

## TRANSFORMATIVE AND RESTORATIVE LEARNING: A VITAL DIALECTIC FOR SUSTAINABLE SOCIETIES

[Elizabeth A Lange](#). [Adult Education Quarterly](#). Washington: [Feb 2004](#). Vol. 54, Iss. 2; pg. 121, 19 pgs

### Abstract (Article Summary)

This study explores the potential of critical **transformative learning** for revitalizing citizen action, particularly action toward a sustainable society. Through an action research process with 14 university extension participants, it was found that a dialectic of transformative and restorative learning is vital for fostering active citizenship. This study also found that transformation is not just an epistemological process involving a change in worldview and habits of thinking; it is also an ontological process where participants experienced a change in their being in the world. As participants shifted into a new mode of relatedness with their material, social, and environmental realities, they sought avenues for socially responsible involvement as active citizens. [PUBLICATION ABSTRACT]

Keywords: **transformative learning**; sustainability; critical pedagogy; citizenship; restorative learning; action research

### Full Text (8076 words)

*Copyright American Association for Adult & Continuing Education Feb 2004*

### [Headnote]

This study explores the potential of critical transformative learning for revitalizing citizen action, particularly action toward a sustainable society. Through an action research process with 14 university extension participants, it was found that a dialectic of transformative and restorative learning is vital for fostering active citizenship. This study also found that transformation is not just an epistemological process involving a change in worldview and habits of thinking; it is also an ontological process where participants experienced a change in their being in the world. As participants shifted into a new mode of relatedness with their material, social, and environmental realities, they sought avenues for socially responsible involvement as active citizens.

Keywords: transformative learning; sustainability; critical pedagogy; citizenship; restorative learning; action research

The purpose of the qualitative study, "Living Transformation: From Midlife Crisis to Restoring Ethical Space" (Lange, 2001), was to pilot and assess a critical transformative learning<sup>1</sup> process for revitalizing citizen action, particularly action toward a sustainable society. In the mid-1990s, preliminary investigation revealed that many adults were experiencing high levels of fear and anxiety regarding the changing structure of work, including intensified work or job loss brought about by the neo-liberal economic policies. A university extension course, Transforming Working and Living, was developed to address issues such as making a transition to a new job, work/life balance, and more meaningful work. As participants engaged in this course, it became evident that there was a distinctive learning process operating that was restorative as well as transformative. This article expands existing understandings of transformative learning by describing restorative learning, its dialectical relationship with transformative learning, and how restorative and transformative learning together constitute an important pedagogy for sustainability education that can revitalize citizen action.

Jack Mezirow (1991), a seminal theorist of transformative learning, drew from Adorno's negative dialectics to suggest that transformative learning develops out of a cognitive disequilibrium or a disorienting dilemma. However, by extrapolating from the processes of change in natural systems, both order and disorder are created simultaneously when bifurcation points appear (Capra, 1996). Some stability is required to survive disorientation, and this study identified this process to be restorative learning. For example, participants in this study reconnected with the personal ethics they

had submerged because of competing cultural scripts implicit in workplaces and the dominant culture. Restoring these ethics to a guiding place in their lives provided the stability from which they could withstand the upheavals required to navigate a very different life course. This stability, as part of restorative learning, aided a deeper transformation that went beyond individual understandings and lifestyle to socially responsible involvement in the community as active citizens.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Democracy is fundamentally hinged on the citizen's ability to play an informed and active role in determining how to live together in society. Yet, citizen activity appears to be atrophying thereby prompting many theorists to claim a crisis in democracy and to attribute its causes to narcissism, anxiety, sullenness, malaise, denial, unconsciousness, or a waning historical memory (Borgmann, 1992; Bowers, 1997; Giddens, 1991; Hobsbawm, 1994; Lasch, 1979; Saul, 1995; C. Taylor, 1991). As Borgmann (1992) declared, and others agree (Saul, 1995), "The public square is naked; ... we have no common life, that what holds us together is a cold and impersonal design" (p. 3). This study began with a different premise-that perhaps citizens want to be involved in the democratic process and that they desire to do "the good" (C. Taylor, 1989), but significant barriers prevent citizen involvement. To explore this premise and educational responses for revitalizing citizen action, the conceptual framework for this study moved beyond the fragmentary thinking that characterizes modernity. Drawing on David Bohm (1980) and the New Science to guide a nonfragmentary way of thinking led to a merger of various strands of literature including alienation, critical pedagogy, transformative learning, and sustainability.

Critical transformative learning attempts to foster an individual's consciousness of himself or herself as situated within larger political and economic forces (Cunningham, 1992). What Paulo Freire (1970) called conscientization is the process of facilitating an understanding and sense of efficacy that relations of domination and alienation can be changed. The intent, then, of critical transformative learning is not just personal transformation but societal transformation so that individuals can be creative producers of self and of society and its political and economic relations (Allman & Wallis, 1990). Therefore, this study utilized a dialectical, rather than mechanical, understanding of personal and social transformation.

