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## **Tripping With Stephen Gaskin: An Exploration of a Hippy Adult Educator**

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The University of Southern Mississippi

TRIPPING WITH STEPHEN GASKIN:  
AN EXPLORATION OF A HIPPIE ADULT EDUCATOR

by

Gabriel Patrick Morley

Abstract of a Dissertation  
Submitted to the Graduate School  
of The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

May 2012

## ABSTRACT

### TRIPPING WITH STEPHEN GASKIN:

### AN EXPLORATION OF A HIPPY ADULT EDUCATOR

by Gabriel Patrick Morley

May 2012

For the last 40 years, Stephen Gaskin has been an adult educator on the fringe, working with tens of thousands of adults in the counterculture movement in pursuit of social change regarding marijuana legalization, women's rights, environmental justice issues and beyond. Gaskin has written 11 books about his experiences teaching and learning with adults outside the mainstream, yet, he is virtually unknown in the field of adult education. He lists his religion as hippy; he is a member of the Counterculture Hall of Fame (inducted 2004), a convicted felon, a United States Marine, a Korean War combat veteran, and a convenor. From 1967 to 1970, Gaskin led weekly rap sessions in which thousands of hippys, up to 3,000 by some accounts, would talk openly about sex, love, drugs, religion, and politics, all with a goal of emancipatory learning for social justice. These informal adult education classes signified the beginning of Gaskin's four decade-long struggle against social injustice and *The Man*. The primary focus of this dissertation is to examine Gaskin's life and mission by analyzing his theories and methodologies in relation to adult education and adult learning in order to show that he is an unrecognized adult educator who has contributed demonstrably, and uniquely, to the field of adult education. Gaskin's writing is situated in a contextual paradigm framed by several existing areas of adult education, including spirituality, ecological consciousness, praxis, and emancipatory learning.

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A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Graduate School  
of The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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May 2012

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Finally, I would like to thank my wife for indulging me through the years, and my parents – what a long, strange trip it’s been. Peace.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	iii
PROLOGUE .....	vi
CHAPTER	
I.    HIPPIES ARE A CULTURAL VITAMIN .....	1
Statement of the Problem	
Methodology	
Plan of Work	
Situated in Adult Education	
Emancipatory Learning Framework	
Definition of Terms	
II.   LITERATURE REVIEW .....	25
Humanism	
Transformational Learning	
Experiential Learning	
Self-Directed Learning	
Critical Theory	
Social Learning	
Spiritual Learning	
Ecological Consciousness (non-Western Learning)	
Linking Gaskin with Learning Theory	
Linking Gaskin with Adult Educators	
III.  PRAXIS .....	57
Gaskin as an Adult Educator	
Moses in Blue Jeans	
Teaching Style	
Farm Living	
Marijuana Praxis	
A Hippy President	
Emancipatory Learning	
Social Justice Mission	
Conclusion	



IV.	SPIRITUAL LEARNING .....	108
	Spiritual Teacher	
	Astral Plane	
	Om - Cleansing the Palette	
	Psychedelic Testimony of the Saints	
	Life Force	
	Miles and Miles of Hippys	
	Spiritual Academy	
	Marijuana	
	Encounters with The Man	
	Social Justice Mission	
	Spiritual Unrest	
	Conclusion	
V.	ECOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS.....	134
	Basis for Ecological Consciousness	
	The Link Between Spirituality and Ecological Consciousness	
	Psychedelics	
	The Farm	
	Social Justice Mission	
	Challenging the Status Quo	
	Conclusion	
VI.	CONCLUSION.....	150
	POSTSCRIPT .....	156
	APPENDIXES .....	163
	REFERENCES .....	174

## PROLOGUE

*Being born into this world gives you the right to attempt to change it.*

(Stephen Gaskin, 1978)

## ENERGY AMPHIBIANS

Stephen Gaskin will love this story. It is about gestalt and the interconnectedness of the universe. Gaskin believes all living things share energy. Through this shared energy he believes we can communicate telepathically with each other, and surely such a magnanimous force could lead to positive improvement for all living things. “We are the energy amphibians,” he said of the hippys and the blossoming counterculture movement of the late 1960s. “We live in the physical world and we live in the energy world” (Gaskin, 1977, p. 25).

I first met Stephen Gaskin by accident in the spring of 1997. I had just finished hiking part of the Appalachian Trail and was living in a hotel in Athens, Georgia, across the street from the University of Georgia. The annual Human Rights Festival was being held downtown, and I had heard Ina May Gaskin (Stephen’s wife) was going to be there. Ina May was perhaps the best known midwife in the country and had attended more than 1,000 births since she began delivering babies on a school bus during a cross-country speaking tour with her husband and hundreds of other hippys in 1971. I wanted to meet Ina May and get a copy of her book, *Spiritual Midwifery* (1990).

I grew up hippy. We were an anti-establishment family. Radical ideas were welcome in our house. We all had long hair, listened to rock-and-roll records, and my mother gave birth at home with my father acting as midwife. We were taught to always

be on the lookout for *The Man*, and to question authority. Ina May and Stephen were my people.

College Square, an area in downtown Athens, had been blocked off for the festival. Ina May and Stephen had a booth in the middle of the street. When I first saw Stephen he was standing behind a table that was covered with a bunch of books I had never heard of. He had a gray beard and long hair and some kind of homemade-looking hat only a hippy would make and only a hippy would wear. Ina May was nowhere around. I had no idea who Stephen was, but his books looked interesting, especially *Cannabis Spirituality* (1996). We spoke briefly, and I bought a copy of the book, which he signed. I also bought a copy of Ina May's book, and that was it. I never got to meet Ina May, but Stephen and I had made a connection. We shared the same energy.

It turns out the Gaskins were the featured speakers of the festival, along with Dave Dellinger of the Chicago 7. I missed all of their presentations. Over the years, I learned more about the Gaskins, read some of their books, and followed their work as social activists. They still live at the intentional community they founded in Tennessee in the early 1970s, which has become a learning center for individuals interested in sustainable farming, natural building, natural childbirth, and veganism, among other things.

As I neared the end of my coursework in the adult education program at The University of Southern Mississippi, I began developing ideas for a traditional, conformist dissertation, which made my stomach hurt. One of the reasons I got into education was to figure out how to subvert the system, not reinforce it. As I sat in my truck one day listening to Mick Jagger singing "Satisfaction," I remembered something my father said

to me once. He said, “The Sixties weren’t just about the music. We learned how to live our lives through the songs.”

Sitting there in my truck, it occurred to me that a generation of adults had been engaged in a variety of informal learning activities as part of the counterculture movement; in many cases, liberation education was the driving force behind the movements. Historians and sociologists have explored the hippys and the counterculture movement widely, but none had investigated hippy learning in an adult education context. I immediately thought of Stephen Gaskin and his Monday Night Class (MNC) which brought together thousands of hippys each week in the late 1960s to participate in informal adult learning activities. Since then, during the last 40 years, Gaskin has been concerned with changing the world from his home base in Tennessee through peace education.

The history of adult education is still being written, and it would be unfortunate for Gaskin not to be included among those who have made a significant impact on a generation of adult learners. After reading his books and analyzing his praxis, it is clear that he was an adult educator in the same vein as Eduard Lindeman, Paulo Freire, Moses Coady, Basil Yeaxlee, and others who have joined the common destiny of men and women engaged in the fight for liberation from the forces of power that conspire to control us in our daily lives.

As a young man, Gaskin’s uncle told him a story that had a profound effect on the remainder of Gaskin’s life. His uncle had been an activist and an organizer. The story he told Gaskin was the story of the Golden Horns. Gaskin would never forget it. He wrote about it in his book, *Rendered Infamous* (1981).

Once there was a kingdom so small that all of the citizens could fit in the king's courtyard. When there was an election, they called in all the citizens of the country to come and stand in the king's courtyard. The rich and the poor were all there, and it was said that this was a country with a fair system of government, because everyone could vote.

The King's Vizier came out and read the resolution to be voted on. He read: "Be it resolved that the poor people shall pay all of the taxes, and that the rich people shall pay none. All those in favor," he bellowed, "raise your golden horns and blow." And all the rich people raised their golden horns and blew a long powerful, note.

The King's Vizier went on. "All those opposed," he said, "raise your golden horns and blow."

Not a sound was heard; for the poor people had no golden horns. (p. 121)

This dissertation is my handmade golden horn. Blow, man, blow.

## CHAPTER I

### HIPPYS ARE A CULTURAL VITAMIN

Historically speaking, the study of adult education is still in its infancy. The discipline is less than 100 years old and confined to a relatively small number of academic contexts throughout the world. However, the practice of adult education has thrived for hundreds of years around the world and continues to gain momentum today as more individuals embrace lifelong learning. Despite the large numbers of adults engaged in learning activities, many do not identify themselves as adult learners; also, many educators of adults do not consider themselves to be adult educators. These dichotomies create boundless opportunities for adult education researchers to continue to shape and define the field.

#### Statement of the Problem

Historical analysis covers a range of disciplines and helps develop a comprehensive view of the human condition. In order to broaden our understanding of adult education it is necessary that we look outside the walls of the academy as we seek to identify and record the unique characteristics of practitioners within the discipline. Public issues need historical examination to “understand their origins and scope, as well as future trends” (Gray, Williamson, Karp, & Dalphin, 2007, p. 242). Building a strong historical knowledge-base helps current and future adult educators expand their depth of understanding related to adult learning and adult education. In an effort to increase the foundational structure of adult education it is important to investigate individuals who have worked to educate adults, whether or not they have been labeled as adult educators. Many of the individuals important to the history and formalization of adult education as an academic discipline have been studied and will continue to be studied by scholars in

the future. But we know the majority of adult educators are unaware that they have participated in or fostered adult education or adult learning; consequently, it is valuable to identify and study those individuals in order to document their contributions to the field of adult education.

One such unrecognized “adult educator,” who has lived on the fringe for more than four decades, is counterculture figure, Stephen Gaskin. Gaskin has been an educator for more than 40 years, working with tens of thousands of adult learners who were seeking transformative experiences within an emancipatory learning framework for social justice. At one point, he led classes of 1,500 to 3,000 hippys on a weekly basis using the dialogue approach to discuss topics outside mainstream education, such as alternative spirituality, sex, drugs, and peace. His theories related to spirituality, ecology, and praxis fit well within the established adult education framework.

Imel (1999) has noted that the literature contains few, if any, studies related to emancipatory education in groups. She goes on to say that almost all emancipatory studies have been focused on the individual. Gaskin’s work is based entirely in group settings; thus, a comprehensive analysis of the programs, methodologies, and theories proposed and practiced by Gaskin would be one of the first such research projects in the field of adult education.

For more than four decades Gaskin has sought to educate adults about spirituality, peace, freedom, ecology, and human rights. He is the consummate counterculture figure, wearing a chest-length beard and two braided pigtales, living in an intentional community called the “Farm,” birthing babies at home, smoking marijuana, practicing veganism, staging sit-ins, playing in drum circles, espousing the benefits of sustainable building and farming (permaculture), and relentlessly railing against The Man. He lists his religion as

hippy. He is a member of the Counterculture Hall of Fame (inducted 2004), a convicted felon, a United States Marine, a Korean War combat veteran, and a convenor (an individual who brings people together for a purpose).

The purpose of this dissertation is to analyze the thinking of Gaskin as a radical hippy educator within an emancipatory education framework in order to position him as an influential figure in the field of adult education during the last 40 years. I will show that Gaskin's focus on emancipatory education for social justice was a driving force of the counterculture movement that is ongoing at Gaskin's living laboratory – the Farm, an intentional community settled in Tennessee in 1971 by Gaskin and more than 200 other hippys.

### Methodology

Stephen Gaskin has spent his life working with adults seeking transformative experiences. Much of that work is described in his books that reveal a canon of adult education literature about the counterculture that has never before been critically analyzed. This study of Gaskin's work represents one of the first, if not the first, large-scale group study of emancipatory learning in the adult education discipline. This research effort was conducted primarily by analyzing the 11 nonfiction books written by Gaskin over a 40-year period from 1968 to 2008.

Analysis was performed using historical research methods of primary and secondary sources. Gaskin's books are all considered primary source material. His first book, *Monday Night Class*, is a selection of recorded sessions from various MNC meetings. In the new introduction to *Monday Night Class*, Gaskin writes that William Meyers transcribed the recordings of the MNC sessions. Gaskin then edited the selections before publishing them in book form.



A content analysis was done of each book in order to situate Gaskin's life and thinking within an adult education framework. The development of his thinking was examined in relation to his personal development as an adult educator, as well as a self-directed learner. Such things that were noted included his age at the time of writing, personal context, his physical location, and the events leading up to the publication of the book. These sources have not been studied or analyzed formally by scholars in the field of adult education. They will help shed light on past events in American history and illuminate an aspect of the counterculture – adult education – that has not been formally studied until now.

Writings on Gaskin's blog, called Stephen Sez, and his personal website ([stephengaskin.com](http://stephengaskin.com)) were also utilized in this research project. It should be noted, too, that Gaskin wrote a book of short stories, *40 Miles of Bad Road* (1964), which served as his master's thesis at San Francisco State College (SFSC). The five fiction stories were published in 1964 and gave no indication that Gaskin would go on to become a counterculture educator. Therefore, the story collection was not reviewed for this dissertation.

The amount of information contained in Gaskin's nonfiction books over the last four decades is immense; however, we know historical data are never complete. For this reason, the methodology includes a personal interview with Gaskin to clarify some of his theories as they pertain specifically to adult education, to record his reflections about his own praxis, and to gain some type of anecdotal assessment of the success or shortcomings of his social justice efforts since 1968.

In addition to an examination of Gaskin's work, a theoretical framework was established to guide the analysis using published material from the social science

literature and adult education literature, as well as other secondary historical material, including books, periodicals, newspapers, court documents, and dissertations. The framework for this study was informed by studies in emancipatory learning for social action, with an emphasis toward spirituality, ecology, and praxis.

In order to place Gaskin's work within the field of adult education and other social science literature, several electronic databases were utilized to gather data, specifically the ERIC database, in addition to other electronic source material. The analysis of Gaskin's work indicates trends in his thinking and patterns of thought as they relate to emancipatory education in the counterculture movement that began in America in the late 1960s. Additionally, one of the goals of the project was to chart Gaskin's own educational theory-building enterprises as they developed. Some of these theories were similar to, or parallel with, existing mainstream adult education theories, and were noted as well.

Part of the potential value of this study is that some of Gaskin's work may reveal new models of adult education theory outside the mainstream that have no current place in the literature. It is important to document those theories for future research.

In order to plot the sequential course and development of Gaskin's thinking, his books were read in the chronological order in which they were published (See Appendix A for a brief annotated bibliography):

- *Monday Night Class* (1970)
- *The Caravan* (1972)
- *Hey Beatnik! This is The Farm Book* (1974)
- *The Grass Case* (1974)
- *Volume One: Sunday Morning Services on The Farm* (1977)

- . . . *This Season's People* (1978)
- *Mind at Play* (1980)
- *Rendered Infamous* (1981)
- *Amazing Dope Tales (Haight Ashbury Flashbacks)* (1990)
- *Cannabis Spirituality* (1996)
- *An Outlaw in My Heart* (2000)

Stephen Gaskin was the only human subject in this study, which included an interview. No animals or other human subjects were involved. During the study all printed, published material used underwent routine critical analysis. All necessary forms for qualification of the study were submitted to The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board for approval prior to beginning the research project.

#### Plan of Work

The first chapter of the dissertation is comprised of a synopsis of the research project. It was important to outline the purpose and goals of the study in order to lay a solid foundation for Gaskin's work and subsequent interpretation as an adult educator. Gaskin's personal background material was included in this section to provide a brief history of Gaskin's early life. It is clear that he seemed destined for social revolution from an early age because one of his earliest memories was the fall of Czechoslovakia in 1939. Only a few years later, when he was eight years old, he would come face-to-face with German prisoners of war at Camp Hale in Colorado where his father was working on a government contract. Alongside the Germans were Americans, imprisoned because they were conscientious objectors. "They were locked in identical barbed wire enclosures with the same guards as the German soldiers" (Gaskin, 1981, p. 4). As a child, he understood why the Germans were imprisoned, but the Americans were more

confounding. Gaskin (1981) related that he was “well-equipped with hate, 1941-style” due to the propaganda being distributed in America (p. 4). He reasoned the conscientious objectors were disloyal and probably spies. A little more than a decade later, Gaskin would return home from the Korean War and become a conscientious objector himself.

Gaskin’s relationship with governing authorities was formed at an early age through his family connections. Gaskin’s father was an itinerant civilian government worker and small businessman. His grandmother was a suffragette, and his uncle a union organizer in California. It is not difficult to imagine the conversations that took place in such a socially conscious family.

But what may have had the biggest effect on Gaskin’s young life was his experience living in Santa Fe in the shadows of the first atomic bomb. His father moved the family to New Mexico in order to work on the new Los Alamos atomic plant being built. His aunt and uncle worked at the plant with his father. They all told stories about the secretive facility. Then one night the sky lit up as the first atomic test bomb was detonated in the Alamogordo desert. Residents in the area did not know what happened until the first real atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. Gaskin (1981) commented that “The closeness of the atomic plant remained part of my consciousness for the rest of my life, as it does today” (p. 8).

Later, as Gaskin recounts in *Rendered Infamous* (1981), while out hunting in the desert, Gaskin and his friend found what they believed was a strange rock. Further investigation revealed the item was not a rock but some type of metal object that was extremely heavy, dense, and nearly indestructible. Gaskin and others attempted to crush the metal, or bend it, or cut it with a torch to no avail. When word got around about the mysterious object, a black car with a federal license plate carrying two men in suits

arrived at the house, secured the object in a lead box and drove away without any explanation.

Years later, Gaskin's aunt, who worked in the medical research department at Los Alamos, told him the item was uranium oxide and the government was monitoring workers that had come in contact with large amounts of the material. Gaskin attempted to use the Freedom of Information act to obtain documentation about the object or the related medical studies, but was told by numerous government agencies that no such information existed. "So even if they won't tell me, I know what I had. And I know something else that most people in this country don't get to know for sure, and I will tell you this: the government lies" (Gaskin, 1981, p. 11). Gaskin would go on to become an outspoken critic of nuclear weapons.

This first section of this project includes the research elements of the dissertation including the statement of the problem and the hypothesis, which detail the assertion that Gaskin has been overlooked as an adult educator and should be recognized as a major contributor to the history of the field of adult education, especially in the areas of spiritual adult learning, ecological adult learning, and adult education praxis. Gaskin's education efforts within the counterculture movement working with marginalized groups toward social transformation are highlighted through the lens of an emancipatory learning framework. The scope of work provides a concise review of what I did in this research project, how I studied and analyzed Gaskin, and why the research is important. It also outlines the theoretical framework for the project.

The second chapter is a literature review. In order to make an argument that Gaskin deserves to be considered an adult educator, he must be situated within the adult education literature. Learning theories such as constructivism and emancipatory learning

were examined closely, as well as others related to Gaskin's work, including humanism, self-directed learning, spiritual learning, social learning, critical theory, transformative learning, non-Western learning theories, and andragogy.

The third chapter focuses on Gaskin's praxis. It is valuable to remember that Gaskin was working with people who were at a disjuncture in their lives because of a mounting culture shift that occurred after World War II. Their previous life experiences had not prepared them adequately for the social rebellion beating the drums in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Individuals needed new learning, but not through traditional pedagogical methods. Gaskin realized the need for an alternative type of education because he had already had a "disorienting dilemma" (Mezirow, 1991) that was similar to what counterculture individuals were clamoring for. Gaskin's disorienting dilemma changed the way he viewed society and his role in it. Becoming a hippy teacher was the social action that resulted from Gaskin's own critical reflection.

The fourth chapter focuses on spiritual learning and how Gaskin applied it as a tool for adult education. He frequently referred to himself as a spiritual teacher, though he had no formal spiritual training and did not espouse any single doctrine. Instead, Gaskin blended aspects of multiple religions in order to establish a broad peace-based spirituality.

The fifth chapter focuses on ecological consciousness. Throughout his 40 year career, Gaskin urged individuals to place themselves in a larger context that includes the mind, body, spirit, and universe. Gaskin's penchant for sustainability is long established and is aligned with the current literature related to ecological consciousness.

The final chapter, Chapter 6, summarizes the major points of the dissertation and serves as a conclusion to the project. Additionally, suggestions are made as to the

usefulness of this research project for current and future adult educators. Finally, recommendations are made about future areas of study related to spiritual learning, ecology consciousness, and counterculture adult education.

#### Situated in Adult Education

Among scholars in the field of adult education Gaskin is virtually unknown, but he is a giant in the counterculture world. In 1980, he was awarded the Right Livelihood Award, which is the alternative Nobel Prize given to individuals “for outstanding vision and work on behalf of our planet and its people” (Right Livelihood, 2011). Research on Gaskin is limited and no significant research exists related to his role in the field of adult education. Although Gaskin and others often referred to him as a teacher, most accounts of Gaskin do not mention his work as an educator or adult educator.

Gaskin has eschewed scholarly publishing, for the most part, writing and self-publishing books about his experiences and posing questions in his writing much like Eduard Lindeman (Brookfield, 1987). In fact, Gaskin has removed himself from any type of formal scholarly activity choosing instead to be a practitioner of adult education in much the same manner as Myles Horton (Horton & Freire, 1990), co-founder of the Highlander Research and Education Center. On more than one occasion, even during university speeches, Gaskin deemed college a waste of time and maintains it is a playpen for those who can afford it. “The only difference between college and welfare is social position” (Gaskin, 1974, p. 62).

Like Lindeman (1926), Gaskin advocates for the immeasurable value of life experience shared among groups of learners using a discussion method. Horton, Lindeman, and Gaskin, all formally educated men who chose to shun the establishment, worked at the fringes of formal adult education, publishing in alternative venues and

preferring the hands-on work of adult education. Whereas Horton and Lindeman have been studied and written about extensively in the adult education literature, Gaskin has never been introduced formally as an adult educator. He receives only scant, indirect reference in the literature (Hodgdon, 2007; LeDoux, 1992). Gaskin never published any scholarly articles and no major biographical or autobiographical works about him exist.

The culmination of Gaskin's thinking rests within 11 nonfiction books he has written during the last four decades, none of which have ever been analyzed in relation to adult learning or within an adult education framework. His inclusion in the literature will chart the recent history of adult education with a social justice mission. Additionally, part of the value of this study is that some of Gaskin's work may uncover new models of adult education theory outside the mainstream that have no current place in the literature. If such is the case, new theories will be explored and recorded.

Despite the wealth of social science and adult education data that could have been gained by formally studying Gaskin's praxis over the last 40 years, mainstream researchers have avoided counterculture adult education. That Gaskin has not been studied formally before now seems stunning. His work with marginalized groups provides long-term data over an extended period. His omission from the literature is not surprising, however, as spiritual learning is often ignored or disregarded altogether (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007).

Very little scholarly research has been produced related to Gaskin or the Farm. Two notable exceptions are Tim Hodgdon's (2007) examination of male gender roles in two communes from 1965-1983, one of which was the Farm, and Pat LeDoux's (1992) historical analysis of the Farm as a commune. Both of these works examine aspects of the



Farm and Gaskin's involvement, but neither explores Gaskin as an individual or as an educator.

As much as mainstream education has avoided Gaskin, he, too, has avoided the mainstream. In his writings, Gaskin outlined his theories, philosophies, and praxis, the majority of which were published by the Farm's publishing company. By his own estimate, Gaskin (2000) said his books have sold more than 500,000 copies. The books focus on spirituality, ecology, counterculture, and activism. Each book, in sequence, helps explain Gaskin's ideas as they were born, matured, and in some cases, dissipated. We are able to chart his thinking from inception, through implementation and praxis, to a summary conclusion. Any outcomes assessment, however, is purely anecdotal, as is often the case with informal learning activities. Gaskin's books are meant to be educational and serve as a guide for understanding his theories and praxis. As his thinking developed over the years, he became more politically active culminating with his campaign for the United States presidency in 2000 as a member of the Green Party.

The primary focus of this dissertation was to examine Gaskin's life and adult education mission during the last 40 years based on his published works of nonfiction. "The goal of social research is to add to what is already known about individuals in society and about the behavior and composition of human groups" (Gray, et al., 2007, p. 2). By plotting Gaskin's counterculture thinking and examining his methodologies new techniques for teaching adults were revealed. Finally, one of the goals of this project was to help establish a better understanding of working with underserved social groups.

Gaskin is a significant individual to study because of the longevity of his work and the number of learners who have shared learning experiences with him. Gaskin worked in relative obscurity for the last four decades and it is time for his influence on

adult education to claim its place in the current literature. Heretofore, Gaskin's work as an educator of adults has been completely ignored by scholars. Although he has been unrecognized in the field of adult education, Gaskin worked with tens of thousands of adults helping guide them toward critical consciousness by offering counterculture programs that encourage individuals to become aware of their own oppression in order to move beyond the social class boundaries constructed by the elite who strive to reinforce the status quo. Gaskin's work deserves to be included in the adult education literature.

Many of the social reform efforts Gaskin worked toward have been integrated somewhat into mainstream culture while others have remained on the fringe. For example, vegan nutrition is a common topic in a variety of venues, but the use of psychedelic drugs remains outside the mainstream. However, researchers recently proposed that psychedelics may be helpful in treating a variety of mental illnesses and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) agreed to a number of clinical trials (Philipkoski, 2004). Gaskin's relentless drive to *legitimize* the counterculture's core values has changed the way many individuals interact with the dominant culture. In fact, in many ways the dominant culture itself has been altered due to these counterculture influences, many of which are hallmarks of Gaskin's work.

This dissertation examines Gaskin's principles and practices in order to show that he belongs among well-known adult educators. More specifically, Gaskin's major works are analyzed in order to identify the theoretical content and delineate major themes related to adult education. This historical research project is not strictly biographical although, by design, it is difficult to separate Gaskin the individual from his work as a teacher and learner.

Gaskin's thinking is situated in a contextual paradigm framed by several existing areas of adult education, including spirituality, ecology consciousness, praxis, and emancipatory learning. In this project, I identify these areas that most clearly exemplify the modern theories of adult education that coincide with Gaskin's experiences both as a teacher and as a learner. Additionally, this scholarly analysis enables future adult learners to broaden their understanding of their own roles in adult education. Further, future adult educators will become aware that alternative theories related to the education of adults are viable and should be encouraged.

#### Emancipatory Learning Framework

Gaskin's work with hippys and other marginalized groups has kept him on the fringes of formal education. Because he is an unknown figure in the field of adult education, any research project needs to provide a historical foundation of Gaskin as an individual in order to contextualize his work as an adult educator. Once established, an examination of Gaskin's teachings can be analyzed in relation to adult education theory and practice.

I used Gaskin's own writing to situate him in the field of adult education by exploring his connection to several major areas of current adult education philosophy, including spirituality, ecology, and praxis. These theories were analyzed within an emancipatory learning framework that suggests as learners become critically aware of the oppressive forces acting against them, they become socially transformed and seek to change the status quo.

The purpose of adult education is most frequently defined by the learner, but throughout the history of the field, the central purpose of adult education has often been associated with emancipatory learning for social justice. Early proponents of

emancipatory learning like Eduard Lindeman (Brookfield, 1987; Lindeman, 1926) and Myles Horton (Horton & Freire, 1990) recognized the potential that adult education had for emancipating individuals and enacting social change. They stressed models of learning that empowered students through dialogue and knowledge construction, techniques that validated learners' previous experience with a nod toward social justice. Later adopters of emancipatory learning like Freire (1970; 1972; 1973; 1985; 2000; Horton & Freire, 1990) became more radical in their approach by politicizing social action as a necessary component of emancipation.

One of the assumptions of this study is that the counterculture is part of Freire's "culture of silence" (1972, p. 57). That is, the dominant political structure of the late 1960s and 1970s refused to acknowledge the voice of the counterculture, rendering them silenced. This study will be informed by the theories of Freire (1970; 1972; 1973; 1985; 2000), specifically his notion of emancipatory learning for social justice.

Freire developed the idea of teachers and learners working together as equals on the path to conscientization, or a gradual awakening to the sociopolitical forces that oppress individuals in order to maintain the status quo. Freire went on to work with learners in an effort to contest the status quo through "praxis," which is a process of action, critical reflection, and social action – wherein social action is defined as "not just an altering of the way an individual thinks of the world, but a transformation of the lifeworld itself – under conditions in which life is lived" (Heaney, 1996, p. 39). In other words, social action results in redistribution of power and wealth not to individuals, but to social classes.

Freire wanted to instigate radical change through social action brought on by emancipatory learning. His methods were based on a problem-solving approach that uses

dialogue and equalizes learners and teachers. Together, teacher and learner develop a curriculum that is embedded in the everyday lives of the learner. This technique leads to conscientization. The ultimate goal of the conscientization process is for individuals to become liberated from forces of oppression through action, critical reflection, and social action. In other words, individuals have an experience, reflect on the experience, contextualize it, critique it in order to learn from it, and then take some kind of social action as a result. This type of emancipatory learning is in contrast to banking education, which presumes the teacher is all knowing and will make knowledge deposits into passive learners (Freire, 1970). “Banking education serves the oppressors because it domesticates the oppressed” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 140).

The foundation for emancipatory learning emerged from Karl Marx’s (1818-1883) critical theory and its associate theories, such as social critical theory developed by Jürgen Habermas (1971), Derrick Bell’s critical race theory (Closson, 2010), postmodern feminism (Merriam et al., 2007), and emancipatory feminism (Tisdell, 1998). Jack Mezirow’s (1981) self-directed learning theory, which is related to emancipatory learning, maintains that individuals may have a transformative experience based on action and critical reflection, but Mezirow does not believe individuals *must* enact social change to be liberated from oppressive forces, though he does acknowledge individuals often *do* take some action.

Freire’s work builds on this critical tradition by making known the power structure and enabling oppressed individuals to become aware of their unfreedom so they can work toward changing the status quo. However, some critics like Jacques Ranciere argue that by being critical the learner becomes dependent on the truth because of a specific mastery, that of the emancipator (Biesta, 2010). This idea implies that teacher

and learner are *not* equal because the student must learn from the teacher who is already free. It also means the learner is dependent on an outside force – a teacher, for example – to become emancipated. Further, learners cannot trust their own experiences because they need someone else to clarify things for them.

