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**ADULT LEARNING AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP:
APPLICATION AND LEARNING FROM A
GROUP RELATIONS CONFERENCE**

by

HEATHER DIEROLF

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education
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August 2009

Dissertation Committee

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ABSTRACT

The role of the principal as a change agent is at the forefront of the conversation regarding the state of schools in public education, yet little is known about how group relations work can enhance a principal's ability to engage in this work. Using a qualitative grounded theory approach, this study examined the change in attitudes and behaviors of K-8 principals who participated in a Group Relations Conference. A grounded theory approach was employed to address the following research questions: How do principals understand and describe their learning after participating in a Group Relations Conference? How do they apply their learning to their professional life? What are the differences in an individual's reported perceptions and application of the learning (if any)? Data was gathered through individual interviews with nine participants.

Building on transformational learning theory, typically attributed to the research of Jack Mezirow, Monroe and her colleagues have crafted an excellent site in which to examine how principal leaders modify their worldview regarding leadership and how they are able to apply that learning to their professional roles over time.

This study found that the learning that resulted from participation in the conferences was related to an individual's predisposition to the Group Relations Conference. Participants' openness affected not only their level of participation at the conference but also their ability to apply that learning after the conference. Overall learning from the conference experience also relied heavily on a participants' willingness to read and reflect upon pre-conference materials and readings.

This information may assist conference directors better prepare for the conference, enhance participants' learning outcomes and, in the case of school leaders, potentially impact their ability to affect change at their school sites. The findings of this research

contribute to our knowledge of adult learning theory as it relates to Group Relations
Conferences in the context of K-8 administrators.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Colleen Marie Boffa, who simply asked that I make a difference in this world. Mom, I am making a difference.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I begin by thanking the Professors at the University of San Diego for guiding me over the last six years of my doctoral studies. Each of them in their unique ways taught me, encouraged me, challenged me, and invited me to have discussions that took me to another level of learning.

I thank my dissertation committee, Dr. Monroe, Dr. Hubbard, and Dr. Getz, my dissertation chair. Each of them guided me in just the right way at just the right time. Dr. Getz not only taught me how to write a dissertation but also taught me how to find the confidence I needed to get the job done.

I am also thankful to the participants of my study for opening their doors, taking the time to meet with me, answering questions, and showing me their schools.

There are so many friends and family member who supported and encouraged me throughout this process. Here are a few who must be mentioned: my grandmother, MaDear, who always tells me of the love and pride she has for me. My sister, Courtney, who I admire for her strength and intelligence and without her knowing, I use her as a role model for myself. My soul sister, Hei Dee, whose friendship and love I could not live without. My *Girls Group* who kept me motivated. My mother, to whom this dissertation is dedicated, I am who I am because of her. There were many times that I could not find the strength to continue and she would say just the right thing at just the right time.

Finally, my dear husband Paul. I thank him for his patience day in and day out, whether it was tears of joy or tears of pain; he is always there for me. I could not have completed this journey without him by my side.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

With over 32,000 members in the United States, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) meets the needs of its members by seeking to “promote high professional standards, focus attention on school leaders challenges, provide a national voice for school leaders, build public confidence in education, strengthen the role of the principal, and publicize the issues and interests of the members” (NASSP, 2007, p. 2).

In meeting their goals, they offer research-based resources to its members and the education community at large. The organization’s 2007 report is entitled: *The Changing Role of the Middle Level and High School Leader: Learning from the Past—Preparing for the Future*. This lengthy report emphasizes the importance of the role of the school principal in implementing school reform and sustaining positive student achievement while acknowledging the need for change. “Principals and assistant principals in today’s schools are required to lead and manage differently more so than ever before” (NASSP, 2007, p. 2). The organization, NASSP, believes, “Principals will need to function less as classical managers and more as change agents” (NASSP, 2007, p. 3). Fullan (2002) wrote about this same idea several years before the NASSP published their report. Only 7 years ago he said, “The principal of the future is the ‘Cultural Change Principal’” (Fullan, 2002, p. 17). The role of the principal as a change agent is at the forefront of the conversation regarding the state of schools in public education.

Background of the Study

The background for this study includes examining the role of the school principal and assistant principal and how individuals take up that role. However, to best understand the present culture of the principalship, I present a brief look at the American education system using an historical perspective. Understanding the foundation of our public education sets the tone for looking more closely at one layer (the principalship) in a system that is rich with emotion, history, and politics.

Given the important role of principals who are crucial to reform efforts, I introduce Transformational Learning theory as the foundation for understanding of change in adults and I suggest that Group Relations theory and the teachings therein, should be considered as tools in the process of transforming school principals with the overall intention of creating change at their school sites. I suggest that without a critical look at the leadership in education and what influences individuals to make decisions in their roles as leaders, our system, may never be reformed.

An Historical Perspective of Public Education

Originally, schools were meant to serve three general purposes. First, for political reasons, schools were designed to create patriotic citizens, teaching the students about our country's history and government. Second, schools were created to meet social needs of our country in that children were educated in hopes of giving them the tools to eliminate social problems. Finally, schools were intended to assist with economic problems. Through education, the hope was that students would obtain better jobs and increase their personal wealth. We tell our students that knowledge is power. With a *good* education, young people can achieve anything.

Since education was thought to be a cure for ignorance, the Jeffersonian Ideal of the 1800s suggested that all students should be taught for a minimum of 3 years. While Jefferson said that he supported schooling for all students, at that time women and minorities were not included. Then, Horace Mann introduced the theory and practice of *common schools*. He believed schools would teach students morality and a way of being in American society, uniting our culture. He also saw schooling as a way to solve social problems and ensure national security (Hubbard, 2006).

As our country progressed, so did the beliefs in education. In the 1940s, it appeared that Americans seemed to be satisfied with their level of access to the American education system; remembering of course, that the Americans who were satisfied were predominantly white males. Access at that time was not made available to all Americans; people of color and those who lived in low income areas did not have the same level of access as did the majority population. In the 1950s, the question *Education for whom?* was asked. With the civil rights movement beginning to form, Americans had to question the practice of having separate schools for blacks and whites, asking which citizens would be granted admission to our schools. During the next two decades, legislative action was taken to widen the door of education. One landmark case, *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), was instrumental in moving toward more equitable education for all and the integration of public schools. Until the 1954 ruling, students were educated in schools that were separated by race, but after the ruling *separate but equal* was no longer the case and black Americans were legally allowed to enter schools which were previously closed to them.

In 1983, a landmark federal report was issued regarding education. American schools were summarized in a report titled, *A Nation at Risk* (1983). The report claimed there was a *rising tide* of mediocrity in our schools disqualifying us from economic competitiveness. Today, we can reflect on the national report and ask ourselves, is the nation still at risk? Did the report make a difference for our students? Did principals and teachers take up the charge of changing our schools? Has there been a change for the better in the K-12 public education system? No Child Left Behind, the most recent federal legislation to improve schools, claims that our schools are still at risk. Schools must look at improving test scores, while being held accountable and ensuring that all of our teachers are highly qualified. School principals are faced with the reality that failure to meet minimum requirements, as noted in the latest reform initiative can mean school closures and loss of jobs.

Education Reform and the Role of the School Principal

Education reform is a phrase that crosses the boundary of academia and lives in mainstream society. For my purposes, I refer to a definition offered by Tyack and Cuban (1995). These two educational researchers frame education reform as “planned efforts to change schools in order to correct perceived social and educational problems” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 4). Tyack and Cuban present an analogy for the challenges of education reform where they frame it as a Bermuda Triangle. Like the folk stories of ships which were lost or missing that fell victim to the folk stories and the mysterious fog of the Bermuda Triangle, they also believe that education reforms simply disappear in the fog of the bureaucratic system. Education reform packages and ideas are created, but seem to vanish before they even get started (p. 4).

Oakes and Wells (1997) use three perspectives to explain the difficulty in trying to change education. They point out that change requires attention to the technical (school buildings, instruction time, structural constraints), cultural (beliefs, language, skills, practices, norms), and political (power, participants) dimensions of education. The NASSP supports Oakes and Wells, stating, “Principals and assistant principals must respond to and influence this larger political, social, economic and cultural context of the community and beyond” (NASSP, 2007, p. 10). Principals and assistant principals must take up their roles as leaders responsible for all aspects on dimensions of education that can threaten or allow for change.

Similarly, Fullan’s discussion of change in education takes Oakes and Wells’s ideas one step further. He presents the role of school principals as a change leader (Fullan, 2002). While principals are the agents for change, he argues that principals, acting in the role of instructional leader, is not enough to “carry the weight of the kinds of reforms that will create schools we need for the future” (Fullan, 2002, p. 17). Fullan suggests breaking the bond of dependency that school principals have on packaged solutions and the need to address the cultural and technical dimensions of school reform as well (Fullan, 1998).

In Brown and Anfara’s (2003) study of 44 middle-school principals, these leaders were described as “visionary,” demonstrating the courage to change, involving others and having the knowledge to transform their respective schools. The NASSP (2007) also used the term, “visionary leadership,” which, according to them, is leadership that “epitomizes energy, values and convictions that all children can learn, as well as inspires others with the same vision” (NASSP, 2007, p. 2). However, they went further by listing visionary

leadership as one of the four roles they see as important for future school administrators. The other three are “community-based leadership, instructional leadership and cultural proficient leadership” (NASSP, 2007, p. 2). The concept of the role of the school principal is not new to the NASSP. The NASSP has been stressing the role of the school principal for the last several years. For example, they recently published *Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform* (NASSP, 2004). This report highlights the school leader’s need to look at his or her beliefs and how those beliefs affect the school.

I would argue that changes in education are often inhibited by the specific beliefs and consequent behaviors of principals and assistant principals who are in a position to create and make change. For example, a school principal has the education and knowledge to implement a school-wide character education program with the intention of improving school climate and student success. If that same school principal has a belief system which contradicts the objective of the plan, no matter how much effort is put into implementation of the plan, odds are that the plan will not succeed.

In order to consider a change in the principal’s beliefs in the hypothetical example previously mentioned, how the principal can change his or her beliefs must be addressed. I suggest using the lens of Transformational Learning theory to tackle this matter. The question of how to make an internal change such as a change in beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions of adults is one that researchers have been considering for at least the past decade (Cranton & King, 2003; Dirks, 2006; King, 2005); Transformational Learning theory addresses this question.

Transformational Learning Theory

Transformational Learning theory is attributed in large part to the research of Jack Mezirow (1978). His theory addresses change on a personal/individual level and how it alters the learner in terms of his or her viewpoint of the world. Two expectations related to the concept of transformational learning are the thought of being or becoming different and/or having some feeling of leaving a learning situation with a different mindset than when the learner started the learning process. While researchers in different fields such as psychology, sociology, and education speak of transformational learning, the theory of transformational learning is still a comparatively new area of study with many layers yet to be discovered.

Mezirow attributes some of the basis of his theory on adult learning to philosophers who came before him. The historical context of today's theories of transformational learning is rooted in the epistemological question of determining how we know what we know. For example, Friere's theory of learning includes a discussion of how individuals achieve a deepening awareness of socio-cultural reality, which shapes their lives, and of the capacity to transform a life through acting upon it (Friere, 1970). Friere emphasized levels of consciousness, with the highest of the four levels being the one in which the individual has the ability to participate in dialogue. It is in this opportunity to dialogue that understanding occurs, and assumptions, which foster oppression of individuals and groups, are challenged (Mezirow, 1991, p. 136). Mezirow builds upon Friere regarding the importance of engaging in dialogue and reflection to facilitate learning.

Mezirow's explanation of learning is, "learning may be understood as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or a revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience, in order to guide future actions" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 12). In this theory, Mezirow argues that learning and thinking are overlapping terms; to have an understanding of the interpretations, one must participate in the process of thought. In short, Mezirow's Transformational Learning theory focuses on how we negotiate and act on our purposes, values, feelings, and meanings with the overall purpose of gaining greater control of our lives.

In addition to defining and facilitating transformational learning, many researchers speak to the goals of transformational learning. A common goal of transformational learning is change (Bennetts, 2003; Burton, 2006; Cranton, 2006; King, 2004; Mezirow, 1991; Taylor, 2006). Change is noted here as an epistemological change or a change in how the individual knows what they know. However, change also includes changes in how an individual thinks, acts, feels and relates to others and the world around them (Bennetts, 2003).

Kraft (2002) argues that there are psychological limits to the process of reflection in transformational learning. In her study of adult educators, she found that often the reflection done by the participants was more technical than personal. Reflection on the technical aspects of teaching such as curriculum usage, student test scores, and the measurement of student outcomes did not foster the transformation of educators; rather it limited their overall success with their students. This paradigm shift of encouraging teachers to think critically rather than technically is where Kraft believes the research on critical reflection should now lie; without critical reflection, transformation can not

occur. Simple shifts in thinking such as the difference “between improving practice to understanding practice, focusing on beliefs, and going from uncritically accepting the status quo to critically examining issues of power” should be studied (Kraft, 2002, p. 188). Future research in this area could greatly impact the work that can bring together educators.

The pedagogy associated with Group Relations theory is similar to that of transformative learning. This work was founded at the Tavistock Institute in England and later at the A. K. Rice Institute in the United States. The Tavistock Institute is at the University of Leicester in England, the location of the first Group Relations Conference. Alfred Bion from England began the work with a 2-week experiential learning event in 1957. His beliefs, along with those of Anne Klein, included a psychoanalytic theory of practice. Simply stated, their theory included “taking a group and viewing it as a collective entity” (Hayden & Molenkamp, 2002, p. 5). Instead of examining the individual, one examines the behavior of the group as a whole. What was originally referred to as an approach evolved into a methodology, which is now practiced worldwide through the work of the A. K. Rice Institute for the Study of Social Systems and similar organizations.

A. K. Rice was Chairman of the Tavistock Centre for Applied Social Research. He began to design conferences so that the participants of the conferences could study leadership. Rice stated, “The primary task of a Group Relations Conference is to provide participants with opportunities to learn about leadership” (Hayden & Molenkamp, 2002, p. 5). Later the focus evolved to include the study of authority. Some conferences have specific themes which include studying race, gender, and class as well as other social

structures, and how they affect leadership and authority in a multitude of scenarios, including those in the field of education.

Powell Pruitt and Barber (2005) have begun to link Group Relations theory and public education. They claim that Group Relations theory (group-as-a-whole) provides a means in which the leaders of the public education system can address the roots of the failure of the system itself. Failure of the system has been named and framed in a variety of ways, each way relevant to the political climate of the nation. For each framed “failure,” a reform package is created to remedy the errors of the system. Unfortunately, to this date, none has been successful for all students in America. They present the question of what is preventing change in education and suggest the use of the Group Relations lens to facilitate change.

Powell Pruitt and Barber suggest that changes in our society will complicate the task of educators and the role they play in preparing tomorrow’s generations to take up their responsibilities (2005, p. 316). They suggest some points for beginning the conversation like the use of Group Relations theory to investigate and evaluate education reform.

Problem Statement

Public education has been examined and researched from a variety of lenses; for example, historians, politicians, sociologists, psychologists, and educators have completed studies on the system of which they are all stakeholders, thus each have a vested interest in seeing improvement in a system which affects American society as a whole. However, at the macro level, the data tells us we are still not succeeding (students are not reaching academic levels of success as required by No Child Left Behind) and

reform efforts have still not made much of a significant difference. Research is also being done at the micro level, examining the individuals who make up the system. However, research is lacking in the area of understanding the role of the school principal as a change agent using the cultural lens perspective suggested by Oakes and Wells (1997). As mentioned previously, the cultural lens includes addressing the beliefs, language, skills, practices, and norms of individuals and the system as a whole.

Linking beliefs and education, Dennis Sparks, in the 2004 NASSP report, *Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform* states, “A change in beliefs requires placing ourselves in situations that produce cognitive dissonance. One of the most powerful means to change beliefs is dialogue through which we make our assumptions known to others and open ourselves to being influenced by the beliefs of others” (NASSP, 2004, p. 44). Group Relations Conferences, transformational learning and the pedagogy associated with both can serve as tools to begin the dialogue for change. However, we know little about principals who have participated in Group Relations Conferences. We do not know how participation has affected the principals and if there is a consequent change in the principals’ beliefs and/or practices at their schools.

Statement of Purpose

Using leaders from school sites in K-8 education (principals and assistant principals) as the unit of analysis, the overarching purpose of this study is to better understand the perceived change in attitudes and behaviors of these individuals after having participated in a Group Relations Conference hosted by a southern California university and whether or not there was a positive change in their roles as school leaders. Thus the specific purpose of this study is threefold: (a) gain an understanding of the

perceived learning which occurs in individuals who participate in Group Relations Conferences, (b) understand how those same individuals apply the learning in their professional roles, and (c) understand if the learning varies over time.

Significance of the Study

Research exists in all three of the background areas for this study: role of the principal, transformational learning, and Group Relations Conferences. However, few researchers bring all three of these fields together in order to understand the interaction among the three. This study inquired about the dynamics that may or (may not) exist when all three are considered simultaneously, illuminating the potential of this research to be influential in all three areas. I ask the critical questions: *How do participants understand and describe their learning as a result of participation in a Group Relations Conference? How are those same participants trying to apply their learning professionally and personally? How did the learning and/or application vary between individuals?* Asking these questions brings to light the importance of joining theories and concepts from multiple fields to best understand the experience of the individual who may, with or without realizing, exist in all three fields. In addition to beginning a conversation, this research laid the foundation for future research. Other researchers may want to continue to ask the questions posed in other districts, counties, and states.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review has three sections: the role of the school principal, Transformational Learning theory, and Group Relations theory. These areas of my literature review are based on results from two preliminary interviews conducted in summer of 2006. The data gathered from these respondents led me to these three areas of research.

Education Reform and the Role of the Principal

The background section of this proposal quotes the National Association of Secondary School Principals. This large organization and its publications are the foundation for this section on the role of the school principal. Their 2007 publication, *The Changing Role of the Middle Level and High School Leader: Learning from the Past—Preparing for the Future* is a summary of a 2-year study which involved both qualitative and quantitative techniques. The task force who compiled the report sought to “understand how the principalship has changed and understand future changes we can anticipate and recommend strategies to help principals succeed in a continually changing environment” (NASSP, 2007, p. 1). The result is a 75-page report that sets the tone for the school principal in today’s climate of change.

In researching educational reform (or change) and the role of the principal, the findings are in agreement with the NASSP report; the principal does play a role in school reform on a school campus. What makes the research articles unique is how they frame the role and the demands that accompany the role. In Fennell’s research, he refers to the changing role of the principal as “new ways of working in schools” (Fennell, 2005,

p. 145). He believes that a philosophical lens is best in considering education reform and the school principal, concluding that the school principal must have a variety of theoretical and philosophical perspectives to successfully carry out their job and responsibilities. Collaborative decision-making, group problem solving, and schools as communities are three of the perspectives Fennell (2005) considers relevant for a school principal to use in viewing school reform.

Portin (2000) concurs with Fennell and he also seeks to understand the perspective of the principal. He argued “there is a pressing need to examine carefully the real world of our urban schools and those who lead them. Careful analysis, both conceptually and empirically, is a necessary step toward understanding and guiding education policy development, school leader preparation and ongoing support to those who lead our schools” (Portin, 2000, p. 492). He concludes by arguing that the role of the principal continues to be essential to the ongoing success of urban schools.

Harris, Brown, and Abbott (2006) framed the role of the school principal by characterizing the principal as a powerful lever for change. Their research, based on interviews with a school principal, outlines six tasks the principal should consider: building leadership capacity, changing school culture, ensuring rapid change, forging collaborative partnerships and external links, establishing whole school evaluation and planning, and being a signal for moral purpose while securing momentum (Harris et al., 2006). Again, the principal is considered a crucial player in change on a school campus.

Several authors frame the role of the principal by investigating the effects of one’s values and beliefs and how they affect how the principal takes up that role (Brown & Anfara, 2003; Fennell, 2005; Gordon & Patterson, 2006; Seller, 2001). The character

traits and the ability to verbalize and act on one's values and beliefs influence how the principal executes his or her role. Gordon and Patterson (2006) go further to say that school leadership is relational, context specific, and encompasses the norms, values, and beliefs of individuals in the community as well as in the school leader. Because the school principal is perceived by the community as a key player in reform on the school campus, all three factors impact the principal.

This section would not be complete without the mention of Michael Fullan's work on education reform. His research encompasses education from a variety of viewpoints. While he does not say the role of the school principal is the answer, he does support the opinion that the principal can help or hinder the process of school reform. As far back as 10 years ago, Fullan is quoted as stressing that we must "give up the futile search for the silver bullet, give up dependency that is fostered by the education system, and take actions that matter" (Fullan, 1998, p. 6). He uses the leadership theory of Heifetz (1994) reminding those in education to call for leadership that will "challenge us to face problems for which there are not simple solutions" (Fullan, 1998, p. 2).

Most monumental in Fullan's work on the role of the school principal in education reform is his term "the change leader" (2002). This phrase is used in the NASSP's 2007 report several times, linking past research and the current state of the role of school principals. Fullan's definition of a change leader is one who "is attuned to the big picture, a sophisticated conceptual thinker who transforms the organization through people and teams" (Fullan, 2002, p. 16). Fullan uses the concept of transformation in his definition of a change leader and asks how a school leader can transform the organization? Or does the transformation begin with the individual?

Transformational Learning Theory

This section on transformational learning will be further divided into four sections: (a) a review of the research and theoretical underpinnings of Mezirow's theory of transformational learning including a synthesis of Mezirow's work with other research on transformational learning, (b) goals of transformational learning, (c) a discussion of the various types of pedagogy associated with transformational learning, and (d) the potential impact Transformational Learning theory has on adult learners.

Research and Theory

Mezirow's Transformational Learning theory is a paradigm of simplicity and complexity. It involves layers of definitions, terms, phases and contexts. He uses terms that are interconnected for the greater understanding of transformation.