This study moved beyond the psychologizing of transformative learning and the autonomous, rational actor to consider how actors are embedded in social and economic relations and how these relations connect the personal and social. This study also acknowledged how individuals often adjust themselves to inherently unjust and/or alienating relations to survive. Alienation means to lose contact with or to be detached or distanced from a part of one's life, including the sociality of existence or the natural world upon which existence most fundamentally depends. Marx, as cited in Ollman (1971), understood alienation to be composed of the following elements:

- \* Humans are alienated in their work or life activity because they have no part in deciding what to do or how to do it and are required to work in detrimental, uncreative conditions;
- \* Humans are alienated from their products or what they create, as they have no control over what they make or what becomes of it;
- \* Humans are alienated from other humans because of competition and hostility among all groupings in society thereby eliminating a feeling of genuine human community; and
- \* Humans are alienated from the natural world by the inorganic conditions of human existence.

In response, the *raison d'etre* of critical transformative learning is to provoke a change at the radix or root of social systems that will facilitate a "move beyond the existing form" (Mayo, 1999, p. 24), including alienated social relations. This process is best described by Rick Arnold, as cited in Spencer (1998): "Social change educators . . . see education as a way to help people critically evaluate and understand themselves and the world . . . to see themselves as creators of culture, history, and an

alternative social vision" (p. 72).

To address the issues participants expressed, a literature review determined that a holistic concept of sustainability<sup>2</sup> had significant potential in offering an alternative vision for work-a vision with transformative power. This organizing concept also challenged current socioeconomic systems and held the potential for stimulating citizen action.

## STUDY DESIGN

### Rationale

To study the impact of a critical transformative learning process for revitalizing citizen action, action research was utilized. Action research has a natural affinity with transformative learning, as it allows study of how understanding develops in the midst of bringing about change (Carson & Sumara, 1997; McTaggart, 1997). A double spiral-action research model was created for this study where the participants studied their working and living while the researcher studied the practice of critical transformative learning.

As a qualitative study, the task was not only to study belief change but how the participants positioned themselves differently in their world and acted upon these beliefs. The notion of "action research as living practice" was employed where "who one is becomes completely caught up with what one knows and does" (Carson & Sumara, 1997, p. xvii). To examine this, Paula Allman's (1999) understanding of Marxian dialectics and consciousness was employed. Consciousness is shaped by the social relations and that in turn shapes how individuals are positioned socially and how they relate with the material and physical worlds. We can understand the prevailing form of consciousness by examining "real people and their activity, especially the activity that took place within the way they were organized to produce and reproduce their material existence" (Allman, 1999, p. 38). Thus, this research practice was one of a deep awareness of being, how consciousness of being and the social and productive relations are structured, and how this is transformed.

### Context

Beginning in 1993, the Klein Revolution was the introduction of New Right ideas in Canada (Harrison & Kachur, 1999). In the Canadian province of Alberta, the Klein government began to restructure the public sector to integrate Alberta into the global neo-liberal economic system. In 1998, the participants that registered in the university extension course had firsthand experience with public and private "downsizing and restructuring." All of the participants described the personal impact of these euphemisms with agonizing clarity-frenetic work pace, longer work hours, exhaustion, stress, anxiety, burnout, health crises, and personal crises. They were searching for more balance between work and home, and they yearned to engage in work that made a difference to their community. Although the purpose of the study was to examine the educational process of catalyzing citizen action, it became apparent that this could not be addressed until the structure of work and how it shaped living was questioned.

### Course Design

A typical course based on action research would involve a participant description of their daily realities, problem posing, socioeconomic analysis, action, reflection, and replanning. This course began with description and problem posing but moved directly to introducing participants to alternative ways of living and working that were hope producing before moving into social and economic critique. It was expected that the participants would be further paralyzed within their "limit-situations" (Freire, 1970) unless they were exposed to hopeful and practical alternatives early in the learning process. It was also expected that the participants would need to be given space to analyze their personal issues within the context of cultural messages prior to a more abstract social and economic analysis. Given this, the pedagogy was designed to

- \* describe and problem pose about participant issues (learner problem posing),
- \* introduce alternative ways of living/working and introduce a holistic concept of sustainability (immersion into alternatives),
- \* analyze cultural and family messages around work and life (cultural analysis),
- \* analyze expenditures of time and money against life priorities (cultural analysis),
- \* identify personal and professional ethics (personal reflection),
- \* analyze the global economy and how it structures their daily working and living (socioeconomic analysis),
- \* engage in action planning (personal and group reflection),
- \* act on the action plan,
- \* reflect on the action plan (personal and group reflection), and
- \* celebrate.

However, these cannot be considered sequential steps in the process but rather iterative pedagogical moments where participants often moved back and forth between these elements. As described by Deborah Barndt (1989), Antonio Gramsci distinguished between structural elements (the relatively permanent social relations) and conjunctural elements (the temporary, fluid social relations) in any particular historical moment. Both the structural and conjunctural are attended to when the pedagogy flows iteratively.