Ranciere's critique seems to be in direct conflict with Freire's idea of conscientization. However, Ranciere suggests that to overcome the flaws in the logic of critical theory and its implications for emancipatory learning, teachers and learners *must* start from a position of equality and work outward. He reasons that to start from inequality would create an imbalance between teacher and learner that could never be overcome.

Avis (1995) has challenged the nature of emancipatory learning. Avis believes that emphasizing learners' previous experience privileges such experience and thus renders the prior experience unavailable for critical reflection. Within the emancipatory education frame, the absence of critical reflection means praxis cannot take place and the structure of emancipatory education for social action then falls apart. However, the methodology of dialogue utilized in collective settings along with the social nature of the emancipatory framework means individuals choose through critical reflection, which experiences – their own or others' – are most vital for their own knowledge construction as they work toward conscientization.

### Definitions of Terms

This section will define key terms used throughout the dissertation. It consists of two sections, counterculture terms and learning theory terms.

*Counterculture Terms*

*Consciousness raising* – “The activity or experience of increasing a person’s sensitivity or awareness, especially in social or political matters” (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2011)

*Counterculture* – “A radical culture, especially amongst the young, that rejects the established social values and practices; a mode of life opposed to the conventional or dominant” (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2011)

*Flower-child* – “A hippy who advocates love, beauty, and peace; a young person in the 1960s and 1970s who rejected the traditional values of society” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online, 2011)

*Free love* – “The doctrine of the right of free choice in forming personal relationships without the restraint of marriage or other legal obligation; the exercise of such free choice; also, unconstrained sexual relations; sexual promiscuity” (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2011)

*Hippy (also hippie)* – [Note: Gaskin preferred the usage of hippy over hippie (personal communication). He said the Establishment attempted to take ownership of the word hippy by spelling it hippie in the media. Gaskin said, “They don’t get to decide. We get to decide” (personal communication).] The term hippy is believed to have been a derivation of the word “hep,” which appeared in the lexicon just before World War II. Hep was slang and is roughly equivalent to saying something is “cool;” “Hippys preach altruism and mysticism, honesty, joy and nonviolence. They find an almost childish fascination in beads, blossoms and bells, blinding strobe lights and ear-shattering music, exotic clothing and erotic slogans. Their professed aim is nothing less than the subversion of Western society by "flower power" and force of example (Hippys, 1967, para. 2); the

definition of hippy that most closely fits Gaskin's interpretation of hippys, and the distinction that will be used throughout this dissertation is that "hippys are mostly young and generally thoughtful Americans who are unable to reconcile themselves to the stated values and implicit contradictions of contemporary Western society, and have become internal émigrés, seeking individual liberation through means as various as drug use, total withdrawal from the economy and the quest for individual identity" (Hippies, 1967, para. 4); "hippys are a continuing strain of artists, writers, musicians, activists, socially conscious folks, and folks who are on the fringe and see ways that society could be doing better and are trying to do something about it" (Gaskin, 2000, p. 43)

*Intentional community* – similar to commune or collective (ex. the Farm founded by Gaskin and others in Tennessee in 1971); a community formed by individuals who agree to communal living and who have shared goals and ideology for the common good (Christensen & Levinson, 2003). Miller (1998) described criteria for intentional communities. They include (a) "a sense of common purpose and of separation from the dominant society;" (b) "some form and level of self-denial, of voluntary suppression of individual choice for the good of the group;" (c) "geographic proximity;" (d) "personal interaction;" (e) "economic sharing;" (f) "real existence;" (g) "critical mass" (pp. xviii-xxii)

*LSD* – lysergic acid diethylamide; acid; "An extremely powerful synthetic hallucinogen which can produce profound changes in perception (especially vision) and mood, with psychotic symptoms resembling those of schizophrenia" (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2011)

*Om* – "a sacred syllable or invocation traditionally uttered at the beginning and end of prayer and meditation" (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2011)



*Psychedelic* – “A drug which produces an alteration in the mind, especially an apparent expansion of consciousness through greater awareness of the sensations, emotions, and unconscious motivations, often accompanied by hallucinations; imitating or inspired by an effect produced by a psychedelic drug; specifically (a) denoting or characterized by musical experimentation and drug-related lyrics; (b) having intense, vivid colors often forming a swirling abstract pattern” (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2011)

*Reefer* – marijuana; “A cannabis cigarette” (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2011)

*The Man* – “A person in authority; especially a prison warder or governor; a policeman; an employer, a boss; “chiefly among African Americans: a white person, especially regarded as an oppressor; white people collectively” (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2011)

*Transcendental* – “Beyond the limits of ordinary experience, extraordinary” (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2011)

*Transcendental meditation* – “a method of relaxation and meditation based on the theory and practice of yoga popularized in the West by the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi” (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2011)

*Tripping* – The meaning of the word “tripping” has evolved over time. In the 1960s, hippys used the word to indicate someone who was out of their mind, usually someone high on psychedelic drugs. The *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (2011) indicates tripping is slang and refers to an individual experiencing hallucinations induced by psychedelic drugs. To some, the word was concrete, indicating an individual was experiencing the effects of psychedelic drugs, most notably LSD. To others, tripping was

used more moderately and indicated an individual was in an altered state of awareness – drug-induced or not. Many counterculture individuals, like Gaskin, used the word to indicate a profound, mind-opening, experience even when drugs were not involved. Gaskin often referred to tripping in his work, most often meaning that individuals were in a state of mind that was receptive to new experiences that could challenge an individual’s core values. More recently, the word tripping has come to symbolize someone who overreacts about insignificant matters, and tripping has acquired a more negative tone.

### *Learning Theory Terms*

*Adult educator* – an individual who works with adults to diagnose learning needs, to plan with the learner the learning activities associated with those needs, to create a safe learning space, to select the most effective learning methods and techniques to meet learning outcomes, to provide resources, and to help learners assess their own learning (Cervero, 1992; Jarvis, 1983; Knowles, 1970; Merriam & Brockett, 2007)

*Community of practice* - groups of people who share common interests and activities whether at work, school, or in the community who learn from each other (Wenger, 1998); over time, the relationships among members deepen and a set of collective ideas, memories, and social practices become common to the group (Wenger, 1998); communities of practice often develop their own vocabularies, as well as binding symbols (Wenger, 1998), much like hippy slang, tie dye, and peace symbols, which reflect the shared knowledge and identity of members of the group

*Conscientization* – “cultural action for freedom; the process by which in the subject-object relationship. . . the subject finds the ability to grasp, in critical terms, the dialectical unity between self and object” (Freire, 1985, p. 160); “a deepening of the coming of consciousness” (Freire, 1993, p. 109); “social psychological processes through

which the dominated become aware of blocked subjectivities related to shared experience” (Morrow & Torres, 2002); “a kind of reading the world rigorously; reading how society works” (Morrow & Torres, 2002)

*Consciousness* – “Internal knowledge or conviction; the state or fact of being mentally conscious or aware of something; The faculty or capacity from which awareness of thought, feeling, and volition and of the external world arises; the totality of the impressions, thoughts, and feelings which make up a person’s sense of self or define a person’s identity” (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2011)

*Critical consciousness* – see conscientization

*Culture of silence* – marginalized groups that are not heard by the dominant ruling class and feel powerless to act on their own behalf because the dominant class controls the social, economic, and political structures of power; four common practices that create a culture of silence include, (a) the establishment of domination by force; (b) the divide and rule tactic that examines small problems disassociated from the whole of society; (c) manipulation through negative communication; and (d) cultural invasion, which denigrates alternative ideas by reinforcing the status quo (Morrow & Torres, 2002)

*Lifeworld* – “The sum of immediate experiences, activities, and contacts that make up the world of an individual, or of a corporate, life (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2011); according to Habermas (1987), the lifeworld is that which we know and recognize culturally and linguistically. It is the sociocultural patterns that are inherently familiar to us as human beings.

*Praxis* – “Action or practice; the practice or exercise of a technical subject or art, as distinct from the theory of it; conscious, willed action; that which theory or philosophy is transformed into practical social activity; the synthesis of theory and practice seen as a

basis for or condition of political and economic change” (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2011)

*Teaching-learning transaction* – the shared responsibility of learner and teacher (Knowles, 1970); human interaction between teacher and learner engaged in a “complex process of exploration and diagnosis of needs for and resistance to learning and change” (Bradford, 1958, p. 135)

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Learning is generally understood to be a potential change in behavior as a result of a significant experience (Skinner, 1950). Learning theories are used to help explain the process of learning, which includes aspects of cognition, emotion, prior experience, and other contextual factors such as societal influences. These identified learning theories are frequently used to describe learning because they group similar learning strategies and provide a conceptual lens through which we can interpret adult learning (Merriam et al., 2007; Pavlov, 2003; Skinner, 1950; Watson, 1913).

In this research study it will be helpful to start with a broad perspective of learning and work toward a narrower understanding of Gaskin's work. Merriam et al. (2007) have grouped adult learning theories into five broad orientations – behaviorist, humanist, cognitivist, social cognitive, and constructivist – which differ somewhat from Zinn's (1999) five philosophical orientations of adult educators, which are identified and explained in Chapter III. Gaskin could be viewed as being aligned with more than one learning theory. His work over the last four decades can be seen in the humanistic and social constructivist traditions. It is important to remember that Gaskin was not only an adult educator, but also an adult learner himself – a characteristic common among those utilizing the dialogue approach.

#### Humanism

Abraham Maslow (1908-1970) is associated closely with humanism. He developed his hierarchy of needs theory based on human motivation, which stems from a humanistic point of view (Maslow, 1970). Maslow reasoned that all humans have the same fundamental desires and each level of desire must be satisfied before an individual

moves to the next level. Physiological needs like eating and sleeping are the most basic level. Each subsequent level of the hierarchy moves learners closer to self-actualization, which is the ultimate goal in life. Maslow (1970) termed self-actualization as “what humans can be, they must be” (p. 22). Maslow went on to distinguish other characteristics of humanism, such as analyzing an individual’s emotions in order to learn from previous experiences, and the concept of living in the present. The humanist learning theory addresses the whole person with a goal of self-actualization. Humanists believe they are in control of their own destiny; therefore, they have an unlimited potential for personal growth (Knowles, 1970; Merriam et al, 2007; Rogers, 1969). Humanists believe much of learning is derived from an individual’s perception of his or her prior experiences. In the humanist vein, the instructor's role is to facilitate the development of the whole person. Humanism also represents self-directed learning and transformation (Knowles, 1970; Merriam et al., 2007; Rogers, 1969).

#### Transformational Learning

Mezirow (1991), working within the broad field of self-directed learning and transformative learning, said perspective transformation is key to adult development. A perspective transformation indicates a permanent change in the inner, core beliefs and long held assumptions of an individual. When we question our frames of reference and decide they are no longer true, we have experienced a perspective transformation. “Through transformative learning we are freed from uncritical acceptance of others’ purposes, values, and beliefs” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 133). Mezirow (1978) developed this theory after studying a group of women who returned to school and found themselves questioning their long-held values and beliefs. Mezirow (1991) maintained that adults must critically examine themselves in conjunction with their prior life experiences in

order to grow and develop. They do this through self-directed learning projects and critical reflection. Dirkx (2001), however, noted that transformation can result from an individual's imagination or emotions, and need not originate from critical reflection. Such transformation is often more closely related to spiritual transformation.

Mezirow (2000) noted that the study of transformative learning is ongoing. As Mezirow's thinking progressed in the area of perspective transformation, he indicated that individuals likely would take some action as a result of their new learning, but not necessarily action for social change. Transformative learning theory linked with social change is most often associated with Freire (1972).

Paulo Freire (2000) was one of the leading scholars and practitioners of emancipatory learning. He spoke out against banking education where teachers were expected to give knowledge to learners. Instead, he advocated for a co-teacher-learner relationship where each person learned from the other and shared the learning experience. His work with Brazilian peasants to embed literacy learning in their lives in order to make it more relevant is widely known and cited. This attempt at sociocultural transformation is often deemed radical because Freire was teaching the oppressed how to recognize the forces operating against them. He was helping them become liberated from the unfreedom of the dominant culture that sought to dictate everything about the peasant's lives.

Freire (1972) said the teacher and learner are the same and must dialogue in order to raise a critical consciousness, which he calls conscientization. With this methodology, learners become part of the solution because learning is tied directly to their lives. They are able to place themselves within the larger context of society. Learners must then reflect on their new learning in regards to prior learning and experience and take action to

transform their lives. Mezirow (1990) said such critical reflection is imperative in adult education because it forces adults “to reflect back on prior learning to determine whether what we have learned is justified under present circumstances” (p. 5). However, Mezirow stopped short of a call to social action.

### Experiential Learning

Two aspects of experiential learning important to this dissertation are constructivism and situated learning. Both theories help explain Gaskin’s work as an adult educator. Kolb (1984) clarified the idea of experiential learning and has been refining his work since then. His experiential learning theory draws inspiration from the work of other theorists such as Dewey (1916), Piaget (1973), and Rogers (1969). The common thread in their work is the notion that learning is a process derived from lived experience, an understanding of concepts, observation of behavior, and adaptation. Kolb (1984) presented a four-stage learning cycle that includes concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. The cycle is integrated with Kolb’s (1984) four-types of learning styles, which include diverging, assimilating, converging, and accommodating.

Fenwick (2003) developed an overview of five theoretical orientations of experiential learning. In addition to constructivist and situative theories, she describes three others, which are psychoanalytic, critical cultural, and complexity. The critical cultural theory and complexity theories are also important in helping to understand Gaskin’s work. Fenwick (2003) noted that critical cultural theory is focused on resisting the dominant social norms of experience. Such resistance is the expression of knowledge in this orientation. Critical consciousness is part of the learning process wherein individuals link their personal experiences of oppression to the dominant forces in



society. The complexity theory outlined by Fenwick (2003) examined ecological relationships between cognition and the environment and how they interact. She noted that learning from this viewpoint is ongoing and always changing based on context and adaptation because as one element changes the other elements are influenced and adjust accordingly.

### *Constructivism*

Two major social constructivist theorists are Piaget (1973) and Vygotsky (1978). This orientation allows educators to facilitate or negotiate meaning making with learners. The individual learners in constructivism share experiences and work together to learn about the culture, which creates shared symbols and vocabulary. Constructivists hold that learning through these type of experiences is how individuals make meaning and construct knowledge.

Both Piaget and Vygotsky worked outside the field of adult education, but we can utilize the basis of their theories when discussing adult learning. Piaget (1973) first proposed the idea that children learn by assimilation, a process of organizing new knowledge and new experiences with the actions that caused them. He went on to explain that if in the future the same action results in a deviation from what is expected, individuals will accommodate the new learning. The ongoing nature of the assimilation and accommodation processes is how Piaget defined learning. It evolved out of a maturation process and quest for equilibration between external stimuli and internal mental constructs.

Vygotsky (1978) examined the social factors involved in a child's development. He argued that children learned from what was happening around them, especially with the help of a parent or teacher who has more knowledge. Both Piaget's and Vygotsky's

cognitive theories can be applied when talking about adult learning. Adults learn through participating in activities by gaining hands-on knowledge as in Piaget's model, and they also learn by placing previous experiences in context and sharing them with other adult learners or teachers as Vygotsky suggests.

### *Situated Learning*

Situated learning has two overriding principles, according to Lave and Wenger (1991). They indicated that situated learning is contextualized by culture and learning is socially constructed by working with others. These two elements make learning a shared effort among people in the same socio-cultural group and help explain the concept of communities of practice. By definition, all adult activities are situated by the context of the situation. In other words, as Brown, Collins, and Duguid (1989) noted, situated learning develops out of authentic activities taking place in an individual's life and the tools the individual uses in the specific situation. "In situated cognition, one cannot separate the learning process from the situation in which the learning is presented" (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 178). Therefore, situated learning is an ongoing process of enculturation among members of a community of practice.

An understanding of communities of practice emerged from Lave and Wenger's (1991) work studying apprenticeships. They found that individuals are typically part of several different communities of practice, which are groups of people who share common interests and activities whether at work, school, or in the community who learn from each other. Essentially, the individuals in the group look to each other for learning help about their related interests and activities. Over time, the relationships among members deepen and a set of collective ideas, memories, and social practices become common to the group. Communities of practice often develop their own vocabularies, as well as binding

symbols, much like hippy slang, tie dye, and peace symbols, which reflect the shared knowledge and identity of members of the group.

In carving out dedicated space for situated learning, Fenwick (2003) noted that situated learning is dependent on the context of the learning and the learner's involvement in a community of practice because critical reflection alone typically is an internal process and does not involve the greater political, social, and cultural contexts. She goes on to say that context cannot be removed from the learner because it is always present with the learner. The knowledge gained through situative learning is specific to the situation and the community of practice, meaning there is no true, concrete knowledge. Relevancy, then, is of the utmost importance among communities of practice. Black and Schell (1995) classify four characteristics that identify situated learning:

Situated learning can be conceptualized as having at least four interrelated learning aspects. (1) learning that is situated in the context of authentic practice, (2) transfer limited to similar situations, (3) learning as a social phenomenon, and (4) learning that relies on use of prior knowledge. (p. 4)

Adults bring a variety of knowledge with them to learning settings based upon previous learning experiences. The transfer of such knowledge is most relevant to other members of the practice-group in the similar situations that Black and Schell refer to in their analysis. The fact that the learning takes place in group settings gives it the social quality that adults most often desire from learning situations. "Theories of situated experience give primacy to the dynamics of everyday existence, improvisation, coordination and interactional choreography" (Wenger, 1998, p. 13). If context is eliminated from the equation, the entire theory falls apart. Situated learning is based on

the fundamental principle of learning being contextualized. The essence of communities of practice is centered amid context and specific common situations where shared knowledge is the goal.

### Self-Directed Learning

Self-direction is one of the primary characteristics of adult education and frequently leads to transformative learning, which often serves as a catalyst for emancipatory learning. Cyril Houle (1961) is generally credited with introducing the idea of self-directed learning to the field of adult education. He felt self-directed learning helped the process of transformation, which leads to emancipatory learning. In 1960, Houle (1961) began an investigation into the motives of 22 adults who were participating in continuing education classes in Milwaukee. After interviewing each subject, he found their reasons for engaging in learning activities fell into one of three different classifications. He noted that some of the learners were goal oriented (career objective), some were activity-oriented (means of socializing) and others were interested in learning for the sake of learning, or learning oriented. Those interested in learning for the enjoyment of learning are what we today would call self-directed learners. Although, Houle never directly mentions self-directed learning in *The Inquiring Mind*, Brockett and Donaghy (2005) have discovered handwritten evidence in Houle's original interview notes, which they believe indicates Houle clearly was thinking of the learning-oriented group as self-directed.

Building on Houle's foundation, Tough (1968) began studying how adults learn. Tough was a student of Houle's and discovered through research that adult learning is self-directed, meaning it is planned, carried out, and evaluated by the individual. It is a broad area of study and has been explored extensively among adult educators. Tough's

thinking was revolutionary at the time because most people believed learning took place in classrooms among groups of people.

### Critical Theory

Critical theory evolved out of Marxism and the Frankfurt School of social theorists, and gained prominence when Jürgen Habermas (1971) began searching for a way to analyze society and critique it. The basis for critical theory is emancipation of individuals from whatever circumstances oppress them (Horkheimer, 1982). Critical analysis allows scholars a standard means for studying and critiquing society in order to identify the aspects of domination. Different variations of critical theory exist such as feminism and critical race theory, but Horkheimer (1982) indicated that ultimately critical theory is about examining society's role in the interplay between capitalism and democracy. One reason the aim of adult education is social action is because adults are able to critically analyze their experiences and contextualize their learning, which leads to liberation and a desire to challenge the dominant culture.

Habermas' (1971) idea was that the status quo seeks to reproduce itself. His goal was to develop a method of understanding regarding how individuals are oppressed by societal structures and how those individuals might overcome their oppression. Prior to Habermas, most learning theory was focused on the individual and ignored the context of such learning. Critical theory opened the door for individuals to examine their learning within the pervasive sociocultural framework that staunchly supports the status quo. Welton (1995) says critical theory can serve as a "foundation for an emancipatory educational practice" (p.12).

According to Habermas (1987), the lifeworld is that which we know and recognize culturally and linguistically. It is the sociocultural patterns that are inherently

familiar to us as human beings. Habermas' (1971) notion that a crisis – intrusion by the state into the lifeworld – spurs a social rebuke “to defend the threatened lifeworld and its ecological substructure” (p. 28) seems to outline the counterculture movement when viewed as a rebellion against the pervasive domination by the ruling class over the lower classes after World War II.

Habermas viewed critical theory as a means of challenging our basic assumptions about power in society, especially as they relate to knowledge. More pointedly, critical theory raises questions about what forms of learning we recognize and accept as legitimate. Using these critical analysis techniques creates a welcome venue to discuss issues of race, class, and gender because it gives voice to those who are often overlooked. “Citizens must engage in a rational discourse about sources of power, knowledge, and oppression in the hope of redressing the current imbalance” of power (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 250).

### Social Learning

Bandura (1977) noted that social learning is predicated on individuals imitating behaviors they have observed in others. He felt that the environment and individual characteristics played an equal role in social learning. Wenger (2000) said that “in a social learning system, competence is historically and socially defined” and because we experience things differently as individuals our experiences may be in conflict with social competencies, such as how we communicate with each other, work together, and cooperate as members of a group (para. 5). Making meaning of this discrepancy is where learning occurs. Further, he explained this is how we construct our identities based on our relationship to the social community. “It is imperative that we reflect on the perspectives that inform our enterprises” (Wenger, 1998, p. 9). Wenger (1998) advocated for social

learning because he suggested narrower forms of education were leading learners toward specialization, which he felt was the wrong direction.

### Spiritual Learning

English and Gillen (2000) noted that research into spiritual education seems to be on the rise. Tisdell (2003) has done significant research in the area of exploring the connections of spirituality, culture, and learning. She notes that symbols and dreams help us make meaning and include the culture as a significant factor in learning. In this vein the teacher is most often a collaborator. English (2005) says public spirituality correlates with social justice, which is one of Gaskin's primary goals. She insists that "social change and spirituality are an integral part of adult education" (English, 2005, p. 1169). In fact, she maintains that spirituality and adult education are historically linked as far back as the original Chautauquas in the late 1800s. The Chautauquas were educational gatherings of adult learners that were originally designed to train Sunday school teachers. "By 1880 the Chautauqua platform had established itself as a national forum for open discussion of public issues, international relations, literature and science" (Chautauqua Institution, 2011). Adult education, social justice, and spirituality continued to be intertwined through the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century when Moses Coady (1882-1959) and Basil Yeaxlee (1883-1967) were leaders in the field.

Some of the earliest proponents of adult education were individuals like Coady (1939) and Yeaxlee (1925) who were spiritually-oriented adult educators. Fisher (1997) claimed Lindeman also was influenced by a spiritual motivation, although Lindeman would go on to distinguish himself and help shape the field of adult education around the idea of democracy.

In one of his most ardent works, *Spiritual Values in Adult Education*, Yeaxlee (1925) noted that spiritual values are not separate from daily life. He maintained the two are enmeshed, and education, therefore, “is an affair of the spirit” (Yeaxlee, 1925, p. 38). Further, he argued that adult education is a spiritual activity because it is based on experience, or what he called “practical wisdom” (Yeaxlee, 1925, p. 57). The idea that mind, body, and spirit are interconnected aligns with more modern interpretations of adult education as a social learning paradigm that *must* consider the context (prior lived experiences) of an individual’s life in order for the learning to be meaningful.

Spiritual learning is often ignored (English, Fenwick, & Parsons, 2003). But new research is reshaping our understanding of the role spirituality plays in adult learning. Merriam et al. (2007) noted that investigation into spiritual learning has been increasing, but “the great majority of the writing has been philosophical in nature” (p. 200).

Spirituality differs from person to person and culture to culture. Tisdell (2003) looked at spirituality and noted it is commonly referred to as a personal belief in some higher purpose that helps individuals make meaning in their lives. Spirituality is different from religion because of its unique personal interpretation and because it is not formally codified. Tisdell (2001) noted that the common definition of spirituality is “the further development of self-awareness, a sense of interconnectedness, and a relationship to a higher power,” but it excludes “the connection between spirituality and a commitment to social justice education and community work” (p. 2).

The adult education learning space must be safe for dialogue. English (2000) said dialogue involves “interpersonal connections and interchanges among people that encourage and promote their spiritual development” (p. 34). “For moments of spiritual learning to occur there must be space in the learning environment” (Merriam et al., 2007,



p. 204). Creating a safe learning space is also one of the tenets of Vella's (2000) "spirited epistemology" (p. 7).

Tisdell (2001) suggested that American culture is becoming more diverse culturally, thereby prompting the need for more diverse forms of education (pp. 4-5). "Spirituality is about how people construct knowledge through largely unconscious and symbolic processes, often made concrete in art forms such as music, art, image, symbol, and ritual which are manifest culturally" (Tisdell, 2003, pp. 28-29). Anyone who knows anything about the hippys knows that music, art, image, symbol, and ritual defined the counterculture.

Adult educators have explored the transformative nature of spirituality as it relates to learning (English, 2000; Tisdell, 2001; 2003; Tisdell & Tolliver, 2001). These ideas about transformation are closely related to emancipatory ideals that empower learners through consciousness raising. It is important to remember that spirituality welcomes intuition, not just reason. Hart and Holton (1993) have gone so far as to call for critical reflection "to be released from its current confines of primarily cognitive processes" opening the door for a greater focus on the value of spiritual learning (p. 255). "A truly comprehensive concept of emancipatory education needs to include an understanding of the noncognitive dimensions of transformative education as well" (Hart & Holton, 1993, pp. 237-238).

Vella (2000) indicated that thinking of learners as subjects of their own learning, as Gaskin did, is revolutionary. She called for teachers to use a spirited epistemology wherein the teacher is accountable to the learner; the learner contextualizes learning in his or her own life; and the dialogue approach is utilized because the teacher is not an expert, but a helper. "A spirited epistemology simply means we design in such a way as

to listen to the adult learners' experiences and knowledge base, and to build on that which is known with that which is new" (p. 11).

#### Ecological Consciousness (non-Western Learning)

According to Merriam et al. (2007), non-Western learning typically emphasizes interdependence, specifically "communal, holistic, and informal learning" (p. 188), while Western approaches rely primarily on "cognition, individuality, autonomy, and independence of thought" (p. 188). Several educational theories that are often thought of as non-Western include those that relate to the environment. Frequently, these theories are aligned with a focus on ecological consciousness, which is the idea that everything in the universe is related. The primary difference between Western and non-Western education, according to Reagan (2008), is that Western societies equate formal schooling with education, which is not necessarily accurate. Non-Western education is sometimes considered "primitive" in relation to the formal requirements of traditional Western schooling because of its focus on civic education (Reagan, 2008, p. 250). Essentially, learning in Western countries is often focused on the individual for private gain while non-Western education is community-oriented and grounded in educating people to be good members of society. "The concept of some adults being teachers and others (presumably) being non-teachers is a somewhat alien one" in many Western traditions (Reagan, 2008, p. 250).

Hill, Wilson, and Watson (2004) defined ecology as the complex interrelatedness of all living things, including the earth. Ecology "emphasizes nonlinear, cyclical, and successional processes, limiting factors and unique opportunities, and recognizes the importance of diversity, mutualistic relationships, and margins and edges as the sites where creativity and productivity are highest" (Hill et al., 2004, p. 49). The authors went

on to note that opportunities abound for researchers in the area of learning ecology. Stressing the important need for adult educators to examine ecology, O'Sullivan (1999) went so far as to say that “The fundamental educational task of our times is to make the choice for a sustainable planetary habitat of interdependent life forms over and against the dysfunctional calling of the global competitive marketplace” (p. 2).

The planetary view of learning maintains that everything is interconnected – people, earth, and the universe (O’Sullivan, 1999). This means that when something happens to one person it can affect everyone and everything else. Therefore, the consequences of an individual’s actions are significant. Planetary education is closely aligned with ecological consciousness, which seeks an understanding of how the elements of the universe are connected. “The goal of transformative education from the [planetary] perspective is reorganization of the whole system (political, social, educational)” (Taylor, 2008, p. 9). Thinking in planetary and ecological terms forces individuals to consider their place in the world and the affect they have on everything around them. The related theories surrounding ecological consciousness focus on “quality of life, a community’s sense of place, diversity within the community and an appreciation of spirituality” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 143). All of these aspects combine to form a holistic approach to adult education.

Clover (2003b) has studied various aspects of environmental learning. She indicated that, “Environmental adult education makes concrete links between the environment and social, economic, political, and cultural aspects of people’s lives” (p. 10). Ralph St. Clair (2003) identified adult environmental learning, labeling it environmental literacy. He suggested environmental literacy is “developing and participating in the social practices likely to change the way our societies think about and

act upon ecological issues” (p. 77). Hill and Johnston (2003) noted that the language adult educators use has an effect on learners. “Language has been successfully used to exclude people and maintain power, and therefore language use can expose attitudes of alienation, separation, and dominance” (Hill & Johnston, 2003, p. 19). Negative environmental metaphors send mixed messages to learners. Hill and Johnston (2003) noted this trend:

Integrating environmental issues in our critical practice extends our ability to address concerns that adult students bring to the learning environment . . . Adult educators can foster consciousness of the value of interdependence, interconnectedness, cooperation, and valuing of diversity as central to our ability to survive and flourish in the world. (p. 17)

Hage and Rauckiene (2004) have attempted to formalize a standard interpretation of ecological consciousness by describing it as a way of thinking about the universe that moves away from human-centered ideals toward a bio-centric philosophy, which means we are all equally part of a holistic system known as the environment. Morris (2002) describes this same premise as an eco-centric philosophy. Hage and Rauckiene (2004) sense that it is a lack of bio-centric education that prevents deeper and more significant ecological thinking and call for a new curriculum to be established.