Mezirow begins with an explanation of his definition of learning. "Learning may be understood as the process of using a prior interpretation, to construe a new or a revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience, in order to guide future actions" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 12). In this theory, Mezirow argues that learning and thinking are overlapping terms; to have an understanding of the interpretations; one must participate in the process of thought.

Learning involves context. Mezirow emphasized five primary interacting contexts:

1. The frame of reference or meaning perspective in which the learning is embedded (from previous life experiences)
2. The conditions of communication: language mastery; the codes that delineate categories, constructs, and labels; and the ways in which problematic assertions are validated
3. The line of action in which learning occurs
4. The self-image of the learner

5. The situation encountered, i.e., the external circumstances within which an interpretation is made and remembered. (Mezirow, 1991, p. 13)

Mezirow's Transformational Learning theory stresses the context of the learning itself; learning in his definition does not occur in isolation. The consideration of context is not different from the philosophy of John Dewey (as cited in Mezirow, 1991). Not more than 50 years before Mezirow's published work, Dewey emphasized the importance of learning beyond the classroom walls and lesson plan, adding the context or situation in which the learning takes place is as important as the learning itself. His pedagogy encouraged individuals to think critically as they consider answers to problems that relate to the larger society, not just to themselves or their own personal experiences. Transformational Learning theory, too, is a constructivist theory applied to adults that incorporates the socialization of childhood, unconscious thoughts and the emotional dimension of interpretations.

In addition to context, Mezirow explains four forms of learning. The first form is learning through meaning schemes. A learner learns through differentiating and elaborating on existing frames of references. In this first form, new schemes are not created. Second is learning new meaning schemes. That is to say, the learner acquires new meaning schemes that remain consistent with existing schemes; the knowledge base is extended. Learning through transformation of meaning schemes is the third form of learning. This learning involves the reflection of one's assumptions, changing the schemes to mean something a bit different than originally believed. Fourth is learning through perspective transformation. Specifically, in this fourth form, the learning takes

place by becoming more aware of presuppositions and transforming the perspective through reorganization of meaning (Mezirow, 1991, p. 93).

Understanding context and forms of learning is essential in order to better grasp the term transformation. Transformation, according to Mezirow, involves reflection. Reflection can occur on three levels: reflection on the content, the process, and/or the premise of a problem. This reflection has the potential of “elaborating, creating, negating, confirming, problematizing, or transforming” meaning schemes (Mezirow, 1991, p. 117). Mezirow explains that transformation theory is not a stage theory but a movement towards reflectivity in adulthood (p. 160).

Mezirow’s theory of transformational learning occurs through 10 phases. As the adult learner moves through the phases, their beliefs, attitudes and assumptions are changed. The phases are:

1. The individual experiences a disorienting dilemma or a situation that may be different or new to that individual
2. The individual examines him or herself acknowledging feelings of guilt or shame
3. The individual participates in a critical assessment of epistemic, socio-cultural, or psychic assumptions
4. The individual then recognizes one’s own discontent and the process of transformation is shared, and that others have also negotiated a similar change
5. The individual explores options for new roles, relationships, and actions
6. The individual plans a course of action based on the new previously decided upon options
7. The individual seeks to acquire knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans
8. The individual goes through a phase of trying of new roles; not yet being set on one
9. The individual builds competence and self-confidence in the new roles and relationships
10. The individual reintegrates into one’s life; using the conditions dictated by one’s new perspective. (Mezirow, 1991, p. 169)

These phases represent intellectual development; they are not specified by time or space. This list of phases outlined by Mezirow lends itself to a belief that the stages are linear. Mezirow's phases of transformational learning are presented in a numerical order; however, the phases should be viewed as phases an individual progresses through in order, but not necessarily consecutively. For example, an individual may experience phase 5, exploring new roles, but may not be ready for phase 6, planning a course of action. That individual then returns to phase 4, recognizing discontent for a second time, processing those thoughts, then proceeds to phase 5 and 6 and so on.

Transformational learning occurs on two dimensions. The first dimension is transformation of meaning schemes or frames of reference (as previously mentioned). These are transformed through the process of reflection. The second dimension is the transformation of meaning perspectives. This is when an individual questions his or her basic premises that may have been taken for granted and are now found unjustified (Mezirow, 1991, p. 192). In short, Mezirow's Transformational Learning theory focuses on how we negotiate and act on our purposes, values, feelings, and meanings with the overall purpose of gaining greater control of our lives.

Mezirow acknowledges Habermas (as cited in Mezirow, 1991) in his call for the need for rationality and critique in gaining control of one's learning. Rationality to Habermas is related to how individuals acquire and use knowledge. Habermas (as cited in Mezirow, 1991) described three kinds of knowledge: instrumental knowledge, communicative knowledge, and emancipatory knowledge. Emancipatory knowledge leads to empowerment and in Mezirow's terms, a possible transformation.

In addition, Habermas noted the need for analysis of how the knowledge is acquired, which has similarities to Mezirow's references to reflection. Analysis included perception, recognition, and interpretation, all three processes necessary for learning (Mezirow, 1991, p. 25). Cranton and King (2003) also note that the theory of transformational learning has historical roots from Habermas and Friere (1970). Mezirow "was the first in American adult education to use the critical theories of Habermas and Friere to promote critical reflection as central to transforming our learning from our experience" (Wilson & Kiely, 2002, p. 1).

The development of Mezirow's theory in the 1970s led to the completion of many dissertations that studied various aspects of Transformational Learning theory. However, Wilson and Kiely (2002) note that these completed dissertations, from the 1980s and 1990s, did not bring an increase in new knowledge or a greater understanding of transformational learning. They primarily reviewed the history of the theory, confirming the ideas previously discussed by Mezirow (Wilson & Kiely, 2002, p. 1).

Young as the definition of Transformational Learning theory may be, researchers have added to and interpreted the definition and description of transformational learning originally laid out by Mezirow. Again, to review the definition of transformational learning presented by Mezirow, "transformative learning is the process of effecting change in a frame of reference" (Mezirow, 1997b, p. 5). Frames of reference are the structure of assumptions through which we understand our experiences; they set lines of action that the individual takes on a daily basis (Mezirow, 1997b). Frames of reference include habits of the mind and points of view. Habits of the mind that become articulated in a point of view are broad, abstract, orienting, habitual ways of thinking, feeling, and

acting influenced by assumptions that constitute a set of codes. Codes may be cultural, social, educational, economic, political or psychological. A point of view is the constellation of belief, value, judgment, attitude, and feeling that shape a particular interpretation (Mezirow, 1997b).

Burton (2006) concurs with Mezirow in stressing the importance of changing one's frame of reference in the process of transformational learning. He added that transformational learning is an epistemological change because it increases knowledge and has an affective interpersonal and moral dimension. Transformational learning is about knowing differently, not simply knowing more (Burton, 2006, p. 2).

Changing one's frame of reference is similar to changing one's mind. Elias (1997) believes transformational learning must include understanding the process of learning and especially learning that changes the nature of consciousness. Elias's definition of trans-formational learning (like Mezirow's definition) involves "meaning schemes [specific beliefs about self and world] and meaning perspectives [comprehensive world views] through reflection on underlying premises, leading to meaning perspectives" (Elias, 1997, p. 3).

Reflection is a critical factor in transformational learning. Mezirow includes reflection in his definition as does Kraft (2002) and Taylor (2001). Kraft said, "in order for transformational learning to occur, we must engage in critical reflection that moves beyond questions or the 'how-to' of action to the questions of why, including the reasons for and consequences of what we do" (Kraft, 2002, p. 179). Kraft emphasized the importance of reflection on assumptions and further stressed that if the assumptions are

found to be faulty, one would need to revise those assumptions if transformational learning is to occur.

Taylor's research (2001) explored the role of emotion in transformational learning; however, within his research, we again see the importance of reflection in his definition of transformational learning. His definition explores three aspects of transformational learning. First, Taylor believes that learning is a social process of construction and involves a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience as a guide to action (Taylor, 2001, p. 220). Second, transformational learning is the revision of meaning structures from experiences that are addressed by the theory of perspective transformation. Third, it is a process by which we attempt to "justify our beliefs either by rationally examining assumptions, often in response to intuitively becoming aware that something is wrong with the result of our thought, or challenging its validity through discourse with others of differing viewpoints and arriving at the best informed judgment" (p. 220). Important to note is that Taylor is critical of most of the definitions of transformational learning. While for the most part, he agrees with the common understanding/definitions, he believes the role of emotion in transformation is not emphasized in studies completed by his colleagues.

His studies show a possible physiological explanation of how emotion and reason intersect, especially in making crucial decisions. Also, he believes that without emotions, individuals are not able to coordinate their behavior. Hence, while reflecting on one's self, emotion associated with decision-making or critical events must be considered in the process of transformative learning and change (Taylor, 2001).

Several authors agree that transformational learning by definition involves a shift in one's overarching frames of reference and is part of the social world in which individuals live (Jarvis, 2006; Kraft, 2002; Merriam, 2004). Merriam (2004) believed that the lens in which an individual views the world is directly related to that same individual's values, beliefs, and assumptions, which is the foundation for the definition of transformative learning. Jarvis (2006) took it one step further by showing how transformational learning enables learners to develop critical reflection skills, which in turn increase awareness of social structures which impact the individual's socio-cultural perspectives. Jarvis and Dirkx agree that transformational learning occurs in the social world. Dirkx (2006) builds on Jarvis's work, however, by pointing out that transformational learning leads to profound shifts in one's awareness or consciousness of being in the world.

Rather than critiquing the previous definitions, Cranton (2006) summarizes the definitions of transformational learning in the following statement: "It may be rational or extra-rational, reflective or imaginative, cognitive or emotional, individual or social" (p. 6). Transformational learning "may be rational, affective, extra-rational or experimental depending on the person engaged in the learning and the context in which it takes place" (p. 6).

Goals of Transformational Learning Theory

Bennetts (2003) believes that it is "commonly understood by adult educators that the aim of adult education is to promote self-directed learning and therefore equip adults better for recognizing they are agents in their own lives" (p. 458). Transformational Learning theory's goals for adult learners include having the learner know they are

agents who can effect change both in themselves and in the culture of which they are a part. It is in the interaction of the self and the world where the learning best occurs.

Bennetts' research focused on the factors that had the most impact on the transformation within their lives.

Her qualitative research study resulted in the formulation of six categories of transformation. These categories are different than Mezirow's phases in that they are a reported state of change rather than phases through which participants evolve. They are: "1) self-transformation, 2) coping with and instigating change in self and others, 3) transformed relationships, 4) increased educational drive, 5) career improvement, and 6) quality of life" (Bennetts, 2003, p. 464). Bennetts showed that for her participants, transformational learning was a slow process, not based on a critical event. She believes that transformational learning is aimed at evoking a new consciousness and self-understanding, and promotes the human experience by thinking, self-expression and actions (Bennetts, 2003).

Cranton and King (2003) agree transformational learning should be a goal of professional development for adults. The process of transformational learning opens up frames of reference, discards habits of the mind, and allows adults to see alternatives and thereby act differently in the world (Cranton & King, 2003, p. 34). The authors see transformational learning as a means of individuation for adults. Adults break away from group beliefs, challenge their own beliefs, and consequently develop a new belief system.

This individuation, which can be a result of transformational learning, leads to a deeper level of authenticity (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004). Authenticity is a "multifaceted concept that includes at least four parts: 1) being genuine, 2) showing consistency

between values and actions, 3) relating to others in such a way as to encourage their authenticity, and 4) living a critical life” (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004, p.7); all similar characteristics to the definition of transformational learning.

In addition to authenticity, another product of transformational learning is autonomy. Merriam (2004) and Cranton and King (2003) emphasize independent thinking and autonomy as goals of transformational learning in adults. Mezirow agrees, adding that transformational learning has both individual and social implications. Transformational learning “demands that we be aware of how we come to our knowledge and be aware as we can about the values that lead to our perspectives” (Mezirow & Associates, 2000, p. 8). Transformation is a journey in which the result is an individual whose values and beliefs are congruent with the school and community and can present their true self to their community.

Pedagogy of Transformational Learning

An overall goal of adult learning is change or *transformation* in the adult learner. The methods used to encourage this change include internal and external processes and practices. Part of the pedagogy is the concept of reframing introduced by Mezirow (1997a). Subjective reframing is part of a process of transforming one’s own frame of reference and often is the result of a disorienting dilemma. This reframing usually occurs in a three part process: “1) critical reflection on one’s assumptions, 2) discourse to validate the crucially reflective thought and 3) action” each of which will be discussed further below (Mezirow, 1997a, p. 60).

First, critical reflection on one’s assumptions plays a major role in the transformation process of adult learning. This concept, according to Mezirow (1998a), is

central to understanding how adults learn to think for themselves rather than act on the concepts, values, and feelings of others. Critical reflection on one's assumptions (CRA) can lead to personal and social transformation. Mezirow notes four types of CRA: narrative, systemic, organizational, and moral/ethical. An explanation of each is listed below:

1. Narrative CRA is the application of the reflection to one's self
2. Systemic CRA involves critical reflection on one's own assumptions pertaining to the economical, ecological, educational, linguistic, political, religious, bureaucratic, or other taken for granted cultural systems
3. Organizational CRA is primarily directed at identifying assumptions that are embedded in the history and culture of a workplace and how they have impacted one's own thoughts and actions
4. Moral ethical CRA involves a critique of the norms of governing one's ethical decision making. (Mezirow, 1998a, p. 189)

Mezirow outlines these four types of critical reflections while other researchers may not delineate the exact sense of critical reflection. They do, however, agree with the importance of reflection in the process of transformational learning.

Similar to Mezirow, Kember et al. (1999) sought to understand the kinds of reflective thinking adults were using in programs for adult educators. Their qualitative research study showed that reflective thinking could be coded into seven categories: "non-reflective action, habitual action, thoughtful action, introspection, reflective action, content reflection, and process/premise reflection" (p. 20). Cranton and King (2003) added another layer to the conversation regarding types of critical reflection by confirming the types of reflection noted by Kember et al. in their discussion of transformational learning as a professional goal.

Cranton again emphasizes reflection in her continued research, joining with Carusetta (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004), where they studied 22 faculty members over a 3-

year period. They sought to understand both perspectives on teaching and authenticity in teaching. They found that perspectives on teaching are an expression of personal beliefs and values related to teaching that are often formed through critical reflection. Although they were not primarily studying transformative learning, they found that for their participants, reflection is important in the practice of authenticity in the classroom (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004).

Kraft (2002) argues that there are psychological limits to the process of reflection. In her study of adult educators, she found that often the reflection done by the participants was more technical than personal. Reflection on the technical aspects of teaching such as curriculum usage, student test scores, and the measurement of student outcomes did not foster the transformation of educators; rather it limited their overall success with their students.

This paradigm shift of encouraging teachers to think critically rather than technically is where Kraft believes the research on critical reflection should now lie; without critical reflection, transformation cannot occur. Simple shifts in thinking such as the difference “between improving practice to understanding practice, focusing on beliefs, and going from uncritically accepting the status quo to critically examining issues of power” should be studied (Kraft, 2002, p. 188). This area for future research can bring together transformational learning and educators.

Although Merriam (2004) agrees with Mezirow’s three types of reflection (content reflection, process reflection, and premise reflection), she adds to our understanding of transformational learning by emphasizing the important role that cognitive development plays in the process. Merriam argues that an adult learner must

have a minimal level of cognitive ability to participate in a transformative type of mental processing. This research, while relevant, leaves us with more questions than answers. How cognitively developed must an adult learner be to have the capacity for critical reflection and the consequent transformational learning? And is cognitive ability fixed or can it be expanded (Merriam, 2004)?

King (2004) concludes her discussion of critical reflection by adding a layer to the research not previously mentioned by the other prominent researchers on transformational learning and critical reflection. She researched the learning process from two perspectives; that of the teacher and the adult learner. Over a 5-year period, she studied five separate groups of adult learners who were taking graduate-level coursework at a university (who were also educators of adults) and their professors. King (2004) found that when given the opportunity to reflect, learners actively evaluate their values, beliefs and assumptions. This in turn led to a change in frame of reference, and at a minimal level, transformative language emerged.

King, while understanding the value of transformational learning for students and learners, also acknowledges there are barriers to becoming a reflective thinker. Barriers can be internal and external. Internal barriers include self-doubt and low self-confidence to becoming a reflective thinker. External barriers include the pressure from peers or the community who do not yet understand the potential for reflective thinking and personal transformation (King, 2004). King (2004) and Jarvis (1999) stress the need for the educator to create an environment for the adult learner, which would be conducive to critical reflection and that the process of reflection is encouraged and supported.

Dirkx (2006) examined the necessary elements for the practice of transformative learning to take place. He concurs with King, stressing the need for the creation of a safe environment for the adult learner. He called this environment a *safe container* to house the emotional dynamic that may surface through the process of reflection. This safe container is further described as “one in which the learner feels held but not held onto, contained but not constrained” (Dirkx, 2006, p. 22). Dirkx (2006) and Taylor (2001) highlight the role of emotion into the transformational learning process. As previously noted, they argue that Mezirow did not put enough emphasis on the role of emotion into the process of transformative learning.

Another strategy considered relevant to the pedagogy of transformative learning is discussion and discourse. Similar to the process of reflection, discussion and discourse can be both internal and external. An adult learner can have discussion with him or herself through private, internal reflection. This is similar to what many call “self-talk,” or having a conversation in one’s head. In contrast, discussion can be public. Group discussions can be with members who join with a common theme or goal or with others who they disagree with. While discussion and discourse is similar to the process of critical reflection previously discussed, many techniques can be used for achieving transformative learning.

Again, I turn to the 2004 study conducted by Cranton and Carusetta who studied the experience of 22 educators over a 3-year span to understand what authentic teaching meant to them and how authenticity manifests itself in the classroom. They described an authentic teacher as one who facilitates and encourages transformation in adult students. Through interviews, observations, and focus groups with educators, discussion and

discourse was found to be a relevant method that allowed teachers to engage in the kind of teaching that would lead to transformational learning. In addition, the relationship formed between the learner and the teacher was shown to be crucial in the level of discussion that may have transpired between the two.

Elias (1997) brings in additional research by Argyis and Schon (1978), noting how dialogue helps an organization as a whole through the process of transformation. The theory of “double loop learning” (Argyis & Schon, 1978) combined with Elias’s suggestion of crucial dialogue involves challenging the assumptions that are the basis for a group’s standards. Getting out of the loop of repetitive thinking leads the group to change. Elias’s took the theory of transformative learning from the individual to the organizational level.

To summarize, strategies that engage the learner in a transformative process are critical reflection and dialogue. Mezirow would add several additional methods to facilitate the learning: concept mapping (writing a concept on the board while group members list definitions or words which show understanding of the concept); sharing of life histories (group members share past experiences searching for common understanding and foundations of beliefs); and conversation to raise consciousness (thorough, open conversation amongst group members; Mezirow, 1997b). Kraft (2002) would then add journal writing and collaboration to that list. Finally, Dirkx (2006) would suggest additional group work and imagery to the list of suggested methods to engage adult learners in the transformative process.

The Adult Educator and Transformative Learning

Descriptions of the potential teacher of transformational learning are included in several of the studies referenced in this review. Cranton and Carusetta (2004) completed studies on authenticity in teaching. They argued that teachers of transformational learning must show authenticity in themselves. Authenticity can be demonstrated through having the “ability to articulate values, demonstrate congruence between values and actions, and be genuine and open” (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004, p. 19). Cranton (2006) further emphasized that one can show authenticity through self-awareness and awareness of others.

Recent literature has begun to really examine the educator even more than in the past. Dirkx (2006) believed that the educator must be able to “listen to his/her own reaction to the student or group interaction” (p. 22). Taylor (2006), who is a critic of some of the early studies of transformational learning, argues that the adult educator must have “skill, courage and be willing to work with the group” (p. 91). He continued to stress that educators must be willing to undergo change themselves (Taylor, 2006).

Taylor is one of the few researchers to mention the role of culture in the practice of leading a student through the transformative process. He noted, that for those educators of ethnocentric backgrounds, he or she “must develop an appreciation of their own culture and the associated privileges and powers [that come with the respective culture]” (Taylor, 2006, p. 92). For example, if the educator is from a European background, and is teaching adult learners who are non-European, a barrier may exist which could hinder the transformative process. Aligning with Taylor, King’s study stressed that the educator must challenge his or her own values, beliefs, and assumptions

(2004). Her study is particularly relevant because she examined both the learner and the teacher in a transformative learning environment.

Previously, I referred to the adult educator who leads others in the transformative learning process as a teacher or educator. Mezirow (1997b) refers to this same person as a facilitator or provocateur. This is quite different than traditional classrooms where the teachers hold the knowledge and disperse it, as they deem appropriate. Here, Mezirow would suggest the teacher is not the authority in the learning environment. The learner participates in the processes as the director of the transformative learning while the educator serves as the guide. Mezirow (1997b) suggests, “The facilitator works herself out of the job of authority figure to become a co-learner by progressively transferring her leadership to the group as it becomes more self-directive” (p. 11).

Cranton and Carusetta (2004) would add that the relationship between the student and teacher is crucial. As previously mentioned, in the section on pedagogy, their 3-year study consisted of interviewing 22 faculty members. They found that “caring for students, helping students learn, sharing self with students, having awareness of how power is exercised, and being aware of the nature of the personal relationships with students” all contributed to a transformation on the part of the student (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004, p. 12).

Cranton and King (2003) further studied the importance of the student/teacher relationship and added that the educator must bring his or her whole self to the learning process. Educators must bring their “values, beliefs and assumptions about teaching and their ways of seeing the world to the learning environment and the learning relationship”

(Cranton & King, 2003, p. 33). Bringing one's self to the learning relationship encourages the process of transformational learning.

Having reviewed the literature on transformational learning, I would argue that the research overall is lacking in two major areas: facilitation and application. Mezirow presented 10 stages of transformational learning. Other researchers have generally supported those phases, adding details or summarizing the phases in their own terminology. However, the research is lacking in the area of how an individual facilitates the process of transformational learning including but not limited to the success and/or failure of educators who attempt to act in the role of facilitator in the process. Research is also lacking as it relates to transformational learning and the ongoing application of the learning. We know from the definition of the theory that transformational learning leads to a change in beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions. How and in what context is this change meaningful and/or long lasting?