### Participants

This elective course was offered through the Faculty of Extension as part of an adult and continuing education certificate program. It was 3 months in duration with weekly 3-hour classes. The participants could use their completion credits toward certification, but it was a credit/no-credit course. Given that registration was on a first-come, first-serve basis and the enrollment was capped at 15, there was no choice in participant diversity. This resulted in predominately women participants. Nevertheless, diversity in terms of age (between 33 and 64 years), part-time to full-time work, household income (\$20,000 to \$115,000), educational background, type of work, ethnic background, and sexual orientation was significant. When considering the overall family income, type of occupation, and cultural and economic capital, all of the participants were defined as middle class.

### Data Collection and Data Analysis

Each participant completed a precourse survey to provide a basic personal and household profile, baseline understandings, and course expectations. A postcourse survey established changes in conceptual understandings. Each participant was interviewed prior, during, and after the course for 60 to 90 minutes each. The participants were not regarded as objects of study but as mutual searchers involved in a discourse about ways of working and living that could be more life giving. Over time, the conversations evolved into deep explorations about what gives meaning to each person, what degrades meaningfulness, how meaning relates to forms of working and living, and new options they were developing. The participants also kept lengthy journals throughout the course to capture the impact of various course activities as well as their daily thoughts. Data analysis comprised three stages: phenomenological description; thematic analysis; and critical, hermeneutic analysis. Interpretive trustworthiness was ensured through participant checks, which reshaped the findings in

addition to the reviews of designated critical friends. Catalytic validity is currently being tracked by studying the nature of the changes over the succeeding 5 years.

## FINDINGS

### Disillusionment and Fragmentation

Everyone who knew Dan during high school knew that all he wanted was a small house, a white picket fence, a wife, and two kids. It seemed a modest expectation; an expectation deemed worthy by North American society. But as Dan said in the first interview, "It didn't work out that way." He experienced a dramatic upheaval through divorce, leaving him as the primary parent for two school-age children. For Dan, his cherished principles of honesty, integrity, and loyalty had been equated with this white-picket-fence image. In other words, being a good person was constituted by a white-picket-fence lifestyle that would symbolize both his principles and his material and relational achievements. Now at a self-described "crossroad," he asked, "Which of these [things] has to be changed? Maybe none of them have to be changed, but maybe they have to be re-evaluated . . . reassessed. I can't believe that any of those things are bad." Dan's questioning went further, however, to encompass questions about the meaning of his work and his ambivalent notions of a fulfilled life:

I'm not making what I'm worth, . . . and society values people on how much they make, so I am not fulfilling my potential in a materialistic, monetary sense. . . . So the question is, is that the only way I view my life? Is that the only measure I use for my life?

He had chosen not to measure his life against the standard of monetary fulfillment, yet he was troubled by what ought to be an appropriate measure of fulfillment. This profound question around the measure of one's life and appropriate signifiers of a life well lived towered at this intersection of the life road for all of the 14 research participants. As Kate explained,

You spend the first part of your life doing what society expects you to. And you reach a point where you've done that and it's like, "Well, okay, now what? What am I supposed to do now? I've got two cars and the house and the kids and the husband. So now what?" . . . There's all that sort of building, and then comes retirement, right? I think you just question if that's really what it's all about.

The popular press and the life-stage theorists would call Dan and Kate's reevaluations of societal expectations a midlife crisis or adult passage, replete with an Eriksonian developmental task. As Gail Sheehy (1976) suggested, a midlife crisis is the predictable but pivotal development task of adulthood whereby individuals reexamine their purposes and life pattern. Either individuals become resigned and calcified, or they experience a renewal of purpose that represents a more authentic life structure. Many of the participants themselves identified their issues as part of a midlife crisis. Yet was a midlife crisis what Dan and Kate were experiencing?

Digging under their description of a midlife crisis, the participants pointed to two deeper phenomena—disillusionment and fragmentation. The participants had multifaceted experiences of disillusionment including disillusionment with

- \* their ability to "do a good job" in a rapidly changing workplace,
- \* the loss of ethics in their workplaces,
- \* the cultural importance given to work,
- \* material things for deriving identity and feelings of success, and
- \* futility in public life.

For instance, prior to workplace restructuring, many of these people felt some efficacy to enact their principles and ethics through their workplace. Now, they described a substantial loss of space to speak about or act on ethics within work organizations. As Kate said,

Now with the government deregulating the whole [utility] industry, there is a lot of politics happening, and I just don't want to be part of any of that. . . . This basic service is being manipulated. . . . There has always been a [values] conflict [at work], but what has changed is that I don't have any kind of control now.

Many of them experienced the increase of meaningless tasks, increased surveillance, and decreased power to influence policies and practices. Many of these workers, from managers to support staff, were now expected to adopt a utilitarian ethic that focused on cost-benefit efficiencies. This flew in the face of programs intended to provide social goods, whether to children in the education system, to the ill and dying in the health system, or to the clientele of basic services such as utilities. As Jennifer summarized,

What really drew me to this work is caring about people and trying to protect what we define as public health. . . . Now [we are] told not to cause flak politically . . . [or we] are told that we can't enforce that piece of legislation for whatever reason; . . . it goes against my ethical judgment.

