborative researchers, and offers a rationale for why this study contributes to the field of adult education. In chapter two, we talk extensively about our own commitments as religious women, religious educators, and adult educators. Chapter three

outlines the theoretical framework that informs the research, provides detailed information about how participants were identified and provides specific details about the research methodology, including the Collaborative Inquiry Metaphor Creation and Analysis Method (CIMCAM). In chapter four, we share details of the collaborative process with a focus on how we planned and made decisions, collaborative data collection and analysis, and the collaborative writing process. Chapter five provides a thick description of CIMCAM, using excerpts from transcripts of our focus group interviews to illuminate the process.

In chapters six, seven, and eight we present the findings from our analysis of data gathered in the individual and focus group interviews. They include many of the personal stories and visual metaphors the 20 participants in our study, including ourselves, shared in the data collection stage of the research process. Chapter nine, addresses the question: "What are the implications and applications of learning, in the context of interreligious dialogue, for the theory and practice of adult education?" In this chapter, we discuss the significance of how symbols, including words, images and stories, are an essential component in the learning that takes place in the context of interreligious dialogue. We further discuss how this also was a significant aspect of how we learned about the learning in this context, as researchers. Further, we discuss how both the cognitive/intellectual and the affective/emotional domains are engaged in the context of interreligious dialogue and in our experience of collaboratively researching the nature of the learning in the context of interreligious dialogue.

Each dimension of this work has been challenging and enriching. It is therefore with a spirit of great joy that we bring the insights we uncovered to our colleagues in the field of adult education. It is our hope that abundant, luscious, and nourishing fruit will spring forth from the seeds of these fruits of our labor.

CHAPTER ONE

PROJECT OVERVIEW

In the three years preceding the writing up of the findings of this study, the world and its peoples have seen many examples of conflict. In the Middle East, Israelis and Palestinians have scuffled, with the resurgence of violence between the two sides in the last six months or so. In China, the majority Han Chinese and the Chinese Muslims have clashed. In India, there have been conflicts between Hindus and Christians. In Indonesia, ethnic and religious violence has created unrest and upheaval. In the former Yugoslavia, Serbs and ethnic Albanians clashed. Most recently, the Taliban in Afghanistan have destroyed Buddhist statues representing a centuries-old religious, cultural, and historical legacy. People of differing religious groups, representing different ideologies and histories have responded to difference with violence.

While it may be argued that many of these differences are not religious but rather political, there can be no denying that religious ideals have been used to equip the arsenals. As Eck (1993) has suggested:

> These struggles are not wholly religious in origin, but they are made more difficult and complex by the extensive use of religious language and symbolism. The encounter of people of differing faiths in the world today, for better and for worse, is one of the most important facts of our time. (p.200)

The United States is not immune from this clash of religious difference. According to the FBI statistics on hate crimes, there were 1,532 reported

religious hate crime offenses in 1999, ranging from intimidation to murder/non-negligent manslaughter. This is up from 1, 475 reported in 1998. The picture is not pretty.

In the midst of all this violence and intolerance, however, there have also been rays of hope. A group of Muslims and Jews have been regularly getting together to talk across religious difference, to learn from and about each other, and to create positive relationships in a much-divided world. A group of Christian and Jewish women have established a dialogue group that is now in its 16th year. They too have been learning about each other from each other. Another group of Christians and Jews began study of religious texts in order to better understand each other, and many of these have gone on to other learning tasks together. A couple of doctoral students – a Muslim and a Jew – have been learning both about each other as religious people and about what happens when religiously committed people sit down to learn together, about each other These are but a few select examples.

None of these rays of hope are changing the world in its entirety, but each is impacting its own little corner of the world in subtle and not-so-subtle ways. It is the process that takes the participants in these dialogues from being on different, and seemingly, opposite, sides of a religious border to a place where while remaining committed to their own tradition they are able to understand, empathize with, and appreciate the beauty and difference of those across that

religious border. That is what this study is about. It is about the nature of the learning in the context of interreligious dialogue.

We are those two doctoral students. We met in 1998 within the context of our doctoral program in adult and continuing education at National-Louis University in Chicago. We are American religious and adult educators from two different religious traditions, born on two different continents, representing different cultural and ethnic traditions, representing two different generations according to American citizenship (one a first generation American and the other a third generation American).

From our initial encounter as graduate students, eventually emerged a conversation about our surprisingly common goals as American religious and adult educators, and our mutually held conviction that greater understanding was needed between people who are committed to different religious traditions and worldviews. Our own interreligious dialogue and its impact in helping both of us better understand each other, led us to think about how the vehicle of interreligious dialogue might impact others, particularly in moving toward a better world. We asked ourselves: "What would it look like if the social spaces Americans share were filled with sincere dialogue about our ideas and assumptions, our definitions and our feelings about our religious commitments and how they impact upon our decisions and actions?" What would it look like when adults learn how to cross borders of difference through dialogue without becoming assimilated into what lies on the other side?

This dialogue and these early questions, initiated the collaborative inquiry research project that we present in this study. The purpose of this research study was to investigate the nature of the learning that occurs when adults who identify themselves as being members of particular religious traditions, intentionally participate in purposeful and sustained interreligious dialogue for the purpose of learning about each other. In the study, we learned about the experience of learning in the context of interreligious dialogue through critical reflection of our own experiences with one another as dialogue partners and through a process of collaborative inquiry about the nature of the learning in the context of interreligious dialogue as experienced by 18 others. These others were participants from the Muslim-Jewish, and Christian-Jewish dialogue groups identified above.

While we recognize that there are many borders of difference that can potentially lead to misunderstanding, conflict, and violence, we have chosen to focus on religious borders because this is an area that has historically not been included in discussions in the field of adult education. Furthermore, our own strong identities as religious people leads us to believe that religious identity and religiously inspired personally held beliefs play a crucial role in how people act in the world. Finally, we agree with Eck (1993) in her suggestion that "religious traditions have been part of the problem as one surveys the divisions and conflicts of the present world; and there is no question that religious traditions will also have to be part of the solution" (p.215).

Why We Believe That This Research Is Important For American Society

From a nation of primarily Protestants, Catholics and Jews, America has become increasingly religiously diverse. Large numbers of new Americans have come to this country bringing with them their diverse cultures including their religious ideas and practices. One reason for this change was the shift in the national position on immigration, reflected in the immigration act initiated by John F. Kennedy, before his death, and signed into law in 1965 by Lyndon B. Johnson. This new law eliminated national origins quotas and opened the door for increased immigration from Asia (Eck 1993). As new Americans have always done in the generations that have come before, this new generation of new Americans has built new religious centers for community fellowship and worship where none had been before (Eck, 1997). People of different religious traditions do not live on isolated, separate islands; rather they are in constant contact, "bump[ing] up against one another all the time" (Eck, 1993, p.190). America's common spaces - where we work, play and participate as citizens in the institutions of democracy - are filled with adults who more and more know less and less about one another.

Harvard religion scholar, Diana Eck (1993), helps us to imagine the contours of what this change in the religious landscape of America means for American adults, when she posits that there are three basic responses to the challenge of an encounter with religious difference: exclusivism, inclusivism, and

pluralism. While these are not the only responses, we agree with her that they represent a range of interpretation that might be found within almost every religious tradition.

The exclusivist response is the one that is best represented through the example of the Christian fundamentalist groups in the United States. These are the people who say: "Our own community, our tradition, our understanding of reality, our encounter with God, is the one and only truth, excluding all others" (Eck, 1993, p.168). For exclusivists, God is theirs alone. An exclusivist stance is one in which religious identity becomes the basis on which a group battles for its own interests *against* that of other groups with whom is shared social and political space. It is too easily a stance that leads to violence.

The inclusivist response is the one best represented by what has come to be known as multiculturalism. In the inclusivist view, "the plurality of religions is not seen as a threat, and 'others' are not seen as opponents" (Eck, 1993, p.179). There are two major issues involved in the taking of an inclusivist stance. The first is that it has the potential of bringing about a "theological supercessionism," a view that recognizes the presence of different religious communities and truths while qualifying that recognition with a sense that "our own way of seeing things is the culmination of the others, superior to the others, or at least wide enough to include the others under our universal canopy and in our own terms" (p.168). It is a casting of others in one's own language and within one's own framework. The second issue is that it is "a 'majority consciousness,' not necessarily in terms

of numbers, but in terms of power. And the consciousness of the majority is typically 'unconscious' because it is not tested and challenged by dialogue with dissenting voices" (p.185).

The pluralist response is acknowledgment that truth is not the "exclusive" or "inclusive" custody of any one religious tradition or community. This stance is not simply a matter of acknowledging plurality; rather it is an active engagement with that plurality. As pluralists " we recognize the limits of the world we already know and seek to understand others *in their own terms* [emphasis added]" (p.169). The plurality of religious traditions, in the pluralist view is "an opportunity for our energetic engagement and dialogue with one another. . . . it means opening up [our] commitments to the give and take of mutual discovery, understanding, and, indeed, transformation" (p. 168). It does not, however, mean giving up our commitments.

We understand the response of the pluralist, as Eck defines it, as the essential character of the intended outcome of interreligious dialogue that works. As a result, it is important to understand that when we ask our research question about the nature of the learning in the context of interreligious dialogue, we are investigating the learning experience from the shared perspective of the religious pluralist, even though it is clear that we do not share particular religious worldviews. We believe that learning about the religious other, from the other, addresses at least one important aspect of how to actualize the promise of religious freedom in America, now, and in the future.

In differentiating pluralism from relativism, multiculturalism, and subjectivism, Eck stresses *"pluralism is not the sheer fact of plurality alone, but is active engagement with plurality"* (p.191). The second point she makes in regards to this is that *"pluralism is not simply tolerance, but also the seeking of understanding"* (p.192). Third, she tells us *"pluralism is not simply relativism, but assumes real commitment"* (p.193). Fourth, she makes the point that *"pluralism is not syncretism, but it is based on respect for differences'* (p.197). Finally, she states *"pluralism is based on interreligious dialogue"* (p. 197).

It is our belief, framed within this pluralistic worldview, that if we can understand how to enable the transition from being strangers with our religious neighbors to not only accepting, but deeply understanding them, we will have moved forward as a society. The process of acknowledgement of and understanding about religious difference, accompanied by interpersonal relationships characterized by empathy, can be a critical and practical part of the process of life today. We agree with Eck that religious particularities and differing understandings of spirituality are the subject of dialogue, not a target for elimination (exclusivism) or inclusion into a larger majority norm (inclusivism). Diversity and plurality of religious commitment offer opportunities for dialogue and engagement that can lead to outcomes marked by "mutual discovery, understanding, and, indeed, transformation" (p.168). It was investigation of if, and how, the process of interreligious dialogue enables this journey of discovery and understanding, that was the focus of the study.

Who We Are in Relation to This Study

We are not distanced researchers attempting to hold ourselves outside of the research process. Rather, we acknowledge that we are co-constructors of knowledge about interreligious dialogue with the other participants of our study. Who we are is therefore important to understanding all aspects of this study. Throughout the book, we will refer to our religious commitments and how our own process of engaging in interreligious dialogue informed all aspects of the research. We introduce ourselves and the initiation of our collaboration briefly below. We provide more specific details about our religious commitments in the next chapter.

<u>Jane's Story</u>

I am a third generation Jewish American woman, who grew up in a small city in eastern Pennsylvania in the 1950's and 60's. Three of my grandparents immigrated to Philadelphia from Eastern Europe in the early part of the twentieth century. I have worked actively as a professional Jewish educator and educational consultant since 1981, engaged in facilitating teaching and learning programs for Jews of all ages. In addition, I have been involved in environmental education, science communication, and visual arts, by vocation and avocation, since 1974. My exposure to Islam and Muslims (prior to my meeting Nadira) was limited to high school and college course work and books, participation as a

guest in a couple of Iftar (Ramadan fast-breaking) meals at the Islamic Center of Cleveland, film, and media reports. While living and studying in Israel, I had an opportunity to visit the Islamic Museum and the Al Aqsa mosque, as a tourist. With these relatively limited experiences, my assumptions about Muslims were limited, based on a relatively uninformed, uncomplicated, and monolithic understanding of Islam. It was an understanding that was primarily filtered through the face of the Muslim communities of the Middle East, with some additional awareness of the uniquely American bent of the followers of the Nation of Islam.

Nadira's Story

I am a Shi'a Ismaili Muslim of East Indian ancestry, born in Zaire. I have lived in seven different cities, in four different countries, on three continents. I have been a religious educator, adjunct instructor, and educational consultant. My exposure to Judaism and Jews (prior to my encounter with Jane) was limited. It was primarily based on media coverage of the Israel-Palestinian situation, textbook encounters through formal education, relationships with secular Jews, historical (and sometimes polemic) accounts of Muslim-Jewish encounters, and Qur'anic literature on the relationship of Muslims and Jews (as well as Christians) as having originated from Abraham. My assumptions about Jews were based on an understanding of Judaism as a monolithic body of religious tradition and practice.

Our Story

Educators from very diverse worlds of practice, we were brought together as research scholars by being members of a cohort of learners in the National-Louis University (NLU) Adult and Continuing Education (ACE) Doctoral Program. Our first encounter was at the admissions weekend where we were placed in the same group to discuss our motivation and goals for participating in the program. From there, our awareness of each other grew, over time, during the program's first two-week residential summer institute and the weekends of study throughout the first year of our doctoral program. First as fellow students, and later as educators who are deeply grounded in our respective religious traditions, we began to work together collaboratively in the program. Several essential events fed the relationship.

Jane remembers: First of these events was my encounter with Nadira's library of Ismaili Muslim religious education curricula for children, located in the basement of her home. We had already established a friendly relationship during the first two-week Summer Institute of the NLU doctoral program. In fact, Nadira offered to give me a ride to the airport in Chicago, and a place to rest for a few hours before my flight home. It was an opportunity I thought I would have to look at Nadira's library of adult education books. Instead, time flew by as I asked Nadira about the little colorful books with the Arabic writing I saw on her shelf.

Nadira began to show me her collection of Ismaili Muslim educational materials and the fact that we were both involved in religious education in America for our respective religious communities became very apparent. This discovery led us to move from being fellow cohort members and friends in a doctoral program, to being religious and adult educator colleagues who shared concerns about how to foster the development of religious identity in members of our religious communities, while living as members of religious minority communities in the predominantly Christian and secular milieu here in America.

Nadira remembers: The second significant event came when Jane had the opportunity to plan an adult education program of her choice, as part of an invitation to teach an alumni educator scholar-in-residence. A graduate of the Rhea Hirsch School of Education at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Los Angeles (one of four seminary locations for preparing rabbis and Jewish education and communal service professionals for the Reform movement), Jane had been chosen to teach and speak on campus, for one week, in late fall 1998.

Jane invited me to co-facilitate a program, for the rabbinical, education and communal service students and faculty, based upon conversations we had following our first experiences thinking about Muslim and Jewish education in my basement, in Chicago. I accepted the invitation and we planned a program entitled "A Conversation in Muslim and Jewish Education." The program drew over 40 student and faculty participants, many of whom had never had such an

opportunity to learn about Islamic religious education in general, and the Ismaili Muslim community in particular. Of great interest to the assembly was the idea that there might be more to learn from one another not only about our respective religions but also how to respond to challenges inherent in the process of educating the children and adults within our respective communities, in America. We were encouraged and excited by planning and facilitating this program together.

While in Los Angeles, we consulted with Sara Lee, director of the Rhea Hirsch School of Education, about her work in Catholic-Jewish interreligious learning with Mary Boys of the Union Theological Seminary. This conversation inspired us to consider working on our doctoral research together focused around interreligious dialogue and adult learning.

The third significant event was our decision to work together on a class assignment for a research purpose statement that would be the precursor of a concept paper that would eventually evolve into this opening chapter. With this step, we consciously began to think about the larger implications of our work together, with a focus both on our collaborative, interreligious experiences and on what they might mean for the field of adult education. We began to look for connections between what we were experiencing ourselves and what we were learning through our coursework in adult education. For example, we found a link between our experience of talking to one another for hours on end about our personal experiences as a Muslim and as a Jew and the concept of dialogic

learning as represented in Mezirow's (1990) description of communicative

learning. In addition, we began to understand that in the process of learning

factual information about our respective religious traditions, we were engaging in

the process of critical reflection described by Mezirow (1990). As we look back

on it now, and as we have experienced it since then, we began our own learning

in the context of interreligious dialogue by "reassessing our own orientation to

receiving, knowing, believing, feeling and acting" (p.13) about one another as

members of our respective religious communities. We were doing this in the

presence of one another, and also on our own, as we reflected and moved

forward in time. What was significant about our dialogue was that we were

coming to understand the other against a global socio-political milieu in which

Jews and Muslims are often seen to be at odds with one another. Our

conversations were leading us down the path to a pluralist response to our

differences.

Parallel to these three significant foundational events was a deepening of

our personal and professional relationship. In spite of the fact that neither of us

now lives in Chicago where our doctoral studies are centered, our

accommodations at the home of another cohort member for the monthly

weekend seminars meant that we often spent time talking as we drove to and

from campus or shared a late night snack. The presence and participation of our

residential colleagues –our hostess, Carole Kabel, and another NLU ACE

doctoral student from out of state, Gary Cale -- further enhanced these

conversations. The process of reflecting back on what had been covered in our seminars or readings and sharing how this had relevance to our daily lives further increased our awareness of each other as individuals and as members of our respective religious communities. The structure of the doctoral program provided us with opportunity for hours of dialogue and conversation that deepened our friendship and we learned about one another, from one another, as religious women, as religious educators, and as adult educators.

Significance For The Field Of Adult Education

The field of adult education does include scholarship in the area of adult religious education as well as scholarship relating to learning across borders of difference, however, there is little scholarship in the field that specifically explores the crossing of borders of religious difference. Because of a current lack of focus on interreligious dialogue in the field of adult education, these research findings add to the knowledge base in the field of adult education, for people and organizations who are engaged in interreligious dialogue, in religious and educational contexts.

The focus of this study is interpretation of the experiences of participants engaged in interreligious dialogue. While we recognize that no education is neutral and that all education takes place in a socio-political context, we have chosen not to focus on issues of power relations or differences based on race, class, or ethnicity. Rather, our focus is on religious difference. Even within this

category of difference, however, we have chosen not to focus on the questions of power. Our focus is on the learning process at the individual, dialogical, and small group level rather than the structural or societal level.

It is not that we are not proponents of radical social change. However, this study focuses on our belief that the solitary, pluralistic responses of individuals can make a difference to how social change occurs. It is when enough individuals are motivated to stand up for the rights and privileges of those who are different that change happens at a structural level. This study focuses on the processes by which individuals change. It is for this reason that the following bodies of literature are most relevant to our work.

There are three primary bodies of literature that both inform, and are informed by, this research. The first body of literature is that of transformative learning theory. The second body of literature focuses on processes and outcomes of particular interreligious and ecumenical dialogue projects. This literature does not come from the field directly, but our research informs the field as we open the door to including discourse about interreligious dialogue in the field of adult education. Finally, the third body of literature includes a wide range of collaborative inquiry and collaborative learning ideas. A brief overview of how each body of literature impacts, and is impacted upon, by our work, follows.

Transformative Learning Theory

       The first area of research that informs our thinking about this work is that of transformation theory. Taylor (1998) discusses three distinct perspectives on transformation in adulthood: Mezirow's perspective transformation, Boyd's transformation as individuation, and Friere's conscientization. For this study, we believe that it is the research that has been generated in relation to the first two perspectives that will have the most impact on our work. While Friere's conscientization has great merit, it is not a model that directly relates to this study in that our focus is not explicitly on "unveiling or demythologizing of reality by the oppressed through the awakening of their critical consciousness" (Taylor, 1998, p.16) As we stated earlier, our focus is on change at the individual level and does not address issues of power. While we emphasize the role of critical reflection, we do not assume that this reflection is necessarily a reflection on the hegemonic structures of society, but rather on how individuals have come to see self and other.

     According to Mezirow (1990)

> 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, discriminatory, permeable, and integrative perspective; and of making decisions or otherwise acting upon these new understandings." (p.14).

       Our investigation of what happens when religiously committed individuals purposefully explore their assumptions and ideas about each other is informed by this core idea in transformation theory. In particular, Mezirow's ideas on

communicative learning and its importance to meaning making are significant aspects of the processes we seek to explore. As Mezirow (February 1999) states "We cannot make meaning alone". In the context of our work, a specific and intended strategy of making meaning with others is the idea of not only learning about the "other" through their eyes, but also learning about "self" in the presence of the "other". Thus, there are two aspects of Mezirow's ideas that are important to this study - the first is the process of critical self-reflection and the second is the process of communicative learning through dialogue.

While we have used Mezirow's work on transformative learning as a reference, there are key points at which we divert from it. In fact, one of the areas for which he has been criticized (Taylor, 1998; Kasl & Yorks, 2000) - and upon which we focus - is his lack of attention to the role that the experiential and affective dimensions play on the learning process. Another key point of divergence is in relation to his description of transformation as a 10-phase process that begins with a disorienting dilemma. Our understanding of the learning involved is not as "a dramatic, extraordinary experience, arising from and completing itself within a relatively unusual and upsetting event or series of events" but rather as a "more subtle, evolutionary, and even enigmatic" process (Dirkx, 2000, p.247).

In contrast to Mezirow's emphasis on the rational, Boyd's ideas on transformation both acknowledge and explore in depth the role of the whole person, with a focus on the psyche of the individual. However, Boyd's grounding

in depth psychology and the framing of his ideas based on the work of Carl Jung, result in a focus that remains primarily on the individual. Our ultimate purpose for engaging in this research resides in the social and interpersonal domain. While we believe that social change can only be accomplished through first focusing on the individual, we do not believe that maintaining a focus on the individual is sufficient for understanding learning in the context of interreligious dialogue. Thus, Boyd's focus on conflicts within the psyche of the individual and their resolution as transformation is a deviation from our focus on understanding adult learning within the social and interpersonal dimension of dialogue. In spite of this difference, we will use research based on Boyd's ideas as it relates to our findings. For this purpose, we will be using Dirkx's writings on individuation and transformation.

In identifying a fusion between Mezirow's emphasis on the rational and Boyd's emphasis on the individual psyche, we will make connections with literature relating to spirituality (Tisdell, 1999; English & Gillen (Eds.), 2000) and faith development (Fowler, 1981). The introduction of spirituality literature is a fairly recent addition to the field of adult education and while it has not been explicitly introduced in terms of transformative learning theory, we have chosen to identify it in this area of the field. A key assumption in the pluralistic view is that in the encounter with other, there is learning about self. It is this aspect of knowledge of self and how it is manifested through the interreligious dialogue that we hope we will most benefit from the literature on spirituality.

Fowler (1981) suggests a six-stage process of faith development, of which the last three stages – individuative-reflective faith, conjunctive faith, and universalizing faith - are representative of adult faith development. He draws on Kohlberg's theory of moral development and Piaget's theory of cognitive development. He extends their work, however, with added focus on the role of imagination in knowing, symbolic processes, and greater attention to unconscious structuring processes.

Recognizing that the development of his ideas is based on a relatively limited sample representing white, primarily Christian, and some Jewish, perspectives, we nonetheless believe his ideas will be valuable to understanding the experiences of participants in this study. Similarly, while we do not accept wholesale the staged nature of faith development suggested by him, we believe that the characteristics he describes related to faith development in adulthood have merit for this research in terms of how they help us understand the characteristics and religious commitment of participants in this study. In particular, we hope to explore Fowler's fifth stage of faith development: conjunctive faith. His ideas on pluralism and symbolic/unconscious knowledge production processes inherent in this stage of faith development are of interest to us as we try to understand the learning about 'self' and 'other' that occurs in interreligious dialogue.

While we draw on research inspired by the work of Mezirow, Boyd, and others, our research, in turn, will contribute to the development of literature on

transformative learning. We believe that what we have learned through our work

will provide additional perspectives on this area of adult education. The insights

shared by the participants of our study, as well as our own insights which result

from our collaborative interreligious learning project can enhance existing

descriptions and understandings about communicative learning and the role of

dialogue in transforming assumptions and stereotypes about religion. In addition,

we feel that the relational emphasis of our work adds valuable insight on the role

of affect, emotion, and image on the transformative learning process. More

specifically, our contribution to this area of the field is in adding detail to the

various facets of transformation, exploring the tension between individual

transformation and social change, and providing a more holistic picture of the

learning process.

Learning in the Context of Interreligious and Ecumenical Projects

In the area of interreligious learning, we have been inspired primarily by

the work of Mary Boys and Sara Lee. As authors and guest editors for the

journal Religious Education (Fall 1996), entitled Religious Traditions in

Conversation, they feature their work with the Catholic-Jewish Colloquium. The

Colloquium was an intensive interreligious learning project designed and

implemented by them with twenty-two Catholic and Jewish religious educators.

The Lilly Endowment funded the project. Essays by participants in the

Colloquium are included in the journal. About their work, Boys and Lee say: " By

engaging in a "thick" description and analysis of the Catholic-Jewish Colloquium, we hope to stimulate serious reflection on the goals and processes of conversation between religious traditions in order to foster a genuinely pluralistic society." (p. 417). Our research for the field of adult education, through this study, builds on the important work of Boys and Lee, and shares with it a vision of a pluralistic society as an ultimate purpose. There is ample evidence from the work of Boys and Lee to suggest that the learning that takes place in the encounter with the "other" across religious borders is not only learning about the 'other" but it is also a process of learning about one's self. In discussing the findings from our research, in chapters six, seven, and eight, we provide examples of how participants in this research study understand aspects of their own learning about themselves and about others, across religious borders.

While there is quite a bit of interfaith dialogue that is taking place in North America today, it is not generally discussed from within the perspective of educational practice. This study is intended to add depth and substance to the existing humanities and religious education literature about interreligious dialogue, by initiating the conversation in the field of adult education. Little has been written about how individuals who engage in these dialogue groups gain meaningful understanding of other religions and eliminate previous assumptions. As we envision a North American pluralistic and democratic society, a society in which deep appreciation for different religious ideas and practices is the norm,

we believe that this study contributes to the documentation and, ultimately, the application of those processes by which interreligious learning takes place.

Collaborative Inquiry/Collaborative Learning

The third area of research that impacts upon, and is impacted by, our work is that of Collaborative Inquiry and Collaborative Learning. Throughout the book, we share our reflections about the collaborative research process. Our thinking about collaboration has been influenced by the work of Bray, Lee, Smith and Yorks (2000), Caron and Hyland (1999), Heron (1996), Lawrence and Mealman (1999, 2000), Lee (1998, 2000), Mealman and Lawrence (1998), and Saltiel, Sgroi, and Brockett (1998).

One major dimension of this study is an account of both the development and impact of the various kinds of collaborative processes in which we engaged to learn about adult learning in the context of interreligious dialogue. In chapter four, we share details of our collaborative process with a focus on how we made decisions, the nature of our planning, data collection and analysis processes. We talk about collaborative writing and how we found our collaborative voice. A highlight of this dimension of the project is a thick description of a new Collaborative Inquiry Metaphor Creation and Analysis Method (CIMCAM) focus group activity we developed especially for data collection and analysis in this project. We first presented CIMCAM at the Midwest Research to Practice

Conference in Madison, Wisconsin (Charaniya & West Walsh, 2000). In this study, we provide more extensive details.

Since our focus is on dialogue and the learning that takes place within the context of socially structured environments, the emphasis on co-creation of knowledge that is vital to the collaborative process, informs much of our work in this study. Here our work reflects the thinking of Schwandt (1998).

Our understanding of the process of learning about learning in the context of interreligious dialogue by doing interreligious dialogue, has been influenced by the writing of Kasl, Dechant, & Marsick (1993). Their description of how they learned about group learning, by engaging in a group learning process themselves, was helpful to us in thinking about the multiple layers of our interaction as researchers and participants in our own study. The detailed account of this dimension of our research process provided throughout this book contributes a thick description of this particular kind of experiential learning, to the field.

Finally, we add to the adult education literature more detailed information about how we, as doctoral students in an adult education graduate program that supported and encouraged academic collaboration, established a collaborative learning partnership and a collaborative inquiry research partnership that yielded rich results for the field. This study adds to what we have previously discussed (Charaniya & West Walsh, 2000) by providing a more detailed account of how we conducted our doctoral research collaboratively. As a second contribution, this

research adds to a growing body of literature about collaborative learning in academic settings and collaborative inquiry as a research methodology, (Baldwin & Austin, 1995; Bosworth & Hamilton, 1994; Bray, Lee, Smith & Yorks, 2000; Brufee, 1993; Christianson, Goulet, Krentz, & Maeers, 1997; Heron, 1996; Lawrence & Mealman, 1999, 2000; Lee, 1998, 2000; Mealman & Lawrence, 1998; Saltiel, Sgroi & Brockett, 1998; Wildevsky, 1986). As an example of the processes of collaborative research in action, this study offers the field of adult education a detailed account, upon which other researchers, and teachers of research processes, can build.

Some Closing Thoughts

As you read about this study and come to meet the many wonderful, remarkable individuals who have helped us better understand the learning in the interreligious dialogue process, we hope that you too will be inspired. The stories we share are remarkable stories of incredible individuals who refused to be satisfied with accepted understandings of self and other, who went out of their way to learn about those who are religiously different from them, and who responded to difference not with hate, apathy or violence, but rather with words, ears, and open hearts. We invite you to journey with us through their experiences and in so doing, perhaps, reflect on what you could be doing to better meet the challenge of religious difference.

CHAPTER TWO

COMMITMENTS THAT INFORM OUR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

It is important that readers understand that our research can be better understood against the backdrop of our commitments: who we are, what drives us, and what we hope to accomplish through our work together. This research has been the centerpiece of our work for the past three years. While our work speaks for us, we want to be more explicit about how who we are - as religious educators and religious women - informs our research. In this chapter, we will describe the commitments we have each made, that we believe inform our research practice as adult and religious educators. As you read each section below, you will see that while each of us come from very different religious perspectives, there are three aspects of commitment that we have in common. We imagined our commitment as having three strong strands that, woven together, make a strong braided rope.

A Braided Rope

The first strand in that braid is that of religious commitment. We will highlight some of the core values from Judaism and Islam, which inform the particular religious worldviews that inform our respective adult education practices. Acknowledging these particularities is essential to understanding how religious commitment informs, shapes and inspires us, not only as individuals but also as collaborative adult educators engaged in research and practice. We will

focus on some of the core values that are essential to our particular understanding of ourselves and our personal commitments to our respective religious traditions. However, we cannot, and do not, claim to represent all of the ideals and values of all of the various perspectives within Judaism and Islam.

The second strand of the rope is the commitment to serving as teachers and educational leaders in our respective religious communities. While we did not know we shared this in common when we met, for each of us, this is a strong and enduring commitment that informs our research and practice, and our very lives. Here we talk generally about our role as educators and lifelong learners in our own communities. We will explain how this role is important to each of us and to the survival of our respective communities.

The third strand of the rope is the commitment to serving as adult educators. This is characterized by our commitments to working proactively in the wider world, beyond the Muslim and Jewish community. It is from the foundation of our religious ideas, values and commitments that we move outward into the world, making a commitment to democratic social change. Ironically, it is this very strand that brought us together to explore the possibilities that learning across religious borders holds for transforming the world, one person at a time.

For each of us, the braided rope of commitment is like a strong central core that at the same time both defines and informs who we are as religious women, as religious educators, and as adult educators. We have come to understand that each of these three strands is like a length of twine braided into a strong rope. Each strand informs and reinforces the other to such an extent

that unraveling the strands destroys the rope. While we found it useful to create this metaphor, we found, in the end, that the strands were woven fairly tightly into one another. So, we have written about the strands, in order, in each of our narratives, below. We present the strands in order, but the ideas representing each strand weave back and forth, one reinforcing the other, as they do in our lives.

Nadira

I was born and raised as an Ismaili Muslim in a family that had its roots in the Khoja (those originating from the territory covered by India before its partition) Ismaili community. In terms of ritual practice, this means that I regularly attend whatever Jamatkhana (place of prayer and congregation) is closest to where I live and participate in the ceremonies that are held there. It also means that I have participated - first as student, then as teacher - in the religious education system within the community. My religious commitment is based on the learning that I have acquired through that religious education system as well as through my own personal intellectual search and understanding of the message of Islam.

First and foremost, my religious commitment is based on an affirmation of the belief in one God (the Islamic term is Allah) and the belief in the guidance of Allah as was shared with humanity through the prophets, of which the Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) was the final one. These two basic ideas of monotheism and divine guidance ending with Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as expressed in the Shahada, or declaration of faith, are the basic

creed of all Muslims. As a Shi'a Muslim, there is a third dimension that is added to this creed – the belief in the moral and spiritual authority of the hereditary office of Imamate that began with the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, Hazrat Ali, and that is carried down through the generations through his direct descendants. His Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan IV, Imam of the Ismaili Muslim community, holds this office today.

The role of the Imam in the Ismaili Muslim context is different from the role of imam as it commonly understood. The imam of a mosque is commonly understood as the person who leads the Muslims in prayer. The term is also sometimes used to refer to a respected leader or religious teacher of great standing. This usage of the term does not apply to the idea of Imam within the Ismaili Muslim community. Within the Ismaili community there can only be one Imam at any given time and this person is the one on whom rests the authority for the guidance of the community. His authority stems from his being a direct descendent of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) through the children of his daughter, Fatima, and his son-in-law, Ali, and by virtue of his having been appointed as Imam by the previous Imam.

Secondly, my religious commitment is based on an understanding of the Qur'an as a document that holds several layers of meaning, including the literal, the allegorical, the jurisprudential, and the ethical. It is my perspective that the Qur'an - a religious text embodying direct revelation from Allah to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) - can be read and interpreted on any of these levels to have meaning for a Muslim. Having recognized that there are multiple

levels of interpretation that are all potentially valid, I choose to read and interpret the message of the Qur'an from a primarily allegorical and esoteric perspective. The power of the Qur'an, for me, lies in its potential in helping me understand its message of the purpose of humankind through its examples and parables rather than through a literal application of its dictums. That is, that the Qur'an - through its many stories, admonitions and examples – provides me with inspiration for a moral and ethical life that is informed by the Qur'an and which, at the same time, is lived within the context of the time and space in which I live.

There is abundant evidence in the Qur'an that indicates that the text is meant to be reflected on. In fact, in many places (2:26, 14:24-25, 24:35, 29:43, 30:28 & 58, 39:27, 47:3, 59:21), Allah invites or commands the believers to reflect on the meaning and significance of the text. In chapter 38, verse 29, Allah says: "(Here is) a Book which We have sent down to you, full of blessings, that they may meditate on its Signs, and that [people] of understanding may receive admonition." (Ali, 1996, p. 301).

The third aspect of my religious commitment is based on my understanding - derived from my interpretation of the Qur'an as well as from the guidance of the Imam - of the role of humans on earth. (This use of the term Imam in its capitalized form is used to refer specifically to the Aga Khan in his role as spiritual leader of the Ismaili community rather than to the position of an imam who leads the prayers in a mosque.)

The Qur'an puts great emphasis on humans as socially responsible beings. We are responsible for not only our own welfare but also that of those around us -

family, community, society, and humanity. In chapter 2, verse 177 for example, the Qur'an tells us that virtue is not in the ritual practice of prayer but rather in having faith and helping those less fortunate members of society. For many Muslims, such as myself, verses such as these are read to be indications of the call for us to live as socially responsible human beings who live out their faith in how they interact in society. Syed Ameer Ali (1978) captures this when he suggests that, for Muslims, the service of one's neighbors and attention to the betterment of humanity are paramount to the service and worship of Allah.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is also said to have emphasized the importance of contributing to the betterment of society. His example is one to which all Muslims turn for inspiration. As the Aga Khan (1976) said:

> The Holy Prophet's life gives us every fundamental guideline that we require to resolve the problem [of defining what a modern Islamic society should look like] as successfully as our human minds and intellects can visualize. His example of integrity, loyalty, honesty, generosity both of means and of time, his solicitude for the poor, the weak and the sick, his steadfastness in friendship, his humility in success, his magnanimity in victory, his simplicity, his wisdom in conceiving new solutions for problems which could not be solved by traditional methods, without affecting the fundamental concepts of Islam, surely all these are foundations which, correctly understood and sincerely interpreted, must enable us to conceive what should be a truly modern and dynamic Islamic Society in the years ahead.

It is my strong belief that the purpose of my life and the reflection of my own religious commitment is measured in the extent to which I am able to live out these same principles through my work in society. As the Aga Khan (1987) reflected when talking about the idea of Islam as a way of life, "the object is not to achieve status, wealth and power, but to contribute to society's overall

development. This implies moral responsibility to help the weaker, less fortunate members." My understanding of these words is that it is my moral responsibility to use whatever resources I have available to me for the purpose of contributing to the creation of a better world. My knowledge, or intellectual "wealth", is the resource that I have the most of. As such, it is my responsibility to use that knowledge to help others in life. Thus, the task of education is very much an aspect of this moral responsibility.

My understanding of the message of Islam is that one's spiritual responsibility and one's intellectual responsibility are intimately linked. The very first words revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), captured in Sura Alaq (chapter 96), verses 1-5, are:

> Read! (or Proclaim!) in the name of your Lord and cherisher, Who created - Created man, out of a (mere) clot of congealed blood: Proclaim! And your Lord is Most Bountiful, - He Who taught (the use of) the Pen – Taught man that which he did not know. (Ali, 1996, p.417)

A common Muslim reading of this text is that not only is Allah the source of all knowledge, but that He is commanding the Prophet (and, through him, all Muslims) to seek knowledge of Him. The significance of this idea is underlined by the fact that this is the message from Allah that marks the beginning of Muhammad's (peace be upon him) prophethood. This text, when read in conjunction with the many verses throughout the Qur'an in which Allah commands the Muslim to understand Him through reading the signs evident in creation, indicates to me that the pursuit of knowledge (or my intellectual responsibility) is no different than my spiritual responsibility (which is to seek knowledge of Allah). This understanding of the importance of knowledge is

further reinforced for me when I encounter such sayings of the prophet (peace be upon him) as "man's glance at knowledge for an hour is better for him than prayer for sixty years" and "pursuit of knowledge is an incumbent duty of every man and woman." (Qadir, 1988, p.16) As an Ismaili Muslim, I am also inspired in this understanding of the interconnection between my spiritual responsibility and my pursuit and sharing of knowledge by the following words of the Imam:

> It is the light of Intellect which distinguishes the complete human being from the human animal...The man [sic.] of faith who fails to pursue intellectual search is likely to have only a limited comprehension of Allah's creation. Indeed, it is man's intellect that enables him to expand his vision of that creation. (Aga Khan, 1985)

One application of this belief regarding the role of reason and intellect in the expression of my own religious commitment is that I have chosen to serve in various educator roles within the Ismaili community. Within this context, I am not an unbiased, impartial observer. Rather, I am deeply committed to helping the community develop religious commitment that is informed by the Qur'an and the guidance of the Imam. I am committed to inspiring members of my own community to engage in their own personal intellectual and esoteric search and to live out a life that is informed by the message of Islam.

From a young age, I was involved in sharing my knowledge and perspectives with others within my community. I have memories of being a young pre-adolescent turning up at one of the smaller religious education centers at a jamatkhana (place of congregation and prayer) in London, England only to find that there was to be no teacher that day. Instead of making the most of it

and using that precious time to play, I instead gathered the younger students that were assembled and proceeded to teach them.

From that initial memory, I move to my arrival in New York as an adolescent where, again, I served in the role of mentor to my peers and those younger than I. Here I took on the role of junior wa'ezeen (lay preacher) and shared my knowledge of Islam and the Ismaili Tariqah (path or way; also understood as brotherhood) through a series of speeches that were developed with the help of my father. From that junior role, I eventually, after many years, became one of the community's core of wa'ezeen – a group of individuals who, in the context of the United States jamat (community) have the primary responsibility as adult religious educators within the community.

In addition to my work as wa'ezeen, I have taught in the religious education center at all levels from pre-Kindergarten to secondary. I have worked (both professionally and as a volunteer) as a teacher trainer and teacher mentor, I have served as faculty at Youth Camps and I have conducted seminars and presentations for adult members of the Jamat.

In my five-year professional role as national religious education coordinator with the organization responsible for the religious education of the Ismaili community, I had opportunity to act based on my religious commitment. I participated in a variety of projects, including curriculum development, teacher professional development, research into the history and development of Islam, and youth identity development designed to help members develop the skills and thinking necessary to living out their lives as informed, religiously committed

individuals who are also fully contributing members of American society. In short, I helped other Ismaili Muslims to develop a deeper understanding of the teachings of Islam and the guidance of the Imam to improving the quality of life of the members of the community.

Although I left my professional position several years back, I have not left behind my commitment to and action on behalf of the community. In fact, following a tradition of voluntary service that is a historic feature of the community, I continue to play the role of educator, mentor, and wa'ezeen. I continue to participate in teacher development efforts in the community, contribute to the development of papers on various topics of import to the community, to teach at youth camps, to deliver wa'ezes (informational and inspirational sermons), and also serve as vice-principal of the local religious education center.