Group Relations Theory

Historical accounts of the development of Group Relations theory are found in numerous introductions of articles and books that discuss Group Relations theory and practice. Hayden and Molenkamp (2002) provide a brief history that is written in a manner that an individual without a psychology background could clearly understand. Others have written accounts directed towards those in the academic arena (Astrachan, 1975; Reed, 1976). Whichever lens is preferred; many authors who continue to publish articles and books about the history and philosophy of Group Relations theory support the existing literature base.

Tavistock Institute, at the University of Leicester in England, was the location of the first Group Relations Conference, organized by Wilfred Bion in 1957. Since the origin of the conference the terms *Group Relations* and *Tavistock* are often used interchangeably to refer to the theory behind the process. Because of his role in the formation of Group Relations theory, Bion is considered one of the fathers of Group Relations theory. Bion's beliefs, along with those of Melanie Klein, stem from a psychoanalytic theory of practice.

A psychoanalytic approach assumes that fundamental behavior exists in all humans. When a safe environment, which has clearly identified boundaries, is created, the analyst begins to observe the behavior of the participants with the intention of understanding the behavior and its possible roots. In using the psychoanalytic lens to study groups, a similar learning environment can be created. A group is formed with defined boundaries and a given task. The task, simply stated, is to study the behavior of the group in the present. The process of completing the task, while also dealing with the leadership and authority of participants and staff, brings forth emotions such as anxiety, anger, and frustrations. Defense mechanisms are used to cope with the emerging emotions. It is the emergent emotions and subsequent behaviors that are then used as data to better understand the group as a whole (Astrachan, 1975; Wells, 1985).

Astrachan's article (1975) links multiple theories, acknowledging that the history of Group Relations theory is rooted in several different theoretical backgrounds. First, he refers to the work of Lewin (1951) who uses social psychology and social system theories. He then notes the integration of the work of Bennis and Shepard (1956) who wrote about group development. By connecting these theories with the psychoanalytic

theory of Group Relations, the development of Group Relations theory can be understood. Publishing theoretical and research based articles on the history and practice of Group Relations work piques the interest of other practitioners. This incorporation of researchers from a variety of theoretical backgrounds increased the potential for future research in the area of Group Relations theory.

A. Kenneth Rice, the original Chairman of the Tavistock Centre for Applied Social Research, designed conferences such that the members and staff could study leadership. Rice believed, “the primary task of a Group Relations Conference is to provide participants with opportunities to learn about leadership” (Hayden & Molenkamp, 2002, p. 5). He brought these opportunities to the United States in 1965, by holding the first Group Relations Conference at Mt. Holyoke College.

Participants of this first conference began to spread around the nation and continued to carry on the work. After the passing of Mr. Rice, the A. K. Rice Institute was founded in the United States. This Institute along with its growing membership sponsors Group Relations Conference throughout the world (Hayden & Molenkamp, 2002). The practice that started with those knowledgeable in psychoanalysis now includes those with varying backgrounds including sociology, education, leadership studies, and organizational development. Backgrounds of those working with Group Relations theory are quite diverse, thus the utilization and the interpretations of Group Relations theory include a variety of perspectives.

Member Learning

The term *member* refers to participants of Group Relations Conferences, whether they are in a college classroom, a weekend event, or week-long conference. Research on

member learning must include a discussion about the difficulties in conducting research on member learning. Much of the learning that occurs at a Group Relations Conference or event is based on the members internalizing the learning based on what they hear or see from others. That internalized learning is voiced in the language of interpretations made by the members or the conference/event staff. Hence, the subjectivity of the learning must be taken into consideration. For example a conference of 60 members has the possibility of resulting in 60 different personal interpretations and descriptions of the same event and differing views of the learning that may or may not have occurred in particular events.

While individual learning is appreciated, the learning can be and should be applied to organizations and systems as a whole. Green and Molenkamp (2005) explain the BART system as it relates to member learning. Boundary (B), authority (A), role (C), and task (T) are constructs the authors see present in member learning. Boundaries, in this case, can be physical, like the color of one's skin as a boundary for being accepted, or psychological, like the boundary of being a mentee to a mentor. Authority can be either the formal authority of the Director or the informal authority one gives to another based on his or her experience. For example, a school principal has formal authority but a teacher who has worked at the same school for decades has informal authority based on time, age, and experience. Role is a center of individual activities that make one responsible for each activity and is distinguishable from others (Hayden & Molenkamp, 2002, p. 30). An example of a role is when one person in a group acts as if her or she is the *leader*. In this instance, one can say he or she is in the role of leader. Being deemed the leader by others comes with certain assumed responsibilities and

expectations. “Task, in the Group Relations context, is the end to which work is directed” (Hayden & Molenkamp, 2002, p. 31). Tasks can be as simple as forming a group of no less than three people or as complex as studying one’s behavior while a member of the group. Using the acronym as a framework, members can learn about their roles in a group as well as the group’s dynamics all in relationship to the boundaries, authority, role, and task of the group (Green & Molenkamp, 2005; Hayden & Molenkamp, 2002).

Several themes emerge from a variety of authors who have studied the member learning. Wells (1985) describes the group processes that frame member learning. The learning can include an increase in knowledge regarding interpersonal relationships, intrapersonal relationships, understanding the group-as-a-whole, and inter-group and inter-organizational dynamics (Wells, 1985, p. 110). Understanding the multiple levels of group processes allows an individual to view the learning in a variety of ways.

Research shows that the design of a Group Relations Conference affects an individual’s learning. Klein, Stone, Correa, Astrachan, and Kossek (1989) hypothesized that context, design, and linkages would influence the learning. The authors studied 13 Group Relations Conferences that were held over a 5-year period. The quantitative approach involved distribution of questionnaires in which members were asked to rate the structure of the conference, 10 topics they could have potentially learned about, and 6 additional descriptors of learning. Structural items referred to conference design and included small groups, application groups, and conference discussions. Descriptors include overall learning, emotional impact, whether or not the individual would recommend the conference to a friend, and the extent to which the individual could describe the conference 3 months later (Klein et al., 1989)

With a 60% response rate, the authors were able to rate some of the learning that occurred at the conferences. The research supported 7-day Group Relations Conferences and 3-day weekend conferences as the best means to facilitate member learning (Klein et al., 1989). Some topics members reportedly learned about were use of personal power, principles of leadership, and organizational dynamics. The authors suggested additional research in the areas of whether or not pre-existing relationships between members affects the learning and how the duration and complexity of the conference affects member learning.

Quantitative research appears to be a valid method for conducting research on member learning. With a sample size of 25, data was collected via questionnaires regarding individuals' learning at a Tavistock conference. The factor analysis of the questionnaires shows that learning reported by the participants could be narrowed down to three factors: (a) general endorsement of the conference, (b) learning about personal relationships and Small Group behavior, and (c) learning about group dynamics and Large Group behavior (Morrison, Greene, & Tischler, 1979). This empirical research further delineated the learning based on the background of the members studied. For example, the research showed that those with a clinical psychology background rated more learning about Large Group behavior than the non-clinical psychologists.

Linking learning to practice for members is sometimes difficult. Correa, Klein, Howe, and Stone (1981) use quantitative techniques in an attempt to illustrate this link. Having distributed questionnaires to 58 conference participants, 62% were returned to the researchers. The result showed that member learning was often emotional and was not dependent on the amount of observable behavioral participation in a particular event

of a conference (Correa et al., 1981). Members who may have sat silently during particular events not verbally offering comments to the group reported a degree of learning nonetheless. Finally, the authors conclude, for mental health professionals, the conferences provided a link to bridge the gap between “pure” clinical situations and organizational situations.

These quantitative studies provide a rich layer of information about member learning particularly with mental health professionals. However, the quantitative data does not give the thick, rich description that would be most helpful in understanding the depth of learning and/or the changes in attitudes and beliefs that may occur at conferences. Both studies would benefit from conducting follow-up interviews of respondents. Interviews have the potential of providing an appreciation of the experience of group members for those with or without a background in Group Relations Conferences as well as those who are part of the mental health field and those who are not. Using both methodologies in one study would enhance our understanding of the merits of this process in changing or transformational learning.

Qualitative research is available about learning as it relates to individuals in organizations. The Menninger Foundation is one group of healthcare workers who participate in Group Relations work. The Menninger Foundation sent 60 of its members to Group Relations Conferences over a 6-year period (Menninger, 1975). While the author acknowledges the difficulty articulating the qualitative, immeasurable descriptors of learning, his research shows that members noted differences in how they see, think, feel, and understand themselves and the world around them after the conference.

In a similar study, physicians who participated in small groups reported similar learning experiences. However, the physicians took the learning to the next level of how understanding affected their practice (Pereles, Lockyer, & Fidler, 2002). The research showed that for the physicians, lessons learned through group involvement helped to refine their practices. This application is important to note with respect to transformational learning; they transformed their beliefs in regards to patient care and patient/doctor relationships.

Lipgar and Struhl (1995) completed research on member learning from Group Relations Conferences that they argue is generalizable because the conference was based on the A. K. Rice/Tavistock tradition. Participants of the study were given a Leadership Preference Questionnaire and asked to rank responses based on their beliefs regarding what characteristics they prefer in a leader before and after the conference experience. Lipgar and Struhl's research, while intended to assist in future conference design, is helpful in illuminating a before-and-after look at how the conference experience influences the participants' perceptions of leadership, which is informative for the purpose of my study. Lipgar and Struhl (1995) suggest that their findings provide a basis for evaluating member learning. In addition, the demonstrated change in leadership preferences, reported by the participants, was attributed to the level of staff experience, the level of the interpretations provided by staff, and the conference design.

Member Learning and Educators

With the sample of research on member learning, the question remains as to whether or not the learning has relevance to educational leaders. Klein and Gould (1973) completed research on a Group Relations Conference in which the members were high

school students. Using the case study approach, the experience and learning of 12 participants of a Yale University summer program in 1967 are discussed. As part of the summer program, a 9-week Group Relations seminar was held with the students as members. The case study is an excellent example that presents observable data from the seminar with the related interpretations. Issues relating to boundary and authority in the small group setting appear to be most relevant to the members' experiences and consequent learning.

Carl Mack, who was superintendent of the Del Paso Heights Elementary School District in Sacramento, used his personal experience in his role as superintendent as data for interpretation using the Group Relations lens. Mack (1995) used this approach to manage what he called the covert issues from the district's establishing a new primary task; that is, meeting the needs of a "multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-linguistic, low-income community" (Mack, 1995, p. 121). Mack notes that using what he describes as the *Tavistock toolbox* assisted him in managing hidden issues. He cites several of the elements associated with Group Relations Conferences such as listening, paraphrasing, and interpreting observed behavior of his staff as tools he used with his staff in his role as an educational leader.

The use of the Group Relations (Tavistock) lens, in Mack's role as a superintendent, allowed him to examine his district differently. Because his research lacked academic rigor and the results are not generalizable to other superintendents' experiences or other districts, Mack admits the limitations of his account. Thus, Mack begins the discussion with a personal case study of which others can use as a basis for additional research (Mack, 1995). He looked at themes represented by members of the

group rather than focusing on technical issues. The process of analysis led him and the staff to see issues that affected their overall success. Even though his work is subjective and non-empirical account it still helps make the connection between the potential for educational change and Group Relations theory.

Mack wrote two more articles regarding his use of Group Relations theory from his personal perspective (Mack, 2003, 2005). The second of the series of three discussed the use of groups and the process of using Group Relations theory in public schools and districts. More recently, he presented another qualitative research article describing his use of Group Relations theory in his role as superintendent in the New York school system during the days and weeks surrounding September 11, 2001, the day New York fell victim to terrorist attacks. Mack's articles are similar to the previously mentioned Powell Pruitt & Barber (2005) article that suggests using the Group Relations lens to examine the education system as a whole.

Summary

The three areas of research reviewed, the role of the school principal, Transformational Learning theory, and Group Relations theory, informed the rationale for my study and helped to explain and give meaning to the data analysis presented in Chapter 4. For the participants of my study, each area was found to be relevant and supported my final argument that each area affects the others and should be considered when answering my research questions of how participants of Group Relations Conferences describe their learning and apply their learning in their roles as school administrators.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of the learning among principals and assistant principals who have participated in Group Relations Conferences and to further understand how their perceived learning translated into action. The three over-arching research questions were:

1. How do participants understand and describe their learning?
2. How are those same participants trying to apply their learning professionally and personally?
3. How did the learning and/or application vary among participants?

Research Design

“Qualitative research attempts to understand the meaning or nature of experience of persons; used to obtain the intricate details about phenomena such as feelings, through processes and emotions that are difficult to extract or learn about through more conventional research methods” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 11). Considering this basic premise of qualitative research, I chose the use of qualitative methods to best answer my research questions. “Qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). Naturalistic inquiry involves studying individuals in their natural setting, trying to make sense of the interpretations individuals give to their experiences. Guba and Lincoln (1981) outline characteristics of naturalistic inquiry each pertaining to qualitative research methodology and are relevant to my research.

First, Guba and Lincoln consider a qualitative researcher a naturalist who elects to carry out research in the natural setting or context of the entity for which the study is proposed. In doing so, I chose to meet the participants at their respective school sites. The naturalist elects to use him- or herself as well as other humans as the primary data-gathering instruments (as opposed to paper-pencil instruments). The primary instruments for my research are the individuals who make up the unit of analysis.

The naturalist is in favor of purposive or theoretical sampling. I purposefully chose participants for my research that met predetermined criteria. The naturalist prefers inductive (to deductive) data analysis because that process is more likely to identify multiple realities to be found in those data. In understanding the reality of the participant, I used inductive data.

The naturalist prefers to have the guiding substantive theory emerge from the data because no a priori theory could possibly encompass the multiple realities that are likely to be encountered. In carrying out naturalistic inquiry, I have chosen grounded theory methodology to complete my research. In addition, the naturalist elects to allow the research design to emerge (flow, cascade, unfold) rather than to construct it preordinately. While I began with a basic design, I allowed the design to morph as needed. The naturalist prefers to negotiate meanings and interpretations with the human sources from which the data have chiefly been drawn. The meanings I gleaned from the participants are a collaboration of their words and my interpretations.

The naturalist is inclined to interpret data (including the drawing of conclusions) idiographically (in terms of the particulars of the case) rather than nomothetically (in terms of the law-like generalizations). The terms of the case in point are crucial in

understanding the perspective of the participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1981) In my case, this means I interpreted the data based in the uniqueness of the individuals and their experiences rather than to make assumptions regarding the experience of all the members of the Leadership Academy or the Group Relations Conference.

The naturalist is likely to be tentative about making broad application of the findings because realities are multiple and different. I must consider that uniqueness of each of the participants in this study by acknowledging their individuality in which they are as people and how they choose to take up their role as administrators. No one person's experience can be duplicated.

The naturalist is likely to find the conventional trustworthiness criteria (internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity) inconsistent with the procedures for naturalistic inquiry. In my research, I must design my own criteria based on my operational procedures, and then consider validity, reliability, and objectivity (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, pp. 39-43).

All of the characteristics outlined by Guba and Lincoln must be considered interdependently; none is unique to the other. Using the theory of naturalistic inquiry as a means of qualitative research matches the research questions and design in my research.

Qualitative research inquiry "contributes to basic research through inductive theory development, a prominent example being the 'grounded theory' approach of Glaser and Strauss" (Patton, 2002, p. 214). Patton also argues that the "grounded theory method denotes a set of well-developed categories (themes and concepts) that are systematically inter-related through statements of relationship to form a theoretical framework that explains some relevant social, psychological, educational or other

phenomenon” (p. 487). Charmaz (2005) further strengthens my understanding of grounded theory through her statement that “grounded theory methods are a set of flexible analytic guidelines that enable researchers to focus their data collection and to build inductive middle-range theories through successive levels of data analysis and conceptual development” (p. 507).

Years before Patton and Charmaz wrote about grounded theory, the theory itself was conceptualized in the publication of the Glaser and Strauss book, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* in 1967. This original publication is the theoretical foundation in which my research was based. When choosing grounded theory, I considered the application of grounded theory. This application is considered using the following four questions: (a) Does the theory fit the area in which it will be used? (b) Is it understandable to those who will use the results of the research? (c) Is the theory applicable to diverse situations? (d) Will the theory be useful in the situations over time (Glaser & Strauss, 1967)?

The research design included an element of flexibility. Grounded theory by definition means theory will emerge as data is collected and analyzed. Keeping this in mind, I conducted initial interviews to gather initial data and understanding from the respondents. I allowed the respondents to review written transcripts of the interview as a means of confirming and validating that the transcripts are an accurate representation of the interviews.

I selected grounded theory and the use of interviews as a strategy for generating and building a new theory regarding the possible learning and application among participants of Group Relations Conferences. Because research in the area of Group

Relations theory is relatively new, I was not able to test existing theory; I built a new theory based on the data collected. Conducting interviews allowed the respondents to tell me in their own words their perceptions, feelings, and beliefs related to their learning which may (or may not) have taken place during a Group Relations Conference and the applicability of the learning to their practice.

When choosing grounded theory, I considered how grounded theory matches my own practice and beliefs. Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest that a researcher who uses grounded theory must have the ability to step back and critically analyze situations, have the ability to recognize a tendency towards bias, have the ability to think abstractly, have the ability to be flexible and open to helpful criticism, and be sensitive to the words and actions of respondents. Grounded theory is the best methodology to answer the research questions previously mentioned; and with my background in counseling, it also matches my professional training and personal preference.

Sample Selection

I used members of the Group Relations Conferences held at a southern California university. The conferences were open to all members of the public and were publicized via a network of professional organizations and publications and through the School of Leadership and Education Sciences' (SOLES) website. Publication of the conference usually results in reaching participants from across America and around the globe. Past participants have come from New York, Virginia, England, France, and Italy. Among all the members of the conference from the previous listed geographic locations and more, each year a group of southern California educational leaders participates in the

conference to fulfill course requirements in an administrative preparation program and concurrent Masters in Education program.

The educational leaders who participate in the conference are part of an Educational Leadership Academy that was created in 2000 in partnership with an urban school district in southern California. The program was designed to address the shortage of qualified principals in K-12 schools in the district by attracting exceptional teachers to become school principals. The Academy has five learning outcomes:

1. Foster a decision-making community that acts from a belief system founded in social justice.
2. Thoughtfully analyze classroom instructional practice.
3. Articulate the elements of effective teaching and design adult learning systems that result in improved student achievement.
4. Implement data-driven accountability systems to ensure the achievement of each child.
5. Align operational functions and resources to support teaching and learning.

The learning outcomes show the link between the purpose of the program and participation in the Group Relations Conference. Decision making, social justice, analyzing practice, being accountable and being able to align function and resources are all learnings which are addressed at Group Relations Conferences. Members of the Academy who attended the Group Relations Conference/course are the individuals who made up the sample for this research.

I used a stratified theoretical sampling procedure in choosing the participants for the research (Patton, 2002, p. 240). The individuals were chosen based on having several

factors in common. Each participant was a former member of the Academy, had participated in at least one Group Relations Conference at the southern California university, and each was employed as a K-8 principal or assistant principal. In following with the strategies and techniques associated with grounded theory, the participants were selected by theoretical purpose and relevance. The sample group was chosen to achieve a representative sample from the available pool of school administrators who met the previously mentioned characteristics (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 214). I selected the sample group to control for similarities and differences (which may include race, gender, age) among sample members.

To begin, I sought to have a full understanding of the previously mentioned Educational Leadership Development Academy (ELDA) program. I began by researching the Academy via the Internet. I then arranged a meeting with the head of the program. I learned that since 2000, 53 students have graduated from the Academy program. The head of the program gave me a list of 45 of the former Academy members who currently are employed with the Urban School District (the other 9 were not currently working in the local school district).

The head of the Academy sent all of the 45 individuals an email introducing me, supporting my proposal, and encouraging them to participate in my research. Soon thereafter, I sent each of them an email explaining my research and its objectives. Three individuals responded to the initial email contact. I then followed up with a second email. Between both emails, 10 individuals voluntarily agreed to participate in my research. One of the individual's personal schedules became too busy and she communicated with

me via email that she was not able to participate in my research. The research continued with the total of nine volunteer participants.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection began after approval from the University of San Diego's Institutional Review Board (IRB). I arranged to meet with the nine volunteers at a location of their choosing. All nine invited me to come to their school site; giving me the opportunity to see each administrator's office. How everyone arranged their office, interacted with the secretary, and responded to school staff was the very first level of data collection for me. Did the principal have an open-door policy? How did the principal interact with the secretary? Is the office arranged in a manner that invites guests or is it crowded with no space for me, parents, or other guests? This information, which may appear to be meaningless, became relevant during the data analysis. For a qualitative researcher, no detail is too small. All information I could gather whether through my own senses or the words of the participants was noted.

Once participants signed the consent to participate form and were confirmed participants, I conducted the interviews. Nine interviews were conducted over a 2-month period of time, using an established interview protocol, using an established interview protocol (Appendices A and B). These interviews lasted an average of 45 minutes. I took written notes and tape-recorded each interview. Participants were reminded that they may end the interview at any time and could choose to not answer any questions. All nine participants answered all the questions. After considering some private transcription services, I choose to personally transcribe each of the tape recordings. This process allowed me to review and become intimate with the data. Upon completion of the

transcription, I emailed each participant a copy of the transcription; giving the individual the opportunity to review the transcription before I began analyzing the transcriptions.

In consultation with one member of my dissertation committee I was granted access to final papers written by participants of the Group Relations Conference. Of the 30 written papers I was given, two were relevant to my research because those two were written by members of ELDA and were on my list of current school administrators. These two papers provided yet another layer of data for me to interpret and reference as I began to analyze my results.