Two participants talked about the organization "owning their soul," where, to receive a paycheck, professional identity, and the chance to climb the career ladder, they had to give over their ethical autonomy and personal identity to the collective ethics and identity of the organization. Garth and Ky said,

Big organizations own your soul. . . . We do really [see] when you work for such a large organization for such a large period of time, they own you, and when times get tough, they own you more, and everybody is just holding onto their job for that security.

Ky was actively silenced when she questioned the "under-the-table" managing of education funding. "We were told we were out of line, that budgeting was not our concern and we should just work with our workload." Garth, a human resources officer, was fired when he disagreed with the process for reducing staff. The feeling of not being able to do a good job or act on one's beliefs gave way to disillusionment about the importance of work and the structure of work relations in our society.

Underneath the expressed desire for balance was the phenomenon of fragmentation where participants described their lives as "whirling," scattered busyness, and being strangled by responsibilities. Most participants reported working simultaneously on isolated tasks with no sense of completion or connected purpose, constant interruptions of space, a persistent need for "sudden" responses, the dispersal of energy in too many directions, and a balancing act of competing responsibilities between job and home. Most of the participants discussed the lack of energy "to maintain the life structure that I've created," and many of them described the condition of burnout including serious illness over the last 5 years. As Dan expressed, "If I don't find balance, I will not make it. . . . I cannot be seven people. . . . All the time I feel pulled." Kate added, "There always seems to be times when I feel my various roles of mother, worker, wife, daughter, etc. are conflicting or all grasping for my personal 'alone' time of which I have none." Anne and Sally both asked, "How [do I] balance all of that out so that I don't feel like I'm being strangled?" The sense of fragmentation resulted in perennial weariness, stress, and sometimes despair.

#### Barriers to Citizen Action

Despite these conditions, participants felt highly responsible for larger social and environmental issues. They were unanimously troubled by not being active in larger community or social issues. Kate expressed the sentiments of most of the participants:

I feel that it is everyone's concern. Yet on the other hand, I have just said that there is nothing I can do. I guess there are lifestyle choices that I can make, . . . but I don't feel it will be a very big impact. With environmental issues, I can do the recycle thing and be more conscious when purchasing products. But I think what discourages me is, I can see myself doing all that, but then I see the bigger picture kind of things, which totally devalues anything that [I] can do.

There was a sense of futility and cynicism that meaningful action could be taken at an individual level when most of the environmental devastation was done at the industrial level. They all described that complex and deep changes were needed in society to address profound social, economic, and environmental crises. Most importantly, they were critical of the exclusionary, confrontational tactics of social movements, and they saw political parties and current political processes as ineffectual. They could identify no other effective and, more importantly, respectable spaces for citizen engagement. They were stranded between feeling individually responsible, the seeming futility of individual action, excessive busyness, and no perceived avenues for effective citizen action.

Most of the participants felt that they could address social and environmental issues best through their jobs. Anne said,

I believe I'm working to make a difference. I also believe that a lot of the time I'm not making any difference at all. . . . I'm in supposedly a position of influence over many people, but it's just a real struggle to feel that the purpose is still there and still meaningful.

Several participants described that professional ethics often demanded silence or confidentiality. In other cases, bureaucratic red tape, profit bottom lines, and public image prevented them from addressing issues. Rather than being passive or narcissistic, these participants were sincerely concerned and were attempting civic action, however ineffectual, through their jobs.

### Pedagogical Entry Points

Disillusionment and fragmentation are important pedagogical entry points for adult educators. All of the participants came desiring transformation and could be considered to be in disorienting dilemmas. Numerous participants used the term crossroads to describe this condition. They came wanting to find "wholeness, balance, and health." Many saw their search as a "spiritual search" to find broader horizons from which to judge their lives and end the warring of cultural scripts. These participants were consciously embracing the crossroads as a transformative opportunity by registering for the course, *Transforming Working and Living*.

### Restorative Learning

Throughout the course, the participants clearly stated that they did not transform their fundamental principles and values as transformative learning theory often supposes. Through their self-reflections, most of the participants echoed Dan in saying that they were able to return to their inner compass, which was submerged under the deluge of adult expectations, cultural scripts, and workplace practices: "I'm starting to get it back. . . . [It] didn't need much clarification; it was my bedrock, my foundation, on which I have based decisions in my life." The participants made it clear that their ethics of "honesty, integrity, fairness, courage, respect, loyalty, community service, and citizen responsibility" did not require transformation but restoration to a rightful place in their lives and in society at large. Contrary to various social analyses, these ethics were not missing among these participants but had been submerged. Gena explained that, as a kid,

I've always had hope for a better world. . . . [I want to] live freedom by living certain principles, certain qualities, to fulfill a certain mission, dedicate oneself to something noble and worthy . . . [like] contributing to making a larger community/ecosphere a better place.

Sally also rediscovered important parts of herself:

I think maybe some of that energy and vitality is something that I used to have in my youth and just simply got covered up with doing for the family and doing for my husband and sacrificing. . . . I've been able, through that course, to give up those feelings of martyrdom. . . . [I am going through] probably a time of transformation. . . . [The course] has helped me to sort through the maze and fog and find my inner self.