To illustrate what drives me in my work within the Ismaili community, I will share the story of Shahla and Meena, two Ismaili adolescent girls. The incident occurred at a New Year's Eve party, held at Meena's house and it occurred with a group of their Christian friends, girls with whom they interact on a daily basis. Somehow, the conversation that night turned to the issue of religion and salvation. Shahla described to me how two of the Christian girls began to try and convince her and Meena that salvation was only possible through Jesus Christ and that anyone who did not believe in him was lost. Eventually, in the interest of moving on with the evening and bringing the onslaught to an end, the two girls agreed with the Christians that perhaps they were right. While Shahla was

confident that this experience had not shaken her own religious commitment, she was, nonetheless, deeply affected by it.

As I watched her relate this experience to me and I talked with her about what the experience was like, I was reminded that my work as a religious educator is about helping people like Shahla and Meena deal with such situations. It is about helping them develop the necessary knowledge and internal resource to be able to face such confrontations without faltering in their own religious commitment. It is about being strong and confident in their identity as a Muslim minority within the larger Christian milieu. It is about being able to articulate what you believe confidently and with clarity.

The reality is that, as a Muslim in America, I am a member of a religious minority in a much larger Christian environment. Everyday I am confronted with challenges to my religious identity. The same is true for other members of the Muslim community. Shahla and Meena's experience is an overt example of this. Other subtler examples include the intrinsic messages that are communicated about Islam and Muslims through the media, and the widespread assumption that everyone celebrates Christmas (and that if you don't you are some kind of a scrooge). It is only by having knowledge of Islam and developing a sense of inner strength as a result of the knowledge that I have been able to overcome the challenges I have faced. I see my task as a religious educator to help others in my community deal with such challenges by not only recognizing them, but by developing their skills, knowledge, and necessary inner strength to be able to deal with them.

My work with Jane is another element of the commitment that I have to the Ismaili community. One of the areas of my work that I have consciously tried to incorporate into my efforts within the community has been an effort to teach for the particular without losing sight of the plural. An understanding of the uniqueness and beauty of one's own faith without it being equated with a negation of the beliefs of others is something that I have always struggled to communicate through my work with the community. Today, I find myself in a position to teach this aspect of my religious commitment through a more thorough understanding of the "other".

The story of Shahla and Meena and their encounter is an example of where my work with Jane can make a difference. Through my deepening understanding of the "other" and my resultant ability to see the "other" from a multiplicity of perspectives, I am better able to help my students do the same. In fact, by sharing my understanding of Christianity as it has developed through our work together, I am able to help people like Shahla and Meena see Christianity beyond the proselytizing stance they encountered on New Years Eve. My hope is that this will, in turn, enable members of the Ismaili community to develop equally deep and enduring relationships with others based on issues of religious commitment rather than despite them.

Islam is a way of life. There is no dichotomy between one's religious life and one's secular life. In fact, it is widely understood by Muslims that the actions taken in society should be on the basis of the ethos of Islam and that one's decisions about where, how, and in which manner one lives should serve to

reinforce one's religious commitments. This idea is expressed in the following words of the Imam (1976):

> Islam, as even non-Muslims have observed, is a way of life. This means that every aspect of the individual's daily existence is guided by Islam: his family relations, his business relations, his education, his health, the means and manner by which he gains his livelihood, his philanthropy, what he sees and hears around him, what he reads, the way he regulates his time, the buildings in which he lives, learns and earns.

It is on the basis of this understanding of the interaction of faith and life that I approach my vocation as adult educator. While an important aspect of my religious commitment is captured through my efforts within the Ismaili Muslim community, this effort is not the only endeavor through which this commitment is epitomized. In fact, my efforts as an adult educator outside of the context of the Ismaili Muslim community is, for me, as much an aspect of my religious commitment as is my work within it.

Earlier, I shared my understanding that the purpose of human life is to engage in a personal, intellectual and esoteric search that leads one to greater knowledge of self, others, and God. One aspect of that purpose, is to enable one to contribute to the creation of a stronger, more just society. It is from within this frame of reference that I approach the understanding of myself as an adult educator working in the wider world.

It should not be misunderstood that my contextualizing of the role of adult education as a facet of my religious commitment is in any way an indication that my practice is one of proselytization. While the intention behind my actions are deeply rooted in my religious commitment, that same commitment is tempered by the belief in, and respect for, multiple realities and multiple truths. The Qur'an

makes a point of asserting that the message of the Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him) is a continuation of others that have preceded him, including Abraham, Moses, and Jesus (peace be upon them). This understanding, tempered by my reading of the verse in which Allah says that there is no compulsion in religion (2: 256) mean that while I am strongly devoted, I do not translate that devotion into a misguided desire to bring others outside of my community, into my way of thinking and belief.

Rather, my practice as a teacher, trainer, and university instructor is informed by the principles of my belief in the importance of intellectual activity as a facet of human endeavor. Thus, everything that I do in the role of educator is designed to encourage those with whom I am privileged to work to explore whatever topic is at hand from as holistic a perspective as possible, to engage in deep levels of critical reflection, and to seek to improve their own lives and their contribution to society accordingly.

My approach is to encourage an exploration of divergent views. This exploration is from a critical perspective in which it is not sufficient to simply acknowledge this multiplicity of views. Rather, the task is one of considering and reflecting on the implications of this diversity and on working toward change such that the result is a better, more inclusive, and more just society.

This recognition of other viewpoints, and the acknowledgement that others, especially those who are part of the Abrahamic tradition (that is, Jews and Christians) are counted in the Qur'an as believers is grounded in my reading of the verse of the Qur'an in which Allah says:

Say, We believe in Allah, and the Revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Ismail, Isaac and Jacob, and the Tribes, and that given to Moses and Jesus and that given to (all) Prophets from their Lord. We make no difference between one and another of them: and we bow to Allah (in Islam). (2:136)

It is no accident that when the opportunity to learn more about these earlier revelations offered itself in the form of my encounter with Jane, I jumped at the opportunity. For to have not made the most of this opportunity would have been in contradiction to who I am and what I believe. Through my encounter with Jane, I have had the privilege of learning about Judaism and the Jewish people from a representative of that religious group; on their terms and not simply through my own lens.

Jane

Though born and raised as a Jew, it was as an adult that I consciously chose to become a religiously committed Jewish woman. I was always a Jew. I was the grandchild of at least two traditional Jews from Poland who brought their upbringing within a world that respected Jewish values and traditions, with them to America. But, it was as the result of a crisis in my personal life, a divorce from my first husband in my late twenties, that I initiated a process of critical self-reflection. This led to my becoming, for about a year or so, a religious seeker.

Feeling deep emotional pain for the first time in my life, I was surprised to find that there was nothing comforting there for me, at least within my knowledge, at the time, of Jewish tradition. Thinking then that religion was supposed to be comforting, a view I since realized I assimilated from the larger American cultural

milieu, I questioned my own background as a Jew. As a religious seeker I was a Jewish woman searching for insight into what values would guide me in living my life. Ironically, this search led me to places I never expected. In the process of questioning Christianity, and learning about it as a seeker with some gentle Christian companions and friends nearby, I learned how much I did not really know or understand about Judaism. I had big gaps in my understanding of Jewish values, the source texts that teach Jews about them, and how to live a full life with Jewish values as a guide. I began to realize that I did not understand the difference between secular and universal values and particular religious values. Living in Denver at the time, in a neighborhood far from Jewish institutions and far from my family on the East coast, I realized I was out on the far edge of assimilation, overlooking the prospect of a leap of faith into Christianity and the majority culture I had felt as a norm. With critical reflection as tool, and intuition as a guide, I found that this was a leap that I simply could not make.

This experience was a bit like that of Franz Rosenzweig, the great Jewish and adult educator who created the innovative Lehrhaus adult Jewish learning center (1919 - 1927) in Frankfort, Germany. Rosenzweig was a Jew who had been raised in a secular German home, without religious education. He debated the merits of Christianity with his circle of family and friends, considering conversion very seriously following intense conversations with Eugen Rosenstock. Correspondence with his cousin Eugen Rosenstock, a convert to Christianity, shows that he followed his cousin toward conversion himself. We know that before he made this decision, Rosenzweig decided to attend a Yom

Kippur service in 1913. It was on that night that he was moved to engage deeply with Jewish learning and tradition, making his ascribed religion his chosen religion (Glatzer, 1953). I too was moved by a sermon in 1981 given by Rabbi Stephen Foster at Temple Emanuel in Denver, to engage more deeply in the Jewish community by joining the synagogue and getting involved in Jewish learning as an adult. I moved back from the edge of conversion, to learn more about what being a Jew could mean to me as an adult. Somewhat like Rosenzweig, I felt that I could not leap into Christianity without first gaining a more sophisticated and knowledgeable understanding of myself as a Jew. I called myself back from the edge to learn more about Judaism, and how Jewish life informs all life, for Jews who are able to open the gates of understanding and are supported in this effort by other Jews in their midst.

It is twenty years since that time in my life. Following those twenty years of periodic reflection upon what really happened then, I have come to see that in my search outside, I was an adult carrying around a child's very limited understanding of Judaism. It was an understanding of Judaism that had deteriorated from years of dormancy and neglect. I had been living my personal and professional life, without serious thought to what being a Jew meant as I negotiated the routines of life. It was a personal crisis that brought this disconnect into sharp enough view for me to respond, then move forward in the different way that I now have. Like Rosenzweig, it was then that I realized the importance of lifelong Jewish learning. I then made a commitment to learning

more about Judaism in adult learning classes sponsored by the Denver Jewish community.

Today, this religious commitment to Jewish life means that I am a participant in the conversation between God and the Jewish people and the Jewish people with each other that began in the biblical desert at Sinai. According to Jewish tradition, it was at Sinai that Moses, one of our greatest teachers, told the people what God had told him we were to do in order to live in relationship to one another and to God. Jewish religious life is characterized by that search for a deeper understanding of what it means to the Jewish people of today and tomorrow, to have been standing together at Sinai.

As a progressive, yet religious Jew, I understand Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Rachel and Leah, and other important leaders from Jewish tradition, to be related to me. We are members of a sociologically extended Jewish family. As most Jews, I too have considered the question of whether it is likely that these ancestors really lived on this earth. Whether they lived in history or not is less important to me than what they represent to the Jewish people as teachers of who we are and what is important to us as a community. For thousands of years, these extended family members have inspired my people with what they did and how they lived. When fellow Jews tell and re-tell their stories, and talk about them as we teach and learn Torah, we speak together as if these leaders are distant relatives, members of our family. We learn from them as we would from members of our present day extended family. These leaders are not perfect. They certainly are not gods. The stories

we have of their challenges and how they confronted them are what we tell and re-tell, generation after generation. I am inspired by them. I consider them as I move through my own life story, confronting challenges of my own. They connect me to Israel and the other places in the stories where they lived and raised their families.

The stories and traditions that have been passed down from generation to generation, starting with Torah at Sinai, are considered important to every Jew because these texts are the bearers of the core values that guide us in living our lives today, and in every age. As a religious Jew, I attempt to make meaning of my life using the guidance and insight from Jewish tradition. I do it in relationship to other Jews, to other people I encounter in the wider world, and to God.

Just as I stand with direction guided from the past, at the same time, I have come to accept my responsibility to being a link to future generations of Jews. Jews call this the chain of tradition. This responsibility is incumbent upon every Jew in its most essential form as a parent. As in most socially constructed communities, the act of bearing and raising children in the tradition is highly valued by religiously committed Jewish people. However, for me, this idea is expressed in my commitment to service as a Jewish educator.

For individuals, like me, who have not biologically brought Jewish children into the world, there are other words of wisdom about the task. The following is an example that comes from the Babylonian Talmud. The Talmud is the compilation of a long oral tradition of laws and commentaries about them that was eventually written down in approximately the year 550 of the Common Era.

This is a traditional translation of the original text found in a section of the Talmud called Masechet Sanhedrin 19b: "Rabbi Samuel ben Nahmani said in Rabbi Jonathan's name: One who teaches the son of his neighbor the Torah, scripture ascribes it to him as if he had given birth to him... "

In the time this was written down, the text was understood to be about boys and men. However, for me to make any sense of the tradition as a Jewish woman today, while I consider the original text and its context, I then further translate traditional texts like these, in accordance with the circumstances of my life and our world today. Next is my contemporary translation, which is also a contemporary and liberal interpretation of the text, at the same time "One who teaches Torah to the child of a neighbor, is worthy of the merit of parenting that child." As an adult educator, I understand – from this and other such texts – that it is my responsibility to pass on what I can to others, as a teacher, as a guide, as a mentor, as a facilitator. Here the Talmud is saying that the process of teaching Torah is likened to the nurturing action of a parent. I understand this to mean that the responsibility of teaching my neighbor's child is essentially linked to my responsibility for teaching the parent of that child, my neighbor, the adult learner, too. My commitment is to serve as an educator to all of the Jewish people, to children and adults.

As a Jewish woman, part of the Jewish people on earth today, my commitments are carried out within the context of relationships. To be a Jew is to live socially and communally. It is a socially constructed way of being in the world. The emphasis is not only on the responsibilities of the individual, but the

individual living in relationship to others. As a progressive Jew, these relationships are guided, and inspired by, the teaching and learning of Torah as understood through a contemporary and critical lens of translation and interpretation.

The guidance and teaching from Jewish tradition emphasizes both relationships between human beings, one to the other (in Hebrew: bain adam l'havero) and between humans and God (in Hebrew: bain adam l'makom). The guiding principle for interpersonal relationships within the Jewish community is simple. According to normative Jewish tradition, every Jewish person has a shared responsibility for the maintenance and nurturance of others in the community. One source for this core value is found in the Babylonian Talmud Shevuot 39a where we read "Kol Yisrael arevim zeh b'zeh." This means all of the Jewish people (referred to here as "Yisrael") bear responsibility for one another. As a community that is spiritually, physically, and communally interdependent, we teach and we learn, one from the other and, when one is in need, we cannot ignore it. We are to take care of one another. It is reciprocal. This is the ideal, the vision, of what the Jewish community could be like. This ideal is expressed today in the many social service agencies and communal organizations supported by the Jewish community, in many cities around the world. In our own time, the expression of this is found in resettlement efforts for Jews from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia, and regular collection of tzedakah (righteous giving of our resources and wealth) in religious schools, synagogues, locally and regionally through communal agencies and federations

and internationally through organizations such as the New Israel Fund, the United Jewish Appeal, and the Jewish National Fund. While the freedom of America enables me to live where I please, I have come to understand that I cannot separate myself from the community and live fully as a Jew. This is a choice and a commitment.

As a Jew, my life is also given meaning by the nature of my relationship to God. As an educator, one of my favorite source texts, from Pirke Avot 3:3, teaches that in that moment when two people sit down together to learn Torah, God's presence is manifest in that very place. I like this text because it expresses the idea that as I carry out my role as both teacher and learner of Torah, the potential for God's presence becoming manifest in the world increases. The author of the text must have had the same experience I have had. That is the experience of Torah learning that is so powerful in its ability to reach inside of me, as learner, that it has given me a glimpse of the image of God in the presence of those with whom I study. It is learning with another that touches heart, mind and spirit, all at once. This experience motivates and inspires me to continue to both teach and learn Torah. When I do not learn Torah with others for a long time, I feel that something is missing in my life. When I teach others, I also learn.

Looking more globally, it is from the foundation of these commitments that I, emerge as a partners with God standing in community with the Jewish people, to engage with those of good will who live as "other" across borders of religion and culture. As a progressive Jew, it is from these commitments that I carry out

my obligation to live fully in the world, engaging with others, to make our world better for all of humankind, where ever and whoever they are.

Yet, not only am I committed to serving as an educator to the Jewish people, I am committed serving as an adult educator in the wider world. As an educator, I explore those interstices as part of the teaching and learning process. It is here that I come to my work with Nadira, and others, learning more about my self and others, in the exchange across borders of religious difference.

My philosophy of education is based upon a theology of social action. As an individual, and as a member of many socially constructed groups, including the Jewish community, I understand my life and my actions in it as part of transtemporal history. By transtemporal, I mean that my understanding of agency is that I am acting in the world, within all of time, not only the here and now. I believe that what I do today, my actions to ask and seek out truth, can influence how I and others interpret and come to know what has happened in the past and make meaning of it for our lives today. That in turn can influence our lives, individually, and communally, in the future. It is understanding the past primarily as a body of experiences, that is potentially meaningful and influential to the present and future.

As a Jew, the past has a powerful influence upon me through the master stories and texts and traditions that have been handed down from generation to generation. It is learned from the many hours encountering ideas at the hands of able teachers, those we call text people: our rabbis, our sages, our educators, our elders, our parents, whenever and wherever the lesson could be taught.

Learner or knower, conscious or not, as a Jew I am a link in that chain of tradition. For those Jews who are conscious that their lives are such a link, making meaning of that past is a never-ending part of life. As a Jewish educator, helping fellow Jews to understand that past and make meaning of it for themselves, and forming commitments to it, I become a teller of stories. This idea does not stop with my interaction with the Jewish people. As an educator working in the wider world, I feel the responsibility and the commitment to hear the stories of others, and to link our stories meaningfully together, as we create a future that is sustainable and healthy, and mutually supportive, for all of humankind. It is also how I understand that God works in the world, with me, through me and others, both inside and outside of the Jewish community, as partners, in history. This partnership is made manifest in each moment-to-moment interaction and relationship with people, ideas, and things. I start from within the foundation of my community, and work beyond it to build on the strength and support that I know and understand. I go from there to seek out common ground, shared ideals and humanity, and to bring whatever personal power that I may have, to bear on combating injustice and oppression, where it lives.

As a Jew, I understand this seeking out of others as a reflection of the Jewish value concept, from the book of Genesis or Bereishit in the Torah that I refer to as B'tzelem Elohim, literally meaning "in the image of God." B'tzelem Elohim is an expression of the idea that all human beings are made in the image

of God. Two citations from the Torah, where this Jewish idea comes from, are included below, using the translation of Everett Fox (1995):

> Genesis 1: 26-27 God said: Let us make humankind, in our image, according to our likeness! Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the fowl of the heavens, animals, all the earth, and all crawling things that crawl about upon the earth! So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God did he create it, male and female he created them.

> Genesis 9:5-6 However, too: for your blood, of your own lives, I will demand satisfaction - from all wild animals I will demand it, and from humankind, from every man regarding his brother, demand satisfaction for human life. Whoever now sheds human blood, for that human shall his blood be shed, for in God's image he made humankind.

Here I learn that only is there is a spark of divine presence in each one of us who was ever born; it means we have a strong connection to one another. And if I really understand that this is part of the Torah, I am called to understand what it means to live my daily life, accordingly. While some may call the thread of unity between all people something different besides an aspect of the image of God, for me, this is one of the core values that has fostered my growing interest in interreligious dialogue. This understanding of God's presence within reach, something that is near to us, is one of the ideas that I hope to share with religiously committed "others" in dialogue. Sometimes, when Nadira speaks, and she tells me something about her religious practice as a Muslim, I feel that it is as if God is speaking through her mouth to me. It is a strong feeling, and I have had it more than once. It is that sense of God's presence indwelling in the midst of our interreligious dialogue. We have talked about it. We have both felt it, at different times. This feeling has been a powerful reinforcement that our search for common ground and understanding is important. We want the product of our

work together to inspire others to experience what we, and others in this study have experienced, together. While it is not quantifiable, it feels very tangible when it happens. While I draw inspiration and connection from my Jewish past, and in my love of Torah learning, it is my interaction with others, like Nadira, in history, today, that leads to the expression of the interconnectedness of all life that is the essence of the agency I assert.

As an adult educator, I assert myself into the world and into history, through those projects that enable me to carry out the commitments that I have made. Learning takes place along the way, at every site, in every moment. Generally, I am the learner and the teacher at the same time. Within this paradigm, the content of adult education is a curriculum of life. It is about the meaning that is given to what takes place within our lives. It is that which is part of history, all of life and that which we call culture, both within those particular domains where we live in our communities of commitment, and the universal domain, where particularities meet up with one another quickly and borders are acknowledged and felt. It is that which is understood as having to do with other people, that which is understood as having to do with the universe and all that dwells within, and that which is understood as having to do with God. It is about taking action within the world, in time, to be a partner with God in healing the world (in Hebrew: Tikun Olam.) While I live through the particularities of Judaism and the Jewish community, I am devoted to fostering the interconnectedness of all life, human and otherwise, all over the earth, all over the world. It is my task,

my commitment, to work with others on the healing and renewal of broken pieces in the world, wherever they are found.

Conclusion

This chapter highlights the dimensions of whom we are as unique individuals, operating out of two very different religious worldviews. Essential to understanding this research is the fact that it is not in spite of, but because of these differences, that we discovered this particularly spacious and verdant stretch of common ground of research and practice, to share together. We hope you enjoy the fruits of that discovery as much as we have.

CHAPTER THREE

DEFINING METHODOLOGY: CHARTING THE TERRAIN

This chapter outlines the design of the study. It begins with an explanation of the theoretical framework and research paradigm within which we locate ourselves. This is followed by a description of the selection process and criteria, and the data collection methodology. Next, we detail the approach used to analyze the collected data. Following this is a discussion of dependability. Finally, there is a brief discussion of the limitations of our study.

Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this research study is to investigate the nature of the learning that occurs when individuals who are committed members of different religious groups intentionally participate in purposeful and sustained interreligious dialogue for the purpose of learning about those who hold different religious beliefs. Currently, the field of adult education does include literature focusing on the area of adult religious education (Elias, 1993), as well as literature relating to learning across borders of difference (Armstrong, Miller, & Zukas (Eds.)1997). However, we have not come across scholarship in the field that explores the crossing of religious borders for the purpose of learning about the other. Because of a current lack of focus on interreligious dialogue in the field of adult education, we anticipate that our findings will add new insight for practitioners

interested in investigating and fostering interreligious dialogue, in a variety of different contexts.

This study is rooted in a constructivist theoretical framework in which the concepts of collaboration and research as artistic endeavor are prominent. This collaborative qualitative research study seeks to understand the experiences of individuals engaged in interreligious dialogue. "Qualitative researchers *are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed*, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world" (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). We will be focused on the experiences of adult participants in four different contexts: (a) the interreligious dialogue process initiated consciously and purposefully by us, a Jew and a Muslim, with one another; (b) a Muslim-Jewish dialogue sponsored by a large Jewish communal agency; (c) a community-wide Christian-Jewish dialogue program; and (d) a Christian-Jewish women's dialogue group.

Constructivist Frame

According to Schwandt (1998), one who subscribes to the constructivist or interpretivist frame believes that "to understand this world of meaning one must interpret it" (p. 222). Thus, the goal of interpretive or constructivist researchers is to comprehend the world through the lived experience of those who experience it. While the terms constructivist and interpretivist are often used

interchangeably, there are subtle differences between them in relation to the role of the researcher.

While both constructivist and interpretivist research seek to explore the world of lived experience through those who live it, interpretivist researchers "struggle with drawing a line between the object of investigation and the investigator" (Schwandt, 1998, p.223). Thus, interpretivist researchers seek to understand and communicate the lived experience of those within their research. Constructivist researchers, on the other hand, seek to go beyond mere understanding and communication to "*understanding and reconstruction* of the constructions that people (including the inquirer) initially hold" (Guba and Lincoln, 1998, p.211).

Our research is situated in the "constructivist paradigm" as suggested by Schwandt (1998). Beginning with our decision to involve ourselves as both researchers and participants, we have consciously engaged in the research as full participants, contributing to whatever develops. In many ways, the meanings that the participants in our research give to their experiences will be influenced by the questions that we ask and the manner in which we probe. Thus, the very act of our questioning participants is creating new meanings for them regarding their experience of interreligious dialogue. Our role is such that we are an intricate part of the research and "the findings or outcomes of [our] inquiry are themselves a literal creation or construction of the inquiry process" (Schwandt, 1998, p.243).

In addition, we locate our study within the "constructivist paradigm" from the standpoint of the understandings, assumptions and beliefs that motivate us to want to engage in a study of the nature of the learning that takes place in interreligious dialogue settings. Rather than working from the assumption that there is a single, fixed religious reality that has claims to possession of the sole and ultimate truth, we believe that "There are multiple, often conflicting, constructions, and all (at least potentially) are meaningful" (Schwandt, 1998, p.243). We believe that the very act of engaging in interreligious dialogue can be an acknowledgement of that very plurality and an attempt to better understand and appreciate religious difference.

We also locate our study within Gergen's idea of Social Constructionism, which is based upon the assumption that knowledge is the result of social processes rather than merely individual ones (Schwandt, p.240). While we are investigating the experiences of individuals, our focus is on the "intersubjectively shared, social constructions of meaning and knowledge" (Schwandt, 1998, p.240). In aligning ourselves with social constructionism, however, our intent is not to convey an assumption that we believe that all knowledge is constructed. Coming as we do from deeply religious perspectives, we are both fully aware that our constructionist stance can easily be interpreted as being somewhat paradoxical to our religious beliefs. However, when we talk of knowledge as being socially constructed, it is from an understanding that that constructed knowledge is situated knowledge. As Gergen and Gergen express (2000),

constructed knowledge "can be valid so long as one does not mistake local conventions for universal truth" (p. 1032)

<u>Collaborative Inquiry</u>

In order to understand our research, it is important to know the role of collaboration relative to the research process. Our commitment to engaging in collaborative inquiry research has its roots in an important collaborative learning partnership (Saltiel, Sgroi, & Brockett, 1998) that was fostered in an environment of collaborative learning in the National-Louis University (NLU) cohort-based adult education doctoral program. This important collaborative research partnership led to the creation of a new collaborative inquiry data gathering method, which, in turn, established conditions for collaborative learning and inquiry into our collaborative inquiry research question, for all participants in our research project, including us. Specific details of this development as well as the collaborative process in which we engaged are provided in chapter 4.

Selection Process and Criteria

The basis of our decision to investigate adult learning and the interreligious dialogue process was the result of our own serendipitous experience with each other. As such, not only were we the first participants selected for the study, we were also the prototype for identification of other potential participants. The criteria we set for selection of individuals was that

they should currently be participating in interreligious dialogue and have been doing so for at least one year; that they should be able to reflect on and talk openly about their experiences in the interreligious dialogue process; and that they should be committed to one religious tradition and, at the same time, be open to learning about another. In addition, we wanted to make sure that they were participating in interreligious dialogue without coercion, without financial compensation, and without a direct connection to a course of study in which participation in interreligious dialogue is a requirement for an academic grade.

The criteria we set in identifying dialogue groups to include in the study was that such groups should focus on dialogue between only two different religious groups, that they should be occurring in the United States, and that the primary purpose should be the development of religious understanding, rather than exploration of explicitly political or social issues or fellowship. Because we had hoped to understand more about the experience of interreligious dialogue for everyday people, we made the decision to look for participants from dialogue groups that were not targeted specifically for academics or members of the clergy. Through networking, searching the Internet and posting on listservs for contacts, we actively sought participants from programs that were designed to encourage typical members of a congregation to participate easily.

The three dialogue groups from which we selected participants for the study included a Muslim-Jewish group, which we shall henceforth refer to as the Shalom/Salaam project, a Christian-Jewish congregational dialogue group, which

we shall henceforth refer to as the Origins project, and a Christian-Jewish women's dialogue group, which we shall henceforth refer to as the Living Room project. These three dialogue groups, plus our own interreligious dialogue process, made up the four data sites for our study.

Having identified the dialogue programs we felt were desirable for our research, we set about securing their commitment. We began by contacting the key individuals, securing their verbal agreement to allow us to use their programs for our research, and then working with them to identify specific individuals from within their programs to include in our purposeful sample.

In the case of the Origins group, we provided the developed criteria and a description of what was expected from participants to our contact person and requested that he suggest individuals for us to contact. Given that the particular program sponsored by the institution was only 4 weeks long, it was important for us to identify individuals who had been involved in a sustained manner both in previous years as well as, potentially, in other contexts. As such, it was agreed that we would have to seek referrals for such individuals from our contact person who, as a program organizer, would have access to this information.

In the case of the Shalom/Salaam group, on the other hand, participants were somewhat self-selected. Since the particular group has been in existence for more than five years, it was possible for us to invite participants of this group to volunteer. We provided our contact person with the identified criteria and a description of what was expected of participants so as to enable her to screen

out volunteers who did not meet our criteria. These criteria, along with a brief description of who we were and what we were interested in learning about, were shared with the dialogue participants at one of their regularly scheduled meetings. The list of volunteers, along with their contact information, was forwarded to us.

In both these cases, the process of finalizing the candidates involved our contacting the individuals, sharing details about our research and our own roles within it, and details regarding the commitment participants would be giving. Candidates were also encouraged to ask questions and seek clarification on things on which we had not been clear. Only when we were confident that individuals met our criteria, understood our purpose, and were comfortable with what would be asked of them did we proceed to confirm their participation.

Unlike the other two groups, the Living Room project was not identified through our initial search. Rather, it was identified when we learned of its existence through a participant selected through from the Origins project. In this case, all of the participants were invited to volunteer for participation in a focus group. The process of selecting which individuals we would include was then the same as was followed for the other two groups.

While the description provided may appear to make the process seem orderly, sequential and linear, the reality is that it was really a very dynamic, complicated, and involved process. In fact, it is very difficult to fully capture the processes that took place and that led us to where we ended up with our

purposeful sample. Our purpose in providing here a general overview of the key steps in the process is to enable the reader to have some sense of what occurred not to provide a detailed journal of events as they took place.

At the end of the selection process, there were a total of 20 participants from the four data sites in our study. Of these 20 participants, 7 were Christian, 5 were Muslim, and 8 were Jewish. 4 participants were from the Origins project, 5 were from the Living Room dialogue group, one was in both the Origins project as well as the Living Room dialogue group, and 8 were from the Shalom/Salaam group. All of the participants were middle to upper-middle class Americans. 19 participants ranged in age from their early 40's to their mid-60's, and one was in her mid 30's. 16 of the participants were white and 4 were people of color (1 African-American, 1 Egyptian, 1 Indian, and 1 Pakistani). 7 participants were male and 13 were female.

Data Collection

Merriam and Simpson (1995) speak of data collection procedures as "steps or activities that describe the general way data are gathered" (p.141). They identify techniques as "the specific device or means of recording data; such as an interview…" (p.142). There are typically three data collection processes discussed within the context of qualitative research: interviews, observations, and documents. While we used all three data collection approaches, our processes are a little different than is typically discussed, because of the collaborative

nature of our research. These differences include the fact that we have data that was collected on our own interreligious dialogue process, we collected and analyzed all our data together, and we observed and facilitated groups together.

As such, this section on data collection is broken down into four areas of data collection: (a) data collected on our own learning as participants and co-researchers on interreligious dialogue, (b) data collected through individual and group interviews, (c) data collected through observation and facilitation of dialogue groups (including our own), and (d) data collected through documents.

Data Collected Through our own Process as Interreligious Dialogue Partners and Co-Researchers

Our study is about interreligious dialogue and the adult learning that takes place in that context. Since we initiated our collaborative learning partnership, we have been engaged in learning about one another from one another, as a Muslim and a Jew. Our collaborative interreligious dialogue experience informs every aspect of our research study. We understand this as a process of learning about interreligious dialogue by engaging in interreligious dialogue, which is similar to the process of learning about group learning by engaging in group learning (Kasl, Dechant & Marsick 1993).

The data collected through this process was documented primarily through individual journals we each kept, as well as a collective discussion strand created through our emails and on a specially designated web forum provided in

the context of the doctoral program. The collected data included information and insights relating to our own learning in the interreligious dialogue process as well as insight into how being participants in the research, as well as co-constructors of knowledge, impacted on the research process itself. In addition to the individual journals, emails and web page discussion, we participated in a joint, semi-structured interview in which our primary advisor, Dr. Elizabeth Tisdell, interviewed us. The transcript of this interview is also included as part of the data.

Data Collected Through Individual and Group Interviews

The interview method was selected as one method of data collection since we wished to "gather descriptive data in the [participants'] own words" in order to help us "develop insights on how [they] interpret" (Bogden & Bilken, 1998, p.94) the experience of interreligious dialogue. All 20 participants in our study were interviewed, including ourselves. In all cases, the interviews (whether individual or group) were confidential and semi-structured, since we wished to "explore all possibilities regarding the information sought" (Merriam & Simpson, 1995, p. 150). The interview procedure consisted of either a semi-structured individual interview, participation in a focus group interview and related activity, or both.

Prior to the actual interview, at least one of us contacted individual participants either by phone, through email, and/or a standard letter. Through this initial communication we provided details to participants relating to the nature

and purpose of the study, what was to take place in the interview, and who we were. Once initial contact had been established, participants were provided with a set of four general questions to reflect on in preparation for the interview (appendix A). All interviews were conducted with both of us present. In the case of the individual interviews, the person who had established initial contact with the participant was the primary interviewer and the other person was a secondary interviewer. In all cases, the interviews were tape-recorded.

Focus group interviews. A focus group interview was established for participants of all three programs identified. In addition to us, there were 5 participants in the Origins project focus group, 7 participants in the Shalom/Salaam project focus group (one of whom was not included in the final data used since she represented the sponsoring organization), and 5 participants in the Living Room project focus group. We initiated a metaphor analysis process in our focus group interviews that draws upon our own practice of adult education and the model presented by Deshler (1990).

This activity - entitled Collaborative Inquiry Metaphor Creation and Analysis Method (CIMCAM) - involved inviting participants to create metaphors that characterized some aspect of their experience in interreligious dialogue. Using sample materials, which we provided, participants created metaphors using words, colors, and shapes. These created metaphors were then placed on the wall, one next to the other, and a process of shared exploration and analysis

began. As researchers, we too engaged with the participants in both the creation of metaphors and the discussion and analysis of them. Participants had been provided with a short list of reflective questions prior to each scheduled focus group, in order to help them focus their thoughts.

The five specific steps of CIMCAM are: (a) a general sharing of some aspect of each participant's experiences in interreligious dialogue; (b) the introduction of the metaphor creation process; (c) work on individual metaphors; (d) sharing of individual metaphors; and (e) a collective, whole group analysis of the metaphors, how they relate to each other, and what further meaning could be derived from seeing them juxtaposed. After the first, each step is dependant on successfully completing the one that preceded it. Further details about CIMCAM and how it worked are provided in chapter five.

Individual Interviews. In addition to the focus group interviews, we also conducted a series of individual interviews. Data from a total of 10 individual interviews are included in the study: 4 from the Origins project (one of whom was also a participant in the Living Room project) and 5 from the Shalom/Salaam project, and the data from our own interview. Participants from the Living Room dialogue group were not individually interviewed. The same questions provided to focus group participants were also used as a basis for the individual interviews.

In all but 2 cases, the interviewees participated in a focus group interview prior to the individual interview. For those who participated in both the focus group and individual interviews great care was taken in regards to the sequence of involvement. Participants first participated in a focus group activity and then were individually interviewed. This allowed participants to begin thinking about the initial interview questions we had provided them with. It also allowed us to draw from their metaphors and contributions to the group discussion for further questions and areas of investigation for the individual interviews. This process enabled both a reinforcement of what may have been shared in the focus group, as well as an opportunity for exploring areas that may not have been brought up. It also allowed the beginning process of member checks in that we were able to clarify our understanding of what may have been said by these participants in the focus group interview when we met with them individually.

In all but one of these cases, the interviews were in person. The exception was an individual in the Shalom/Salaam project who had to be interviewed by telephone. However, since she had participated in the focus group interview and metaphor analysis activity and we had already established rapport, this format did not impact on the quality of the data that was collected through the interview.

In addition to the interviews described above, we also conducted several semi-structured, information-seeking interviews with several individuals not associated with the programs we had selected for inclusion in our study. The

purpose of these interviews was to explore the phenomena of interreligious dialogue from the perspective of individuals who had either consciously planned such dialogue groups, individuals who had written about it, or both. These interviews were not part of our data as much as they were an aspect of our review of the literature on the subject.

Observations

Observations were used as a secondary method of data collection since we wished to observe the interreligious dialogue process "in action" (Merriam & Simpson, 1995, p.152). Our observation of dialogue groups was broken down into three parts. The first part is our observations of our own dialogue. The second part was observation of three other interreligious dialogue situations. The third part was our observation of the dialogue that took place between participants in our focus groups as they shared their metaphors.

Observation of Our Own Dialogue Process. Observation of our own dialogue was facilitated through each of us keeping our own personal journals, in which we explicitly paid attention to both the content and the process of our interreligious dialogue. We also paid attention to feedback and comments that we received from others. For example, our experience of co-facilitating the brown-bag lunch session at Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles provided us with comments on our comfort with each other. Similarly, our joint Torah-Qu'ran

study in Peoria and subsequent interview with a journalist from the Peoria Journal Star gave us further feedback on what others perceived about our dialogue. Another source of this sort of feedback were our cohort colleagues, faculty members and spouses who were perhaps the most consistent observers of our dialogue experiences. The comments we received through all of these different avenues were noted and we kept track of them in our personal notes. In most cases, we shared our personal observations with each other after we had opportunity to add them to our journals. In many cases, these conversations regarding our personal observations about our interreligious dialogue process were tape-recorded and added to the rest of the data.

Observation of Other Dialogue Groups. In the case of both the Origins project and the Shalom/Salaam project, we engaged in observation of the dialogue in process. The purpose of doing so was different in each case. However, for both cases, the observation yielded valuable data that allowed us richer insight into the interreligious dialogue process.

In the case of the Origins project, the observations we conducted were of the current dialogue series. This series consisted of a series of 4 meetings between members of Christian and Jewish congregations in the community and were focused on 4 specific shared texts. The individuals that we had selected for interviewing were not necessarily participating in this particular series of dialogues. Those that were involved were functioning in the capacity of

facilitators for the various sub-groups within the program.   We observed one specific sub-group, which was facilitated by one of the participants in our study, at two of their four dialogue sessions. The other participants in this dialogue group did not meet our selection criteria in that they were relative newcomers to the interreligious dialogue process. As such, the importance of these two observations lay in their usefulness in helping us understand whether the dynamics we observed with this dialogue seemed to be the same as, or different from, that described by our interviewees who met the criteria of extended involvement, and experienced in our own interreligious dialogue experiences.

In the case of the Shalom/Salaam project, we observed one of their regular sessions. 6 of the 7 individuals we interviewed from this group were present at the session we observed. Our purpose in this case was to get a sense of how this particular group interacted in the dialogue setting. We hoped that our observation would enable us to ask deeper questions of the individuals we interviewed. We also anticipated that this observation would prove to be a useful way to further triangulate the data that we were to collect from the subsequent interviews and that our view of what was being observed would change as the research progressed (Merriam & Simpson, 1995). This observation was done before we conducted any of the interviews and was our first point of entry into the experiences of these participants. The observations for both of these projects were debriefed and tape-recorded shortly after the observation.

Focus Group Metaphor Analysis Observation. The third type of observation involved in our study was observation of the dialogue between focus group participants, including ourselves, as we created and shared our metaphors in the CIMCAM activity. Although this was not intended as an observation exercise when we designed it, we found that in having participants share the metaphors they had each created and encouraging them to look for connections between the different metaphors we had initiated new process of interreligious dialogue between the participants. This dialogue was not only about the interreligious dialogue process but also included moments of interreligious dialogue itself. In the explanation of thoughts and feelings, participants talked about their own religious ideas and how they influence the dialogue process. Our reflections on this unanticipated aspect of the research, particularly how participants interacted with each other and with the different metaphors, were captured in our personal field notes, as well as the debrief conversations we recorded.

Documents

By and large, documents were a secondary data source to "help. . . uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights" (Merriam, 1998, p.133) related to our research questions. We used a variety of different document sources to collect further data for our study. This included our

personal journals, the metaphors created by our focus group participants, emails and journals shared with us by some of the participants, and various curricula. Each source provided us with deeper insight into the interreligious dialogue experience.

Data from our own interreligious dialogue came from our personal journals, which contained our individual reflections on both the incidental learning and purposeful encounters we structured for ourselves. These purposeful encounters included analysis of religious education curricula from Jewish and Muslim communities, study of Jewish and Muslim texts relating to religious values and stories from the Torah and the Qur'an, the sharing of and participation in rituals and ceremonies that took place within each of our immediate religious contexts, and shared participation in religious rituals and ceremonies outside of our immediate contexts.

Data regarding the interreligious dialogue experience for the other participants in our study came from the metaphors they had created in the focus group activity, the outlined curricula for each group follow-up emails and documents such as personal journals and poems created by participants that were shared with us. The metaphors helped us to better understand the nature of the learning for each individual, as they reflected back on it. The emails and personal documents also served the same purpose. Examining the curricular approach of each project helped us to understand the impact of content on the interreligious dialogue process.