Data Analysis

Grounded theory directs the researcher to analyze the data at multiple levels and stages in the research process. The first and most superficial level of analysis was the use of memos. I began memo writing at the onset of the research process. Memos are “written records that contain the products of analysis or directions for the analyst. They are meant to be analytical and conceptual rather than descriptive” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 217). These memos were shared with my dissertation chair and were used to guide me as I took on the process of completing this analysis. Through memo writing, emails, and conversations, I was in frequent communication with my dissertation chair.

The second level of analysis was the use of procedures as suggested by Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) explanation of grounded theory. One procedure, microanalysis, is “the detailed line by line analysis necessary at the beginning of a study to generate initial categories and to suggest Relationships among categories” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 57). Another procedure, open coding, is the “analytic process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in data” (p. 101). As the

process of coding continued, my inquiry led me to the creation of categories and themes. I then developed relational statements “which are initial hunches about how concepts relate because they link two or more concepts explaining the what, why, where and how of phenomena” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 135).

I used analytical tools suggested by grounded theory to facilitate the coding process. The tools include the use of questioning, analysis of a particular word, phrase, or sentence, and analysis through comparisons. Strauss and Corbin (1998) state that the analytic tools have 10 purposes, for example: “steer a researcher’s thinking away from the confines of both the technical literature and personal experience, avoid standard ways of thinking about phenomena, allow fruitful labeling of concepts and discover properties and dimensions of categories” (p. 89), to name a few.

In addition to the tools suggested by the authors of *Grounded Theory*, I used the computer program, InVivo, 2007. InVivo is a computer software program designed to assist the researcher in analyzing the data using qualitative methodologies. To learn the program, I reviewed the given written tutorial and participated in an on-line tutoring session that was led by an InVivo staff member who talked me through the program and its components. I found that a combination of paper/pencil analysis (note taking, use of index cards) and computer coding (free nodes, tree nodes, parent nodes, and child nodes) worked best in analyzing my data.

Using technical techniques within the parameters of qualitative research was the foundation for my data analysis. As technical as they may be, I also relied on personal learning style to help me with the rich analysis. Imagine the floor of a home office covered in over 100 color-coded index cards. Each card represented an emerging

category, derived from the words of my participants. The categories were then sorted by color; allowing me to visualize the categories and begin to try to make sense of the responses. This task was overwhelming, frustrating, and confusing. I was relying on my understanding of grounded theory, but found myself stuck in the process with no way out. I realized that having a partner to assist the initial analysis could enhance my work. So, I brought in my color-coded index cards to my chair and together, we *played* with the cards. Cards went from color-coded piles, to categorical piles, to piles by respondent. Through open-ended conversation, my chair was able to guide me to organize my data.

I returned to my office and took another approach. I went from a floor covered in index cards, to walls covered with large butcher paper. I turned to old-fashioned markers and colored pencils to mark off categories and emerging themes. After weeks of transcribing interviews, understanding the words themselves, and developing categories (on paper, index cards, and butcher paper), my grounded theory began to emerge. I can vividly remember that moment: looking around the room at the butcher paper with the multiple colors, arrows from one page to the next, and circles showing patterns and connections. It was then I was able to step back, use my knowledge and experience with the computer program InVivo to then organize my data in a professional manner.

I provide this information to underscore the ongoing process analyzing my data to generate theory. It was not simple and clean as the survey instruments of quantitative research can be. It began as messy, frustrating, and confusing but ended as exciting and inspiring as I was able to contribute to the existing literature.

Grounded theory is meant to build theory rather than test an existing theory. Through the processes outlined by the founders of grounded theory, Glaser and Strauss

(1967) and Strauss and Corbin (1998), I discovered the answers to my research questions and developed a theory to explain the perceptions of the learning that occurred among the participants in my study in addition to gaining an understanding of the application of the reported learning.

Trustworthiness

Guba and Lincoln (1981) address the topic of trustworthiness of grounded theory, proposing four terms, “credibility (in place of internal validity), transferability (in place of external validity), dependability (in place of reliability), and confirmability (in place of objectivity),” that are an appropriate fit with naturalistic inquiry” (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 219).

Techniques are suggested to ensure each of the four conditions. For credibility, Guba and Lincoln (1981) make several suggestions for conducting research, including certain activities (prolonged engagement and triangulations), peer debriefing, and member checks. I employed these activities to the fullest extent possible. I spent time with my participants, had a colleague not related to my research review my data, and provided my participants with the opportunity to review transcripts and results of my analysis throughout the research process.

Transferability, similar to external validity, according to Guba and Lincoln (1981), is nearly impossible in naturalistic inquiry. They suggest that the research cannot guarantee transferability but must provide a thick description in order for others to reach a conclusion themselves about whether or not the results can be transferred to other cases. The emphasis is on the researcher’s ability to paint a clear picture of the research and the results, not on the results themselves.

Dependability is made evident by a technique referred to as overlapping and/or the use of the inquiry audit (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). I overlapped the data by reading and reviewing writings completed by two of the participants after having participated in the conference. Completing an inquiry audit means having another person question the process of inquiry I used in completing the research. I did this by having my dissertation chair review my work periodically. In addition, a colleague in the field of education, who is not associated with the university or my research, reviewed my process and emergent theory, giving me her unbiased opinion of my research and emergent theory.

Confirmability is shown via a confirmability audit (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Guba and Lincoln suggest six categories for the audit: evidence of raw data, data reduction and analysis products, data reconstruction, process notes, materials relating to intentions, and instrument development information. In order to demonstrate credibility, I have kept evidence of all six of these categories for the review of my dissertation committee and my colleagues.

Raw data in the form of written transcripts and interview notes are on file by interview number. I have kept data reduction and analysis products in multiple forms; including my hand notes and the computer generated notes from the InVivo program. Process notes were emailed to my chair and kept in a personal research journal. The materials relating to my intentions include computerized journal entries, email correspondence, and written memos. Finally, information relating to the development of my instrument has been kept since the onset of my research dating back to my pilot interviews.

The methodology I have chosen for my research represents the nexus between naturalistic inquiry, grounded theory, my professional training as a graduate student, and my professional experience in the field of education. Steps have been taken to insure that the methodology is utilized maintaining the rigor and intentions of qualitative research. However, it is relevant to conclude this chapter with a discussion about my positionality in regards to the research, the participants, and my potential findings.

There is a comprehensive list of explanation of limitations in Chapter 5; however, obvious bias exists between the research topic and me that should be mentioned here. At first, like the participants in my study, I attended the conference to earn three graduate credits at a southern California university. The credits went towards the same doctoral degree in which the dissertation is the final component. After the first conference, I have consequently attended six more conferences by my choice. I chose to repeat the conference experience because I believed that I was learning from the experience. In fact, now seven conferences later I know that I learned and can give concrete examples of my learning.

An additional factor that contributes to my positionality is my professional job. I am a principal of a small, alternative education school in the same district in which my participants work. My school is independent of the district yet is located in and is required to follow the same laws and regulations associated with the school district. In my day-to-day work, I take up similar roles and responsibilities as the participants in my study. I have an opinion on how one should be as a vice principal or principal on a school campus.

This point brings to light the position that I take professionally and personally: individuals can and do learn from participating in the conference. In completing this research, I wondered if there were others like me. Have others that have a similar professional role and have participated in the conference learned as I did? Have others noticed a change in how they take up their role on a school campus? Can others identify the personal and professional changes in themselves as I did? This research gives language not only to my experience but also to the experience of the participants. Throughout the research process, I constantly kept in mind my bias and opinions at all stages of the research most importantly in the data analysis, detailing this in memos and in conversations with colleagues.

Summary

The goal of this qualitative study was to understand the experience each of my participants had during and after having participated in the Group Relations Conference. I gathered data through personal interviews and a review of papers completed by participants as part of the course requirements associated with the conference. Data analysis was completed using methods associated with grounded theory, both modern, by way of the qualitative research program In Vivo, and less modern, by way of color coded index cards.

In the end, I present an empirical research project grounded in the literature, explained by grounded theory, and applicable in the fields of Group Relations theory and Transformational Learning theory.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The focus of this study was to learn how participants in Group Relations Conferences understand the learning which may or may not have taken place as a result of their participation in a conference, to understand how participants apply their learning and to understand how, if at all, those same participants are able to apply their learning in their professional roles as K-12 school administrators.

In this chapter, the first section describes a typical Group Relations Conference. In the second section, the data is presented by way of three individual cases that represent the whole of the nine participants in the study. Through the cases the voices of each participant is expressed. In addition, Mezirow's Transformational Learning theory is used to frame my analysis, asking the question, according to the literature, *to what degree, if at all, the participants experienced a change in beliefs, attitudes, or assumptions as a result of their experience with the group conference*. The findings from this study reflect the ability of participants to apply their learning from conference participation to their professional lives, the idea that conference participation empowers people to act as change agents on their school campuses, and finally, this study exposes the lessons learned from the experiences of the participants in this study for future Group Relations Conferences. I conclude chapter 4 with an explanation of the grounded theory that emerged from the data analysis.

The Group Relations Conference

Each Group Relations Conference at the small, liberal arts college in southern California is a unique conference; each having a theme and structure organized by the

director of the conference. While unique, most conferences, including the ones the participants from this study were a part of, have similar features and each one is one of several required courses for graduate students. For example, all the conferences have a Director, Associate Director, and group consultants, many of whom are university faculty and members. While there are books written about the conference and the conference design, I will briefly describe the conference events to lay the foundation for understanding the experience as well as the language used by the participants in this study. In addition, quotes from course syllabi are used to further illustrate the theoretical base of the conference and the experience itself.

The conference itself is an “active learning model” (Monroe, 2009, p. 4). Participants are encouraged to examine their “assumptions and behaviors related to the exercise of leadership and authority in order to help them function more effectively in their roles” (p. 4). Like any other conference, there are several sessions within the conference format. The Group Relations Conference usually has several events that are repeated over the 3-day, weekend event. There is the Small Group Experience, Large Group Experience, Institutional Event, and Review and Application Group. The next section explains each.

The Small Group Experience (Small Group) is usually 6 to 12 individual members and a Small Group facilitator who is part of the staff. The group facilitator is an individual who is both experienced and trained in Group Relations Conferences. The role of the group facilitator is to guide the group members in discussing the topics at hand and assist the individual members and the group as a whole in learning. The task of the Small Group is to study the behavior of the members as it occurs, in what is called the “here

and now.” Here and now is a phrase commonly used in Group Relations work. Simply stated, it means to study what is currently happening among and between the group members as well as with each person as an individual in the moment. The task of the Small Group is to explore “how they take up personal, as compared to formal and delegated authority” (Monroe, 2009, p. 5).

Studying behavior in the “here and now” is not an easy task. Participants new to Group Relations Conferences are encouraged to try to recognize and understand their reactions to others; beginning with reactions that are observable, such as sighing or rolling of the eyes when someone speaks. These reactions, which are usually ignored, are considered significant *data* or information in understanding the often-unconscious dynamics present in individuals and groups. As the individual becomes more confident in recognizing their overt reactions as they are happening along with the underlying feeling associated with the reaction, the Small Group facilitator helps the group members learn to pay attention to internal, non-observable reactions, like butterflies in the stomach, rising of the body temperature or headaches, which may involuntarily occur as a result of a particular situation in the group. These reactions may be felt by an individual but are not considered unique to the individual. The practice of Group Relation Theory informs us that there is degree of group consciousness in every group, meaning that the reactions represent group phenomena, not simply the reaction of an individual.

For example, let us suppose that I am in a group of female school principals discussing the topic of gender bias in the classroom. Then a male, of equal status professionally, joins our group and then let us assume that my observable reaction is crossing my arms, which could be interpreted as showing unwelcoming body language.

My internal reactions may be: increased body temperature and/or feelings of being bothered and annoyed that a male is joining our all female group. With the group facilitator's help, I might also become more aware of how my feelings are often shared by others, yet often are only expressed by a single individual. This is an example of viewing behavior from a group perspective versus simply an individual one. In this case, being in the *here and now* would mean studying my own personal reaction to the male entering the room, and trying to understand why I am so offended by his joining, as well as what this might represent for the whole group. Perhaps they notice that I do not want him in the group and they join me in *not welcoming* him. As a member of the group, I might then reflect on how my reaction is affecting the other group members. Is it keeping others from expressing themselves or am I making a contribution that might help the group work together more productively? The strategies and techniques taught during the conference help participants to learn the answers to these questions, modify their behaviors, and adjust their beliefs, attitudes, assumptions, and behavior to develop better individual awareness and as an individual of the group.

As noted above, the conference is structured in a way that facilitates learning about myself in the *here and now*, by analyzing reactions both physical and emotional, and understanding how my reactions, whether intentional or not, affect others. In Group Relations Conferences, participants ask themselves questions such as the ones mentioned above to reach a deeper understanding of ourselves, and how our prejudices and biases the impact our interactions in have everyday lives. Studying one's own reaction has the potential to lead to a greater understanding of one's self and one's perception of others. This learning is an important step to greater understanding of group dynamics. If you can

understand yourself, your perceptions and reactions to others, you can begin to control, modify, suppress, and capitalize on this knowledge in other situations where the stakes are much higher.

The Large Group Experience (Large Group) is the setting in which all the participants (also referred to as members) ranging from 45 to 75 individuals and two to four staff consultants gather together in one room. The role of the group consultants (facilitators) is similar to that of the Small Group facilitator. Both facilitators are present and participate in the group discussion, offering verbal prompts to guide the group discussion and the members in understanding what is being said verbally by each person as well as the underlying themes, which may not be verbalized. Many themes emerge yet some may not be said or called out as racism, gender bias, classism, and/or power struggles between and among members. For example, a female group member may say something like, "I don't like how Mike always seems to do the talking." The facilitator may recognize the person's frustration with Mike as an individual but might also point out what her statement might represent for the group as a whole; for example, how the men of the group seem to be monopolizing the speaking in the group. The facilitator may make a comment to invite/encourage a dialogue about what he or she observed.

One stated purpose of a Large Group is for members to "study their own behavior in a situation in which face-to-face interaction is problematic or impossible" (Hayden & Molenkamp, 2002, p.19). Face to face interaction is not possible because of the arrangement of the chairs. Examples of chair arrangements include being arranged in the shape of a spiral, concentric circles, or in quadrants with each quadrant facing the other, much like the arms of a windmill. The windmill arrangement might be chosen to create a

sense of movement among the group as well as making it clear to everyone, there is no front or back of the room, no distinct center seat, and no particular seat which is designated for the *leader of the group*. Some find the physical arrangement of the chairs *different* or *unusual*; however, the design is always intentional in meeting the purpose of the Large Group.

Examples of group members' behavior which may arise and become available for study occurs when members of the Large Group join together to verbally attack other members of the group based on race, ethnicity, or gender, formal positions of authority, or when group members sit silent for minutes at a time choosing not to communicate with one another about the common experience, i.e., being a part of the Large Group, which they are all a part. The Large Group "highlights the dynamics that may occur in large assemblies such as staff meetings, town hall meetings or crowds" (Monroe, 2009, p. 5).

The Review and Application Group (RAG) is another aspect of the Conference. The RAG consists of 6 to 10 members and a group facilitator who meet periodically throughout the conference. During weekend conferences such as the one the participants of my study were a part, the RAG meets at the end of each day. The RAG group gives members the opportunity to reflect on their experience with the assistance of the group facilitator. Group facilitators use techniques such as role play, journaling, open discussion, imagery, and drawing to help members describe and understand their experiences and learning that occurred as a result of participating in the various aspects of the conference. In this arena, the members have the opportunity to think about what they learned for the day and discuss how they will apply their learning to the next day of

the conference and then eventually to their lives outside of the conference. As the name of the group suggests, members *review* the day and begin to *apply* their experience to their lives.

Usually on the second day of a 3-day conference, the Conference Event is held. The Conference Event is also known as the “Institutional Event (IE).” This is the portion of the conference in which *all* members and staff participate together; as opposed to the Small Group and Large Group where only some of the staff participates in each event. The purpose of the IE is to create a micro-system that has groups, managers, formal authority figures, and members; mimicking all the components of any work system that may exist outside of a conference; and use that micro-system to learn about relations of power, authority, and leadership. Everyone is encouraged to examine the relationships between and among sub-groups. The structure of this event can vary depending on the Conference Director and his or her particular conference design. Also unique to the Institutional Event is the fact that the members of the conference are encouraged to form their own groups, which differs from the Small and Large Group events where the director assigns participants to specific groups. These groups are often formed around a common interest regarding a topic the members want to discuss relating to leadership such as power, trust, or issues of social identity.

The IE can best be described as the creation of a mock-organization with various levels of management, each trying to understand and communicate with the others. The task of this event is “to study relationships as they happen between and among groups” (Hayden & Molenkamp, 2002, p. 22). The thoughts, feelings, and behaviors inform the

individual, group and the whole system (the entire conference including members and staff).

The IE is interesting because similar to most organizations, tensions can arise among sub-groups. Miscommunication among groups, disagreements with management, lack of clear communication, and a variety of diverse personalities influence individuals and subgroups and this often simulates the kind of chaos and complexity that exists in most contemporary organizations. At the end of the IE, everyone gathers to discuss the actions and behaviors of the groups that contributed to or took away from the cohesiveness of the groups themselves as well as within the Institutional Event as a whole.

All of the conference events, Small Group, Large Group, Institutional Event, and the Review and Application Group, fit into a daily schedule and are repeated throughout the 3-day conference. A typical schedule for the weekend conference is displayed in Table 1.

Some compare this conference experience to other more commonly understood *experiential learning* activities or events but it is actually quite different from most others. To participants the purpose of the conferences seems unclear and the task (which is stated at the beginning) often feels ambiguous. However, the weekend is well planned with the event times, locations, and task of each event clearly stated in writing along with the purpose of the conference. For example, the stated aim or purpose of a recent conference, held January 2008 and titled *Leadership for Change: Evoking Collective Wisdom and Energy in Groups and Organizations: Awakening the Soul, Connecting with the Spirit* was “to provide opportunities for participants to develop a spirit of inquiry into

the complexities of organizational life that interweaves intuition, intention, and attention to the inspiration that emerges in the midst of ‘unknowing’ with critical, strategic thinking, integrity, and responsible action” (Monroe, 2008, n.p.). The purpose is used to guide the group facilitators as they work with participants in all of the events that make up the 3-day conference.

Table 1. *Typical 1-Day Schedule*

Time	Conference Event
9:00-10:15	Small Group
10:45-12:00	Large Group
12:00-1:00	Lunch
1:00-1:30	Institutional Event Opening
1:45-3:00	Institutional Event
3:15-4:30	Institutional Event
4:30-6:00	Dinner
6:00-7:30	Institutional Event
7:45-9:00	Review and Application Group

Adapted from Hayden and Molenkamp (2002, p. 21).

Another way to describe the purpose of a particular conference such as the one described here is to engage members in learning how to connect one’s inner spirit/passion/drive with the work that one does to complete daily tasks in their personal and professional life. With regards to professionals working in education, the emphasis is on learning how to hold onto the passion and energy which brought them to the field of

education while managing the task of running a school in their district, and with state and federal guidelines of public education that often impose and constrain their actions. They must do this also, in the context of an institution where many people often hold conflicting perspectives, ideologies, beliefs; regarding what should be done to best educate the children; conflict is often the norm.

The purpose of the course is to “acquaint students with the dynamics of organizational change and the challenges they present for those who hold positions of formal authority and to help students develop the personal skills and discipline necessary to exercise leadership effectively” (Monroe, 2009, p. 2). The stated aim (course objectives) of the class is to provide students the opportunities to:

1. To examine theories of leadership and authority in order to develop their own definitions and conceptual frameworks for diagnosing and intervening in educational and organizational systems.
2. To study and analyze the dynamic forces that influences the life of groups and organizations including those that are intentional and conscious as well as those that are unintended and less conscious.
3. To identify and evaluate their own assumptions and behaviors related to the exercise of leadership and authority. (Monroe, 2009, p. 2)

The learning opportunities listed above represent the high aspirations and expectations the conference staff have for participants; suggesting that there is potential for each person to complete the conference with a deeper understanding of themselves and others.

Participants

The available pool of participants for this study were those who had the requisite features, i.e., participated in a Group Relations Conference at the university and currently are employed as an administrator in a K-12 school. This pool included 44 principals and

assistant principals from throughout the district. All of the 44 were sent an electronic mailing inviting them to participate in this study. Of the available 44, 9 volunteered to participate and met me for personal interviews. Dr. Monroe, professor of the course associated with the conference, provided me with a copy of two of the final papers, written approximately 1 week after the conference experience. These papers were from two school administrators who were part of the original 44 names given to me by the director of the ELDA program but not were part of the 9 that I interviewed.

Before examining my findings, it is important for me to highlight some aspects about the participants. Pseudonyms are used throughout to protect the participants' anonymity. The field of education is quite political; keeping a job as a school principal and/or assistant principal is difficult in this competitive market. It was important to me that the participants were able to speak frankly and honestly not only about the Leadership Program and the conference, but also about their school sites without fear of negative reactions from colleagues in their district or by their Leadership Program colleagues. Thus, I took extra care to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

Researcher Bias

Having spoken about the Group Relations Conference and the participants of this study, it is important to reiterate my relationship to the study itself. I have attended six Group Relations Conferences at the same university I used in this study. I have served in several roles at the conference: member, researcher, administrative staff member, and most recently as a member of the training group. In addition, I am a principal at a K-12 school located in the same district as my participants. Through conference participation, conversations with professors and colleagues, and many readings, I have experienced

great personal growth including a better understanding of myself about how I act in my professional role and how I exercise leadership at my school site. All of this learning cannot be separated from my interpretations of this data; I am a co-creator in this process. I present the data analysis, leaving myself out as a unit of analysis but using my experience both with the conference and as someone with an education background to inform my understanding of the data and consequent emerging theory.

The challenge of having specific knowledge and similar experience as my participants was a constant struggle. I listened carefully to each participant without injecting my thoughts or opinions. My questions had to be open ended, without influencing or directing responses. For example, I asked the participants to “Tell me what you remember about the conference” instead of “Tell me about what you did during the Large Group.” The latter would stress a perceived importance to the Large Group as well as assume that the participants *did* something during the Large Group. At times, during the interview process when the participants were stumbling for words to describe their learning or events, I made sure I did not give them the word they were searching for in an effort to keep the responses in their own words, not mine.