These ethics and return to the inner self gave them a platform of stability that guided them through the upheavals of negotiating transformation in their work or home lives. Reacquaintance with their deepest values also provided openness, rather than the usual resistance, as we engaged in a critique of global economic relations.

Adult education as an ethical sanctuary. One part of restorative learning was to provide an ethical sanctuary for participants to heighten their ethical consciousness, reidentify their priorities, and find ways to animate this. In her journal, Kate wrote,

Good work for me is something that is consistent with who I am and what I believe; mindful of the natural world and my impact on it; part of a "community" of others with a common purpose; helping others better themselves, while at the same time allowing me to have a healthy body, attitude and quality life with my family.

In her daily examination of her workplace, she began to question "everything for economic gain. . . . I keep thinking about purpose, purpose of work, and I analyze everything I do based on this: Who's benefiting?" Offended by the loss in decision-making power, patriarchy, and policy manipulation benefiting corporate customers and burdening homeowners, she gave voice to her fundamental ethical conflict. By reidentifying the importance of her preschool children, Kate reduced her work hours and eventually quit her position as a protest against the ethical compromises needed to stay. She now works on contract doing educational work for a climate-change consortium that better expresses her professional ethics and training.

Radical relatedness. A second part of restorative learning was to restore an organic or radical relatedness to time, space, body, and relationships. Through various activities, the participants began to relearn organic time, contemplative practices, energy-conserving activities like adequate rest and sleep, and noncommodified simple pleasures. Through experiences of late-night silence, star gazing, and reflective candlelight moments, Dan suggested, "Life is a grand adventure, full of mystery. . . . I lost that sense of wonder for a long time, but I'm starting to get it back." Many of the participants relearned how to play in wild spaces, as they knew how to do as children. This was a restoration of important relationships to self and environment. They also decluttered their physical and mental spaces and opted to expand their social, not monetary, wealth. As people saw themselves embedded in their bodies, a social world, a species, a natural world, and a larger cosmos, they moved beyond anthropocentric worldviews and humanist moralities to a much larger horizon of significance. Some of them had the experience of deep awareness and participation in the creative dynamics of a living universe. After the retreat and significant visualization and outdoor activities, Sally reflected, "We are so connected to this planet Earth. The ancient feeling and dreams from long, long ago are still in us."

### Transformative Learning

Broadened horizons. As the participants restored their ethics and energy, they lifted their sights away from the daily personal sphere and ego self onto broader ecological and global human concerns. At first, when the educational process moved into a socioeconomic analysis, some of the participants found it hard to integrate the new information on the global economy and the implications for middle-class Canadians. It was overwhelming and some expressed fear of this knowledge, as it challenged their media-saturated viewpoints and daily habits. This was the most difficult part of the educational process where anger and despair surfaced. Space was provided for despair and grieving, consistent with Macy (1998) and Fox's (1994) contention that this creates space for new life to arise. By the end of the course, as one aspect of their transformation, they began to think and act in ways they considered socially and ecologically responsible.

From having to being. A second aspect of transformation was the shift from the mode of having to the mode of being. Fromm (1976, 1989) defined this as an ontological journey from having, including consuming and grasping, to being, including a sense of relatedness. This was the most significant aspect of transformation—the realization that, beyond a certain point, material things do not add much to the quality of life and most often detract from it. The being orientation is, in Meister Eckhart's (cited in Fromm, 1976) words, where people should not consider so much what they are to do as what they are. Most of the participants felt pulled to a materially simple but socially and spiritually rich existence.

This was a central issue for Dan—to move from his white-picket-fence image of family and breadwinner success toward full, rounded relationships as the mark of a good person. Kate also struggled with the comfort of consumption. "Consumption may not be the answer," she said. "I need to work out my life so my needs are met internally rather than trying to meet them externally through consumption." In a few months she observed, "I have taken action to focus on people and relationships rather than 'things' and my work. . . . I feel more powerful."

By the end of the course, most of the participants reported that the cultural scripts they held for success, security, status, importance of paid work, life purpose, and fulfillment were redefined. For instance, Sally broke the connection between work for pay and life purpose. As a support person with little power in her workplace, she moved beyond the notion that work defines a person and provides one's identity:

I think the most significant [part] was the mind opening thought that you can separate your work for pay from your true work. That to me was astounding! That I can have other things that are more meaningful for me to do, that can identify who I am.

She reclaimed her life purpose by embracing the archetypal mother that was present in many of her dreams. Given her empty nest, she transformed her notion of mothering by becoming active in her union to fight for equal pay and against the exploitation of women in professional support positions.

Sally also broke the connection between material goods as being the signifier of a fulfilled, successful life. She saw conspicuous consumption not as an ideal to reach for but an addiction to break. She said, it was important "to know that the affluent people in the latest fashion styles are robbing other human beings of the basic needs of food, shelter, and clothing" as a way to break her consumptive desires. Similarly, many of the participants reduced/changed their consumption patterns according to the principles of social justice and bioregional sourcing of goods and services.

Gena also made radical changes in her lifestyle regarding consumption. She exclaimed,

What I found, interestingly, is that when I began this course I thought sustainability was way outside what I was looking for. . . . Now, it's like, YES, this is how it can be. . . . I am still able to do the work I've been doing, but in a whole new way.