The most useful environmental education would challenge notions of human separation from and domination over the rest of nature by assisting to instill a stronger ethic of care, cooperation, and partnership building. It would include the less tangible dimensions of human/earth relations such as the emotional, inner, spiritual or inscape dimensions. (p. 65)

Morris (2002) reasons that ecological consciousness is important in education because it re-situates learners as living in concert with the world instead of dominating or damaging it. “Consciousness is not separated from the environment; the Subject is immersed in nature” (Morris, 2002, p. 571). Admittedly, consciousness is difficult to represent, but Morris (2002) suggests it can be divided into two distinct areas – the phenomenology of experience (what it feels like to be conscious) and functional aspects of neurobiology (how consciousness works).

Regardless of how consciousness is defined, Morris (2002) perceives one overriding, inescapable fact – we are all tied together in some way whether we understand the relationships or recognize the degree of interconnectivity. “Consciousness arises in co-conscious inter-relations with others and the world. We are co-conscious creatures. We are entangled in a web of consciousness” (Morris, 2002, p. 579).

What is interesting about Morris’ (2002) work is his suggestion that despite the interconnectivity of all things, we are all clearly not the same, which is where consciousness is best understood. He maintains that we are different and what is important about consciousness is recognizing the differences (co-consciousness) and our particular individual role in an eco-centric philosophy. For example, we know we are not gorillas *because of* our differences. This recognition is extremely important in the process of emancipatory learning because by highlighting our differences from each other it demonstrates how the power structure is imbalanced in favor of one group over another. At the same time, Morris (2002) concedes that humankind is anthropocentric and overcoming that fallacy can be challenging. “It is hard not to think that we are not the centre of everything. It is very difficult to move away from thinking that the earth is merely a tool for us to exploit” (Morris, 2002, p. 581).

Selby (2000) contended that a lack of ecological consciousness is a cultural problem derived from a mechanistic worldview, which views humans as separate from nature where individuals “deny ethical and moral status to other life forms and the environment” (p. 88). He labels the mechanistic worldview a “relational web” (p. 89). It is relational because all living things have intrinsic value. Our interconnectivity means we have a responsibility to the other elements in the web. Selby (2000) went on to say that green thinking is more than just environmental thinking. It includes “issues of culture, development, environmental and social justice, equity, health, and peace to be seamless and inseparable” (Selby, 2000, p. 89). Ecological consciousness takes all these facets into consideration while shining a contemptuous light on unsustainable levels of consumerism that celebrate privatization and denigrate the earth. Selby (2000) further argued that one of the reasons for the lack of ecological consciousness in society is because of a predominance of rational thinking, which values reason over intuition, and prefers thinking more than feeling. Ruethier (1983) said epistemologies like those Selby derided are “ecologically dysfunctional” because they disregard anything in the natural world that cannot be reduced to scientific explanation (pp. 89-90).

Traina (1995) argued for the value of learning using the senses. He claims learning through the senses in conjunction with nature is a “vital element in the recovery of the earth” (p. 20). But as Hage and Rauckiene (2004) pointed out, the only way to do this is to change our consciousness.

Hill et al. (2004) maintained that ecology broadens learning by taking into account non-scientific factors like morality and philosophy. Such consciousness awareness promotes deep, transformative learning.

Researchers deGuerre and Taylor (2004) proposed six principles that outline the unconventional teaching style necessary to teach ecology: “practice is primary; systems-in-environments are the primary focus; process is central; learning to learn is figural; collaboration is primary, and; reflexive understanding incorporates but goes beyond detached analysis” (pp. 67-68).

Hill et al. (2004) maintained that learning ecology contextualizes learning for the individual socially, ecologically, and spiritually. This is important, then, because learners must rely on relationships and social setting to move forward in the transformative learning process; thus, learners are forced to see themselves as part of the larger cosmology.

#### Linking Gaskin with Learning Theory

From his earliest days as an adult educator, Gaskin was a proponent of free will. He made room in his teaching for adults to determine their own paths toward self-improvement, or self-actualization. Like other humanists, Gaskin felt humans had limitless potential and he encouraged them to think outside the bounds of traditional scientific reasoning. Further, he consistently urged learners to consider the present circumstances of their lives by analyzing their previous life experiences. Gaskin understood that individuals perceive the world around them based on prior experience, and he considered his role as an adult educator to facilitate the development of the learner as a human being. The dialogue approach used by Gaskin allowed learners to elucidate their previous life experiences without them being degraded or minimized. This process revealed a type of freedom that humanists argue leads individuals to accept a responsibility to continue to excel in order to become what one is capable of becoming (Merriam et al., 2007).

Humanism is often associated with transformational learning (Knowles, 1970; Merriam et al., 2007; Rogers, 1969). The individuals who worked with Gaskin over the years came to him with their own learning goals and objectives and were seeking some type of transformative experience. Years before Mezirow (1991) developed his theory of perspective transformation based on a disorienting dilemma, Gaskin was actually helping learners through the transformative process. Gaskin's Monday Night Class (MNC) was originated in order to help individuals learn how to experience a disorienting dilemma that could lead to perspective transformation. Critical analysis of long-held beliefs and assumptions was central to the process. In the early years of MNC, psychedelic drugs were promoted as an avenue to have a life-changing experience. Gaskin later focused on spirituality as a means to perspective transformation. Toward the end of his career he attempted to help instigate transformation among learners through an understanding of ecological consciousness. In every instance, Gaskin (1970; 1972; 1974; 1977; 1978; 1996) attempted to explain to learners how altering their core beliefs and assumptions expanded their consciousness and led to transformation.

Several elements of Gaskin's work with adults promoted experiential learning (1970; 1972; 1974; 1977; 1978; 1996; 2000). Experiential learning is a method utilized by Gaskin at the Farm for the last 40 years. Learners have an experience, critically reflect on that experience, place it in context and then adapt their behavior based on the new learning. Years later, Kolb (1984) would develop his four-stage learning cycle that seems to describe the learning process of Gaskin and others. From the inception of the Farm in Tennessee, the hippys were working and learning together night and day – farming, building, and parenting, among other things, were topics of discussion and shared experience. Meanwhile, tripping remained a high priority for the hippys. Opening their



minds to new experiences with and without drugs allowed them to develop unique signs, symbols, and vocabulary associated with such experiences. These new norms helped hippys resist the dominant social norms. Fenwick (2003) indicated this resistance as a result of new learning is a type of critical cultural experiential learning.

Piaget (1973) and Vygotsky (1978) were working at the same time as Gaskin, but it is unknown if he was aware of their learning theories. He never mentioned either theorist, yet in his praxis he encouraged individuals to learn by doing and to share that knowledge with the group. Under Gaskin's guidance, the hippys were engaged in an ongoing process of assimilation and accommodation as described by Piaget (1973). Vygotsky (1978) underlined the importance of having a knowledgeable teacher to help students make meaning of what they were experiencing. Gaskin served in such a capacity for more than 40 years.

In relation to situated learning, Gaskin founded MNC to share experiences with other people who were tripping – with and without drugs – and facing a radically changing society. The class became a community of practice grounded in situative learning. The knowledge that passed between learners during these classes was integral to the development of their changing social roles. Individuals turned to each other in order to acclimate to the new social climate. The context of the 1960s counterculture had its genesis in San Francisco where Gaskin was teaching. It can be argued that the Haight-Ashbury district where MNC originated was the epicenter of the hippy counterculture movement. There could have been no better context for the alternative learning taking place at MNC. Situated learning in groups is why Gaskin's classes grew so rapidly and widely. MNC was a social event for other like-minded individuals who wanted to trip with each other. These factors led to the creation of a community of practice within the

larger MNC attendance. The context of the learning was threaded throughout the process and is important to situative learning because of the sociocultural influences that adults use to make meaning.

Learners sought out Gaskin because of his own life experiences. In the same way that he encouraged others to fulfill their potential, he also sought the same self-actualization for himself. In 2000, despite a long, satisfying career, Gaskin decided he could do more. He developed a platform of change and entered the 2000 presidential race as a member of the Green Party, an obvious indication that there was still unfinished work for him as an adult learner and as an adult educator.

Much of Gaskin's own personal learning outside academia and before MNC was self-directed. He had a few informal mentors, but primarily devised his own learning projects, conducted them, and assessed his own level of satisfaction. In fact, in an attempt to learn more about the hippys and tripping, he began MNC as a way for groups of people to get together to learn from each other's experiences. Recognizing the impact of such learning led him primarily to resort to this method of teaching and learning for the remainder of his career.

One element of self-directed learning is emancipatory learning, which requires social action as a result of critical reflection. This is where Gaskin's teaching came to rest most often. It was not enough, in most cases, for an individual to undergo a perspective transformation. Inevitably, in Gaskin's (1970, 1974, 1977, 1978, 1980, 1981, 1996; 2000) mind, that shift in perspective led to some kind of action for social justice or reform. For the learners Gaskin worked with, reform was necessary because the inequities of society were all around, including the oppression of the counterculture. Long hair, bell bottom pants, rock and roll, drugs, and free love were all actions meant to disrupt the status quo.

Gaskin's (1972) 42-state tour of the country giving lectures and holding dialogue sessions with people was a mission of education wherein he encouraged people to critically analyze society and the dominant culture. He was not speaking just to hippys and members of the counterculture, but also to *ordinary* individuals who perhaps had never before been challenged to consider alternative lifestyles or ways of being. He explained to the individuals who attended his classes that their life experiences had value and they could learn from each other to improve their own lives, their communities, and the world.

It is not clear if Gaskin was aware of Habermas' work related to critical theory, though surely during Gaskin's formal college education at San Francisco State College (SFSC) he must have encountered the work of Marx (1848) at some point. Nevertheless, Gaskin never explicitly refers to critical theory in any of his writings. But it cannot be disputed that Gaskin promoted critical theory as a means of challenging individuals to become liberated in an effort to challenge the status quo. Merriam et al. (2007) write that "one of the major tasks of a critical analysis is to uncover and expose power relationships wherein the domination of one group's interests results in the oppression of other groups" (p. 249). Critical theory provided individuals a method to critique society by examining their learning within the sociocultural milieu.

Gaskin was relentless in his praxis trying to understand how the parts formed the whole. He questioned tradition and normalcy over and over again, working around the obstacles enforced by the power structure created by the dominant class. Gaskin (1977) spoke out about this trend as early as 1976 arguing that specialization worked toward social exclusivity, when the whole life trip is about being a generalist. Gaskin favored a

holistic approach to learning that encompassed environmental, cognitive, and behavioral aspects of learning.

Spiritual learning allowed Gaskin to work outside the bounds of traditional education with all of its presupposed barriers to learning. Gaskin was careful to make a clear distinction between religion and spirituality. For those like Gaskin, who worked on the fringe of education, spirituality has always been a part of the adult learning process. Gaskin considered himself a spiritual teacher and defined what that meant clearly throughout his work. Early in his career, Gaskin worked primarily within the framework of spiritual-cultural transformative learning. He pre-dated many of the attributes that Tisdell (2003) would outline 30 years later as being significant in the practice of spiritual-cultural transformative learning, such as encouraging cross-cultural relationships, and having a teacher who is spiritually and culturally grounded in order for learners to have an authentic experience. Gaskin also worked to position learning within an environment that was community-oriented in order to ensure learners felt safe. Gaskin provides some insight into the practical application of spiritual learning as he urges individuals to consider their lives in a context that is both physical and beyond the bounds of what is scientifically tangible.

Creating a safe learning environment for dialogue was one of the primary objectives Gaskin set for himself when MNC began. The very reason he established the class was to create a place for other hippys to share tripping experiences. It was absolutely vital to the existence of the class that this space be free from judgment and preconceived ideas. Gaskin made every effort to create and recreate this space everywhere he spoke. Spirituality was often used as the vehicle to clear a path to this dialogical space because of its innate sacredness. Ultimately, Gaskin sought to create a

permanent space, the Farm, which was intended as a model society based in dialogue.

“Creating a teaching practice in which concerns for spirituality and the environment are accepted and valued for discussion is essential” (Hill & Johnston, 2003, p. 25).

Gaskin's ecological teachings stressed a mind, body, spirit synergy that traditional education discounts. Noncognitive dimensions like spirit, emotion, and intuition were encouraged by Gaskin as learners worked toward liberation. In 1971, Gaskin told a group of students at the University of Missouri that he helped guide people who wanted to be better (1972). His interest was in seeing people improve, and then helping them go out into the world to make it better.

Evidence that Gaskin utilizes ecological theory for emancipatory learning comes from his life's work. Gaskin and those who worked with him were forerunners in the realm of environmentalism, adopting low impact practices like veganism and using solar energy as a power source in the early 1970s. This integration of the environment into his spiritual teaching demonstrated the theories of ecological consciousness he would promote beginning in the early 1980s.

Gaskin was a proponent of ecological thinking as far back as MNC in the late 1960s. As an adult education practitioner, Gaskin could serve as the model for deGuerre and Taylor's (2004) principles of effective teaching of ecology. Since the beginning of his career as an adult educator, Gaskin (1970) promoted the idea that all things in the environment share energy, are interrelated, and dependent upon each other. He went a step further in his praxis by attempting to embed ecology learning into a collective consciousness.

### Linking Gaskin with Adult Educators

Eduard Lindeman (1885-1953) was a humanist adult educator. He wanted adult education to be for the people and by the people. He felt the goal of adult education was to help people make meaning in their lives (Lindeman, 1926). Much of his work focused on promoting democracy in society. Lindeman was influenced heavily in his thinking by John Dewey's (1916) work and insisted that adult education should be humanistic, voluntary, and require no tests. Lindeman (1926) proposed four assumptions that have guided the field of adult education for more than 50 years. These assumptions include education is life; adult education is non-vocational; adult education is situative (utilizing group discussion), and; adult learning should be based on prior experiences. Lindeman (1926) argued that the point of adult education is social action. He maintained that all social groups should also be adult education groups and will eventually become about social action.

Gaskin's adult education work is aligned with the founding assumptions about adult learning put forth by Lindeman (1926), but it is unlikely that Gaskin was aware of Lindeman's work. Lindeman died a decade before Gaskin began his adult education praxis and Gaskin never mentions Lindeman in any of his books. Nevertheless, Gaskin can be placed in the radical adult educator orientation along with Lindeman. Both men believed that adult learning was more than just the acquisition of knowledge. Lindeman felt adult education was for social action. Gaskin was never this clear although much of his work was intended to lead to social action. It could be argued, however, that founding the Farm in Tennessee was a collective form of social action undertaken by Gaskin and other adult learners. Gaskin's teaching is a clear example of Lindeman's declaration that all adult education groups eventually become about social action. Gaskin's Monday night

classes began his foray into adult education in the late 1960s, and as he progressed in his thinking, he became more reform minded and inclined toward social action, as did those who worked with him.

Gaskin, like Lindeman, relied on learner-centered objectives in his practice. “The essence of [Lindeman’s] curriculum philosophy was that the instructor should engage in discovering what adults were prepared to learn rather than determining what should be taught” (Stewart, 1987, pp. 154-155). Engaging learners to determine their needs was the model of Monday Night Class. Further, Lindeman (1926) argued that the “focus should be on learning rather than the tools for learning” (p. 155). Lindeman believed the teacher should be a facilitator who “draws out the learning skills of the individual” (p. 159). In order to do this effectively, he advocated for the group discussion method. These are Gaskin’s methods entirely – group discussion based on experiential learning with a nudge from the teacher from time to time.

John Dewey (1859-1952) was a social constructivist working within the education discipline at the same time as Lindeman. Dewey, too, predated Gaskin, but Dewey is widely regarded and quoted as an early education theorist. Gaskin never specifically mentions Dewey, but it is difficult to imagine that Gaskin was not aware of the education pioneer. Gaskin had two English degrees from SFSC and must have encountered Dewey’s work at some point during his formal college career. Whether he was aware of Dewey’s work or not, parallels can be drawn between the two men and their ideas related to constructivism. Dewey (1916) believed that learning occurred based on experiences derived from specific social situations in a person’s life and what resulted from such experiences. “Education is thus a fostering, a nurturing, a cultivating, process” (Dewey, 1916, “The Nature and Meaning of Environment,” para. 1). Dewey went on to explain

that experience is not cognitive, it is doing something and undergoing the consequences of that action. The value of the experience lies in its interpretation and understanding (meaning). Half a century later, Gaskin based all of his educational foundations on this principle, telling a Minnesota group on Halloween night in 1970, “The only kind of learning comes from actual experience” (1972, p. 18). Gaskin’s teaching was all about doing, experiencing, living. He urged learners to live in the present and to analyze their experiences in context. “Being a hippy means being a doer” (Gaskin, 2000, p. 37).

Paulo Freire (1921-1997) was a champion for emancipatory learning and social change. He believed the teacher and learner shared the learning task and should work together through dialogue to meet their respective learning objectives. He is highly regarded as a leader in the field of transformational learning and a proponent of social action as a result of such learning. He labeled the process of becoming aware of oppression by a dominant force as conscientization. Freire and Gaskin were contemporaries, living and working during the same time. However, much of Freire’s (2000) work was done internationally through formal channels whereas most of Gaskin’s work was done informally with adults in America. Despite having similar goals, neither man ever indicated in writing that he was aware of the other’s work, which is not surprising since Gaskin was consistently overlooked as a scholar and Freire’s popularity was just beginning in the 1970s with the publication of his seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000).

Throughout Gaskin’s career working with adults he urged learners to not only improve themselves, but to consider how their actions and those of the dominant culture affected everything else. He wanted individuals to see how their actions fit into the whole. He wanted them to find value in their experiences and place them in a social



context. This ecological consciousness raising is a major theme of his work. He was adamant that learners consider the notion of gestalt, “that the whole is more than the sum of its parts” (1972, p. 131). To do this he encouraged learners to think critically about themselves and their surroundings and evaluate that status quo. This is also sometimes referred to as situated learning. This methodology was similar to Freire’s. Freire (2000) problematized learning by situating it in the lives of his learners. He used the language and situations in the learners lives to promote learning. Gaskin, too, problematized learning to highlight the transformative nature of learning. Through the Monday night classes, dialogue, and experiential learning activities, individuals in the counterculture were able to collaborate and find new ways to move forward with their social reform agendas.

Although Gaskin’s work was similar to Freire’s, it has never been analyzed through the lens of adult education. Perhaps working with hippys, smoking marijuana, and talking about spirituality diminishes Gaskin’s work somehow when compared to the struggle of poor, illiterate farmers in Brazil that Freire worked with. But Gaskin’s teaching and learning with counterculture individuals seems equivalent to what Freire (1970) terms a culture of silence. The struggle for liberation among any marginalized group cannot be downplayed. The staunch resistance by those in power to relinquish any power is exactly what Gaskin worked against for more than four decades using the same emancipatory learning principles as famed and lauded adult educator Freire.

Gaskin engaged learners to think for themselves and critically reflect on their experiences in context by challenging the assumptions in their lives based on new learning. Additionally, he offered guidance and wisdom gained from his own personal experiences. He advocated for peace, women's rights, the legalization of marijuana, and

ecology consciousness because these were problems he and others faced in their daily lives. He felt that individuals could work to resolve these societal issues by embarking on a learning journey together as co-learners to critically analyze and discover that which was keeping individuals oppressed, and then acting in concert to change the status quo.

Moses Coady (1882-1959) was a Roman Catholic priest who helped found the Antigonish movement in Canada in the 1920s and 1930s. He was doing the work of adult education before Gaskin was born. Welton (2001) has called Coady “one of our foremost philosophers of adult education” (p. 137). The socially minded priest first worked to organize farmers and fishermen in Nova Scotia because he wanted people to have control of their own destinies instead of being forced to rely on the oppressive institutions in place at the time (Coady, 1939). Fishermen had no control over the price they were paid for their catch. Coady showed them that by working together they could control their own prices and improve their lot. He used emancipatory learning techniques to guide the fishermen toward this economic liberation.

Although much of Gaskin’s adult education work revolved around spirituality, he never mentioned Coady in his writing. Such a fact is not surprising. Coady worked almost exclusively in Canada during his career and was not a prolific writer. Further, Coady and Gaskin approached adult education from opposing perspectives related to spirituality. Coady (1939) said he worked with fishermen in the area of economic equality in order to enable the individuals to become more spiritual. Gaskin’s work in adult education was based in spirituality and sought to liberate individuals in order to make society more equitable.

Basil Yeaxlee (1883-1967) studied to be a minister in the Congregationalist church in England, and began working for the Young Men’s Christian Association

(YMCA) there during World War I. He went on to chart a course for the future of adult education programming with social justice incentives. His book, *Lifelong Education*, was one of the first attempts at explaining adult education. In his later work, Yeaxlee (1925) argued that spirituality is part of human daily life and all education is infused with such spirituality. Although Gaskin gave no indication that he had read or studied Yeaxlee's books, Gaskin would have agreed with Yeaxlee's declarations about spirituality. Both men felt that life was a spiritual event and analyzing it provided a basis for self-improvement and creating a better society through cooperation (Gaskin, 1970, 1972, 1974, 1977, 1978, 1996, 2000; Yeaxlee, 1925). Ideas proposed by Yeaxlee (1925), such as the mind, body, and spirit connection resurfaced in the 1960s and 1970s with practitioners like Gaskin who insisted that holistic learning, which included mind, body, and spirit be integrated into an emancipatory learning framework.

## CHAPTER III

### PRAXIS

Praxis is commonly defined as “action with reflection” (Vella, 2002, p. 11). Vella is a champion for the philosophy that adults learn by doing. She feels that by participating in the learning, adults process what they are doing and learn from that experience whether they realize it or not. Praxis, then, becomes an ongoing process of refinement. Adults are continuously analyzing their skills, beliefs, and techniques, and revising them. Vella believes adult education can be a liberating experience that provides learners an opportunity to practice new ideas. Gaskin designed his adult education work in the spirit of discovery and praxis.

#### Gaskin as an Adult Educator

Gaskin began his long tenure as an adult educator by accident. He had been teaching writing classes at his alma mater, San Francisco State College (SFSC), when he became interested in the emerging counterculture movement. In an attempt to understand more about the hippys and their lifestyle, particularly tripping, Gaskin began holding weekly rap sessions—informal gatherings of people to discuss common interests – through SFSC's Experimental College.

The Experimental College was one of many educational experiments in higher education at the time. Students were given the authority to devise topics and teach classes based on their own interests. Rojas (2007) noted that students were enabled to “define their own education” at the Experimental College (p. 60). He goes on to say that the loose structure of the Experimental College at SFSC allowed for the ultimate development of new academic programs, like Black Studies, that did not exist in mainstream higher education at the time.

San Francisco and the Haight-Ashbury district of the city figure prominently in the birth of the hippy counterculture movement. Young people, tired of the staid Eisenhower years, were beginning to rebel against the conformity of American culture post World War II. LeDoux (1992) noted that young people in the mid-1960s felt alienated from society and joined together to change it. Dissent was apparent in music, art, literature etc. The growing counterculture began to oppose the Establishment and its power structure. “Because they did not find answers to their fundamental questions in their families or in the universities they attended, these young people were drawn to alternative modes of thought in their quest for truth” (LeDoux, 1992, p. 15).

Small pockets of these counterculture individuals around the country began getting together to collaborate musically and artistically. Then, in January 1967, a Human Be-In was held at Golden Gate Park in San Francisco. The event was billed as a “gathering of tribes” (Wesson, 2011, p. 155). Tens of thousands of young people travelled to the city to be part of the happening; many never left. That summer, 1967, became known as the Summer of Love, and it solidified San Francisco as the epicenter of the counterculture movement.

Also working in San Francisco’s favor as being the hub of the counterculture movement was the introduction of recreational psychedelic drug use. Wesson (2011) notes that many of the people who came to San Francisco at the time wanted to find answers to moral and spiritual questions that were outside the traditional norms of established religions. These young people were anti-war, anti-materialism, and favored minimal drug laws, all of which were threats to the established power structure at the time. Wesson (2011) noted their frustration with the status quo and their desire to find an alternative:

They were seeking a lifestyle different from the mainstream culture, one that deemphasized consumerism and military imperialism, one that was in principle communal but also in some ways remained staunchly individualistic that would allow everyone to do their own thing. (p. 155)

One way these individuals found to expand their consciousness was through psychedelic drugs like lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD, also known informally as acid) and other natural hallucinogenic substances like peyote. Many among the throng of those who would become known as hippys believed psychedelics led to transcendental experiences and ushered forth a spiritual enlightenment. Gaskin (1972) counts himself among those who had a spiritual conversion through the use of psychedelic drugs, claiming that he was inspired by his visions on acid. He was an early adopter of psychedelic drug use and much of his teaching is based on reaching a level of consciousness that can be obtained through psychedelics, though he acknowledges there are also other ways of reaching this altered state, including spirituality.

Wesson (2011), a medical doctor who has used and studied psychedelic drugs, said drugs like LSD and peyote have dramatic effects that contribute to enhanced sensory perceptions, along with mind-altering capabilities that can result in visual hallucinations. “The changes in perception and consciousness are often associated with the sense that one is looking beyond ordinary perception and seeing things as they ‘really’ are for the first time” (Wesson, 2011, p. 156). This heightened sensation of the senses is exactly the mood and state of consciousness the counterculture was trying to discover in order to view society in a new way. “They blended Eastern mysticism, Native American rituals and psychedelic drug use into what would variously be called the hippy movement or the psychedelic drug counterculture” (Wesson, 2011, p. 154). Coupled with the search for a

new spiritual path, the mind altering drugs opened up new possibilities for how society might work together to overcome war, consumerism, and privatization.

The hippys evolved from the Beats, who were prominent during the 1950s and 1960s (Spates & Levin, 1972). Beatniks “stressed artistic self-expression and a rejection of the mores of conventional society” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online, 2011). In fact, Gaskin (2000) refers to making this conversion himself, going from coffee shop-owning Beat to hippy after experimenting with psychedelic drugs. Gaskin (2000) said he was interested in hippys because “they looked at the world in a fresh way and thought how it should be” (p. 40). They challenged authority and the status quo, something Gaskin had been thinking about since childhood.

When I was a child I used to hope for calamities because the world seemed so sewed up and frozen in the status quo. I longed for an earthquake or a blizzard so the world would be malleable. When I became a hippy my fondest dreams had come true. The world was up for grabs. (Gaskin, 2000, p. 17)

The first time Gaskin dropped acid “his mind rumbled because he was an educated American who had been taught to believe in an American worldview that took progress for granted” (p. 24). The acid made him realize the status quo was optional and this led to his understanding of the spiritual plane. “I realized all that stuff in the Bible was the truth and the Sermon on the Mount was not just goody-goody Boy Scout instructions but a technical manual about how to survive at a certain level” (LeDoux, 1992, pp. 24-25). Gaskin went on to say his past experiences and new found understanding of life’s questions led him to begin his counterculture adult learning class, which came to be known simply as Monday Night Class (MNC).

The term hippy is believed to have been a derivation of the word “hep,” which appeared in the lexicon just before World War II. Hep was slang and is roughly equivalent to saying something is “cool.” Over time, hep was modified to hip during the rise of the Beats, and, eventually, became hippy as individuals broke away from the stoicism of the Beats and began experimenting with psychedelic drugs (Hippies, 1967). Martin E. Marty, a theologian who was teaching at the University of Chicago during the origination of the hippys described them then as “spiritually motivated crusaders striking at the values of straight society where it is most vulnerable: its lack of soul” (Hippies, para. 14). Other scholars (Spates & Levin, 1972) noted that hippys believed people should be honest with each other in “social, psychological and sexual encounters” (p. 332).

During the late 1960s, many people were having a difficult time understanding who the hippys were and what they wanted. The editors of *Time* magazine attempted to define hippys in a cover story published in July 1967 as the counterculture movement gained prominence across the country.

Hippies preach altruism and mysticism, honesty, joy and nonviolence. They find an almost childish fascination in beads, blossoms and bells, blinding strobe lights and ear-shattering music, exotic clothing and erotic slogans. Their professed aim is nothing less than the subversion of Western society by "flower power" and force of example. (Hippies, 1967, para. 2)

The definition of hippy that most closely fits Gaskin’s interpretation of hippys, and the distinction that will be used throughout this dissertation, also comes from the editors at *Time* magazine:



[hippies] are mostly young and generally thoughtful Americans who are unable to reconcile themselves to the stated values and implicit contradictions of contemporary Western society, and have become internal émigrés, seeking individual liberation through means as various as drug use, total withdrawal from the economy and the quest for individual identity. (Hippies, 1967, para. 4)

Thirty years after founding MNC, Gaskin (2000) wrote that “the vast majority of hippys were folks who had school, and families, and homes, and jobs, and could only afford to do it part time. But they still had that ideal” (p. 41). Later he expounded on the definition saying that “hippys are a continuing strain of artists, writers, musicians, activists, socially conscious folks, and folks who are on the fringe and see ways that society could be doing better and are trying to do something about it” (Gaskin, 2000, p. 43).

Gaskin frequently referred to MNC as a place to learn the instructions for tripping. The meaning of the word “tripping” has evolved over time. In the 1960s, hippys used the word to indicate someone who was out of their mind, usually someone high on psychedelic drugs. The *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (2011) indicates tripping is slang and refers to an individual experiencing hallucinations induced by psychedelic drugs. The word tripping was used openly by hippys. At the time, connotations of the word varied depending on the individual. To some, the word was concrete, indicating an individual was experiencing the effects of psychedelic drugs, most notably LSD. To others, tripping was used more moderately and indicated an individual was in an altered state of awareness—drug-induced or not. Many counterculture individuals used the word to indicate a profound, mind-opening, experience even when drugs were not involved. Gaskin often referred to tripping in his work, most often meaning that individuals were in

a state of mind that was receptive to new experiences that could challenge an individual's core values. More recently, the word tripping has come to symbolize someone who overreacts about insignificant matters, and tripping has acquired a more negative tone.

The rap sessions Gaskin led at MNC covered a variety of topics determined by those in attendance. Subjects like tripping, peace, love, sex, drugs, God, telepathy, ecology, and the astral plane—a dimension not bound by the laws of the physical world, a spirit world—were common in those early meetings. Gaskin served as facilitator of MNC in San Francisco for five years before touring the country doing the same thing at churches, town halls, and universities in 42 states. In 1971, Gaskin and hundreds of other hippys settled an intentional community south of Nashville, TN where he continues his work advocating for social justice issues.