Data Analysis

Grounded theory was the most effective methodology to analyze the data I collected. This chosen methodology, rather than testing an existing theory, allowed the theory to emerge. I present the results of the research as three cases. Each case is a fictitious person made up of several participants who shared similar levels of learning at the conference. Imagine that each case is an example of a typical individual who participates in the conference. Begin each section with a brief overview of the number of

participants represented by each case. Then in Chapter 5, I include descriptions and more in depth details about each of the nine participants.

Penny, the first case, is a combination of three of the nine participants in my study. Penny represents the three people who had a negative predisposition, reported little participation in the conference events and after the conference, did not take any action to further their understanding of the experience.

The case of Rhonda represents the four individuals who had neutral to positive predisposition about themselves and the conference experience. The people represented by Rhonda participated in the events throughout the weekend and made some connections with others while there. They were interested in the conference experience and eager to apply the learning to their professional roles as school administrators. The challenge for Rhonda (and those she represents) is that she made some changes in how she executes her role as an assistant principal but did not show evidence of an internal change in thinking regarding herself or others.

Annie is the third of the three cases and is compiled of two individuals. Annie represents those who had a positive predisposition at the start of the conference and they were excited and interested in the potential learning at the start of the weekend and they participated earnestly throughout the weekend. Annie represents those individuals who took the most action after the conference to understand and eventually apply their learning to their professional roles.

The nine individuals that I interviewed, although experiencing the conference in unique individual ways, demonstrated common factors that coalesced around three factors: predispositions to learning engagement, level of participation in the specific

events during the weekend, and the amount of active and applied learning resulting from the conference in the weeks and months that occurred after the conclusion of the conference.

Penny

I present facts and instances from all three of the interviews that make up the case of Penny as if they were one person. Each example, while from three different individuals, adds layers to the portrayal of the three that makes up the case of Penny. This shows how a typical person who shares Penny's characteristics experiences the conference. In this case, Penny is represented as an African-American principal at an elementary school in the local school district and the only member of a minority group of my three cases. Of the three participants represented by Penny, two were African-American and three worked at elementary schools. When creating the cases I used characteristics that were common on at least two of the participants and sometimes all three shared the same characteristics.

The case of Penny encapsulates the principal with approximately 6 years experience as an administrator and 5 years as a teacher before that. In those 11 years, Penny has seen both growth and stagnation in her school district and in her community as a whole. The average age of the three individuals who make up Penny is 55. Penny describes her own parents as "active in minority rights," which is why she says she is determined to give back to the community. In doing so, she chooses to work in the neighborhood in which she grew up. City Elementary (pseudonym), the elementary school that she leads, is known for being in one of the tougher areas of the school district

that faces issues of poverty, gang influence, and crime. Even with those factors, the school atmosphere and the staff who greeted me made me feel welcomed.

I arrived at the City Elementary School shortly before dismissal. Arriving then was helpful for me to get a sense of the school population. I witnessed the excitement of dismissal; parents searching for their children and older siblings for their younger siblings. Dismissal at City Elementary coincides with the neighboring high school, which only adds to the sea of students and apparent organized chaos as viewed by an outsider like me. After watching the dismissal process, I entered the front office of City Elementary School. The office was small and was decorated in seasonal decorations. As I waited in one of the three chairs to see Penny, I noticed parents and children vying for the attention of the front desk staff to get their particular issues addressed. I got a sense that the office staff (and school), while small, sought to accommodate the students and parents as best they could. I saw who I assumed was Penny pass by three times before she invited me into her office.

Penny's office was much larger than I expected in comparison to the front office and waiting area. The furniture looked as though it was straight from a catalog of formal office furniture, including desk, bookshelves work table, and round meeting table. Each solid wood piece went together perfectly. She invited me to sit at the round table in the middle of her office. A description of her office setting is relevant because often one's office is a representation of one's self. Her formal office setting with the overbearing furniture gave me the impression that Penny, too, would be formal in her role as principal.

To help lay the foundation for the interview I asked Penny how she described the Group Relations Conference before she attended. Penny remembered hearing about the conference from others who described the conference as a “nightmare, long, grueling, the worse thing in the world and expect people to be arguing and fighting.” She took their words and experience seriously and admitted that she joined it with her own negative presumptions of the conference.

Penny, like those she represents in this case, went into the conference close-minded. Penny said she had a predisposition that she believed she already knew whatever it was she needed to know and held a negative attitude toward the new experiences. She believed she has seen diversity and challenges in her personal life and professional life and did not need to participate in a Group Relations Conference to discuss issues relating to diversity, prejudices, and assumptions about other people or groups of people. Penny admitted to not being engaged in the conference activities and found it boring, irrelevant, and basically was physically present but not engaged with others or with the process of learning.

Penny, as mentioned previously, has a background in activism and she lived as a minority in the midst of a majority. I asked her if she could give any reasons to why she thought she did not “need” the conference to help her learn about the topics that may have come up at the conference she attended. She said because she grew up as a minority in a city characterized as unwelcoming and segregated, she does not need to discuss those same topics in a group setting. Penny commented that being raised in an activist family had already taught her to be aware of prejudices and to fight for equality.

Penny stated that, “We have, as African-Americans, been an invisible race; where people would just totally ignore you.” She believed that having had the experience of living as an “invisible race,” meant that she did not need to discuss the topic that was brought up at the conference of being invisible with others. She already knew it, felt it, experienced it, and chose not to further discuss it at the conference events. Penny qualified her negative attitude by saying, “It [the conference] wasn’t as bad as I thought it was going to be. Because it was a sense of reality of life that I have dealt with all the time.” It seemed as though Penny was changing her responses to meet what she thought may have been my need. She was concerned about how I might have been judging her responses. I had to change the line of questioning and returned to a phrase she used in our interview, “invisible people.”

Penny used the term “invisible people” several times throughout the interview. She says that, over the course of the weekend, she noted becoming aware that there are “invisible” people in groups who have issues they want to discuss but both the issue and the person remain invisible if the group is not aware.

It was just very interesting that some people’s perspective was much different than others and I think that you know that there are people that are invisible and people aren’t aware that they are creating an environment where people are invisible and they are in denial of that. The reality was that it was evident that weekend, that there are people that are invisible that we don’t really see or hear because of who they are. And so, I thought there was a lot of power, power struggles in that weekend and umm, it was really different when we broke into groups the dynamics of the groups, it was just really different.

Although increasingly aware of the “invisible” groups and individuals at the conference, her predisposition to be closed towards the new experience led her to not discuss the new awareness with others. Both in the Large Group and in the Small Group, she explained

that she chose to sit quietly, not engaging with the group members or the topic of being invisible. In addition to not talking with others, I did not have any evidence that she connected with others during the breaks, which is significant in that it further illustrates her lack of interest in building relationships during the conference.

I was curious about her confessed disengagement during the conference. Upon further probing, Penny remembered one male member who she connected with during the Large Group Experience who described himself as Jewish. In detailing this story she became a bit more open about the conference members.

She explained that she was quite surprised with herself in her feelings of connectedness to a person whom she assumed she had nothing in common. This individual was multiracial and according to Penny could pass for more than one race or ethnicity. She said people might assume he is white, American, Christian, or Mexican. Penny commented, “this one guy who was Mexican and Jewish chose to represent being Jewish at this event. I did not realize how much *I*, as a black woman, had in common with him. He talked about passing as more than one ethnicity, passing as Christian, passing as an American, all these things.” She remembered thinking, “You are my brother aren’t you?” Here, she used her own term, *my brother*, which is a term of endearment used in black culture signifying commonality for a man she thought she had nothing in common with and assumed she would not like.

Her experience in the Large Group reinforced her awareness that she, not unlike the Mexican gentleman she spoke with, also had a need for belonging with her group members as the group members most likely do for her too. Again, she was not expecting to have a commonality with someone of a different ethnicity, religion, and gender as

herself. Her heightened awareness of self and others brought this to light. I attribute this example of when she felt a connection to another person and her using the interaction as a point of learning to the fact that although she presents herself to be a closed person to the benefits of the conference because of her background and experience as a minority, she was able to relate to another person and their unique situation and appreciated the benefit of the conference in allowing her to see those connections.

I continued to ask Penny if she remembered anything else from the conference. She responded by saying, “I am trying to remember . . . I don’t recall anything.” She continued to describe the conference as “a lot of sitting around and not saying much.” She then admitted not doing the readings that are assigned as part of the course requirements and are specifically designed to enhance the conference experience and the conference learning. She did talk about the “paper” which was assigned as part of the course requirements. She considered that simply a “task” that she had to take care of. She compared it to her role at work. She has tasks to do, she gets them done precisely and succinctly, but does not put deeper thought or consideration to the purpose of the tasks. Examples of tasks that keep Penny busy at work are, “answering phone calls, emails and completing correspondence with the district office.” The fact that she emphasized the importance of tasks is relevant because to Penny, participation in the conference mimicked her job as a principal. In both instances, she is focused on the tasks she has to get done, not in deliberating over the meaning or purpose behind these tasks. This is not unlike a theme that is common at Group Relations Conferences: the theme of *task* including the sub-themes of giving people tasks, understanding of the tasks, and task completion.

At the conference, a task is given to the members for each of the events. For example, the task of the Large Group is to study the behavior in the here and now. This task, when first heard, is considered vague and confusing by the participants. Participants of the conference complain about not understanding the tasks and wishing the task was clearer or more specific. Penny was no different. When the task was perceived as vague like in the Large Group, she withdrew and did not participate. When the task was specific, like the completion of a paper, she participated fully by writing a complete paper and turning it in on time.

I challenged Penny a bit more, asking that although she did not remember any of the events of the conference beyond the one interaction with the Mexican-American male, would she say that she learned anything from the conference? I was probing to see if she could make any links between the conference events and her learning. She again brought up the importance of delegating out specific tasks to her staff. She learned that if people don't have specific tasks to do, the work does not get done. The conference taught her to be task oriented and maintain the same standard of practice for her employees.

When I asked Penny if she found anything that she learned from the weekend that helps her with how she exercises leadership, Penny responded, "Give people tasks to do." I further asked, "Give them something to do?" And she said, "Yeah give people something to do and provide strong leadership I think people want to look to a leader they don't want to be . . . to have edicts passed down, but they want to know that someone is holding onto the wheel." When probed, she said that she learned that it is important to recognize people's anxiety that arises from not being given a task. This was the first time she brought up a feeling (the feeling of anxiety) in association with task.

Penny believes the more specific the task, the less the anxiety, and the more vague the task, the higher the anxiety. Penny illustrated her point by using an analogy. She said, “You know that feeling of *I am in a car and no one is holding onto the wheel*, it breeds lots of discontent you know? People get pretty anxious like that; I guess that would be my . . . learning.” I interpret this to mean two things: (a) Penny feels anxious when a task is vague as sometimes is the case during a conference; this caused her to feel unable to participate, and (b) in her place of work, since she wants active participation from her employees, she does not want her staff feeling anxious so she creates a lot of well defined tasks for them so that work gets done.

In relating this experience to her role at City Elementary we talked about the task of her job. For Penny, the tasks of being a school principal focused around what I categorize as managing her elementary school. She sees her job as being able to “find what people are good at doing and then, giving them a task that they can accomplish, then get out of their way and let them do it.” For Penny, having and knowing the task is important for her to be able to be successful in her work. Penny’s perception of lack of specific tasks at the conference, reinforced the notion that to run a school, specific tasks, with clear expectations, must be delegated to the staff members.

Penny not only used the word task, but she also used the term “structures” as something that is important in how she manages her school. She stated, “I think leaders need to give people structures that they can work in so, a lesson learned [at the conference] may be that you need to set structures where people can be successful and you don’t do the content of the work, but you put them in a place where they can do the work and give them something they can reasonably do.” An example of a structure at the

conference relevant to her point is the structure created by the conference director during the Institutional Event. During this time, there is a specific structure in which all the participants of the conference work. Penny recalled the comfort she felt during this event because of the structure and wanted to create a similar experience at her school site. So she is saying then that while the structure was there and that facilitated the work, the tasks were not always well-defined and that impeded her work.

Overall, Penny reported minimal learning as a result of participating in the conference. She acknowledged she learned some about others, their prejudices and ignorance, but nothing about herself. By probing and re-questioning, I found her to be grounded in the thought that she was already sufficiently knowledgeable about herself and did not need to change. I attribute her experience with the conference and the fact that she felt she did not learn anything about herself to her self-proclaimed negative predisposition to the conference experience, her resistance to a different way of learning, and the conference inability to articulate to her satisfaction well-defined tasks that might have motivated her lack participation in the weekend events.

The Group Relations Conference is organized to assist individuals to understand themselves and their working relationships with others, particularly in a context where they hold formal authority. The conference opportunity had the potential of helping Penny deal more effectively with her employees. Instead, because of her predisposition (and the others she represents), she was unable to truly learn as intended. Although there were beginning signs that she became aware of others, the experience that she shared with them and the fact that she could learn from them, she was unable to internalize the learning. The case study of Penny represents the story of the three individuals in my

study who had a negative predisposition, participated minimally in the conference, and showed very little evidence of any post-conference learning.

Rhonda

The case of Rhonda is comprised of four individuals, Mary, Barbara, Jen, and Sue. I present the four of them as one case, representing a typical participant with very similar experiences who attended the conference. Thus, these four participants were group based on their shared similarities in how they prepared, engaged and responded to events during and after the conference. The facts I present emerged from the data in two or more of the participants and combined they are represented in Rhonda's story. The facts included are relevant because they characterize a typical person (like one of the four participants) who shares many similarities in their experience of attending a Group Relations Conference.

At 46 years old, Rhonda has been a classroom teacher for over 20 years. It was only in the last 2 years that she decided to make the change from the classroom to administration. In doing so, she joined the ELDA program, knowing it was a partnership with her school district and the local university and it happened to be the same university where she earned her teaching credential in the late 1970s. Rhonda spent most of her years teaching drama and art. Her love for the arts permeates her life and her perceptions of the world. She refers to herself as "someone who looks for the beauty in everything."

Since graduating from the ELDA program, Rhonda was a temporary assistant principal at three different school sites filling in for assistant principals on maternity leave or extended medical leaves. She says for some, it may be difficult to have been at three different schools, but she believed this experience taught her to appreciate the

uniqueness of each school site, its problems and its beauty. Unlike Penny who did not like vagueness or ambiguity, Rhonda had no problem with working in different schools, with no set time-line and varying expectations.

In October of 2007, an opening for West Elementary School principal was posted. Rhonda applied for and got the job, feeling excited about finally having her own school. West Elementary is located in the western part of the city, not far from the beach and away from what many would believe are the lower socio-economic areas. In fact, the majority of her children received free or reduced lunch.

I met Rhonda in her office. Although she had been at the school for 2 months, her office was not quite unpacked. Her desk, computer area, and worktable were clear but the rest of the office was piled with boxes and books. Rhonda told me she was not going to unpack until she was able to paint the office a brighter color. However, she said there were other areas in the school that needed attention before her office got a “make-over.” The physical environment gave me a sense that Rhonda was ready to “clean house” at her new elementary school. In addition, I categorize her professional experience thus far as someone who was not afraid of change and was willing to make sacrifices for the good of the school.

I describe Rhonda as having a vivacious personality. This label is based on the fact that she welcomed me with positive energy, an eagerness to get talking, and an interest in asking me about my research. She asked me about as many questions as she answered. She attended the conference, like all of the participants, as a requirement for her administrative credential and her Master’s Degree in Education.

In stark contrast to the resisters, characterized by Penny above, Rhonda described the conference as “interesting and outstanding.” This positive attitude towards herself and the conference laid the foundation for her receptiveness to the conference experience. My description of a positive predisposition to the conference can be represented best by the words of Rhonda, “I think it was an outstanding experience. There were a lot of people who were afraid to go. It was hard for me to comprehend the fear of doing what to me was an exciting new exercise.” Referring to the 3-day conference as an exercise gave me the impression that attending was not a chore for her. In fact she described herself as willing participant interested in what the weekend had in store for her. Rhonda even commented on the readings that were assigned as part of the requirement for the course associated with the conference. She called the readings “really interesting” and she completed all of them. Rhonda admitted being “skeptical” about the conference but also wanted to “immerse” herself as much as she could in the learning experience.

In regards to receptiveness, Rhonda was open and willing to learn from the experience. She seemed to be able to relate her personal and professional background such as her interests in reading and drama and apply them to the conference experience. For Rhonda, bringing a bit of herself enhanced the experience and the learning, kept it positive and interesting, and enhanced her ability to apply the conference learning to her personal and professional roles.

We began with my asking Rhonda quite simply, “What do you remember from the conference?” Rhonda remembered being quite emotional during the weekend conference. She had the experience of crying in front of others. First, she broke down into tears when a colleague in her Small Group confronted her about an aspect of her

personality. That colleague told her she is “too out-going and loud.” The colleague went further to add that she is “a little too cute and too funny.” Rhonda felt that she did not do anything particular to warrant what she felt was a verbal attack and reacted by crying. At the time she did not like the confrontation but, looking back, she is glad she was able to be open to the feedback. To this day, she continued to reflect on this feedback, knowing at times how she shows her excitement for a task may be seen by others as cute or immature for someone of her age and experience. While she did not say she would necessarily change this aspect of her personality, she does, however, keep it in mind when working with new groups of people. This is the first clue that Rhonda did learn *something* about herself from the conference experience.

Rhonda cried during our interview when she recalled an emotional experience at the conference. It began when I asked her about any emotional reactions she may have had at the conference. She recalled the conversation that took place in the Large Group sessions, where all participants of the conference were present. The group began to talk about African Americans and their experience as a minority group in a society that is predominantly Caucasian. Rhonda shared the story with me.

I am getting emotional, right now, this is amazing. [Getting teary and beginning to cry—then laughing at herself.] Who would think I would react after that question? The African Americans in the group were in so much pain. Yeah, being in that room and hearing the pain. It was just, you know, coming out, you know there is no context here, there is nothing that said, here is the subject we are going to talk about. As things came out, you know, the intensity of that pain, yeah, my emotional reaction, wow. Wow.

The conference environment is often one that is supportive and understanding so that participants can share meaningful life experiences. Rhonda’s emotionality at the

conference leads me to believe that a supportive environment was created in the Large Group Event at the conference.

As a reminder, the academy of which they are a part is an Educational Leadership Academy. The purpose is to gain leadership skills and improve practice. Participants often asked themselves, “What kind of leader am I?” and “How do I, as an individual, act in a leadership role?” Seeking answers to those questions throughout the weekend leads them to peel away layers of awareness. This was true in the case of Rhonda because for her the learning was in the area of awareness of self and others. I suspect that because she was open, both mentally and emotionally to the experience, she was able to reach a point of increased awareness.

Of all the conference events (Small Group, Large Group, Review and Application Group, and Institutional Event), Rhonda attributed much of her learning to the Large Group Experience. Prior to the conference Rhonda admits she never considered herself a “leader.” On the surface she realized she was in a leadership position by choice, but would not describe herself as a leader. However, being aware of this led her to challenge herself to not be in her usual role, but to try out a new role while at the conference. For example, on the first day of the conference, Rhonda sat towards the outside of the Large Group. Her sitting towards the outside of the Large Group was discussed in the Review and Application Group by the group facilitators at the end of the first day. The facilitators explain role and its relationship to location in the group. For example, facilitators ask questions such as, “Does the authority figure have to sit in the front to take up the role as group leader? Can the group leader be sitting in the center of the group? How does perception of role relate to where you may choose to sit?” Rhonda listened to these points

and by the end of day 3 of the 3-day conference, she sat towards the center of the Large Group.

This movement, although subtle to the outsider, symbolizes her trying out a new position in the group, towards the center of the Large Group, and consequently being seen as a leader by others. Rhonda believed that sitting in the center was characteristic of the person who others referred to as a leader of the group. One could argue, simply sitting in the center does not make one a leader, but in this case, Rhonda's perception is most relevant to the argument that one's position in the room does influence how at least one perceives their own position of authority and likely how one is seen by others.

Her initial position of sitting towards the outside of the group, she was able to hide both physically and emotionally. Hiding was comfortable and safe for her. Upon reflecting on her Large Group experience Rhonda realized she need to move: "By the end of the weekend, you know, I am going to the center of the circle and standing up and speaking my piece." She was aware of her need to look at herself and her role differently. She said, "I thought dog-gonnit, you know at a certain point, you just gotta do something! Be the leader because if other people aren't going to step up to the plate, you just gotta." In this example, Rhonda acted upon her new level of awareness of herself in her role as the observer, and changed her role to that of a participant who stood up to speak her mind. Rhonda shared this memory with enthusiasm and had a smile on her face. She remembers this instance with pride.

Rhonda gained an increased sense of awareness from the conference experience that led to her desire to change how she executed her role as an administrator at West Elementary. For her experience in the Large Group and in the Small Group, she reported

that she realized the importance of “creating a positive place to be” for students and staff that is conducive to being able to build connections, so that everyone can do their jobs. She recognized and appreciated the safe space created by group facilitators at the conference. In addition because at the conference the emphasis on the interconnectedness of everyone in the group and the importance of participants understanding their relationships among and between the learning was extremely valuable for Rhonda. Although Rhonda did not explicitly link the relationships she made at the conference to her learning, her knowledge of the importance of relationships at her school site is evidence that she noticed the connection to the conference experience.

I asked her if attending the conference affected how she exercises leadership at her school. Rhonda said,

I know it [the conference] has affected how I lead . . . I observe, how I position my body. I had a very serious parent meeting the Friday before the holiday a week ago. I positioned myself so that I could give this parent empowerment they needed which they were craving, you know? Versus being this authoritarian with all the power that is not going to help us. I think about that.

In this example, Rhonda relates her physical position with perceived power and authority and made the appropriate adjustment to her position as demonstration of how she exercises leadership in a parent conference differently as a result of the Group Relations Conference.