She is now learning how to blend the concept of sustainability into her multimedia educational work. Dan added, "[I need to] try to think and experience outside the narrow Western civilization box [I] normally dwell in. . . . This is a transformation . . . subtle, profound, deep inside." Dan reidentified the love he had for his city of birth and took up volunteer educational work with an environmental group advocating sustainable city policies.

As described above, the being orientation centered around a renewed sense of relationships—both intimate and global. In a visualization exercise, the image of a loon on a mountain lake surfaced for Gena. Jungian von Franz (1964) explained that, when a profound change is occurring, symbols related to crossing over water and animal figures may appear. In pondering the meaning of the loon and water, Gena wrote in her journal,

It appeals to my belief in the connectedness of all things. . . . Guess it gives me a sense of place. . . .

[Its] time to broaden my scope . . . to communicate on another level . . . beyond the personal level. . . . To me, the walls and structure (my security) are breaking down around me. Growth is easier to see, because it really feels to me like I just burst through the clouds and now there's this whole new world where I am. . . . Growth in desire to be of service, that's what I wanted to do as a kid, was serve. . . . Growth in feelings of connectedness/community. . . . Growth in global thinking-how the pieces connect to the whole.

From this experience, she went on to write a compelling mission statement on diversity that has led her into public action within the gay/lesbian community.

As the power of the interlocking cultural messages around work and life began to erode and as the participants began to break through the property structures embedded in their consumptive lifestyles and thinking, the ego boundaries faded to a more expansive and primal connection with life-giving forces. Deep ecologists (Naess, 1986) call this the forming of an ecological self. Fromm (1976) called this "the process of mutual alive relatedness," in which one overcomes the barrier of separateness between I and the Other to participate in the "dance of life" (pp. 87-88). Paul Tillich (1952) considered this the paradox of the "courage to be." The human task most commonly forgotten in a having-oriented society is affirming the self-as-world. The self is at once itself but, fundamentally, all other things. It does not just belong to the world; it is the world. Tillich called this the courage to participate and be a part of a group, a movement, of life itself.

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

### The Dialectic of Restorative and Transformative Learning

In a world that privileges change for change's sake, there has been less consideration in the literature of what needs to be preserved and recovered other than what is proposed by right-wing conservative thinkers. The reification of change is an extreme modernist assumption itself. Ecological educator Bowers (1995) suggested that this belief in big change as always progressive, even among the most radical thinkers, perpetuates some of the deepest and most destructive cultural patterns in modern culture. What is considered most enlightened and liberating may actually be that which is most problematic.

Transformation is usually considered

empowerment . . . [as it] relates to the potential for change within the individual's deeper structures of sedimented knowledge. . . . The problem we face is how to disturb these deeper layers of calcified experience in order to enable meaningful deep change to take place and new kinds of structures to develop. . . . For change to occur in a meaningful way, this bedrock of calcified experience and understanding needs to be disturbed. . . . [They need] a gradual and protected examination and destabilization of their internal core. . . . For many it is a traumatic awakening into a scream of consciousness where the familiar daily routines . . . become discordant symbols of the conflicts between the surface (articulated) and deep (unarticulated) levels of knowing. With the right support, change can occur in a constructive way. (Sanger, 1990, pp. 174-175)

Although Sanger was referring to the sedimented ideas that teachers hold about their teaching practice, this notion that the deepest, sedimented experience needs to be transformed as part of healthy adult development is an assumption that undergirds much of transformation theory.

This assumption is problematic as are related assumptions such as the reconstruction of individuals/organizations/societies; the privileging of cognitive transformation; the psychologizing of social relations; the autonomous, cosmopolitan, expressive individual as an isolated actor; and the anthropocentrism that regards humans as the primary agents in the universe. As summarized by E. Taylor (1998), transformation theory, as theorized predominately by Mezirow, contains three themes of the centrality of individual experience, critical reflection, and rational discourse. In this view, the facilitator's role is to consciously disrupt the integrity of taken-for-granted assumptions and

interpretations of experience to bring to light contradictions and thereby facilitate the move toward inclusive, permeable, integrated-meaning perspectives.

However, one of the most significant discoveries in this study was not disruption but the restoration of the participant's foundational ethics to a conscious place in their daily lives. All the basic ethics that people were taught and need to know, as learned in kindergarten (Fulghum, 1993), were submerged as horizons of significance over the adult life course. Restoring these learnings grounded the participants so they could withstand the disorienting aspects of transformation and remain open to threatening new knowledge. Restorative learning was an empowering starting point that tapped old ways of being and helped the participants overcome alienating social relations in which they were embedded including disillusionment, fragmentation, exploitation, and meaningless work.

Herein lies the dialectical nature of transformative and restorative learning: As the participants recovered suppressed values/ethics and forgotten relations (restoration), they engaged in a critique of dominant cultural values and embraced new values related to the concept of sustainability (transformation). As the participants restored forgotten relationships and submerged ethics, they transformed their worldview, habits of mind, and social relations. These relationships and ethics were reintegrated in a way that augments the transformative process.