Gaskin refers to himself as a teacher infrequently in his writing, but it is clear that he meets many of the generally accepted criteria for being labeled an adult educator including (a) working expressly with adults his entire career; (b) serving as a facilitator and mentor to tens of thousands of adults over the years personally and through his writing in response to the individual's needs, not his own; (c) participating in the teaching-learning transaction himself, becoming a learner alongside those he was working with; (d) establishing safe learning environments, creating spaces where adults were free to explore without reproach or condemnation; and (e) stressing experiential learning through dialogue (Knowles, 1970; Lindeman, 1926; Merriam et al., 2007; Vella, 2002). Gaskin (1972) said that he became a teacher because someone needed to do it, he was willing, and all of his teachings were based on his own life experience. "I got to a place where I gave advice on how to trip, and then I found out life was a trip" (p. 129).

Becoming a good teacher requires patience, practice, and experience. Zinn (1999) argued that we all have some sort of life philosophy that guides us. This life philosophy helps us select content, create objectives, choose materials, and so on. “Methods of education emerge from individual and/or shared perceptions of how things are and how they should be” (Zinn, 1999, p. 41). From early on, Gaskin (1970) had been concerned with an ecology consciousness, which he equated with a balance of the body, mind, and universe. His co-mingling of religious ideas and broad notions of spirituality helped guide his practice and inform his teaching.

Conti (1999) defined teaching style as an individual’s qualities that remain the same no matter the content. He identified two teaching styles: teacher-centered and learner-centered. Teacher-centered is the most dominant method, but adult educators are typically learner-centered. The emphasis in learner-centered teaching styles is to focus on the learner, not the content. Teacher-centered styles are concerned with measurable objectives. Gaskin's (1972) objectives were somewhat more difficult to measure. “What I teach is how to be groovy in the here and now by understanding the situation so you can work with it intelligently” (p. 83). Nevertheless, Gaskin was concerned with approaching learners from their perspective in order to meet their individual goals.

Good teachers need to take into account that adults are practical learners who come to situations with vast amounts of previous experience. Respect for learners and using the dialogue approach in learning activities are two important components of being a successful teacher of adults. Additionally, teachers should recognize that not all learners are the same. Using a variety of teaching techniques to cater to the different learning styles will help facilitate the teaching-learning transaction. Instructors can lecture, show

videos, use handouts, role play, have learners complete journals, do group projects, roll joints, etc.

Gaskin (1996) found that marijuana often aids in the learning process by enabling dialogue. He has said that when called to mediate disputes or counsel couples, he frequently rolls joints until each person can tell their story without interruption. The variety of teaching techniques offered to adult learners takes into account different learning styles and allows each individual an opportunity to excel in a manner that is consistent with the learning objectives.

The basic premise threaded throughout Parker Palmer's (1998) book about the inner-life of teachers, *Courage to Teach*, speaks to the authenticity required of teachers in the learning space. "Good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher" (p. 10). This idea is central to Palmer's philosophy and Gaskin's own praxis. Palmer downplayed the relevance of content and subject matter, stressing the importance of the role played by the teacher in guiding the learner toward a self-identified goal. "No matter how we devote ourselves to reading and research, teaching requires a command of content that always eludes our grasp" (p. 2). This admission places even more emphasis on the idea that the self-discovery of the teacher is vital to establishing a successful learning environment. It is Palmer's belief that the more we learn about ourselves, the better teachers we become. Gaskin (1972) recognized this early in his career, which is one of the reasons he began MNC. He wanted to benefit from the shared learning experiences of the "group mind" to expand his own knowledge about tripping, as well as others (p. 14).

From the outset of his teaching career, Gaskin avoided prescriptive content. He preferred to allow the learners to determine their own objectives. He spent his free time in

the early days reading about a variety of topics to educate himself and make himself more available to the needs of his students. He had always been a fan of science fiction stories, but once MNC was underway Gaskin felt the need to broaden his understanding of the world. He read about “religion, magic, superstition, ecology, extrasensory perception, fairy tales, collective unconscious, folkways, and math and physics” (Gaskin, 1972, p. 127).

One of Gaskin’s favorite authors was Aldous Huxley (1894-1963). In 1954, Huxley detailed his own experiences under the influence of psychedelic drugs in *The Doors of Perception*. Huxley, like Gaskin, was interested in spiritual matters and thought psychedelics might help reveal his consciousness to himself. Huxley ingested mescaline, the psychedelic property in peyote, as an experiment and chronicled his experience in the book. Huxley said he was surprised to discover the drug did not give him hallucinations as he thought it would. Instead, he noted that his perception of reality was clarified on a much deeper psychological level – potentially an expansion of consciousness. “The great change was in the realm of objective fact” (Huxley, 1990, p. 17). Gaskin latched onto Huxley’s ideas and began to explore psychedelic effects himself. In fact, Gaskin wrote a similar book, *Haight Ashbury Flashbacks* (1990), which described his experiences using LSD and other mind altering drugs.

Perhaps one of the most important elements of Gaskin as an adult educator was his insistence on a safe, uninhibited learning environment. Since the inception of MNC, Gaskin worked to create a space for people to learn that was nurturing and allowed for experimentation, deviation from the norm, exploration of radical ideas, and success and failure – a space to become whole. Vogel (2000) calls this “holding challenge and support in creative tension” (p. 20). Gaskin was all at once encouraging learners toward

transformation, yet he was with them on the learning journey, supporting them when they needed his guidance.

Gaskin has never been easy to define. He served in combat during the Korean War, but now identifies himself as a conscientious objector to war. In prison, he was punished with solitary confinement because he refused to wear leather boots, a stance against the killing of animals. And, he said, even though he was seen as a flower-child, reefer-smoking member of the spiritual Left, among hippys he was considered a moderate-conservative (Gaskin, 1996).

Describing Gaskin as an adult educator is not as difficult. He exhibited traits in three of Zinn's (1999) five philosophical orientations for adult educators, progressive, humanist, and radical. Zinn (1999) described five philosophical orientations of adult educators, but noted that often discrepancies exist between what we say and what we do as adult educators. This dissonance can be explained partly by the idea of espoused theory versus theory-in-use, a concept first proposed by Argyris and Schön (1974) when they suggested that:

When someone is asked how he would behave under certain circumstances, the answer he usually gives is his espoused theory of action for that situation. This is the theory of action to which he gives allegiance, and which, upon request, he communicates to others. However, the theory that actually governs his actions is his theory-in-use, which may or may not be compatible with his espoused theory; furthermore, the individual may or may not be aware of the incompatibility of the two theories. (pp. 6-7)

Zinn's five orientations are liberal, behaviorist, progressive, humanistic and radical. Gaskin was a progressive seeking to help learners develop practical problem-

solving skills in order to enact social change. But he was a humanist and a radical adult educator also, working with adults to grow and develop as individuals while encouraging them to work toward social change through emancipatory education.

Zinn maintains that if adult educators can understand their own orientation they will better minimize bias in the classroom. Gaskin never self-identified as a type of educator, though in the 1970s he considered himself similar to other progressive thinkers like Buckminster Fuller, a renaissance thinker who popularized geodesic domes. Gaskin most likely was unaware of such orientations but worked diligently to remove bias from the learning environment, consistently urging individual's to think about others. "Everybody's responsible a little bit for somebody else's trip" (Gaskin, 1970).

It is easy to place Gaskin among other progressive educators throughout history who have sought social change. Lindeman (1926) was a major figure in progressive education circles in the early part of the last century, working to spread the notion of democracy through adult education. To enact social change, progressive education uses a problem-solving methodology, which poses problems and sets learners to the task of defining the problem and working through it by practical means. Learners are immediately immersed in the learning because it is representative of their daily lives. In this orientation, the learner's needs and prior life experience are crucial to the learning equation. Working in groups helps facilitate the learning because each individual brings something unique to the collaboration. The teacher is an organizer and a guide in the progressive philosophy.

We also find Gaskin among those humanists who see personal growth and development as the objectives of learning. Gaskin wanted individuals to be better individuals for the sake of strengthening society. Essentially, the idea was that individual

betterment would ultimately lead to a more improved society. This collective spirit was often mistaken for a Communist point of view, which Gaskin worked hard to dispel (LeDoux, 1992). He specifically did not want the Farm to be called a commune for this reason. Instead he insisted that it be called an intentional community (Gaskin, 1974). In fact, the original organization papers listed the Farm as a monastery in order to avoid paying Tennessee property taxes (LeDoux, 1992).

Malcolm Knowles (1970) was the leading humanist in adult education. Humanists prefer to use experiential group learning as the dominant methodology. In this case, learners are self-motivated and teachers are facilitators meant to help learners examine and make sense of their own experiences. Gaskin's initial foray into adult education emerged in this tradition of self-motivated adults seeking to learn from their life experiences. Counterculture individuals began attending MNC in droves in order to talk about their experiences. Gaskin facilitated the weekly discussions and offered guidance based on his own experience and education. Classes often proceeded with Gaskin giving some brief, opening remarks and then taking questions from members of the group.

Radical education seeks to challenge the status quo. Gaskin was situated comfortably in this orientation. He worked tirelessly, as other radicals do, to change the dominant culture and power structure of society in order to make it more equitable for everyone. Freire (1972, 2000) was a guiding force for radical educators and helped define the dialogue approach that is favored by radicals. The dialogue approach sets the teacher and learner as equal co-learners working together to transfer knowledge toward a goal of personal liberation and social action. The learner, therefore, is on equal par with the teacher, who instead of guiding or controlling, provokes the learner to act upon his or her own accord.



Jane Vella (2002) has written extensively about adult education and its praxis throughout the world. She has identified 12 principles for adult learning to be effective. Vella, like Gaskin, was a proponent of the dialogue approach in her teaching. She strove to create safe learning environments and established a relationship with each learner in order to erase the barriers between student and teacher that often prohibit learning. As further evidence of Gaskin's role as an adult educator, three of Vella's 12 principles for effective adult learning are presented to elucidate briefly how Gaskin facilitates such learning.

#### *Needs Assessment*

A needs assessment establishes a foundation for any adult education class. Determining what learners want and need out of the class is the most vital aspect of any adult education endeavor. "Doing an adequate needs assessment is a basic principle of adult learning" (Vella, 2002, p. 4). The key is talking to the learners and listening to discover what they want to learn. Understanding what the learner wants and needs is what will make adult education classes successful. From the needs assessment, an adult educator can develop content related to the issues learners are interested in learning. This type of learning actively engages learners in the process of learning. "As a teacher I need to discover what they know and what they think they need or want to know" (Vella, 2002, p. 5). Gaskin was always cognizant of the importance of helping learners assess their own needs. His classes were learner-centered and driven by questions raised by the individuals in the classes he taught.

#### *Immediacy*

Another important principle described by Vella was immediacy. Adults do not have time to waste. The learning needs to be relevant and immediately practical;

otherwise, adults may not sustain interest in the learning activities, nor remain in the learning environment. Vella (2002) said adults want to know they can use information immediately. One way to do this is by using situated learning techniques like integrating learning into the learner's work or life. Gaskin's classes addressed the current topics of the day that were affecting his students. Weekly sessions discussed tripping, sex, social roles, music, war, etc. Learners were immersed in the learning because it was situated in their everyday lives.

### *Accountability*

Vella looked at accountability from a variety of lenses that are all learner-centered. "The design of learning events must be accountable to the learners" (Vella, 2002, p. 21). If adult educators make accountability their ultimate goal, it stands to reason that they should meet the learner's needs above all else. This idea positions accountability as a primary guide for adult educators. Adult education should not be driven by content, but by the process. Vella (2002) suggests that what is most important about accountability for adult educators is that the learner should learn what the learner wants to learn. Gaskin promoted such learner-driven efforts in his work. Individuals attended MNC to make meaning of experiences that related to them personally. The learners themselves determined the learning objectives of each class. Gaskin worked with them to interpret and contextualize their learning in terms they could understand in order to meet their needs.

We have very little measurable outcomes assessment regarding Gaskin's work. He never handed out satisfaction surveys and any evidence from former students is anecdotal. No scholarly studies have been done gauging the success or failure of his social justice efforts although LeDoux (1992) did examine the successes and failures of

the Farm as an intentional community. All we have is anecdotal evidence that the counterculture did, in fact, change the world to some degree. This, in and of itself, is not sufficient to make a reasonable assumption as to the level of accountability Gaskin exhibited among learners; however, it is clear that learners continued to seek Gaskin's guidance for decades. Suffice it to say, that he got his message out there and hundreds of thousands of individuals over almost half a century have benefited from his tireless generosity to humankind and the universe. Gaskin (1977) made his point succinctly:

Now there is a tremendous body of information among you, hundreds of hours of shared communication about the nature of the mind and subconscious and the body and the energy and love and psychology; and if you don't interflow it among yourselves and test it in your daily life by testing things they say are supposed to work, and use them, then you are not using the teachings. (p. 127)

Knowles (1970) proposed the theory of andragogy around the same time Gaskin was doing MNC. Gaskin never makes mention of Knowles or andragogy in his writing and there is nothing to suggest that either man knew of the other. Yet, Gaskin's work meets many of Knowles' assumptions about adult learning. Knowles essentially said that adults become more self-directed as they develop, that they draw from past experience to help make decisions about the present and the future, that they choose to learn based on their need to develop in social roles, and that they want learning to be immediately applicable in their lives. Later, Knowles would say that adults are also motivated to learn internally, and that they want to know why they are learning. These assumptions have been challenged by others, but provide a general foundation to compare Gaskin's work with adults.

Participation in all of Gaskin's classes was voluntary, participants were adults talking about their experiences, objectives were determined by the learners, an adult learning environment was clearly established, informal as it were, the learning was situated in the lives of the learners and was immediately useful in their everyday lives. If any of these factors had been absent from Gaskin's praxis, it is unlikely he would have been successful as an adult educator. He seemed to intuit what learners needed and remained flexible enough in his approach that he was able to complement their learning.

One should also remember that Gaskin was an adult learner himself. He was just as eager to learn about spirituality and emancipatory practices as those who attended MNC. Hunt (1998) reasons that spirituality has a place in education because of its reflective nature. He refers to the type of reflective learning undertaken by Gaskin as "the mapping of different vantage points reached on various learning journeys. . ." (Hunt, 1998, para. 5). Reflection can also have broader, far-reaching implications. Habermas (1971) said self-reflection "makes real the unity of intuition and emancipation" from domination (p. 287). It was this consciousness raising that Gaskin focused on as an adult educator and as an adult learner.

For both Freire (1970) and Habermas (1971), self-designed learning is key to the transformative process. Morrow and Torres (2002) expanded that vision by claiming that learners must devise their own objectives in relation to the context of their lives otherwise there is no impetus to transform or enact social change. Gaskin sought to establish a praxis that urged individuals to break free from the dominant culture based on the issues they encountered in their daily lives. Such an idea was not new. Marx wrote about revolutionary praxis as a transformative theory (Feuer, 1959). He posited that consciousness raising led to emancipation, but he devalued the social aspects of learning

(Feuer, 1959). Freire and Habermas, however, felt social considerations must be part of the learning transaction. To be fair, Marx was writing about economics and labor while Freire and Habermas were focused on education.

Gaskin brought the social aspects of the hippy lifestyle to the forefront in his praxis. His praxis progressed through open dialogue where he positioned himself and others as co-learners, a radical idea at the time. He went further outside mainstream education by teaching learners to critically analyze society and their own roles in the perpetuation of the status quo (Gaskin, 1970; 1972; 1974; 1978; 1980; 1981; 1996; 2000).

Gaskin proposed that hippys were being manipulated by those in power, and he wanted to equalize that dissonance. His goal was to establish a subject-subject relationship, where the object became some third thing to be manipulated, not the hippys themselves. This is what Freire (1973) called “intersubjectivity” (p. 136). Freire maintains that the subject-subject design insists on communication and shared thinking, instead of opposition. Dialogue establishes this trust between subjects because of a shared sense of commonality. Meaningful communication ensures mutual understanding.

One of the assumptions of this project is that hippys were part of a culture of silence as defined by Freire (1970). The notion of a culture of silence has micro and macro implications for learners. In addition to the generalized interpretation of an oppressed group being silenced by the majority, Morrow and Torres (2002) argue that the silence Freire refers to is a “false consciousness” (p. 102). Essentially, the authors maintain that individuals do not know the value of their experiences until that value is revealed through dialogue. Gaskin worked toward this goal of overcoming false

consciousness and, in fact, sometimes referred to psychedelic trips as revelations (Gaskin, 1974, p. 3).

Antidialogical actions of the dominant class undermine the oppressed classes and create the culture of silence (Morrow & Torres, 2002). The authors identify four common practices that create a culture of silence, three of which Gaskin faced routinely in his work. The four characteristics of a culture of silence include (a) the establishment of domination by force; (b) the divide and rule tactic that examines small problems disassociated from the whole of society; (c) manipulation through negative communication, and; (d) cultural invasion, which denigrates alternative ideas by reinforcing the status quo (Morrow & Torres, 2002). Groups or individuals living under such circumstances first need to become aware of such oppression and this is what Gaskin, Freire, and others worked toward through the process of conscientization. “Conscientization, which is identified with cultural action for freedom, is the process by which in the subject-object relationship. . . the subject finds the ability to grasp, in critical terms, the dialectical unity between self and object” (Freire, 1985, p. 160).

Jarvis (1987) noted that individuals learn through critically analyzing experiences, which are contextualized by society and the learner’s environment. Kolb (1984) suggested that “knowledge is created through the transformation of experience”, noting that it is about how content and experience work to influence each other (p. 38). Coady (1939), too, used experimentation as his primary adult education praxis. Lindeman (1926) said education can supply energy for collective enterprises “by developing a method for social functions which will make the collective life an educational experience” (p. 97). These two statements combined form the basis of Gaskin’s praxis. Van der Veen (1993) went on to say that community education aids community practice “by stimulating a

reflective/critical attitude, by stimulating (sociological) imagination, by mediation with the culture at large” (p. 193). Gaskin and his work over the last 40 years is a prime example of Van der Veen’s assessment. “If you apprehend the universe more subtly, you get a more subtle universe back” (Gaskin, 1972, p. 79).

Freire (Shor & Freire, 1987) said emancipatory learning has a place in social movements, though sometimes it is not realized. Frequently, the process of emancipatory learning is catalyzed through problem-posing education. The point of problem posing education is to have learners actively participating in their own learning by relating to the content of their daily lives. The hippys needed Gaskin for this reason. He helped them overcome their traditional dependent learning so they could think for themselves. Like the disenfranchised Brazilians that Freire worked with, Gaskin’s students had to transform themselves through experience – a hallmark of adult learning.

#### Moses in Blue Jeans

Freire (1970) wanted to change society through education. He felt by raising the consciousness of individuals, learners could put that new knowledge into practice for social justice. His goal was to liberate individuals so they could then improve society. Gaskin shared many of the same ideals as Freire. The two men had similar emancipatory goals, and both believed the dialogue approach was most effective for adult learners. Where they differ slightly is in their methodologies. Freire worked with oppressed individuals using literacy as a means of emancipatory education while Gaskin worked with hippys using spirituality and ecology consciousness as his guiding principles.

Gaskin has been known as a spiritual teacher, an evangelist, an American hippy philosopher, and a “teacher of humility, simplicity, and peace” (Conover, 1975; Education, 1981; Hall, 1979; McCleary, 2004, pp. 173-174; Stein, 1985). LeDoux (1992)

noted that Gaskin also has been called “Moses in Blue Jeans,” presumably, for his work helping hippys free themselves from an oppressive society (p. 22). Similarly, Moses helped lead his people, the Israelites, out of Egypt where they were being enslaved by Egyptian pharaohs (Reilly, 1911). Gaskin frequently referred to himself as a teacher, but almost reluctantly as if he could not find a more appropriate word for how he interacted with adult learners. Until he began MNC, all of his personal educational experiences had been in formal institutions. He mentions no adult education influences in his work, neither does he ever outline any specific educational theories. Clearly, what he was doing at MNC was out of the ordinary and beyond mainstream education. Under the circumstances, Gaskin’s struggle to describe himself as an educator seems more than reasonable considering the fact that he never intended to be a hippy adult educator and fell into the role because he was older than most hippys and had more life experience.

The very foundation of Gaskin’s work is rooted in praxis and his own self-directed learning. He became a hippy and an adult educator precisely because he was interested in finding out more about the hippys and their lifestyle. He said consciousness is “sitting right there, you’re perfectly sane, you’re perfectly awake, you’re perfectly together, you know where it’s at anyway, and it’s cool” (Gaskin, 1977, p. 71).

Gaskin began dropping acid, smoking marijuana, listening to rock and roll music and trying to formulate the essence of the counterculture as a means of emancipating himself from the status quo. As it were, tens of thousands of other hippys were interested in learning the same things. The timing was perfect for someone like Gaskin to come along and reach out to adults in new ways. As Lindeman (1926) noted, “Adult learners are precisely those whose intellectual aspirations are least likely to be aroused by the



rigid, uncompromising requirements of authoritative, conventionalized institutions of learning” (p. 19).

Gaskin developed the idea that tripping allowed individuals to expand their consciousness and overcome the conditioning that society put upon them. For the next 40 years he lived a life of action with reflection that was aimed squarely at social justice. MNC was Gaskin’s first attempt at learning by doing. When Gaskin began MNC in San Francisco, he said it was like a “research instrument” (Gaskin, 1996, p. 23). They talked about “God, politics, cannabis, love, sex, marriage, death, religion, nonviolence, telepathy, subconscious and enlightenment” (p. 24). Gaskin (1970) immersed himself in the counterculture by holding weekly classes where individuals could share experiences about how to trip, what he referred to as tripping instructions. “The only kind of learning comes from actual experience” (Gaskin, 1972, p. 18). Participants at MNC shared a common vision and engaged in dialogue as a tool for learning. Bates (1999) said, “Stephen would say let’s talk about how we’re gonna be. Not how we’re gonna stop the war or how we’re gonna make it fair, but how we’re gonna be” (para. 4). This methodology was in stark contrast to how Gaskin had learned and taught before in formal educational settings.

Gaskin had been a college instructor for two years before beginning MNC and realized almost immediately that a traditional learning structure would not work for the alternative format he planned. Gaskin believed adult learning came through experience and frequently downplayed the significance of college, relaying that it was a waste of time and little more than welfare for young people of parents with means (Gaskin, 1974). “A university is pretty much dedicated to teaching relative truth” (Gaskin, 1972, p. 74).

He went on to explain that what he taught was “how to be groovy in the here and now by understanding the situation so you can work with it intelligently” (Gaskin, 1972, p. 83). He insisted that MNC be conversational, inclusive, learner-centered and non-prescriptive. This meant the formal teacher-student relationship prevalent in most educational activities was discarded immediately because Gaskin intended to be a co-learner. “Consciousness is not an individual thing” (Gaskin, 1980, p. 9).

Gaskin would typically speak for a few minutes about some aspect of tripping and then individuals would begin asking questions based on their own needs. The group was encouraged to support each other and often meditated together in order to help create a learning environment that was safe for the open exchange of ideas. Bates (1999) recalled Stephen explaining MNC this way:

Here’s the way the class works. It’s open doors and it’s free and everybody can come in, and the way it’s always been is that the questions I like best are the ones that start with “what about” and “what if.” So we’ve asked those, and I seem to be doing it [chairing the discussion] because I seem to be the only one who can do it. I’m quite willing to do it if anybody wants it done. But other folks can talk. I lead the discussions. I guess I can serve a function as a psychedelic fuse. . . (para. 5)

Even those who sought to disrupt MNC were given fair treatment exemplified by Gaskin’s (2000) description of an individual at a MNC session who was heckling him and others during the class. Some of the people present wanted the man removed because they felt like he was being a nuisance, but Gaskin intervened and used the man’s disruption as a teaching moment. Gaskin (2000) indicated that the disruption was part of the learning process, demonstrating the openness of the class and the importance of critical analysis in emancipatory learning. Every individual’s experiences must be

respected in the dialogue approach. Each experience may not be valuable, but it must be analyzed in order to make such distinction. “We learn how to be by bumping against each other a little bit” (Gaskin, 1972, p. 19).

One of the most clear definitions of Gaskin’s praxis philosophy is his idea of the “unsulliable nature of the intellect” (1970, p. 183). Gaskin (1970) defines the unsulliable nature of the intellect this way:

You can’t break or ruin your mind by anything you think. Your mind must be able to think anything. It must be able to consider all alternatives, no matter how awful or horrible. Your intellect is a perfect computer. If your mind couldn’t consider all the alternatives, that would be something wrong in itself. It does not make you crazy to think a crazy thought. (p. 183)

The concept of the unsulliable nature of the intellect is attributed to the Tibetan guru Gampopa (1079-1152) (Evans-Wentz, 2000). The phrase sometimes appears in ancient Tibetan yoga scriptures. “If the unsulliable nature of the intellect be realized, no longer is it necessary to seek absolution of one’s sins” (Evans-Wentz, 2000, p. 89). The phrase is included among a list of ten unnecessary things in the *Supreme Path of Discipleship: The Precepts of the Gurus*. According to Evans-Wentz (2000), Ashvaghosha, a Mahayana Buddhist, interpreted the unsulliable nature of the intellect as the clear mind one is born with (a tabula rosa). The mind then becomes corrupted, or sullied, by life and an individual’s experiences. The essence of the purity of the mind still exists, however, it is unattainable to most. Ashvaghosha maintains that enlightened individuals can understand the original unsullied nature of the intellect, the original pure mind. The concept seems similar to the path to conscientization as outlined by Freire (1970). For Gaskin, the unsulliable nature of the intellect was central to his praxis. He

encouraged individuals not to self-limit their thinking and to expand their consciousness with meditation, psychedelic drugs, and spirituality. Gaskin claimed it was important for individuals to learn their own minds so they could understand all the presuppositions in their lives. Only then could they deprogram themselves.

Soon after MNC began and was thriving, Gaskin noted that the dominant culture was looking at the hippys “trying to find out what we are, and how do we survive the way we do . . . and how we keep looking the way we do. We’re going to be asked to be teachers” (Gaskin, 1970, p. 78). This realization seemed to confirm in Gaskin’s mind that how the hippys lived was a social justice action.

### Teaching Style

Freire (1970) considers the role of the teacher as a facilitator and not someone who dispenses correct knowledge. This is why it is important for the teacher to speak the same language as the learners. Gaskin would not have been as successful if he did not speak the hippy language (slang), and immerse himself in the hippy lifestyle. This allowed him not only to know about hippys, but also to understand them and how they viewed themselves in the world. The process of validation of hippy constructs could authenticate previous life experiences in a way that formal education could not. Several examples have already been alluded to in this dissertation including tripping and the astral plane.

Problematizing education leads the learner down a path of discovery. This frequently leads to a challenge of the status quo and gives learners the impetus to reconstruct their own situation so they become the subject of their own reality. This was the technique Gaskin utilized to help learners delve into their consciousness (Gaskin, 1970; 1972; 1977; 1978; 1996). During the early years, Gaskin was doing double-duty by

learning how to trip and learning how to be an adult educator. He was teaching MNC at the same time that others were experimenting with the teacher-learner relationship, including Carl Rogers (1969). Rogers was a psychotherapist who critiqued traditional teaching and helped establish the idea that the teacher should be a facilitator of self-directed and experiential learning. He went so far as to say that in order for education to be emancipatory, the teacher and learner *must* share power.

It appears that Gaskin made many efforts to equalize the teacher-learner relationship in his work. However, LeDoux (1992) interviewed some individuals who claimed that in the late 1970s Gaskin went on an ego trip, which alienated learners at the Farm. This was the same time when Gaskin's role as a spiritual teacher began to decline.

Knowles (1984) established seven criteria for adult instructional practices including (a) creating a safe place to learn; (b) including learners in the planning process; (c) allowing learners to dictate their own learning needs; (d) allowing learners to set their own learning objectives; (e) helping learners choose learning resources and methods; (f) encouraging learners to meet their stated objectives, and; (g) helping learners assess their learning. Galbraith (1998) offered his own set of adult instructional practices, some of which are closely aligned with those outlined by Knowles. Galbraith's principles for effective adult instruction include (a) an appropriate educational philosophy; (b) an understanding of the learners; (c) a safe learning environment; (d) limiting factors that create resistance to learning; (e) challenging learners; (f) promoting critical questioning and analysis; (g) demonstrating a reason for the educational process; (h) credibility; (i) working with learners on their terms, and; (j) encouraging independence and continued self-directed study.

From an adult education perspective, Gaskin exhibited several traits consistent with successful teachers of adults. Gaskin preferred to be called by his first name in class and frequently indicated he was only a guide to help others who were tripping. He avoided formal ceremony because he felt it was arbitrary and rooted in dogma (Gaskin, 1974). Gaskin used a variety of teaching methods in order to accommodate different learning styles. Merriam et al. (2007) noted that such a variety of methods is crucial in adult education, “. . .because development of the whole person is imperative, instruction can take many forms . . . such as storytelling, poetry, ceremonies, dreams, meditation and so on” (pp. 237-238).

Gaskin was a proponent of meditation. He said “everything you do throughout the day should be a meditation” (Gaskin, 1974, p. 73). This speaks directly to the importance he placed on action and reflection. He encouraged learners to look within themselves constantly and critically analyze their actions, motives, and reactions. “Meditation comes from learning how to handle the normal thoughts that come up” (Gaskin, 1970, p. 43). As an adult learner, Gaskin benefitted from meditation himself and credited the practice with helping him become an adult educator:

I didn't have any energy when I started doing [teaching]. I got the energy from doing it. I learned how to handle it. I didn't spring out of a lotus blossom knowing where it was at. I figured out where it was at by paying attention for a long time, sometimes when it was really hard. (Gaskin, 1970, p. 157)

Gaskin maintained that he became a teacher because someone needed to do it, and he seemed to have the most experience. When he began MNC it had 12 people, then dwindled to six before attendance began to surge. Gaskin (1972) said the first night of MNC he got into such a hassle with some guy he had to call off the whole class. It was a

learning experience. Over time, he realized working with adults was different than traditional pedagogy. Adults wanted to participate in their own learning. He told LeDoux (1992) “as long as he was fair and in the open and did not use the power against individuals, he felt justified in continuing as a spiritual teacher” (p. 31). But he was also concerned that learners be comfortable with him. In his praxis, he frequently considered his own role, bias, and objectives when educating others. A teacher needs to “interact with the community till the community finds out can he teach or is it worthwhile if he does” (Gaskin, 1972, p. 68).