Data Analysis

Eisner (1995) writes: "Artistically crafted works of art often make aspects of the world vivid and generate a sense of empathy.... Sometimes this is done through focal attention to telling detail and at other times through a process of defamiliarization: the artist decontextualizes the familiar so that it takes on a new significance." (p. 2). Eisner characterizes the way in which artists work as a way to help us to understand that we can learn about schools through artistically crafted research that asks the same questions that artists ask as they work. As artist-researchers, we understand that we are asking the same kinds of questions that artists ask as they work. In our research, the data analysis began the moment we began to reflect on our own experiences in interreligious dialogue with one another.

We understand our approach to data analysis to be congruent with the process described by Eisner in that we moved back and forth between focusing on details and stepping back to look at the overall picture painted by the data. While we followed the familiar process of the constant comparative method of coding data into tentative categories, attempting to integrate categories and their properties, reducing similar categories to a smaller number of highly conceptual categories, and writing up our findings from the coded data and memos (Merriam and Simpson, 1995), the fluidity and creativity of the process is better described

using Eisner's description of the artist researcher's approach to the analysis of data.

In the context of the focus groups, the data was analyzed collaboratively, as we talked about our metaphors side by side with our participants who talked about theirs. We started out in the first and second steps as facilitators, to initiate the process and start the conversation. CIMCAM then enabled us to shift roles and to become peers with focus group interview participants. As we had hoped, by participating in the CIMCAM process alongside the other participants, we could shift into our other role of fellow interreligious dialogue participants and they became co-inquirers, our peers, in our efforts to answer the core research question about interreligious dialogue and adult learning, much in the same vein as is done within the context of participatory research. We hung our metaphors on the wall, side by side with all the others. Our reflections became part of the discussion about the metaphors. We learned more about our own ideas about interreligious dialogue, when we discovered what others saw in our metaphors that we simply did not see until the analysis discussion took place. We saw for ourselves what it means to say it is possible to access knowledge that cannot be expressed in mere words.

CIMCAM is particularly important in this study given the collaborative inquiry process from which it emerges. We understand CIMCAM to be a powerful experience of collaborative co-constructing of knowledge in the collaborative inquiry process. CIMCAM helped us to temporarily widen the circle of

collaborative inquiry partners. It helped us to shift the balance of power between

our roles as facilitators and roles as participants in the interviews. Furthermore,

the impact of the process in helping participants both better understand and share

their experiences was evident in the individual interviews that we conducted

collaboratively following the focus group interviews. Not only did participants refer

back to their own metaphors but also to others and to the discussion that was

generated as the group collaboratively analyzed the metaphors. As researchers,

the metaphors provided memorable conversation about our research question that

was not easily dismissed or forgotten. Months later, we find that we remember

each one clearly, as well as a great deal of the conversation generated at these

focus group interviews. Patterns of similarity and difference were noted

immediately, to be considered later on by us, again, along side of the other

metaphor analysis data we gathered at later focus group and personal

interviews. We have provided additional details about how this worked in chapter

five.

In terms of the specific techniques and procedures we used to code the

transcripts, our data analysis led us from manually "…writ[ing] down words and

phrases" to develop "a list of coded categories after the data [had] been

collected" (Bogden & Bilken, 1998, p. 171) to utilizing the software Ethnograph to

better manage and organize the data. We began first to code our interviews by

writing notes in the margins of the transcripts. To do this, we generated a long

list of possible themes that were emerging in our many conversations. We did

this first list from memory, assuming that the most salient and memorable aspects of the research would be most easily recalled. We found this writing in the margins to be more and more of a complex activity as we color coded the themes as individuals, and then shared our thoughts with one another.

In the third summer institute in June 2000, we learned that Ethnograph is a tool that can help us to code the interviews with numbers and symbols, and generate multiple copies that can easily be manipulated later and changed. Because there are two of us, and because we do not live near enough to share marked copies of documents easily, this seemed to be a good solution to the challenge of each of us having access to the data. Ethnograph gives us the ability to easily change our minds or eliminate categories as our analysis progresses. Manipulation of large numbers of note cards or cut and pasted pages in folders did not seem to be the most efficient way for us to work, although we began to try this method. We have been committed to having equal access and doing parallel analysis along the way. While we believe that we could have made that cut and paste method work, it seemed messy and difficult since we are researchers in two different cities.

Strengthening the Quality of Analysis and Ensuring Dependability

Throughout our research process, we were very aware of the need to ensure that our research was sound. Merriam (1998) suggests, "validity and reliability are concerns that can be approached through careful attention to a

study's conceptualization and the way in which the data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted, and the way in which the findings are presented" (p. 199-200). Guba and Lincoln (1985) identify a number of steps by way of which naturalistic inquirers can ensure the dependability, trustworthiness and credibility of their research findings. The three steps that figure prominently in our efforts to this end are peer debriefing, triangulation, and member checks.

Peer Debriefing

The first step we took to ensure the reliability of our data was the process of peer debriefing. Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to peer debriefing as "a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (p.308). This peer debriefing process occurred for us as a routine aspect of our study in at least two ways.

Firstly, the establishment of clinics through the structure of our doctoral program placed us in the position of having to share with our cohort members, the progress we had made in our research, issues we were facing and findings that were emerging. In talking about these three aspects with our cohort peers – who while interested in our work had no vested interest in seeing any particular outcomes for the study – we often found our peers seeking to make sure that we were aware of our posture and the potential influence that our own values and

assumptions were having on how we were viewing and interpreting the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Of particular importance was the feedback and probing of our Christian peers about how we were reading what had been collected from the Christian participants in the study.

A second facet of the peer debriefing within the study was the informal debriefing each of us engaged in with our respective spouses. By periodically sharing with them our observations and insights we found that we were able to probe further or re-examine aspects which otherwise may have been evidence of our own biases as a Muslim and a Jew. Our spouses' respective Jewish and Muslim insights - which were not influenced by engagement as participants within the study – provided a much needed third eye for us.

Triangulation

The second step we took to ensure the reliability of our data was triangulation. Mathison (1988) describes triangulation as the use of "multiple methods, data sources, and researchers to enhance the validity of research findings" (p. 127). All three of these aspects were very much a part of our research.

Multiple methods. In terms of methods, we used individual and group interviews, observations, personal engagement in the interreligious dialogue process, and documents from which to gather our data. In addition, the CIMCAM activity used in the focus groups provided deeper data than could be obtained by

simply asking participants to verbally share with us their experiences and thus served as another distinct triangulation method for our research.

Multiple data sources. In terms of the data sources, we used a total of four different contexts, including our own, to enable us to gather meaningful data. Furthermore, our interviews with administrators and implementers of interreligious dialogue both directly related to the sites we had selected as well as outside these sites, while not included explicitly as part of our data, enabled us to further triangulate the data.

Multiple researchers. Finally, the fact that our study is a collaborative one through which we are both engaged as partners and peers yet from different religious traditions enabled us to meet the criteria of multiple researchers. This aspect of triangulation was further strengthened through an ongoing process of shared reflection at each stage as the data collection progresses. Eisner (1995) writes that coherence is essential for the credibility of a work of art and for artistically crafted research. Along the way, we thought that we needed to make sense of what we saw and heard as individuals, in addition to what we saw and heard as a collaborative research partnership.

In our efforts to create coherence that was not coerced, in an ongoing way, we developed a disciplined process of writing up our own individual field notes following each observation, focus group interview, and individual interview. Only then, after this step of thinking and writing, did we compared notes and talk about what we thought we understood, saw and heard. We recorded these

collaborative field notes on audiotape and transcribed them to use as a means of re-tracing our thoughts, as we came to the final stage of recording our findings. We used these collaborative field notes only after our final stage of analysis of the interview transcripts was complete, as a source for checking another level of internal coherence using our own prior observations and thoughts as a tool.

We created a process of analysis that will ensure that coherence is not, in fact, a mask for simple agreement. We have been vigilant and disciplined in our practice. At all stages of the research process, there have been definite points at which we did not agree on what we perceived had happened. When this would happen, we talked it through and held our ideas for additional reflection later. Sometimes hearing another interpretation of what we thought we heard and saw was helpful in moving us as individuals to understanding that there was indeed more than one way to interpret a conversation and an experience. We found that the time consuming conversation that characterized every step of the data analysis process is what challenged us to be ever vigilant about what we saw, thought and felt were our findings.

Member Check

Member checking occurred on a number of levels within the study. Informally, we engaged in a variety of techniques including "playing" the output of one interview with subsequent participants, testing insights from one group with others, and reflectively summarizing what we heard within the context of

interviews in order to ensure that what we thought we heard was what the interviewees intended to communicate (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Formally, we contacted individual participants once our findings had been written up. We shared with participants what we had used from the interviews, how we had interpreted these pieces of data, and what conclusions we had drawn from them. Participants were given opportunity to ensure that they were not misrepresented or misinterpreted.

Limitations of the Study

It is quite likely that those seeking to carefully examine our research may find numerous limitations, some of which we ourselves may not have considered. In recognition of this and in our effort to increase the transparency of our study, we have outlined several key limitations that we recognize. The limitations relate to our positionality within the study as participant-researchers and as insiders within the Jewish and Muslim traditions respectively, to the relatively limited scope of our research, and, finally, to the kind of participant we included based on our selection criteria.

In terms of the limitations resulting from our role as participant-researchers, it could be argued that because we were so deeply embedded in the experience of interreligious dialogue ourselves, and we were also collaborative inquirers about the experience with the other participants in our study, that we found familiarity more often than dissonance in our conversation

and analysis of the experience. However, as we shared our metaphors and discussed our experiences with other participants in the study, over and over again, we found ideas repeated and aspects of the interreligious dialogue experience shared by many others in the study. As such, we have a high degree of confidence in the coherence of the themes and concepts that we have generated on our data display. Furthermore, the extensive steps taken to ensure the dependability and reliability of the data were sound measures that enabled us to separate out our own biases and assumptions so that what is reported is an accurate recording of what participants shared.

Another limitation of the study relates to our respective positions as insiders within the Jewish and Muslim communities. This circumstance provided both positive and negative challenges. On the one hand, because members of our respective religious groups considered us insiders, it may have made it easier for them to share intimate information and insights with us. On the other hand, it is quite possible that important insights and observations may have not been shared with us as participants made assumptions about what we already knew as insiders.

Another aspect of this is that our own biases and assumptions about Jews and Muslims could color how we interpreted what we were seeing and hearing. If there is one thing we have gained from doing this research it is an awakening to the realization that even within a single religious tradition, there are many views and interpretations. Despite this awareness, however, the possibility that

we would analyze what we were seeing and hearing through our own personal lenses exists. Again, our efforts at ensuring the credibility and dependability of the data - including triangulation and member-checking – minimizes the likelihood that what we present in our findings is not what was reported by participants.

Another limitation to the study relates to the scope of the study. We have representatives of only three religious traditions, and there are indeed so many others that could have been included. However, given that this study is a qualitative one that seeks to describe the experiences of specific individuals engaged in interreligious dialogue, and we do not suggest that these experiences are in any way representative of all interreligious dialogue experiences, the inclusion of only three religious traditions is not an issue.

Finally, we are aware that it is a limitation to know that our study was conceptualized as an exploration of the interreligious dialogue learning experience of those who have had a primarily positive experience. We know this because we agree that it is not likely that those who have had a negative experience would have continued to participate for at least one year, the criteria for participants in our study. It would be interesting to learn from those who fell away earlier, those who attempted interreligious dialogue and did not continue to engage thereafter. However, such an investigation is beyond the scope of this particular study and we will have to leave this and other questions for future studies to explore.

Despite all the limitations listed here, we strongly believe that this study is important. It provides valuable insight into how these particular participants have been able to develop greater understandings of their religious neighbors in a manner that has enabled them to create - at least in their own corner of society - a more civil, more open, and more informed world. This is a first step.

CHAPTER FOUR

SCENES FROM AN ACADEMIC COLLABORATION

Our work together is deeply infused with different manifestations of the process of collaboration. Our experience as collaborative learning and research partners has shown us that collaboration can be a professionally productive and personally rewarding process. While we cannot quantitatively measure the output of our research efforts, we agree that the phrase "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts" applies to both the quality and the productivity level of our research efforts. Saltiel, Sgroi, and Brockett (1998) highlight this element of collaboration succinctly when they say: "The power of collaborative partnerships can be highlighted in a single word: synergy" (p.1).

Our theoretical framework of constructivism, a shared orientation towards thinking about our research as being artistically crafted (Eisner, 1995), the manner in which we approached, planned, executed, and shared our research, and the manner in which we invited participants to share their experiences with us, are all examples of how collaboration, collaborative learning, and collaborative inquiry are integrally woven into this research study. We have shared the details of the journey that led us to be collaborative inquiry partners in chapter one, in which we described key events that led to our collaboration. Now that we have set the context for our study by sharing details about who we are, what brought us to the topic of interreligious dialogue, what we hope to

accomplish through this study, and how the study was approached and carried

out, we present a more detailed picture of what the collaboration processes

looked like, as well the impact that it had on our work.

First, in a section we call 'collaboration in formation', we provide an

overview of our journey moving from being individual learners, to becoming

learning partners to ultimately working as collaborative inquiry and research

partners. We will share specific examples of what the journey looked like in its

formative period. Following that, in the section we call 'collaborative research in

action', we illuminate the process of working together as collaborative

researchers. We provide examples from our journals, field notes, and transcripts

of what our collaboration process looked and felt like, to us, as we moved

through the planning, research, and writing stages of the research study. We

have divided this 'collaborative research in action' section into four areas. The

four areas are: (a) artist-researchers in collaboration, (b) collaborative planning

and decision making, where we provide details of how we engaged as

collaborators who lived thousands of miles apart in different states; (c) data

collection and analysis, where we provide details of how our collaboration

enabled us to ensure the integrity of our data; and (d) academic writing, where

we will discuss the process by which we managed to write cohesive documents -

such as conference papers and this completed project - that embody a

collaborative voice. It is important to note up front, that the experience of our

academic collaboration is much more iterative, developmental, evolutionary,

organic and holistic than what we can convey on the page. While they are not linear, and they are not distinct and totally separate, for the purposes of writing this chapter, we created these areas of focus, so that we more succinctly share aspects of the experiences we had.

It is also essential to state that in a fully collaborative partnership, the ongoing and regular communications process has the character of being completely cumulative. Reflecting now upon almost three years of this process together, in both the formation period and the collaborative research process itself, we have the sense that everything we did in this process, even the most seemingly tangential activity, was valuable. Our collaboration was very creative and productive.

Collaboration in Formation

According to Lee (1998, 2000), the four essential elements in a collaborative learning approach are: (a) active engagement with the dialogue process, (b) appreciation of the social constructionist theory of knowledge construction, (c) a distinct shift in locus of authority from the traditional teacher to the dynamic learning community, and (d) fostering a culture of learning where there is an atmosphere of critical openness which leads to engagement of the whole person. Our experience as students in the NLU doctoral program in adult and continuing education (ACE) is that these elements are very much an aspect

of how this program has been designed. It is this design that stimulated our subsequent collaborative efforts with one another.

Before we move on to describe how our learning partnership developed, there are a few points that we need to clarify. Our belief that the NLU doctoral program was a key catalyst in jump-starting our collaboration by engaging us as collaborative learners is not intended to communicate an assumption that the program is without its flaws nor an assumption that all members of our cohort viewed the program similarly. There is a difference between a program nurturing and providing for the key elements of collaborative learning and that program actualizing a collaborative learning atmosphere. The former is an element of design and intent, the latter an element of execution that is strongly impacted by factors other than intent, including whether students are ready and willing to follow the collaborative lead of the program faculty. In the case of our work, there is no doubt that, we not only followed the lead of the program as conceptualized and responded to faculty commitment to support collaboration, but we also actually went beyond that starting point in response to our own inclinations to work with one another. This was not necessarily the case for others of our cohort, some of whom were either not interested in the collaborative dimension to the same extent we are or who did not perceive the program to have nurtured this collaboration based on their own experiences along the way. Our descriptions of how the program fostered our collaborative work together reflect our shared understanding of the role of institutional support for academic

collaboration, and how that support manifested itself in the doctoral program in which we were learning.

One key outcome of our being part of an institutional framework that encourages collaboration, is that we formed a collaborative learning partnership as defined by the following key elements: (a) a deep trust and respect for one another, (b) the conscious selection of one another as learning partners; (c) the discovery of a mutual striving toward common goals linked to powerful ideas and shared dreams; (d) having different but complementary personality traits; and (e) the development of synergy or a sense that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, as a result of the collaborative partnership that is created (Sgroi & Saltiel, 1998). While the nurturing of these elements is due in large part to who we are, as individuals, the consciously constructed collaborative context of the NLU ACE doctoral program provided an opportunity for our collaborative learning partnership to flower. As we reflect now, almost three years after we first met as cohort members, we can see that each of these five essential elements can be found in all stages of our collaborative partnership. At one point, we began to choose to do writing assignments together, which led us gradually towards the commitment to do collaborative doctoral research together. "There is magic in a collaborative partnership. It provides the power to transform ordinary learning experiences into dynamic relationships, resulting in a synergistic process of accomplishment" (Saltiel et al., 1998, P. 5). The magic for us is in the transition from collaborative learners, to collaborative learning partners to collaborative

research partners, who engage in collaborative inquiry as a research methodology.

Bray, Lee, Smith, & Yorks (2000) define collaborative inquiry as "a process of repeated episodes of reflection and action through which a group of peers strives to answer a question of importance to them" (p.6). Building on our experience of forming a collaborative learning partnership through the NLU ACE doctoral program, we next formed a collaborative research partnership as we established a relationship as collaborative inquirers interested in learning more about the nature of interreligious dialogue and adult learning. The primary distinction we are drawing between this new relationship and our prior collaborative learning partnership is that the focus of collaborative learning fostered in the classroom is on externally created activities and assignments, while in the case of a collaborative inquiry research partnership, both the motivation to collaborate and the questions being asked emerge from the interests and intentions of the research collaborators themselves. In our case, this is the stage when we began to decide learning and research tasks for ourselves. This was the point at which we became the peers who would strive to answer a research question of importance to us both. The catalyst for this transition from learners to inquirers came first when we began to ask questions relating to our individual fields of practice, Jane as a professional Jewish educator and Nadira as a volunteer educator in the Ismaili Muslim community. Further details about this particular aspect of this stage in our journey are

discussed elsewhere in the literature (Charaniya & West Walsh, 1999). We understand this now as the initiating episode of reflection and action in the collaborative inquiry research process.

Collaborative Research in Action

We are now aware of at least two important ways in which collaborative inquiry is organically bound into the process of establishing, maintaining and sustaining our collaborative research partnership: (a) learning about interreligious dialogue by engaging in interreligious dialogue, and (b) shared reflection as triangulation. In the beginning, we understood these two aspects of our work, simply as ways we worked together to help each other to think about our research question, which is about the nature of the learning in the interreligious dialogue process. Now, we have come to understand these two aspects also as essential components of collaborative inquiry as a methodology for our research and practice. Like connecting trails, our experiences as individuals and as collaborative researchers, build on each other, to help us answer our research questions.

Our research is about interreligious dialogue and the adult learning that takes place in that context. Since we initiated our collaborative learning partnership, we ourselves have been engaged in learning about one another from one another, as a Muslim and a Jew. Our collaborative interreligious dialogue experience informs every aspect of our research study. As we prepared

the purpose statement and core question for our research; as we participated in the observations of dialogue programs; as we participated in the focus group interviews; as we collaboratively conducted the individual interviews; and as we analyzed the materials we gathered together, we found that we continually saw parallels between what we experienced ourselves and what we understood the other participants in our study to be telling us. As collaborative research partners in conversation, we understand this as a process of learning about interreligious dialogue by collaboratively engaging in interreligious dialogue – much like the process of learning about group learning by engaging in group learning (Kasl, Dechant, & Marsick, 1993).

Consciously, as part of our collaborative research process, we initiated an ongoing process of shared reflection, at each stage, as data collection progressed. This functioned as an immediate triangulation of thoughts and ideas that could then be used to inform subsequent observations, focus group interviews, and private interviews. In this shared reflection, we at times challenged each other and at other times validated our observations and the feelings that accompanied them. Together, collaboratively, we created an understanding of what took place, what questions we still had, and how a particular experience added to our ideas about interreligious dialogue and our research question. It could be argued that some form of this type of triangulation occurs whenever researchers seek out peers with whom they can discuss their work. It is our understanding that it is distinctive to collaborative inquiry research

when this sort of triangulation is built into the research process. Our particular

collaborative inquiry research design enabled us to bring our individual ideas into

sharper focus before the triangulation conversations began.

One of the most fruitful outcomes of our work, as collaborative inquiry

research partners, was the development of a collaborative inquiry research tool

that involves metaphor creation and analysis as a research application. We used

this new method for our focus group interviews. We have labeled this the

Collaborative Inquiry Metaphor Creation and Analysis Method (CIMCAM).

Specific details about this method are provided in chapter five. Most important

here is the idea that CIMCAM helped us to temporarily widen the circle of

collaborative inquiry partners. It helped us to shift the balance of power between

our roles as facilitators and roles as participants in the interviews. We

understand this method to be a powerful experience of collaborative co-

constructing of knowledge in the collaborative inquiry process. Furthermore, the

impact of the process in helping participants both better understand and share their

experiences was evident in the individual interviews that we conducted

collaboratively following the focus group interviews. Not only did participants refer

back to their own metaphors but also to others and to the discussion that was

generated as the group collaboratively analyzed the metaphors. As researchers,

the metaphors provided memorable conversation about our research question that

was not easily dismissed or forgotten. Months later, we found that we remembered

most of them clearly, as well as a great deal of the conversation generated at these

focus group interviews, because the metaphor images were such powerful means to express ideas.

Artist-Researchers in Collaboration

We have come to understand our work together as artistically crafted research (Eisner, 1995). Our overarching orientation or stance toward qualitative research methodology is as artist-researchers that are artistically engaged in the research process. It is easy to see this now, in retrospect, however it was neither obvious nor understood as such, from the beginning. It was there from the first moments that we presented ourselves to our doctoral cohort in general, and to one another, in particular. It was there also at the earliest stages of our collaboration.

Nadira first expressed herself in the cohort in pictures, writing her very first official paper as a mind map, an interconnected series of forms with words and ideas expressed inside of each one. She knew exactly what she was trying to say about the concept of Critical Reflection, the writing assignment topic. The mind map format puzzled many in the cohort, including the professor who assigned the project. She was challenged by the cohort, and more notably by that very professor, to present herself and her ideas in a more conventional format as a paper, and she did. However, that moment of seeing what she had dared to create left an indelible impression upon us as cohort. Those of us who lived in the same dormitory residence areas as Nadira for those two weeks of the first summer institute then watched her work, late into the night, crafting her ideas

in a more conventional format required to communicate to us as a cohort and enable others to understand her thoughts and ideas as she did, without her being present. One of those people had been Jane.

Jane's work as a technical illustrator and graphic artist had sustained her for ten years of her professional life, before turning to Jewish education as a new forum for her creativity and self expression in the early 1980's. Always thinking about ideas and concepts and their relation to self expression, in 1981 she turned from a focus on graphic communication of the complex ideas of science and nature to the challenge of communication and teaching about the complex ideas found in Jewish history and tradition. It was a shift in focus and form, yet the thread of creativity was there, expressing itself in newly artistic ways. There was also a thread there that would ultimately lead to adult education based upon a personal and professional commitment to fostering the kind of interactions between personal growth and social change that are intimately connected to particular kinds of knowledge.

Besides these professional forms of creative expression, each of us has had a lifelong affinity to working creatively, enjoying a variety of forms of creative activities. We each like to use color, shape and form to make objects with which we can express our affection and respect for colleagues and friends and loved ones. Nadira's home in Bartlett, Illinois, the home where we first learned about our shared interest and focus on religious education for our respective religious communities, had not only an office space with adult and religious education

books and a place to write with several computers available, but also a craft room just for Nadira's many art and craft materials and a work space to use them. Nadira's newest home in California has less space, but the house is filled with the fruits of her efforts at creating decorated house wares, clothing, and toys. Despite the lack of space, the creative juices still flow, and the space for creating new things can be found on a counter top or on a box top in the center of the floor, as needed. Jane's home is accented with the completed projects from a lifetime of imaging ideas with clay, pencils, pastels, and metals. Works in progress are squeezed into drawers, corners, and on the tops of bookshelves, awaiting their next steps toward completion.

What we experienced and the manner in which this artistic-researcher dimension of our work manifested itself is very similar to Caron and Hyland's (1999) description of how art played an important role in their co-operative inquiry. They tell us:

> When we could not find our way into a topic, or we were lost in a topic, we would turn to the arts side of our personality to save us. In the drawing of a concept, or in the colors we implemented to express the concept, more often than not we found our way back to the language of words. The color, shape and patterns frequently led us, sometimes together, sometimes separately, into connections that might not have surfaced in discussion only. (p.91)

As we reflect back on the many metaphors we used to try and explain what we were seeing from the data and the numerous mind-maps we created to help organize our ideas, we realize that it was this very dimension of the creative

aspects of our personalities that helped us find richness and depth that perhaps would have been lost in a purely rational, cognitive, and intellectual approach.

Seeing it now, in retrospect, thinking about how we have moved through the stages of reflection and action that our own collaborative learning and collaborative inquiry has taken, it has become clear to us that our approach to qualitative research methodology in general, and our data analysis process, in particular, is suspended within an overarching understanding of qualitative research as an endeavor that resides comfortably in the confluence of the worlds of both art and science. We are not neutral in this regard. We are not objective and distanced researchers who attempt to bring a value-free stance to our research. We indeed bring along with us the bias of the aesthetic. We also acknowledge that we are both value-laden with a religious perspective. This is a position that assumes that there is a God and that God does in some way impact upon the world of human endeavor in ways that are not completely knowable and that do impact on human understanding and perceptions of reality and truth. Our biases are generated within this aspect of who we are and how we understand, albeit in a limited way, how the world works.

While as collaborative researchers we do not come from the same religious perspective, and we do not share the same religious tradition and world view, we do agree that this is a starting point upon which we come to the interreligious dialogue table as adult education researchers and practitioners. We understand that this value-laden stance is also relevant for all of the

participants in our study. They bring some element of this bias about how the world works with them, as they have chosen to participate in our study because of their participation in interreligious dialogue, and because they have done so from their place as a committed member of a particular religious community.

As we strive to be accountable and disciplined like scientists, so too do we strive to think deeply about our research and experience in new ways, using symbols and metaphors as vehicles to move us along. As we have moved through the stages of our work as doctoral student researchers, reflecting on our own methodological practice, we have come to think of ourselves as artistic researchers. We have come to understand ourselves as researchers who are what Eisner refers to as "artistically engaged" (Eisner, 1995). This understanding is not something with which we entered the research process with; rather, it emerged through our experiences and as we understood our experiences through Eisner's writing on the subject.

In the educational theory literature, Eisner (1995) describes artistically engaged researchers as having

> The ability to negotiate the tension between control and surrender, between giving in to the insistent demands of the world and yielding to the chaos of the unconscious. The space between the world and the unconscious is what Lawrence Kubie calls the 'pre-conscious.' Using the space productively is of paramount importance in the shaping of incisive and aesthetically revealing work, regardless of the domain in which it is done. (p.5)

We understand the creation of metaphor to express ideas about the meaning and the experience of interreligious dialogue, and the ongoing creative

exchange about what we believe is happening in the research process, as concrete manifestations of being artistically engaged as qualitative research scholars. Eisner (1995) writes:

> It is ironic that qualities as fundamental and powerful as those that constitute art have been so neglected in the discourse of research methodology. We academics have made such a sharp differentiation between art and science that we believe social science has nothing at all to do with art. This view not only reveals a parochial conception of art; it reveals a distorted view of science. It is a view that does not serve educational research well (p.5).

Eisner is talking particularly about artistry as expressed in the social sciences. He advocates the use of artistry in social science research by saying

> Artistically crafted research can inform practicing educators and scholars in ways that are both powerful and illuminating. Research with no coherent story, no vivid images, and no sense of the particular is unlikely to stick. Coherence, imagery, and particularity are the fruits of artistic thinking (p.5).

Eisner writes about artistically crafted research and how it can help educational researchers and practitioners to better understand schools, as he often addresses a reading audience focused on K-12 education in America. From our own experience of this in our own work as researchers in the field of adult education, we understand that while Eisner writes about social science research in general, his ideas are transferable to the particular questions with which adult education research is concerned.

Collaborative Planning And Decision Making

In January of 1999, we decided that in order to work collaboratively, we would need to establish a routine of communication that would enable us to keep thinking about our work together on a regular basis. This communication consisted of weekly telephone calls of between 45 to 75 minutes in duration, almost daily emails between us and posting of important thoughts, ideas and communication on a web page especially set up as part of the NLU doctoral program forum, and periodic physical planning sessions that coincided with our monthly doctoral weekends or professional conferences we were presenting at. Each of these three communication methods enabled us to successfully plan our research

Weekly telephone calls. When we first began our weekly telephone calls, we scheduled them consistently for every Sunday morning at 6:00 a.m. Pacific time/8:00 a.m. Central time. For most of 1999, we kept to this schedule, allowing for a change in day or time when life events, religious occasions, or other obstacles presented themselves. We used these calls to catch up on what each of us had been doing, for planning the next steps and for making decisions about our research direction. At this point we were still in the process of generating the first concept paper related to our research and then, later, trying to identify potential data sites. Along with the decision to work collaboratively on our research project came a related decision to collaboratively submit those

assignments for our doctoral coursework that directly impacted on the eventual research project. Thus, our calls were filled with discussions and decisions about what we had accomplished and how to proceed.

These calls, however, were not simply "business as usual" calls. Rather, they were our way of connecting with each other about our lives. They were also filled with personal sharing about our lives, our work and our families, and the practical realities of planning for our collaborative assignments and how we would carry them out both together and as individuals. While we worked on tasks and shared ideas about our assignments for the collaborative Critical Engagement Project, there was also an ongoing dialogue about one another as Muslim and Jew – about our ideas, values and beliefs, as well as details about the various religious holidays and traditions. We talked about our selves and our families and put these experiences into a context for one another within the framework of the larger national and world communities of Muslims and Jews, now and in history. It was this ongoing dialogue, imbedded deeply within our relationship as colleagues and friends, which inspired our collaborative CEP work and has continued to propel this study forward.

Mealman and Lawrence (1998) identify commitment as key to the collaborative process. They suggest that commitment - to self, to the project, to the group, and to one another – is an essential component of the collaborative inquiry process. In talking about the commitment to one another, they say:

> In our experience we have sometimes delayed working on the
> "collaborative project" when one or the other can not be fully present

because of some other pressing concern. A collaborator may need help getting unstuck or freed up from some other aspect of one's life. (p. 136)

Our experience has been very similar. We have often spent entire phone calls listening to each other talk about personal issues such as those relating to Jane's shift into a new professional role as an educational working on projects outside of where she lived in Peoria, and her position as a rabbi's wife and step mother of a teenage son; and Nadira's recurring health concerns such as chronic migraines and Fibromyalgia and her challenges raising two young sons. Talk about our respective family situations, our dreams and fears, and our professional lives seemed to roll into our talk about our research. Along the way, Nadira had an emergency surgery that required a recovery of several weeks. Jane lost her father in the first fall of the doctoral program, three aunts along the way in between, and her mother-in-law at the end, when the deadline for turning in our writing was at hand. There was never a time when our calls dealt only with our work. Even when the bulk of our conversation focused on actual planning, we usually began our conversations catching up on the personal. We found that the time we took to connect on these issues outside of the immediate scope of the research freed us up to concentrate more fully on the work at hand. Caron and Hyland (1999) capture this when they state: "We have provided for each other privacy when necessary and energy when needed . . . . We have given each other the gift of time . . . we have given each other an environment for learning" (p.98).

While we have always been regular with our telephone communication, the frequency of them has fluctuated at different points along the way. One occasion when our calls changed from being weekly to occasionally was in the latter part of 1999 when Nadira underwent Gall Bladder surgery. The surgery and the subsequent recovery time involved meant that Nadira was often neither physically nor mentally able to focus on the work at hand. This was when Jane's commitment to Nadira and to the project kicked into action. Despite her own anxiety at the potential impact of the stall, she continued to provide support , understanding and comfort to her collaborator and, in so doing, ensured that the work would go on. Nadira later reflected in her journal that

> It is amazing how even when something occurs that can potentially derail the work, our commitment to the work and to each other helps us somehow muddle through. Jane's support when I have been unable to mentally, emotionally, and physically contribute has meant that we were able to overcome another potential obstacle. In fact, I believe that our collaborative partnership is even the stronger as a result.

Our regular telephone calls have been an important aspect of our work together and have provided us with a sense of connection that would other wise have been rather more difficult. With Nadira living in California and Jane living in Illinois, we did not have the luxury of meeting over coffee, thus our telephone calls were vital to our collaboration. While we have talked here specifically about their importance to the planning process, they were also crucial to the decision-making, data analysis, and writing processes.

Email and forum postings. Throughout our work together, we have relied heavily on our computers and on the communication possibilities provided by them. As part of the NLU ACE doctoral program, at the time of our acceptance to the program, we were told that participation would require the use of an e-mail address. We would be expected to use email for communication with the faculty and members of the cohort between our monthly class sessions and summer institute programs. Jane began using email for the first time, at this time, while Nadira was already comfortable using this medium. Additionally, given the time difference between our two cities and the many other responsibilities that we each have, it was not always possible for us to connect by phone.

Our use of email covered a wide range of purposes. We sent each other updates of our progress in between telephone calls. We exchanged document drafts, we forwarded important pieces of information that were relevant to our work but that were not central –such as news stories from the global arena, or literature, resources or potential contacts that could help us along the way. We shared insights about things we were reading or ideas that had occurred to us that in some way related to our work together. We sent each other literature summaries that we had each developed as a result of reading something or of attending a conference session. Sometimes, we even shared how we were feeling – emotionally, mentally, socially, or physically, on a given day. We found that these seemingly disconnected pieces of information somehow often made

their way back into our conversations about our work or in the interreligious dialogue in which we engaged with one another.

Email soon became an important dimension of our communication. In addition to enabling us to share thoughts, resources, ideas, and events with each other, email provided us with written documentation of our process together. We used email to bounce ideas off each other. We even planned the agendas for our telephone calls through our emails. Another important function of the email was collaborating on conference proposals, papers, and presentations.

In December of 1999, we enlarged the scope of our technical communication by asking that a private page be set up for us on the NLU ACE doctoral Forum page on the web. Here we posted relevant emails as well as articles relating to our work together. Over time, we created a series of different folders ranging from CEP planning notes to information important to our own interreligious dialogue process. As our research progressed, we included folders for each of our data sites, for possible literature sources, and for information about various areas of the field that we felt were important to our study. The following interchange that took place on the Forum illustrates how our collaboration through this medium worked:

> Jane: Hi Nadira - it feels to me as if we are spinning off on our own without as much connection and conversation as we have had before. I am not sure whether this is due to your recent surgery, or whether we are in fact entering a new phase of our working relationship. . .

> Nadira: I too have been doing a lot of thinking about this and I think that while it did begin with my surgery, it is more than just that. I think

we have entered a new phase in our working relationship. I think we will find now that we are talking less frequently but that the depth and length of our conversations will be increased. I think that it may actually require face-to-face meetings (although I am not sure how we will manage this) rather than our weekly telephone conversations. The one thing that I think we still need to work more on (and you've been better than I have about this) is our email communication. Since this form of communication can take place regardless of our schedules, we should both try and make sure we send each other an "update" (where we are, what new insights have occurred, who else we've talked to, etc) at least once a week. These are just my initial thoughts; we do need to talk more about this. . .

Jane: Thanks for the updates and suggestions. I agree that the lack of e-mails from you, combined with the break in the routine of phone calls, has contributed to my feeling that we are not as much in sync as we were. Your circumstances at home, and my recent work schedule have made it extremely difficult for us to keep in touch. I like the suggestion of regular e-mail updates. This works for me pretty well and I would like to see you post more often, if you can. With all of the challenges, not the least of which has been your health, it does amaze me how quickly we get back in step when we do communicate: for instance, in Boston we had some quality time, I think, and the brief conversations we had at Carole's on the last weekend and on the phone the other day, seem to keep us going, albeit more slowly than we perhaps would like.

As is illustrated by the above interchange, we sometimes made use of the forum and emails to share concerns that would normally be better shared in a physical conversation. However, the level of trust and confidence that we had established enabled us to be able to communicate about even these potentially sensitive issues via an electronic medium. We believe this is due to the fact that we have invested a considerable amount of time and energy, both consciously and unconsciously, to relationship building, a concept that Clark and Watson

(1998) and Mealman and Lawrence (1998) identify as one of the essential components of the collaborative research process.

Physical meetings: working together face to face. The third, and perhaps most important aspect of our communication with each other were the times we were able to meet in person. Our NLU doctoral weekends were scheduled on the second weekend of every month from September to April beginning in the Fall of 1998. In addition, the program's doctoral Summer Institute was scheduled for two weeks in early to mid-June of every year, beginning in 1998. On each of these occasions, beginning with the January 1999 term, we would take time out to share perspectives and plan for our research together. Sometimes we would accomplish this by snatching a lunch break or after dinner at the home of our colleague with whom we stayed, at other times coming in a day or two early. In addition, we have presented at conferences on four different occasions and have seized these times as extra opportunities to collaborate on our work. Finally, Jane spent almost a week in Nadira's home in California in May 2000 and a total of 5 days between February and March 2001.

There are a variety of tasks that we undertook in our meetings, including completing assignments related to the coursework of the program, sharing resources and exchanging materials, planning for upcoming events such as conferences and data collection trips, and engaging in our own interreligious dialogue. Often, we used these times to complete tasks that were begun through email or on the phone but which required actual physical time together to be

effective. At those times when we met over a cohort weekend, we often included other members of our cohort in our discussions, as well as faculty members.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of our physical meeting time was that often we did not necessarily have an established list of tasks or a concrete agenda to accomplish, however, we always somehow managed to get work done related to our research. It was as if we could not separate ourselves from our research, so that everything became connected to it. Our experiences exemplify the "shared passion" suggested by Mealman and Lawrence (1998) as an essential component of the collaborative inquiry process. In regards to this, they say: "when passion is mutual, the motivation for collaboration is high. Excitement and energy by one member often ignites passion in others." In our case, our mutual passion for our work together often inspired, in each of us, a desire to continue exploring the various aspects of our work together.

The one area where this shared passion surfaced more often than anything else in our physical meetings was that related to our own interreligious dialogue project. It was not unusual for us to sit until the very late hours of the night, after a full day of classes, talking about our respective beliefs, religious traditions, and community norms. Often our eyes would be drooping from sleep but our minds and our mouths would continue to share that very personal aspect of our selves that is embodied in our identity as religious persons. With each articulation by one of us, the other would be inspired to share a commonality or profound difference that was sparked by the other's observations. It was at these

moments that we found the most intense and personal moments of interreligious dialogue occurred.

Mealman and Lawrence (1998), in talking about the centrality of dialogue to collaborative inquiry, identify "storytelling, creating metaphors and using other right brained processes, experience sharing and the expression of tentative, not fully-formed ideas" as elements of the dialogue process. On those nights when we sat up into the early hours of the morning talking and sharing, we often did so through these very processes. Sometimes they were embodied in the stories we shared, at other times it was the metaphors we created or illustrations we drew to describe our understanding of our process.

It was this telling of stories about our respective religious traditions as well as our own life stories as they intertwined with these community stories that most often embodied the interreligious dialogue experience between us. Even when talking about an assignment that may be due for our doctoral course work or a project one of us might be engaged in as part of our professional responsibilities, our stories and sharing emerged. As a result, our interreligious dialogue process, particularly as it developed in these dialogic moments of talking and sharing, are more characteristic of storytellers around a fire, sharing the warmth of the fire and the sustenance of each other's knowledge.

Jane captures this sense of the flowing, interweaving of information and ideas, perspectives and beliefs in our interview. After having admitted that it seems like it would be hard for her to identify the cognitive knowledge she has

gained about Islam through our dialogue, she describes it as being "more than

that". She goes on to describe the process in the following way:

> We'll be talking about our paper that's due or the proposal but there is
> never a conversation that doesn't have some dimension about "oh, the
> Imam said this" or "what did you mean by that?" or "the betzelomelohim."
> I don't know, it's just woven at this point, woven into everything. That's
> why it doesn't feel like a discreet, separate thing anymore.

Collecting and Analyzing Data

In the previous chapter, we briefly touched upon how our collaborative

process enabled us to ensure the dependability of our data through the use of

multiple researchers. Here we will elaborate on that a little more by providing

specific examples of the process as it occurred in our data collection and

analysis. Specifically, we will talk about the collaborative experience of collecting

data and analyzing data together and how this looked. In addition, we will share

the details of how we actually worked on coding our data in terms of the impact

of our collaborative approach.