#### Midlife Crisis as Alienated Social Relations

To return to the beginning of the study, the participants described their arrival at the crossroads as a midlife crisis. However, a midlife crisis can be considered a manifestation of alienated social relations. Modern notions of freedom are predicated on the right to depart from traditional moral horizons and to determine personal convictions (C. Taylor, 1991). Expressive individualism promotes the drive to be and do as much as we can. According to popular literature, the cure for the midlife crisis is to become authentic (Sheehy, 1976). When personal experiences of disillusionment and fragmentation accumulate, midlife transition becomes a time to center on the development needs of the self. It is suggested that authenticity is best expressed by reshaping your job, daily activities, relationships, and material things to best express your unique self. This is a materialist definition of authenticity that is predicated on the mode of having, indicative of capitalist property relations. This is how Dan confused his principles with the white-picket-fence lifestyle and how Kate contused adult autonomy and success with acquiring a job, a spouse, a house, and kids. Thus, the crisis of democracy and crisis of midlife are alienated social relations that are connected through the lack of a larger horizon of meaning beyond the acquisitive self and paid work. In this way, midlife crisis theories do not account for the larger social context that shapes this psychological phenomenon.

Similarly, the educational process used in this study can appear individualistic. However, it acknowledges that participants need to address their personal dilemmas and see hopeful alternatives before they can move into global socioeconomic analysis and eventually find individual and collective avenues for civic action. The dialectical process of restorative and transformative learning illustrates that perhaps an effective education process for sustainability embraces the individualism that permeates current consciousness and encourages the transformation of individualism to a broader horizon of significance and an expanded sense of self.

Current longitudinal research on these initial and subsequent course participants shows that this educational process helped to unleash the energy and direction required for citizen action. Over the 5 years since the course, many of the participants have become involved in voluntary and community-based activities, particularly environmental and justice organizations, which they understand as an expression of their desire for a sustainable society. Current data gathering is focusing on the nature of the connection between the course and subsequent civic action. Interestingly, the participants are now creating an educational institute for sustainability education and are initiating several community-action projects. The participants continue to claim that they have a new rhythm between having, doing, and being, and often, after 2 years, they find that they have significantly repositioned themselves in their social and economic relations. Thus, the research continues to point to a process of moving from individualism and no civic action to individual civic action and then to collective civic action.

## The Professionalizing of Citizen Action

Finally, let us return to the primary purpose of this study—to determine an effective transformative learning process for revitalizing citizen action. To make a difference is to see oneself as a creator that can cause something to exist or occur. Seeing a reflection of oneself in the world is evidence of having been in the world and having mattered. This doing of the right thing or good is what imparts meaning to existence and provides what C. Taylor (1989) called a horizon of significance. In this way, ethical action provides a sense of identity. Given a sense of futility in the public sphere and given the increasing time and work pressures experienced in all spheres of life, most of these middle-class participants had projected their ethical identities and civic responsibilities onto their job. Most of the participants strongly believed that if they found the right job they would be able to make a difference in society and enact their professional and personal ethics. This belief was held by the various levels of workers—from managers and professionals to support staff. It is this belief that has so significantly undercut civic action in social movements or other arenas in civil society.

When citizens are typified as passive and narcissistic, it is an analysis that is also embedded in alienated social relations. Passivity and narcissism are more a sign of alienation and marginalization from the public square through professionalized civic action than individual failing. It is also a sign of an incomplete analysis that does not account for the desires of many citizens to take part in meaningful public interaction and that uses the autonomous individual as the analytical reference point.

Further, when the intention for civic responsibility is located in the workplace, it becomes controlled and disciplined as the workplace evolves within the larger economic context of neo-liberal policies to further privilege the politics of power, the business of money, and the hierarchies of status. Unable to voice and enact ethically responsible actions in the workplace, the culture of silence and disillusionment grows. Adult educators can insert transformative pedagogies into this culture of silence to challenge these assumptions and the illusions that perpetuate the professionalizing of civic action. However, without a concomitant transformation toward sustainable lifestyles, there will be no room in people's lives for civic involvement.

## SIGNIFICANCE AND CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, there is no shortage of literature that critiques the dynamics of economic neo-liberalism, proposes a new social order built on sustainability and participatory democracy, and delineates an educational agenda to engender these commitments (Bowers, 1995; Korten, 1999; Mander & Goldsmith, 1996; O'Sullivan, 1999). Yet, there is a lack of literature on the learning processes that bridge the what is with the what could be beyond modernist formulations. The dialectic of transformative and restorative learning is vital, for it affirms that transformation is not just an epistemological process involving a change in world view and habits of thinking; it is also an ontological process where participants experience a change in their being in the world including their forms of relatedness. As Chilean neuroscientist Humberto Maturana proposed, the process of knowing is the process of life (Capra, 1996). The inner world of concepts is entwined with behavioral coordination and social context that are co-emergent. Thus, as participants restore their ethics and transform their interaction with their material, social, and physical realities, they seek avenues for getting involved in community issues that enact their sense of social and environmental responsibility. Krishnamurti (1981) stated, when your mind, your heart, your whole being becomes totally aware of being all and of the fluidity of all things, then you have broken the program of disillusionment, fragmentation, and alienation. Theories about the crisis of democracy and midlife crisis point to some of the deepest levels of alienation in Western society. Together, restorative and transformative learning processes can address this alienation and point to what living and working could mean—for individuals, for human communities, and for us as only one species on this Earth. This enlarges and enriches our view of transformative learning beyond modernist conceptions in this new, millennial moment.