Lindeman (1926) said the teacher’s job “is not to profess, but to provoke” (p. 119). As he matured, Gaskin developed a similar philosophy. He said teachers should not hide in the background. “[They] ought to be out talking to folks, and if some dude’s got bad habits, hassle him about it some” (Gaskin, 1972, p. 174). On more than one occasion, Gaskin referred to himself as a guide for people who wanted to be better. He felt the key to such a learning transaction was communication, which is a dialogue between the teacher and learner (Gaskin, 1972). He was successful during MNC using this approach because he created a safe learning environment based on mutuality by urging people to tell the truth and not to intimidate others (Gaskin, 1977). But it was not easy. He noted that you have to put effort into communication because many people are afraid of such honest dialogue, adding that in some cases you have to do 100 percent of the work (Gaskin, 2000).

When he had difficulty reaching learners through dialogue, he relied on a more traditional self-directed method of instruction – reading. “Theory is what we’re supposed to return to when we get snagged in the practice” (Gaskin, 1977, p. 117). LeDoux (1992) found that when learners were stuck or had trouble understanding a problem Gaskin

would “give them reading assignments in philosophy, religion, science fiction, yoga, and fairy tales” (pp. 30-31). Gaskin was careful to avoid prescriptive content. When asked by a member of the congregation of the Swope Park United Methodist Church in Kansas City why he had no curriculum, Gaskin (1972) said he decided not to use a curriculum so he could teach by human contact. He had been a formal university instructor who was required to use a curriculum and found that traditional pedagogy was not effective for adult learners. He indicated it was easier to help people learn by approaching them as humans (Gaskin, 1972). Respect for learners and their needs is another hallmark of adult education.

### Farm Living

When Gaskin took MNC on the road the communal nature of the class members that went with him took on the feel of a mobile community. Rather than meeting weekly as they had done in San Francisco, the group was living and working together on a daily basis. The sense of communion led the group to found the Farm in Tennessee so they could continue to be together. Learning during the caravan was ongoing among Gaskin and the others. In fact, Gaskin (1972) was not reluctant to admit during the caravan that some of his ideas were fluid because he, too, was constantly learning through living and critically analyzing his experiences.

Gaskin and others moved to the Farm specifically to continue living a communal life, learning from each other and working together to make things better for everyone (Gaskin, 1974). At the Farm, they had to learn new things such as farming, mechanics, construction, and plumbing. They relied on each other and their neighbors for acquiring specific knowledge. Gaskin (1974) suggested much learning was accomplished through trial-and-error. The Farm was more than simply a group of hippys living together; it was



a living demonstration of how society could be more efficient and fair to everyone. “We didn’t leave San Francisco to go look for a place to be. We left San Francisco to make a difference” (Gaskin, 1977, p. 158).

Stein (1985) said the Farm has a social justice mission. Stein (1985) studied social movements in America and noted that those arising out of the post-Vietnam era were often working to develop answers to larger problems like hunger and housing. These movements were frequently organized around spirituality. The beginnings of the Farm were no different. Gaskin (1980) maintained that the Farm was meant to demonstrate that “mainstream culture is far wrong and has lost the essential human values, and we’re trying to grow a little culture of those essential human values” (p. 172).

At the Farm, everyone was treated equally although in the early years Gaskin was still the spiritual leader of the group. He performed weddings and held Sunday morning services, but much of the learning taking place at the Farm was becoming more practical as the group began putting theory into practice. As the transition evolved, Gaskin’s priorities shifted along with the learner’s needs. Some researchers indicated this shift in priorities may have had more to do with learners losing interest or faith in Gaskin as a spiritual leader (LeDoux, 1992). Nevertheless, Gaskin began to delve into ecological consciousness more than spirituality indicating that people need to stick together, care for each other, and love each other because doing for others is an expression of love not commerce (Gaskin, 1977). “To develop a cheap and livable and graceful lifestyle is one of the most important and heaviest things that we can pass on to mankind” (Gaskin, 1977, p. 49). It is easy to see Gaskin was becoming more focused in his teaching and more political. Gaskin (1978) said their discipline is “to be truthful; to be kind; to try to share;

to try to love one another” (p. 23). These new teachings are about social justice, social action, and society, not just about spirituality.

Interestingly, the Farm had a school for children. It became necessary once 129 babies were born on the Farm in the first two years of its existence (Gaskin, 1974). Gaskin does not write about the school in detail, but said it was not about curriculum and instruction. The school for Farm children was about learning in the sense that the children were taught to be decent human beings. It was most important to Gaskin and the other Farm parents that their children develop strong imaginations, which they felt led to free will thinking. “The school’s more to introduce them into our way of life and not to educate them to some abstract standard” (Gaskin, 1974, p. 71).

Whereas Gaskin used spirituality and psychedelics as a tool to expand consciousness, the Farm had become the beginning of a social action imperative. Learners moved through the stages of emancipation at their own intervals and the cycle was perpetuated by new arrivals who learned from individuals with more experience. Gaskin was pleased with the design because of its potential for sustainability. “We’re trying to keep a piece of knowledge alive for more than ten years, trying to pass something from generation to generation” (Gaskin, 1980, p. 43).

### Marijuana Praxis

Gaskin has never shied away from controversial or unpopular ideas. Although his first experience with marijuana (grass) as a teenager was unfulfilling, he later took a firm stance in favor of the benefits of smoking grass. Despite serving a prison term in the 1970s after authorities found marijuana growing on the Farm, Gaskin continued to use marijuana in his praxis. He argues that marijuana helps individuals place themselves in the context of the world (Gaskin, 1996). “You see yourself as one person among a whole

world population rather than as an absolute personal ego” (Gaskin, 1996, p. 75). Grass was an important part of Gaskin’s peace education efforts. When called to mediate disputes between individuals he often sat and rolled joints with them. They kept smoking joints until each person had had an opportunity to make his or her point and a resolution had been reached.

In his own process of self-learning, Gaskin (1996) relayed that smoking marijuana helped him learn the truth about sex. Marijuana allowed Gaskin to understand sex in a way that was non-procreational. “The object is not to impregnate or be impregnated, but to share a healing, loving ceremony that leaves both partners lighter, freer and more healthy” (Gaskin, 1996, p. 88). He went on to become a teacher of tantric yoga where he explained to others that “Grass is an amplifier and facilitator of natural sexual vibrations” (Gaskin, 1996, p. 89).

#### A Hippy President

From the earliest days at the Farm, Gaskin attempted to avoid politics. He felt his mission was outside the scope of politics and stressed spirituality and ecological consciousness as the means to enact social change. But he was acutely aware of the political power the Farm could wield if challenged. Because the Farm was located in such a poor, rural county, as more and more hippys arrived, their voting bloc grew to the point where if the hippys went to the polls en masse, they could influence the outcome of any county election. The potential power contained in such a collective voting bloc was not lost on candidates who pandered to the hippys in Lewis County.

The realization that the hippys suddenly had some political sway, albeit in rural Tennessee, was new for Gaskin. Up to the point when the Farm was burgeoning with new arrivals in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Gaskin had been concerned primarily with the

development of the individual as a means to better the whole. But a shift in learning priorities diminished his role as a spiritual teacher. Farm members began to develop social justice projects off the Farm and Gaskin, as a teacher, took on a more subdued role.

Early on, the issue of social class was more of a catalyst for Gaskin's teaching than specific politics or government issues. Although he had grown up in a socially conscious family, Gaskin admitted he had a somewhat sheltered life because of his father's middle-class income. Politics and government were mentioned frequently in Gaskin's work, but often as a counterpoint to the collective nature of his spiritual and ecological messages. Despite common preconceptions, Gaskin and the others living at the Farm were not opposed to government. In fact, they were in favor of government – just a different kind of government. They wanted a government less focused on capitalism and privatization, and more focused on an equitable distribution of wealth and resources. For decades they lived by the mantra “Don't take over the government, take over the government's function” (Gaskin, 1974, p. 62).

As Gaskin's former learners drifted away from his spiritual teaching in the 1980s and 1990s, Gaskin reassessed his methods and became more political in his mission to help others become emancipated. This was a turning point for Gaskin. He was no longer working with adults on an individual basis to the extent he had done for the first 10-15 years of his adult education practice. He was positing himself and others to be more radical in their approach to criticizing the status quo. “I am not content to live in a country that has become less free the longer that I have lived in it. That is the wrong direction and I pledge to work to try and fix it” (Gaskin, 1996, pp. 118-119).

Gaskin felt the country was losing its social consciousness. He wanted to make some noise and needed an avenue to get his message out to the people. No longer content

to remain on the Farm and work around the system, Gaskin felt it was time to attempt to change the system from within using its own mechanisms against itself. He said he had to get political in order to make politicians talk about real issues like environmentalism and prison overcrowding (Gaskin, 2000). So he ran for president of the United States.

Gaskin ran for president as a member of the Green Party in the 2000 presidential election. He lost the party nomination to Ralph Nader. Gaskin's goal was to instill a sense of social awareness among the government (Gaskin, 2000). In his book, *Outlaw in My Heart*, Gaskin framed his thinking this way:

Republicans and Libertarians are wrong. There is a reason to have a strong government. The government's role should be fighting to protect the rights of the people in a heartless market economy instead of accepting money from lobbyists to sell out the public interest. (p. 98)

Gaskin went on to say that the country should have the "amount of government it takes to do the job" (Gaskin, 2000, p. 113). With these ideals he launched a campaign predicated on social justice and equality for all Americans. He had 10 planks that were the foundation of his platform. His first plank was meant to enact campaign finance and election reform. Gaskin (2000) called campaign finance "bribery" (p. 4). He argued for capping campaign spending, controlling the amount and type of lobbying, and making free TV time available to political candidates so voters would have more choices and ordinary people will have an affordable opportunity to run for office. "It is considered somehow OK to subvert the democratic process for the purpose of profit. It is not OK to do that" (Gaskin, 2000, p. 47).

His second plank insisted that legislation designating a corporation as a person be withdrawn from federal law. Gaskin (2000) maintained there is a need for government to

regulate the “unreasonable power and resources” controlled by corporations (p. 8). Further, he suggested that America was in the midst of a class war because of the income disparity between rich and poor. “There’s a little bit of sympathy for racial justice, but not as much for economic justice” (Gaskin, 2000, pp. 57-58). He believed power coerced people into submission and silence because speaking out would be detrimental to their personal well-being. Freire termed this scenario a culture of silence. Gaskin (2000) interpreted such scenarios in similar terms:

It’s a form of slavery – which is what corporations hope for. This is a type of slavery in which the corporations don’t have to own the slaves, they just rent them. If they can tie the people down with enough velvet chains to enough television sets so they can’t walk away from them, and convince them that they are consumers, they’ve got them. (p. 51)

His third plank was a call for universal health care. This is an idea he had been pushing for 30 years by stressing the importance of ecological consciousness. Gaskin (2000) said that health care is linked to environmental health and needs to be “taken away from the drug industrial complex and returned to the people” (Gaskin, 2000, p. 8). He maintains that we already have examples of socialized medicine in this country – the military and Congress. “What we want is not for profit national health care” (Gaskin, 2000, p. 66).

Gaskin’s fourth plank was focused on education. He advocated for choice in education. He was adamant about giving parents options for the education of their children. “We need to be teaching conflict resolution and emotional literacy, and helping children to explore and accept the different ways of being in the world so that we can start producing more balanced, more satisfied human beings” (Gaskin, 2000, p. 9).

Another decades long crusade, decriminalizing marijuana, was Gaskin's fifth plank. He urged amnesty for all marijuana prisoners who were not arrested in connection with gun crimes or violent acts. Gaskin (2000) called marijuana offenders "dissidents" (p. 9). His own history with marijuana and the legal system gave him particular insight into the issue.

Gaskin also wanted to fix the veteran benefit system and establish an equal rights amendment for women. He felt strongly that women's rights were one of America's most important issues. He argued that women need to be treated more fairly in society and suggested that they should be given special dispensation regarding typical employment benefits such as leave, on-site daycare, and alternative work schedules. "Motherhood is a positive, productive administrative service provided to the human race; it needs to be recognized as such, compensated as such, and supported by everyone else on the planet" (Gaskin, 2000, p. 10).

Gaskin did not write much about animals, but one of his 10 planks called for a effort to codify more stringent animal rights. Gaskin considered animals to be fellow beings and did not eat them. But he made an important qualification, acknowledging that he was free not to eat animals because of his position in life and his place in the world – what he calls the food chain.

I have the luxury of being pretty much a pacifist because I live in the United States of America. If I lived in some Third World country, and my family was being killed, I'm not going to guarantee that I would be able to maintain a high-minded attitude. (Gaskin, 2000, p. 82)

Gay rights was part of Gaskin's presidential campaign as well. He said the Constitution applies to all people. His final plank was an insistence that America stop building and selling nuclear weapons.

### Emancipatory Learning

McLaren and Farahmandpur (2002) said critical or emancipatory education is necessary to understand the differences in social class. "The social space is created as a social product, a political positioning of the players who dominate the arena as observers watch and wait, hoping that they will be taken care of and be heard" (Slater, 2002, p. 57). Further, Slater (2002) argued that most people do not recognize they are being oppressed. Gaskin and other adult educators attempted to create new space through emancipatory learning. "Oppressed people do not submit; although you may kill individuals, the truth lives on in the minds of the people and cannot be destroyed until there is a conscious effort of love and forgiveness on both sides" (Gaskin, 1981, p. 170). Gaskin's goal in becoming an adult educator was to help adults become liberated from the oppressive forces in American society that emerged after World War II. He used a variety of techniques toward this goal, but always insisted on love and forgiveness as a means to reconciliation. Gaskin was strictly anti-violent and worked for worldwide peace for more than four decades. He wanted adults to participate in MNC so they would be empowered and would no longer be disenfranchised. Such an ideal is the most basic tenet of emancipatory learning, and the impetus for social justice.

Coady (1939) used adult education as a means of promoting emancipation in order for adults to improve their lives socially and economically. He said that adult education asks adults "by education and enlightenment, to create new opportunities for themselves" (p. 35). Coady suggested that individuals learning and working together



could establish “institutions that will enable them to obtain control of the instruments of production” (p. 17). Gaskin followed this same path, calling for individuals to resist the status quo by creating something entirely new such as the Farm. Heaney and Horton (1990) said for emancipatory learning to work it must get outside the mainstream to avoid the dominant agenda.

For Coady and Gaskin, creating space was an important aspect of emancipatory learning, but the two men approached the endeavor based on the needs of the learners, fishermen and hippys respectively. Coady (1939) said that “We put our first emphasis on the material and the economic that we may the more readily attain the spiritual and cultural toward which all our efforts are directed” (p. 112). Gaskin did the exact opposite. He placed his emphasis directly on spirituality, and invoked a vow of poverty in order to deemphasize the material and economics. The two examples above illustrate the flexible nature of Coady and Gaskin as facilitators of adult learning. Both men worked with their respective learners in terms the learner’s themselves found to be most practical and useful.

Heaney and Horton (1990) have found that strategies such as the one used by Gaskin often fail to change the status quo, while those used by Coady are frequently successful. “While many emancipatory education efforts encourage critical reflection and transformative learning, little attention is given to the political apparatus into which the newly released energy of transformed learners must flow” (Heaney & Horton, 1990, p. 85). Huiskamp (2002) reinforces that view claiming that “even for those repositioned toward working for societal transformation within civil society, the shift has tended to be one more of strategic practice than ontological praxis” (p. 83).

For the first 10-15 years of his work, Gaskin seemed to pay little attention to how transformed or enlightened individuals might integrate into society. He was more concerned with creating a permanent alternative to the mainstream. However, as time wore on, some learners began to feel exhausted by the counterculture's ongoing confrontation with mainstream America. These disgruntled individuals eventually reentered mainstream society. Others remained steadfast and continue to live on the Farm today.

Heaney and Horton (1990) go on to say that adult education programs often fail when thought is not given to the future and how change will affect society long term. It seems Gaskin had a plan for the future, and he had some momentum in the 1970s, but the counterculture movement ultimately failed to displace mainstream American culture. Heaney and Horton (1990) have found that vision alone is not enough to supplant entrenched ideas for newer ones. "It is concrete situations, structures, and organizations that maintain oppression. Only in creating equally concrete alternatives to these does liberation occur. The task is never simply educational" (Heaney & Horton, 1990, p. 87). The Farm was an attempt to create an alternative society, and in many regards it has been successful in establishing its own identity. But large scale acceptance of the Farm lifestyle has been declining since the mid-1980s, which could be because of a lack of a unified purpose for learning. Heaney and Horton (1990) indicated that "Emancipatory education begins with the invitation of a community or group engaged in a struggle" (p. 89). While it would be easy to say that the individuals at the Farm are engaged in a struggle against the mainstream, the effort is not nearly as popular today as it was in the 1960s and 1970s.

Mezirow (1990) said it is obvious that adult educators are not neutral, but the point of adult education is to help people question their understanding of the way things are and why. Coupled with such emancipatory practices, adult educators also present options for making decisions that alter individuals' core assumptions. Gaskin merely showed learners alternatives to mainstream society and then allowed individuals to make choices on their own. Gaskin's message to the hippys was the idea that "the state does not confer any psychic power on you" (Versluis & Shipley, 2010, p. 153). He was a proponent of free will and felt transformation began with the recognition of a problem as defined by the learner.

Even before the hippy movement began in earnest, Gaskin (1970; 1972; 1978) seemed to understand that backlash against the staid culture of America was looming. Separate minority groups (Blacks, Women, anti-war activists) had similar issues and common obstacles to overcome in order to become liberated. Hart (1990) explained that consciousness raising (liberation) must develop out of the oppression of a homogenous group and come from lived experiences. It is a "process of reclaiming social membership" (Hart, 1990, p. 70). Further, Hart (1990) claims the feminist movement was about consciousness raising because women were part of a culture of silence, just like the hippys and other oppressed groups at the time. What helped make Gaskin successful as an adult educator was that he was not an outsider; he was one of the hippys himself. "The teacher must be able to link her or his motivations to those of the other participants as an oppressed group and share with them their interest in liberation" (Hart, 1990, p. 64).

To a certain extent, language controls our identity, and typically the dominant class controls the language. It was important for Gaskin and the hippys to craft their own language to better understand themselves in a way that was not filtered through the lens

of the dominant class language. “The oppressed are imprisoned in a cultural construction of reality that is false to them but one from which it is difficult to escape, since even the language used by them transmits the values that imprison them” (Jarvis, 1983, p. 91). Despite being an English teacher of composition and rhetoric, or perhaps because of it, Gaskin was able to make an immediate connection with hippy adult learners as they constructed a unique language all their own that allowed them to communicate and validate their previous life experiences in a meaningful way. This dialogic process is central to emancipatory learning and urges liberated individuals to enact social change.

Slater, Fain, and Rossatto (2002) maintain that dialog “serves to humanize and develop a consciousness of the obligation a free person has to improve the world” (p. 1). Adults become transformed through this learning process because they suddenly have the language to interpret and define their previous experiences, which leads to some level of social action. “Without commitment to action, emancipatory education lacks the possibility of vision, because transforming action is the ground upon which the future is experienced and known in the present” (Heaney & Horton, 1990, p. 92).

“Emancipatory education always requires political judgment concerning the configuration of a just society, for justice is always concrete and embodied in specific political options” (Heaney & Horton, 1990, p. 88). Gaskin understood this most clearly toward the end of his career when he decided to run for president. He had come to realize that simply modeling a more peaceful and spiritual way of life was not enough. He needed to change the political structure from within (Gaskin, 2000).

#### Social Justice Mission

Freire (1996) said we must pay attention to “what we are producing, who it benefits, and who it hurts” (p. 84). The awareness Freire refers to is conscientization, an

understanding of the universe and how everything is interrelated and influenced by everything else. This awareness is what Gaskin was promoting through his holistic approach to emancipatory education. Through psychedelics, Gaskin (1980) felt individuals could shed the imprinting and conditioning of their lives. With psychedelics “you can look clear into your subconscious and see conditioning, and make a decision to not do that anymore, and become unconditioned” (Gaskin, 1980, pp. 7-8). Both men recognized, however, that consciousness raising was a political act, and that the effects of conscientization ultimately led to social action.

Gaskin (1980) noted that breaking free from social conditioning was a social justice act in and of itself because some people have no choice in their lives and are unaware that they are conditioned. When individuals are so poor that they are always starving, they do not have time to think about how they are being oppressed. “To oppress them by removing value from their culture and their language and their ways so that they must abandon them for the culture and the language and the ways of the oppressors – of the conquerors – although you don’t kill their physical bodies, kills them as a people” (Gaskin, 1981, p. 197).

When Gaskin began MNC his ideas related to social justice were not as well defined as they would become later in his career. This could be due to his personal development. In the mid-to late-1960s Gaskin was still learning about consciousness raising himself. At the time, he and the others at MNC were more concerned with understanding the oppositional forces than countermanding them. But as Gaskin’s praxis evolved from a strictly spiritual nature and learners seemed to become aware of their own oppression, social action became more prominent in Gaskin’s thinking. Perhaps what is most interesting about Gaskin’s praxis are his initial attempts at social justice. Instead of

trying to upend the current power structure, Gaskin and thousands of other hippys dropped out of society. They opted to establish their own alternative culture. Certainly, the founding of the Farm was a push for social justice. It was a model for how society could reposition itself for the betterment of all people and not just the powerful elite.

Gaskin (1981) maintained that America was founded by “people of conscience” who were “protesting that they didn’t have control over their worship, or the freedom of their life” (p. 254). He sought to help people find that personal freedom and self-determination using the U.S. Constitution as a guide, arguing that the Constitution is a “protective document” that ensures equality among all people (p. 254). “That is why we protest: not to break the law, but to fulfill it. We assume that the law represents the people; and if the law doesn’t represent the people, it should be amended” (Gaskin, 1981, p. 254). Gaskin (1978) felt that what he and other hippys were doing was right and justified. He noted that it was revolutionary to grow your own food, to deliver your own babies, to get knowledge out of college, to learn how to fix machinery, and to learn how to take care of yourself. “Our purpose is not to pervert the system or divert the system, but to make the system fulfill itself” (Gaskin, 1981, p. 254).

Gaskin’s social justice bent gained traction in the 1980s when he began to realize that spirituality alone would not be enough to wrestle away control from those in power. Working exclusively outside the mainstream was not accomplishing the social change he and the other hippys had hoped for. Gaskin’s work became more forthright and political. He began to advocate for universal healthcare, homosexual rights, and immigrant rights (Gaskin, 1981). He indicated on multiple occasions that he did not want to be political, but felt he had no choice. The Farm alone was not sufficiently addressing issues of emancipation and social justice. Gaskin reasoned that he might have more success

working within the system. He sought to use the tools and structure of the government apparatus to his advantage. “The Constitution is not a static document. It has no allegiance to the status quo. It refers to principles of right and justice, and urges that the public apply those principles in their own defense” (Gaskin, 1981, p. 250). In the early 1980s, Gaskin sensed that American society was becoming disjointed and self-possessed. He offered this simple critique and in so doing solidified his personal commitment:

You have to coalesce around the highest ideal, rather than the lowest. The highest ideal is that in a country like this, the machinery for the protection of the small must be kept in use at all times, or the small will not be protected. (Gaskin, 1981, p. 251)

Gaskin continued to reach into the mainstream for the remainder of his career in order to promote his social justice agenda. He worked with others on outreach projects at the Farm to provide international aid including food and housing, and continued his individual praxis as well. When Newt Gingrich, a Republican from Georgia, attacked the hippys in the early 1990s and attempted to blame society’s problems on the hippys, Gaskin pushed back. He wrote *Cannabis Spirituality* (1996) partly to counter Gingrich’s arguments. In the book, Gaskin alleged that Gingrich was instigating a “culture war” (p. 112). Gaskin countered Gingrich’s claims by saying that hippys were not the problem, “hippys are a cultural vitamin” (p. 115). He went on to explain that hippy ideals of fairness and equality were not the cause of the economic and political turmoil in the 1990s, arguing that the opposite were true:

It seems to me that when service and taking care of people become something that we are going to barter and trade for, then to go out and give service out of the

goodness of your heart gets to be a real in-your-face revolutionary act. (Gaskin, 1996, p. 105)

The year 1996 was a decidedly different time than 1966, but Gaskin held fast to the message that he had been teaching all along, that liberated individuals were able to place themselves in context with the rest of the world, and made better decisions as a result. Gaskin (1996) explained it this way:

Enlightenment means you aren't easily driven to rage, you don't let people push your buttons and you don't use emotion as a tool to manipulate other people. It means you are not in the game for money or fame but for love and justice. (pp. 16-17)

The statements above, on a personal level, show that Gaskin had honed his teaching skills over the years and was adept at crafting a message for a specific audience. He had been working with adult learners for 30 years at that point. Much of his success as an adult educator stemmed from his ability to adapt and adjust to meet learner needs, to be a liaison for adult learning. "The capacity to change yourself is the heaviest factor for world change that people have" (Gaskin, 1996, p. 30). It is not apparent if Gaskin realized that he also was speaking about himself. Examining three decades of Gaskin's life experience reveals a clear path of development as a self-directed learner and as an adult educator interested in social change. His ideas evolved over time, but he never let go of the principle that "people you abuse do not make good citizens" (Gaskin, 2000, p. 90). Late in his career, during his campaign for the presidency, Gaskin (2000) made his views on social activism clear:



We should join together with people of a like mind who have any juice or any power to do anything at all. We have to get to where there's enough of us together in a large voting body that somebody cares about what we think. (p. 107)

### Conclusion

For more than 40 years, Gaskin has been an adult learner and adult educator. During that time, his praxis has evolved with his own development and that of the learners who studied with him. What has remained constant is his drive for emancipatory learning and social justice. Gaskin (1978) said we are “sleepwalking because of our normal cultural upbringing” (p. 106). His goal was to help individuals become aware of that *normal cultural upbringing* so that they might understand the interconnectedness of the universe and break free from the oppression of the status quo.

Gaskin utilized a variety of techniques in his praxis, most notably the dialogue approach. Dialogue equalizes teachers and learners and establishes an environment conducive to adult learning. Gaskin's other strong-suit was situative learning. He met learners on their terms and embedded principles of emancipatory learning into the context of their everyday lives. He did not shy away from, or devalue, hippy ideals like using drugs to expand consciousness. In fact, he encouraged tripping on drugs to help remove the artificial barriers erected by society. “Being stoned changes your energy field” (Gaskin, 1972, p. 175). LeDoux (1992) pointed out that Gaskin's own self-directed learning was enhanced by drug use, noting that he became an adult educator after experiencing a profound acid trip that he claims helped him understand how the universe worked. Gaskin (1972) said in that perfect psychedelic vision he realized the importance of the Biblical (King James) pronouncement that “as you sow, so shall you reap” (p. 60). The phrase is from Galatians 6:7 and means that what an individual does now, good or

bad, will affect what comes later in that individual's life. LeDoux (1992) explained it in these terms:

Stephen taught that creating a better society began with individuals who were willing to change themselves and devote their lives to this work. It was after a revealing trip that one would gain the vision to change one's self. (p. 27)

Perhaps what learners sought most from Gaskin is at the heart of all adult learning – life experience. Gaskin was about a decade older than many of the early hippys and had already accumulated a hodge-podge of life experience. In other words, he was authentic. He was not just a teacher standing up in front of a room full of pupils. He was a co-learner with some valuable life experience to share with younger adults. He had used drugs and seen their power and destruction. He advocated for psychedelic experiences, but only those from naturally occurring substances like peyote and marijuana. When Gaskin went to prison for manufacturing marijuana, he remained true to his values. He refused to eat meat while in jail, and refused to wear leather boots made from animals. For his beliefs, Gaskin was sent to the hole (solitary confinement) (Gaskin, 1981).

Gaskin had been to war in Korea and could speak to the nature of the war in Vietnam. He admitted that he was glad to have served in the Marines, but became a conscientious objector after returning from Korea. He said the first time he saw someone get shot in Korea his inclination was to help. "I am a pacifist and do not support any kind of violence; I think we must move for political, humanitarian, creative solutions rather than military solutions" (Gaskin, 1981, p. 72). The dichotomous nature of Gaskin's experiences was beneficial to learners trying to make sense of their own lives and their place in the world.

One of the foundations of adult education is that learning be practical and useful. Gaskin's praxis was grounded in this philosophy. From the time of MNC when content was entirely generated by learners up through the founding of the Farm when individuals learned from each other and their neighbors, Gaskin's learning activities were based on everyday issues in learner's lives that could be applied immediately. In fact, part of the hippy ethos was to live in the moment. Gaskin (1972) felt enlightenment was about understanding and experiencing the here and now.

We've got to recognize that we're all a portion of the earth. We're here together in this community, in this town, in this house, in this neighborhood, in this country, on this planet. We're all here together, and here's where it is right now. (Gaskin, 2000, p. 142)

Gaskin's teaching style was to watch, listen, and try to distill issues while allowing adults to figure out things on their own (1978). These skills aided his praxis by creating nonthreatening learning environments and making space for discovery. "We're pretty durable and we need to bump up against the universe a little bit to find out where it's at. Also we need to bump up against each other a little bit" (Gaskin, 1972, p. 18). Gaskin was opposed to traditional pedagogical methods that devalued prior learning. He attempted through his praxis to authenticate learners' life experiences for the benefit of the individual and the group.

If you are just willing to let knowledge flow forth like a fountain, and let people have it like they want, and don't make them have to have Ph.D.'s or anything after their name to symbolize that they have touched the knowledge – if you just see that everyone is doing their best, and if those folks who have trouble

stretching can hang tight with the majority, they will be carried and they will be stretched. (Gaskin, 1980, pp. 8-9)

Formal learning assessment has never been part of Gaskin's praxis. His work with adults speaks for itself. Learners came and went. Some have remained with him at the Farm for 30 years. Of course, there are individuals who gained nothing from Gaskin and doubt that he had much to offer in the way of education (LeDoux, 1992). But anecdotal evidence would suggest that tens of thousands of individuals over four decades sought out Gaskin as a teacher for a reason. They were seeking liberation from an oppressive system that did not recognize or value them. The assessment that seems most valuable to Gaskin is the satisfaction of the learners who studied with him. He noted that his body of teachings is not in books, it is "how well they are understood in your mind and in the minds of everyone that I have communicated with . . ." (Gaskin, 1977, p. 126). He went on to say that the group mind "is a giant organic computer. . . [that] can leave a socio-spiritual ecological legacy" (Gaskin, 1977, pp. 126-127).