Data collection. In all cases, the collection of data was a collaborative

effort. We both conducted all individual interviews together, we completed every

observation together, and we facilitated the focus groups and CIMCAM activity

together. One of the initial concerns we had about doing so was that our

presence as a team of researchers might overwhelm our participants. We took

steps to minimize the potential of that by making sure that in all cases, one of us took the lead while the other jumped in only when there was an important point that had not been followed up on.

In the case of the individual interviews, it was usually the person who had established initial contact with the interviewee who served as the primary interviewer. In the case of the focus group interviews, we each took turns facilitating different parts of the CIMCAM process. In all three cases, Jane facilitated the first step of inviting participants to share some aspect of their experiences in interreligious dialogue while Nadira introduced the metaphor creation process and began the process of having participants share their individual metaphors. The final step, a collective analysis of all the metaphors together, was usually initiated by a comment from Nadira, however since this was the aspect of CIMCAM where there was collaboration between all participants, there was not real facilitator role that was played by either of us. One clear advantage of both doing the interviews and observations together was that we each focused on different areas of inquiry and were thus able to cover a wider range of perspectives.

One example of how having two of us collecting data together was far more beneficial than had we done so individually is clear in what happened with the first observation we did with the Origins project. The observation was of the second of four meetings of a Christian-Jewish group. Diane, one of the participants in our study, was facilitating a discussion on the Book of Ruth. Our

purpose in observing them was to see if there was a difference between the experiences described by the participants in our study who have been engaged in interreligious dialogue for more than a year and what we observed of the interactions of this nascent group. A secondary purpose was to see how Diane's prolonged engagement in interreligious dialogue impacted her facilitation of the nascent group.

Nadira, being neither Jewish nor Christian, was not familiar with either the Book of Ruth or the various traditions of interpretation that accompany it in either religious tradition. Jane, on the other hand, is intimately familiar with both the book itself and with the historical and cultural dimensions that play a role in the interpretation of it from the Jewish perspective. During the course of the observation, a Christian member of the group shared his interpretation that the story was about love and then he connected this idea to the idea of love embodied in Jesus. When we later talked about the observation and shared our reactions to it, Jane commented on her perception that the Jewish participants did not talk about the biblical tradition of halitzah, which is embedded in the book of Ruth. This is the historical tradition of a widow marrying her husbands brother, or if there is no brother, the male relative who will inherit the wealth. The intent behind this was to ensure that the widow could have a son to carry on the family name. It appeared, to Jane, to be a fact that was missing in the interpretation of the story that evening. What was interesting is that Nadira, who was not as invested in the story but was more attentive to the actual communication

processes, had heard one of the Jewish participants, albeit fleetingly, articulate this information about Jewish custom in response to the love interpretation. By virtue of being able to have captured this (something that Jane had missed in her radar), our observation was more complex and provided a more complete picture of what actually took place. Had Jane been conducting the observation alone, this valuable piece of information may not have been caught and she may have proceeded to make assumptions without it. At the same time, had Nadira been doing the observation alone, she may not have caught the significance of this important interchange since neither interpretation held any real meaning for her. This was only one of many instances where collecting data together made a difference to both the quality and dependability of the data.

The example we have shared here relates to our religious diversity and how it enhanced the data collection process. There are, in fact, many other ways in which we are different and that this difference positively impacted on our collaboration. There is sometimes a mistaken notion that collaboration works best when those engaged in collaboration think alike, share the same types of experiences, and represent the same types of social groups. In the case of our collaboration together, our diversity as well as our similarities deepened the collaborative experience and the richness that it added to the research process.

We have already outlined how our similarities as religious educators, women, and artist-researchers strengthened this study. We have also highlighted how the fact that we represent two different religious traditions was

useful in the data collection process. Other ways in which we are different include the fact that Nadira is a first generation naturalized American whereas Jane is a third generation American by birth. There is also a vast difference in our ages, with 13 years between us. While Jane's geographical life experiences are limited to the United States and Israel, Nadira has lived in Zaire, England, Canada, and the United States. Jane has experienced marginalization as a Jew living in America. Nadira, on the other hand, has experienced marginalization both from the perspective of her religious identity as well as from the fact of the color of her skin.

Additionally, what each of us brought to the collaboration in terms of specific skills was also different. Jane is a very critical reader and has the ability to hone in on very specific details and nuances of our work, whereas Nadira's criticality takes a more global and macro approach. Similarly, Nadira has a talent for easily being able to negotiate technical aspects of the research, particularly the use of the various software we used in our research, whereas Jane was more attuned to the subtle details related to networking and maintaining communication with various individuals. Each of these differences, while they may appear to be tangential to our work, were extremely important to the collaboration in that they enabled us to bring different but complimentary skills and life experiences to our work together, particularly in the process of data collection.

Data analysis. There are two key aspects of the data analysis process that were influenced by the collaborative nature of our work together. Our debrief procedure immediately following a data collection event enabled us to engage in both individual reflection as well as collective reflection thus improving the overall quality of the analysis and minimizing the possibility of "group think". Secondly, our individual field and collective debrief notes provided additional back-up clarification when we were physically and chronologically removed from the data collection sites.

The procedure we had adopted for our debrief following data collection consisted of each of us taking some time to reflect on the experience and write up our individual field notes as soon as possible following an interview, focus group or observation. We were very disciplined about not talking about the experience or collectively reflecting on it until we had managed to process our own individual thoughts. Instead, we each found separate areas where we could sit, reflect and write notes to capture what we had gotten from the data collection process that had just ended. Mealman and Lawrence (1998) suggest, "engagement in collaborative inquiry requires multiple levels of reflection." This process of our taking the time to work individually on our field notes gave us opportunity to engage in "individual reflection on process and experience" (p. 135).

The next step was a sharing of our notes with each other and a discussion of what we had learned. Often over coffee or dinner, we would sit and go

through the process of debriefing the experience and sharing important things from our individual field notes. This level of reflection was a "group reflection through dialogue" in that what occurred was that as we each shared our perceptions a conversation emerged through which we found similarities or areas of difference in perception that ultimately led to a deeper level of reflection about the experience as we continue to talk. Most of these debrief sessions were tape-recorded and then later transcribed. Sometimes they happened immediately after we had written up our field notes, sometimes they happened after we had written up more than one set of notes.

One of the most important aspects of this debrief process was that because we took the time to initial write up our individual field notes, we were able to clearly see where our analysis of what occurred differed. In those situations, we discussed what each of our perceptions and came to a collaborative understanding based on this discussion. This process enabled us to get clarification on things one of us may not have seen, to acknowledge potential difficulties related to our individual status as insiders or outsiders to the particular individual of group in question, and to understand how our individual biases may have filtered what we saw, as in the example related to the Origins project observation given above.

Following is an example of the dialogue that took place when we didn't necessarily see things in quite the same way. This debrief took place following two of the individual interviews with participants in the Origins project:

Nadira : There's no doubt in my mind that the people that we've interviewed and have come across have commitment.

Jane: What, how do you define commitment? Commitment to their own [religious tradition]? See, Ashley was talking about commitment to the process. Diana Eck talks about commitment and Mary Boys and Sara Lee talk about commitment to your own religious tradition as a requirement [to participate in interreligious dialogue]

Nadira: Well I'm talking about commitment to the process. But that's not to say that I don't think commitment to your own [religious tradition is not important]

Jane: Yeah, so we have to be careful when we say commitment because that is a word that has been used in the literature and it seems to require that commitment-what you're suggesting is there are two kinds of commitment. Why would you have commitment, you know when you start though. I don't think that's a requirement at the beginning.

Nadira: For the process? Because if you don't have a commitment to the process then the process isn't going to work. You're not going-because listening to another, trying to see another's point of view requires effort. If you're not committed to making that effort. . .

Jane: Yeah, I understand that there's an element of it, but I'm not convinced that people who walk in the first time, or second time, or even commit to a four-session thing, are committed.

Nadira: That's not what I'm saying. What I'm saying is that in the context of these successful encounters that we've come across. These people who have been successful and have continued. That one of the things that seems to be characteristic is that they are committed to this process. I'm not saying that they necessarily walked in with that kind of commitment. They may have walked in saying, "Well this sounds interesting. Let me see, let me check it out." But what I am saying - or what I'm asking is -was the development of that commitment an element of the success? In a sense, it's almost common sense - but it's not. I mean I don't want to make that assumption. One could say that one of the reasons why they have been successful and why they have continued and why they have gotten positive results is because they've been committed enough to deal with the tensions, with the conflict, with the discomfort.

Jane: I've been thinking of it as motivation when in fact it might be commitment or some other form of that. But there seems to be something that people bring to this that enables them to get through some of the more difficult moments and I think that's what Ashley was talking about and I'm raising the question-I think a few minutes ago on this tape I was raising the question: Are we talking about motivation or commitment at the beginning to get you started? After you've been in it a year or two, does it require the same kind of sense of motivation or commitment to keep going? Or is this thing somehow self-motivating, which is more what I saw this week. Commitment did not occur to me as I heard these people speak, our interviewees. It didn't feel like I'm going to make a commitment, you know and stick with it. It didn't sound like that and I'm not trying to put words in your mouth but it-at least for more experienced people I would call it something else.

Nadira: Well, yeah, I guess, it may just be a question of semantics, but when I think of commitment I wasn't thinking of it in that context. That's kind of like, almost like a, it's my responsibility, I've committed to this and therefore I'm going [to keep going] . . . And maybe commitment is not the right word for it. I'm not able to find another word and I don't think motivation [is the right word either] . . . It's more, you know, I'm invested in this. This is something that is important and I'm going to go out of my way [to make it happen].

As can be seen from this example, our collaborative process was such that while we were not afraid to disagree with each other, this disagreement was handled as an essential aspect of the collaborative thinking process. This is but one of many instances in which what could be regarded as potential conflict in ideas and perceptions actually deepened the richness and depth of our thinking. Regardless of the topic at hand, the process of expressing and discussing our disagreements built upon our collaborative relationship and enabled us to move forward in profound ways.

In their discussion of the power of collaborative inquiry, Mealman and Lawrence (1998) talk about one use of the dialogue between collaborators being the "baking of ideas." Their suggestion that the trust and openness that is an aspect of the collaborative endeavor enables partners to share "half-baked or partially formed ideas" without hesitation, knowing that these ideas will be taken seriously, nurtured, and added to. The example given above is on instance where this was evident in our collaborative process. This rather long excerpt from our debrief conversation illustrates one of many times when we did not necessarily see things in the same light. However, through the process of critical questioning, clarifying, and working together, we were able to get to a place where we at least agreed on what we each meant, even if we did not resolve the issue of semantics at that point in time.

Academic Writing

At the 1999 Summer Institute of the NLU doctoral program, we were in the midst of developing a concept paper that was to serve as a proposal for this CEP. As we sat together at Nadira's laptop computer in the meeting hall at George Williams Campus, trying to both simultaneously contribute to the creation of this document, we discovered that this was not a successful process for us. We found the process to be exhaustive, tense, and more than a little trying. Many of our cohort colleagues expressed concern about our decision to work on a collaborative project as they saw the effort it was requiring of the two of us.

While others took time to relax and socialize over the daily afternoon cocktail hour, or take a leisurely dip in Lake Geneva, we continued to struggle, both with actually writing our paper and with trying to do so together. While we were eventually successful at developing the paper, we vowed that this process would not be repeated. Since then, we have developed a collaborative working style that not only works for us, but also actually enables us to create a better quality of work.

The relationship that has developed in terms of our subsequent collaborative writing process is not unlike the relationship between an author and an editor. The difference, in our case, is that we both take on both roles interchangeably and we are both invested in the document equally. The way it usually works is that one of us will take a first try at writing whatever it is that needs to be written after we have talked together about what should be included. The decision as to who will take the first crack can be based on a number of things, including an expressed desire to take the responsibility by one of us, a suggestion or request by the other, or an agreed sense that one of us is better prepared to do so based on her knowledge base or time available.

Once this first draft has been written -sometimes as a complete piece and at other times in outline or bullet form - we have a conversation about it. In most cases, this conversation takes place over the phone, is extensive, and consists of a collective verbal editing of the piece. We will raise questions related to content, word meaning, links to literature, intent, audience, and other such important

aspects. After this conversation takes place, one of us will work with the document and revise it based on the conversation. In some cases, this revision is simply a matter of adding "meat" to the existing piece or bringing it down to a certain number of words, in other cases, it requires a complete overhaul. Once this second version is complete, we talk again.

This process of talking, writing, talking, re-writing and talking again sometimes stops after the first revision and sometimes takes three or more revisions. Until we are both comfortable with a document and feel that it best represents what it is that we are trying to communicate, we keep at the process. In some cases, both the original draft and the revisions are handled by the same person, in other cases, we take turns. Regardless of who actually does the physical writing; the completed piece is a collective effort that reflects both of our perceptions, beliefs, ideas, and images.

Mealman and Lawrence (1998) talk about the emergence of the collaborative self as a theme that emerged from their own experiences in collaborative inquiry. They talk about this collaborative self in the following way:

> To work collaboratively in research and writing, one must place value on joint contributions relinquishing the idea of sole ownership of individual contributions. Additionally, one must not hold fast to ideas being viewed in one particular way. There is a fear that one could lose him or herself in the process and cease to be recognized. . . . Over time, we became less concerned about finding our individual voices because we could see that they were reflected in the outcome, and yet that outcome was stronger and deeper than either one of us could accomplish alone. Like a rope made up of individual threads we can be pulled apart and retain our individual uniqueness. However, entwined together, the rope has more strength. Rather than losing our selves to the collaboration, we found a stronger self (p.138).

Our own collaborative writing process echoes this experience articulated here by them. In fact, it was not unusual for one or other of us, in the re-writing process to completely revamp the document to reflect our discussions but in a different way than had initially been agreed upon. In that sense, we individually took editorial and creative decisions about how the document should look, what it should include, and how it should be organized as we were writing. We did this because our collaborative process enabled us to do so. The level of trust, respect and mutual integrity that we have developed working together enabled us to take these risks without fear that it would negatively impact on our work together and with confidence that if the other person did not agree with the new approach, we could always change it back.

As with the planning and decision making and data collection and analysis processes, our shared involvement in this endeavor meant that we each brought different eyes, ears and voices to the documents and yet it is these differences that enabled us to come together in a stronger and more cohesive way. Today, as we look through all the writing that we have generated through our collaborative experience, it is indeed very difficult for us to identify which idea originated from which of us, for every idea has been deepened, strengthened and clarified through the collaborative process so that it is, indeed, a collaborative voice with which we speak.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we described several of the discrete processes in the collaboration process in an academic setting. Our purpose in doing so was to enable our readers to see concrete examples of how our collaboration was formed and how it informed our research process and practice, every step of the way. In closing this chapter, there are several points that must be made.

First, it may seem to the critical eye that our portrait of collaboration is painted in rosy colors. In fact, the nature of our experience together was such that even when either one of us felt negative energy, this energy was soon dispelled because of the collaborative relationship as well as our own trust in each other. Furthermore, as we reflect back on our process, we do not separate out the conflicts from the consensus. Rather, we see the conflict as inherent in and necessary to our journey toward consensus. An example of this is provided in the transcript excerpt related to our discussion of whether participants exhibited commitment or motivation, provided earlier in this chapter.

Second, as reported by Clark and Watson (1998) there is a financial and personal cost involved in collaboration. The expense of weekly phone calls and frequent mailings back and forth was a concern (although one that was somewhat minimized by our use of free internet PC-to-Phone calling websites) as was the additional time that was taken away from our families and respective jobs from the need for constant and frequent conversations and meetings. However, in agreement with the findings of Clark and Watson, we believe that

the interplay of the intellectual and the personal that characterizes collaborative research and writing is worth the effort, the time, the money, and the trouble. We have formed a lifetime partnership in this collaboration process, that is based in deep caring and friendship as well as intellectual and professional interest.

Finally, it may seem that the collaborative process can be neatly broken down into the discrete and somewhat linear steps we have described in this chapter. It is important for our readers to understand, however, that it truly is not linear in character or tone. As Bray, Lee, Smith, and Yorks (2000) state:

> In our work we have found meaning emerging even as we engaged in the early stages of planning the inquiry, during the cycles of action and reflection, and as part of an extended period of making meaning from our experience... collaborative inquiry is an open process that seeks answers to questions that have no preset answers. It is a discovery-oriented form of inquiry, not a confirming or validating one. Meaning arises and submerges, is tacit and articulated, and deals with data one moment and the means of gathering data the next. In brief, change is a constant element in collaborative meaning-making. Periods of clarity are followed by confusion and then by more clarity. We never know where the inquiry will take us; we must constantly be mindful of its emerging nature. (p. 89)

We have painted a portrait of collaboration and opened a window into the mechanics of our academic collaboration. Now we move into a description of the Collaborative Inquiry Metaphor Creation and Analysis Method (CIMCAM), one important product of this collaboration (Charaniya & West Walsh, 2000). It is also another facet of how we sought to understand the nature of the learning in the interreligious dialogue process through collaborative learning. In the next chapter, we provide a detailed look at CIMCAM, what it is, and how and why it played an important role in this study.

CHAPTER FIVE

CIMCAM: FRUITS OF A COLLABORATIVE PROCESS

In the preceding chapter, we illuminated further the collaborative process
that is so central to the work of this study. One important product of this
collaboration has been the development of the Collaborative Inquiry Metaphor
Creation and Analysis Method (CIMCAM), a qualitative research tool for
gathering rich data (Charaniya & West Walsh, 2000). Through this chapter, we
intend to provide additional information about CIMCAM, including how it came
about, how it was used in the study, what the process looked like in practice, and
how it enabled the participants of our study to engage in a collaborative
exploration of their personal experiences in interreligious dialogue.

CIMCAM as a Data Collection and Analysis Method

CIMCAM emerged as a data collection method through our efforts to
foster collaborative critical reflection about interreligious dialogue experiences
within the context of focus group interviews. Our aim was to invite participants to
go deeper, beyond what they may share through simply verbal sharing
processes. We wanted participants to attempt to bring ideas they may hold
about their interreligious dialogue experiences into the shared space of the focus
group, in the form of visual or graphic metaphors. This attempt to capture
abstract ideas and feelings related to our participants' experiences of learning in

the context of the interreligious dialogue process is directly related to the way James Fowler (1981) discusses his ideas of imaginal knowing.

Fowler (1981) posits that knowledge derived from the lifetime of experiences we have, including those we gain in infancy before we have the capacity to put these ideas into a narrative form as concepts, is stored in ways that are "far more comprehensive than our own conscious awareness can monitor" (p.25). Most of this knowledge is stored in the form of images and, with this in mind, he suggests that all of our knowing begins with images. Furthermore, he suggests that it is the image that is the vehicle that unites cognitive information with the feelings we have about that information. These images link with others we retain from previous experiences. The images are also "prior to and deeper than concepts" (p.26). Concepts would be the articulated narratives that we share in verbal form, that emerge, in part, from this process of imaginal knowing. Creating CIMCAM and using it in the focus groups was an attempt to help the participants in our study to capture those experiences of learning in the context of interreligious dialogue that resided in the imaginal realm, and move them out into the conceptual realm, where we could talk about them.

In a more recent work in the field of adult education, Kasl and Yorks (2000) describe John Heron's concept of an extended epistemology including the imaginal mode, comprising intuition and imagery, as one of four primary modes in which the psyche functions. (The other three modes are affective, conceptual,

and practical.) For Heron (1992) "the extended epistemology that springs from these modes of psyche includes four ways of knowing - experiential, presentational, propositional, and practical...presentational knowing is evident in our intuitive grasp of imaginal patterns as expressed in graphic, plastic, moving, musical, and verbal art forms" (p. 14-15). Using Heron's model, CIMCAM can be understood as a research tool for engaging the imaginal mode of the psyche, in order to foster presentational knowing in the context of the collaborative process of sharing the metaphors in the focus group.

In addition, we wanted to be able to create a dialogue situation within the context of the focus groups that would enable participants to share their experiences not only with us as facilitators, but also with the others in the group. This latter intent was based on our belief that "meanings of things arise out of the process of social interaction" and further that "meanings are modified through an interpretive process which involves self-reflective individuals symbolically interacting with one another" (Denzin, 1992, p.xiv). Thus, it is not enough for one to simply reflect on one's experience. Rather, in the tradition of constructivism (Schwandt, 1998), it is the process of sharing that reflection in a social group that not only allows one to express one's understanding but to also then re-interpret one's meanings through the dialogue that ensues. We wanted to talk about the metaphors as part of a process of collaborative inquiry about them, and thus learn from them, and from one another about them, through the analysis phase of the process.

While we were both comfortable with, and interested in, the relationship between the arts and learning, our decision to develop metaphors as an artistic form for collecting data came slowly, collaboratively, over time. First, we learned about the uses of artistic forms in research from our classes at National-Louis University. We saw examples of how researchers used photographs and film, drama and storytelling, to not only report on their research findings, but also as a tool for engaging participants in the research process itself. Our desire to find a meaningful way to use the arts as a vehicle for creating knowledge about interreligious dialogue grew.

We then turned to our own experiences for inspiration. We discovered that both of us had previously used a similar technique to help students to access ideas that may be difficult to express initially in words. As practitioners in our particular areas of religious educational practice; Nadira within the Ismaili Muslim community, and Jane in the Jewish community, using a technique called handmade midrash (Milgrom, 1994), we had used simple art materials to engage teachers and learners of all ages to think metaphorically about their ideas and experiences. With the metaphor creation and analysis process, ideas needing some visual prompting to help them to emerge into the world, are aided by colorful visual metaphors that can be shared and discussed. It often worked, in our respective religious educational practice, as a way of learning more about abstract or inaccessible ideas and concepts.

As adult educators, we became familiar with David Deshler's (1990) description of metaphor analysis as a tool for fostering critical reflection. We felt we could build on his example, using our own expertise in practice, to create the kind of collaborative reflective process we wanted to enhance our research. Lawrence and Mealman affirm this idea when they write, "artistic forms of collecting data assist the research participants in accessing knowledge that cannot be expressed in mere words" (Lawrence & Mealman, 2000, p.1)

CIMCAM consists of five steps: (a) a general introductory discussion for approximately 30 minutes about the participants' experiences in interreligious dialogue centered around three basic ideas of content, context and relationship; (b) introduction of the metaphor creation process; (c) twenty minutes of time for focus group members to work on individual metaphors; (d) the sharing of individual metaphors; and (e) a collective, whole group analysis of the metaphors, how they relate to each other, and what further meaning could be derived from seeing them juxtaposed. Each step is dependent on the other.

Starting first as facilitators, to initiate the process and start the conversation, we then became peers with focus group participants. As we had hoped, by participating in the metaphor creation process alongside the other participants, we became fellow interreligious dialogue participants and they became co-collaborators in the research. We hung our metaphors on the wall, side by side with all the others. Our reflections became part of the discussion about the metaphors. We learned more about our own ideas about interreligious

dialogue, when we discovered what others saw in our metaphors that we simply did not see until the analysis discussion took place. We saw for ourselves what it means to say it is possible to access knowledge that cannot be expressed in mere words.

We understand this to be a powerful experience of collaborative co-constructing of knowledge. This methodology helped us temporarily widen the circle of collaborative inquiry partners, helped us shift the power between the facilitators and participants, and helped us learn about collaborative inquiry as a research method. Furthermore, the impact of the process in helping participants both better understand and share their experiences was evident in the individual interviews that were conducted collaboratively by us following the focus group. Not only did participants refer back to their own metaphors but also to those of others (including ours) and to the discussion that was generated as the group collaboratively analyzed the metaphors in talking further about their own experiences.

For us, as researchers, the metaphors provided food for thought that was not easily dismissed or forgotten. Months later, we find that we remember each one clearly, as well as a great deal of the conversation generated at these focus group interviews. We believe that this experience is an important one to share with colleagues engaged in qualitative research. As a research tool, it should be explored and developed more fully by researchers interested in fostering critical reflection about abstract, yet very personal ideas.

CIMCAM in Action

It is time for the first of our three collaboratively facilitated focus group interviews. It is a weekday evening in the middle of winter, and we are sitting around a large wooden table in a small, but tastefully appointed room, which had been reserved for our use for the focus group interview. While we are meeting on the grounds of a Catholic seminary, this room has no religious images in it, making it a more neutral site for our study. In preparation for the creation of the metaphors, we arrive early and cover the length of the table with the many colored sheets of construction paper, glue sticks, colored dots and stars, and markers, crayons and pens we have brought with us. We want everyone to see the materials as they arrive, enriching the creative possibilities from the first moment. We place our modest snack of chocolates and cold drinks within easy reach for all. Both of us are wearing nametags, and everyone greets us by name, already being familiar with who we are through our initial telephone contact. Since they have been referred to us by the same organization, some of them recognized each other from programs and dialogues that have taken place over the years. Two of the participants are in the same dialogue group and are members of the same congregation. Everyone arrives on time.

Jane begins the first step with an invitation to the participants to introduce themselves and share one thing about their experience in interreligious dialogue that might relate to at least one of the following three aspects: something about

the content, something about the context, or something about the relationships that they encountered. The conversation gets started. It is a verbal group. This step flows easily as people remember their experiences, how they began, and what moved them. We become excited as we listen, thinking that we really will have some great material for our study, confident that our topic was indeed worthy. Our tape recorders are running. As that first step in the process of sharing concludes, Nadira introduces the metaphor creation process. On that particular evening, this was the most challenging step.

> We had promised you that you would be doing something a little bit different in our focus group interview. We told you that we would be doing an activity together called metaphor analysis as a way of learning about your experiences in the interreligious dialogue process.

> Responding to anxiety on the part of Alice, one of the five participants, regarding the process and her desire to continue the verbal interchange, Nadira goes on to say

> . . .we think that using metaphors to describe experiences and thoughts forces you, helps you, to think beyond the verbal. A metaphor, as you probably all remember from English class, is a comparison of two unlike objects such as: Life is a circus . . . The idea here is that we are asking you to take things that you normally would not put together, put them together and then look at what that might mean. . . . What we would like to do is to be able to probe a little bit deeper and to have you reflect a little bit deeper about your experiences. We are asking you . . . to think about a metaphor that describes or captures your learning, your experiences within the interreligious dialogue process. This is not about your religious education, or your knowledge about religion. It is about your interreligious learning; the learning that takes place as you have gone along in the dialogue process as you have come to know it. There is a richness of experience in this room that can help us to learn about this process in ways we cannot otherwise know.

For some of our participants, creating a metaphor with paper and glue comes easily. Diane asks: "Are we just doing one metaphor? I actually thought, of course being the kind of person I am, of five". For others, it is not so easy. As Bruce, Diane, and Jack reach eagerly for the materials in the middle of the table, Alice and Larry sit quietly, not moving. Then, Larry calmly says: "I'm kind of lost. I have no idea of what to do".

Trying to help, Diane talks about her own experience of having used this kind of technique to teach about a Bible story recently in an interreligious dialogue class she was facilitating for teens. Jane then makes a point about how what we are doing here is both similar to and different from what Diane was doing with the teens:

> The idea behind what we want you to try to do is to understand that you and your experiences in interreligious dialogue are the content or the texts being considered, not the Biblical story. The ideas and relationships we want you to relate to us as metaphors are based on your own experiences. It could be about color; it could be about shape; could be about a particular object you draw that in some way captures some element of the experience for you. It can be about a particular moment that stands out in your memory, or something about the entire experience as you reflect upon it . . . . You can draw, you can write, you can use anything that is on this table.

Nadira has been thinking of another concrete example to help Larry and Alice to get started:

> Let's say that I was going to come up with a metaphor for who I am – nothing to do with my learning, nothing to do with my interreligious learning experience – who I am. I might, for example, think of a mosaic. And say my metaphor example is a mosaic because there are different pieces in a mosaic, they do not have to all fit in, and yet they all come together to make a larger whole. My life - I was born in Africa. I lived in England; in Canada, in the U.S. so the diversity within my life comes

together in the whole that is me through the mortar or whatever. So my metaphor would be, for who I am, would be a mosaic.

Alice and Larry are still not moving towards the colors on the table. Five minutes have passed. Jane and Nadira pass glances of concern to one another. Jane begins:

Go back over the years you have been engaged in interreligious dialogue and think of one experience that stands out in your mind as very memorable. You just shared one with us. It could be about that one. Maybe there are others. Then try to think of an image or words. If it was a tense moment that became something different at the end, maybe there would be a metaphor about change.

Looking to Nadira for support, Jane is thinking that the best way to move on may be to back off. She decides that even though she and Nadira had discussed that they would not do this activity, being facilitators only tonight, maybe modeling the process and being quiet would be the best course of action to help Alice and Larry to get started. Jane turns from the front of the table and starts to draw her focus inward, taking the assignment seriously for herself, not having a ready-made metaphor prepared in advance.

Larry says, again: "I don't understand what to do. I don't understand what to do with this." Nadira responds to him: "Again, keep in mind that the emphasis is not on the product, but the process." Larry responds by asking if writing is okay. Jane replies in the affirmative and emphasizes the purpose of the activity: "try to reflect deeply about some piece of your experience." In the meantime, Nadira takes some blue paper from the center of the table and has started to

work on her own metaphor, as the room gets quiet. Larry and Alice reach

towards the center of the table for paper and crayons, and they begin.

As the metaphors are finished, one by one, we attach them to a poster

pad with blue tack, and a mosaic of images appears as we see the seven

metaphors together, side by side. Bruce's is a three dimensional piece, a

multicolored flower made of the figures of human beings in multiple colors,

attached at the hands by staples. Alice's is a yellow sun with hot red rays

glowing forth. Larry's is a red scribbled background with a figure of a person

between a large "X" and a light bulb in the foreground. Diane's is a complex

image of rays and colors, lines and dots going from one source outwards towards

many destinations. Jack's is a series of three thick fractured arrows, broken as

they first emerge out of and then turn back towards the central yellow core of the

drawing. The arrows are in what Diane later called a "womb-like shape."

Nadira's is a series of white shapes on a royal blue background, the white

shapes appear to have once fit together, but they float now on the blue surface.

Jane's is a yellow central shape, with torn papers of white, brown, and red slowly

coming out from the yellow center, creating a tunnel effect. Members of the

group describe it as an egg, though when they say this, Jane exclaims surprise,

having not been aware of its truly egg-like character. These are the kinds of

metaphors that were created by the first steps of CIMCAM. The analysis of the

metaphors, by the focus group members, in the hour that followed, was rich.

This conversation gave us thick descriptions of the experience of interreligious

dialogue that we can use as we proceed in the data analysis process. The sharing and discussion generated laughter and warm sharing.

Collaborative Analysis in Action

One of the strengths of CIMCAM is that not only does it encourage participants to probe deeper to explore and express their experiences, it also allows participants to engage in a collaborative analysis of the metaphors such that new meanings are found or created by both the person whose metaphor is being analyzed and the others in the group. In essence, the symbols and their meanings for all present are modified, transformed, or simply enriched through the interaction that results from a shared reflection. This process usually occurs primarily at the fifth step of the CIMCAM process in which participants, aided by the facilitator(s), begin to examine each individual metaphor in relation to the others. However, it can also be encouraged in the fourth step when individuals invite other participants to guess at the significance of the metaphor before sharing with them what that person intended for it to represent. In this section, we will share with you an example of both of these processes.

Collective sharing and analysis in Step Five

In the Origins Project focus group, Jack's metaphor stands out as an example of how the group engaged in a collaborative analysis at the fifth step of the process. Jack had not explicitly invited the others to guess what his

metaphor was about. Instead, once Jack had shared his intended meaning,

others in the group naturally jumped in to share their thoughts on what they saw.

Keeping in mind that the response of the others to Jack's metaphor was colored

by their own experiences and perspectives on interreligious dialogue, we can see

that this collaborative process allowed us, as researchers, to capture thinking

and ideas that were sparked by Jack's metaphor but which built upon the

individual ideas of the others. What is so powerful about this is that as one

person introduces an idea or thought, others in the group contribute to expand

the idea or take it elsewhere. Here is Jack's metaphor and the discussion

around it:

> Jack: Mine, I think of almost everything in cosmic terms. The center dot,
> the red dot represents God, but the drops, if you will, from the dot
> represent the blood. And the arrows, which are the three principal
> religions coming out of the children of Abraham. The breaks in the
> arrows represent the Fall which damaged everyone, and the yellow
> around it represents the glow of God and outside the circle is
> complete absence – there is nothing outside the world of God. So,
> you know, the universe exists within God and outside of God there
> is nothing. And the only reason that the, those arrows don't go out
> is because of the love of God – he turned us back around and
> through the blood. Some cases through sacrifice -- well, in all cases
> the sacrifice, just different sacrifices.

Nadira: Was it conscious? It seems like your outer circle is kind of triangular. Was that a conscious...

Jack: No. . .

Jane: Does the blood represent -- does it in some way reflect a particular thought in your religious tradition or is it blood in terms of representing suffering because of the different religions? I just want to hear more.

Jack: For me, the blood in Judaism represents the sacrificial (inaudible). In Christianity it represents the sacrifice of Christ, and I don't know enough about Moslems.

Jane: Interesting.

Nadira: The connection in the arrows are a little different whereas in Diane's [to Diane] you're using the arrows to connect people laterally, [to Jack] you're using them to show commonality of root.

Jack: And I'm focusing on groups, not people, more or less. Global.

Jane: It's a more global...

Diane: Could the blood also be the suffering of God? The suffering of humanity but also...

Jane: It is the same color as God, interestingly enough.

Diane: The suffering of God. When I saw it, then you explained it, but God...

Jack: I hadn't thought of it that way.

Bill: One of the things that intrigued me about it is that when I see those arrows, that's violence, and it looks to me like a devil's tail. And in a way, it looks like the kind of thing that looks like each tradition has used its wickedness in a sense to draw that blood. I mean, there's a convergence back to God, but the convergence is not in the same place. It's at different loca around the point so that each one is almost like stabbing the other one. I would have liked to see blood coming out of all of them, which represents the terrible destruction of non-dialogue. I think it's a pretty neat piece, too. It's good art.

Diane: Or the dark side.

Bill: Yeah, the dark side of not discussing, you know. I mean, each of them have broken. Maybe that's what the problem is. Maybe that the cleaving of each of the limbs is such that they've gone the wrong way, they've turned on themselves in a way that would not have happened had they somehow or other stayed as a unit, or something like that.

Diane: I also saw it as very, just looking at it, and [talking to Bill] your interpretation is really wonderful

Bill: Oh, no.

Diane: When I first saw it, I thought it was very womb-like. I mean that was my immediate image.

Jack: Womb-like?

Diane: And I don't know quite what to do with that except light -- and I did have a sense of things breaking. There's a break in it – is that the community, God, and mankind. That's just really provocative.

In this example, both Diane and Bill shared their reactions and thoughts based on Jack's explanation of his metaphor. It is interesting to note that while Diane's own metaphor (representing a stained glass window through which different religious traditions see different colors of the same God and by virtue of which she contemplates that people will reach out to each other) was communicated with words such as "spark", "vision", "light" and "relationship", her reference to Jack's image as womb-like then led her to talk about interreligious dialogue as a generative, life-giving experience, an idea that didn't surface in her discussion of the experience of interreligious dialogue until this moment in the focus group. Similarly, when sharing his own metaphor, Bill talks about dialogue

as a tool for building a better world, but it is not until the discussion of Jack's

metaphor that he elaborates on the idea of non-dialogue as destructive. For both

Diane and Bill, the opportunity to be able to reflect on and contribute to an

analysis of Jack's metaphor enabled them to expand their own.

Collaborative Analysis through Invitation at Step Four

The process of collaborative analysis in the above example is an intended

outcome of the CIMCAM process. In fact, the intent of having the fifth step is

precisely to generate this kind of discussion. In addition to this approach,

however, we found that CIMCAM enabled us to generate the same kind of

discussion even at step 4. In the example that follows, Jane has not yet shared

her individual metaphor with the group. Instead of explaining it, she invites the

Shalom/Salaam Muslim and Jewish focus group participants to read her

metaphor and speculate on its meaning. As with the previous example,

participants used their own metaphors and understandings to explore Jane's

metaphor, thereby enabling us to collect richer data about their experiences in

interreligious dialogue. Additionally, the reflections of the other participants

enabled Jane to see her own metaphor in a deeper way. Following is an excerpt

of the discussion around Jane's metaphor in focus group 3:

Jane: ....This is another way we sometimes do this so we're going to try it this way. Mine's the one in the middle on the bottom, so I'm going to ask you to tell me what you think it's about.

Reshma: I look at it and I think of the blue, the red, the yellow as different groups of people whether they're different on religious grounds or social ground or political grounds or whatever. And the black - the darker colors that are coming out of them - are the ideas that come out from these different groups and how they interact with each other. You know, looking at it, I can't quite say that they've all come together in their thought process, but there are, that you can be of different backgrounds whether they be political, religious, social, and have ideas that may not be very dissimilar from each other.

Rachel: I'm going to go in another direction. There's a reason, I'm sure, why the pieces are fractured. I'm going to suggest that those are windows. They give light, and they give an opportunity to see through beyond the immediate into the future, perhaps, or beyond what one perceives as being the truth, to perhaps a bigger truth beyond that window. It's also a little risky because sometimes you don't want to see beyond where you are - it can be painful - but the risk is worth it. However, of course, that doesn't answer why this one is not severed. That's for someone else to come up with. (Laughter)

Jane: Well, so why maybe? So I want to say that you are both right (lots of laughter). So, like, why maybe isn't it?

Sara: There are things that lie outside the things that have somehow managed to find the joining, um, or torn up pieces there represent to me like dialogue does. Um - Even in fractured lives, is a willingness to see that come together. But there are those that stay outside. They just don't join, and they stay as they are, alone. They're there. But, the ones that have found some way to be close to each other ...

Jane: I don't know if you noticed that different pieces -- all the pieces are there; they're just in different places. They're all there, and they're like trying to come - find their way together - but through each other.

F: What does it mean?

Jane: I'm not sure. That's why I asked you...I don't know...

Alim: I see the unity. The thing is that you have the sort of breakthroughs. I see very much the risk, but I'm always cautious in art of what the background is because you always start off with a wash or something, but there's no wash on this. It's white. So the purity is what lies underneath all this, and some have windows of purity, some resist opening their hearts to that purity. The black things to me are the things that emanate out of differences and are the things that obscure the light and the people who opened them are then open to that background of light. What unifies it? The piece of paper that it's on is what unifies it...

Jane: I have to say we've done this a few times, and it's always, of course, risky. The last time we did it we let everybody guess everybody else's. I have to say you guys were so -- I mean, I didn't have all these thoughts exactly formed that way, but everything that you said is what I was sort of trying to get at. The little black things, I hadn't thought of them as ideas, but they are ideas. And I was thinking that they're little but they're altogether. If I put all those pieces together, it would be a big, black thing. But, they're not. They're little pieces and they're not necessarily bad and they're looped around. So thank you. That was great!

In this example, as with the previous one, participants drew from their own metaphors in interpreting Jane's metaphor but they also added depth and richness to their metaphors in doing so. For example, Rachel's reference to both

the opportunity and the risk she sees portrayed in Jane's metaphor builds on her own metaphor, shared earlier, which emphasized both the potentially confusing and difficult process of interreligious dialogue as well as the reward of participating. In addition, however, the different interpretations of her metaphor enabled Jane to better articulate what she had intended when creating the metaphor, while also expanding her own understanding of what she intended.

Conclusion

As can be seen from the examples provided in this chapter, CIMCAM can be a powerful data collection method that enables researchers to probe deeply and access richer perspectives from research participants. Its strength lies not only in eliciting emerging ideas and thoughts, but also in enabling an environment where individuals are invited and encouraged to reflect both individually and collectively. In the next three chapters, we discuss what we learned about the nature of the learning in the interreligious dialogue process based on what participants shared with us through CIMCAM and other data collection processes.

CHAPTER SIX

FACTORS THAT MOTIVATE INVOLVEMENT

Participants in this study have engaged in interreligious dialogue for at least one year and are individuals who have chosen to participate on their own, with no compensation and with no coercion of any kind. Given these facts, we think it is important to understand what motivated them to become interreligious learners in the first place. In the following pages of this chapter, we will share with you the responses given by participants of the study to the first of the four questions they were asked to reflect on in preparation for our semi-structured individual and focus group interviews. The remaining three questions will be addressed in chapters seven and eight.

The responses shared in this chapter relate to the question: "What motivated you to participate in interreligious dialogue?" We have organized these responses into four overarching key influences that seem to have motivated the participants in this study to engage in interreligious dialogue: (a) institutional, structural, and personal support, (b) significant life experiences, (c) personal characteristics, and (d) personal interpretation of religious tradition.

Institutional, Structural, and Personal Support

Participants in the study described two very specific ways in which the organization of the interreligious dialogue project/program influenced their

decision to participate. Both of these ways are similar to the process of

becoming more socially responsible as described by Daloz (2000) in his

discussion of the experiences of the 100 people interviewed in the Common Fire

study conducted by Daloz, Keen, Keen and Parks (1996). In Daloz's description,

the term socially responsible was defined to mean the "capacity to identify one's

own sense of self with the well-being of all life" (2000, p 105). We found

similarities to this process as we compared it to what we learned about

motivation and support for the process of getting started in interreligious

dialogue, from the participants in our study. The first, that of being invited,

encouraged, or inspired to join the dialogue, relates to Daloz's description of

"significant others" (p. 115). The second, relating to the extent and nature of the

support that was afforded them in going through the process, is similar to his

discussion of a "mentoring community" (p.116).