Acting based on the requirements of the group, or *role*, is another concept that emerged for Rhonda that she could apply to her professional work. In this area, she referred to her job as principal at West Elementary in which confidence is an aspect of her role. The confidence is shown as courage in groups and the drive to “make things happen” at her school. These examples of developing confidence and courage can be

seen throughout all the conference events. She noted that it took courage to speak up in the Large Group and Small Group meetings. She also had to have self-confidence to trust peers in the conference and her work place. Here, the supportive group facilitators and the group events, which provided safe spaces for the participants to be open and honest, were influential to her learning and application of that learning.

An example that demonstrates a similar pattern of thinking is the example Rhonda gave of her behavior at a staff meeting. After the conference, Rhonda says,

I stand up front [of the staff members], so if my principal is speaking, I am behind him kind of facing the group too, so am watching who, what, when, why and how [things happen]. That has been something [I have changed]. When I first became a VP, I would want to sit with the teachers, and now I have evolved to knowing I am an administrator. It took me at least 2 years where people call me their boss, to see myself in that role, too, to seat myself accordingly and to position myself accordingly.

In this case, she learned to take up her own authority, realizing that where she sat did matter both to her principal and her teachers. This is another example of how physically positioning one's self in a room (during a staff meeting) is the way in which Rhonda has begun to look at her role differently and make simple changes which have the potential for influencing a group, a parent conference or a simple conversation differently.

Rhonda entered the conference with an interest in the conference itself and actively participated in the conference events. The data suggests that Rhonda experienced some noticeable degree of change in comparison to Penny as a result of participating in the conference. She described a few examples of how she changed, such as being aware of herself and others in a group, being aware of physical positioning in a room, and being able to find confidence and courage in her role as an administrator.

Rhonda was able to verbalize how she changed, but it appears that she does not have the ability to make changes in behavior on a regular basis. She gave me the few examples, but the examples seem isolated rather than integrated into her role as assistant principal. I was unable to determine an exact reason for the inconsistency but it seems, based on the data, that she would have needed to deepen her learning perhaps by continuing her learning after the conference in the area of group dynamics in order to truly understand how to apply her learning from the conference to her professional role on a routine basis.

Comparing the two cases presented thus far, the case of Penny represents the typical participant who had a negative predisposition towards the conference, participated minimally throughout the 3-day weekend, and although she completed the paper after the conference, she did not deepen her learning by doing the readings. She is summarized as learning a bit about herself but was not able to verbalize or apply the learning after the conference. In the case of Rhonda, Rhonda represents the typical participant who had a positive predisposition towards the conference and participated more actively during the weekend. More than simply writing the assigned paper, she also completed (and remembered) the readings after the conference had ended. She was able to speak more specifically about her learning and gave a few examples of changing how she managed her school site. Next, I present third case, Annie.

Annie

The case of Annie is comprised of two of the participants, Michelle and Mike. Similar to the previous two cases, I present the data in a way that best represents the similarities and characteristics of both participants. The data that emerged is presented as

if it came from one person, Annie, but are actually the data came from both of the two, either Michelle or Mike. Exactly which fact belongs to which person is not as relevant as the representation of their experiences and what can be learned from their shared experiences.

Annie is different from both Penny and Rhonda in several categories: professional experience, age, and learning from her conference experience. First, she is a middle school administrator and has been for the last 6 years. In fact, she has been at the same school site for a total of 13 years: the first 7 she held a variety of roles including classroom teacher and resource teacher. The completion of the ELDA (the university principal preparation program) coincided with an opening for the position of principal at Central Middle. With a new credential and a positive attitude, she was ready to take on the challenge of becoming the new principal.

Annie is a 40-year-old Filipino woman. She presented herself in a professional manner yet also gave a feeling of being approachable and available. Her office is particularly large, and upon asking about it, I found out as soon as she became principal, she remodeled the office, knocking a wall down, adding a great amount of square footage to what was a typically sized administrative office. The office now had three distinct areas. The first area is a sitting area where Annie tells me she can speak to parents face to face, without the obstruction of a desk between her and her guests. The second area is her desk where she does most of her business work. The third area has a large conference table with a bowl of fruit in the middle and a white board on the wall. Each area is connected yet separated by its purpose. Annie explained, depending on the situation, she will choose the best area to sit for a particular outcome. For example, at a formal meeting

with a teacher, she may sit at her desk with the teacher on the opposite side of the desk. However, in discussing a sensitive topic with a parent, she may choose to sit in the sitting area, with the three chairs and coffee table. The arrangement of her office was interesting because I had recently talked with Rhonda who talked about the importance of physical positioning of herself at the conference and at her school.

Annie invited me to join her at the conference table allowing me a space to take notes while we talked. We began talking about the physical décor of her office, the peaceful paintings, the knick-knacks given to her by teachers and the bowl of fresh fruit grown from the tree of one of her families. Immediately, she showed me direct attention by asking her secretary to hold all calls.

From my conversation with Annie, I was able to gain an understanding of her conference experience and the learning that she attributed from the experience. Annie is unique, in comparison with Penny and Rhonda, in that she had the language to describe her learning. Penny and Rhonda, for example, used phrases such as, “I don’t know what I learned but I think . . .” or “I think I learned something but I don’t act any differently.” These parallels will be made clear as I describe Annie’s case, who again represents two of my nine participants who strike a similar profile.

Annie is the only one of the three cases that shared with me the final paper she wrote for the course associated with the conference. Penny and Rhonda wrote the paper, but did not have a copy to share with me, not terribly surprising since it had been over 3 years. What is more remarkable is that Annie did have the paper. The 10-page paper included responses to prompts that were designed to help the individual integrate his or her learning and really contemplate the conference experience. The final paper was

written within 1 week of completing the conference experience and represents similar questions that I asked during the interviews. Annie also chose to further her learning about the conference experience by completing additional readings, writing in a journal, and having conversations with colleagues about her experience. This seems to be the most important factor in what allows me to categorize Annie as someone who learned from her participation in the conference and takes deliberate action to hold onto the learning and enhance it. It is why I consider her to be the person that on a continuum had the greatest amount of measurable learning and application of the learning resulting from participating in the conference, evidence I describe below.

Annie was similar to Rhonda in that I characterize them both as having a positive predisposition. But, it begs the question: Why was Annie best able to understand, verbalize, and apply her learning compared to Rhonda? Her learning style may be related to her inherent personality traits and predisposition towards the class. She has a predisposition that is positive, interested, open and ready for a new experience. Annie described herself in her own words as one who is open to learning differently. Annie said, "I am a reflective person going into the conference; I go into things with an open mind." She further added, "I believe in free-will and I believe that I can create a shift in my own present reality. I was willing to be completely honest, I had nothing to lose. I felt quite good about myself and the conference experience." Annie had heard some of the negative comments from others who had previously attended the conference but unlike Penny she did not let the comments influence her attitudes towards the conference experience.

Throughout the interview, she used terms and vocabulary that are associated with Group Relations theory. For example, she referred to the conference as *Tavistock*. The term is known in the field of Group Relations but is less common in the field of education. I asked Annie if she had read about Group Relations theory or *Tavistock* before she went to the conference or if her understanding of the concepts all came from her conference experience. She replied:

Well, no. I had never heard of Tavistock. And I did not read up afterwards [about Tavistock]. But, it is part of what I believe in terms of science, it is an inquiry, engaging people. Asking yourself, how do you engage people? I mean in science we have this five E model, engage, explore, explain, those are the fundamentals of how do we get people engaged and give them opportunities.

She held onto the vocabulary of the conference and incorporated the words into her repertoire of understanding. Now, for Annie, *Tavistock* is a term she uses freely and comfortably to explain the conference to others.

How Annie came about her learning was through the tools she had in her repertoire of learning techniques. One of those tools was her orientation toward the inquiry process that she brought to the conference work from her background in teaching science to children and leading teachers in the subject of science education. She easily compared her learning to the learning associated with science curriculum. To Annie, being a scientist is the knowing and practicing the art of inquiry, wondering about what she sees happening around her, creating a hypothesis and finding data to support or refute what she believes to be true. Unknown to Penny at the time of her attending the conference is that this orientation of inquiry toward learning is remarkably similar to the pedagogy of Group Relations Conferences: participants are taught to be observant, create hypotheses about what they see, test those hypotheses by continuing to observe and ask

questions, and finally come up with an idea or guess about what is happening with themselves and the groups of which they are a part.

Annie had techniques that she used to facilitate her learning. For example, the use of critical reflection was clear as she described how she came to her learning. She also used the phrase, “reflective learning.” I interpret this to mean careful consideration of one’s thoughts, beliefs, and assumptions, in an attempt to make meaning of the experience. In addition to reflection, she used journal writing, talking to others, taking personal stock or inventory of one’s self, and self-checking throughout the weekend. Using these techniques that were either part of her repertoire from her background in science or that she learned from conference events led to a heightened level of awareness for Annie. These techniques are also used in Transformational Learning theory and will be further explained at the end of this chapter.

Annie did gain a sense of awareness about herself and others, but it did not come easy for her. Feelings like frustration, exhaustion, confusion, and the overall feeling of being “stressed out” led the way to the eye-opening experience. She said she felt like an “alien” at the beginning of the conference. As the conference progressed, “things became clearer and the language and methods were making more sense.” Annie summarized it best for herself when she said, “It [the conference experience] was extremely stressful, which is really odd, nobody beat me [causing me physical harm].” She compares her perceptions of the emotional pain that may arise from participating in the conference to that of being physically beaten. The conference design of open/honest communication on the part of the staff and the members is anxiety provoking for some. The anxious feelings, for Annie, was the pain she experienced during the weekend. For her the pain of

learning and experiencing a different way of learning was great. Being aware of her particular feelings; bringing that awareness to the forefront, paved the way to being aware of other aspects of herself including realizing the role she took up in groups and how that role affected the group as a whole.

In *Key Concepts That Inform Group Relations Work* by Theresa Monroe (2004) the concept of Role Theory as it relates to Group Relations work is explained. Role is explained as “a psychological concept dealing with human beings interacting with other human beings” (Monroe, 2004, p. 6). In explaining the concept of role, Monroe goes further to say that “every individual in an organization occupies a position whether or not it is formally defined—carries with them certain expectations of behavior held by on-lookers and by persons occupying the role” (p. 6) The defined role usually goes hand in hand with expected behavior. Role theory informs my research.

The roles we play can influence who we are in groups and how we are perceived in groups. Annie explained that she was “cognizant” of the role that she played throughout the weekend vacillating between taking active role and passive role. Annie described active roles as “doing something” in the midst of turmoil in a group or “standing up and speaking my piece.” A passive role for Annie was when she sat in the Large Group not speaking for the entire hour. Her ability to articulate the difference and her strategy and rationale for engagement or passive engagement demonstrated that Annie understood the concept of role and how it was operationalized.

It seems that Annie, when feeling unsure, fell back into typical roles, in this case, the role of the observer; which in comparison to other roles (instigator, objector, crier, or antagonist) is a more passive role to take up in a Group Relations Conference. Annie

was concerned with herself taking up a passive role, questioning her thought of taking up a more active role. She told me, “I just shut down. I thought I am not gonna do this [change from being an observer to being a more verbal participant], this is not worth it.” Here, because she had a heightened level of awareness about herself, Annie was able to make the choice in which role she would take up and to what degree she would take up that role. Being an observer, although outwardly passive, is no less important of a role. In this role, she is able to notice aspects of the group dynamics and begin to reflect on her observations; thus giving her information with which to make future decisions as a member of the group.

Another interesting factor that emerged from the data is that Annie, although aware of her roles, and somewhat unsatisfied with herself, did not seek to change her behavior during the weekend. It seems that the feeling of frustration and exhaustion overshadowed the ability or interest in changing roles in which she found herself stuck. Annie commented, “It was hard, because I was going through my own anxiety about my role.” For an administrator who, in her professional life, is quite active on her school campus, this was contradictory to what one would expect from an educational leader.

Just as Annie became aware of her role as an individual, she also became aware of the roles others played in the conference. This is demonstrated when I asked Annie, “What did you learn from the experience?” Annie responded, “Umm [pause with laughter], you know I think, it is interesting, I think, it is one of those things, it helps to reinforce the idea that there are roles in groups that people are going to assume.” She went further to say, “I became very fascinated about group dynamics, the interaction with things that were going on during the weekend, people who I’ve worked with and seen for

many years I was very shocked at the personality and the roles they kind of stepped into and their behavior.” The conference culture allows for and encourages participants to be open and honest about their thoughts, feelings, and reactions. This raw truth is something in which people are not accustomed. Annie’s feeling of being shocked at what she heard from others is common at the conference.

The link for these levels of awareness of others is *perceptions*. How Annie perceived others in the group influenced her interpretation of the members’ feelings, needs, and roles. For Annie, who is in a leadership-training program, being aware of one’s perceptions of self and others has the potential for being a catalyst for change. Change is more likely to occur when an individual, including Annie in her role as an administrator, joins in a common perception of the challenge with other group members or in the case of her own school site, her colleagues, and takes on a challenge as group, rather than as one individual trying to create change on their own. The group as a whole can accomplish more than one administrator can by herself.

A change in the individual (change in being) is beneficial to the individual but has the potential to be even more beneficial if there was not also a change in how they act on their school campus (change in doing). A change in being was internal and only able to be judge by the individual her/himself. A change in doing, I categorize as external and observable by others. Again, this refers to how the individual applies his/her learning from the conference experience. The change in doing, as I see it, is a change in how one acts in their role, in this case as an administrator on a school campus. Annie offered several examples in “change in doing” in her work at Central Middle School.

Annie spoke of how she problem-solves differently after having participated in the conference, gleaning information from her staff by not always asking the obvious but paying attention to the body language and interactions of that staff member with others. I asked her, “Do you think it [the conference experience] taught you some of that problem solving and some of that gleaning that you refer to?” Annie answered with a lengthy response. She began with, “I think it did.” Annie continued,

I would rather study people or situations, before making the big leap of faith into problem solving. Not everybody needs a problem solved, most people just want to be heard. And they are very intelligent, nobody here is unintelligent or they wouldn't be here, they just want a sounding board to be able to treat their own, or they just want to be heard. And maybe they want help.

For Annie, problem solving included stepping back from the situation and getting to the deeper issue in addition to together with her colleagues, coming up with a different route on how to solve the problem. This is not unlike the Institutional Event (IE) at the conference. During the Institutional Event, the group gets confused during the initial formation of the group and the beginning stages of assigning roles and understanding the task of the IE. Here it is helpful if one of the group members steps back and works together to determine the best course of action for the group.

In both the Large Group and the Small Group, the group facilitators help the members get “unstuck” and encourage them to get to a better place, emotionally and professionally. The facilitators provide interpretations of the behavior demonstrated by the participants, bringing clarity to what may be happening for the group. This is similar to how Annie has changed in how she approaches problem solving and searches for the little details that may lead to the optimal solution. She wants her staff to feel success even in the midst of turmoil. Annie explains, “With success, or with misery with these people,

I have to figure out how do I keep their success going, or if they are stuck, I need to figure out how to get them to the next level. I am wanting to figure out what needs to happen to get them a little happier. Or get them to a different place but I do think that's the learning." This thought process in how to help facilitate success with her staff is similar to the role of the facilitator at the conference.

Another example of *change in doing* is Annie's being able to gather the information she needs to know from staff members to help her make decisions. She also called it "massaging personalities" to achieve a goal. She was careful not to appear manipulative but acknowledged a bit of control she uses in her conversations with staff. Problem solving for her is different; it is not a one-way street. By asking carefully crafted questions and probing the individual, she involves and empowers her staff to actively participate in the process. Because several years have passed since she participated in the conference, she does not distinguish which aspects of the conference led to particular learning; she categorizes the conference experience as a whole.

Annie also gave more specific examples in how she acts differently in her role as principal. She has changed where she sits in group meetings. Although Rhonda clearly reflected on this as well; Annie was better able to articulate the reasoning behind the choice of where she physically places herself in a meeting. She believes that choice affects the productivity of the meeting. Interesting to note, she also noticed that when she enters classrooms, she consciously makes a choice of where she stands in the room as to not hinder the classroom dynamics, but facilitate them instead.

She learned how her physical location affects the group dynamic from participating in the events at the conference. At the conference, she learned to notice

where the staff members sat and how their location affected the productivity of the group. For example, during the Small Group, she noticed the person who did not sit directly next to the staff member seemed to be more open and talk more. In the Large Group, she noticed the members of the group who she considered group leaders; noticing how their location affected the whole group. Another example was when the more boisterous group members sat in the middle of the configuration of chairs, they seemed to act as though they were the leader of the group, talking more, directing the group topic, simply by virtue of sitting in the middle. Annie tried to make the point clear that she believed that authority is based on perception not location.

In realizing that for Annie a *change in being* led to a *change in doing*, an obvious goal of her conference work, I further probed hoping that she could be more specific in her description of her self reported change in actions. I found that for the Annie, the change in doing could be characterized as the ability to manage one's role. Annie described herself as managing roles differently in two ways; one that I categorize as less noticeable, or covert; and the other I categorize as more noticeable or overt.

When one exercises leadership, there are things one does that are not often noticeable to others. These things include the actions that are purposeful to the person exercising leadership but not necessarily measurable by others. The steps it takes to build relationships, the time it takes to listen to others, the knowledge of when to exhibit power/authority, and the management of perceptions of co-workers are all covert ways in which the participants report managing their roles. The following are examples from Annie that demonstrate the subtle, covert techniques of role management.

Annie's examples show her methods of managing role covertly. As noted earlier in this section, she was a teacher at her school for 6 years, before transitioning to the role of principal. She attributes her learning from the conference and the application of her learning to the success her school displayed while going through the change in leadership. Annie spoke of being able to "bring the people's state of equilibrium where they can manage change yet put enough discomfort so that they need to change." This philosophical approach to change is discussed at the conference during the Review and Application Groups, bringing light and understanding to the change and the how the state of disequilibrium helps the change process along. She also acknowledges the challenge of "keeping the work continuing" during the months of change. She remembers the conference staff doing a similar task. She described behaviors of the conference staff during both Small and Large Group as creating enough anxiety so people were aware they needed to change but not too much that they would leave the conference or quit the experience.

Considering that no one could see this change in role management, I challenged her to be more specific in how she managed her role in this process of change. She shared that first, she had to think about the relationship between the leader (herself) and the organization's members (the school staff). She attributed her improved listening skills as a key to her successes that first year as principal. In this, she means having learned to pay attention to verbal and non-verbal cues of the staff. She remembered having to step back, figuratively speaking, in meetings to determine if the staff members are honestly expressing their point of view, or speaking on behalf of the group. She referred to this as "reading the temperature of my group."

Knowing the temperature of the group in combination with always being aware of how she is perceived has helped her understand how her role influences the group. As a teacher she was seen one way, and wanted to keep in her consciousness the difference in her new role as the principal. In the beginning stage of change, Annie describes her role management as something just she realized; as time progressed, when she felt the group was ready, she managed her role more overtly by making noticeable changes such as being more directive in her expectations, organizing more frequent staff meetings, and assigning specific responsibilities to specific members of her staff. This understanding for Annie can be linked to the staff members at the conference. The staff must do exactly the same thing Annie was talking about, knowing the temperature of the group (whether the group is in an state of happiness, confusion, excitement, etc.), and knowing how you are perceived (as supportive, confrontational, aloof, etc). The key is in knowing these two factors and using that knowledge to help the participants learn.

Another example Annie shared was about taking the concepts from the conference back to her school site. In this instance she spoke about the concept of using silence. "I can already see the advantages to my silence and more refined observational skills. In just this past week [at a meeting], I learned a tremendous amount about my staff and their interactions with each other. During one meeting, two staff members began a heated argument; however I remained calm and consciously observed the situation. Taking this time allowed me to be able to diffuse the situation and bring the meeting back to the original purpose. I was quite surprised that I was able to incorporate these techniques so quickly and naturally into my 'real' world leadership role." This technique is demonstrated throughout the conference when the facilitators, instead of intervening

verbally, often sit in silence, waiting for group members to work out the issue on their own. Here, the learning occurs by having the participant solve their own problems rather than the facilitator solving it for them.

A different example of a change in being was when Annie was discussing budgetary concerns at a meeting with her colleagues at her school site.

Most of the participants in the meeting were sedate and quiet. One member expressed frustration and anger at these types of meetings that waste his time by claiming they want his input but then don't really use it. It felt so good to know that he expressed exactly what he felt. And as most of the other participants began to nod their head I realized what he was feeling was the same as the entire team. I would not have noticed this if I hadn't had my experience at the conference. It was a complete epiphany in the middle of my leading this session and it made me smile. I was thinking, wow, I really can apply this to me immediate work.

Here, Annie recognized that she leads meetings such as the one mentioned using a different lens. She pays attention to the whole group, not just the individual who was frustrated. Her paying attention is an example of a change in being for Annie. The change may not have been noticeable to others, but she recognized a change and was pleased with herself and the potential impact on others.

Annie was also able to describe her ability to manage roles overtly, displaying her leadership skills in her role as an administrator with more passion and enthusiasm in her voice. I suspected this is the area where she was not only confident in her work, but felt as though she was making a difference on her school campus. Annie told me that she cannot sit in silence when her "passion is ignited." Participants in the Large Group meeting often report the feeling of not being able to sit in silence when energized.

As we continued to talk about her learning from the conference, Annie used the transition of her role from teacher to principal as her example because soon after Annie

participated in the conference, she transitioned from being a teacher to the principal. She spoke most specifically about her managing her staff through what she described as a change process. The change process is something that she not only orchestrated as she managed her role as principal but was also an instrumental player in process. Change was happening, she could have either been an observer of the change or participate and lead the change process. Annie summarizes it best by saying, "I learned the most [at the conference] about the dynamics of change and leading people through change; and the role of the leader as a system is going through change." This is not unlike the Director of the Group Relations Conference. Annie saw the conference Director orchestrate a weekend of learning events, with the intention of leading the participants through the change process.