Gaskin felt that adults were never finished learning. He was always learning something new and encouraged others to do the same. His praxis and his self were one in the same. "My miracle is not that you can't knock me down; my miracle is that I know how to get up. And I can teach you how to get up. After you get up a few times, it gets easier" (Gaskin, 1970, p. 157).

## CHAPTER IV

### SPIRITUAL LEARNING

Gaskin was 30 years old when he began MNC at SFSC's Experimental College. He was older than most of the young people who attended his classes, which could explain partially why so many initially sought his counsel. Gaskin had already served in the Korean War, returned home, graduated from college and earned a master's degree in English before experiencing the major shift in his life that led to the establishment of MNC. He had a wisdom culled from life experience that many of the younger learners did not.

Gaskin was teaching composition and rhetoric at SFSC. He was only peripherally aware of what was happening socially with the emergence of the hippys. Some of his college students who were into the early hippy movement suggested Gaskin watch *A Hard Day's Night*, featuring the Beatles (1981). The movie made Gaskin aware of the potential the counterculture movement had to change the world, and he wanted to be part of it. He let his hair grow long, started wearing bell-bottom jeans, beads, and brightly colored clothing, and began to immerse himself in the counterculture lifestyle.

When the Monday night classes began, fewer than a handful of people attended. But the event grew each week as more young people learned about Gaskin and his interesting classes. Before long, hundreds of individuals were showing up each week to participate in MNC. Albert Bates (1999), an attorney who has studied and worked with Gaskin for more than 40 years, described it this way:

Monday Night Class became a weekly pilgrimage of throngs of hippys from up and down the coast, from high school and university campuses, from army bases and police academies, from mountain communes and Haight Street crash pads.

Thousands of people, in various states of consciousness, came with tambourines and diaphanous gowns, love beads and bangles, Dr. Strange cloaks and top hats with feathers. The open-ended discussions ventured into Hermeneutic geometry, Masonic-Rosicrucian mysticism, Eckankar and the Rolling Stones, but opened with a long, silent meditation and closed with a sense of purpose. At the center of this psychedelic crucible, the professor in the welder's hood, was 31-year-old Stephen Gaskin, known simply to most hippys as "Stephen". (para. 3)

The classes grew so readily that the location was moved several times in order to accommodate the increasing number of learners. Though he had grown up with activists in his family, Gaskin's life up until MNC had been relatively ordinary for the time. But San Francisco in the mid- to late-1960s was becoming the birth place of a counterculture movement. It was a time for new music, new ideas, and radical political and social reform. Independent movements like those advocating for women's rights and civil rights were beginning to congeal into one massive counterculture opposed to the staid status quo in America (LeDoux, 1992). The practice of Eastern religions and alternative forms of spirituality were also becoming more commonplace as young people sought to break free from the traditional spiritual beliefs of their parents (Wesson, 2011).

San Francisco had long been a cultural center in America and blossomed under the rising of this new dawn. Hippys and other counterculture groups emerged seeking new interpretations of old ideas and a willingness to experiment with drugs in order to expand their consciousness. Previously taboo social norms were cast aside as free love, long hair, and costume dress were all embraced by the counterculture (Hippies, 1967). Spirituality, too, was a significant aspect of the counterculture movement. Gaskin (1972) clearly intended spirituality to play a role in his teaching, noting that he began MNC

because he felt like he was “taking care of the spiritual needs of a little community” (p. 61).

### Spiritual Teacher

From the earliest days of MNC, Gaskin identified himself as a spiritual teacher; although, he had never had any prior plans to be one. In fact, Gaskin spent most of his life avoiding religion and spirituality with a vigor. He had no religious upbringing as a child and actually praised his father for getting the family out of the church (Versluis & Shipley, 2010). So it is somewhat surprising that as an adult Gaskin chose to become a spiritual teacher. But when viewed through the lens of adult education, Gaskin’s decision can be explained, at least partially, by what Mezirow (1991) termed a disorienting dilemma.

A disorienting dilemma is commonly associated with perspective transformation. It is a situation in an individual’s life wherein the individual undergoes a permanent change in core beliefs because his or her beliefs are inadequate, or because the individual has no prior experience to help understand and resolve the situation confronting them. Long held assumptions are of no value when facing this new type of situation and individuals must form new perspectives that alter their inner being. Mezirow (1991) posits that once these core beliefs are challenged by an individual and understood to be of no value, the individual has experienced a perspective transformation.

It was not until Gaskin read Huxley’s *The Doors of Perception* (1954) that he decided spirituality might be an interesting topic for emancipatory learning. Gaskin said it was Huxley’s book that encouraged him to take psychedelic drugs for the first time in order to have a religious experience (Grass Case, 1974). It was during one of these

psychedelic trips that Gaskin experienced his disorienting dilemma that led him to begin MNC (Gaskin, 1972).

The beginnings of Gaskin's entry into the area of informal adult education developed out of this new interest in spirituality, and his approach to teaching it during the MNC sessions. Tisdell (2001; 2003) noted that spirituality is difficult to define. In this dissertation spirituality will be understood as an awareness of something other, or larger, than ourselves. Spirituality in this dissertation, and as Gaskin understood it, is further defined as an attempt to make meaning of our lives, and an interconnectedness among people and the earth. More simply, spirituality is about the meaning of life.

Tolliver and Tisdell (2002) have said spirituality helps people make meaning through symbols, music, and shared experience. Spirituality is always present in this type of creative endeavor. Gaskin's learners had a shared cultural identity as hippys. They developed their own symbols, gestures, and shared language. Gaskin was able to use that commonality to work with individuals toward a spiritual enlightenment. Spirituality helped Gaskin's learners establish a framework for their learning and allowed them to understand their own intrinsic value in their own terms. In other words, MNC helped learners validate their individual identities in relation to the group and the wider world. For the first time, Gaskin's learners were able to value their own life experiences.

The basis for using spirituality in his teaching was to meet learners in a place where they felt safe and were open and receptive to new ideas. For many individuals, spirituality consists of deep feelings of faith and it is often a guiding principle in their lives. Arguably, spirituality has a profound influence on people. Gaskin understood that through his own lived experiences. He came to understand that spirituality helps people make meaning of the world, as it had done for him. "Being spiritual means knowing that



you can change your head and it will change your life and it will change the universe” (Gaskin, 1974, p. 31). The seriousness of spirituality and its unlimited potential for teaching and learning were exciting to him, and allowed him to reach out to learners in a non-threatening manner. “To write the spirituality of some of these experiments off as pop-Aquarianism would be a mistake” (Bates, 1999, para. 1).

Gaskin (1972) indicated he wanted to help guide people who wanted to be better human beings. After his psychedelic spiritual reformation, he became greatly concerned with the lack of attention humans paid to the astral plane. The astral plane was a popular topic among MNC participants. Essentially, the astral plane was a plane of existence beyond the material plane that was located in a higher state of consciousness (Gaskin, 1970; 1972).

Gaskin (1972) maintained that in the astral plane, all things were one, and living things could communicate telepathically through energy vibrations. Karma, a Sanskrit word borrowed from Buddhism, was also a factor in Gaskin’s spiritual teaching. Karma is a “necessary fate or destiny, following as effect from cause” (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2011). Gaskin interpreted karma as “the law of cause and effect” and often described it as “a subconscious physical uptightness” (Gaskin, 1972, p. 24 & 40).

Gaskin and his students spent much time discussing the astral plane in an attempt to define its parameters and understand its nature. When Gaskin decided to tour the country doing MNC in venues around the country, he referred to it as an Astral Continental Congress (Gaskin, 1972). The Astral Continental Congress was meant to be a healing trip for the nation that would help resolve social conflict.

Participants of MNC were definitive in the astral plane’s disassociation from astrology, which was considered a sham. Numerology and Tarot were also avoided by the

group's members because it was felt that numerology and Tarot had more to do with superstition than any identifiable spiritual subtext (Gaskin, 1980). Palmistry, popular at the time, was also derided by Gaskin as being more about magic than spirituality. This is an important point because it helps shape Gaskin's thinking about spirituality. He was not merely pandering to a group of individuals seeking mystical alternative experiences. Instead, he was trying to redefine the boundaries of more generally accepted spiritual practices in order to demonstrate the commonality and mutual goals shared by all people.

Over time, Gaskin would rely less on the distinction between the astral plane and the material plane, and focused his teaching more on a unifying spiritual practice that did not predicate one belief system over any other. "Spirit is one with the universe, and everybody's spirit is one" (Gaskin, 1972, p. 47). But in the beginnings of MNC, the astral plane was a significant development.

#### Astral Plane

Gaskin (1972) said psychedelics introduced him to "another plane of experience other than the material plane" (p. 109). That newfound place was the astral plane. It was a place without time or space. It did not operate within the physical laws of the natural world and Gaskin (1972) said it had "no personality or ego" (p. 47). He believed he understood reality in its truest form when he reached the astral plane after receding deeply into his consciousness with the help of LSD.

This consciousness raising experience led him to the conclusion that the hippys and other fringe groups (women, Blacks) were being oppressed by the power structure in place in America and needed to be liberated. He decided then that spiritual education was the means for unity and emancipation. "We base our whole way of being on the idea that the spiritual plane is the progenitor of the material plane" (Gaskin, 1972, p. 109).

The material plane, or the physical world, is susceptible to entropy, which Gaskin (1970) maintained is a constant, gradual erosion toward disorder. He was concerned that the material world and increasing consumerism were leading society down a path of no return. He focused on the idea that the material world was temporary and a collective spirit would clear the way for humankind to exist in communion with the earth. It was the ultimate social justice ideal. He went on to elaborate that we can never achieve material satisfaction, which is why we must focus on spirituality. “Spirit can only maintain itself on the material plane through the agency of compassionate human beings who will make themselves a reservoir for it” (Gaskin, 1972, p. 140).

In an attempt to further define the astral plane, Gaskin maintained that the astral plane is similar to what Jung called the collective unconscious (Grass Case, 1974). Gaskin defined it as a “continuum of vibrational planes that progress in degrees of subtlety and purity until you reach one of absolute spiritual purity” (Grass Case, 1974, p. 22). Jung (1981) posited that there is another psychic consciousness beyond the individual, which is collective and is the same for all individuals. He believed this collective unconscious was inherited or innate, not something learned from experience.

After almost a decade of studying and discussing the astral plane, Gaskin (1978) was still trying to put it into concrete terms. He said it was really about “understanding the nature of the relationship of man to the universe, understanding that human beings are telepathic” (p. 8). He bases this claim on the idea that the universe is vibratory and that humans affect those vibrations significantly (Gaskin, 1978). In fact, the unification of humans acting together with the universe is Gaskin’s interpretation of God. “We are all parts of God. Each one of us has an electrical body field that surrounds us, and a mind field that goes on to Infinity” (Gaskin, 1978, p. 16).

Gaskin (1978) further relates that because all living things have an energy field, when two or more individuals get together a “vector-resultant of those fields” is created, which everyone can feel (p. 16). This feeling, he insists, is a unified vibration that is God. This is one reason group learning was valuable during MNC. It allowed a large number of people with a singular purpose to gather together to share energy and benefit from what Gaskin (1996) called the contact high. Welton (2001) noted that Coady, too, believed humans had energy and thought adult educators could “release the human energy available” within learners (p. 139). This technique, according to Coady, was best achieved through situative learning by “attitudinizing the human mind”, a practice wherein the learner becomes invested (situated) in his or her own learning (Welton, 2001, p. 139).

By 1980, Gaskin had come to the realization that many of the counterculture values were being either absorbed into mainstream society in watered down fashion, or were being discarded altogether. He was particularly concerned that individuals were having a difficult time understanding the fundamental principles of the astral plane, his foundational platform for teaching based in spirituality (Gaskin, 1980).

In an effort to salvage the structure of the astral plane Gaskin opined that the name should be changed to the “plane of soul communication” (Gaskin, 1980, p. 120). It is clear he was struggling with his diminishing presence as a spiritual teacher in a fast-changing world. LeDoux (1992) notes that it was around this same time that individuals began to question Gaskin’s significance in their lives. Some of the individuals living on the Farm had been students of Gaskin’s for more than a decade and seemed frustrated that Gaskin’s ideas had not become mainstream and began to lose faith in him as a

teacher. The astral plane took on less and less significance as Gaskin's spiritual message faded into the background of the 1980s.

#### Om – Cleansing the Palette

Before beginning most of his sessions, Gaskin would lead the class in reciting the om, a meditation technique. He also closed many classes with a group om. Gaskin (1996) said the om is actually from the Hindu trinity (Brahma, Shiva, and Vishnu) and is spelled aum. He discussed the significance of the om most clearly in *Cannabis Spirituality* (1996). “The om is a hymn without any words – you take your simplest, openest, most honest note and let it out” (p. 37).

Gaskin maintained that the om reduced the tension level of everyone who was a part of it. He went on to explain that the om is like an energy wave that vibrates your head to elevate your consciousness. For Gaskin and the other learners at MNC, the om was a means for bringing everyone together at the same time in the same place concentrating on the same thing. “They say if you took all the sound in the universe and listened to it all at once, it would sound like the om” (Gaskin, 1996, p. 37).

#### Psychedelic Testimony of the Saints

Much of Gaskin's teaching revolved around an amalgamation of religious and spiritual thought from around the world. He combined elements of formal religious thought like Catholicism and Judaism, along with less traditional spiritual practices such as those held by many native cultures. He recognized the inherent power that spirituality had in many people's lives, including his own, and tried to be respectful of individual beliefs while simultaneously encouraging learners to look beyond their long-held beliefs and assumptions. It is safe to say that Gaskin approached the different religions cautiously. “I love the ethical teachings of almost all the religions, and I love the

psychedelic testimony of their saints. But I do not believe any of their dogmas” (Gaskin, 1996, p. 8). It is the essence of those religions that Gaskin uses in his own work while dismissing the accoutrements. “I don’t believe in too much religious paraphernalia” (Gaskin, 1996, p. 10).

His openness about spirituality and the idea of inclusiveness may have been one of the reasons Gaskin’s popularity grew while other more fervent religious teachings seemed to have a negative effect on hippy learners. Similarly, at the same time Gaskin was gaining popularity in America, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi was developing a non-religious movement based on transcendental meditation around the world. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi worked with thousands of adults, including the Beatles, to help individuals achieve inner peace (Oates, 1976). The transcendental meditation movement continues to thrive at training centers throughout the world.

Gaskin was insistent that no one religion be given priority over any other. They were all equally valuable in his eyes. He attempted to construct a definition of religion as he perceived it by saying it is “a generic term for how we relate to the Universe and how God and our Universe relate to us, and what is our proper relationship and perspective in the Universe” (Gaskin, 1978, p. 27). This unifying spirituality is examined more closely in its relationship to Gaskin’s penchant for ecological consciousness in Chapter 5 of this project. “When I say religion, I don’t necessarily mean Catholicism or Judaism or something, but I mean a philosophy and a world view that covers you all the way through” (Gaskin, 1974, p. 24).

By downplaying the overt religious connections to specific spiritual tenets and practices, Gaskin was able to establish a learning environment that was commutable among a variety of learners without privileging any single belief system (Gaskin, 1970;

1972; 1974; 1977; 1978; 1996). In that regard, spiritual teachings were a way that Gaskin reached out to learners to meet them at a point where they were receptive to new learning. This step, creating space, is vital in the adult learning process because it gives teachers and learners a place to begin their dialogue.

It should not be surprising that Gaskin believed in God. Despite his aversion to organized religion as a child, Gaskin had a strong belief in his interpretation of God. “God is the total All of everything” (Gaskin, 1972, p. 129). Gaskin went on to explain that he did not believe that God was an old man with a white beard, but instead He was an immanent God that is in all things. “The intelligence of God is composed of non-simultaneously occurring thoughts” that blend together like fibers in a rope, to combine a transcendent God and the immanent God (Gaskin, 1980, p. 176).

What is interesting about Gaskin’s spirituality is that he also felt strongly about other religious leaders, indicating that he believed just as faithfully in Jesus and Buddha (Gaskin, 1974). In fact, one of the guiding principles in Gaskin’s own spiritual learning was the *Vow of the Bodhisattva*, which he referenced throughout his work: “The deluding passions are inexhaustible / I vow to extinguish them all / Sentient beings are numberless / I vow to save them all / The truth is impossible to expound / I vow to expound it / The way of the Buddha is unattainable / I vow to attain it” (as cited in Gaskin, 1978, p. 111).

#### Life Force

What is clear is that Gaskin does not subscribe to any single religion or spiritual dogma. Over the last four decades, he borrowed teachings from many spiritual arenas to inform his work with adults, including those from the Far East. There is “one great world

religion, which has no name, and all of the other religions are merely maps of that” (Gaskin, 1972, p. 122).

Gaskin frequently mentions that he was a self-directed student and admirer of Suzuki Roshi though he acknowledged he did not know the man well. Roshi was a Zen Buddhist who presided over the Sokoji (place of worship) in San Francisco. Roshi was a teacher and practitioner of Mahayana Buddhism, where he taught that there is “no final and perfect enlightenment until everybody is enlightened” (Gaskin, 1974, p. 6). Gaskin (1990) said he was acquainted with Roshi and heard him speak several times, but he did not study with Roshi; he mainly studied Roshi’s teachings on his own. He went on to say that Roshi had integrity whether Gaskin was around or not, explaining their relationship in these terms:

Knowing that [Roshi] was there and that he had his integrity all the time made it so that I felt safe. As wild and scary and trippy as it was in San Francisco, I felt safe, because I knew there was such a thing as an honest man. I knew an honest man. I knew where an honest man lived. I knew I could go see him and talk to him if I wanted to. There was an honest man there who believed in reality. He was the strength to all of my trippings: Everything I ever did in San Francisco was strengthened from knowing that he was there, that he existed, that he was like he was. (p. 11)

Gaskin (1970) frequently referred to the myriad spiritual teachings he used as life force. Alternately, he would use the term Shakti (or Sakti), a Sanskrit word that means power or divine energy, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (2011). In other instances, Gaskin (1978) termed the life force “prana” or “spiritual energy” (pp. 52-59). Hindus believe prana is the breath of life that inhabits all beings (Oxford English



Dictionary Online, 2011). He also talked about *baraka*, which he indicated is a Sufi word for energy that flows between people (Gaskin, 1977). The word is not found in the *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (2011), but it does appear on Dictionary.com, where it is defined as “a spiritual power believed to be possessed by certain persons” (2011). All of these derivations of life force form what the hippys frequently referred to as an aura, or an energy field that exists around living things (Gaskin, 1978, p. 154).

This life force designation seemed to ground Gaskin’s work among individual learners by highlighting the usefulness and practicality of the learning, two components of traditional adult education. Gaskin (1970) believed that learners could change their life force, or aura, by modifying how they lived their lives, which would then release good vibes into the universe creating more harmony on the trip to enlightenment. The life force was shared by all living things through energy, and consisted of a mind and body equilibrium. Because of this deep connection with all living things, Gaskin (1970) felt each individual was partially responsible for the welfare and well-being of every other individual – not just physically, but also spiritually. Consequently, he was able to make the argument that what one person did affected other people in some way. Such a strategy encouraged individuals to think and interact with each other more thoughtfully. Again, this technique aided in the development of a safe learning environment conducive to adult learning.

#### Miles and Miles of Hippys

It is interesting to note that Gaskin had been leading MNC for five years in San Francisco and gave no indications of ending the weekly gatherings when he was approached by a group of preachers from around the country who were in town for a conference. The group liked his message and asked him to come to their churches to talk

about hippys and the counterculture movement. Gaskin was a natural choice because his message was non-threatening, inclusive, and authentic. He told the preachers MNC had always been a “spiritual event” and agreed to visit their churches (Gaskin, 1972, p. 6).

Gaskin was eager to discuss his ideas with other individuals around the country – hippys and non-hippys. He saw the opportunity to take MNC on the road as a means of educating those in middle-age and middle-America about the burgeoning counterculture movement flowing outward from the West Coast.

Gaskin (1972) noted that the early stages of planning for the cross-country trip only included himself and a few other people. But soon, hundreds of other MNC devotees decided to pack up their lives and go on the road with Gaskin. This exodus of hippys and their journey would come to be referred to as the caravan because when the group embarked the caravan included more than 40 vehicles (Gaskin, 1972).

Gaskin and others had purchased old school buses and then refurbished them with wood stoves and bunk beds. They would be living in the buses, using the bathroom in the buses, and even giving birth in the buses as they traveled from state to state for the next four months. When the group set out from San Francisco in October 1970, the caravan and its traveling collection of hippys stretched out for miles down rural highways in buses, cars, trucks, trailers and other converted vehicles.

The caravan speaking tour operated much the same as MNC. Gaskin would speak briefly for a few minutes at the beginning of each session and then the group would ask questions and have a discussion about current topics. Gaskin’s appeal was evident by the variety of venues where he was asked to speak. He led classes at colleges such as Mount Angel College in Oregon and Princeton University in New Jersey. He met with learners in churches such as St. Stephen’s Catholic Church in Minnesota, All Souls Unitarian

Church in Washington, DC, Edgehill Methodist Church in Nashville, Tennessee, and Swope Park United Methodist Church in Kansas City, Missouri. In Atlanta, he was asked to lead a class at a public park in order to help quell civil unrest in the city (Gaskin, 1972).

A few weeks after leaving California, on Halloween night 1970, Gaskin spoke to a group of adults at St. Stephen's Catholic Church in Minnesota where he told the people gathered there "religion is the wiring diagram of the way human energy is moved to relate to the universe" (Gaskin, 1972, p. 14). It is important to note that Gaskin did not modify his teaching style or his message during the speaking tour. His definition of spirituality remained at the core of his classes.

Gaskin seemed to recognize the inherent value in respecting the learners, but also approaching them in a way that allowed them to define their own objectives. The members of the class chose the content and he simply guided them toward an understanding of how all things are interrelated, essentially involving them in consciousness raising. While the caravan did not have an overtly religious agenda, Gaskin's spirituality was clearly underlying his social justice philosophy. The theme and style of MNC had simply been taken on the road. When the group returned to California in February of 1971, someone asked Gaskin what had been the purpose of the trip. He replied, "To go out and put the word on folks" (Gaskin, 1972, p. 251).

### Spiritual Academy

Many of those who had been part of the caravan wanted to continue living and learning together. It was then that Gaskin and about 600 other people founded a 1,600 acre intentional community, which they named Farm. The people in Tennessee had been friendly to the hippys during the caravan, and the weather was temperate, so the group

headed eastward again. Eventually, the group settled the Farm just south of Nashville, Tennessee in the rural area of Lewis County. They pooled their money and paid \$70 per acre. With no housing and no jobs, individuals simply continued living in their makeshift homes – the converted school buses – while they set about establishing what Gaskin (1977) called a “spiritual academy” (p. 74).

Gaskin (1974) noted that they went to the Farm to live a spiritual life. During the caravan, Gaskin had frequently held a Sunday morning service, where he spoke briefly and those in attendance would meditate. Bates (1999) said the Sunday services were similar to the sessions at MNC, and included “a sunrise meditation, a group om, Stephen giving a short talk, and the group of 1500 people engaging in a free-ranging discussion of everything from bop Kaballah to transubstantiation” (para. 14).

Gaskin (1974) said “meditation is learning to be quiet and shut your head off long enough to hear what else is going on” (p. 52). At the Farm, this tradition of Sunday morning services continued for many years and helped solidify the group. Gaskin (1977) said the Sunday service was meant to bring people together to pool energy and form a group head. LeDoux (1992) noted that many of the Farm’s administrative decisions were made during these Sunday gatherings as well.

An important distinction to make here is to differentiate Gaskin’s thinking and behavior from other individuals at the time who claimed to be leaders of specific groups, such as Jim Jones. Jones was the leader of Peoples Temple, which is often described as a cult. Gaskin was aware of Jones and what was happening with Peoples Temple and he reflected negatively on the subject. Gaskin felt the people supporting Jones were being manipulated (Gaskin, 1980). He went on to relate that he felt Jones’ methods were prescriptive and thus the learners had no ability to think for themselves or discover their

own knowledge. Spirituality aside, Jones' strict regimentation did not allow for anything close to emancipation or conscientization.

In 1977, Gaskin published his first book devoted to spirituality, *Volume One: Sunday Morning Services on the Farm*, which was a compilation of many of the Sunday morning services that had been held at the Farm. The book collected excerpts from the Sunday gatherings beginning in August 1975 through March 1977, and reinforced the ideas about spirituality and the interrelatedness of the universe that Gaskin had been discussing for the last decade, including his overarching ideal that "We are not done if there is one person who is uncovered" (Gaskin, 1977, p. 15).

### Marijuana

By 1996, Gaskin had been using marijuana in his praxis for almost 30 years. In the early days of MNC, he was a strong supporter of psychedelic drugs, but gradually backed away from their use as psychedelics became illegal and more dangerous. He continued to promote the use of natural substances such as marijuana and peyote, but only as an individual choice in a quest for spiritual enlightenment.

In 1996, Gaskin returned to spirituality as a theme in his book, *Cannabis Spirituality*. Gaskin had long been a proponent of legalizing marijuana for personal use and had served a prison term (with three other Farm residents) when the plant was found to be growing on the Farm. He tried unsuccessfully to argue during his trial that marijuana use was a religious sacrament, a "holy tool" but the court ruled against him saying he provided no evidence to support his claim (Gaskin, 1996, p. 40). Nevertheless, Gaskin continued to smoke marijuana and use it in his praxis in ensuing years.

He described his first encounter with marijuana when he was a teenager in the Marine Corps. His cousin gave him a joint and the experience was awful (Gaskin, 1990).

Gaskin described his initial impression of the drug as a producing a bad trip and indicated that his cousin was a terrible guide because he didn't help Gaskin understand what was happening or how to harness the power of the drug's effects. Because of his bad experience with marijuana, Gaskin did not smoke marijuana again until years later when he was given some Acapulco Gold, premiere marijuana at the time.

Gaskin's second experience with marijuana, when he was out of the Marine Corps and doing MNC in San Francisco, benefitted from his maturity and newfound hippy spirituality. He was able to appreciate the high that smoking grass produced and control its effects now that he understood what was happening to his mind on the drug. He found that marijuana enabled him to reach the astral plane and he began encouraging its use in order to help others reach the heightened plane of consciousness. "Grass is an ally. It naturally engenders spirituality in the people who do it" (Gaskin, 1996, p. 74).

#### Encounters with The Man

On August 31, 1971, the Farm was raided by law enforcement officers who served a warrant, which allowed them to search the Farm for marijuana plants. Officers found marijuana growing on the 1,600 acre property and arrested Gaskin, along with three other men (Dane Culbertson, Wilbur Jordan and Brandon Lerda) from the Farm, for manufacturing marijuana.

Gaskin was convicted two months later, on November 11, 1971, in Lewis County Criminal Court for violating the Tennessee Drug Control Law. He was sentenced to one to three years in prison. Gaskin appealed, but on February 5, 1973 the Tennessee Supreme Court affirmed the lower court's conviction. Gaskin then made a final appeal to the United States Supreme Court arguing that the Tennessee Drug Control Law violated his constitutional rights, including his right to free exercise of religion, claiming that

marijuana was used in religious practices to aid meditation (Grass Case, 1974). In his appeal, Gaskin said “our use of marihuana [sic] as a sacrament in no way degrades or corrupts us but helps us to grow spiritually” (Grass Case, 1974, p. 21). In the same brief to the court, Gaskin continued his argument when he indicated “We believe that you can use marihuana [sic] for a sacrament – not as an end in itself, but as a Holy tool to allow us to experience reality” (Grass Case, 1974, p. 17). On October 15, 1973 the US Supreme Court dismissed Gaskin’s appeal because there was no substantial federal question.

The incident is similar to the raids conducted by authorities on the Highlander Folk School (now the Highlander Research and Education Center) founded by Myles Horton (1905-1990) and Don West (1906-1992) in Monteagle, Tennessee in the 1930s. The original Highlander Folk School was raided and padlocked by police in 1959 after accusations were raised that Horton was a communist and Highlander a communist training school. In fact, Horton and others at Highlander had been training civil rights workers to combat racial segregation (Horton, 1990). After months and months of investigation, the state of Tennessee revoked Highlander’s charter and seized the school in 1961 claiming the school was holding interracial classes and illegally selling beer on the premises (Horton, 1990). “Highlander didn’t exist anymore, either physically or legally. Within two months of our leaving, all the buildings burned” (Horton, 1990, p. 110). Horton reestablished highlander in Knoxville, Tennessee but continued to be threatened and intimidated by those opposed to his work. After a decade in Knoxville, Highlander was moved to New Market, Tennessee in the 1970s, where it remains (Horton, 1990).

## Social Justice Mission

Gaskin had a deep affinity for human beings and worked for social justice for all people. He constantly questioned authority and insisted that human beings have a responsibility “to our fellow man” (Gaskin, 1977, p. 68). This effort was in part because of what he perceived as a lack of spirituality in the world. “It’s not the chant you chant; it’s not the name that you name God: it’s how you live. And this (the Farm) is a school about how to live” (Gaskin, 1977, p. 68-69).

Spirituality was a means to an end for Gaskin. He sought to elevate all human beings and reasoned that at its core, social justice is about equality. He hoped to help educate people through spirituality, and ultimately liberation, so that they, too, could see the connections all things have with each other. “The basis of our path is that if we always be faithful to the energy, that energy will keep us and sustain us and keep us smart enough so that we will be just and kind to one another: justice and liberty, goodness and kindness and all of the human virtues fall out of Holy Spirit” (Gaskin, 1977, p. 122).

Gaskin made a strong, clear statement that spirituality guides us toward the moral conclusion of social justice. He insisted that by using spirituality as a tool for learning we are able to see issues of social justice more clearly, and in better relation to ourselves and the wider universe. We become able not only to observe others, but to share the energy they share in order to better understand their life and circumstances, as they understand our own. This spiritual consciousness raising deposited individuals in an ecological consciousness that encompassed all living things, including the earth. Individuals who reached this stage of enlightenment could experience a transformative experience that allowed them to become emancipated by understanding how they had been oppressed by those who control the power in society. Gaskin’s belief in the ability of spirituality to



help learners work toward conscientization was summarized succinctly in the following statement: “What is going to carry us through is faith and love and good principles. Faith that there are such things as love and good principles, and the nerve to try to use them and carry them out” (Gaskin, 1978, p. 167).