Invitation and Opportunity

Participants in our study described their involvement in dialogue as having

been initiated in one of three ways. For those who were involved in the Origins

project, involvement in interreligious dialogue came in response to an invitation

and encouragement from a rabbi or pastor. For participants in the Living Room

dialogue, as well as for us, the invitation came from a friend of colleague. Finally,

for participants in the Shalom/Salaam project there is an open invitation to

members of both communities; an invitation that is extended by existing group members.

Invitation and encouragement from religious leader. Participants in the Origins project entered into the interreligious dialogue experience in this particular project after having been invited or encouraged by a rabbi, pastor, or minister. Of the participants in this project, Jack stands out as the strongest example of how the invitation to participate from a religious leader was significant. Jack, an African American, is a married father of school-aged children. He is a professional working in a scientific and technical field. In addition to this, he serves actively as a Deacon in his church, an inner city Baptist church in a large east coast city. Jack's involvement in the Origins project was directly related to his relationship with the pastor of his church. A regular bible study participant at the church and a deacon active in many areas of church organization, Jack and his pastor knew one another very well. His venture into interreligious dialogue was the direct result of support from and encouragement of his pastor.

Participants for the particular series of Origins dialogue programs that Jack was initially involved with were identified and recommended by the clergy from the local churches and synagogues affiliated with the Origins organization. While the pastor's encouragement was not the only factor, it certainly was a key one. In response to Jane's question of why Jack thought his pastor volunteered him for the project, he explained: "Because he knows my gifts. . . one of my gifts

is teaching and the other is administration so he's always trying to get me in environments where I've either gotta go learn or I've gotta teach.". This echoes what Daloz (2000) shared about the impact of "significant others, " individuals who participants in the *Common Fire* study identified as having contributed to their decisions to become socially active. These 'others' were people "who saw something special" and "encouraged a deeper sense of purpose" (p.115) in participants of the *Common Fire* study.

Based on what we heard from Jack and others, we think that being recommended or invited to participate in an interreligious dialogue can be an important factor in a person's decision to get started, particularly if the person doing the inviting is seen as a mentor. While the propensity for engaging in this kind of dialogue is there in all the participants, it seems that in many cases the presentation of an opportunity acts as a catalyst for them to act on that inclination.

Invitation and encouragement from friend or colleague. The Living Room Dialogue is organized by invitation only, having a constant number of Christian and Jewish women at all times. When one person drops out, another is invited by the group to take her place. In the Living Room Dialogue focus group interview, we heard many stories about being invited, getting started, and becoming acclimated in that group as a newcomer. There, prior friendships and personal relationships among group members was the impetus for the invitation

having been extended, the motivation to get started, and the means by which participants became fully engaged as part of the group.

Open Invitation. The Shalom/Salaam Muslim Jewish dialogue has an open door policy, welcoming newcomers who hear about it primarily by word of mouth, at any time. Some of the participants there are clergy. Others are members of their congregations who have been invited in by the clergy. While that particular dialogue is not officially co-sponsored by any of the congregations in the area, the rabbis and the imam who participate on a regular basis do make it known to their congregations that they themselves participate and that the opportunity to get involved is available. It is sponsored by a Jewish communal agency that is funded by the larger Jewish community in which the rabbis and their congregants are living. In the focus group with the Shalom-Salaam Muslim Jewish dialogue group, we heard many stories about how the dialogue got started as a result of the tension surrounding of the building of a mosque in the neighborhood. Participants today, several years after the crisis surrounding the mosque ended and the mosque and educational center were built, are an informal extension of the original group who met in response to that crisis. In most cases, new members who joined the group did so at the urging or invitation of existing group members who served as mentors in getting them involved.

<u>Parameters and Support</u>

In talking with the participants in the study, we realized that the initial processes by which a group got started and the kind of ongoing support that was available to the group members were important conditions for motivation both to get started in interreligious dialogue, and to remain committed to it. While the specific conditions were different for each particular site, the overall sense that how a group got started, what expectations were established at the beginning, and how the dialogue was supported was important applied to all four data collection sites.

 In setting up expectations and establishing ground rules, the supporting institutions/individuals enabled participants to develop an understanding of what to expect. They also enabled participants to establish or find ways of dealing with potential conflict and awkwardness that otherwise might have turned them away from further engagement in interreligious dialogue. Whether through the provision of a set beginning curriculum, identification of a specific task, setting up parameters of expectation, or continued support, individuals and institutions provided the safety and comfort necessary for sustained engagement. These organizational factors thus initiated the beginnings of a mentoring community for participants.

In suggesting the presence of such a mentoring community as the third of four conditions for transformation, Daloz (2000) defines it as "an ecology of relationships with people who value diversity and transformative discourse"

(p.116). In Daloz's description, such a mentoring community was found in either the past or current lives of the participants of the *Common Fire* study. Here, we are suggesting that the sponsoring organizations, institutions, and group themselves enabled the creation of such a mentoring community within the context of the dialogue itself through either the setting of a beginning curriculum, establishing and supporting learning tasks for the group, establishment of operating rules and expectations, or providing a network of support for participants.

Beginning curriculum. In the case of both the Origins project and the Shalom/Salaam project, there was a beginning curriculum that was established by the sponsoring organization and followed by the participants. In both cases, participants reported that this beginning curriculum was a useful tool with which to embark on the dialogue.

Alice - a Conservative Jewish member of the Origins project - reported that the curriculum of the project enabled the group to get comfortable with each other, thus reaching a point where

> Although there are areas where we mutually agree to disagree and we're very careful about not offending and not hurting anybody's feelings, at the same time we're comfortable saying things that are on our minds that are important to the conversation.

She described to us how the curriculum of the program enabled participants to talk about something meaningful and significant without feeling threatened or pressured. As she put it: "Interpreting and giving personal spins and

personal values based on the material seemed to me to be a less threatening environment than just being asked to sit down and say who you are and what you think."

Larry and Jack both echoed this sentiment regarding the importance of the beginning curriculum, albeit in different ways. Larry, a Conservative Jew who is naturally a rather shy and withdrawn person, told us

> I have a hard time just doing small talk . . . But, by having a content to discuss . . . I could talk about something because it related to something I knew. Then once I knew, once I know the person, then I can talk. [The content] made it a lot easier to open up.

Both Larry and Alice are members of the same dialogue group and both reported that after they had managed to complete the beginning two years of the established curriculum, their group spawned a successful ongoing, group-initiated, and sustained dialogue that took on an independence of its own.

Jack's underlining of the importance of the beginning curriculum, on the other hand, had less to do with the interpersonal safety that it helped establish and more to do with his own cognitive safety. In describing the point in the first year of his engagement in the Origins interreligious dialogue project, he shared with us how one particularly text was unsettling to his own religious understanding. More particularly, he shared that having discussion of that unsettling text follow a more neutral one helped him get to a point where it was not difficult exploring the difficult text within the interreligious group. As he explains it:

> And, see, I guess it was divinely ordered, but had the order of classes

started with [the text in question], I don't think it would have worked because [that text] was so intense that the first session gave us time to get to know each other.

For participants in the Shalom/Salaam dialogue group, there was both a beginning task and, later, a beginning curriculum: a book entitled "Shalom/Salaam: A Resource for Jewish-Muslim Dialogue." The book was useful in that it gave the group opportunity to begin the dialogue process and establish relationships, as was the case with the Origins project. As one of the Shalom/Salaam participants, Ross – a white Conservative rabbi - put it: "Well, we used it as the guide because we didn't really know where we were going and then after that book was finished we've been choosing individual topics on a variety of things."

In this dialogue group, the book enabled participants to begin setting a relationship through a resource that provided background information in Islam and Judaism and that the sponsors of the project saw as helping to "frame dialogue discussions." Once this had been accomplished, the group moved on to discussing such varied topics as medical ethics; teaching parables; discussion on war and peace; and conversation about, and sharing in, the celebration of various festivals and celebrations within each respective tradition. These later topics were identified and selected by the group as areas of interest to them once the discussion around the book was complete.

Beginning learning tasks. In the case of the Living Room dialogue group as well as in the case of our own interreligious dialogue project, there was no beginning curriculum per se. Instead, both these projects provide examples of the beginning learning tasks having been set by members of the group. What is interesting is that in both these cases, members of the dialogue had already established a relationship prior to the onset of the interreligious dialogue experience and thus did not need to have an objectified, neutral curriculum from which to establish a dialogue relationship. In a sense, these two groups were at the stage that Larry and Alice's group from the Origins project and the Shalom/Salaam group were at when they transitioned to self identified topics for discussion.

In the case of the Living Room dialogue group, the learning task was a simple one. The dialogue group emerged when a group of Christian and Jewish women who had been serving as hospitality hosts for a national interfaith conference decided to take some time after the conference had ended to jointly listen to the tapes of the various conference sessions, which they had been unable to participate in during the conference. From this initial learning task emerged an interreligious dialogue project that has been sustained for over 16 years now. Since its inception, the group has continuously identified and carried out new learning tasks, ranging from a joint trip to Israel to book discussions on topics of interreligious interest. The task of coordinating the activities of the

group through these 15 years have been handled by their own group-appointed member-facilitator.

In the case of our own interreligious dialogue with each other, the decisions relating to what we would study together came from our ongoing experiences in the doctoral program. After Jane's initial encounter with Nadira's library of religious education materials, occasions kept presenting themselves through our course work in the program to informally talk about our respective religious traditions. One such example was when we both found resonance with the seven principles – Nguzu Saba - used by Colin and Guy (1998) in discussing an Africentric model of curriculum development. As we talked about how both the principles themselves, as well as the Kiswahili words that were used to represent them, had echoes of our own particular religious traditions and religious languages, we began sharing greater detail of our respective religious traditions with each other.

From initial informal discussions such as the one around the Nguzu Saba, we evolved to a stage where we identified explicit, formal, and deliberate interreligious learning tasks in order to help us further our dialogue with each other. Once we had made the decision to not only work as research partners in investigating the nature of the learning in interreligious dialogue but also to include ourselves in the study, it was important that we constructed learning tasks that would enable us to further our dialogue. It was at this point that we identified texts that we would study together, planned to do a comparative review

of our respective religious education curricula, view videos together, and engage in other such activities that would help us to experience the interreligious dialogue process. While we still have along way to go in accomplishing all that we set out to do, this process of identifying learning tasks and carrying them out has provided us with a structure that has served to keep us involved, interested, and informed.

Parameters of expectation. In the Origins project, these beginning structures included the establishment of ground rules for the dialogue by a representative of the sponsoring institution. As both Bill and Larry shared with us, the institution that was sponsoring the Origins project made it very clear what was expected from participants in terms of the purpose of the dialogue. In responding to Jane's question of what prevents a person from being triumphal in their approach to the dialogue, Bill – a white Conservative Jew who is a retired medical professional - told us that "Well, what happens is, I think, first of all anybody who comes to this dialogue, you're told initially that triumphalism isn't right." He explained to us that at the beginning of the project, the professionals and members of the clergy who contribute to the organization of the project create these parameters for safe dialogue by sharing the understanding that it is not about triumphalism or proselytizing. Bill went on to acknowledge that people do not always understand these parameters but that the group then takes over in subtle and nonverbal ways to reinforce the expectations.

Larry talked about the opening session in which these parameters are set as having created, for him, a sense of safety about what he should expect to get out of the experience. When asked what he had expected from the experience of the Origins project dialogues, he told us that he "was expecting an education." He shared with us how the opening session of the project in which the expectations were set helped him to focus on the task ahead: "You had to agree that you could accept different views. . . the thing you had to agree at the beginning was, you had your view, everybody has theirs. Just listen, don't proselytize."

This setting of parameters of expectations in the context of the Origins project did not, however, serve as rigid rules that hindered full expression and participation. If anything, it enabled participants to freely engage as fully as possible. For Jack, this meant that he was able to explore aspects of his own faith that had not been possible in his own congregational context. He puts it like this:

> And the first few sessions I was so excited I could barely work. It was a whole way of looking at things, and what I found from a content perspective is it gave you the permission to question God. Within your own faith you can't because you can't talk to anyone because there's always the fear, what exactly are you saying? Where in a group, in an interreligious group, everyone's expecting you to say what you're going to say anyway. So, for me it gave me an opportunity to explore and hear what I think without spinning it around in my head.

Larry echoes this same sense of being able to freely and comfortably engage in deep discussion of thoughts and ideas when he shared with us an incident in which he questioned the logic and justice of the parable of the prodigal

son. His description of the discussion that took place in which he could not understand what the parable was about and how from his perspective the "parable was totally wrong" because it was "like benefiting the bad kid" helped us to understand the dialogue as a comfortable setting in which divergent opinions and beliefs could be addressed without creating tension and strife in the group. Larry described it like this: "And we went into a major discussion. One guy from the Presbyterian Church was going, "Don't you see it?" But it wasn't an antagonistic thing."

Available network of support. In addition to helping individuals to get started, institutional and professional support provided by adult educators, religious educators and clergy who work for organizations that sponsor interreligious dialogue programs also make a difference in whether an individual stays involved. Larry, in talking about how the Origins group helped lay out the ground rules and enabled people to know what to expect, explained how the support from a key member of the institution's staff helped him as a facilitator of one of the dialogue groups. He said:

> We had a real hard time at the beginning with one individual who was very antagonistic when you disagreed with him. So, we knew you could call [to get assistance], so I would call [the director of the program at the] office to give me ideas on how to handle him.

Other participants in the study referred to the importance of institutional support. Jack, for example, talked about how the network of support from professionals and clergy involved in the Origins project helped his curriculum-

planning group prepare for the second year of the dialogue program. As one of

the facilitators for the first dialogue series, he was asked to participate in an

interreligious team to develop the content for the second year, a task that proved

to be somewhat more difficult than the actual dialogues from year one. He

shared with us how the opportunity to have support staff that could be turned to

was invaluable to their process:

> And, so it was, that was a struggle. And then when you're dealing with
> material that's difficult, I mean it is just flat out, it was difficult. Matter of
> fact, to give you an example, in the planning committee on a number of
> times we called [the director of the organization] back in and said, "Can
> you tell us again why we're doing this?" (Laughter) Because we just kept,
> "Why are we going through this?" "Why did you choose this?"

He went on to indicate that being able to get this kind of support helped

the group get past the difficult times and move forward in their task. His

description of the support provided during this curriculum planning process is

important in that it calls attention to the need for facilitators and organizers of

such dialogues to pay careful attention to the educational and support processes

required for "safe" dialogue. Similar to the educational processes described by

Boys and Lee (1996) and Addie Walker (1996) - a member of the faculty of

Assumption Seminary in San Antonio Texas and a participant in the Catholic -

Jewish Colloquium organized by Boys and Lee - as being crucial to the success

of the Catholic-Jewish colloquium, these support processes help create a sense

of safety for dialogue participants.

Institutional support helps provide particular resources for context,

programmatic structure, and content, in addition to the kind of counseling and

support both Larry and Jack described. While the specific configuration of interreligious dialogue projects and programs may sometimes change for a particular individual, in most cases, there is some organizing individual or organization who takes the initiative to get something new off the ground. We learned that because of their experience and longevity as interreligious dialogue participants, some of the participants in our study have also been invited by organizing institutions to become facilitators for newly forming dialogue groups. In all cases, they are not paid to do this work. Jack, Diane (a white Christian member of the group), Larry, and Bill have each taken this role at one time, or another, for adult interreligious dialogue groups and groups for high school students, sponsored by the same organization.

In the case of our own interreligious dialogue project with each other, we found that while we did not have an organization or institution that was explicitly sponsoring our interreligious dialogue, the supportive role of the faculty and programmatic structure of the NLU doctorate gave us much of the same kind of support as described by the other participants. We have shared in chapter 3, and for the field (Charaniya and Walsh, 2000), details about the institutional support for collaborative learning and research, in the ACE doctoral program at NLU, of how this support helped us initiate our collaborative learning and research partnership. As we reach the end of this particular academic road, it is clear to us both that had we not had the support from faculty members to explore this particular uncharted area of the field, we would not have devoted so much of

our time to our own interreligious learning. We may not have been in a position

to choose this topic, nor would we have been able to pursue it as a collaborative

research project.

Prompted by Significant Experiences

The stories our participants shared with us about their experiences in life

and how these impacted upon their decision to engage in interreligious dialogue

fell into one or more of the following two general areas (a) a history of family

interaction patterns that both fostered and/or supported participation, and (b)

significant experiences with the "other" (both positive and negative) that triggered

a desire to engage. In some cases, only one of these factors was attributed with

providing the spark, in other cases there were a combination of both.

A history of family interaction patterns.

Hillary is one of the participants who talked about her motivation being

grounded both in her family interaction patterns and in significant positive

experiences with Christians. She is a white Orthodox Jewish woman in her mid-

life years. She is married with grown children. She works as a professional in

the chaplaincy department of a hospital. Having been born in America, she

spent the formative years of her life (between the ages of 7 and 18) in post-World

War II England surrounded by physical reminders of the war, stories of the

horrors of Jewish persecution suffered by members of her own extended family, and an awareness that "England did not particularly love the Jews".

Yet, in contrast to this, she also grew up hearing stories of how "by the grace of the goodness of other members of another faith " her cousins survived. She describes her home as one in which there existed "an innate respect for someone else's faith system" and one in which her parents' non-Jewish friends were welcomed. Today, her own home is not too different from what she described in her childhood. For example, she shared with us how both her husband's and her own closest friends are both non-Jews and yet their wider circle of friends also includes many people whose values are more of a mirror image of their own. Thus the example set by the interaction patterns of her family – both past and present - and her experiences with "others" with belief systems that were different from her own, provided a strong catalyst for engaging in interreligious dialogue. As she puts it: "As I think of interreligious dialogue, . . . my relationships with people whose backgrounds are different than mine goes back to my childhood, goes back to my childhood, seeing my parents do this."

Diane is a white Christian woman in mid-life. She is a life long member of the Episcopal Church in the community where she was raised. She is a graduate of an Ivy League women's college, who has lived a full and active adult life as a wife and mother, teacher, and community volunteer. Diane is a bright and eager learner by nature.

She attributed her motivation to her parent's encouragement, her early

family life, and the way they freely and comfortably exchanged religious ideas.

She thought all families talked about religion around the dinner table:

> I grew up in a family that lived questions - so my whole life has been about kind of, in part, about living the questions. Not necessarily finding answers. But I think that's something that, if I look back on my life, and I remember my parents, one was a Christian Scientist and one was a Lutheran and they came together and they sent my sister and me off to the closest church which was . . . an Episcopal Church. And then, they started to really get involved. My mother became quite religious, but they were trying to find a common meeting ground and so they became so involved in this church and asking questions and they became pillars, as a matter of fact, both of them, of [this church and] that became part of our dining room discussions. And, I didn't realize that all families didn't sit around and talk about God and who Jesus was and how we were to live and what does the Resurrection mean?"

Diane's family encouraged her to ask questions about everything,

including religion. Diane remembered a family story that was told about her, that

she herself did not remember. She recalled: "Apparently when I was about eight,

[my parents] kind of remember my coming home from church and saying, "How

could Jesus be Jewish and Christian at the same time?" Willingness, interest,

and the ability to ask many questions are the characteristics that all of the

participants in our study have in common.

Significant experiences with the "other".

Reshma is a middle-aged Muslim woman who is a wife and mother. She

is a medical professional by occupation. Born and raised in Pakistan, she

immigrated to the United States 20 years ago as a young woman. For Reshma,

the primary catalyst to engage in interreligious dialogue was a disconcerting or negative experience with an "other".

She is part of the Shalom/Salaam Muslim-Jewish dialogue group that began with a group of individuals who had responded to incidents of hostility and xenophobia within one suburban community where a mosque was to be built. A local Muslim community had developed detailed plans to build a mosque and educational center in an east coast suburb of a large city. Because of the size and location, a zoning hearing was required. In the process, there was a lot of opposition from the neighbors in the surrounding community, some of whom were Jews.

Reshma recalled her encounter with an elderly Jewish woman at a public meeting about the proposed mosque as the point at which she came to have awareness that there was a need for interreligious dialogue:

> There was such animosity against the Muslims, and I have come from a background where everybody was a Muslim so for me I never thought of myself being anything abnormal or unusual. I was a Muslim, and if you were not a Muslim, that was no problem for me, but apparently it was a problem for this group of people. There was this one lady, and this was like six or seven years ago, and I still distinctly remember.... She was sitting across the room. It was a big room; with a lot of people, and this was an old woman. And she looked at me in the eye and she said, "I don't want you making bombs in my back yard." And it took my breath away, and I didn't realize that - is this what people think a Muslim would be? I never thought of myself as a bomb maker or a terrorist or somebody who doesn't follow the law, and it took me aback, and I was very offended. And actually I said, "Oh, well, I don't really care what you think," but I really did care. I didn't want her to think that that's all Muslims are about. And then this dialogue was born out of that and Ashley [a Jewish community relations professional] had a lot to do with it, and so then there was an effort to have Muslims and Jewish people living in the neighborhood to try to get together and to know each other. And for myself, I have found it to

be a very enlightening experience.

Reshma had told us that growing up in Pakistan, practically everyone that she met was a Muslim. Although she had been living in America for over ten years when this incident with the mosque happened, she shared with us how she understood that her thinking had changed:

> I never, until this thing happened, never really gave any serious thought to anybody's religion. I thought your religion is your business, and it has nothing to do with me as an individual. And then I realized that that perhaps was not true and that what you do as an individual has a lot to do with your religious perspective or how you think of yourself in the environment.

Reshma's motivation story is an example of a "disorienting dilemma" (Mezirow, 1991) in that the encounter with the old women was "a major challenge to [her] established perspective," and it "call[ed] into question deeply held personal values and threaten[ed her] very sense of self" (p.169). As a young woman, Reshma had learned that there were other religions in the world and she had thought of everyone's right to practice their own religion in their way, as individuals, as a privilege that she had, as well. This idea worked for her, but only until her right to participate in her religion was challenged by a group of individuals who reacted with fear to her religious community. She believes that this experience could never have happened to her in Pakistan, where the majority of the population is Muslim. She realized that something different is required for her to live as a religiously committed Muslim adult in America. However, this "disorienting dilemma" (Mezirow, 1991) experienced by Reshma was not followed by self-examination that included guilt or shame, suggested by

Mezirow as the second stage of the transformative learning process. Rather, this uncomfortable but eye-opening encounter pressed Reshma to think about how to go about working on changing the conditions that had led to what she encountered, both for herself and for the 'other'.

For Bill, the experience with the "other" was not a discrete, isolated moment but rather a collection of experiences over time. In our opinion, Bill's story is an example of an incremental transformation (Mezirow, 2000; Daloz, 2000). A white male, Bill is a Conservative Jew who is now a retired medical professional. His experiences growing up and being on the receiving end of anti-Semitic attitudes played an essential role in his decision to ultimately engage in interreligious dialogue. This encounter with the "other" as he grew up in America in the middle years of the twentieth century, was the impetus for his involvement in Christian-Jewish dialogue. He tells it like this:

> I was always, you know, troubled by this whole issue of why–how can these people be beating on me? When they are talking about Jesus, who is a Jew, you know I could never quite understand this tremendous hostility. You know, if Jesus were walking on the street now, they'd be saying the same thing to him. So I was always troubled by this. And I was always, you know, I've always looked–how can we change things? How can we make it better?

Bill's repeated encounters with the "other" as he grew up are an example of incremental transformation. These encounters resulted in cycles of critical reflection about how he understood himself as a Jew in relationship to those Christians who were "beating on" him. This understanding of 'self' and 'other'

appears to have inspired him to engage in interreligious dialogue with Christians when the opportunity presented itself.

Other participants reported various encounters with the 'other' that had led in one way or another to their excursion into interreligious dialogue. They told us that the encounters that they had in childhood stayed with them, influencing their thoughts and feelings over the years. These encounters were pivotal encouragement for participation in interreligious dialogue when the opportunity presented itself. In some cases, these encounters were negative, as in the case of Reshma, Bill, and Larry, a middle-aged, Jewish, Caucasian, married father, who runs his own professional service business, who also grew up in a predominantly anti-Semitic environment. In other cases, the encounters were positive such as with Hillary and Diane, who described her encounter with an Israeli citizen from Canada who served as a guide on her first trip to Israel. She told us of how she had been taken by the sensitivity with which he had read a section from the Gospel of Mathew and of how her subsequent conversation with him led her to want to engage deeply in an effort to understand Judaism and Jews. In all of these cases, there was no doubt that the encounter with the "other" was an important factor leading to engagement in interreligious dialogue.

Personal Characteristics

Our study reveals that as a group, our participants are a body of learners that have a history of eagerness to learn, a willingness to ask questions, a love of

learning, and a tolerance for ambiguity in the process of learning. In fact, many

are expert learners, achieving significant success in their professions and fields

of academic and professional pursuit following many years of learning in school

settings. They are individuals who choose to learn something new on a regular

basis and are not thrown off by having their assumptions called into question in

their encounter with new learning.

Intellectual Curiosity.

Diane is an example of one of our participants who characterizes this idea

of intellectual curiosity. At the time we met Diane, we learned that she had been

on interreligious trips to Israel four times over the course of her fifteen years of

being involved in interreligious dialogue. It was the experience of having gone on

one of these interreligious trips, to which she had been invited by a Christian

friend, which got her started actively in interreligious dialogue, as an adult. It was

the people she met there who encouraged her to get started in a local ongoing

dialogue group. That first trip had been sponsored by a local Jewish community

relations agency, which is part of the local Jewish Federation organization in the

large city where she lives.

Small informal groups for dialogue were available to her at that time, and

she eagerly participated. She was one of many local women who set up

interreligious committees that organized local arrangements and programs for a

biennial national conference on Christian Jewish relations held soon after that in

her community. She remarked in the interview that one turning point was starting

a series of conversations with the Christian and Jewish women she met there, as

they met to listen to and discuss the tape recordings of the speakers who came

for the conference (they were too busy hosting at the conference to listen in on

the sessions). Her eagerness to learn was the impetus for her to organize and

participate in new venues for interreligious dialogue and learning.

Following the success of the conference, local religious leaders and

philanthropists organized local churches and synagogues to cooperate with a

new non-profit organization that was to begin to sponsor interreligious dialogue

projects on a more regular basis. Her eagerness to learn brought her into this

group on the ground floor. She got involved with this group as a participant and

a board member, participating in a wide variety of dialogue programs and

projects as both a participant and, eventually, as a facilitator, for new groups.

These experiences eventually led Diane, and others in her circle, to pursue a

Masters degree in ecumenical studies at a locally sponsored academic

institution, simply for her own interest in learning. Diane has been a participating

member of the Christian-Jewish women's Living Room Dialogue group that was

part of our study, for the 15 years of its existence.

Larry is another example of the personal characteristic of intellectual

curiosity. He is very involved in his large and active Conservative congregation,

having served for many years on the board of trustees, including having served

as president. When asked in his personal interview what he was hoping for from

the interreligious dialogue experience, he simply said: "I was expecting an education". He went on to say:

> I was always raised with the idea that education is something you have all your life and nobody can take it away from you. You know, I remember my grandmother talking about the Holocaust and such, and she would say '...you know, they killed the people, but they never took away what they knew ...and they couldn't take away what they were.' I always agreed with that idea. The more I can learn, the better off I'll be.

Larry engages in interreligious dialogue as a way to improve his thinking and his way of life. He shared with us his view that in interreligious dialogue, one never knows what will emerge as part of the dialogue, until it emerges. We had an opportunity to experience this ourselves, as our interview with Larry became an opportunity for interreligious dialogue. It was a surprise to all three of us present. In the midst of the interview, Larry became visibly excited when, as part of the conversation, we shared some of our own experience of interreligious dialogue with one another.

The moment occurred as we talked with him about our experience of having facilitated a text study on the story of Abraham's sacrifice with a Torah study group in Peoria. In sharing our experience with him, we also shared the details of the differences in the understanding of the story between Jewish tradition and Muslim tradition. It was at this point that we observed the impact of this new knowledge on him.

We talked about how there is a story in the Qu'ran about the sacrifice of Ishmael that parallels the story Jews refer to as "the binding of Isaac" in the Torah. In the Torah, it is Isaac, the son of Sara; in the Qu'ran, it is Ishmael, the

son of Hagar, both of whom are the sons of Abraham, who is to be offered, by Abraham, as a sacrifice at God's direction. As we shared the differences in the Qur'anic story and that found in the Torah with Larry, we were able to witness the power, for Larry, of learning something he did not previously know, that he did not know. In the midst of the interview - as we shared this information with him - Larry's physical demeanor transformed. Larry, a man who only seconds before was friendly and affable, yet quiet, calm, and efficiently businesslike, became animated with joy and excitement as he realized for the first time that the Muslim understanding of the story was different from the Jewish and Christian reading.

We were interviewing Larry because he had been a participant in a Christian and Jewish dialogue. He told us that he had never had the opportunity to talk to or meet a Muslim, at least that he knew of, before meeting Nadira. This brief exchange, in the context of our research, seemed to open a door for future learning that was previously perceived by Larry as closed and inaccessible. It was a delight to behold his response.

This characteristic of intellectual curiosity exemplified in Diane and Larry was also evident in almost all of the other participants. The women in the living room dialogue group were all well educated and eager to learn in the context of the interreligious dialogue. This penchant for learning was exhibited in these women through their having pursued courses and programs outside of the context of their dialogue group as well as having actively engaged in the learning tasks set for within their group. As Linda put it: "I would say that this interreligious

experience was part of a rather broader experience . . . we were already looking to improve our own knowledge before we were given this wonderful additional experience [of being part of the interreligious dialogue]."

While we had intentionally not selected programs that required participants to hold a particular leadership role within their respective communities or to have a particular level of content knowledge about their religious traditions, we found that the participants in the study were a well-informed, intellectually active and eager group of learners. We found that their level of knowledge and interest in learning about religious ideas and practices played a key role in their continuation and perception of their personal success as interreligious dialogue participants. They turned out to be active in their religious communities as participants in regularly sponsored faith-based adult learning programs, and leadership activities in their synagogues, mosques, community centers, and churches. They were strongly affiliated Christians, Muslims, and Jews. While some were better educated in religious ideas than others, as a group, all twenty participants have an intellectual foundation that supports their religious commitments and beliefs. Many had some sort of informal leadership or educational role, either within their respective communities or in an academic setting.

<u>Tolerance for ambiguity.</u>

In discussing the planning and preparation for the Catholic-Jewish

Colloquium, Boys and Lee (1996) state:

> We knew from the outset that if the participants engaged in study in the presence of the other, disequilibrium would be inevitable. Beliefs, attitudes and perceptions would be challenged, as participants attempted to explain their own tradition in response to the probing questions of members of the other tradition. (p.426)

Sandra Lubarsky - a religious studies professor at Northern Arizona

University who has published her ideas about interreligious dialogue (1990,

1996) - connects this sense of risk that is inevitably involved in interreligious

dialogue with Buber's idea of "holy insecurity." She says: "Dialogue with people

of different faiths heightens the ambiguity in our lives because it is part and

parcel of the creative action that defines life itself" (1996, p.545).

For the participants in our study, an awareness of what both Boys and Lee

and Lubarsky suggest are inevitable outcomes of dialogue was evident in the

personal characteristic of having a tolerance for ambiguity. This tolerance for

ambiguity implies not only openness to multiple interpretations but also

recognition that in the face of questions raised by the "other", it is highly likely

that one's self-understanding will be called into question. Participants expressed

this characteristic of tolerance for ambiguity in a number of ways.

Diane connected it to the idea of "living in the in-between." She shared

with us her feeling of still being a committed Christian yet, at the same time,

finding it difficult to reconcile the practices and attitudes of her own church

community with her growing awareness of how these have historically contributed to a negative view of Jews. For Diane, tolerance for ambiguity means that one can expose oneself to the questions and uncertainties that are a natural outcome of truly critically reflecting on one's beliefs and yet confront these uncertainties honestly without becoming overcome with despair or losing one's sense of self. It also means being able to truly hear what the "other" has to say without filtering it through one's own assumptions and prejudices. For her, it is a process similar to what Lubarsky (1996) describes when suggesting that "In putting forward our beliefs and values for scrutiny and in opening ourselves to another worldview, we become vulnerable . . . ." (p.543). Diane captures this idea when she says:

> I loved that–that was another metaphor for that–what it means to live in the in between. And it means a lot of different things, but where, and I'm not sure, but that space where there are ambiguities, there are different voices coming together. There are differences, always, differences - and can we live with that? And can we express our voice–honestly, faithfully, and listen to the other's voice and learn from that and come together... which I expressed last night [at the focus group interview] sometimes in a level where you are almost transcending yourself.

Larry's reference to his own tolerance for ambiguity was expressed through acknowledgment that one can only know what one has known for all of one's life but that it is the recognition of this knowledge as being partial, incomplete and one-sided that is important in the dialogue process. He captured this idea beautifully when he said: "one of the benefits of this group is that you learn that what you've been taught all your life, maybe it's not true, but it doesn't

matter." His eagerness and joy in learning something previously totally unknown as in the discovery of the Qur'anic story of Abraham described earlier, was accompanied by a humble recognition that all people are somewhat limited by the perspectives which they have from childhood or from ideas they carry along and uncritically accept.

From our own experience of interreligious dialogue with each other, we understand it as a space in which religiously committed adults, who are individuals of good will, can come together to learn about one another. In the process, if they stay with it, they will reflect on assumptions they hold very dear as they challenge themselves to learn more about their own ideas and commitments.

Jack captured the importance of tolerance for ambiguity in terms of his suggestion that in order to participate in interreligious dialogue, one must be fully "anchored" in one's own religious understandings. In describing the risk involved in interreligious dialogue, he said:

> Part of the risk of this type of dialogue is that the knowledge and the change in faith—I'd like to believe it increases faith—will actually devastate you short term. That you will be so unsettled by it that it can devastate you. And the trick is relaxing. Realizing that it's going to devastate you. Everything you know is going to disappear and you only have two choices. You can relax or you can fight it because there's nothing you can do about it.

His idea of what it means to be "anchored" in one's own faith was intimately linked with a belief that it is only in having been "tested" in life that a

person can be at stage where they are ready to tackle the kinds of risks involved. He described this testing in the following way:

> I mean down in the dirt struggle. You lost a job, you lost a house. 'How am I going to make it?' The only way you are going to make it is through faith. You know the moments in life when you realize there's absolutely nothing anybody can do for you . . . . And I think that the testing, that purification, has to be there. Because otherwise you don't know. You don't know if you're strong enough—and the worst place—you don't know if you can swim until you've fallen in the water and that's the worst place to find you can't.

Thus, for Jack, individuals who have not been tested in the ways in which he describes are not ready for engagement in interreligious dialogue because "they're gong to be devastated" by the uncertainty and risk that he sees as inherent in the process.

Just as Diane, Larry and Jack all characterized the importance of tolerance for ambiguity, other participants shared different variations of the same idea. What was common across the board, however, was the recognition that engaging in interreligious dialogue would lead to moments of self-doubt and a questioning of one's dearly held assumptions. Whether characterized by Rachel's (a Jewish member of the Shalom/Salaam group) image of the dialogue as an often confusing and chaotic maze through which one is not quite sure how one will emerge, or Nadira's acknowledgement that being questioned about her understandings and religious beliefs by Jane often led her to confront her own assumptions, the idea that those who participate in interreligious dialogue need to possess the ability to remain staunch in their own beliefs while at the same time, recognizing and confronting the limitations of these same beliefs was

central to participant discussion of personal characteristics needed for successful engagement in interreligious dialogue. The possession of the ability for tolerance with ambiguity is very much like the conjunctive stage of faith, described by Fowler (1995) in which there is the presence of "ironic imagination" which is: "a capacity to see and be in one's or one's group's most powerful meanings, while simultaneously recognizing that they are relative, partial and inevitably distorting apprehensions of transcendent reality" (p.198)

Personal Interpretation Of Religious Tradition

While there is an implicit understanding that the motivation to participate was influenced by all of the participants' personal interpretation of their religious teachings or traditions, we found that several of the participants explicitly refer to their interpretation in talking about their involvement in interreligious dialogue. The participants who we found to make those explicit references are Diane, Jack, Bill, Sara, Jane, Nadira, Hillary, and Alim. It is the comments from these participants that we will highlight here.

Diane's interpretation of her own religious tradition and how this influences and motivates her involvement in interreligious dialogue emerged during her personal interview. In a hushed tone, almost whispered as a prayer, she said:

> For me truth, and I–it's even hard to put into words, but for me truth is–I guess with a capital T–is that there is, there is the divine, there is God, many names--many, many names...many understandings. But there is someone who is–a being who, somehow, is creator, some kind of

redeemer, some kind of sustainer, that we have been - this world and other worlds- may have been created by the Divine ultimate reality, whatever names one wants to give that. And that, for me, this world, and this earth, and we human beings, have some of that divine within us, and its up to us, human beings now, to recognize in the world around us, but in others, that divine spark and connection and to live out a life of love and compassion and of connection with others and, it's [a source of] the healing of the world...to be able to live a life where I, for me, this is a bedrock, a kind of foundation and, I would say, Truth... it's real, I believe in it... I would like to live my life in a way that, you know, I'm living out that conviction and that belief. . . so the dialogue is a vehicle.

Jack talks about his involvement in interreligious dialogue being directly inspired by his interpretation of his own religious tradition or teachings just as powerfully, although a little differently. In answering the question of what motivates him to engage, he divided his answer into two parts. The first part, the encouragement and recommendation of his pastor as part of his motivation for getting started, we referred to earlier in this section. Jack referred to this as being "on a human level." He continued, and gave a second part to his answer. The second part he related to his understanding of his personal connection to God. He referred to this as being on the level of the "Divine." Jack told us:

The other is Divine, not that I understand it. But, the one thing I am confident of, and it has taken me years to get to the understanding, is that everything that has ever happened to me has prepared me for this moment. Now, I don't know what the moment may be, but, in other words, nothing has happened just to be happening. And nothing will happen. Nothing happens by accident. The people you meet, the places you go, because you only see what you see. You don't see the car that didn't hit you. You don't see the people that didn't mug you. You don't see a lot of things that God holds back.

Jack's worldview assumes that there is action going on for him on both a human and a divine level. He understands his involvement in interreligious

dialogue to be connected to both of these regions of his personal and interpersonal universe.

For Bill, the experience of interreligious dialogue is about the experience of closeness and connection and a striving towards unity in the universe. He talks at great length about the lack of personal connection in this busy world and the corresponding human need that we all have to make that connection. He expresses this perspective within the context of his interpretation of Jewish religious tradition, when he talks about how we are created in one another's image, which is really the image of God.

> It's you as a human, do you see me, do you hear me? Do I see you? And do you see me? And that's, you know…again…, where is God? I mean God is, as far as I'm concerned, He's in each person. Try and identify Him. Look into that. Maybe that's, when we say we are created in the image of the other fellow, when I talk to you, I'm talking to God, represented in you and you're talking to God represented in me. And that closeness and bringing together is that unity which we crave.

In the CIMCAM focus group activity, Sara, a Caucasian Muslim woman now in her senior years, wanted to create her metaphor in words rather than pictures. For her metaphor, she wrote:

> *We breathe in the name of goodness and mercy. Breath has life. Breath is in our hearts and in our speech as we dialogue.*

As we went around the room, explaining our metaphors, she said simply: "I thought about the way in which the Creator gave us His metaphor, which is

breath." Further she said regarding the dialogue," We are elementally alike. We breathe the same air and Allah's presence in the world is in that breath."

This idea of breath, expressed so eloquently by Sara, was the inspiration for Jane to express her thoughts referring also in terms of the presence of the breath of God.

In chapter two, Jane wrote about her inspiration for engaging in interreligious dialogue and social action as being rooted in the idea of B'tzelem *Elohim*. Mentioned twice in the book of Genesis in the Torah, the idea that humans are made in God's image holds within it the promise of perfection, yet we know that we cannot reach that perfection alone, without others. God's presence in the world then, to some extent, depends on our actions in order to be made manifest, so, indeed, God needs us, as well.

> There are moments when Nadira is speaking to me, when we are in the process of interreligious dialogue, that feel to me like God speaking to me through her mouth. I cannot explain it any other way. It is when this happens that I understand interreligious dialogue to be a sacred space, a holy space, between two human beings. . . It is in the space in between the words one of us may be saying, that God's presence dwells. It feels like the action of dialogue itself calls God to make an appearance. I have experienced this also in the context of studying Torah with other Jews. In fact, Jewish tradition teaches us that when two Jews study Torah, God sits in between. That, in fact, is one of the reasons that I became a Jewish educator following a career as a graphic and technical artist. I wanted other Jews to know what this feels like. I wanted those who have never experienced this to discover it for themselves. I made a career out of creating opportunities so others could find God in the midst of Torah. I never expected to find this here, with Nadira. When I teach Torah to her or talk about the how and why we live as Jews, and when she teaches me about the beauty of Islam as she knows it, it is like God breathes life into us, and we both feel it.