### [Sidebar]

ADULT EDUCATION QUARTERLY, Vol. 54 No. 2, February 2004 121-139

DOI: 10.1177/0741713603260276

© 2004 American Association for Adult and Continuing Education

## **[Footnote]**

### NOTES

1. The term critical transformative learning is used to position the understanding of transformative learning within the heritage of critical pedagogy.
2. Sustainability is most commonly understood as ecological sustainability whereby the demands placed on the environment by human society can be met without reducing the capacity of the environment to provide for future generations (Hawken, 1993). Sustainability is distinct from sustainable development, which attempts to rationalize economic growth with minor green adjustments. For this study, the notion of sustainability was redefined holistically to include ecological as well as personal and community sustainability.

## **[Reference]**

### REFERENCES

- Allman, P. (1999). *Revolutionary social transformation*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.
- Allman, P., & Wallis, J. (1990). Praxis: Implications for "really" radical education. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 22(1), 14-30.
- Barndt, D. (1989). *Naming the moment: Political analysis for action-a manual for community groups*. Toronto, Canada: Jesuit Centre for Social Faith and Justice.
- Bohm, D. (1980). *Wholeness and the implicate order*. London: Routledge.
- Borgmann, A. (1992). *Crossing the postmodern divide*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bowers, C. A. (1995). *Educating for an ecologically sustainable culture*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Bowers, C. A. (1997). *The culture of denial*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Capra, F. (1996). *The web of life*. New York: Anchor Doubleday Books.
- Carson, T., & Sumara, D. (Eds.). (1997). *Action research as living practice*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Cunningham, P. (1992). From Freire to feminism: The North American experience with critical pedagogy. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 42(3), 180-191.
- Fox, M. (1994). *The reinvention of work: A new vision of livelihood for our time*. New York: Harper San Francisco.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Seabury Press.
- Fromm, E. (1976). *To have or to be?* New York: Continuum.
- Fromm, E. (1989). *The art of being*. New York: Continuum.
- Fulghum, R. (1993). *All I really need to know I learned in kindergarten*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Harrison, T., & Kachur, J. (1999). *Contested classrooms: Education, globalization, and democracy in Alberta*. Edmonton, Canada: University of Alberta Press & Parkland Institute.
- Hawken, P. (1993). *The ecology of commerce: A declaration of sustainability*. New York: Harper Business.
- Hobsbawm, E. (1994). *The age of extremes: A history of the world, 1914-1991*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Korten, D. (1999). *The post-corporate world: Life after capitalism*. San Francisco & Hartford, CT: Berrett-Koehler & Kumarian Press.
- Krishnamurti, J. (1981). *The network of thought*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.
- Lange, E. (2001). *Living transformation: From midlife crisis to restoring ethical space*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada.
- Lasch, C. (1979). *The culture of narcissism*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Macy, J. (1998). *Coming back to life: Practices to reconnect our lives, our world*. Gabriola Island, British Columbia: New Society Publishers.
- Mander, J., & Goldsmith, E. (1996). *The case against the global economy: And for a turn toward the local*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.
- Mayo, P. (1999). *Gramsci, Freire and adult education*. London: Zed Books.
- McTaggart, R. (1997). *Participatory action research*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Naess, A. (1986). Self-realization: An ecological approach to being in the world. In J. Seed, J. Macy, P. Fleming, & A. Naess, *Thinking like a mountain* (pp. 19-31). Gabriola Island, British Columbia: New Society Publishers.
- Ollman, B. (1971). *Alienation: Marx's conception of man in capitalist society*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- O'Sullivan, E. (1999). *Transformative learning: Educational vision for the 21st century*. London: Zed Books.
- Sanger, J. (1990). Awakening a scream of consciousness: The critical group in action research. *Theory Into Practice*, 29(3), 174-178.

- Saul, J. R. (1995). *The unconscious civilization*. Concord, Canada: House of Anansi Press.
- Sheehy, G. (1976). *Passages: Predictable crises of adult life*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Spencer, B. (1998). *The purposes of adult education*. Toronto, Canada: Thompson Educational Publishing, Inc.
- Taylor, C. (1989). *Sources of the self*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Taylor, C. (1991). *The malaise of modernity*. Concord, Canada: House of Anansi Press.
- Taylor, E. (1998). *The theory and practice of transformative learning: A critical review* (ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Training for Employment, Information Series No. 374). Columbus, OH: Office of Educational Research and Improvement.
- Tillich, P. (1952). *The courage to be*. London: Fontana Library.
- von Franz, M. L. (1964). *The process of individuation*. In C. Jung (Ed.), *Man and his symbols* (pp. 158-229). Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

**[Author Affiliation]**

ELIZABETH A. LANGE  
Athabasca University