The sense of peace and shared understanding that Gaskin helped guide learners to could lead to conscientization as individuals come to realize that all of us are not being treated equally, that an imbalance exists among those who have power and those who do not. Gaskin (1977) wants learners to “unattach” themselves so they can guard against being influenced from outside forces (p. 126). He argues that being unattached enables individuals to maintain and control their own energy. “I believe in making your subconscious conscious: it makes you free” (Gaskin, 1977, p. 26).

### Spiritual Unrest

A year after publication of *Volume One: Sunday Morning Services on the Farm*, Gaskin published a second book related to spirituality, . . . *This Season's People* (1978). In the new book, Gaskin attempts to refine his views on spirituality and place them in a broader context. But this was also a time that Gaskin was beginning to feel some resistance from those who had previously been receptive to his ideology. It was just grumblings at first, but dissension was growing.

LeDoux (1992) speculates that the living conditions at the Farm were still minimal in the late 1970s, and as more and more people showed up to the Farm overpopulation put a strain on food, housing, and welfare. She suggests that the new people who arrived at the Farm did not understand the spiritual nature of the Farm or the group mind philosophy that Gaskin had been promoting for 20 years. This created a divide between the original Farm members and newer arrivals. Some original settlers

wanted to limit the number of individuals who could live at the Farm, but Gaskin resisted, maintaining that the Farm was all inclusive and the more people who joined the movement the better.

. . . *This Season's People* was partially an attempt to reconfirm the spiritual foundation of the Farm and Gaskin's teaching for those who had not been with the original group since the late 1960s in California. He explained his commitment to inclusiveness this way: "That's what folks are doing all this for; that's why anybody comes to see me, or any other teacher at all, is because they want to change their consciousness" (Gaskin, 1980, p. 33). But other Farm residents were not convinced.

It is important to remember that Gaskin was operating outside the traditional cultural norms, but was cognizant of this fact and worked to mold his teaching and learning so it was applicable in a variety of settings.

We're religious revolutionaries. We're establishing the privileges of religion outside the establishment of religion. We have reestablished matters of sanctuary and conscience which do not belong to the law and do not belong to any establishment: they belong to the people. (Gaskin, 1980, p. 53).

It should also be noted that Gaskin was a co-learner with all of his students, admitting often that he was making things up as he went along. This is consistent with adult education praxis as educators encourage the value of lifelong learning. As far back as Yeaxlee in 1925, adult educators were in favor of constant self-reflection, analysis, and action. Such learning is a vital part of the learning process. "Our scale of values is constantly corrected as we attain to wider comprehension of experience and greater consistency of thought" (Yeaxlee, 1925, p. 33).

It is impossible to fully understand if Gaskin began moving away from spirituality because the learners had moved on or because the message was simply waning. By 1980, the Farm had been in existence for almost 10 years and many of the people living there had been studying with Gaskin for close to 15 years. What is clear is that Gaskin began focusing on other pursuits besides spirituality around this time. Previously, he had been averse to politics reasoning that spirituality and ecological consciousness could engender political change. “Politics is a matter of power confrontation – winner take all. Spirit says that no one is expendable – that everyone must be accounted for” (Gaskin, 1978, p. 129). He moved away from spiritual teaching around this time but did not abandon his quest for liberation and social justice.

In 1981, Gaskin’s focus shifted from spirituality to politics and social reform. His writing became more forceful and was directed toward finding more practical solutions for humanity’s ills like adequate housing, food, and health care for poor, oppressed people around the world. Gone were the heady, spiritual dimensions of his work. In their place was a renewed sense of social action through ecological consciousness that went beyond the Farm and out into the consumerist and increasingly privatized society that threatened to overtake everything in its path.

### Conclusion

Gaskin (1974) said that his religion is about communion and experience. He demonstrates this over and over again throughout his career as an adult educator. In a letter to Bates (1995), Gaskin said “I think each one of us has a non-shirkable obligation to figure out the world on our own as best we can. The way we behave as a result of that investigation is our real and practiced religion” (p. 374). If not for his deep belief in the power of spirituality to help foster emancipatory learning and social justice, Gaskin may

have never become a practitioner of adult education. Once he did, however, he never relinquished the moniker. From his first poorly attended forays with MNC, through the height of his popularity where he was holding classes that had thousands of learners, Gaskin remained true to certain principles that help define adult education. He created safe places for learners to congregate and share life experiences with each other using the dialogue approach. He put himself on the same level as learners so that they became co-learners. He valued life experience over specific content, and embedded the learning in the daily lives of the learners. By problematizing the learning activities he urged learners to elevate their consciousness in order to understand reality more fully. And he did all of this with a goal of liberating individuals in order to promote social justice.

Spirituality was a method for Gaskin to attend to his learners and to educate himself in the process of conscientization. The trips that learners experienced – with and without drugs – often led to new learning. “We learned that if you really want to change the world, you have to change your soul – you have to change things from the spiritual level” (Grass Case, 1974, p. 11).

The decision to use spirituality as a learning tool was clearly his intention from the beginning of his efforts. Gaskin (1974) acknowledged that MNC was “dedicated to spirit and religion” (p. 4). But he also recognized the inherent danger of such an approach, noting that religion and spirituality are often fraught with meaning. “The most dangerous thing about religion is self-righteousness” (Gaskin, 1996, p. 16). This understanding is perhaps why Gaskin was successful while other teachers failed to capture the interest of hippy learners. He was always willing to take the trip if others were willing to join him as co-trippers.

Writing in *Cannabis Spirituality* (1996) after having been at the Farm for 25 years and after having his role as a spiritual teacher diminish considerably, Gaskin sums up the extent of three decades of hands-on work with adult learners. “The way we’re living and what we’re doing is trying out a philosophy to see if it works – trying out a religion and a way of life to see if it really functions” (p.34). This pronouncement speaks to the longevity and the practical nature of the ongoing experimentation taking place at the Farm. Perhaps the fact that Gaskin spearheaded a non-violent, non-conformist attack on the establishment by living as he did in open opposition to the status quo for as long as he did is an indication of his success as an adult educator. Vella (2002) explained that adults know they have learned something *because* they have done it. The mere demonstration by Gaskin of how to live a radical life may be the ultimate form of assessing his work.

## CHAPTER V

### ECOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Thomas Berry, in the foreword to *Transformative Learning* (O'Sullivan, 1999), said "When we begin to assert a human priority over the natural world we forget where we came from; we forget that we and all our institutions of learning are primarily in a learning position in reference to the larger world about us" (p. xiv). Berry's interpretation of ecology is part of the grand vision that Gaskin came to realize during a psychedelic vision in the 1960s. He spent the last four decades trying to help other people around the world reach this same plateau of understanding. "Learning something new extends your consciousness out further" (Gaskin, 1972, p. 57).

In this dissertation, ecology is understood to mean the inter-relational web of all living things, including the earth. Gaskin rarely mentioned the word "ecology" in his writing, but he was aware of the concept and clearly was a proponent. It is interesting to note that O'Sullivan's (1999) call for more global ecological learning comes almost 30 years into Gaskin's practice. In fact, one of the reasons Gaskin and others founded the Farm was to combine ecological theory and practice (Gaskin, 1974).

Gaskin dedicated much of his teaching to interconnectedness, harmony, and belonging within the universe. He stressed the importance of group learning over individual learning. This is in accordance with non-Western educational ideals that focus on communal benefits of learning (Eheanzu, 1983; Merriam et al., 2007; Merriam & Kim, 2008). In many non-Western societies all participants in the community have a responsibility to help everyone else in society learn. This was life on the Farm.

Most non-Western learning is informal as was the majority of the learning facilitated by Gaskin (Eheanzu, 1983; Merriam et al. 2007; Merriam & Kim, 2008). He

was a holistic teacher using mind, body, and spirit to help people learn whereas most Western learning is cognitive and based on rational thinking traditions in formal classroom settings (Boateng, 1990; Merriam et al., 2007; Merriam & Kim, 2008). Like other adult educators who used spirituality as a platform, Gaskin attempted to illuminate the ripple effects individuals have on themselves and others around them.

Ecology learning has been outside the mainstream of most formal education, yet adult educators have embraced it from the beginnings of the discipline. Yeaxlee's (1925) work was fraught with dialogue about ecology and the mind-body connection. From his earliest days at MNC, Gaskin sought to balance the body and mind. He promoted his own efforts by saying that he teaches "the care, feeding, cleaning and manipulation of the universe/self-system" (Gaskin, 1972, p. 81).

#### Basis for Ecological Consciousness

Establishing a foundation for ecological thinking was a primary task for Gaskin in the early years of MNC. It made sense for Gaskin to explore ecology theories because of their close ties to his enmeshed spirituality. When learners were confronted with issues like tripping on psychedelic drugs, they could learn not only from the related spirituality, but they also had to acknowledge their own role in the interrelatedness of the world. A bad trip could affect not only the tripper, but also those around him or her. Further, a bad trip potentially could be the result of bad karma. It was in everyone's best interest to put off good vibes and keep the group head healthy. "In an ecological perspective, there is no sense of the person without the sense of community" (O'Sullivan & Taylor, 2004, p. 13).

As Gaskin wove spirituality and ecology together, ecological consciousness emerged naturally as part of his overall philosophy. Still, it took some work to convince

hippys who were fed up with the status quo that they had a responsibility larger than themselves. Gaskin (1970) tried to explain it to them this way:

The first thing you have to do if you're going to do anything about changing the world, I've found, is you have to buy it for perfect right now . . .you have to buy it for perfect and become responsible for it in the condition that it is now in . . .not say, Hey, let's get it neat and then I'll be responsible for it, but responsible for it in the condition that it's now in. (p. 114)

Gaskin (1978) argued that the illusion of separateness from the earth and from each other is perpetuated by privatization. Society continues to push people to be individuals in order to disassociate themselves from what happens to others because privatization is good for capitalism. This view was becoming clear to Gaskin as the country moved further away from the Great Depression years, and seemed to be hurrying toward the 1980s. He foresaw the perils of a society overrun with consumerism and worked at encouraging people to look beyond their own self-interests to see what was important in the grand scheme of the world. "Reconfiguration of our social world – organizations, institutions, communities, relationships—is a critical transformative practice in learning our way toward an ecological consciousness" (O'Sullivan & Taylor, 2004, p. 11).

Mechanistic thinking relies on linear thought generated from physical and biological scientific explanations (Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy, 2012). Ecological thinking with its holistic viewpoint stands in contrast to mechanistic thinking. Selby (2000) argued that ecological thinking is necessary in education because it includes cultural and intrinsic values that Western science disregards, such as "emotion, subjectivity, caring, and intuition as ways of knowing" (p. 91). This anti-mechanistic



worldview allows “students to explore their inner ecology, cultivate their attunement to their senses and body rhythms, and, thus, develop an embodied relationship with the natural world” (Selby, 2000, p. 89). Alternative learning methodologies like Selby describes ground Gaskin’s work firmly in an ecological arena. Selby (2000) went on to explain that “contemplative and therapeutic art, dance, breathing exercises, yoga, meditation” could become important aspects of an ecological learning process (p. 89). Learners studying with Gaskin were encouraged to use all forms of learning by any method—including drug use—that worked to open the mind to new experiences. Gaskin was a proponent of yoga, meditation, the mind-body connection, art, and music as nontraditional activities for learning.

Ecological consciousness is a social justice issue because as Morris (2002) said, “Consciousness and environment are entangled, confused, co-related, co-dependent. There is no way to separate consciousness from environment without doing violence to the very ecosystem that sustains us” (p. 579). She goes on to argue that in consumer-capitalist societies economic status determines human value; therefore, “consumer capitalism has much to do with what is considered valuable and what is not” (Morris, 2002, p. 582). The elite want to remain in power and continue to reap the benefits of a system that penalizes the powerless just like *The Story of the Golden Horns* described in the prologue of this project. Morris (2002) maintained that ecological degradation is equivalent to racism, sexism, and homophobia. “Structural inequalities need to be dismantled if justice is to prevail, if human beings are to make this earth a more equitable place” (p. 582).

Gaskin (1978) intoned that if humans acted in concert with the world around them as one ecosystem, we would have to give up competition for food, life, death, and

housing. But he realized immediately that a lack of competition would be almost impossible to achieve on the material plane because the material plane is limited by its physical boundaries. This limitation makes total ecology difficult because everyone cannot be in the same place at the same time. However, Gaskin (1978) noted, everyone *can* be in the astral plane at the same time without competition. The astral plane is infinite; consequently, there would be no reason for competition of resources. Without competition, the astral plane engenders a fundamental element of equality in the universe, establishes a learning space suitable for dialogue, and meets the needs of adult learners by being open to alternative forms of learning.

#### The Link Between Spirituality and Ecological Consciousness

Gaskin's views on spirituality and ecological consciousness are perfectly aligned with one another. In his writing and life's work, the two melded together seamlessly forming a clear path toward liberation. "Spirit is one with the universe, and everybody's spirit is one" (Gaskin, 1972, p. 47). Miller (1980) suggests holding these similar spiritual and ecological beliefs that God is integrated into everything in the universe does two things. It stresses the importance of the present, what Gaskin refers to as the here and now, and it compels individuals to live in harmony with each other.

One of the primary tools of ecological consciousness in Gaskin's mind was telepathy, which is communication beyond the senses. He explained it this way: "Telepathy is people's electrical fields being able to sense each other," and those fields can overlap, which creates a "fabric of consciousness" (Gaskin, 1972, p. 14). In more modern terms, the fabric of consciousness could be termed ecological consciousness.

It is the interrelatedness (ecology) of all living things that allows such telepathic communication. Gaskin was convinced that telepathy, with its focus on inclusivity, was

beneficial to understanding the totality of his spiritual message. In Gaskin's mind, it was impossible for learners to move forward in their critique of society without accepting the relational web of the universe. "All the people in the world are co-creating this environment" including the good things and the bad things like pollution, hunger, and oppression (Gaskin, 1980, p. 120).

Gaskin promoted telepathy vigorously from the very beginnings of MNC, but the idea seemed to fade along with his status as a spiritual teacher around 1980. For more than a decade, though, telepathy was a major part of Gaskin's classes. He frequently referred to this ability as the "group mind" or "group head" (Gaskin, 1972, p. 14).

We have found over a long period of time that we can interact in such a way that we can all find out what we need to know . . .that as we sit here like this we're a group mind. (p. 14)

This was a significant part of the dialogue process for Gaskin. He felt telepathy was like taking a raw vibration and translating it into information. Telepathy is a unique example of how Gaskin attempted to involve all class participants in the dialogue sessions. Telepathy allowed individuals who were reluctant to speak in class the opportunity to participate in their own way and still feel like part of the group. "We all breathe the same air and live out of the same chemicals of the same earth, and our minds partake of a lot of the same territory all the time" (Gaskin, 1980, p. 114).

Gaskin did not discount anything simply because it was outside the bounds of science or reason. He felt compassion was body telepathy, and his wife, Ina May, would go on to explore this idea in great detail through her practice of midwifery, which she labeled "spiritual midwifery" (Gaskin, 1990). Ina May and the Farm midwives have

delivered thousands of babies over the last 30 years and still promote natural child birth using principles of Gaskin's philosophy.

In more recent years it seems Gaskin (1996) reconceived his ideas about telepathy when he writes about what is commonly referred to as a "contact high" (p. 36). The *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (2011) indicates that contact high is a slang term for an individual feeling the effects of another individual's "drug induced behavior or mood." Gaskin claimed that the notion of the contact high is what initially drew him to telepathy and psychedelic drugs in the first place. "Someone can feel the effects of a psychedelic just by coming into contact with someone using it" (Gaskin, 1996, p. 36). For him, this idea presented boundless opportunities for investigation.

### Psychedelics

Psychedelic drugs revealed an entirely new world to Gaskin and catalyzed his life as a hippy adult educator. The drugs allowed Gaskin to experience things he believed were in his subconscious (1972; 1980; 1990). He noted many times that psychedelics introduced him to "another plane of experience other than the material plane" (Gaskin, 1972, p. 109). This mind-altering glimpse into his own psyche was precisely what he had been hoping for when he took the drugs for the first time.

Gaskin advocated for the use of psychedelic drugs like LSD, mushrooms, and peyote during MNC sessions, but not long afterward. He felt the drugs would help others reach a heightened state of consciousness similar to his own experience. MNC was, partly, a result of wanting to trip with others who were undergoing similar drug-induced experiences. It is never clear in Gaskin's books if Gaskin was high on psychedelics while leading specific MNC sessions; neither is it clear if learners were experiencing the effects

of the drugs while attending MNC. However, the nature of the class about tripping would suggest that many, if not all, of the learners were users of some kind of drug.

When Gaskin and others began dropping acid in the mid- to late-1960s, the drug was legal and had only recently been discovered by recreational users. As the popularity of psychedelic drugs grew, so did the danger. Drug dealers began emerging around San Francisco with new drugs that were more potent and highly addictive. Gaskin immediately began lobbying against speed, heroin, methamphetamines (meth), and barbiturates. The danger of those drugs was too significant. He did, however, still recommend peyote and marijuana because he considered those drugs naturally occurring, and he maintained they can produce the same type of heightened sensations and consciousness raising effects as manufactured psychedelics.

May 4, 1970 was the last time Gaskin dropped acid. He remembered the day clearly because it was the day soldiers with the Ohio National Guard shot and killed four unarmed college students and wounded nine others at Kent State University who were protesting America's invasion of Cambodia. Gaskin was leading a solemn MNC session that night when a girl gave him a piece of candy that had a lid of LSD on it. Unaware that he had been dosed, and threatened by a menacing group of learners who were riled by the shootings earlier that day, Gaskin attempted to end the class early. But other members of the class refused to let him leave during such a difficult time in their lives. There were calls by some members of the group to get guns. Others called for retaliation and vengeance against the government. A groundswell of support for violence was sweeping through the crowd. And amid the raucous din, surrounded by thousands of hippys bent on revenge Gaskin did something very courageous. He stood up to them.

I come in here and talk peace and love, and you guys say ‘yeah, yeah.’ I come in here and I talk peace and love, and you guys say ‘yeah, yeah.’ I come in here and talk peace and love, man and . . . and I was going to go off on ‘I talk peace and love and here you guys are coming on warlike.’ But instead of that, when I said it a third time, almost the entire room, it must have been ninety percent, roared back at me, ‘Yeah! Yeah!’ It was an incredible loud, strong consensus, and it took me off the hook. (Gaskin, 1990, p. 266)

### The Farm

When Gaskin and 200 or so other hippys founded the Farm in the early 1970s, they wanted it to be a model of cooperation (Gaskin, 1974). Each aspect of the Farm was meant to integrate with every other element. Sustainability and self-sufficiency were two of the main goals. But in the beginning, survival was the primary goal.

Life at the Farm was rough the first few years without permanent housing, running water, or bathroom facilities (LeDoux, 1992). Individuals were busy learning to do all the things necessary to make a small community of several hundred people run smoothly. Everyone at the Farm was a vegetarian. The choice not to eat meat or animal products was not a political decision, it was simple economics. The hippys at the Farm realized they could grow enough soybeans on a small plot of land to feed ten times more people than raising cattle on the same amount of land. “We try to keep the land sacred” (Gaskin, 1980, p. 26). As far as Gaskin was concerned, other people had lived on the Farm before he got there and the hippys were just taking care of it temporarily.

It is worth noting that Gaskin and those who traveled with him on the caravan and helped settle the Farm were hard workers, which countered the prevailing view at the time that hippys were carefree and lazy. O’Sullivan (1999) remarked that “People who

attend to their spiritual life are seen as non-productive or underdeveloped” (p. 263). But Gaskin’s group worked for themselves and at jobs in the mainstream in order to make enough money to live. Gaskin was opposed to welfare and felt those who could work ought to so as to help those who could not. “Those who are strong and healthy and intelligent should use their energies for the benefit of all, because that’s what it takes to make it” (Gaskin, 1980, pp. 93-94).

Gaskin was thinking hard about ecology consciousness in the late 1970s. It was a time of reflection for him related to all of his praxis. His popularity was declining among learners at the Farm and he was seeking a new direction to be useful and helpful within the community. He had always been interested in how people relate to each other and why those relationships often become maligned. It was a line of questioning born out of his own changing life experience at the time. In *Volume One: Sunday Morning Services* (1977) Gaskin posed a rhetorical question that seemed to extend beyond the abstract to a more personal sense of self-direction: “What is our responsibility to our fellow man?” (p. 68).

O’Sullivan (1999) noted that indigenous people can serve as a model for how to live because their spirituality is not tied to economics. Gaskin and the others at the Farm tried living a spiritual life free from economic influence for almost a decade, but enthusiasm for continuing in the same way was receding. Learners were questioning the validity of Gaskin’s teaching as the outside world refused to embrace the holistic, spiritual hippy lifestyle being modeled at the Farm. More and more people were crowding into the Farm where resources were becoming scarcer. A creeping sense of consumerism was invading the Farm’s hippy ethos, which LeDoux (1992) posited could have been because Farm children were beginning to grow up. Apparently, according to

LeDoux (1992), the hippy lifestyle of poverty and “do your own thing” was fine for the hippys themselves, but becoming parents changed their worldview. Many of the individuals whose children were reaching school age began to question their sub-poverty surroundings.

Gaskin’s inquiry into the evolving purpose of his life and the Farm marked a shift in his focus from one concentrated within spirituality to more of an ecological way of thinking. This shift also brought Gaskin and the others down from the astral plane and placed them squarely in confrontation with the establishment, which controlled the material plane. In fact, Gaskin (1980) noted that he and the others felt an obligation to do something more, beyond their work at the Farm. “We have to take responsibility for our part of the universe. . . we have a moral obligation to be sure that every one of us has the best experience of this universe that we can” (Gaskin, 1980, p. 93).

Individuals at the Farm began working with people in need all over the world. Relief efforts were numerous through the Farm’s aid organization PLENTY. They worked with many indigenous groups in Guatemala, Haiti, and Africa to build housing, water wells, and instigate soybean farming. “Every one of us deserves food, healthcare, and shelter” (Gaskin, 1977, p. 119). Once again, Gaskin and the other members of the Farm had found a role they could play in the larger cosmology.

#### Social Justice Mission

Ecology thinking takes into account non-scientific factors like intuition. Often, these factors are major contributors to transformative learning because they are contained in an individual’s consciousness (Selby, 2000). Gaskin attempted to embed the idea of ecology into his teaching in order to reach a learner’s deepest beliefs and assumptions. He wanted to form a giant collective consciousness – a true oneness of all things.



Ecology learning is inclusive. Inclusiveness is a primary principle of adult education leading toward a safe and conducive learning environment (Tisdell, 1995). “There’s no one who is expendable. That’s one of our key assumptions” (Gaskin, 1977, p. 63). Ecology, along with spirituality, was another non-threatening attempt by Gaskin to create a safe learning environment for individuals to question the status quo. He sought to illuminate through ecological consciousness the intimate relationships of all things and how those relationships were being abused by a powerful, elite ruling class to the detriment of the earth, society, and humankind. Gaskin’s praxis in this area was a precursor to greater significance being placed on environmental education, an issue that has worldwide importance, according to a report issued by UNESCO (1976):

The goal of environmental education is to develop a world population that is aware of and concerned about the environment and its associated problems and which has the knowledge, skills, attitudes, motivations and commitment to work individually and collectively towards *solutions of current problems and prevention of new ones*. (p. 1)

Consciousness is difficult to represent, but it is vital to our ability to transform through learning because it re-situates us in the world. “Consumer capitalism reproduces dangerous value systems that serve to exploit and degrade the earth” (Morris, 2002, p. 582). Ecological consciousness requires us to reexamine our core beliefs and assumptions when we study ecology. This process steers us toward conscientization. When we realize the totality of the relational web of the universe, we are compelled to act in order to work toward equality. The ecological learning process was instrumental in Gaskin’s work. Through it he was able to demonstrate to adult hippy learners that they were being oppressed. Once hippys realized their role in the relational web in reference to those

controlling society, it was necessary that hippys take some sort of social action to correct the imbalance of power. They would also come to realize the severe level of oppression suffered by other groups like women and Native Americans, and worked to help them over the years.

Gaskin was nonviolent, and he viewed damaging the earth as violence, which was degrading to the universe. The equation led those at the Farm to use the least destructive farming methods possible. When the Farm was first settled members wanted the Farm to be organic. But, after several unsuccessful attempts at organic farming, fertilizer was used as minimally as possible. During the last 30 years, individuals at the Farm have been revising their farming methods in order to develop sustainable permaculture practices that weave principles of ecology with community-building. Permaculture is a method of sustainable land use design that attempts to mimic natural ecosystems as its main objective (Mollison & Holmgren, 1978). It includes natural home building, growing food locally, restoring landscapes, catching rainwater, and building interdependent communities. Permaculture is most commonly associated with sustainable farming practices, some of which have been employed at the Farm. Low-impact permaculture techniques contrast industrial farming practices (Mollison & Holmgren, 1978). Gaskin said that “We believe that how you be makes a difference in how it is for everybody. There is something you can do and it’s within your power to do it; and if you do it, it makes a difference” (Grass Case, 1974, p. 12). This ongoing effort to tread as lightly as possible on the earth and its ecological systems speaks directly to Gaskin’s social justice mission and teachings.

### Challenging the Status Quo

After teaching about ecology for more than 30 years, and frustrated by what he perceived as a lack of progress in the area, Gaskin decided to run for president of the United States in 2000. He ran as a member of the Green party, but with almost no money he was unable to garner the support necessary for a national campaign. He finished third in the primary voting behind ultimate Green party presidential candidate Ralph Nader. Gaskin (2000) acknowledged that one of his reasons for seeking the country's highest office was to make cleaning up the environment a priority. Gaskin was upset by the country's refusal to participate in the signing of international protocols, which included environmental and nuclear protections.

Gaskin was also concerned with the eroding rights of animals in the U.S., which he considered an environmental issue. He argued that environmental issues are often portrayed by corporations as false dichotomies – either or propositions – such as saving the old growth redwood forests means reducing jobs for loggers. But this is not the case. Other logging jobs exist in other areas, and new jobs protecting the forests might be created (Gaskin, 2000). Because of his ecological background Gaskin was able to understand the interconnectedness of environmental policy and how it affects other systems in the world. “I want it to be understood that we are a bunch of tree huggers and mystics and greens and that there are about 35 million of us . . . I want us to influence the future of this nation” (Gaskin, 2000, p. 21). He argued that the earth and its people are a biological system, and that damaging one part damages the entire system.

### Conclusion

Gaskin spent the last 40 years focused on finding ways to reach learners through ecology learning. He did it through dialogue during MNC and the caravan. He did it

through hands-on learning activities at the Farm. And he did it through his own praxis, which resulted in Gaskin's ultimate social justice effort in America – a campaign for the U.S. presidency. Since that first acid trip that helped him reach a state of elevated consciousness, Gaskin espoused the benefits of ecological thinking. He and the learners who studied with him were a living example of ecology at work. They found a way to embed themselves harmoniously into the fabric of the universe. “We as a people are a microcosm of the whole planet and how we are doing shows how the world is doing” (Gaskin, 2005, p.60).

What makes Gaskin stand out in this area of adult education is his ability to problematize the learning. He made ecological learning important in a way that was inescapable. He taught that individuals should take care of their ecology because by definition it is part of what makes them who they are (Gaskin, 1970). By challenging learners to live according to an ecological consciousness, Gaskin embedded learning in their everyday lives. They treated animals fairly by becoming vegetarians. They preserved the environment by establishing permaculture practices. They attacked hunger issues worldwide by growing soybeans and showing others how to do it.

Time after time, Gaskin and the adults who worked with him found and adopted alternative solutions to destructive ecology. During one of the first MNC sessions, when he was discussing environmentalism, Gaskin (1970) said that “I think what it comes down to is we're gonna have to woo and charm mankind” (p. 90). He spent the next four decades doing so successfully.

## CHAPTER VI

## CONCLUSION

John Dewey begins his book, *Freedom and Culture* (1939), by posing two questions: “What is freedom and why is it prized” (p. 3). What follows as a response is fully another page of questions related to the nature of freedom. Consequently, Dewey notes that freedom is part of our cultural makeup in America. In other words, freedom is part of who we are as a people. The struggle for liberation and equality is inherent within us all. It is most certainly what motivated Stephen Gaskin.

Gaskin worked with adult learners in the counterculture for 40 years. It was a remarkable career that initially began with a class of six adults and Gaskin, their hippy teacher. They wanted to share extraordinary experiences with each other in order to make the world a more just place. “The karma we work out is not our personal karma, but our collective karma” (Gaskin, 1972, p. 40).

Gaskin had the idea that emancipatory learning through the lens of spirituality could awaken individuals to the inner workings of society. When learner interest in spirituality waned, he approached learners from a different place and stressed the interrelatedness of all things, honing his emancipatory message in terms of an ecological consciousness raising. Always, he insisted that the learning be applicable and embedded in the daily lives of learners. Foley (2001) said emancipatory learning is “to free people to take control of their own lives” (p. 72). The hippys that Gaskin worked with were rebelling against the status quo that they felt did not represent them. However, as Freire and others found, it is difficult for the oppressed to fight against the system because those in power make the rules. Gaskin set out to change those rules with MNC and then later the Farm.

“Radical adult educators are those who work for emancipatory social change and whose work engages with the learning dimension of social life” (Foley, 2001, p. 72).

Gaskin worked with adult learners to help them become free from oppression through conscientization. He was unique in that his approach used hippy slang and counterculture values as the basis for learning. For example, instead of deriding telepathy and the astral plane, Gaskin embraced these ideas. Further, he encouraged learners to embrace their own ideas and take some type of social action as a result of their liberation. For tens of thousands of adult learners, Gaskin was a beacon who helped them place themselves in a broader context of the world.