Nadira personal religious interpretations that inspires dialogue is based in part on her understanding of the Muslim idea of human responsibility and what she believes to be the role of humankind in this world. Referring to the Islamic concept of Ashraf ul-Makhluqat, or "humankind as the highest form of creation." She says:

> In the Muslim tradition there isn't a fall, per se, with Adam. The story goes that God offered this trust to all of creation, and the trust is knowledge of all things, and everyone refused except for Adam, who represents all of humankind. Humankind was foolish enough to accept the trust, and that is what makes humankind the highest form of creation. How I interpret that and how quite a few people within the Muslim community interpret that, is that this acceptance implies social consciousness, and that implies equality. It's a trust. It informs every aspect of my life. How I interact with Jane should be the same way as how I interact with someone from my own community. When it says Ashraf ul-Makhluqat, it's not that only Muslims are Ashraf ul-Makhluqat, the highest form of creation. It's all of humankind that is the highest form of creation.

Hillary, an Orthodox Jewish woman, talked a great deal about how her father's openness, acceptance of people with different perspectives, and optimism, had played a role in how she sees the world. She feels that this as one of the reasons why she finds herself comfortable in an interreligious dialogue setting. In reflecting on whether she thought that her father's openness and optimism was influenced by his religious faith, she connected his faith to hers in a powerful way, as she responded:

> Faith is a very personal journey, and it actualizes differently from one person to the next. I think [my parents] were both propelled by their faith. Was it connected in my father, in that sense [of being connected to how he acted towards other people in the world], in a very profound direction? I think it was. And, I think it is in me. And, one of the most important lessons I took away, from my upbringing, is the fact that every single person on the face of the earth is made in God's image.
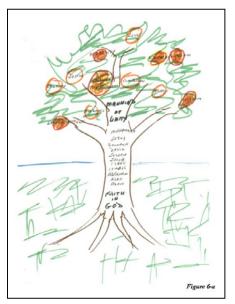
A Muslim cleric, Alim grounds his motivation firmly in his religious ideas. The influence of his interpretation of his religious tradition and teachings on involvement in interreligious dialogue is also clear in Alim's description of why he got involved in the Shalom/Salaam project. He is not interested strictly in social change. His focus is much more spiritual in nature. He told us:

> My approach was not so much any sort of civil understanding - not for external goals, but rather to try to make everyone be attuned to God and the divinity within themselves and make them see the richness they [have with one another]. I always talk about God and try to relate everything back to God.

This idea is reinforced in his answer to the question of what motivated him to engage in interreligious dialogue. He says, "I think, if you said what made this happen, I would say God made it happen, and I have firm convictions about that." This idea is also reflected in the tree metaphor (figure 6-a) that Alim created in the CIMCAM activity.

Figure 6-a

In explaining his metaphor, Alim described it as the tree of God from which all humankind emanates. He used this metaphor, common in Islamic stories, to describe his understanding of interreligious dialogue as an opportunity for people to "go back to our original root and see what will grow from that." He went on elaborate on this by comparing the fruits of the tree to the teachings of the prophets of God and the Islamic view that all

prophets are from the same God, who in Arabic is called Allah (literally "the

God"). As he put it:

> The fruits come in various kinds. The Qur'anic passage says that the tree
> of the oneness of God will bear fruit in every season. It doesn't just
> produce fruit at one time nor is it subject to droughts or anything like that
> because it's deep-rooted and the fruits will always be there. So ... what
> are the fruits? Compassion, love, wisdom, divine knowledge [which
> comes through the knowledge of the heart], justice, unity -- all of these
> things are fruits that we see coming out of our dialogue and those will be
> tasty when cut.

Thus, we can see that for Diane, Jack, Bill, Sara, Jane, Nadira, Hillary,

and Alim the motivation to engage in interreligious dialogue is very much

informed by their own interpretations of their respective religious traditions. In all

these cases, the interpretation of their religious tradition by participants in the

study represents what Fowler (1995), summarizing Smith, calls faith. As he puts

it:

> *Faith*, rather than belief or religion, is the most fundamental category in the
> human quest for relation to transcendence. Faith, it appears, is generic, a
> universal feature of human living, recognizably similar everywhere despite
> the remarkable variety of forms and contents of religious practice and
> belief. (p.14)

In sharing with you what we discovered about the motivation with which

participants in the study engaged in interreligous dialogue, we have described

the role of institutional, structural, and personal support; significant life

experiences; personal characteristics; and the participants' personal

interpretations of their respective religious traditions. In the next chapter, we

share details relating to the learning and meaning making processes that took

place for participants in the dialogue experience.

CHAPTER SEVEN

INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AS SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED KNOWLEDGE

In the previous chapter, we shared participant perspectives in response to the question of what motivated them to engage in interreligious dialogue. In this chapter and the following one, our focus is on how participants described the impact of their participation. The specific area on which we focus in this chapter is how participants reported having constructed knowledge and made meaning about self and other as a result of the experience of interreligious dialogue.

This discussion focuses on how engagement in interreligious dialogue changed what participants understood about "self" and "other". Specifically, it explores the interconnection between the role of cognitive/intellectual processes and affective/emotional processes, and how the interplay between the two was essential in the learning that took place. Central to this discussion is the function of language, image, and story as symbol in engaging the affective/emotional and cognitive/intellectual learning domains. It is broken down into four sub-sections: (a) interconnection of cognitive and affective, (b) significance of image and symbol; (c) new knowledge constructed: self and other, and (d) the drive to continue.

Interconnection of Cognitive and Affective

Mezirow (1991) asserts that learning is all about making meaning, that one learns through a process of making explicit, connecting with, interpreting, remembering, validating, and acting upon "some aspect of our engagement with the environment, other persons, or ourselves." (p.11). In describing this process of making meaning, or learning, in the context of interreligious dialogue, participants in the study painted a picture of experiences in which knowledge was socially and collaboratively constructed (Peters & Armstrong, 1998).

This learning that participants described was more than simply a matter of gathering facts and information about the "other". It was more than a rational exercise in "constructive discourse to use the experience of others to assess reasons justifying [one's] assumptions, and making an action decision based on the resulting insight" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 8). Rather, it was, as Rossiter (1999) suggests, a process of listening, hearing, questioning, relating, symbolizing, feeling, and storying (a process by which participants engaged in the sharing, revising and enlargement of narratives related to religious teachings, religious beliefs, and personal life stories as they relate to who they are as religious people).
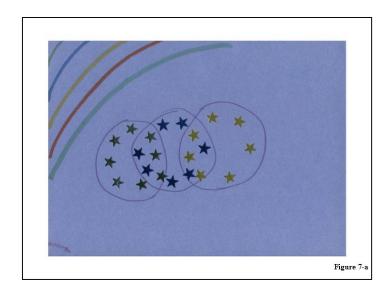
Based on the descriptions shared by the participants in the study, we have come to understand the interreligious dialogue experience as one that involves interacting with the "other" using the mind, the heart, the ears, the mouth, and the spirit. It is what Dirkx (1997) refers to as "learning through soul", which is when

"the socioemotional and the intellectual world meet" (p.85). More specifically, we have come to understand it as collaborative knowledge construction.

According to Lee (1998, 2000), cultivating critical openness and engaging the whole person are core values of collaborative learning. For Lee, subsumed under these values are others such as stimulating critical thinking through dialogue, appreciating diverse perspectives, dwelling with questions (which we have previously referred to as tolerance for ambiguity), touching the affective, strengthening the cognitive, and enhancing the social. As we have shown in the previous chapter, many of our participants came into the interreligious dialogue experience committed to living lives reflective of many of these values.

The personal characteristics of intellectual curiosity and tolerance for ambiguity, described by our participants as motivators to engage, capture the same values as Lee suggests are encompassed in 'strengthening the cognitive', 'dwelling with questions', 'appreciating diverse perspectives', and 'stimulating thinking through dialogue'. Not only did participants enter the experience with these values, they also reported having had them reinforced through the experience. As Larry puts it: " knowing what I don't know gives me a chance to learn more," and one aspect of that chance to learn more is related to learning "that what you've been taught all your life, maybe it's not true."

In addition to the reinforcement of these existing values, participants indicated that the values of 'touching the affective' and 'enhancing the social' were ones that emerged through the interreligious dialogue process. Bill

Figure 7-a

captured this sense of being affectively touched when he described what

happens in the dialogue process:

> The person you see is moved. I mean they are really, usually when these people talk about their experiences religiously, or about this particular episode—they are talking about it because it has moved them somehow. And you see that and you can't help but share, if you are really listening— if you are really listening, you can't help but be moved by whatever it is that moved them. So you have to say, "Wow, that's a pretty powerful force that has made this person's," you know it resonates with you.

The collaborative knowledge construction described by the participants

was also very similar to Peters & Armstrong's (1998) description of what happens

when they say "Collaboration means that people labor together in order to

construct something that did not exist before the collaboration, something that

does not and cannot fully exist in the lives of individual collaborators" (p.75). It is

something that the participants said cannot happen when one reads about the

other from a book. Hillary captured this idea in her metaphor (figure 7-a) when describing two concentric circles that represent the dialogue partners, she said:

> They link at the center, and that center changes the outside circles because you've shared something. And in the act of sharing, the outside circles are never the same as before they changed. . . . They do not disappear. They can become richer, they can become brighter, . . . but they don't become the same. But this thing that you have caused in the center, that can have a life of its own, and that goes on existing past conversation.
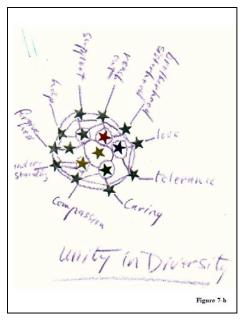
Harriet's description of the changing of the outer circles in the process of the dialogue was representative of the description of the experience by many of the participants. This awareness of the creation of a collaborative understanding or reality with the "other" in the interreligous dialogue process is indicative of openness on the part of the participants to being changed in some way. It echoes Fowler's (1995) description of conjunctive faith, the fifth stage of his six-stage model of faith development in that it represents participant readiness "for significant encounters with other traditions than [their] own, expecting that truth has disclosed and disclose itself in those traditions in ways that may complement or correct [their] own." (p.186)

Fowler goes on to suggest that this openness, however, is not encompassed in a naïveté represented by "a precritical relationship of unbroken participation in symbolically mediated reality" (p.187). Rather, conjunctive faith "is a veteran of critical reflection" (p.187). If we accept Mezirow's (1991) proposition that a goal of learning that is required for adults is that they "become more critically reflective, participate more fully and freely in rational discourse and

action, and advance developmentally by moving toward meaning perspectives that are more inclusive, discriminating, permeable, and integrative of experience" (p.225) then there is no doubt that participants in the study met this goal and, in so doing, are representative of Fowler's fifth stage.

Sadru, an Egyptian-born Muslim college professor, captured the impact of rational discourse on helping participants move toward a more inclusive, permeable, discriminatory, and integrative perspective when he stated:

> This dialogue has been a very enriching experience in the sense that, number one, it brought a lot of education, and, number two, it did eliminate a lot of misconceptions that people started with. And really, it also created an atmosphere in which civil dialogue can take place and people can differ - politics and all that.

Figure 7-b

However, what participants shared was not only limited to the gaining of knowledge through this "education" and "elimination of misconceptions", it was something far richer and more meaningful than is implied by the terms "rational discourse" and being "critically reflective" as represented in Mezirow's ideas. Sadru's metaphor (figure 7-b) is an example of the articulation of the idea that the learning in the interreligious dialogue process went deeper than simply intellectual or cognitive learning; beyond the accumulation of knowledge represented in facts, figures, and information. In explaining his metaphor, Sadru said:

I took the different colors of the stars and put them inside a circle - blue, green, red, . . . representing the diversity of people in a sense as well as cultural diversity, religious diversity...... Diversity of thoughts and maybe diversity of geography and location and other aspects of the differences and ethnicity and things like that. But then the outer circle is all silver, same color as stars, and each of these represents some of the fundamental feelings and sentiments that all people despite their diversity, share. So each one of these current stars is also connected to all the other silver stars in a sense that despite the apparent or superficial or outside differences of color or race or ethnicity or religion, culture, there is an underlying unity in the sameness of the feelings and functions that we all have such as love, caring, compassion, forgiveness, and so on. So I said "unity" even though all of human beings are united by those noble and gracious feelings despite the apparent differences they may have of cultural, religious, etc....:   It's the same thing [others have said]

Heron (1992), in discussing the affective mode and its influence on self, says:

Feeling is deeply and deliciously paradoxical. It unites us with what is other while telling us that it is other and that we are other to it. It celebrates unity in diversity, identification with what is different without loss of personal distinctness." (p.93)

Sadru's emphasis on the "underlying unity in the sameness of the feelings and functions that we all have" immediately after his statement regarding the diversity that is represented in interreligious dialogue are an example of how the experience of interreligious dialogue was both a cognitive and an affective one for him. Captured in his metaphor is both acknowledgment of the diversity as well as expression of realization of unity that emerged from the experience for him.

As can be seen from Bill, Harriet, and Sadru's examples given above, participants' descriptions of their experiences underline the impact of participation on both the cognitive and the affective domain. In addition, we found that there

was a third equally important domain that emerged in the context of interreligious dialogue. In the midst of stories shared and the interactive storytelling that occurred, images that were used and the symbolic elements of each religious tradition that were brought to the fore in the dialogue process were as much an aspect of the learning as was the content being shared and the relationships being strengthened.

Significance of Image and Symbol

The premise that human beings interact with people and objects in their environment on the basis of meanings that these people and objects hold for them, that these meanings are constructed through a process of social interaction, and that they can be re-constructed or modified through deepened social interaction is key to understanding the idea of symbolic interactionism (Schwandt, 1998). In the case of the participants in our study, the meanings attached to different stories, images, symbols, and constructed understandings of the "other" that they came into the interreligious dialogue experience with were built up over their lifetimes as a result of socialization processes within their own religious traditions as well as in the context of the wider society. Thus, participant understandings of symbols and images such as 'jihad', 'faith', 'love', and 'peace' differed and were shaped by messages participants had received from religious authorities, parents, significant caregivers, mass media, and teachers.

However, in the process of interreligious dialogue, along with gaining content knowledge about and developing relationships with their dialogue partners, participants began to re-construct their own understandings of and reactions to these symbols and images. In some cases, this re-construction of the significance of a symbol or image was more profound in impact than gaining information about the history or theology of the "other". As Fowler (1995) states:

> The forming of an image does not wait or depend upon conscious processes. The image unites "information" and feeling; it holds together orientation and affectional significance. (p.26)

If we agree that "human experience is mediated by interpretation" (Bogden & Biklen, 1998, p.25) then the reconstruction of the meanings of these images and symbols in the interreligious dialogue process represents a re-interpretation of one's religious understandings based on the knowledge gained through interaction with the "other". It reflects " a capacity to see and be in one's or one's group's most powerful meanings, while simultaneously recognizing that they are relative, partial and inevitably distorting" (Fowler, 1995, p.198), a strength of Fowler's conjunctive faith. For example, Jane's understanding of 'jihad' as a holy war against Jews was re-constructed following a conversation with Nadira about both what the term represents in the context of Islamic belief as well as what it meant for Nadira personally. As a result, whereas Jane's past reaction to the use of the term by a Muslim in her presence would have been negative or fearful, today that reaction is more likely to be tempered by an awareness that perhaps it is not meant as a personal attack on her as a Jew. Similarly, Bill's understanding

of love, a concept central to Christian theology but not his own Jewish understanding, has considerably changed as a result of his dialogue with Christians. As he put it: "I've tried to explore this . . . I've wanted to know what, how do Christians view love and how do Jews view love? Because love has become very important in my life now."

In both examples given here, the participants could have obtained the information by having read about it in a book or through listening to a lecture. However, it was the combination of the information gained and the nature of the way in which it was gained that impacted on how it helped re-construct the meaning of the images for Jane and Bill. It was the uniting of information and feeling referred to by Fowler. In essence, what participants in this study described was a dance between partners from two different religious traditions within which the content knowledge they brought into the experience was bolstered by how they interacted with the "other, their reflections upon their own inner selves, and by the manner in which this knowledge was shared and communicated. As such, the cognitive aspect of the experience was influenced by the content previously discussed, knowledge previously acquired in light of new information studied and shared; the affective dimension was influenced by the relationships formed within the dialogue process and their accompanying emotions; and the symbolic domain was influenced by the stories and storytelling, metaphors and imaging that took place in the dialogic exchange. This idea is captured by Kasl and Yorks (2000) in their statement: "When

learners engage in communicative learning as whole persons, [emphasis added] they engage each other in the affective and imaginal modes of the psyche as well as the conceptual and practical" (p.177)
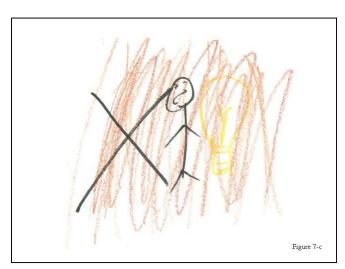
New Knowledge Constructed: The Other and the Self

In the two subsections that follow, we will share some examples of how this dance was envisioned as having impacted on participant understandings of the "other" and of "self".

New Knowledge of "Other".

In describing the nature of his experience in interreligious dialogue, Larry created a metaphor that captured both an emphasis on learning about the other as well as the relational aspect of the learning. His metaphor (figure 7-c) consisted of three distinct images – an "X", a figure of a person, and a light bulb - placed against of a background of color meant to symbolize warmth and heat.

He said: "I tried to express the feeling I felt after entering this dialogue,

Figure 7-c

basically a feeling of warmth that other people would see us learning about them as persons and the light of understanding. " He described the "X" as representing the contact between

people that happens in the dialogue process and "the person is knowledge, and the light bulb, . . . [represents] the idea of the light going on -understanding."

In Larry's metaphor, the themes of learning and understanding are intertwined with that of feeling, warmth, and connection. One dimension of the interaction of cognitive and affective through the symbolic relates to the question of how and in what ways learning about the other in the presence of the other is different than learning through books and courses alone. Brufee (1999), describing his experiences in collaborative learning, says:

> But although we learned a lot from what we read, we learned a lot more from what we said to one another about what we read. Each of us began to change, and we discovered that the most powerful force changing us was our influence on one another. (pg. 9)

Participants in this study echoed this sense of the interdependence of learning and feeling, knowing and sharing, exploring and growing. For example, in response to how interreligious dialogue was different from learning about the "other" through reading and formal classes, one participant, Ross, answered: "Because it's people. Because you're sitting down with someone that has a totally different upbringing and viewpoint of life and of the world." When asked if the insight and growth that is possible in the dialogue experience was conceivable if the dialogue remained only at the cognitive or intellectual level, Bill focused on the interpersonal element of the affective domain as he replied: " No, I don't think so because we have the smartest people in the world and they are some of the dumbest damn people in the world when it comes to real human interaction. They can't talk to each other."

Larry expanded upon the importance of the affective dimension in learning about the other in his suggestion that understanding comes not only from talking about, but feeling, watching, and experiencing. He stated:

> And I know that when we talked about our religious services, like Yom Kippur, which is our holiest day, to the Christian members of our group, they understood. But, when they came to services and saw 2000 people standing there and joining in, it was amazing listening to their reaction after the program compared to, "Oh, okay." You know, I know what Christmas is, but until I went to a midnight Mass I never knew how beautiful a Christmas service could be.

Here, Larry's understanding of the symbol "Christmas" and what it represents for Christians was qualitatively deepened through having been able to experience some of the power of the midnight mass. As a result, very much like with Jane's understanding of the symbol "jihad" and Bill's understanding of "love", the meanings attached to the symbol of "Christmas" qualitatively changed for Larry. Linda – a Jewish member of the Living Room dialogue group - echoed this same sense of the importance of the interaction of the cognitive, affective and symbolic dimensions in learning about the other when she stated: "It's much bigger than just intellectual. I think it would be an acceptance of other people's thought processes and what's inside of them when they see something - other people's reactions to life based on   the different base." Linda's reference to "acceptance of other people's thought processes. . .when they see something" suggests that coming to understanding the "other" is not simply about gaining information about doctrine, history and theology. Rather, it requires that the dialogue partner "actively enter the worlds" of their dialogue partner "in order to

'see the situation as it is seen by the [partner], observing what the [partner] takes into account, observing how he [sic.] interprets what is taken into account" (Schwandt, 1998, p.233-234). This is similar to what Boys and Lee (1996) refer to as the importance of the personal dimension of dialogue. In discussing of their work with the Catholic-Jewish Colloquium, they say:

> Only when Jews can experience the dynamics of Christian life as lived by contemporary Christians can they come to appreciate its beliefs and practices and to be able to engage in the kind of in-depth conversation that lies at the heart of genuine dialogue. (p. 425)

In a sense, what our participants described was a transition from a monolithic to a multidimensional understanding of the "other" manifested through an intimate, personal, and interpersonal engagement of self and other. This is a non-linear process by which the information they had previously acquired about the "other," began to be re-shaped and transformed through the experience of engaging in interreligious dialogue. We have begun to think of this aspect of the learning as the acquiring of tacit knowledge that is not easily available from books or articles. It is supported by a scaffolding of assumptions (or symbolic meanings) that are derived from what one may have learned from books, films, travel, visits to holy sites, and lectures or academic classes in religion. The scaffold can also consist of the teachings that come to us about religious "others" from our own clergy, the professional and volunteer religious educators with whom we have had contact over the years, as well as from what parents and public school teachers may have taught about members of other religious communities. It is in the context of the interchange of self and "other" as well as

cognitive, affective, and symbolic that takes place within the interreligious dialogue process that this scaffolding provides support for the personal expanding of horizons and meaning making process described by participants in this study. The prior content knowledge that is brought into interreligious dialogue is an important base or starting point, but it is what happens within the interreligious dialogue process that challenges and confirms it. Sara captured this idea when she stated:

> What I love the most in a Muslim Jewish dialogue program is when we discover our oneness or unity. We find that in the celebration of events in family life. Some of the words used regarding births, marriage, and death are nearly the same in both religions. There is something shared in the lives of Muslims and Jews that goes beyond ritual and it fills me with great joy. It is as if my inner being is borne on wings which take flight and I see all the brothers and sisters in Truth.

Another aspect of this interchange is that participants begin to develop a sense that while they are representative of a larger religious community, they are actually sharing ideas and understandings of their religious communities from their own personal perspective. We have begun to think about this aspect of the experience in the form of a researcher metaphor, which is that of a well-tended community garden of content knowledge. The content scaffolding is then like individual trellises that support and nurture plants growing in a garden filled with a variety of plants and flowers. Members of the religious community tend different plants in the garden. Around the garden is a fence to which all the individual trellises are connected and by which they, in turn, are supported. The ideas relative to participant understandings of who they are as religious beings

are linked to the larger fence of the religious community, yet the individual's understanding and experiences with the particular teachings and ideas are represented by the individual trellis and plant structures inside the fence. In dialogue, the gates of the fenced gardens are opened up for visitors to see, touch, taste, smell, and learn from, together. Sometimes the visits to the garden are pleasant, such as when what one sees and hears supports and validates one's own beliefs. Other times the visits can be uncomfortable, such as when what one encounters in the garden calls into question one's own beliefs.

In the beginning of our own interreligious dialogue, as we asked each other questions about our religious ideas and beliefs, it soon became clear that we could best represent ourselves, and not the whole of the Jewish or Muslim world of ideas and practices. This was true because we realized, in a very personal way, that there are the nuances of belief and practice within Judaism and Islam that ranged across a wide continuum. By focusing on our experience of learning about one another, from one another, and not primarily from a book about religion, we understood each other as moving bodies on that continuum. Through dialogue, we have come to know each other as religiously committed women engaging in an evolving and fluid world through our particular religious worldviews that are formed by both the fence of our particular religious traditions as well as the individual trellis of our life histories   We can talk about our experiences in the world, with one another, knowing that we can ask questions of one another about how this worldview makes a difference in each situation.

Our answers to the other's questions included a wide range of responses. Sometimes these responses were particular to our own community and family practice. Other times, the responses were couched in the long span of history that Islam and Judaism traverse. This recognition that we really speak not for the whole of the Jewish or Muslim world, but only our own piece of that world, often produced a sense of inadequacy. However, our stage 5 conjunctive faith (Fowler, 1995) understanding that "the symbols, stories, doctrines and liturgies offered by [our] or other traditions are inevitably partial, limited to a particular experience of God and incomplete" (p.186) enabled us to capture a more concrete outcome through an increasingly nuanced portrait of the other religious community. Without a detailed timeline or series of facts delivered or memorized from a lecture or a text, we understand the other community from more of an insider's perspective, in our dialogic encounters over time. Acquiring tacit knowledge from a religiously committed other appears to be distinctively different in character from learning from a book or a lecture.

An example of this is seen in an early interchange between us about the meaning of the word "jihad", referred to earlier in this chapter. Jane's recollection of this encounter and all that surrounded it is reflected in the following journal entry:

> I remember asking Nadira about the word "Jihad" in the early months of our dialogue, before a commitment had been made to become collaborative research partners. I was aware that Jihad was interpreted in the media in America as "holy war" and the idea of a war being holy was foreign to my Jewish religious worldview. Furthermore, if the idea was so simple to interpret, I wondered how someone like Nadira could ignore it in

her interaction with the Jewish community. I knew that Nadira had had Jewish friends and acquaintances before. Our relationship in the cohort was immediately easy and friendly. . . .

So the moment came to discuss this powerful and politically charged word and idea that Jews fear. I knew that Jihad must have some other meaning. Asking about Jihad seemed like a safe bet, since I knew that if Nadira were not comfortable answering, she would simply tell me so. Nadira's answer was simple. In Arabic, Jihad means struggle. Nadira explained it as referring to the struggle that Muslims face in this world as they seek to follow the five pillars of Islam, yet live in the real world filled with the realities of disagreements, discontinuities, family dysfunction, illness and disease, and limited amounts and distribution of resources. She explained that this is how the Ismaili community, her branch of Islam, understands and teaches the idea of Jihad.   This answer made sense to me.

An interreligious exchange followed. I told Nadira that this reminded me of the Jewish idea that people are born with both an inclination to do good and an inclination to fall short or even bring evil into this world.   Jews understand that God gives people free will and the choice to exercise it. Of course, the Torah and other Jewish sources are filled with guidance and expectations for normative Jewish behavior, in order to insure that the choices made by Jews do not fall anywhere near the area of evil deeds. Yet, the Jewish people have a choice to learn and understand the guidance offered through the generations, or reject it. The struggle with God in Jewish tradition is represented metaphorically by the idea that we have within us both the Yetzer Ha'tov, which means the inclination to do good and the Yetzer Ha'rah -which means the inclination to do evil. Like having a good and a bad angel on each shoulder to argue with us each day, the struggle is tangible and real for those who seek to live a Jewish life.

Nadira's recollection of the conversation is captured in her own journal entry:

I can't believe how difficult it is to explain what Jihad means. When Jane asked me the question, my first inclination was to immediately respond with "it's not what the media says it is." But to actually articulate what it means and what it represents to me is much more difficult than replying in the negative.

As a religious person, I am very aware of the significance and importance of the idea of struggle as a religious principal. Yet, as a member of a society that is constantly bombarded with images of this

religious principal as a modern call by Muslims for war, I am also painfully aware that my interpretation is only one of many. My own understanding of jihad as first a psychological, and to a lesser extent, a physical struggle is colored by a somewhat liberal perspective of life and religion, After all, my definition of al-Jihad-al-Asghar (the lesser struggle) as a struggle against those who would prevent one from living out one's faith is to place that struggle as a defensive one [- one which, in my mind, does not even equate with physical violence.] Yet, one could argue that this definition is exactly what those religious fundamentalists who call for Jihad against the Jews [and others] are using and that they believe they have been driven to do so and therefore are reacting defensively. [My stance on this, however, is that the possibility of being able to rationalize one's actions does not legitimate them as justifiable, particularly when such actions are so antithetical to the spirit of peace that I believe Islam is about.]

The fact that I choose to place emphasis on al-Jihad al-Akbar [the greater struggle] as the constant inner struggle to overcome my own baser instincts – a striving to live an ethical and moral life – may be why I do not interpret jihad as those Muslims who are spotlighted in the media might. The paradox of my trying to explain it to Jane is that I am trying to communicate a holistic and historical sense of the word while, at the same time, trying to couch this in my own personal worldview. Perhaps that is what this whole process of interreligious dialogue is about. Perhaps it is about making concrete and personal all that is general and, supposedly, universal.
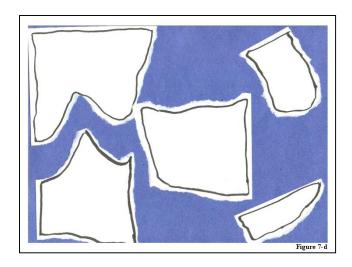
When we share these ideas with one another, we are painfully aware of our own limitations. But, it does not stop us, nor does this stop the other participants in our study. This entry from Jane's journal is a reflection about Nadira's visit to her home and congregation for Yom Kippur services in September of 1999. This was conceptualized as one way of engaging in interreligious dialogue. By becoming a guest in one another's religious services and activities, we hoped to stimulate a deeper level of understanding, one that is similar to Larry's experience of the Christmas midnight mass referred to earlier in this chapter. By this time, we had been engaged in interreligious dialogue with

one another for just over one year. The journal entry begins with a description of

the car ride to Jane's home in Peoria, Illinois, on a Sunday afternoon, following

doctoral cohort classes in Chicago. The Day of Atonement, the most sacred day

of the Jewish year, would be starting within hours of our arrival. Nadira had

asked many questions about the holiday, and the religious practices that she

would encounter upon her first ever visit to a synagogue. Jane wrote:

> Amidst this deep talk of religious tradition and practice, I realized that I
> was not only speaking from my personal experience of practice as a
> Reform and Conservative Jew. I was also trying to give Nadira a broader
> picture of the range of traditional practice throughout the Jewish world, in
> all places, throughout time. We are - the two of us- painfully aware of our
> limitations; that we speak for only ourselves; and that while that is surely
> limited, it is something powerful and real, not only for us and our families,
> but for our people and how the two of us touch both at one point and the
> whole, at the same time.

> How can any one person speak for all of Jewish thought and
> history? Surely, I am just one humble servant of God - one Jewess
> among the multitudes in time who have attempted to learn and teach
> others about the wisdom and beauty of our traditions and values. As I
> drove from Chicago to Peoria, I became conscious that in my telling of our
> story to my friend Nadira, my voice as her friend became the voice of the
> teacher - the storyteller ... and the two of us driving down highway 55 were
> sitting by the transcendent fire of the ages, one of us sitting next to her
> ancestors by the fire, one of us an invited guest from another tribe. No
> lovingly roasted calf or chickens from the fire for us, though. In our late
> 20th century hurry to get home for Kol Nidre, we stopped for a fast food
> meal, along the way.

As can be seen from the examples provided in this subsection, the

interaction of the cognitive, affective and symbolic dimensions of learning through

the interreligious dialogue process enabled participants to gain a richer, deeper,

and more integrative understanding of the "other". Representative of Fowler's

(1995) conjunctive faith stage, participants in our study were "ready for significant

Figure 7-d

encounters with other traditions than [their] own" (p. 186). Through these
significant encounters in the interreligious dialogue process, participants were
"challenged to let go of old conceptualizations of self and their world and to
embrace new understandings" (Clark, 1993, p.49).

New Knowledge of self.

Much of what we have described thus far about the learning relates
specifically to how one comes to grow in one's understanding of the "other".
Another important aspect of the learning that takes place in the context of
interreligious dialogue is the development of a more mature understanding of
one's own religious tradition as well. Many participants communicated a sense
that the opportunity to be able to dialogue with those who are different forced
them to look at their own religious tradition in new ways. This sense of the
interaction with the "other" leading to discovery of both self and "other" is
captured in Nadira's metaphor (figure 7-d):

It's almost like the continental drift idea of starting as one planned mass

and separating, but in that separation there are differences. If you go to different parts of the world, there are differences. And for me in some ways, yes, it fits together but not all of the pieces. In a sense it's also a representation of my mosaic in the sense that [the spaces in between are the flexible and space-allowing dimensions which allow one to be oneself and yet also recognize and acknowledge the other.] . . . One of the things that I found in the dialogue with Jane is that I've become more knowledgeable about my own faith as well as about the "other". So, the line [around each piece] is not meant to be a boundary or a wall, but it's a reinforcement of my own identity, while at the same time, reaching out and coming together with the others.

It is echoed again in Nadira's reflections on what happens in the interreligious

dialogue process and how it is different from talking with people from your own

religious group:

One of the things that is happening is when you talk to someone from your own community, they're not going to ask you questions about your own religious tradition in the same way that someone who doesn't know it is. And one of the strongest things I've found in terms of the dialogue that Jane and I have is she'll ask me a question, and I'll say, "You know, I never thought about that." I had to learn about that. I had to go and find out. And so, in the process, I am learning more about myself and my own community and my own religious tradition.

Hannah, a middle-aged, Jewish member of the Living Room dialogue

group, echoed this same idea of interreligious dialogue leading to deeper

knowledge about one's own religious tradition when she stated:

Well, I feel very strongly about that. One of the statements that Mary Boys made [about her experience of interreligious dialogue] is that one of the outcomes of dialogue is that you learn more about yourself   through discussing with the other. And that I have found absolutely true.

Another member of the Living Room dialogue group, Beth - a white Jewish woman and an established Jewish community leader and philanthropist who identifies herself as a member of the Reform Jewish community, concurs with this when she stated that: "I feel very strongly that this has encouraged me to learn more about my own text".

Patty, a white Christian woman, serves as an organizing guide for the Living Room dialogue group. She is a philanthropic leader in her city and works nationally as an advocate for interreligious affairs. She beautifully captured this same idea of the experience of interreligious dialogue leading to a greater understanding of self in her metaphor (figure 7-e). In describing how this deepening of the understanding of self occurs, she stated:

> First of all, we start out very separately...very solidly in our traditions. We are solidly Jewish...so you've got the solid star. Or we are solidly Christians. We start in our own circles. Once we moved into the bigger circle, which was the circle where we were going to exchange ideas, understandings, attitudes, we experienced a very shaky situation. And [we] still do sometimes. . . . The cross is, as shown here, no longer solid; the star is no longer solid...The Jews are learning that their understanding of Judaism never incorporated the Judaism of Jesus... there is something, another dimension of their tradition, which is not there. Jesus was a Jew, speaking out of a Jewish tradition, who died a pious Jew. Christians are learning that what they thought was Christianity only its not quite the 'solid' thing they thought it was. All of their presuppositions aren't accurate as they had little understanding of its Jewish roots. I think the more we understand each other...the more we're true to who we are. As we come

Figure 7-e

together as one...in the final analysis, I think we are more solidly who we are, Christian and Jewish. Yet...we are also more solidly together than we've ever been. So, that is what the center circle is.
.

What Patty described through her metaphor was how in the context of the

interreligious dialogue, participants are confronted by information, perspectives

or questions that present a "disorienting dilemma" (Mezirow, 1991) that leads

them to confront that own religious understandings through critical self-

examination. In a sense one is almost forced to engage in this critical reflection

on the meanings associated with religious symbols in order to explain these

meanings to the "other," a process that often comes with some discomfort and

pain. Fowler (1995) describes this process in the following way:

> For those who have previously enjoyed an unquestioning relation to the transcendent and to their fellow worshiper through a set of religious symbols, Stage 4's translations of their meanings into conceptual prose can bring a sense of loss, dislocation, grief, and even guilt." (p.180)

It is this discomfort and the recognition "that life is more complex than

stage 4's logic of clear distinctions and abstract concepts can comprehend" that

moves participants into the conjunctive faith stage and a "more dialectical and

multilevel approach to life truth" (Fowler, 1995, p. 183)

Rachel, a Jewish participant in the Shalom/Salaam dialogue group,

captured the potential discomfort of this process of critical reflection in the

dialogue process as well as the outcome of having a better sense of self and

other in her metaphor (figure 7-f). She described it like this:

Figure 7-f

It's . . . a very complicated maze because the directions are always changing and you never know how exactly you're going to find your way through this maze, whether the end is better than the beginning you're not sure, but you have to get through it. You have to understand that. But when you do get through this, you find as many colors, almost like a flame. You know how a flame takes on many colors? And it burns and sometimes it's blue and sometimes it's red and sometimes it's yellow, and that could represent a stream of mixing, the flame mixes altogether, but it's many different ideas, backgrounds, experiences, but they all come together.

In this development of understanding about one's own religious tradition,

the importance of the interaction of the cognitive and affective is once again

highlighted in that participants expressed that the safety of being able to go to

those potentially painful and uncomfortable places with dialogue partners who

were neither impartial nor negative. In fact, the safety of the group and the

interpersonal relationships that had been built up enabled this exploration in a

positive manner. Lawrence (1997) describes this experience as it occurs within

learning cohorts. In describing what happened in the cohorts she studied, she

said: "In order for learning to take place, it was essential that individuals were open to learning from one another. This meant a willingness to question their own assumptions and learning to view ideas from multiple perspectives."

Nadira's captured her experience of this process like this:

> It amazes me how much my conversations with Jane are pushing me to dig deeper into how I understand my own faith. When she asks me questions, she does so from her perspective. Often these are questions that I have not asked myself because I've never had to or because the answers are assumed. But when I have to think about the questions and talk with Jane about what I think the answers or perspectives are, I often have to dig deeper - to look at myself and my beliefs in a new light. This process of learning and the experience of doing it with someone who cares and can understand what I am going through is unlike anything I have experienced before. As I go through it, I come out a more [religiously] committed person with a broader understanding of both myself as a Muslim and of Jane as a Jew.

Thus, we see how engagement in the interreligious dialogue process impacts on participant knowledge about both other and self. It is not just about gaining content knowledge, but rather about having one's very frame of reference changed by the interaction, questioning, and dialogue that takes place as one tries to seeks to represent oneself while, at the same time, seeking to learn about the other from their point of view. It is about learning about self and other in the presence of the other; influenced by this presence.

The Drive to Continue

In discussing the factors that motivated our participants to engage in interreligious dialogue, we identified intellectual curiosity as one of the personal characteristics of our participants. What we soon discovered in talking with them

is that this intellectual curiosity was not only a motivating factor for participants to initially engage in interreligious dialogue, but it was also a factor that sustained their participation in interreligious dialogue. Part of the joy of the learning for these individuals was in being able to experience an "aha" moment in the midst of the dialogue. It is linked to sharing our understanding of how our experiences are part of the grand narratives that sustain us as members of our particular religious communities. These "aha" moments can be grounded in the discovery of completely new ideas or facts, or the revelation that previously held assumptions are incorrect. In the two subsections that follow, we share how this intellectual curiosity, as well as the affective dimension of the experience, contributed to deeper and extended engagement by participants.

<u>Intellectual Curiosity</u>

It is the nexus of this moment when one is faced with information that in some way challenges a previously held assumption about the "other" that characterizes the most powerful moments of dialogue for many participants. These are unplanned and unanticipated moments of surprise that present themselves as opportunities for learning. Whether through the transformation of prior assumptions about the other, or the expansion of the boundaries of understanding with new information, this experience of learning inspires many to continue to remain engaged in interreligious dialogue for years.

In the preceding chapter, we described what happened when Larry discovered, in the midst of the interview, that the Muslim version of the story of Abraham's sacrifice was different from that understood by Christians and Jews. This revelation is an example of both how Larry's intellectual curiosity brought him into the interreligious dialogue experience, and it is also an example of how that same intellectual curiosity has kept him engaged over the years. In fact, after having learned that there was a difference in the presentation of the story about Abraham's sacrifice of one of his son, Larry told us
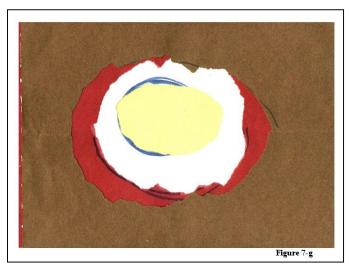
> The next time my group gets together . . . . I'm going to raise a question. Does anybody here believe it wasn't Isaac who was [bound]? I mean, I know, nobody knows that fact—that it may not have been Isaac.

This example of Larry's experience with the Muslim version of the story of Abraham's sacrifice highlights the idea that one aspect of the motivation for ongoing participation in interreligious dialogue was driven by experience of unanticipated moments of discovery and the potential for thinking about familiar ideas from differing perspectives.