Annie employs several methods to support her staff in getting through an obvious change in the system; in her case the change from her being in the role of teacher to becoming the school's principal. She gave her staff readings regarding the change process, has periodic meetings where staff can reflect on the process of change, and talks through the feelings associated with change. She remembered telling her staff at one point, "If you are feeling anxious, if you are feeling angry, if you are feeling ticked off, if you are feeling like all of a sudden why am I incompetent? It is actually okay, because it is part of the process." Finally, she emphasized that she, as the principal in managing her role on campus, needs to be outwardly explicit with her staff. She cannot assume they are aware of the change process of which she is responsible for executing.

Annie attributed her need to create a positive environment to her experience at the Institutional Event during the conference. The Institutional Event (IE) was the event in

which participants were encouraged to choose their own groups and work on a leadership topic of their choice. Annie explained,

As a leader, this Institutional Event, coupled with the class readings and literature, has opened my eyes to many new and innovative ways to lead. I now see the importance of building a work environment that fosters growth and development of the soul and spirit. I also understand the importance of taking the time to create an environment that will allow for such growth and development. The discourse that engaged our group [in the Institutional Event] was so rich and rewarding.

Choosing the group members she wanted to work with, the room in which they would work, and the topic they would discuss, all led to the members being more engaged in the group work. She increased her capacity to create a positive environment supportive of one another.

Annie provided the final point of comparison for the three case studies. Penny had a negative predisposition, participated the least and did no post-conference learning in the area of Group Relations theory. Penny had the least amount of evidence of learning and/or application of the learning. Rhonda had a positive predisposition, participated in the conference, and completed the assigned readings after the conference. She had evidence of some application of the learning but had minimal evidence of true integration or application of the learning to her every day role as a principal. Annie had a positive predisposition, actively participated in the conference, and continued her learning after the conference by doing additional readings and using her framework as a science teacher to give her a foundation to integrate her previous knowledge with her new knowledge in the area of Group Relations theory. Her ability to describe her learning, apply the learning, and reflect on the learning gave me the evidence I needed to suggest the importance of all three factors: predisposition, active participation in conference, and

post-conference continued learning as factors that influence the individual's learning and the ability to apply the learning to his/her professional role.

Using the cases of Penny, Rhonda, and Annie, I align the experience and learning of all nine of the participants in my study with the research of Jack Mezirow and Transformational Learning theory. In the next section, I describe how the three factors (predisposition to the conference, level of participation during the conference, and the amount of learning each person did after the conference) I found not only influence the amount of learning each of them expressed since the conference ended but also affect the degree to which any of them could be considered *transformed*.

The data analysis thus far has been framed in the cases of Penny, Rhonda, and Annie. In the next section, which discusses transformational learning, the cases are expanded, delineating those who comprise the case studies. Pseudonyms are used to maintain confidentiality. This illustrated that although I found there to be three typical experiences for individuals attending the Group Relations Conference, there is an aspect of individuality which is explained through Transformational Learning theory.

Transformational Learning Theory

Jack Mezirow is known as the father of Transformation Learning theory. Since the 1970s, he has written books and articles on the subject. Chapter 3 presented a brief synopsis of his research. For the purposes of this chapter, I will focus on the phases of transformation as they relate specifically to my findings. First, as a review, the definition of transformational learning presented by Mezirow is “transformative learning is the process of effecting change in a frame of reference” (Mezirow, 1997b, p. 5).

Mezirow's theory of transformational learning occurs through 10 phases. As the adult learner moves through the phases, their beliefs, attitudes and assumptions are changed. The phases are:

1. Disorienting dilemma
2. Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt or shame
3. A critical assessment of assumptions
4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships and actions
6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquiring knowledge of skills for implementing one's plans
8. Provisional trying of new roles
9. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective. (Mezirow & Associates, 2000, p. 22)

These phases represent intellectual development; they are not specified by time or space.

The phases should be viewed as phases an individual develops through in order, but not in a particular amount of time.

All three of the cases, Penny, Rhonda, and Annie, and thus all nine of the participants in this study experienced Mezirow's phase 1, "A disorienting dilemma." The disorienting dilemma, in this case, is the conference itself. The conference design is described in the course syllabus written by Monroe, as an "art studio or laboratory; a place for experimentation and practice, a place in which a whole range of grays comes into view" (Monroe, 2009, p. 4). Monroe goes further to say that "the active learning model encourages participants to examine and evaluate their own assumptions and behaviors."

My participants, being educators and administrators, were admittedly accustomed to traditional conferences designed to include lectures and seminars. More typically, they attend *how to* conferences where they expect to be taught *how to* be a better leader or

implement a new curriculum. Being in a *laboratory* setting and studying one's own behavior is not typical and is considered odd, confusing, and sometimes frustrating. This indeed was disorienting for all nine participants. They used words and phrases like "annoying, daunting, frustrated and frightening" to describe their initial reactions to the first day of the conference. One participant commented that she felt like she was going to "lose her mind."

Mezirow does note that the "disorienting dilemma" can either be one event or a series of events. This is true for my study, because some of the participants focused on the weekend as a whole as a disorienting dilemma, while others focused on the different events of the conference, almost separate from the conference itself. For example, one of the participants, represented by Rhonda, noted that she did not remember much about the conference overall, but remembered feelings from the Large Group Experience. For her, that experience, which took place over 2 days, was her disorienting dilemma.

Phase 2 is a time where individuals face "self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt or shame" (Mezirow & Associates, 2000, p. 23). In aligning the three cases from my case with phase 2, we see that all the participants acknowledge some level of guilt or shame regarding their beliefs towards others. One of the participants, Lynn, represented by Penny, had the experience of feeling badly that she judged a member of her Large Group. She assumed he was Caucasian and formed an opinion of him based on the assumptions. When she realized he was Jewish and Mexican, she felt guilty about her assumption.

Barbara, who was represented by Rhonda's case, illustrates an experience of phase 2 with the example of how she thought of African-American males. After hearing a

particular story of pain and suffering by an African-American male, she felt sad and guilty for not having previously understood the depth of his, or other black people's experience. In this case, Barbara cried during the Large Group and while telling the story to me, and while this particular story came from one person (Barbara) included in the case of Rhonda, the other three individuals in this case shared similar experiences about feelings of guilt.

Phase 3 is when the individual begins "a critical assessment of assumptions" (Mezirow & Associates, 2000, p. 22). It is in this phase where the three cases of my study begin to show some differentiation. The premise of phase 3 is that the individual begins to critically assess his or her beliefs, questioning one's beliefs and assumptions of self and others. I argue that the three participants represented in the case of Penny, while they showed hints of beginning to critically assess their assumptions, in actuality questioned themselves briefly and but not critically and as a consequence changed the least as a result of the conference.

For example, one African American participant, Lynn, asked herself about how she felt about other minority groups. She believed based on her experience as a black woman, she was accustomed to being treated poorly and felt she could not change this. She stated, "This is the reality of life for me, and the experience of that battle [racism] . . . I have experienced it, born and raised here in San Diego, we have been as an African-American just totally ignored." She seemed content with this view of reality, not interested in looking at her expectation or assumptions of how others would treat her. This is similar for the other two participants in this case. For example, another participant, Scott, mentioned thoughts about how his being a male affected how others

perceive him. He realized being a male, standing tall in a room might be intimidating for students and parents. However, he did not delve further and critically assess what that means for him in a leadership role at the conference or at his school site.

Mezirow believes moving through the phases and ultimately changing is influenced by one's culture, history, and biography (Mezirow & Associates, 2000). One of the three participants, Lynn, included in the case of Penny, had a background of growing up in what she described as an activist family. Lynn reported already having thought critically about others, being satisfied with her beliefs, and choosing to not put any energy in the events of the conference; which may or may not influence her beliefs, attitudes, or assumptions and consequently lead to a change or transformation. This example of one of the participants who make up Penny did not move much beyond Mezirow's phase 2: self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame.

In contrast, the four participants who were represented in the case of Rhonda went a bit further in their critical self-assessment. To begin with, one of the four participants, Barbara, noted that she was "more reflective" of herself while in both the Large and Small Group Experience. She said she did not speak out loud in those groups but instead questioned herself and her feelings that occurred when someone was speaking. In the Large Group, she remembered "thinking, reflecting, then something clicking in her head." In another instance of the Large Group, Jen, another of the individuals represented by Rhonda, remembered feeling as though she was being judged because of her age. She assumed others did not like her because she is older although she dresses and acts younger than her years. She was able to assess the validity of these assumptions she had of herself and others while in the Large Group.

Another example of critical self-assessment that appeared in the case of Rhonda is that one participant, Sue, noticed that in the beginning of the conference, she would make assumptions about other people based on what they were saying or what they looked like. She took what they said at face value. After having participated in the Large Group, she believed that she reflected about what she was assuming about others and looked for the “hidden agenda” of the individual. When beginning to think more critically about her assumptions she found they were not always correct or accurate.

The two participants who made up Annie’s case also were able to provide examples of phase 3, critical self-assessment. For example, one participant, Michelle, stated, “There was that tension there between the different belief systems,” referring to her own belief systems and those of other participants she learned about during the Large Group Experience. She also commented about, being “very shocked” at the personality, roles they (members of the Large Group) took up, and their behavior. She not only questioned the behavior of others but her reaction to the behavior as well.

One participant represented in Annie’s case, Mike, was a science teacher before becoming an administrator. He used his background in science to connect with the process of critical assessment. He was able to acknowledge his thoughts, gather data to support his thoughts and beliefs, and asked himself the tough questions to validate and challenge or not the assumptions he was making about others at the conference.

The cases of Rhonda and Annie demonstrate how these six participants continue through the process of transformational learning by showing examples of phase 4, “recognizing that one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared,” and phase 5, when the individual “explores of new roles, relationships, and actions”

(Mezirow & Associates, 2000, p. 22). The opportunity to discuss shared experiences was provided to both of them at the end of the day in the Review and Application Groups (RAG). The individuals represented by Rhonda used the time constructively to discuss their feelings of discontent with what they were noticing and learning about themselves and others during the RAG experience. Michelle, represented in the case of Annie, expressed confusion and said to her RAG group members, “maybe we can figure it out together.”

It is the job of the facilitators of the RAG group to encourage members to reflect on the role they have taken up during the day and think about taking up new roles for the remainder of the conference (phase 5 of Mezirow’s 10 stages). Participants in Rhonda’s case were able to do just that. During the beginning of the conference, one of the participants, Mary, represented in Rhonda’s case, stated she was in the role of “observer.” Mary sat back, watched what was happening in her groups but did not respond verbally. By the end of the weekend, and with the encouragement of the RAG facilitator and the other members of her RAG group, she began to try out new roles. For example, in the last of the Large Group meetings, she sat more towards the center of the group, challenging herself to act as a “leader” of the group. She did this by verbally participating and directing the conversation to what she considered meaningful topics.

One last example is another participant in Rhonda’s case, Jen, who compared the overall experience to “teaching an old dog new tricks.” She believed through the conversations of the RAG group she could learn new tricks in how to take up and manipulate her role in groups.

Here is another point in which the three cases differ. Participants represented by Rhonda progressed through phase 5 but they did not move on any further through the phases of transformational learning. Those participants in Annie's case did. Their learning and their ability to voice that learning demonstrates evidence that they experienced the final 5 phases of Mezirow's 10 phases which will be further explained below, whereas the participants in Rhonda's case were unable to apply and verbalize their learning to the same extent and this prevented them from progressing.

The evidence suggests that the two participants that were represented by Annie, Mike and Michelle, did indeed continue to progress through all 10 phases of the transformational learning phases as noted by Mezirow. Both were able to verbalize their learning, their thoughts/feelings/reactions from the experience, and apply their learning to their work at their school sites. Participants acquired a level of transformational learning through the last 5 phases.

I wanted to be sure there was some learning outside of the conference because not all 10 phases can occur in the 3-day conference. I suspected that there would be some evidence of the final phases during the conference but to be sure some transformational learning occurred, I wanted to be convinced that the individual would have to be able to continue the process of learning on his or her own.

The participants included in the case of Annie, Mike and Michelle, were able to continue the learning on their own because they completed additional readings, participated in self-reflection, and had active discourse with colleagues on their Group Relations experience. All actions, according to Mezirow, are crucial to the process of transformational learning. For these individuals planning a course of action (phase 6) fit

in their professional lives. For example, soon after the conference Michelle went from being a lead teacher on her school site, to becoming the principal. Michelle knew she had to create a course of action for such a change in her role. Her first step of action was to consider her previous role as a teacher and compare that to how she wanted to take up her role as a principal. She knew it would be different but was unsure of how it would play out.

Soon thereafter, Michelle had to acquire knowledge and skills for implementing her plan of action, Mezirow's phase 6. To begin, she remembered "thinking about the relationship between leader and the organizational members." Then she did additional reading and told me, "I read up on many change theories, I can't remember who is the author of which, to gain an understanding of change." Reading about relationships between the leader and the organizations and on change theories, coupled with her experience at the conference, grounded her in her work and as an individual in the process of transformation. This is similar to Mike (also included in this case) who went from being a science teacher to being an assistant principal.

Next Michelle tried out the new roles at her work. She no longer was the observer but more of a participant and a change agent. In being a change agent, not only was she aware of herself but she was able to maintain an awareness of how her new role affected her staff members. She recognized, "There is this sense of anxiety from the organizational members about this loss of what's known." Knowing there may be a sense of loss with a change of role, Michelle had to be aware of her provisional role and be sure to make adjustments as to how she took up her role as principal. With some success, she

moved to phase 9 of Mezirow's phases, "building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships."

Competence and self-confidence is demonstrated in Michelle as she noticed that her role change on her school campus was working. Her staff members were receptive and willing to follow her lead. She attributed this to "trying to involve relationships, I don't want to be in the background." With self-confidence she was a more active administrator. She then noticed, "Some level of expertise and structure began to fall into place. You can get to a place where it's not so new, now the change is not considered threatening. They begin to see the benefits of change." Once some level of change occurred, was well received, she had the confidence to continue in her work as a change agent. She would tell her staff, "We're about to go through another one [change]. Remember we survived the last one and you came out better at the end. Remember that?"

Mike also demonstrated his competence by way of displaying his students' improved standardized test scores. This improvement was meant to illustrate that his new role as the assistant principal was having a positive impact on the students. Positive results led to increased confidence in his role.

Phase 10, "a reintegration into one's life" (Mezirow & Associates, 2000, p. 22), is difficult to capture. I noticed a strong sense of self and little self-doubt on the part of the participants who were a part of Annie's case. Both of them answered questions confidently and pointedly. I saw that having experienced the 10 phases, they were able to reflect on the process and transform additional beliefs and assumptions as needed in their work as school administrators. For example, Michelle offered additional readings to her staff, encouraging them her to join her in her journey of transformation. Just as she was

confident of her change, she was humble enough to say, she has integrated Group Relations into her work but knows she has much more to learn. Mike, too, suggested books on the topic of facing challenges on a school site, encouraging open dialogue about how to make school-wide improvements which would positively effect the student and the staff members.

Conclusion

Chapter 4 illustrates the influence of the three factors: predisposition of the individual, level of participation at the conference, and post-conference learning. The chapter then aligns these factors to the phases of transformational learning within each of the three cases as outlined in Table 2.

Table 2. *Levels of Transformational Learning*

Participant	Pre-disposition	Level of participation at conference	Post-conference learning	Phase of transformational learning
Penny (Lynn, Scott, & Colleen)	Negative	Low	None	Phase 2
Rhonda (Mary, Barbara, Jen, & Sue)	Positive	Medium	Minimum	Phase 5
Annie (Mike & Michelle)	Positive	High	High	Phase 10

The case presentation method allowed me to group the nine individuals and make the influential factors clear. However, behind each case are a number of individuals who had their own beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions about the conference, themselves, and others.

This study found that the learning that resulted from participation in the conferences was related to an individual's predisposition to the Group Relations Conference. Participants' openness affected not only their level of participation at the conference but also their ability to apply that learning after the conference. Overall learning from the conference experience also relied heavily on a participants' willingness to read and reflect upon pre-conference materials and readings. Knowing this information will help the conference director and the conference members to better prepare themselves and participants for the conference. This analysis has the potential to influence the outcomes for other individuals who participate in the conference in the future.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY

The three purposes of this study were: (a) to gain an understanding of the perceived learning which occurs in individuals who participate in a Group Relations Conference at one southern California university, (b) to understand how those same individuals apply the learning in their professional roles, and (c) to understand how the learning varies as they take up their role as K-8 school administrators.

The following three questions guided my research:

1. How do participants understand and describe their learning as a result of participation in a Group Relations Conference?
2. How do those same participants apply their learning professionally and personally?
3. How did the learning and/or application vary between participants?

In seeking the answers to these questions, I used qualitative research techniques associated with grounded theory methodology.

In this chapter, I first present a brief review of the unit of analysis used for this study, which was the weekend Group Relations Conference. I then provide a more in-depth description of my participants and how I represented each of them as three distinct cases studies. Next, I discuss the outcomes and the theory that emerged from the research, and I connect those outcomes to adult learning, specifically Transformational Learning theory. Finally, I end this chapter drawing conclusions about the outcomes before presenting recommendations for future research.

Summary of Methodology

This was a qualitative study using the methodology associated with grounded theory as defined by Glaser and Strauss (1967). I used a stratified theoretical sampling procedure in choosing the participants for the research (Patton, 2002, p. 240). I collected data through individual interviews with each of the nine volunteer participants at their school sites. The individuals were chosen based on having several factors in common. Each participant was a former member of the Education Leadership Development Academy (ELDA), was employed as a K-8 principal or assistant principal, and had participated in at least one Group Relations Conference at the southern California university.

The Group Relations Conference, held twice a year at the southern California university, is a 3-day event designed to provide participants an experiential learning environment to study leadership and authority as it relates to themselves and others in a group. Participants are encouraged to use the constructs of boundaries, authority, role, and task to scaffold their learning and the application of their learning to their professional roles.

I presented the results of the research as three cases. Each case is a fictitious person made up of several people who were part of my study; each is an example of a typical individual that participates in the conference. I present the data analysis in this way to assist the reader in understanding how a Group Relation Conference affects a typical person at the conference. The cases are those of Penny, Rhonda, and Annie. Following are descriptions of each case and more in-depth information about each of the nine participants that were represented in one of the three cases. Data is provided in the

area of demographics for means of comparison in addition to any characteristics that I found to be influential towards my findings.

The Case of Penny

Penny, the first case, was a combination of three participants in my study: Lynn, Scott, and Colleen. Penny represented the three people who had a negative predisposition and minimal openness to the conference experience, reported little participation in the conference events, and after the conference, they did not take any action such as additional readings or conversations with colleagues to further their understanding of the experience.

Lynn is 42 years old, proud of her age, African-American woman; she shared her age with enthusiasm and pride. She is married and has two children. Since she was a young girl she has lived in this same city, fighting for the rights of blacks and other minorities. She shared stories of her life as an activist in the black community. As the assistant principal she sees her role as managing the staff and being sure the students are safe and welcomed onto the campus. I attribute this characteristic to two things: (a) her being a professional African-American woman in a leadership role in a community where this is not common, and (b) working in an area of the city known for its gang violence and crime; she feels compelled to be sure school is safe place for learning.

Scott is the second of the three individuals represented by the case of Penny. Scott had 5 years experience as an assistant principal in the same district before taking on the role of principal at his current elementary school. Of all the participants, he had the most difficult time recalling memories from the conference. He remembered the technical aspects of the conference, that there were readings and the paper that he had to write, but

did not recall any particular feelings or emotions he might have had at the conference that related to the conference experience or events. His emphasis on task is further reinforced by his description of his learning. Scott noted that he learned the importance of giving people tasks, which to me, is an aspect of his leadership style that appears to be direct, without emotion, and to the point. Much like I imagined he was like during the conference.

Colleen was the second of two African American women in my study and the third person who was represented by the case of Penny. Coincidentally, both of the African American women who volunteered to speak with me work at the same elementary school. I found this to be interesting because there are not many African American woman administrators in the district. It gave me the sense that these two woman may have similar world views and life experience which gave more cause for grouping them together in the same case. Colleen is 55 years old and is the principal at her elementary school. Both she and Scott were very focused on the tasks of their job; in her case, she shared with me a compilation binder of each student, his/her demographic information, current grades, and test scores. Colleen keeps this information handy to have a constant eye on the success of her teachers and her students. This example demonstrates how Colleen, not unlike Scott, is task oriented when it comes to her professional role as a principal.

The Case of Rhonda

The second case was the case of Rhonda. Rhonda represented the four individuals (Mary, Sue, Barbara, and Jen) who had neutral to positive predisposition about themselves and the conference experience. These individuals participated in the events

throughout the weekend and made some connections with others while there. They were interested in the conference experience and eager to apply the learning to their professional role as school administrators. What joins those who made up the case of Rhonda is that they made some changes in how they executed their roles as school administrators but did not show evidence of an internal change in perception regarding themselves or others.

Mary is a Caucasian woman in her 40s. Mary has been the assistant principal for 6 years and taught grades four through six for 3 years before that. She was not shy about expressing her feelings about the conference and her role as the assistant principal. Mary shared that she has tried to remember what she has learned at the conference and apply it to her daily life at work. This shows me that even years later after attending the conference, Mary continues to work towards the objective of integrating conference learning to her role as a school administrator.

Sue, the second of the four individuals who make up the case of Rhonda, is the principal at an elementary school. Previously to being an administrator, she was an elementary school teacher for 12 years. At age 38, she is an accomplished professional in the field of education. She noted that her “two primary objectives [as the principal] are to make sure that kids are learning and teachers are improving their practice.” That became more obvious to me during our interview. It was difficult for her to speak just about herself, her role or her learning; she often included her teachers, students, and their families in her responses.

Barbara, the third of four individuals who are part of the case of Rhonda, was exciting, unique, and energetic. It all made sense to me when she told me she had been

teaching music and drama since 1977. She has only been principal at her school site for the 2 months before the date of our interview. For the last few years, she has bounced from school to school, filling vacancies for principals and assistant principals at various elementary schools. She was happy to have landed at her own elementary school. Her office was filled with boxes and books, yet felt bright and fresh not stuffy or unorganized. Most notable was that as a Caucasian woman she shared that she puts energy in getting to know the minority populations in which she serves; and loves every minute of it.