Gaskin was effective as an adult educator for a number of reasons. He approached learners in a nonthreatening way and communicated with them as an equal, not as a teacher with status elevated above a student. He made an effort to understand the learners’ needs and valued their previous life experiences. Gaskin also stressed the dialogue approach in learning activities and utilized the principles of andragogy although he never explicitly indicates that that is what he was doing.

Many of Gaskin’s accomplishments came as the result of his own adult learning. He was not afraid to experiment and deviate from traditional educational ideals. Context and experience, not content, were utmost. He learned along with the hippys who attended MNC. He learned alongside those who helped found the Farm. For Gaskin, learning was an ongoing activity. He believed adults learned best in groups, that hands-on learning was important, and that psychedelic drugs and marijuana could enhance learning experiences, all of which he used in his own praxis. Gaskin’s learning path coincides with Jarvis’ (1983) interpretation of an adult learner.

It is recognized that the individual is moulded by the forces that are exerted upon him as he seeks to discover his place in society but that the human being is more than a passive recipient and processor of social pressures, he is able to act back upon his world and become an agency of change. (p. 3)

Gaskin's work focused on improving things for all of humanity. He encouraged learners to stick together, care for each other, and love each other because doing for others is an expression of love rather than commerce (Gaskin, 1977). Making money and profiteering were not high on Gaskin's list of priorities. He was concerned with individuals improving their lives through cooperation and sustainability. Over the years, learners came and went. Learning objectives evolved. Outcomes varied. But Gaskin never lost sight of the long-term goal of helping liberate those who felt oppressed by the system. Whatever transpired, Gaskin always tried to keep things in perspective. Suzuki-Roshi, whom Gaskin greatly admired, had a theory of minimum desire that Gaskin quoted frequently. Suzuki Roshi said, "you should desire desirelessness until the desire for desirelessness becomes a desire, and then you better level off about there" (Gaskin, 1974, p. 1).

Gaskin was a servant to adult learners for more than 40 years. He modeled his teaching-life around Suzuki Roshi's theory of minimum desire. In the early 1980s when spiritual learners began to disperse from the Farm, Gaskin did not let his own desires overtake him. He continued his emancipatory work at the Farm, but in a reduced capacity. Gaskin reemerged on the national scene in 2000 when he ran for president, but faded from view after failing to garner the Green Party nomination. Since then, he has been living at the Farm, making speaking engagements, and blogging. However, in the midst of writing this dissertation, Gaskin's website and blog both disappeared. In

December 2011, the domain name stephengaskin.com went up for sale and all the material Gaskin had posted was lost. He has not published a book since 2000 although rumors circulated on his former blog that he was working on a novel. For the last several years, Gaskin has been working on a project to build a retirement village for hippys called Rocinante, an homage to Don Quixote's horse.

Researchers have ignored Gaskin's work for the most part, but he never sought scholarly acceptance. This dissertation attempts to place his teaching and learning experiences with adult learners in a scholarly context and promote further study about Gaskin, adult learning, and adult education. There is also potential for Gaskin's ideas to cross disciplinary boundaries. Recently, Matei (2005) credited Gaskin's work at the Farm as a precursor to the modern communal experiences taking place in the virtual realm. Matei posits that a new counterculture is burgeoning on the web and revolves around the ideals of cooperation and sustainability that Gaskin focused on in his work. It would be interesting to explore the emancipatory nature of these online counterculture communities to understand if aspects of adult learning are taking place virtually.

Additionally, future research related to Gaskin and this dissertation could include a study of spiritual midwifery, which is a birthing methodology derived primarily from Stephen Gaskin's principles of spirituality by Ina May Gaskin and the Farm midwives. In the beginnings of spiritual midwifery, nearly all the learning was informal and experiential. Further, scholars could examine how hippys, as young adults, learned to be parents, and how they applied that learning. Adult education researchers, also, could study the adult children of Gaskin's former students to document their adult learning tendencies and perceptions, which may differ from children with more traditional backgrounds. Another possible area of future study is for scholars to examine how rock



and roll music was used as an adult learning tool. At various times, Gaskin and the Farm band traveled together to speaking engagements. Gaskin (1974) said rock and roll was the hippys' church music. Ironically, Gaskin's attempts at establishing a hippy retirement village could provide a wealth of opportunities for adult education scholars and other social scientists to study hippy aging issues, including learning.

The most difficult aspect of this dissertation has been trying to identify a meaningful assessment of Gaskin's work with adults. Assessment is an important piece of the teaching-learning transaction. Did the individuals who studied with Gaskin learn anything? Certainly, they must have or they would not have returned to him over and over again. Learners were making self-assessments of their learning. As Vella (2002) indicated, adult learners know they have learned something when they have actively participated in accomplishing the learning objective. However, there is no way to empirically measure the learning that took place at MNC or the Farm. Perhaps this concern for assessment of adult learning is the same concern Lindeman had almost 100 years ago when he was struggling to make space for adult education in society. He knew adult education was important, but how to prove it? "Adult education is an attempt to discover a new method and create a new incentive for learning; its implications are qualitative, not quantitative" (Lindeman, 1926, p. 19). He went on to say that "a small group of adults in a single community seriously concerned about the values of creative living is sufficient to alter the quality of the total community process" (p. 58). Gaskin would agree. Learning assessment was simple as far as he was concerned. When asked about all the learners who had worked with him, Gaskin told LeDoux (1992) that "by changing themselves, they changed the world" (p. 195).

Gaskin maintained that the country ought to fall back on the hippy ethic of “eating healthy, living simply, walking lightly on the earth, treating everybody like family, and taking care of the mothers and babies” (2000, p. 13). He noted that service to others seems to have become a revolutionary act in the decades since the 1960s, and he encouraged others to work to change that sentiment. “What the hippys taught us through their protests, massive music concerts, and sit-ins is that we can do big things together” (Gaskin, 2000, p. 40).

Gaskin never gave up on his counterculture values. He became a hippy because he loved their message and he wanted to help do his part to change the world. “Being a hippy means being a doer” (Gaskin, 2000, p. 37). He was intrigued to see the hippys doing things together because they had no authority from any agency to do those things. Until that time, he said he never realized people like him had any power. What followed was a long life of working with adults toward the liberation all oppressed people.

## POSTSCRIPT

## INTERVIEW WITH STEPHEN GASKIN

Gaskin was interviewed at his home on the Farm in Summertown, TN during the afternoon of February 10, 2012 to clarify points of discussion in his books and to discuss his work with adult learners. Gaskin had not been feeling well and spoke so softly that at times it was difficult to hear him despite the recorder being only inches from him. The interview was recorded and transcribed below. Analysis of Gaskin's responses to the interview questions was not part of this dissertation; instead, the interview serves as a stand-alone supplement that provides insight into Gaskin's thinking during his 40 year career as a hippy adult educator.

Gabriel Morley (GM): Have you ever heard the terms adult education or adult learning? In what context and under what circumstances?

*Stephen Gaskin (SG): No I haven't. Not in the terms you've described.*

GM: Are you, or were you, familiar with any of adult education's notable radicals such as John Dewey, Paulo Freire, Myles Horton, Jane Vella, Eduard Lindeman, or Malcolm Knowles?

*SG: Nope. . . I had no pre-college education. My father had run away from home at 13 or 14. So he raised me in Denver, Sante Fe, and Albuquerque. I watched him be a carpenter. I watched him be a commercial fisherman and learn how to navigate by the stars. Took me to sea, when I was eight years old. I went to two different states, two different schools for the first grade. For the third grade, my father was the civilian housing manager and I had quite an experience there. I would stop on the way to school to chat with a German prisoner who was a trustee [unintelligible]. What happened was*

*he had been given a stud card. His girlfriend was short, dark, and Jewish. So what he did was surrender to the first American soldier he saw. He was quite a guy to get to know.*

GM: And then you went to high school in Los Alamos.

*SG: Yes. At a place called Tombstone T where the mountain comes down from Los Alamos. [Unintelligible].*

GM: Well how did you like San Francisco. You came home from Korea and went to San Francisco State.

*SG: I came back from Korea and my folks were there so I got into junior college [San Bernardino]. I always got the feeling that there never was a place where the action was happening and alive. By the time the word gets out, it's started to fade already. The thing about the hippys was, they just came up around me.*

GM: Because you were in the Beat mode then. You had some coffeehouses.

*SG: I was actually a Beatnik before I was a hippy. I've probably said this before, but I wanted to be a hippy the way other boys wanted to be a cowboy.*

GM: I'm glad you did. I think a lot of people are.

*SG: Well, the problem about it is it's not an official way of getting [unintelligible].*

GM: That's what I try to argue in this dissertation, that these informal educational practices are just as valuable as everything else. They just haven't been given their due. People have looked at community-building and social movements, but no one has looked at education. That's what helped ya'll change things.

*SG: Yep.*

GM: People understanding and learning about the processes.

*SG: We were on the outs with the political element.* [Gaskin then talked about something he had heard recently about California Governor Jerry Brown.]

GM: Well, what happened? You ended up finishing at San Francisco State but then things got squirrely there.

[Note: Gaskin told a story about S. I. Hayakawa who was his professor at San Francisco State College.]

GM: I read a book by [Fabio]Rojas and it talked about how the Experimental College [at SFSC] helped create the field of Black studies.

*SG: Yeah. That and a lot of colleges at that time were having experimental colleges. I ran up to the last class I taught formally . . . I had a good time teaching. I taught for two years. I taught semantics and writing.*

GM: Then you had enough?

*SG: What happened was my students said, "We like you well enough but you don't know what's happening." [Unintelligible].*

[Note: Gaskin then talked about The Grateful Dead song "St. Stephen". Gaskin was friends with members of The Grateful Dead and there is speculation that Gaskin is the subject of the song. Gaskin said he does not know if he was the inspiration or not, but he sees many similarities between himself and what he was doing in San Francisco at the time and the song's lyrics.]

GM: As a teacher, you demonstrate many of the attributes that adults seek when entering into learning activities, but you seem to have had a traditional formal schooling background. Can you talk about your formal schooling, and how that may have influenced you, as well as some of the individuals who most influenced you as an educator and thinker?

GM: Nevermind. We already did this one. [Note: See answer to question 1.]

Let's move on. I know you read a variety of texts when you were doing Monday Night Class, and surely you had the opportunity to pursue further graduate studies, but you chose instead to educate yourself. Did you ever consider going back to school, or did you prefer being self-directed? How do you feel that decision affected your life?

*SG: No. I taught my last class and went to Belize. They had plenty of grass down there but no rolling papers so they rolled their joints in one-pound paper bags.*

[Note: Gaskin then discussed driving across the Yucatan Peninsula in a Volkswagen bus on roads that had been cut only by machete.]

*SG: Part of my thing was, I said to them, "You have to write about your experiences. Your papers are dull." I already had a reputation, which Ina May [Gaskin; Stephen's wife] says was central to my teaching, I would fart in class.*

GM: That is one of the huge arguments I make in the paper. The way you taught the class is what opened it up. That's what freed people to reach this other level of consciousness.

*SG: Yeah. There's two things about responsibility. Their responsibility and my responsibility. Mine was to do my best and say, "I don't know" if I don't. Their's was, the guy who asks the question is the one who gets to hear the answer.*

5. What do you consider to be your primary educational theories and how did they develop? Essentially, what is the basis of your work as an educator and why is it important?

[Note: Gaskin did not respond directly to the question. Instead, he responded by telling the story about the time he was young and living in Los Alamos and found a piece of a nuclear bomb in the desert. No one knew what the material was or where it had come

from. According to Gaskin, unidentified individuals from the government confiscated the material. Years later, Gaskin said he met a nuclear engineer who told him it was a piece of a bomb. The engineer explained to him how the bomb worked. The federal government denies the incident, according to Gaskin.]

[Note: Gaskin then told a story about being arrested because some individuals had planted marijuana on the Farm. At the Tennessee State Penitentiary the other inmates protected him and the three other individuals from the Farm who were sentenced for violating Tennessee's drug laws at the time.]

GM: When you first began Monday Night Class, what were you hoping would happen?

*SG: My first room was at the [SFSC] Experimental College where we started off. I would throw my coat down on the stage and say, "Who's gonna help me pay for the room?" I had a great time.*

[Note: Gaskin then discussed his last consensual and non-consensual haircuts. He said the last time he voluntarily cut his hair was after getting his master's degree. He was considering applying for teaching jobs and wanted to look presentable. His last non-voluntary haircut, and the last hair cut he has had in 40 years, was at the Tennessee State Penitentiary in 1971.]

*SG: I had the student body like I was a regular teacher but it was not official. . . It was a way that everybody felt like they were part of it. It wasn't that ideas that I had, had religious type visions. You could stop the first 45 people walking down Haight Street and 4 or 5 of them or so would tell you what religious experiences they had.*

GM: That's what I argue in my paper, that it wasn't a religious thing, it was spiritual.

*SG: Right.*

GM: That it combined elements from all over.

*SG: Yeah.*

GM: How, if at all, do you feel your thinking has evolved over the last 40 years?

*SG: I realized that there's guys like me every now and then. Things tend to organize themselves in a certain way around me. I never told anybody what to do and I don't now.*

[Note: Gaskin then discussed waking up people during the Caravan by banging on the front bumpers of the buses with a ball peen hammer. Then he said the hippys were treated well when they first arrived in Summertown because he spoke perfect redneck.]

*SG: I used to go around and the neighbors wondered if we were sissies because we didn't have any guns. So we told the people on the gate [the entrance to the Farm is gated and has a Welcome Center] to tell them I was a Korean combat veteran with the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division. So I would go to visit one of the neighbors and they would hand me a gun. A .45 I know like the inside of my hat. I'd pop a beer can at 40 yards or so.*

GM: What do you feel you accomplished over the last four decades as an educator of adults and would you have done anything differently?

*SG: I don't know if I could tell you that or not because some of the stuff I didn't know I was gonna do turned out to be pretty heavy. I couldn't have dreamed or asked for the life I've been privileged to have. It happened because I used psychedelic principles. [Unintelligible].*

GM: Your last book was published in 2000 when you ran for president. Have you been working on any other books since then?

*SG: I'm working on an autobiography.*



GM: You've been working on that a long time.

*SG: I have.*

[Note: In the 1970s, author Fletcher Knebel wrote a biography of Gaskin that was never published. Gaskin has the unpublished manuscript at his house, along with portions of a Knebel novel about Gaskin and the Farm titled *Big Juice Dude*. Gaskin said the title came from a guy who used to stand on Haight Street who said every generation a big juice dude comes along.]

GM: Do you remember the story of the golden horns? Can you talk about why that made such an impression on you as a younger man?

[Note: Gaskin did not respond to the question directly. He said his uncle Charlie is the one who told him the story of the golden horns. Charlie had been an organizer on the waterfront in San Francisco. He went on to describe Charlie's marriage to a Mexican woman. Charlie's son is writing a book about fishing with Charlie and Gaskin contributed to the book.]

GM: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your work educating adults?

*SG: I feel like we helped. We made quite a difference.*

[Note: Gaskin then told stories about the local sheriff.]

## APPENDIX A

## ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF GASKIN'S BOOKS

Gaskin, S. (1964). *40 miles of bad road*. Summertown, TN: The Book Publishing Company.

*This was Gaskin's master of arts thesis at San Francisco State College. It is a collection of five fiction stories. The stories are not very memorable and show no indication that Gaskin may go on to become a counterculture spiritual teacher.*

Gaskin, S. (1970). *Monday night class*. Summertown, TN: The Book Publishing Company.

*MNC was a weekly teaching and learning session in San Francisco led by Gaskin in the late 1960s. The class was not a formal university class. Gaskin talked about sex, drugs, religion, and tripping among other things. Thousands of hippys would attend the classes each week. Gaskin would talk briefly and then take questions from the audience. He lays the foundation for his theories during these classes, including things like the material and astral planes, consciousness, telepathy and energy, karma, truth, free will and the "unsulliable nature of the intellect" (p. 183).*

Gaskin, S. (1972). *The caravan*. Summertown, TN: The Book Publishing Company.

*After holding MNC in San Francisco for four years, Gaskin was commissioned by a group of preachers to travel the country speaking at churches. The preachers hoped Gaskin could explain about the hippys and their lifestyle. When Gaskin announced he was leaving MNC to go on the road, people asked if they could go with him. So he took MNC on the road. The trip began on Oct. 12, 1970 with 25 school buses retrofitted into motor-homes. They visited 42 states and picked up*

*more people and buses as they crossed the country. The caravan ultimately had more than 50 vehicles and over 250 people. Gaskin discussed a variety of topics generated by question-and-answer group discussion. Six babies were born during the trip with Gaskin's wife, Ina May, delivering them on the buses and learning by experience how to be a midwife. When the trip was over and the group had returned to San Francisco Gaskin was asked the purpose of the trip. He replied, "To go out and put the word on folks" (p. 251).*

Gaskin, S. (1974). *Hey beatnik! This is the Farm book*. Summertown, TN: The Book Publishing Company.

*This book describes the Farm and how Gaskin has been putting into practice his theories. Gaskin and a group of hippys bought 1600 acres of land to start an intentional community. The land was \$70 per acre. At the time of founding, 600 people were involved. Gaskin said they moved to Farm to live a spiritual life. They had to teach themselves and learn about everything – farming, horses, banking, building, tripping. The book provides detailed nutritional information and Vegan diet guidelines. Gaskin advocates for only taking natural drugs like marijuana and psychedelics like peyote (cactus). He also discusses relationships, childbirth, child rearing, and child educating.*

Gaskin, S. (1977) *Volume one: Sunday morning services on the Farm*. Summertown, TN: The Book Publishing Company.

*This book is a collection of Sunday morning discussions held on the Farm primarily in 1976. Gaskin defines clearly many of the ideals he has been living and promoting since the late 1960s. This is his first attempt at describing some of the lessons he has been teaching for nearly a decade. He talks of holiness, energy,*

*a Oneness among people, consciousness, politics, religion, a shard vision, and about making a difference in the world. Gaskin said the body of his teachings are not found in books and tapes, but rather in how well they are understood and used by the individuals who worked with him during MNC, the Caravan, and at the Farm.*

Gaskin, S. (1978). . . .*this season's people*. Summertown, TN: The Book Publishing Company.

*This book was published almost 10 years after the publication of Gaskin's first book, MNC. He has been at the Farm almost 10 years at this point. Gaskin is reflective and heavy on the religious aspects of what the group has been trying to accomplish. He said religion is a generic term to describe how we relate to the universe and God and vice-versa. He stresses his belief in free will and independent thinking through his teaching style. Gaskin said what he and others at the Farm are doing is revolutionary because they are growing their own food, delivering their own babies and learning on their own without formal instruction. Toward the end of the book he proposed a vision for the future.*

Gaskin, S. (1980) *Mind at play*. Summertown, TN: The Book Publishing Company.

*Gaskin discusses the current culture and attempts to better explain what he and others are attempting to accomplish with their lifestyle. He debunks numerology, astrology, and Tarot cards in an effort to distance himself from New Age theorists. Gaskin goes on to discuss aspects of religion related to truth, health care, and pacifism. He also describes some of his travels abroad.*

Gaskin, S. (1981). *Rendered infamous*. Summertown, TN: The Book Publishing Company.

*In the book some attention is given to Gaskin's early life, as well as his experiences in the army. He writes about his combat time in Korea. Gaskin also discusses America's gun problem for the first time and expands on his theories of pacifism and foreign policy. "In this age of great communication, the people of the world need to communicate one to another, not through their countries, but as human beings to human beings" (p. 75). Gaskin for the first time is strongly political in this book, looking outside himself more than within himself. He also discusses his time in prison for marijuana cultivation. Lastly, he mentions PLENTY, the Farm's relief organization that offers aid to oppressed people around the world.*

Gaskin, S. (1990). *Haight Ashbury flashbacks*. Berkeley, CA: Ronin Publishing.

*In this book Gaskin outlines many of his psychedelic experiences, including details about the first time he used various drugs. He does not present much theory in this book. It reads more like a memoir, summarizing different aspects of his life that are interesting, but probably not useful for the purposes of this dissertation.*

Gaskin, S. (1996). *Cannabis spirituality*. New York, NY: High Times Books.

*The book is dedicated to Jerry Garcia (The Grateful Dead guitarist). Gaskin discusses spirituality, enlightenment, and a variety of religions and their influence on him. He mentions marijuana as a religious sacrament, and briefly explores sex, child-rearing, and politics, calling hippys "a cultural vitamin" (p. 115). "The way we're living and what we're doing is trying out a philosophy to see if it works—trying out a religion and a way of life to see if it really functions" (p. 34).*

Gaskin, S. (2000). *An outlaw in my heart: A political activist's user's manual*.

Philadelphia, PA: Camino Books.

*This is perhaps Gaskin's most coherent book. He is able to discuss many of his theories in context, reflecting on a lifetime of work in relation to the current culture. Gaskin wrote this book to elucidate his platform in his bid for the presidency in 2000. He ran as a Green Party candidate, citing several reasons in 10 "planks" including campaign finance reform, universal health care, decriminalization of marijuana, women's rights, animal rights, gay rights, and anti-nuclear weapons. In the book he discusses hippy philosophies and why they would be good to reverse the course our country is taking. "Why do we need an uneducated, unvaccinated, diseased lower class running around to hold up our liquor stores for us?" (p. 140).*

The grass case: Defense for the religious use of marihuana submitted to the United States

Supreme Court. (1974). Summertown, TN: The Book Publishing Company.

*In this book, Gaskin includes court documents and filings from the 1971 trial where he and three others were convicted of cultivating marijuana on the Farm. He adds some context to the case and its surroundings, including some background information. Ultimately, the case was appealed to the Tennessee Supreme Court and the U.S. Supreme Court. The Tennessee Supreme Court upheld the conviction. The U.S. Supreme Court would not hear the case saying there was no federal jurisdiction. Gaskin spent one year in state prison and is a felon, but successfully lobbied to have his voting rights returned.*

## APPENDIX B

## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD PROTOCOL

1. Project Goals: The goal of this study is to examine, through document review and interviews, Stephen Gaskin's adult education mission during the last 40 years based on his 11 published works of nonfiction.

2. Protocol

a. Procedures: Written permission (See Attachment A) will be sought to interview Gaskin to discuss and record his adult education theories and praxis in order to supplement the historical analysis of his 11 nonfiction books.

The researcher will contact Gaskin to obtain permission to interview him at an agreed upon location at an agreed upon date.

The researcher will begin collecting data only after receiving authorization from the Institutional Review Board. The researcher will begin data collection as soon as possible after written permission is received from the Institutional Review Board and may continue through March 16, 2012.

A cover letter (See Attachment A) will be attached to the interview questions (See Attachment B). In the cover letter, Gaskin will be advised that the data collected will not be anonymous. Further, the cover letter will state that all data obtained during the study will remain confidential until the research project is completed. The cover letter states participation in the study is strictly voluntary. In the cover letter, Gaskin is made aware that if he chooses to participate he will not be anonymous, nor will he have an opportunity to review the data after it is transcribed. The cover letter indicates the data will be used in a formal academic dissertation and every attempt to publish the data will be made by the researcher. The researcher will verbally instruct Gaskin in order to reiterate the stipulations in the cover letter.

Gaskin will be approached by e-mail or telephone and asked if he would be willing to participate in the research study. If the answer is affirmative, the researcher will provide Gaskin a copy of the cover letter and interview questions. Before beginning the interview, the researcher will verbally explain the cover letter, taking special care to highlight the voluntary nature of the study, the time frame needed to complete the interview, and the precautions to protect the interview subject. Once the interview is completed, the researcher will keep the recordings locked in a file cabinet or desk drawer until the data are transcribed and analyzed by the researcher.

Once the data are aggregated and analyzed, they will be included in the dissertation project, and then submitted to the dissertation committee chair, Dr. Lilian Hill, PhD. Further, the findings of the research study have potential value in academia. Every attempt will be made to publish the findings in a refereed academic journal. Attempts to present the research at a conference will be made as well.

b. Number and age range: Gaskin will be the only participant in the interview. He is 76 years old.

c. Participant Population: Gaskin will be the only participant in the interview process. Written permission (See Attachment A) to interview Gaskin will be obtained.

d. Time: The amount of time it should take to complete the interview is two to four hours.

e. Setting For Data Collection: Data will be gathered by interviewing Gaskin at an agreed upon location that is convenient to Gaskin.

f. Data will be gathered utilizing the interview method. Questions will be asked and Gaskin will be allowed to respond freely. The questions (See Attachment B) were specifically developed for this research project by the researcher. Follow-up questions stemming from Gaskin's answers may be asked spontaneously.

g. Describe any special situations: During the course of the interview, illegal activities engaged in by Gaskin may be discussed. Gaskin is a convicted felon and has written extensively about his arrest, trial, and subsequent incarceration in the 11 nonfiction books that will be analyzed as part of this research study. Further, Gaskin publicly has sought the legalization of certain drugs, and continues to lobby openly for such legislation. Any information related to past illegal activities that is discussed during the interview will be used in this dissertation. Information related to current or future illegal activities presents an interesting ethical dilemma; however, for the purposes of this project, information related to current or future illegal activities will not be recorded.

h. Letter of permission: Letter is attached.

3. Benefits: By participating in this research project Gaskin will be able to reflect on his own adult education mission during the last four decades, and his contributions to the discipline of adult education. Additionally, the findings of this study can be useful to educators designing new instruction methods, curricula, and program planning. Once the study has been completed and the data analyzed, Gaskin may request a copy of the project's findings. Gaskin, then, will have an opportunity to measure his individual contribution to the field of adult education.

4. Risks: The risks to human subjects in this study are expected to be minimal. No known physical or psychological risks are involved. Anonymity is not a concern in this project, which is a historical analysis of Gaskin as an unrecognized adult educator. Participation is strictly voluntary and Gaskin will not be coerced to participate. Additionally, no penalties exist for declining to participate in the study.

5. Informed Consent: The cover letter included with the interview questions specifically indicates the purpose of the research, the time required to complete the interview, and that participation is voluntary. Additionally, it is expressly indicated that all data collected will remain secured and confidential until such time as the research project is



completed. Once the data are no longer needed, they will be destroyed by shredding. The researcher's name, email address, and phone number are included in the cover letter for contact information. By agreeing to participate in the interview, Gaskin authorizes the use of the data gathered from his responses to be used in the manner described in this proposal.

## APPENDIX C

## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI.**

## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

118 College Drive #5147 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001

Phone: 601.266.6820 | Fax: 601.266.4377 | www.usm.edu/irb

**NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION**

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months.  
Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: **11101802**PROJECT TITLE: **Tripping with Stephen Gaskin: An  
Exploration of a Hippie Adult Educator**PROJECT TYPE: **Dissertation**RESEARCHER/S: **Gabriel Morley**COLLEGE/DIVISION: **College of Education & Psychology**FUNDING AGENCY: **N/A**IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: **Expedited Review Approval**PERIOD OF PROJECT APPROVAL: **10/31/2011 to 10/30/2012**

Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.  
Institutional Review Board Chair

Attachment A: Gaskin Interview Cover Letter  
Tripping With Stephen Gaskin: An Exploration of a Hippy Adult Educator

Dear Stephen Gaskin,

I am a doctoral student at The University of Southern Mississippi in the field of adult education, and I would like to interview you for my dissertation.

I am conducting a study to examine your adult education mission during the last 40 years based on your 11 published works of nonfiction in order to show that you are an unrecognized adult educator who has contributed demonstrably, and uniquely, to the field of adult education. More specifically, your work with counterculture adults can be regarded as the largest group study of emancipatory learning ever documented in the scholarly literature. I plan to document your work with informal adult learners seeking social transformation.

I would like to interview you to clarify points of discussion in your books and to frame your work with adults in an adult education framework. I have attached the proposed questions I plan to ask if you grant permission for this interview. I anticipate the interview should take between two and four hours. Participation in this project is completely voluntary. Please feel free to decline participation or to discontinue your participation at any point without concern for penalty, prejudice, or any other negative consequences.

Because this dissertation is about your life and work with adult learners, data collected during the interview will not be anonymous. By participating in this research project you will be able to reflect on your own contributions to the scholarly field of adult education. Additionally, the findings of this study can be useful for future formal and informal educators designing new instruction methods and curricula. Once the study has been completed and the data analyzed, you may request a copy of the project's findings. Then, you will have an opportunity to measure your own individual contribution to the field of adult education.

Data will be aggregated, and a dissertation will be submitted to a committee of professors at The University of Southern Mississippi. Additionally, every effort will be made to publish the results of this study in professional academic journals, at conferences, or in book form. If you have any questions concerning this research, please contact me at 423 441-2210 or by email at [gmorley19@gmail.com](mailto:gmorley19@gmail.com). This research project is being conducted under the supervision of Lilian Hill, PhD.

This project has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research participant should be directed to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, (601) 266-6820.

By agreeing in writing to participate as an interview subject, you are giving permission for interview data to be used for the purposes described above.

Thank you for participating in this project.

Sincerely,  
Gabriel Morley

Attachment B: Gaskin Interview Questions  
Tripping With Stephen Gaskin: An Exploration of a Hippy Adult Educator

1. Have you ever heard the terms adult education or adult learning? In what context and under what circumstances?
2. Are you, or were you, familiar with any of adult education's notable radicals such as John Dewey, Paulo Freire, Myles Horton, Jane Vella, Eduard Lindeman, or Malcolm Knowles?
3. As a teacher, you demonstrate many of the attributes that adults seek when entering into learning activities, but you seem to have had a traditional formal schooling background. Can you talk about your formal schooling, and how that may have influenced you, as well as some of the individuals who most influenced you as an educator and thinker?
4. I know you read a variety of texts when you were doing Monday Night Class, and surely you had the opportunity to pursue further graduate studies, but you chose instead to educate yourself. Did you ever consider going back to school, or did you prefer being self-directed? How do you feel that decision affected your life?
5. What do you consider to be your primary educational theories and how did they develop? Essentially, what is the basis of your work as an educator and why is it important?
6. When you first began Monday Night Class, what were you hoping would happen?
7. How, if at all, do you feel your thinking has evolved over the last 40 years?
8. What do you feel you accomplished over the last four decades as an educator of adults and would you have done anything differently?
9. Your last book was published in 2000 when you ran for president. Have you been working on any other books since then?
10. Do you remember the story of the golden horns? Can you talk about why that made such an impression on you as a younger man?
11. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your work educating adults?

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