While it may seem obvious that we do not always know what we do not know, and that in some cases this carries negative emotional weight for us as when we might discover on a road trip that the bridge we need to cross is closed for repairs, this idea in the context of interreligious dialogue can be a motivating factor. For some of our participants, on a regular basis, in the context of interreligious dialogue, the experience of having something completely unexpected come from the mouth of a dialogue partner is very engaging and

inspires motivation to continue. The resultant surprise fosters the willingness to explore new and deeper areas of the discourse. With this surprise comes a feeling that one is changed forever by learning something one did not know, one did not know.

Jane expressed this idea in one of her metaphors. The metaphor (figure 7-g) is a series of torn construction paper circles, with dark colored edges revealed in ever narrowing ovals leading to a central area characterized by a white oval with a yellow smaller circle, inside. Created from the outside in, to Jane it

Figure 7-g

was a tunnel-like image with a hint of the idea of light in the center, to represent the light that drives her forward. It is a graphic expression of the moment of encounter with what one does not know what one does not know. Like going through a wormhole towards a new sector of the universe, this tunnel leads to a new universe of possibilities of knowing. In the context of interreligious dialogue, this experience is accompanied by the sense that one can never go back to thinking about, or knowing, the "other", in the same way.

In the course of the semi-structured interview process, participants related particular stories about specific interreligious dialogue experiences they had.

Talking about a discussion he once had about the impact of the Crusades in the context of the interview, Larry said:

> I didn't know it either when I was a child either, from school. And it wasn't thought that, wait a second, what right, you know, did the King of England have going to Jerusalem to kill people of the Islamic faith? I mean it was kind of like [asking myself] What right did I, as a white person, have to own a black person? I mean it was just, you know, bad, how did these good Christian people go to church and then come home and hit their slaves? Now, I mean we all come from our own perspective and I think that's the good thing about this program [of interreligious dialogue]. You should start saying [to yourself]: "Wait a second. Maybe I don't know".

The motivation to continue to engage deeply to learn what one does not yet know, can occur in connection to the participant's own faith, as well as the faith of the religiously committed dialogue partners. In talking about the experience of first engaging in interreligious dialogue, Jack stated:

> After the first few sessions I was so excited I could barely work. It was a whole way of looking at things, and what I found from a content perspective is it gave you the permission to question God. Within your own faith you can't [question God] because you can't talk to anyone because there's always the fear, [someone will challenge you publicly about] what exactly are you saying? Where in a group, in an interreligious group, everyone's expecting you to say whatever you're going to say anyway. So, for me, it gave me an opportunity to explore and hear what I think without spinning it around in my head. The interesting thing for me is that I've found, and a few other people from our church found, that we had less disagreement between Christians and Jews than we did between Christians.

Hannah captured the same idea of the ability to explore new learning a little differently. Relating the quest for information to a certain level of maturity that exists within the Living Room dialogue group, she stated:

> This is something that all of us share, that we are open to new information. We have a lot of questions, and after all that, that's what maturity is, too. We have more questions than answers. Whereas when you're young, you

have more answers than questions, and so it's this desire, this quest for information, and I can't think of a better place to get this kind of information than this group.

This idea of having more questions than answers as one of the

characteristics of the experience in interreligious dialogue is also expressed by

Diane, another member of the Living Room dialogue group. She is also involved

in the Origins group. She expressed this idea by saying: "Do I have answers?

No. But I have more informed questions and more informed understanding."

Diane is representative of someone who is at Fowler's (1995) conjunctive faith

stage in that she has "a critical recognition of [her] social unconscious – the

myths, ideal images and prejudices built deeply into the self-system by virtue of

one's nurture within a particular social class, religious tradition, ethnic group or

the like." (p.198) She uses this recognition to spur her onto deeper levels of

engagement in interreligious dialogue and learning about the "other" in a variety

of ways, including participation in formal lectures and educational opportunities.

The impact of the intellectual domain as a way of confronting this social

unconscious and of continuing her pursuit of this learning was captured when

she stated:

> I've learned so much about Judaism that has just been such a gift. Just such a gift in terms of my own spirituality. In terms of, well, I've learned about something about the past of Christianity, which I didn't realize was quite as dark as it was. And that has, . . . [led me to] such big theological questions—at a lot of different levels. I certainly, have gotten to… have been struggling with, both Christianity today, but also its past, trying to understand what, in fact, did happen. Vis-à-vis the development of Christianity as a full sect. . . so I studied that book, the Hebrew scriptures, the Christian text, and looked at the anti-Judaic side—that's been a big slant and makes it difficult. I mean sometimes I wish life were simpler and

just had this little faith and didn't worry about such things—but I do worry because I carry the burden, I think, as a Christian, for what has happened. Not that I go around saying "Mea culpa", because things happen and I didn't… But there are things that we can do today that, to at least change how we are living today with each other.

Thus, we can see that the intellectual dimensions of the interreligious dialogue experience for Jane, Larry, Jack, Hannah, and Diane provided a drive for them to continue to engage in the process. For these participants, the experience of engaging in interreligious dialogue is not "reduced to a sharing of opinions and uninformed perspectives." (Boys & Lee, 1996, p. 435).

Connected Knowing

Although we found that knowledge construction was a process through which the dimension of an individual's affective, cognitive, and symbolic self interacted to create a holistic experience, there was no doubt that the affective domain played an essential, and somewhat primary, role in the process. This was especially true when it came to talking about the context and role of the particular people or group with whom one was engaged in dialogue. In the next three subsections we explore how this emphasis on the relational aspect of the experience emerged through participant comments on affect and intimacy, on the nature of the group itself, and on the idea of interreligious dialogue as a generative, life-giving activity.

Affect and intimacy. Jerrold Apps (1996) talks about five recurring life themes that engage us throughout our lives: developing relationships, searching for meaning, confronting mortality, revisiting our personal history, creativity, and knowing ourselves. Participants shared with us that they are drawn to the interreligious dialogue process because it provides a vehicle to experience a kind of intimacy and closeness that they do not experience regularly anywhere else in their lives. It is not a sexual intimacy that we are discussing here, but the kind of intimacy that Apps talks about when he says that developing relationships and searching for meaning, and knowing ourselves are three of the recurring life themes that we return to again and again. As Nadira said in the interview: "[What I find striking is] the fact that I can talk to someone of another faith about my faith in a more intimate and deep way than I can with people of my own faith."

Participants describe their encounters in interreligious dialogue as a way to talk about what really matters to them in life. As they build relationships and attempt to make meaning with others who care deeply about the same kinds of things that they do, for many, this sense of intimacy eventually emerges.

Bill talked about how in our day to day hurried American lives, we often do not take the time to really talk together, barely saying good morning to one another in the offices and classrooms in which we spend so much of our time working. Face to face in the interreligious dialogue, there is no escape from the conversation about big ideas. Some of the participants noted that the things they share in the dialogue they do not think they could share comfortably with

members of their own family, or members of their own church. Jack referred to

the dialogue group as friends who are the repository of some of his greatest

fears. It is a way to explore emergent ideas about life's most enduring questions,

in an environment that is characterized by trust and confidence. This is related to

Apps' idea of knowing oneself as a recurring theme.

From our own experiences, we learned that interreligious dialogue allows

us to explore ourselves from entirely new perspectives through the questions we

are asked by our interreligious dialogue partners.   In that space, talking and

listening to one another is the main activity. Engaging deeply is the purpose.

Through this process, intimacy comes when we create the time, space and place

to explore life's meaning with "other's" who genuinely care about religious ideas

and about us as people. As Nadira reflected when interviewed:

> I could have taken a class on Judaism [with other Jews present], and I
> don't think it would be the same . . . because now I'm not just talking about
> Mr. X or Miss Y that I met who happened to interest me and I got into
> dialogue; I'm talking about someone that in a sense is family.

One of the things that several participants reflected on was the nature of

the friendships that emerge or develop as a result of the interreligious dialogue

experience. For most of the participants in our study, the nature of the social

relationships are unique in that they are not friendships in which people attend

social occasions or do casual things together. Yet, at the same time, within the

context of the dialogue, there is a connection about the most important and

meaningful things in life in ways reminiscent of conversations with our closest

friends. Reflecting on why it may be that the intimate relationships formed in the

context of interreligious dialogue do not necessarily grow to include casual social

activity, Hillary suggested:

> It's safe because you know it's within- inside - this parameter, and it lives
> within this parameter. And, if you don't have a connection in between this
> meeting and the next meeting, nothing else interferes with what's inside
> that circle. But, if you have a relationship outside, then something may
> indeed change that dynamic. . . . For some people it's easier to ask the
> tough questions of somebody that you can then walk away from and you
> don't have any other link to.

Boundaried nature of the group. Alice, a middle-aged Jewish participant in

the same Origins dialogue group as Larry, captured the importance of the safety

that needs to be created as part of the interpersonal dimension of the group in

her reflections about the impact of having a pre-arranged and agreed upon set of

topics and content for discussion, on building relationships:

> [the content] gave us an opportunity to speak about neutral things without
> getting total strangers to have some thing to talk about. It wasn't intimate
> and wasn't personal right off the bat. Interpreting and giving personal
> spins and personal values based on the material seemed to me to be a
> less threatening environment than just being asked to sit down and say
> who you are and what you think. In addition to that, I thought that the
> material was intriguing. Our group has stayed together . . . Relationships
> have developed ... just the language, the shared time together, is much
> more comfortable and agreeable, and although there are areas where we
> mutually agree to disagree and we're very careful about not offending and
> not hurting anybody's feelings, at the same time we're comfortable saying
> things that are on our minds that are important to the conversation.

What is interesting to note is that prior friendship does not necessarily lead

to adding interreligious dialogue to an existing strong relationship. Reshma, a

Muslim woman born and raised in Pakistan, commented that while in her 20 plus

years in America she and her husband have made many personal friends who

are Jewish, she has not engaged in interreligious dialogue as part of those relationships until now. She has been surprised at this, knowing her interest and involvement in the Shalom/ Salaam dialogue to be so successful. She told us that it is difficult to talk with her Jewish friends about being a Muslim and what that means to her in her life. She described this as being a kind of boundary wall that cannot be approached with these friends. While they are trusted friends on many levels, sharing intimately about their religious ideas is not a part of the relationship. Reshma told us about one particular encounter with a Jewish woman who has been a long time friend, wistfully noting that while she herself was ready to engage in a conversation about Muslim and Jewish interaction in the world, her Jewish friend was uncomfortable, and would not. For Reshma, and others, the relationships formed in the interreligious dialogue setting have the potential to break down interpersonal boundary walls that are found in many other daily public settings. Breaking down such walls within the security of the dialogue group is one aspect of the experience that fosters learning across religious borders.

Generativity and its connection to the symbolic realm. One dimension of the intimacy that emerged for our participants as a result of engagement in IRD was a sense of having touched a wellspring of generativity that is life affirming and hopeful in posture. For Erikson (1985), generativity and stagnation are representative of a stage of adulthood in which the focus is expressed, in either a

positive or negative way, as the concern for establishing and guiding the next generation. In the positive mode, this includes a sense of creativity and productivity within its domain. Erikson understood generativity as a way we link ourselves to the future, by establishing connections through the individuals and institutions we participate in supporting. He called the opposing force for this positive and life affirming process stagnation, a state of being frozen in place, over time.

In our study, generativity emerged as an expression from the symbolic domain repeatedly in the discussion about the CIMCAM metaphors created in focus group interview one. Images in the CIMCAM activity reminded focus group members gathered around the table of eggs, beginnings, birth, heat, warmth and light. Other images used that evoked this same sense of hope and legacy abounded. Words such as trust, joy, unity, hope, compassion, love, wisdom, generativity, intimacy, connection, and happiness were used by many different participants to communicate the positive dimension and/or the potential outcome of interreligious dialogue. These images, and the conversation they stimulated, evoked a sense of emergent growth that was framed in a positive and life affirming way. Our understanding and use of the term generativity encompasses all of Apps' recurring themes.

As an example, Hillary's metaphor (figure 7-a) uses the natural imagery of stars along with the idea of richness and promise. Hillary is a Jewish woman, an Orthodox Jew, whose work in a field related to hospital chaplaincy brings her into

contact with religious diversity every day, described the impact of her

engagement in interreligious dialogue in the following way:

> I really think that the heart of any conversation, which is what dialogue is, is just people being linked together and people being willing to put on the table in the conversation some part of themselves, and it doesn't have to be the deepest part of yourself. It can be something entirely different. But that once you do that, the two outside circles have some sense of concentricity to them -- they link – there's a center, and that center changes the outside circles because you've shared something.

She went on to say:

> The reason that the colors are in the corner is a rainbow, and my favorite story from Torah is the story of Noah, the story of the ark, the story of the rainbow. To me it encompasses both human dynamics - every metaphor of every aspect of life is in that parable - and the rainbow to me is a sign of the promise of the future. And those joining together of those circles is a promise of the future because I don't think you have one unless you join together.

It is not surprising that the images of generativity were prominent in

participant discussions of the experiences in and motives for interreligious

dialogue. We have already seen in the examples provided in this chapter that

many participants are representative of Fowler's (1995) conjunctive faith, a stage

that he parallels with Erikson's crisis of Generativity vs. Stagnation.

In this chapter, we have shared with you what we discovered about the

knowledge construction and meaning making process as it occurred in the

context of the interreligious dialogue process. We have shared with you what

participants reported having learnt about 'self' and 'other,' how important the

group was to the process, and how several participants experienced the process

as generative. In describing the interaction of the cognitive, affective, and

symbolic dimensions, we hope we have painted a lush and thorough picture of

what took place at the dialogue table. In the next chapter, we move on to

shedding light on the ways in which this knowledge impacted these individuals.

CHAPTER EIGHT

ATTITUDES, BEHAVIORS, AND PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIAL ACTION

In chapter six, we shared participant perspectives in response to the question of what motivated them to engage in interreligious dialogue. In chapter seven, we focused on participant responses to the question of what knowledge construction and meaning-making processes were involved in learning about self and other in the interreligious dialogue experience. In this, the third of our findings chapters, concentration is placed on what participants shared regarding how this knowledge construction and meaning making had changed the ways in which they interact in society.

The discussion in this chapter brings to light the ways in which participation in interreligious dialogue made a difference to how participants perceive of, and react to, the "other" outside of the immediate context of the dialogue group. The chapter is broken down into three sections: (a) impact on personal worldview; (b) impact on reported behaviors; and (c) envisioning social change, a philosophical framing of the potential of interreligious dialogue as a tool for social change. The first two sections build upon the discussion, in chapter seven, about the knowledge participants reported having gained. Specifically, the focus in these two sections is on how participants reported having changed their perceptions of, and behavior toward "others" as a result of the knowledge gained. These first two sections focus on impact at the individual

level. In contrast, the heart of the last section - envisioning social change - lies in the philosophical reflections of participants about the potential long-term impact on society if we change the world, one person at a time, through interreligious dialogue.

Impact on Personal Worldview

McKenzie (1991) defines worldview as "an interpretation of reality that provides an understanding of the world" (p.14). He suggests that one's understanding of the world directly influences the way in which one moves about in the world. That is, one's worldview is the basis on which one acts in the world. What we are suggesting here, and what we discovered through our research, was that in the process of interreligious dialogue, there was an important change in worldviews and that this change caused participants to see, and act in, the world in a qualitatively richer manner.

Much of what we learned about the impact of engagement in interreligious dialogue on personal worldview connects to what has already been written about the collaborative construction of knowledge discussed in chapter seven in that participants found themselves being changed by the encounter with the other and what emerged was new knowledge and understandings. Specifically, participants reported having an increased tolerance for difference, a growing awareness of how much more there was for them to learn, and an increased desire to pursue additional sources of learning about the "other" outside of the

context of the dialogue itself. While these are all potentially areas of growth that could be considered as part of the knowledge-construction and meaning-making realm of learning, we have chosen to identify them as falling under the realm of action because in all cases they had implication beyond the dialogue group itself.

Rachel, a white Jewish participant in the Shalom/Salaam project, captured the idea of how her attitudes and perspectives had changed as a result of the interreligious dialogue process when she stated:

> And I think it's been a very sobering experience for me coming from a community that is very quick to jump to conclusions, very anxious to be in the front of things, very willing to sometimes take risks, all of which are very admirable traits, but you find -- at least I find; I'm talking for myself -- what I find from going through this exercise is that -- I don't want to say exercise negatively, but it is an exercise in a sense, a discipline, that we've developed -- is that you learn other admirable traits that go beyond your own community. Those are developing listening skills and also slowing down a little bit. . . Dialogue is what its all about. It's a totally different pace - slow pace - and at times it can be frustrating and at times it is satisfying but its an incremental, slow building upon building upon building. But that's the nature of the deal. It is very empowering and yet I think the most productive way to go...and in my old age I am still learning...

This description by Rachel of how the dialogue experience had helped her in "slowing down" was reinforced by a story shared by Reshma about the discussion around an incident that had occurred in the Middle East:

> On that day there had been a picture on the front page of the *Inquirer* of a little girl in Israel who was a target of a terrorist attack . . . and they were showing her and there was a big write-up about the response of the various leaders as to the death of that one child. And there was a small notation within that that said that because of whatever retaliation, 32 or 22 kids died in the Palestinian camp. Rachel . . . was here . . . and people were talking about that and you could see their emotions in what they were saying; and I said to her, I said, "Somehow the feeling I get is that the blood of that one child is more precious than that of the 22 other children who died who had parents and whose mothers are mourning

them just as well. Does that legitimize this?" And she got tears in her eyes. She said, "No, never ever. No amount of barbarism justifies killing children . . . whether they be Jewish or they be Muslim." And I said, "Well, how come I don't hear that?" And the rest of the evening, I mean, she was literally devastated by the fact that I could think that the impression of the Jewish leaders on their part was that the blood of that one Jewish child was more precious.

While Rachel's intention may not have been to communicate the idea that the one Israeli child's life was more important, from Reshma's point of view her question helped Rachel realize that perhaps in jumping into a condemnation of the Israeli's girl's murderer, she and other Jewish participants may have lost sight of other details of the story. What Rachel described to us about the changes in her attitude toward and understanding of 'others' and what Reshma shared about their conversation lead us to believe that Rachel's worldview was altered as a result of her participation in interreligious dialogue. As McKenzie (1991) states: "In confronting texts, different views and prejudices, alternative life forms and worldviews, we can put our own prejudices in play and learn to enrich our own point of view" (p.58).

Another example of this same subtle change in attitude, or worldview, can be seen in participant descriptions of turning to their dialogue partners to help them maneuver through the information about the "other" that they see reported in the media and elsewhere. One example of this is Jane's reaction to a posting she received from a Jewish online web list she is on. She had received a posting from this list that indicated that Muslim authorities were engaging in wholesale destruction of Jewish antiquities on the Temple Mount. Rather than accept the

truth of this report at face value as she may have done previously, Jane turned to

Nadira to verify the authenticity of the information she had received. This act of

turning to Nadira represents an expansion in Jane's worldview in that rather than

assuming the validity of the accusations based on her own prior understanding or

experiences, she realized the need to authenticate the allegations from other

sources. This kind of change in worldview is particularly important when one

considers the potentially negative impact of acting in the world on the basis of

partial information or personal stereotypes and prejudices.

Alim's example represents a change in attitude that is captured through

the process of introspection. He captured this sense of looking at oneself and

examining one's reactions to things a little differently when he told us:

> And I think . . . at least most people have that maybe not intention, but it's something that's happened through the dialogue where they've said, "Uh-oh, that was something that doesn't prove quite right." Sometimes we defend it when we're talking and then we go home and say, "That was really stupid"...[laughter in the room]

In this case, Alim is talking about developing an awareness of one's

reactions and expression of ideas within the interreligious dialogue context.

Prefaced as it was by his statement that "the whole idea of living is to improve

ourselves - it's pretty hard to improve someone else," this recognition by Alim

about the introspection regarding what one has said and how one has

represented oneself in the dialogue group provides another example of how

engagement can lead to a change in attitude. McKenzie (1991) suggests that

one "cannot become a better person without changing [one's] patterns of

thinking, feeling, willing, and acting that arise out of [one's] worldview" (p.95).

What Alim described to us was a subtle change in his pattern of thinking and,

subsequently, acting as a result of the interreligious dialogue experience.

Another aspect of the impact on attitudes came out in the midst of the

initial discussion in the focus group with participants of the Shalom/Salaam

project. In this case, the feeling expressed by participants was that the impact of

the dialogue somehow emanates outward beyond the group. In a sense,

participants were implying that the changes in attitudes amongst group members

had an impact far beyond the group itself. Sara refers to it in the following way:

> And whatever it is that we are there is a core of some goodness in us and
> from that comes vibrations or waves that flow outwards on the airwaves.
> The goodness of each of our sessions is out there. Sooner or later they
> spread and go further than we think. This is illustrated by the very fact that
> you found us. [laughter]."

Sara is saying that the emanations of good feeling were strong enough so

that we, as researchers, picked them up and came across the country to meet

the members of this group. Whether or not you believe that Sara's idea has any

merit, her expression of this belief about the impact of being involved in

interreligious dialogue is one way in which she has made meaning of

participating in interreligious dialogue. Hillary echoed this when she responded

to Sara's comment:

> I think you're right in the way when it goes out in the air it's because also
> each person takes it with them into any other encounter there in any
> circumstance. . . It has a domino effect on your perceptions of anything:
> your perceptions of yourself, your perceptions of any other encounter that
> you have, you can take it with you. You grow yourself from one day to the
> next.

A further example of this sense of the learning in the dialogue group having a domino effect on any other encounter that you have, is beautifully illustrated in a story that Bill, a Jewish participant from the Christian -Jewish Origins program, shared about what was reported to him by a Palestinian Muslim that he met when he was participating in a local Muslim-Jewish dialogue group in which he was also involved:

> . . . the Palestinian, who is really fascinating when he was there - it had been right after Yitzhak Rabin shook hands, I guess, with Arafat and, "God," he said, "I go back to Israel so many times and one time," he said, "I was driving along the highway in my home town and I saw this Israeli soldier standing on the highway waiting to be picked up, a hitchhiker." He says, "Most of the time I just zoomed passed at 50 miles an hour or faster because I don't want to see these guys, but I thought, you know what, maybe I should give him a ride. So I gave him a ride." He said we had the most wonderful talk that ever was. He says, "I just felt that, you know, I could talk." He was really very moved by this experience and it was very moving to listen to him.

Another facet of the change in attitudes expressed by participants was captured through email correspondence from Jane to a fellow Jewish educator in response to a question regarding the impact of the rising violence in the Middle East on our work:

> As I have come to know Nadira, and how she lives her life, and the other Muslims that I have met in my research and life here in Peoria, I cannot but think that Islam and Judaism have a great deal to share, and that the golden age in Spain must have been a glorious time of learning and sharing in deep and powerful ways, . . . now I understand it in a more tacit and personal way. It gives me the glimpse of hope I need, as we strive to make peace more prominent than hatred, everywhere we live. Our work is focused on America and not Israel, but we are both convinced that our efforts here to understand and foster adult learning in the context of interreligious dialogue do make a difference. I feel that each word we write together is like a prayer for peace that we both hold dear in our

hearts.

This posture of deepening understanding as a result of the dialogue process is especially well illustrated in Jane's remarks to this same colleague concerning how having come to a "deeper sense of understanding of the human face of the Muslim community" helped her more confidently face a potentially hostile student group at an interfaith panel hosted by the Islamic student group at a local university. As she put it:

> Because of my work with Nadira, I am able to move ahead with more confidence and knowledge of what I may be facing. It is not a naive idea reflecting only the warmth and friendship that Nadira and I have together transmitted onto other Muslims, but rather a deeper sense of understanding of the human face of the Muslim community that has the same challenging and sometimes frightening complexities that we do, in our own beloved Jewish community.

The examples of the experiences of Rachel, Reshma, Alim, Sara, Hillary, Bill, and Jane provided in this section illustrate the impact of participation in interreligious dialogue on their attitudes about, and stance toward, the "other". Specifically, these examples showed how this participation enabled them to develop deeper, more informed and more permeable understandings of the other that had implications for how they moved in the world. These examples show the impact of this kind of dialogue on participant worldviews. The next section provides more insight into the nature of that movement in the world as a result of these changed worldviews.

Impact on Reported Behaviors

In terms of actual behaviors reported by participants as directly having been influenced by participation in interreligious dialogue, there was a range of contexts in which these were reported to have occurred. These contexts included speaking at some sort of a public forum, inviting members of the "other" group to speak at a forum within one's own religious community, and asking advice from a member of the "other" group in dealing with situations having to do with interaction with other members of that group. Other ways included changing the way in which one carried out one's educational responsibilities within the context of one's own religious community, and actively seeking to create change for one's self, and potentially for a larger circle others in one's own religious community, as a result of one's interreligious dialogue learning experiences.

One particularly striking example was Diane's decision to get very involved in creating her mother's funeral service to be held in the Episcopal Church where she grew up. She described how she remembered sitting on the floor of the church cutting and pasting sections of the traditional service together, editing parts that she felt would be offensive to the many Jewish friends she knew would be attending the funeral. Her task, as she described it to us, was to honor her mother's life and memory within the arena of their beloved Christian tradition. Yet, at the same time, she saw this as an opportunity to begin to act on her understanding about how the use of triumphal language in the context of the expression of supercessionism within the Christian church (an attitude that sees

one own religious tradition as being superior to, more complete than, and a replacement for another). Her engagement in interreligious dialogue has helped her understand how this triumphal language has had devastating effects on Christian-Jewish relations, and, sometimes fostering Christian anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism and leading to death and destruction for the Jewish people.

Diane wanted to screen the traditional service for remnants of this language, if she could, taking action in her own small way to change the language with which her church's liturgy communicates the Christian ideals and values she and her parents so dearly cherish. She told us this very personal and very moving story, about preparing for her mother's funeral, in a whispered hushed tone:

> My mom just died in December and . . . I was really the one who put the service together. . . I was sitting there and I know a number of Jewish friends are coming. . . I was sitting there trying to work out this service to . . . be faithful to–not only my tradition, but to Christianity and, of course, I had to go with certain things in the service. You just don't say, "Sorry, we're not having . . ." I just wrestled with the text. I spent hours on this - one, because I know something, but also because of my sensitivities and wanting to be as welcoming for all the people there, as well as, that's the only way I would do it anyway, whether there were any Jews or Muslims who were coming in, I would do that anyway.

In describing her experience of preparing for her mother's service, Diane painted a picture of someone who was intent on being true to her own tradition but also to the larger Christian and non-Christian traditions. Her comment that she would do that anyway is an example of how engagement in interreligious dialogue has moved her to a point where her actions are not simply out of

respect for or recognition of the presence of the "other" but are a deeply imbedded attitude of pluralism.

As we listened to Diane, we were both deeply moved by this expression of courage and strength. This devoted Christian confronted the enormous power of the history and tradition of the church she loved, critiquing it gently, transforming its language, at a time of great personal loss. Diane's sense of personal agency is expressed in her action to revise the liturgy for her mother's funeral service. She acknowledged that this was at least in part a result of the learning she had done in the context of interreligious dialogue, over the course of many years.

Ross, a rabbi, describes the impact of interreligious dialogue on action as he relates a story about how Sadru, a Muslim male and fellow participant in the Shalom/Salaam dialogue group, sought him out as a teacher:

> I had a basic Hebrew reading class, and he wanted to learn how to read Hebrew, and he came down. He's a very busy guy and he travels a lot. But he came here. . . He's a person that I would call upon–I mean we're not friends in the sense of, you know, going-out type friends... I'm friendly with Ray [another rabbi and participant of the dialogue group and this study] and his wife, but I have a relationship with [Sadru] and I know who he is. We've been together enough that I can call him; he calls me, and we have that kind of relationship . . .

He further emphasized the impact of his participation in interreligious dialogue by sharing his decision to participate in the signing of a document calling for a shared Jerusalem:

> A small group of rabbis and - I actually signed the letter myself–you know, to call for a shared Jerusalem, whatever that may mean. A lot of things that happen in the Middle East are perception and you know the reality is not important but it's what people perceive - and I think if you ask the average Israeli on the street–you know give this up–they'd say "Yeah,

we've had enough killing, enough wars"–and you know the United States you can have a war and it won't affect everybody–even World War II. Hundreds of thousands of people who died. It was so big. In Israel one person dies on the border or you have a war and 1000 people die, it's like every single person in the country knows that person and there's no reason for it. So, I've become more sensitive - more sensitive from the other side and trying to see what is taking place on both sides [Jane then asks: So it has changed you?] Oh, yeah, absolutely. Yeah. And because there's nothing, as far as I am concerned, and there are some people who violently disagree with me at the synagogue - I try not to discuss these things with them because they have not had the opportunity to sit down and talk with a person who lived in Syria or ...who was born on the West Bank or is a Muslim and has a different viewpoint.

Perhaps one of the most striking things we have discovered about the impact of participation in interreligious dialogue on one's behavior is that, for participants in this study, participation in one context of interreligious dialogue seems to lead to participation in other contexts, as well. For some participants, the very act of engaging in interreligious dialogue is understood as a form of social action. This sense is similar to what Eck (1993) describes when she suggests that religious pluralism involves more than merely the recognition of other religious traditions and insuring their rights. It is "the active effort to understand difference and commonality through dialogue" (p.192). Participants of the Shalom/Salaam project who were part of the original group present at the zoning board meeting and subsequent session that established the dialogue are an example of this "active effort". Confronted by misunderstanding, prejudice, and hatred, the participants – both Jewish and Muslims – decided that one way of overcoming this discord was to learn about each other. For them, the very act of dialogue was social action.

Other forms of action vary and range from subtle; incremental action to action that is more explicitly political in nature. Some of the more subtle actions reported by participants included using fellow dialogue partners as resources in some way. For example, Reshma told us of how she had sought the advice of a Jewish dialogue partner about what was expected of her an invited guest to a colleague's daughter's bat mitzvah. Ross related how he has invited a fellow Muslim dialogue partner to talk with students in one of his adult education classes about the Hajj. The example given earlier in this chapter of how Jane turned to Nadira to verify the truth of the claim about Muslim authorities destroying Jewish artifacts at the Temple Mount is another example of how participants begin to rely on dialogue partners as resources.

Another modest way in which behavior is impacted by participation in interreligious dialogue is captured in the ability of participants to talk about the "other" in their own religious communities. Eck (1993) refers to that as "keeping another's image" (p.218). She says that in society, people "depend upon one another not to tell lies, not to spread hatred, not to purvey a sensational or distorted image of one another. We all depend upon one another to correct these lies and distortions when they are made." (p.219). Participants in this study reported a more active stance than simply correcting "distortions when they are made." For example, Nadira, in her role as lay preacher and religious educator within her own community has consciously applied what she has gained

through her dialogue with Jane, to helping others in her community understand

Jews. As she put it:

> I've gotten up in front of the community on numerous occasions and delivered speeches on the idea of the Abrahamic tradition and comparative religions and building bridges, but now when I do it, it's different. It's not just information. I mean, there's a passion behind it now. There's a certain level of personal knowledge that informs it . . . And so, it's already impacting how I function within my own community.

Ross echoed this sense of being better able to keep the image of Muslims

in his interactions as rabbi and teacher in his own congregation when he said:

> My knowledge of Islam and things that I just knew very tangentially are totally different—very, very more knowledgeable—I can read something with more knowledge. I have my confirmation class . . . when we read the chapter on Islam, I was reading more from knowledge.

Reshma also told us that the perspectives she has gained as a result of

her encounter with Jews enrich her interaction with students at the Mosque

where she is responsible for religious education. In responding to the question of

whether or not her participation in interreligious dialogue had impacted on her

role as someone responsible for the religious education of children at her

mosque, Reshma replied that it is normal practice in Muslim religious education

to include teaching about Moses and other prophets whose stories are included

in the Qur'an. She went on to say that the message of tolerance for and

acceptance of Jews as Ahl al-Kitab or 'people of the book' (primarily Semitic

religions whose prophets are believed to have received divine guidance that was

captured in 'book' form) is something that had always been present in her

teachings, however, she said:

There is a difference in saying it for the sake of saying it and then saying it with authority and with an emotion behind it because now you yourself can relate to that.

Other forms of action reported by participants in the study involved steps that were taken outside of the context of the religious communities and the task of representing the other. Reshma, for example, has participated in a four-faiths forum on spirituality in the workplace. Alim has spoken to school groups and other forums where he has been invited. Ross has taken his children to participate in and understand Muslim services. The participants in Larry and Alice's particular Christian -Jewish dialogue group participated in the funeral services of one of the Christian group members who passed away. Jane accepted an invitation to speak from a Jewish perspective in a program sponsored by the Islamic Student Association, at a local college In all of these cases, while the intent behind the action was not focused on expanding the dialogue experience in any way, it was possible because of a connection or opportunity that presented itself as a result of participation in the dialogue.

Finally, there were some actions taken by participants in the study that were clearly more political in focus. While not representing earth-shattering revolutions, these actions embody the desire to create social change. Participants who reported engaging in these types of behavior included Rachel, Alim, Diane, and ourselves. Rachel and Alim co-wrote a letter to the Reverend Pat Robertson in protest of his remarks against Muslims. Diane is involved in a special committee within her regional church organization that deals explicitly

with how Christian liturgy and teaching portrays other religious traditions. Our own dialogue led us to co-plan and co-facilitate a session with future rabbis, educators, and Jewish communal service professionals at Hebrew Union College- Jewish Institute of Religion in Los Angeles entitled 'A Conversation in Muslim and Jewish Education.'
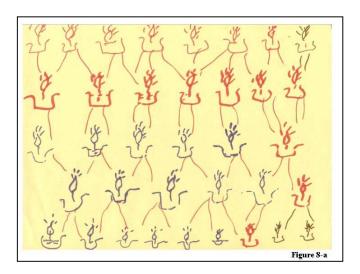
The examples given here reflect minor, individual steps participants reported having taken that were, in some way, influenced by their participation in interreligious dialogue. While these are not ground shaking acts of social upheaval, they are rooted in a philosophical stance that is very much focused on changing the world. The next section sheds light on the visions that represent that philosophical stance.

Envisioning Social Change.

If we understand worldview to be that an outlook or "historico-cultural-personal environment that provides a range of observational points, a vista, a horizon" McKenzie, 1991, p.1), then what participants described to us regarding their visions for both the present and future captured their worldviews. More importantly, their descriptions of the impact of interreligious dialogue on both self and society reflect their ideas on how such a vehicle can impact worldview construction. In each of the examples provided in this section, participants expressed philosophically what was portrayed in behavior through the examples in the previous section. As we have suggested in the previous section, given

"opportunity to act on one's evolving commitments, to test and ground one's growing convictions in action" (Daloz, 2000, p.117) each of these participants would engage precisely because to not do so is no longer an option.

Reshma's metaphor (figure 8-a) is a simple and eloquent statement that reflects Sara's previously discussed idea that there is a positive "wave" that emanates from the dialogue participants themselves. Here too is the idea that sustained participation in interreligious dialogue leads to it becoming an integral

Figure 8-a

part of one's life. Giving voice to the vision that interreligious dialogue lead to social change, Reshma explained her CIMCAM metaphor in the following way:

> Mine's the yellow one with very simplistic [images] and I look at it as these are what we call the Urdu word Diya, which are little earthen vessels. You put a little oil in it and you light it and it burns. These are like little points of light that we spread and reach to a bigger audience or a bigger crowd or a bigger or a higher cause and spread the light.

Reshma brings her vision down to a concrete level when she articulates the hope that interreligious dialogue between Muslims and Jews will lead to
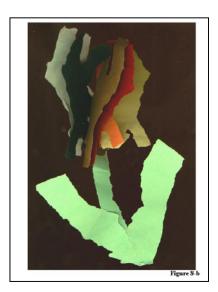
greater understanding and tolerance in times of crisis and global animosity. She

says:

> And I'm hoping that in the bigger scheme of things, when things go bad for Muslims in the world and things don't go so well with the Jewish people in this world, perhaps this kind of bridging of understanding will have an impact on trying to (a) understand and (b) in some way prevent it from developing into a catastrophic situation.

Reshma also expressed a belief that while it is a slow and seemingly long

road to take to changing the world, interreligious dialogue can have an impact for

the generations of the future, when she says:

> I think that the goal, if we look at it as trying to form a forum that can solve the political issues in that part of the world, I don't think it's going to
> happen, but I think that if we look at it as a forum for understanding or at least trying to understand, that regardless of whatever faith you may belong to, that you are individuals also ... and the religion on the basis of which we fight and we grab for land or whatever, has so many similarities between the two of them, that if we could work on the similarities and try to emphasize those, rather than the differences, that perhaps maybe - not in my lifetime, but in the lifetime of my children, there will be enough of understanding where something like this could be achieved.

Figure 8-b

Bill's metaphor (figure 8-b) reflected his

vision of social change, his idea of making it better, which is the motivation that

not only helped him to get started but also helps to sustain his continued

involvement today. He explained his metaphor in the following way:

> Basically, what I did was I tore each of the colors: white, black, brown, red, orange and yellow, to represent the shades of humankind. And each

of the figures is supposed to represent a human figure of that color, with the heads down so that they're all joined together as if they're in the process of dialogue. And it kind of reminds me of the story of God creating humankind *B'tzelem Elohim* - in the image of God.

> And their hands are joined together with staples. All the hands reach in as if they are -- the idea of *Tikun Olam* - to heal the world - to work on something to heal the world. When they act like this, they are in a sense a flowering of humankind in God's mission of building the earth and they'll be beautiful like a flower is beautiful when growing up toward the sun.

Bill sees interreligious dialogue as a way to change the world and make it better. It is one very powerful element in his motivation and his sense of purpose. It is founded in his Jewish understanding of the concept of *B'tzelem Elohim*, that we are all made in the image of God, and the concept of *Tikun Olam*, which is the idea that our task on earth is to become God's partners in repairing the world and making it better.

Bill's subsequent reflection on his metaphor also captures this desire to change the world. He said:

> I was thinking about my own particular [metaphor], about what I've done, and it struck me that the figures that I have made into the flower all were standing on their heads, which struck me, too, when I started thinking about it. Well, that's really what we want to do. We want to stand the world on its head with this whole process [of interreligious dialogue], which is really one of reversing everything, in a sense.

Ray, very knowledgeable about the experiences of the American Jewish community and the challenges of identity formation and the forces of assimilation, on the other hand, shared with us a very concrete and practical vision of what he hopes will come out of the interreligious dialogue encounter. He stated:

You know, the Muslim community, the immigrant Muslim community is where the Jews were a couple of generations ago and they have a lot of the same concerns. How do we preserve our identity? You know, what do we do? We send our children to public school. There are all kinds of bad influences there. How do we preserve our identity? You know, how do we keep from being assimilated into the myriad of American culture? All these issues, which, you know, resonate with the Jewish community, although the Muslim community is at a different stage here. So that really struck a cord. I hope you [speaking directly to Nadira] folks can learn from our mistakes, frankly. Because I think we have made a lot [of mistakes].

Nadira captures this same hopeful idea that dialogue will lead to greater understanding and tolerance, in her metaphor:

There's a saying that my father always told me which is . . . when ignorance comes in through the door, hate comes in through the window. . . When I enter dialogue, there is fellowship, understanding, peace, care, humanity, connection. And I could have sat all night and come up with all these words, but just this idea of . . when ignorance comes in through the door, hate comes in through the window, and dialogue is about getting rid of that ignorance. And hopefully by getting rid of the ignorance, at least lessening, it if not obliterating hate.

The images of "dialogue. . . fellowship, peace, care, humanity, connection" in Nadira's metaphor inspired Alim to share a popular Sufi (Islamic mystical movement) story that captures his vision for dialogue:

[The mad Sufi] is said to have gone to Baghdad one day and he had traveled all day, and he came in that night and was very tired and so he went up to a merchant, and he said, "What do you do?" And the man said, "I'm a merchant." And he said, "What comprises being a merchant?" And he said, "A merchant is a person who takes something and makes a profit out of it." And he said, "What is a profit?" He said, "It's like when you have one thing and you make it into two." And he said, "Glory be to God - I've spent my whole life trying to make two into one." So what happens in a dialogue is you make two into one, and this is the supreme achievement of human existence.

This story reflects the idea that in spite of differences, one aspect of the interreligious dialogue experience is a striving to find elements of unity within the

diversity of religious ideas, practices, and cultural life. It is an underlying idea

that Reshma and Bill also expressed in their metaphors. The simple message of

turning two into one, which is expressed in the story, underlines the desire of

many of the participants in our study to create a more significant level of

interreligious understanding in the social context, through the vehicle of dialogue.

It is not an inclusivist (Eck, 1993) vision whereby one understands the "other"

only through one's own frame of reference, but rather it is a pluralist vision in

which the "other" is understood on their own terms and difference is not only

acknowledged but deeply understood.