Jen is a 46-year-old, Caucasian woman. She sat with her legs crossed under her own body, on the chair and exuded a youthful energy. She decorated the room with children's books, pictures of children of different ethnicities, and various pieces of art from around the world. She described herself as one who gets the crowd going, not shy or reserved, although, she admitted, some people are offended by her constant positive attitude toward life. Jen really believes in the work that she does on her school campus. She told me she is the type of assistant principal who gets to know her students. She commented that she still does lunch duty, talks and plays with the students every day.

All four of these women have several factors in common. They are all Caucasian, have professional jobs in which they had to earn their ranking on their sites, they consider their jobs of the utmost importance and believe being a school leader is more than raising test scores, as is commonly thought. They were all out-going and energetic during my interviews, characteristics that were paralleled in the conference.

The Case of Annie

The fictitious Annie was the third of the three cases and was compiled of two individuals, Mike and Michelle. These two individuals had positive predispositions at the start of the conference; both were open, excited, and interested in the potential learning at the start of the weekend. They participated earnestly throughout the weekend. These two individuals took the most action after the conference to understand and eventually apply their learning to their professional roles.

Mike is a 48-year-old, Caucasian male. He is in his first year as the assistant principal at his middle school but has 2 years previous experience as an assistant principal at a different middle school in this same district and 11 years experience as a teacher. Mike was an open book. He shared personal information like the fact that he is a recovering alcoholic, having not had an alcoholic drink for over 20 years but was still able to maintain a level of professionalism during our interview. He seemed eager to share his memories of the conference and the consequent learning that occurred.

My last interview of the nine was Michelle. Michelle is a 40-year-old Filipino woman. She has worked at her school for 13 years, the last 6 as the school principal. I describe Michelle as an advocate for her staff and her school. She described the challenge her staff had with her changing role from resource teacher to principal 6 years ago with kindness and respect. Although, she remarked that she is still processing the feelings associated with change of role both within herself and with her staff. She believes that she is a change agent in her school site; feeling empowered and inspired to face her daily challenges as a team member not just a figurehead leader. Michelle spoke of the

conference experience as instrumental in helping her learn to manage change on her campus and learn how to take up her own authority in tumultuous times.

The nine individuals that I interviewed were unique in their experience of the conference, but throughout the interviews I was able to identify three characteristics that helped me better understand their learning associated with their conference experience. I used these characteristics to determine which of the three cases each participant would be placed. The three characteristics are: (a) predisposition or openness to the conference experience, (b) participation in the conference events, and (c) the amount of active learning that he or she did on his/her own in the weeks and months after the conclusion of the conference. Each of these factors will be discussed next.

Discussion

The Group Relations Conference, for the participants, is a requirement of their graduate program. It requires before and after classes in addition to a 3-day, weekend conference that lasts from nine o'clock in the morning to nine o'clock at night on Friday and Saturday and from nine o'clock in the morning to four o'clock in the afternoon on Sunday. Attendance at all parts is mandatory to pass the course and eventually complete the administrative credentialing program. In conducting this research I found three factors that were influential to the each of the individuals in how they described their learning, how they applied the learning, and how the learning varied between each of the nine people.

The first factor that I found influential in how each person described the learning was predisposition. By predisposition, I mean not only the individual's personality but also what he or she thought about the conference prior to enrolling in the course and his

or her openness to the pedagogy associated with Group Relations Conferences. The factor is listed first because it seems to be the most influential on the individuals and the two other factors. There were differences in each of the cases. Lynn, Scott, and Colleen (Penny), for example, entered the conference hearing from previous conference participants words like “awful, frustrating, tiring, and horrible” as descriptors of the weekend. Mary and Jen remembered both the positive and the negative comments and those who were represented by Annie referred to the conference as exciting and had a sense of curiosity about the experience.

The second factor that I found that influenced the learning for the participants was the level of participation that each person showed during the conference itself. The higher amount of participation during the conference, the more the individual reported learning. Examples of participating include speaking out during conference events, being actively engaged by making connections with and building relationships with others throughout the weekend, and actively participating in the Review and Application Group discussions at the close of each conference day. Both of the first two factors, predisposition of the individuals and the level of participation, were influential in how the participant described his or her learning.

The third factor I found which influenced the degree to which the individual reported learning was the amount of follow-up activities/learning the individual completed on his or her own or with colleagues. The variance in this category was related to the amount of reading, discussing, journaling, and processing of the conference experience and what each learned in the weeks and months after the conference ended.

Penny, who represented three of my participants (Lynn, Scott, and Colleen), completed the minimal amount of post conference work. These three individuals completed the final papers for the course associated with the conference but did not go any further than completing the task. Colleen, one of the three who make up Penny, admitted not doing the readings at all. Consequently, I note that the three of them had the least amount of learning compared to Rhonda and Annie. The participants represented by Penny noted the conference as something that was required for the purpose of completing a graduate course, not as an opportunity for growth or change.

Rhonda represented the four participants (Mary, Sue, Barbara, and Jen) who completed the additional assignments and the readings, and most importantly they integrate the material with their existing knowledge base. Mary and Barbara remembered the readings and remembered enjoying doing the post-conference work. Barbara used a journal to keep track of her learning after the conference and had examples of how she applied her learning. What I named *change in being*, she called a “shift” within her and an increase in confidence of how she executes her role as a school administrator. She stated that, “it [the conference] increased my confidence in my ability to lead. Learn the way I am, and be who I am.”

Mike and Michelle, who were included in the case of Annie, did the most post conference work and experienced both a change in being and a change in doing. For them, a *change in being* was noted as a change in how they describe themselves as educational leaders. The *change in doing* was the clear overt change in how their behaviors changed and how they described their changes and its impact on their school

campuses. They led meetings differently, listened to staff with patience, worked more collaboratively with co-workers, and carefully crafted change in their schools.

These two individuals went beyond completing the course work and found additional readings in the area of Group Relations theory, Change theory, and Leadership theory. Going a bit further, Michelle shared relevant articles with the teaching staff at her school site so everyone would have a common understanding of change and leadership; thus using a common understanding to guide their everyday work as educators. Michelle and Mike both described techniques they acquired from their conference experience. The techniques included listening more carefully to their staff, asking questions more pointedly, and having meaningful conversations with the staff members at their respective school sites.

Adult Learning

Jack Mezirow (1991, 1997a) notes that as the adult learner moves through the 10 phases of adult learning (Transformational Learning theory), their beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions are changed. The phases illustrate a process of learning that is fluid. The phases are not linear and people often progress through one phase and then depending on the situation may rely on a previous stage to make sense of their learning. A common goal of transformational learning is change (Bennetts, 2003; Burton, 2006; Cranton, 2006; King, 2004; Mezirow, 1991; Taylor, 2006). Change includes a difference in how an individual thinks, acts, feels, and relates to others and the world around them (Bennetts, 2003). Burton (2006) stated that transformational learning is an epistemological change because it increases knowledge and has an affective interpersonal and moral dimension. This means that personal emotions, feelings, and values are

influential in transformational learning. Transformational learning is a process of meaning making not simply knowing more (Burton, 2006, p. 2).

In this study I found that the learning that resulted from participation in the conferences was related to an individual's predisposition to the Group Relations Conference. Participants' openness affected not only their level of participation at the conference but also their ability to apply that learning after the conference. Thus, learning from the conference experience also relied heavily on a participants' willingness to read and reflect upon pre-conference materials and readings.

For example, Scott told me he did not read the pre-conference materials. He reported being too busy, but I argue he chose not to read the material. Scott was one of the nine participants who reported not learning from the conference. By not doing the readings and having a closed-mind towards the conference experience, he did not progress through the phases of transformational learning. Lynn was also closed-minded regarding the conference experience. Consequently, she did not actively engage in the conference and had little to no post-conference learning. Lynn is an example of someone who progressed to phase 2 of Mezirow's 10 phases, with no evidence of personal transformation or change. Whereas Michelle, who had a positive predisposition and is categorized as being open to the conference, was actively engaged throughout the conference and completed additional work after the conference in the area of Group Relations. Hence, I argue that Michelle experienced all 10 phases of Mezirow's transformational learning. Thus, one's predisposition influences the other two factors of participation during the conference and the active choice of continuing the learning through additional readings and research in the area of Group Relations.

Conclusions

At the onset of this research I sought to understand what people learn from participating in the Group Relations Conference. Having participated in several conferences myself, I had a point of comparison in which to begin my questioning. For me, the conference experience led to a change in beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions about others and myself. I had a change in how I saw myself in groups and in how I take up my role as a school administrator. I had hoped to learn about the experience of others who were like me. Were they applying the learning and recognizing personal growth or change as I did?

After much reflection, what I found were similar patterns of learning between my personal experience and that of the nine participants. When I think back to my first conference experience, I was the person with a closed-mind and negative predisposition. I spent most of the weekend confused and frustrated; not understanding the pedagogy or the purpose of the conference or the conference events. I was not unlike Lynn, Colleen, and Scott (case of Penny). I attended, completed the assigned papers, and earned my college credit. At that point, I would consider myself the *Penny* of the group. However, there was one difference between Penny and myself. It was that I was curious about the pedagogy and the potential learning. So, I attended the conference a second time. I wanted to better understand what it was I was supposed to be learning and how this learning might be meaningful to me.

I thought that there are thousands of highly educated people who participate in Group Relations Conferences nationwide; there must be something I am missing. I attributed my lack of learning or lack of change to my negative attitude and made a

conscious choice to change. I signed up for my second conference with a more open mind and positive attitude overall. With this better attitude, I promised myself I would participate in the events by speaking out and paying attention to other people's actions and behaviors. I would use the conference events to learn about my reactions to opportunities for leadership and authority. After the conference, I joined a group of fellow students who attended the conference. Our purpose was to understand our learning and begin to apply the learning to our professional roles. We met once a month for about 6 months after the conference. With my more positive attitude and open mind to the conference experience, I began to sense a transformation within me. I was moving through Mezirow's stages of transformational learning. At this point, I compare myself to Mary, Sue, Barbara, and Jen (the case of Rhonda). I put some energy into learning and saw positive results such as the ability to self-reflect on my role in groups and whether or not my behavior helped or hindered the group's work. In reflecting, I think the fact that those in the case of Rhonda entered the conference with a better attitude from the start, they were better able to begin the progression of change quicker than those in the case of Penny and myself.

I was not yet satisfied with my understanding of the conference. Intellectually, I was recognizing a change in myself but knew the change could be even more significant to my professional role as a vice-principal of a school. Again, I voluntarily signed up to participate in two more conferences. This time, I attended with a positive energy and enthusiasm for the potential learning. I was thirsty to dive into conversations and participation with other participants. Both before and after the conference I completed additional readings on Group Relations theory. I completed these two conferences with a

deeper understanding of myself, the roles I take up in groups, and now had the ability to discuss my learning, apply my learning, and display a noticeable change in how I exercise leadership on my school campus. For me, it took four conferences, time, and techniques associated with transformational learning to reach the point of Michelle and Mike (the case of Annie) in which I could show evidence of being *transformed*. In combining my experience with my research, the data suggests that Michelle and Mike were able to reach the phases of transformation after one conference while it took me several and not at all for the cases of Penny and Rhonda because of their readiness for change, something that at the time, I was lacking.

I share this personal experience to link what I learned about myself from participating in the Group Relations Conferences and from my participants who participated in my research. The similarities between our learning can be attributed to the similarities I share with the participants such as having been a graduate student in education and an administrator in a K-8 school. Differences include age and experience; for I have less experience in education compared to the participants in my study. The outcomes of my research and this comparison inform my recommendations for future research.

Limitations

The limitations of this study involved both the area being researched and the researcher. First the topic being researched is limited in that Group Relations theory has a research base that is predominantly written by those in support of the work; often including those who hold positions of leadership within the Group Relations tradition. The limited research may be the result of the difficulty of measuring beliefs, attitudes,

and subsequent changes of behavior that occur via participation in the conference. Also, because of its psychoanalytical foundations, Group Relations theory is often critiqued and misunderstood which may be a result of the theoretical foundations of psychoanalysis in working with the unconscious, ego, and defense mechanisms. This criticism and confusion leads to fewer researchers choosing to investigate the learning associated with participation in Group Relations work.

The study was conducted with administrators from the same local school district and with individuals who have attended the same graduate program. These two facts come with inherent biases stemming from geography and similar motivations for attending the conference. Also, my study was limited in that the number of participants was nine. This study could have been more encompassing with at least twice the number. In addition, having more participants could have added data to support my themes or refute them, continuing the process of grounded theory.

The data gathered for this study is a snapshot of the viewpoint of the nine individuals. By snapshot, I mean a detail of their beliefs regarding the conference in one point in time. Considerations were not made for the time lapse post-conference or life changes from when the participants attended the conference to the day of the interview.

Also, I have personal experience in Group Relations Conferences and consider that experience positive. I had to take into consideration the fact that I have chosen to participate in five Group Relations Conferences and am familiar with the leadership and structure of the conferences. My positive bias may have influenced the manner in which I questioned the respondents and perhaps even influenced how I interpreted the data. It was important for me to compensate for this bias by carefully analyzing the data and sharing

the process of analysis and the results of the analysis with my committee members. Their experience as qualitative researchers heightens their awareness of positive bias in the findings so that they were able to judge whether the theory emerged from the data and not from my experience.

Recommendations

In completing this research I was interested in learning more about the potential impact Group Relations Conferences could have on K-8 administrators and how they exercise leadership on their school sites. My study did confirm that the conference experience *could* affect change in an individual and that change, for some, was apparent at the school sites.

However, since only two of the nine participants experienced what I would call a significant change, I believe much more work needs to be done to better understand the impact of this work on school leaders. In this section and the following one, I discuss my recommendations for future research, and I make suggestions for enhancing the learning for school administrators attending Group Relations conferences in the future.

Recommendations for Further Research

In the next sections I discuss potential future research, suggestions for future conferences, and questions that remain unanswered but were elicited in this study. This research was purposeful and added to the conversation in the areas of Group Relations theory and transformative learning. I suggest future research in both of those areas.

In considering the limitations and having completed this research study, the ideal research study that could account for the limitations previously mentioned would be a longitudinal, mixed research study including quantitative and qualitative study

methodology. Participants could be recruited at the start of the ELDA program and followed for the 2-year period with the conference experience being in the middle of the 2 years. Then, a researcher would have additional data to add to the themes I found relevant in my study such as predisposition and post-conference learning.

I suggest the quantitative study be completed to give another perspective on the learning that occurred with participants who participated in the Group Relations Conference. Specifically, research examining the various predispositions of students, the level of participation, and the amount of post-conference learning each person completes. A more expansive understanding of these factors would inform both the potential participant and the conference staff. This could be completed using the results of this study as a framework. Traditional survey research methods or Q-Sort Methodology are two possible methods that could be beneficial.

The longitudinal qualitative study using the same participants over a 18- to 24-month period of time after having participated in the conference and being in a leadership role on a K-12 campus. Several of the participants alluded to the fact that they were not in a leadership role while participating in the conference. They did not yet have the experience in which to apply their learning. If those individuals were followed over a period of time, the learning that occurred could be monitored for change and development as the individual developed in his/her role professional role.

In the area of transformative learning, I noted in Chapter 4 how Mezirow might interpret my results. I suggest additional research take place challenging the phases of transformative learning for each of the individuals interviewed in this study. An ethnographic study could be completed to delve in deeper to the perceived learning that

occurred in the individuals and how they believe they applied the learning in their professional roles. More time can be spent on reaching a deeper level of understanding of the role of the school administrator and the challenges he/she has in applying the learning and fostering change on his/her school campus.

I hope those in the fields of Adult Education and Group Relations use my research to further their understanding of the connection between the two. The Group Relations Conference has the potential for taking the adult learner to a new level of understanding about him/herself, and in relation to the groups that he/she is a part. The results provide information to further discussions, and could be useful to conference facilitators, and to the graduate student participants with the potential for improving the experience and enhancing the learning for both.

Suggestions for Future Conferences

Based on my research, participation in the conference can serve as a critical event that has the potential for transformative learning. Assuming the course instructors support the idea that the purpose of the course is to foster transformative learning, he/she might consider the results of this research and make adjustments in the course. For example, based on the theories of transformative learning and adult learning theories the course might be enhanced by including additional assignments such as journaling, additional opportunities for critical reflections, and additional follow up meetings 3, 6, and even 12 twelve months after completion of the conference.

Small changes in the conference pre-session class could be made for the conference participants to better understand the purpose of the course. For example, only one of the nine participants I interviewed knew and could articulate the purpose of the

conference. Also there was confusion among the participants as to *how to learn* using the methodology of the conference. I suggest in the pre-conference sessions provide additional explanation about the pedagogy of the conference as well as additional reading on the theory itself juxtaposed with readings about leadership and authority that might help the participants begin to link their learning to their professional roles. These slight changes might bring deeper meaning of the conference to the participants.

Also, considering that I found that predisposition/openness did matter in terms of each person's learning, this should be considered at the start of the course. Conference staff and course instructors play a crucial role in this area. Staff members could assess individuals via one-on-one interviews for positive or negative predispositions before the weekend conference begins. More time could be spent on those who have a negative predisposition, explaining to them the function of the conference, the pedagogy of the conference, as well as conference events. This has the potential for taking someone from a closed-mind attitude towards the conference to a more open-minded point of view; hence increasing the potential for learning. Staff must realize the influential role they play in the individual's experience and the consequent outcomes for those individuals.

Questions for Future Investigations

In this section, I ask pose several unanswered questions that seemed to emerge as a result of this study. This research has led me to question why Penny, Rhonda, and Annie (the three cases presented in this research) differed in how they experienced the conference. Why were some participants able to reach higher stages of transformation when others did not? Can this be attributed to age? Personal experience? Ethnicity? What made some of the participants' predispositions more open to the experience while others

were close-minded? On the surface, I find the past experiences and self-descriptions of the participants the most likely factor to answer my question, but I am intrigued by what else may have influenced their experiences and learning. By way of contrast, one might ask the same questions of those in the case of Penny.

Another question I have is regarding the group of which all my participants are a part, Education Leadership Development Academy (ELDA). What about the ELDA program encourages or discourages the participants as they make choices on how much or how little they will participate in the conference? Does the ELDA program encourage reflection, discourse, and dialogue? These are components that are necessary in the process of transformational learning in adults and this is an important question with respect to program enhancements.

My final question is regarding school administrators in general. While some of my participants successfully learned and grew from attending the conference, others did not. So, I am curious about the dissonance between school administrators and the willingness to participate in a Group Relations Conference. How do we both account for and lessen the dissonance all at the same time? Consequently having the potential of increasing the number of school administrators who willingly participate in the conference and experience some transformational learning.

Concluding Remarks

Change in individuals and in systems is difficult to measure and describe. I sought to understand the subjective world of transformative learning. I found that, to some degree, transformative learning could occur in individuals who participate in the Group Relations Conference. However, there are many challenges such as those

described in this dissertation that often impede learning for some groups of people. The insights gained from this research may assist conference directors to better prepare for the conference, enhance participants' learning outcomes and, in the case of school leaders, potentially impact their ability to affect change at their school sites. Thus the findings of this research contribute to our knowledge of adult learning theory as it relates to Group Relations Conferences in the context of K-8 administrators.

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Appendix A
Interview Protocol

Preparation:

In each interview, I mentioned the following:

- An appreciation for participants' taking the time and making an effort to be part of my study.
- The interview will last between 45 and 60 minutes.
- The purpose is to understand their perceptions of the learning and consequent applications of the learning.
- Review of the signed consent form.
- They are free to not answer any of the questions.
- The interview will be taped and transcribed.
- They will be given the opportunity to review the transcription.
- Confidentiality will be upheld by destroying the audio tapes after transcription and number codes will be used in place of names.
- Pseudonyms will be used when reporting the data
- I am open to answering questions about the study.

(Martynowych, 2006, p. 247)

- Collection of demographic information (how do you describe yourself?)
- Name, age, gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation
- Current role in K-12 education
- Describe your job duties/responsibilities in that role
- Number of years in that role
- Any others roles held in K-12 education, and for how long
- Current or past member of the ELDA
- Year of participation in group relations conference
- Design of the conference (what activities were part if the conference? small group meetings, large group meetings, application of the learning groups)
- Name of the Director of the conference in which the participant participated
- Any other relevant information that he/she would like to share about themselves

Appendix B
Interview Questions

The following questions were used to guide the interviews. However, I acknowledge the need for flexibility in the questioning, thus making space to allow for the natural flow of the interview process. Probing and clarification occurred as the respondents shared their responses with me.

1. How would do you describe the Group Relations Conference at the Southern California University? (Goals, processes you were a part of, feelings, impressions, etc.)
2. What do you recall from your experience at the group relations conference?
3. Does any particular event stand out in your mind? If so, which event, and why do you think that event stands out? (High lights/low lights)
4. Did you remember any physical reactions? Emotional reactions? Please tell me about them. To what do you attribute these reactions?
5. How would you describe your learning from your participation in the conference? Learning about yourself? Other individuals? Groups? Roles? Leadership? Authority?
6. How, if at all, did the experience effect your beliefs, attitudes or assumptions about yourself? Others? Those in leadership roles? Those in authority roles?
7. Can you attribute your learning to any of your experience? Yes or No, explain.
8. Now think more about your learning (or lack of), where have you applied your learning? For example, in what areas of your life? Professional life? Personal life?
9. Please cite examples of how you applied your learning. Include examples of when you wanted to but could not. Why not?

10. Do you attribute any of the learning or application to any specific experience or particular event at the group relations conference? Yes/no. Which experience/event? Why or why not?

11. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

UNIVERSITY OF SAN DIEGO

CANDIDATE'S NAME Heather Dierolf

TITLE OF
DISSERTATION Adult Learning and School Leadership: Application and
Learning from a Group Relations Conference

APPROVAL

Chair

Member

Member

DATE