For our own dialogue process, and for our own work together as

researchers, we have been inspired from the beginning by these particular words

from one of the 20th century's most influential Jewish philosophers and teachers,

Abraham Joshua Heschel (as quoted in Dresner, 1997):

> No religion is an island. We are all involved with one another. Spiritual
> betrayal on the part of one of us affects the faith of all of us. Views
> adopted in one community have an impact on other communities. Today
> religious isolationism is a myth. For all the profound differences in
> perspective and substance, Judaism is sooner or later affected by the
> intellectual, moral, and spiritual events within the Christian society, and
> vice versa.
>
> We fail to realize that while different exponents of faith in the world
> of religion continue to be wary of the ecumenical movement, there is
> another ecumenical movement, worldwide in extent and influence:
> nihilism. We must choose between interfaith and inter-nihilism. Cynicism
> is not parochial. Should religions insist upon the illusion of complete
> isolation? Should we refuse to be on speaking terms with one another
> and hope for each other's failure? Or should we pray for each other's
> health, and help one another in preserving one's respective legacy, in
> preserving a common legacy? " (p. 70)

In our opinion, each of the participants in this study, in his or her own small way, through both word and action, is taking a step forward in this direction. Each small step taken by these individuals is a step forward in creating a world that is characterized by mutual respect, empathy, compassion, and caring; a world that defeats nihilism through the individual acts of people who want to bring down the walls of indifference, cross interpersonal and religious borders, and move beyond tolerance.

CHAPTER NINE

PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER

The focus of our study was on answering the question "what is the nature of the learning in the interreligious dialogue process?" In chapters six, seven, and eight, we have tried to shed light on participant responses to this question. Specifically, we have suggested that there are three major factors that seem to play a crucial role in answering this question: (a) events and circumstances that motivated participation thus triggering the experience, (b) the manner in which knowledge was constructed and meaning was made in the process of interreligious dialogue, and (c) the impact of participation on personal worldviews, behaviors and visions for social change.

In trying to capture and consolidate these three distinct facets of the experience, we have developed a researcher metaphor that suggests that the nature of the learning in the context of interreligious dialogue is incremental transformative learning. Transformation does not always occur, but when it does, it is precipitated by a rich collaborative learning that leads to essential changes in thoughts, behavior, or both. The metaphor we are suggesting is that of interreligious dialogue as a pool in which participants immerse themselves and which rejuvenates them. We will provide a more detailed description of this pool later in the chapter.

Before we share the full metaphor, it is important that we define what we mean when we describe interreligious dialogue as transformative learning. It is

also necessary for us to clarify how the learning is collaborative. That is what we will do in the two sections that follow. After, this, we will share the metaphor and provide a detailed description of each facet of it and how it links to the idea of interreligious dialogue as both transformative and collaborative learning. Following this, we will reflect on the implications of what we are suggesting to both the field of adult education and to activities in interfaith and ecumenical work. Finally, we will suggest ways in which others might use our research to expand consideration of interreligious dialogue.

Interreligious Dialogue as Transformative Learning

Kegan (2000) suggests that for learning to be trans-*form*-ative (p.49) it must put the 'form' itself at risk of change. He suggests that the difference between what he terms 'in-*form*-ative' (p. 49) learning and trans-*form*-ative learning is that while the former is limited to increase in one's knowledge, the latter occurs only when one's very frame of reference is changed. Thus trans-*form*-ative learning is "always to some extent an epistemological change rather than merely a change in behavioral repertoire or an increase in the quantity or fund of knowledge." (p.48) This same definition is echoed by Daloz (2000) when he says: "What shifts in the transformative process is our very epistemology – the way in which we know and make meaning" (p.104). We believe that much of what participants in this study described was trans-*form*-ative in the sense defined by Kegan and Daloz. One clear example of this is Diane's awareness of the supercessionist language embedded in the liturgy of her church, and her

subsequent efforts at limiting its presence in planning her mother's funeral service, details of which we shared in chapter 8.

The process of transformation, as suggested by Mezirow (1991), begins when one is confronted by "an acute internal and personal crisis" (Taylor, 2000, p.298), a disorienting dilemma that begins a problem-solving process mediated by critical reflection, and resulting in an important shift in one's meaning perspective. This disorienting dilemma triggers the transformative learning process when it presents a "major challenge to an established perspective" (Mezirow, 1991, p.168) that pushes one to engage in a "critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 168). The most obvious example of the presence of a disorienting dilemma for participants in our study was Reshma's encounter with the older Jewish woman at public meeting about the building of the Islamic Educational Center and Mosque (details of which are shared in chapter 6), an encounter that "took [her] breath away".

We found in our study, however, that the disorienting dilemma was not the only catalyst for transformative learning. As Clark (1993) and others (Dirkx, 2000, Taylor, 2000) have reported, the catalyst for transformative learning is often not a single event that presents a personal crisis. In a study of nine transformational learning experiences, Clark (1993) introduced another type of initiating event other than the disorienting dilemma. This second type of initiating or catalytic event, which she identifies as an integrating circumstance, is an event "which provides a missing and yet sought after piece in the person's life" (p.79). Clark suggests that an integrating circumstance "seems to be the culmination of

an earlier stage of exploration and searching which prepares the person for the learning to follow" (p.81). Our understanding of it is that it is almost like the final peg or gear that somehow falls into place enabling the person to engage in transformative learning. Diane and Bill provide an example of this type of trigger in that the opportunity to participate in interreligious dialogue was, for them, an opportunity to answer some of the deepest questions that they had been asking throughout their lives, in a new way.

Dirkx (2000) suggests a slightly different understanding of what precipitates transformative learning. He suggests that rather than being characterized as a sudden abrupt or life-altering dilemma, or even an integrating circumstance that presents itself as a convenient resolution to a question that one has been searching for, transformative learning "seems more subtle, evolutionary, and even enigmatic" (p.247). What he suggests is that "Aspects of the learning environment often seem to capture and captivate" (p.247). We understand Dirkx's suggestion of how transformative learning occurs as more of a window or door that is slightly opened and through which one catches a glimpse of something that teases, intrigues, or excites. As Dirkx suggests: "Individuals are often swept up and carried away by forces seemingly beyond their conscious control" (p.247).

Dirkx's ideas suggest that rather than there being a peg or gear which suddenly falls into place, transformative learning is characterized by imaginative openness to the unconscious that presents "powerful opportunities to see mystery in the mundane, to find enchantment in everyday life (Moore, 1996), to

deepen the multiplicity that makes up the self (Hillman, 1975) in seemingly ordinary experiences" (p.247). In terms of the experience of participants in our study, we equate what Dirkx suggests to the experience of those participants in the Origins project who began their encounter with interreligious dialogue in response to an invitation but, following that first experience, found it to be something that drew them deeper and deeper into the process, engaging them at deeper levels along the way.

Daloz (2000) suggests that transformation is something that happens over time. Describing transformative learning as incremental (Mezirow, 2000), Daloz suggests that it "has a context that is historical and developmental as well as social" (p.106). He distinguishes this kind of transformative learning from epochal transformation, which involves a "sudden, dramatic, reorienting insight" (Mezirow, 2000, p.21). Daloz suggests instead, "although a single event may catalyze a shift or a particular story might dramatize a transformation, closer examination reveals that change or shift was long in coming and its possibility prepared for in myriad ways, generally across years" (p.106). Given the experiences described by participants in our study, we believe that the transformative learning that occurred for them through the process of interreligious dialogue was incremental rather than epochal.

The transformational learning process that takes place in the context of interreligious dialogue also appears to be directly linked to spiritual dimensions of adult development, as described recently in the literature. Because this is a relatively new focus for adult development research that is being actively

explored currently in the field, we see this link as important. It is a connection

that suggests to us that there is a need for further research that can shed light on

how interreligious dialogue can enrich or enhance an already existing spiritual

development path of the religiously committed adult. English (2000) identifies

dialogue as one of three possible strategies that foster spiritual development.

Referring to dialogue as "the interpersonal connections and interchanges among

people that encourage and promote their spiritual development" (p.34), she

suggests, "the use of dialogue is key to the dissolution of barriers, and promoting

collaboration and partnership" (p.34). Tisdell (1999), referencing the work of

Dirkx, suggests that:

> Adult educators who encourage adult learners to work with image and
> symbol and to critically reflect on the meanings and power such images
> hold . . . may be encouraging and facilitating spiritual development as
> adult learners continue to negotiate new knowledge and new meaning in
> the world (p.94).

Both English and Tisdell point to key ideas that were very prominent in the

description of experiences reported by participants. As we have shown in

chapter 7, the sharing of religious symbols and deeply held beliefs about these

symbols is the very essence of the interreligious dialogue process. Further, as

Tisdell suggests, it is in the sharing of these symbols and meanings that

participants come to understand, critically reflect on, and subsequently re-

interpret the symbols they hold dear. It is also in the sharing of those images and

symbols that barriers were dissolved as participants came to better understand

the very beliefs that inspired, generated, and perpetuated those images and

symbols for both 'self' and 'other.' As a result of this study, we believe that the

process of interreligious dialogue fosters spiritual development through transformative learning as participants come to better understand both 'self' and 'other.' As Boys and Lee (1996) so eloquently put it, "The journey takes unexpected twists and turns because it is one of both self-discovery and discovery of the other" (p.440).

In sum, our first answer to the question "what is the nature of the learning in the context of interreligious dialogue" is that the nature of the learning is transformative learning. More specifically, the nature of the learning is incremental transformative learning that is preceded and accompanied by a series of events and triggers, often accumulated over a lifetime, that lead to engagement in the interreligious dialogue process in the first place. Being a dialogue partner in interreligious dialogue is then the context for transformation of one's understanding of self and other, as religiously committed adults. This incremental transformation takes place within the dialogue about religious beliefs, traditions and symbols, as the learners engage cognitive, affective and imaginal modes of the heart, mind and spirit, learning from one another about one another. The transformative learning that takes place through this interaction of the cognitive, affective, and symbolic is far richer than and qualitatively different from the critical reflection of assumptions through participation in rational discourse described by Mezirow (1991). Learning in the interreligious dialogue process is certainly tranformative, but it is not only that. There is an important interpersonal dimension involved that is not easily captured within the idea of

rational discourse, a dimension that leads us to understand it as collaborative.

The next section explores interreligious dialogue as collaborative learning.

Interreligious Dialogue as Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning is dynamic (Lee, 1998). It is a social act in which

learning occurs through talking (Gerlach, 1994). It is an experience in which

"individuals bring their knowledge and their actions to the table, and as members

of a group, individuals contribute their collective knowledge and actions to the

experience" (Peters & Armstrong, 1998, p.76). Collaborative learning involves

critical exploration through dialogue (Lee, 1998). It is whole-person learning

(Kasl & Yorks, 2000).

Lee (1998) provides a definition of collaborative learning that explains it as

an approach that:

> Mobilizes the social synergy that resides within a group of co-learners
> engaged in a dynamic process of shared inquiry. Through dialogue,
> learning evolves by critically exploring the perspectives of others. New
> dimensions of interpretation are fueled, issues clarified and
> interdependence valued. (p.17)

This description of collaborative learning places emphasis on

interdependence, shared inquiry, and synergy. The presence of these three

elements in collaborative learning - combined with the suggestion that it is

through dialogue that there is a critical exploration of ideas which leads to "new

dimensions of interpretation" and clarification of issues - underscores the very

reasons why we believe that the nature of the learning in interreligious dialogue

is collaborative learning. What participants shared with us about the nature of

the learning for them as they engaged in interreligious dialogue echoes these core ideas.

As we have shown in chapter 7, the process of sharing ideas, symbols, and meanings in interreligious dialogue involved participant interaction at both the cognitive and the affective level. Participants came to know 'self' and 'other' as they shared information, feelings, ideas, thoughts, and experiences. However, this process is more than simply a social act, it is an act of full engagement as people. It is what Kasl & Yorks (2000) describe as "an act of full personhood" (p.177). This process of coming to know 'self' and 'other' through the dialogue process is contingent upon participants being able to listen. It is a process through which ego, in its most negative sense, is left at the door, and openness to the ideas, thoughts, feelings, and beliefs of the other is evident. It is not about coming to agreement or even moving to a state of tolerance of the 'other'. As Eck (1993) has suggested, "We do not enter dialogue to produce an agreement, but to produce real relationship, even friendship, which is premised upon mutual understanding, ... a clear understanding of differences is as precious as the affirmation of similarities" (p.197).

Finally, the learning that occurs in the interreligious dialogue process is not simply the result of communicative learning in which 'we assess the meanings behind the words; the coherence, the truth, and appropriateness of what is being communicated" (Mezirow, 2000, p.9) as suggested in Mezirow's description of transformative learning. In fact, we agree with Kasl & Yorks (2000) when they suggest, "Mezirow's conceptualization of discourse describes a social

act, not an act of full personhood" (p.177). It is for this very reason that we are not content with describing the learning in the interreligious dialogue process as simply transformative. Rather, what participants in the study described was a transformative learning experience that was rooted in a collaborative learning experience in which "learners engage[d] . . . as whole persons" (Kasl & Yorks, 2000, p.177). This collaborative process is what Kasl and Yorks (2000) have called "*learning-in-relationship*" (p.177). The related ideas of "learning - in - relationship" and "whole person knowing", foreground the collaborative learning nature of interreligious dialogue. In interreligious dialogue, that means that at least two of the people in the dialogue process together are bringing themselves fully into the conversation, as whole persons, engaging all four modes of the psyche as they talk about their religious self understandings and the experiences they have had, with one another.

Kasl and Yorks (2000) base their ideas of learning -in - relationship and whole person knowing on the extended epistemology described by John Heron (1992, 1996) as a form of co-operative inquiry. According to Heron, the psyche functions in four primary modes: (a) the affective mode with a focus on feeling and emotion, (b) the imaginal mode with a focus on intuition and imagery, (c) the conceptual mode with a focus on reflection and discrimination and (d) the practical mode with a focus on intention and action. From these modes of psychic functioning, emerges an extended epistemology in the form of four ways of knowing: (a) experiential, (b) presentational, (c) propositional, and (d) practical.

Heron writes that experiential knowing is evident when we meet and feel the presence of some energy, entity, person, place, process, or thing. Presentational knowing is evident in our intuitive grasp of the significance of imaginal patterns as expressed in graphic, plastic, moving, musical, and verbal art forms. Propositional knowing is expressed in intellectual statements, both verbal and numeric, organized in ways that do not infringe the rules of logic and evidence. Practical knowing is evident in knowing how to exercise a skill." (Kasl and Yorks, p. 175)

In interreligious dialogue, at least two of the people in the dialogue process are bringing themselves fully into the conversation, as whole persons, engaging all four modes of the psyche as they talk about their religious self-understandings. This learning in relationship is at the heart of the idea that one aspect of the nature of the learning in the interreligious dialogue process is that it is collaborative learning that has the potential to engage the whole person.

Interreligious Dialogue as a Pool of Water

Not only did we use metaphors to help us to learn about the nature of the learning through CIMCAM, in the final stages of the data analysis process we created a researcher metaphor that helped us to put the pieces of our understanding about interreligious dialogue and adult learning into one conceptual frame. We call the metaphor "interreligious dialogue as a pool of water." The ways in which participants enter and exit the pool reflects the transformative nature of the experience, beginning with the catalysts for that transformation and ending with the "forms" that are transformed. Some of what happens in the pool itself relates to the collaborative dimension. We explain the metaphor and provide a graphic diagram below.

Interreligious dialogue is a pool of water into which participants enter from one of three possible entryways, and from which participants emerge in one of three possible ways. The journey one takes through this pool can be a one-shot deal in which participants walk away either minimally or not changed. It can also be a series of dips taken in the pool that may progress from initial ventures that result in little or no transformation to deeper and deeper impact being felt on self in many ways. Finally, it can, but does not always, lead to transformation that leads to action. The extent to which one is impacted by having been in the pool is influenced both by the number of dips taken as well as the duration of time in the pool.

Interreligious Dialogue as a Pool of Water

Figure 9-a

This interreligious dialogue pool (figure 9-a) is maintained either by participants themselves or by a separate entity such as an organizing institution. This maintenance role is very important in that it enables participants to experience a safe and relatively untroubled journey through the pool.

By providing occasional buoys and safety devices, these maintenance people help keep the participants afloat in the dialogue process. These are also the people who provide swimming lessons, beginning with basic floating techniques. Their help, support, and guidance enable participants to safely and comfortably find their way around the pool. Their role, however important, is secondary. It is the journey of the participants through the pool that is most important

Entering the Pool

There are three possible initial entryways into the pool of interreligious dialogue: (a) getting pushed in, (b) testing the waters, and (c) diving in. Those who are "pushed in" are those who encounter disorienting dilemmas, such as Reshma and other participants in the Shalom/Salaam group whose dialogue emerged in response to a community crisis in which both Jews and Muslims were confronted with feelings of fear, ignorance, and even hatred. It is important to remember that even those who are "pushed in" still make the choice to enter the pool and stay there for a while; they are not literally pushed in nor are they pulled out.

Their reaction to the disorienting dilemma pushes them toward dialogue rather than running away from it. We shared Reshma's story of having been confronted by an older Jewish women who did not "want [her] making bombs in her backyard" in chapter 6. This disorienting dilemma inspired Reshma, and other Muslims and Jews, to participate in getting the Shalom/Salaam dialogue

group up and running. After 6 years of meeting approximately six times per year, they are still regular attendees. The particular Jewish woman from the story shared in chapter six, unfortunately, does not participate. She remains on the lawn, in the shade, under a tree, and well outside of the pool.

Those who "dive in" are participants such as Diane, Hillary, and Bill, who have been preparing for the encounter all their lives and took the opportunity to engage in interreligious dialogue as an integrating circumstance to lead them forward. The women in the Living Room dialogue group are also examples of this type of entry into the pool, as are we. In all these cases, participants encountered an integrating circumstance – the invitation or opportunity to enter interreligious dialogue – that drew them in "to greater depths of understanding and personal growth" (Clark, 1993, p.83).

Bill, for example, remembered being taunted and physically attacked because he was a Jew, as a child growing up in an American east coast city, in the middle years of the 20th century. All of his life he wondered about this, not really understanding how a person who purports to be a Christian could do such a thing to a Jew, since Jesus himself was a Jew. Having the opportunity to engage in Christian and Jewish dialogue, years later as an adult, gave him the context in which he could work out the answer to this old and very personal question, in a more public way, with the Christians present to talk about it. He dove into the pool when the opportunity presented itself, and in the process, he was able to transform his understanding of the experiences of his childhood in a new adult learning context. Pool divers actively seek out the experience in a

variety of ways, as they find the integrating circumstance a form of opportunity to learn and move on in their lives, seeing things in new ways, making meaning from old experiences and new, in the context of the dialogue.

Those who enter to "test the waters" are not confronted with a dilemma, nor does the invitation present itself as "an opportunity for exploration and development" (Clark, 1993, p.82) as is the case with an integrating circumstance. Rather, they are intrigued, interested, or simply curious about the possibilities. Early stage dialogue projects that provide a way for participants to test the water include public lectures on interreligious topics, panel discussions in the context of a congregational or community setting, and dialogue sessions of three, four or six facilitated discussions about a group of parallel texts, that are tightly structured and led by facilitators who have been prepared in advance are opportunities for people to test the waters.

Participants in the Origins project such as Larry, Alice, and Jack, who got involved in interreligious dialogue at the invitation of their pastor or rabbi, represent this type of entry. Entering the pool in this way is no less beneficial than diving in or being pushed in as the result of a disorienting dilemma, in fact even those who enter just to test the waters can find themselves being transformed. While Jack, Lou, and Alice all started out by entering the pool in this way, they are now fully engaged and participating in the cycles of emerging and re-immersion that leads to transformation. These participants are representative of those whom Dirkx (2000) suggests, "are caught up with the images and symbols which swirl around the learning environment" (p. 247).

<u>Immersion in the Pool</u>

The experience of being in the pool is varied and depends on many factors, including the length of time in the pool, the depth to which one goes in the pool, and the kind of interreligious activities in which one engages. It is in the pool that participants gain knowledge and begin the meaning-making process, which can eventually lead them to changes in worldview, behavior, and/or visions of a better society. The learning that takes place in the interreligious dialogue pool varies from being collaboratively constructed dialogue through varieties of facilitated or directed discussions to incidents of self-directed learning that are sparked by encounters with others in the pool.

The times in the pool that are characterized by being part of a directed or facilitated discussion are the times when one stands in the shallows of the pool, as are the times when one engages in self-directed learning as a result of something that has happened in the deeper elements of the pool. These times of reading a book, watching a video, or enrolling in a formal class or seminar are in the shallow end of the pool, because while they are times of learning, they lack the depth that learning- in - relationship offers when learning from and with the other.

In fact, it is in those times in the pool that are characterized by the collaborative exploration of 'self' and 'other' that are the times when one is standing in the deepest part of the pool. This is the process of *"learning-in-relationship"* (Kasl & Yorks, 2000, p.177). Standing together, in a metaphorical

circle, participants hold up their dialogue partners and, in the depths, they float together, and are, at the same time, being held up by one another, in the depths. The interaction of the cognitive and affective, through the exploration of symbol and image and what these represent, mean participants are fully immersed in collaborative inquiry that potentially leads to transformation. It is from these depths that participants emerge transformed. They become human beings whose very understandings of self and other, and whose action for the future, are changed. It is only when one has stood in the depths that transformation is possible. It is when participants have entered these depths, and spent some time there, that the cycles of emerging and re-immersion are most likely to occur.

Regardless of the point of entry that one has taken to get in the pool, it is possible to stay in the shallows, go immediately into the deep, make one's way slowly from the shallows into the deep, or find oneself moving between depths and shallows. For all of the participants in our study, the time spent in the pool has held moments of both shallow wading as well as treading water out in the depths of the pool. These participants are strong and able swimmers who are not interested in leaving the pool completely, for any extended time. Inner strength and endurance help them to negotiate the deeper waters, reinforced by their commitment to their own religious traditions as well as their openness to the beliefs and truths as understood by the 'other.' For the participants in our study, the encounter in the pool, while sometimes draining and exhausting, did not prove threatening to their sense of self.

Participants in our study appear to have engaged in repeated cycles of emerging from the pool and re-immersing, at a later time, in a new context, with new partners, or with the old partners who have reconvened for another round of engaging with one another for another calendar year. Consequently, not only were the ways in which they saw themselves and the "other" different as a result of being in the pool together, they sought to extend that experience by continuing to engage. For many, such as Diane, Bill, and Harriet, being in the pool is a way of life. For others, such as Jack, it is a personal time dedicated for oneself, distant from the demands of everyday life. For the women in the Living Room group, it is a weekly journey, not to be missed. For participants in the Shalom/Salaam group, it is a periodic meeting of minds, hearts, ideas, and beliefs in the comfort of a pool that is found in the intimate environment of someone's home. For us, it is the beginning of a lifelong journey that will be brimming with many trips to the pool, both together and separately.

As is the case in collaborative learning, any movement by any one of the dialogue participants in the depths of the pool sends forth ever widening circular ripples. The ripples going outward from each person represent the verbal exchange in the form of the teaching and sharing that come from the person towards the others who are also standing in the pool, engaging in the dialogue. When one sends ripples forth, one is at once both teacher and learner. Dialogue partners ask questions and share answers and ideas. Overlapping ripples from the other participants, over time, affect the ripples each teacher/learner sends forth.

Sometimes there is a brisk exchange, which produces a churning among the ripples. Sometimes there is silence. Silence does not mean that one is not engaged in the dialogue. That person is still standing in the pool, feeling and thinking. Sometimes the pool is hot. Sometimes the pool is cold. Sometimes the pool is a private pool filled with friends and invited guests. Sometimes it is a public pool where strangers meet for varying times to exchange ideas. Many of the participants in our study stand in more than one pool, simultaneously. While there is generally one first experience that gets things started, the nature of the learning is complex and ongoing, over time, and space. From meeting these inspiring people who were the participants in our study, we have learned that one's very "frame of reference" or meaning perspective (Mezirow, 1991) has the potential to change as a result of the learning that takes place in the interreligious dialogue pool.

We believe that what is found in the depths of the pool, and what enables transformation to begin, are three of the conditions of transformation suggested by Daloz (2000): (a) the presence of the other, (b) reflective discourse, and (c) a mentoring community. In discussing the importance of the presence of the other, Daloz suggests that the encounter with the other enables one "to [cross] some earlier boundary between 'us' and 'them' and [makes] available an alternative way of being, a different voice that [challenges] the earlier assumptions about how life is and [makes] possible the construction of a new 'we'" (p.113). Reflective discourse is important in that "the purpose is less to identify objective truth on which the parties may agree than to establish what Rothman (1996) calls

an 'introspective resonance' within which each can come to a shared understanding of 'core narratives, meaning, and motives'" (p.115). The presence of a mentoring community, something we identified in chapter 6 as important to motivation to engage in dialogue, is also important within the context of the dialogue itself. The relationships that are established and maintained with one's dialogue partners are an essential aspect of the extent to which participants are moved. These three ingredients, which we believe are also crucial elements of collaborative learning, are what enable swimmers in the depths to learn, grow, change, and emerge.

The knowledge that is constructed in the midst of this deepest part of the pool for participants in our study, is primarily the personal, first hand account of what it is like to live, today, as a Jew, a Muslim, or a Christian. It is primary source knowledge delivered directly and interactively, in a relational and interpersonal learning context. It is knowledge, first and foremost, of how one's dialogue partner makes meaning in his or her life as a Christian, Jew, or a Muslim. It is knowledge about how that person understands him or her self to be a member of a particular religious community within the context of the social and cultural milieu as he or she defines it. It is knowledge about how, and in what way, that person understands and experiences God. We refer to this as the sharing and learning of "tacit knowledge" of one's own religious tradition. For the purposes of this study, we define tacit knowledge as the knowledge an individual carries with him or her self, at all times, of the religious texts, symbols, ideas, ideals, values, customs and traditions, as learned and experienced over the

course of his or her life, as a religiously committed member of a particular religious community.

It is this tacit knowledge that enhances and enriches the knowledge one already has acquired, or continues to acquire, from academic settings and coursework, from independently reading books and watching videos, or doing research from secondary sources. In fact, many of the participants of our study are simultaneously standing in the pool and participating in learning about religion through other avenues, as well. Participants in our study affirmed the idea that participation in interreligious dialogue encourages one to learn more about one's own religious tradition. It helps to bring new depth to one's own commitment and religious self-understanding. This understanding of self is as important as the understanding of the other in the transformational learning process, in this context.

Another outcome of the dialogue is learning about how others understand ways that God's presence reveals itself to us, in the world. One aspect of this dimension of the learning was a complete surprise for us. In our own process of interreligious dialogue, there were moments of seeming transcendence, for one or the other of us, as one of our many conversations proceeded. Whether the experience manifested itself through Jane's acknowledgement that there are times when Nadira speaks and it seems like God's voice reaching out through the words and the phrases, or Nadira's spontaneous tears, flowing down her cheeks, as she listened to Jane talk, this sense of feeling the presence of God made manifest through the words and thoughts of the other, was a powerful

aspect of our own dialogue. This aspect is easily described, yet does not do justice to the feelings it engenders within, when it happens. It does not feel like an academic idea, yet we cannot ignore that this sense of God's presence among us when we work and talk together, has happened, over and over again, throughout our study. It tells us that the nature of the learning in the context of interreligious dialogue can be learning about how God's presence is with us in the world, unseen yet present. It tells us that in the midst of our research, we may have stumbled upon an epistemology of the numinous we refer to as "noumenology", a way of knowing and feeling the immanent presence of God, in our midst. Certainly, this area of our research cries out for more work and refinement, by ourselves and interested others.

Pluralism, truth, and multiple truths. What we have described here should not be interpreted as simple acceptance of the 'other's' truth. It is not a simple relativism that is built on the idea that all truths are the same or that the goal of dialogue is agreement. Its goal is not "to find the lowest common denominator or the most neutral religious language" (Eck, 1993, p.189). Rather, it is an attempt to find, and the subsequent discovery of, those spaces that enable us to live together as religiously committed individuals within the context of a diverse world. It is not simple tolerance, for to tolerate someone I do not have to do anything with, or for, him or her. It is a commitment to *actively* engage in learning about the other and in so doing, learn more about oneself.

As we have written in chapter 7, this learning is neither simply relational nor is it limited to information. Rather, it is learning that is characterized by both

the cognitive and affective domains. It is in the melding of the relationships that are built, the emotions that are touched, the connections to previous knowledge that are made, and the insights that participants begin to not only understand the other's beliefs but also to understand the meanings behind symbols and images that are important to the 'other'.

This learning is not always pleasant or smooth. It involves moments of tension, disagreement, criticism, and even conflicts of interest. However, it is always respectful and committed to the acceptance that "To live together we need to know these things about one another and to risk the changes of heart and mind that may well come when we do" (Eck, 1993, p.199). It is in the midst of the deepest parts of the pool, where we are most likely to struggle for air and buoyancy, that transformative learning takes place. It is also there that we find the most care and support from those with whom we take this journey.

Emerging from the Pool

Just as there are three entryways into the pool, so are there three exit points: emerging without having really been impacted, emerging with informational learning, and emerging transformed. While it is possible to leave the pool by way of the first two exits, and still re-enter, there is also the potential that one will choose to stay out of the pool. Once one has emerged from the pool with a change in attitude, behavior, or a new vision that is the result of a changed perspective, future dips in the pool are both more likely and more enriched such that even the times spent in the shallows are more meaningful.

Those who leave the pool unchanged are those who participants have suggested are "not ready for dialogue." They enter the pool wearing wet suits or other barriers that result in their leaving the pool as dry as when they entered. They have not let the water envelope and enrich them in any way. They are those that walk away from the experience neither recognizing informational learning that was potentially there, nor being transformed personally or touched affectively, or relationally, through the encounter.

One example of this type of exit comes out of our data collection process. As part of our plan for learning about interreligious dialogue programs and how some of them are organized, we observed a nascent Christian and Jewish community sponsored dialogue program that included white and African American members of local churches and synagogues. It was the second of a four evening series, of which we observed sessions two and three. Groups of approximately ten dialogue partners sat in a circle around tables, with a volunteer facilitator leading a discussion using a prepared discussion guide and the biblical text to be studied that evening. One session we observed was a facilitated discussion about the book of Jonah. Tom, a middle-aged African-American Baptist male, came and left that evening, determined to preach about his particular perspective on Jonah. He even pulled a card of notes out of his pocket at one point, as he stood to address the larger group in the closing portion of the evening.

While he came and engaged in discussion with others, he left still very much focused on his own ideas. He appeared to us to have been completely

unaffected by the process of talking to others, and very settled in his purpose of preaching to others about his own religious worldview. While we can never be sure from just two observations, we both agreed on the impression that this person was not yet fully open to hearing more about the worldview of others. He had exited the pool as dry as when he entered. We do not really know whether participants in our study were ever at this stage. We did not ask.

Leaving the pool with informational learning is not unlike Kegan's (2000) example of the 10-year old boy who set out one summer to read the entire encyclopedia. His task "dramatically increased his fund of content familiarities" (p.50), but this learning did not change him. This form of exit, a way to learn facts and ideas, is beneficial, but the way one sees oneself or acts in the world is no different than when one entered the pool. One has not been transformed. Other participants in Tom's group on the night we observed it, emerged from the shallows of that pool, which was characterized by a guided discussion, with informational learning.

Participants in our study demonstrated emerging from the pool transformed in one of three possible ways: emerging with transformed worldviews, emerging with new behaviors, and/or emerging with a fresh vision of how interreligious dialogue can change society. For many participants, including ourselves, the continued cycles of emerging and re-immersion is itself an aspect of the transformation that occurs.   These cycles are indicative of transformation in that they represent recognition by participants that one has "to *participate* in pluralism. {We} can't just stand by and watch" (Eck, 1993, p.191).

As we shared in chapter 8, there were some participants who reported having changed their attitudes about and outlook toward both self and other. This sense of having been transformed is captured in the recognition - suggested by Jean Halperin, a Jewish scholar - that "We not only need to understand one another, we need one another to understand ourselves" (cited in Eck, 1993, p.189). It is a recognition that how one views one's own religious tradition and the symbols within it has a profound impact on one's stance toward the other. This change in worldview was especially important in the case of those participants who hold educational roles within their own religious communities because it translated into recognition that the task of religious education within one's own religious community was a challenge of being able to educate for the particular without negating the plural.

For Reshma, the two rabbis, the imam, and us, we know now that we could not teach anything to the children and families at the congregations in which we work, at the expense of 'other,' without stopping to reflect and change course in the midst. We were already engaged in teaching moral values and traditions guided by our religious practices in our communities. However, the learning in dialogue moved us to deep empathy for difference and the manifestations of ideas radically unlike our own that difference holds forth as a challenge.

A second impact of transformation reported by participants in our study were actual behaviors that they had taken as a result of this new understanding of self and other. These reported behaviors appear to have been taken largely

when participants were presented with the fourth of Daloz's (2000) four conditions of transformation: opportunity for committed action. Thus, it is not that participants went out of their way to 'change the world' but when the opportunity presented itself, participants did not run away and instead eagerly moved forward. These changes in behavior were sometimes subtle and other times more overt, but they were all the result of the changed understandings and attitudes experienced as a result of the encounter with the 'other' in the context of interreligious dialogue.

The third way in which this transformed understanding manifested itself was in the visions participants articulated for the potential of interreligious dialogue. Having experienced the power of the dialogue process - the impact of swimming in the very depths of the pool - participants envisioned the potential impact on society if more individuals waded out to the deeper waters to engage in interreligious dialogue. Their revised understanding of self and other acquired through the interreligious dialogue process led them to believe that the act of interreligious dialogue was a powerful tool for social action, and their visions for the future were based on this very belief.

Finally, for many of the participants in our study, including ourselves, the very act of engaging in interreligious dialogue, of wading out to the deep end and collaboratively constructing knowledge so that self and other are both enriched, is a form of social action. Eck suggests, "People of every religious tradition depend upon one another to interpret one another fairly and accurately. We are the keepers of one another's image" (p.219). For those participants for whom

interreligious dialogue is itself social action, the task is to learn about and understand the other <u>on the other's terms</u> so that we are better able to keep this "sacred trust" (Eck, 1993, p.219). It is recognition that "No religion is an island" and that "We are all involved with one another" (Heschel, 1991, p.6).

Implications for Further Research

As we come to the end of this first project in our efforts at understanding the nature of the learning in the interreligious dialogue process, we realize that there is much yet to learn about the way that symbols function as epistemological tools. We have tried to explain the way that the learning happens; yet, we are convinced that there is more to say about the experience. Further research could investigate such questions as those that follow: In what ways does the learning in the symbolic realm that takes place in the interreligious dialogue process contribute to the ongoing process of worldview construction? Is the incremental transformation process we uncovered simply one aspect of an evolving worldview construction process that involves changes in attitude about other areas of life and relationships, as well? From the perspective of adult development, what more can we learn about relationship of the age of the participants to potentially positive outcomes for learning that takes place in the context of interreligious dialogue? By contrast, when teens engage in interreligious dialogue, in what ways is the learning process different from the way that adults learn? Can one expect similar or different outcomes? What can we share from this research that can help new parents, young children, older

adults, and couples to live in a way that promotes dialogue and pluralism in our society?

Adult educators could learn more about how individuals and institutions can coordinate existing resources and support into networks that can foster more interreligious dialogue in the years to come. We wonder how what we have learned about interreligious dialogue could be helpful in efforts to ease intra-religious tensions that exist around the world today. How can we engage our colleagues in the field of adult education to help us in thinking about these important, and very adult, questions? What role can this research have in helping to encourage more interreligious dialogue to take place in the common places of our American lives, in a true spirit of pluralism? We hope that this research inspires others to ask, and take steps to find answers to, these and other related questions.

Implications for Practice: Building New Pools for the Future

In addition to generating new questions for further research, we also recognize the insights that we have gained have had a tremendous impact on us both a s adult educators and as religious educators.

One important implication of this for the field is our realization that while there is extensive discourse about how we understand ourselves as practitioners through the lenses of race, class, gender and culture, the lens of "religion" is decidedly undiscussed. The emerging power of spirituality as an acknowledged dimension of the study of adult development seems to encompass a synthesis of

the idea of religious identity and religion as a dimension of culture. We think that these are emerging as important nuances for the practitioner in a variety of adult educational contexts, worldwide. Our study and our experiences as practitioners points to a need for further clarification of what these particular ideas mean for practitioners in the field. We would advocate for adult educators having opportunities at conferences and in collaborative learning contexts that they can create for themselves, for reflective discourse about their own spiritual or religious development, and the intersection of those self understandings for their work and those they teach. One starting question for such reflection might be: What is the role of religious or spiritual development in the daily practice of the adult educator?

One other important implication for practice that emerges from this research study is the acknowledgement that the hundreds of interreligious dialogue projects now going on both nationally and internationally, are to be taken seriously as a part of the discourse of the field. While religious education is not a new area for our practitioners' concerns, interreligious education appears to be very new. As the current new millennium unfolds, we predict that this will be a growing area of interest by adult educators who are concerned with democratic social change and the role of spiritual and religious development in that process.

In addition to generating new questions, we also recognize the insights that we have gained have had a tremendous impact on us both as adult educators and as religious educators. Who are we becoming? In chapter 2, we

talked about who we are and how our religious ideas ground us and inspire us to serve our own religious communities as leaders and educators. These ideas have served as our roots and the foundation of who we are and why we do what we do. Yet, to our delight, as a result of the NLU doctoral program, we are now a research team, a new commitment that we could not have anticipated when this project began. Collaboration has not only yielded great rewards in our professional lives, having had our presentations welcomed at conferences this past year, but also in our personal lives, as friends and colleagues who care about one another a great deal. We started this research with an idea for doing an action research project with colleagues from our respective communities. While impractical then, it seems more do-able now. Can we get funding? Will we be able to work and yet still have time to work together, keeping our collaborative learning and research partnership alive in the coming years? Questions now, yet a vision for the future, as well.

As we emerge from the program as collaborative research scholars, we have many to thank for our having made it this far in our research. We stand on the shoulders of many that have come before us. It is in honor of each of these people, listed by name in the acknowledgements, that we dedicate our efforts to transform the world, one interreligious dialogue at a time.

Following are the four general questions that participants were asked to reflect upon in preparation for participation in an individual interview, a focus group interview, or both.

1. What motivated you to participate in interreligious dialogue?

2. Can you describe your involvement and the nature of your experiences participating in interreligious dialogue?

3. In what ways has your participation in interreligious dialogue had an impact upon how you think about and understand individuals who are members of the religious group you are in dialogue with and their associated religious community? Please describe processes of change in your thinking that you think may have taken place over time.

4. Describe the impact that participation in the dialogue had on your own religious understandings and commitments.

Our Own Muslim - Jewish Interreligious Dialogue Project

Nadira is an East Indian, Muslim female in her mid-30s. She is a religious educator within the Ismaili Muslim community and an adult educator by profession

Jane is a Jewish, white female in her mid- life years. She is a religious and adult educator involved broadly with Jewish educational and environmental projects.

Participants in the Origins Christian - Jewish Dialogue Project

Alice is a Jewish, white, female in mid-life who is a member of a Conservative synagogue.

Bill is a Jewish, white male, who is an active member of a Conservative congregation. He is now a retired medical professional.

Diane is a Christian, white female in mid-life who is a life long member of the church in the community where she was raised.

Jack is a Christian, African- American male of color in early mid -life. He is a professional in a scientific field and serves as a Deacon in his inner city Baptist church

Larry is a Jewish, white male in mid-life, who runs his own professional service business. He is an active former president of his Conservative congregation.

Participants in the Living Room Christian - Jewish Dialogue Group

Beth is a Jewish, white female in her senior years. She is an active community leader and a member of a Reform congregation.

Deb is a Christian, white female in her mid - life years. She is a Christian educator in a local church.

Hannah is a Jewish, white female in later mid-life who returned to school for a professional degree after raising her children.

Linda is a Jewish, white female in her later mid-life years.

Patty is a Christian, white female in her later mid-life years. The group depends on her skills as an organizing guide. She is a leader in her city and works on the staff of a national museum.

Participants in the Shalom/Salaam Muslim - Jewish Dialogue Group

Alim is a Muslim, white male, in his mid-life years. He is an Imam currently serving as a communal and religious leader in a mosque and Islamic education center located in a suburban area, of a large city.

Hillary is a Jewish, white female in her mid-life years. She is active in her Orthodox congregation and is a senior administrator for a chaplaincy program.

Rachel is a Jewish, white female who has served the Jewish community actively for many years as a communal leader and synagogue member.

Ray is a Jewish, white male in his mid-life years. He is a Conservative rabbi currently serving a congregation located in the suburbs of a large city

Reshma is a Muslim female of color, now in her mid-life years. Born and raised in Pakistan, she immigrated to the United States 20 years ago as a young female. She is a medical professional.

Ross is a Jewish, white male in his mid-life years. He is a Conservative rabbi currently serving a congregation located in the suburbs of a large city.

Sadru is a Muslim, male of color, born in Egypt, in his mid-life years. He is a college professor.

Sara is a Caucasian Muslim female, now in her senior years. She is a lay leader in her community serving at this time as president of her mosque.

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