CHAPTER 4.

THE NATURE AND PROCESSES OF TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

Chapter 4 considers the results of the research in relation to the first two of the four questions which formed the basis of the interviews with the practitioners and the participants and my own personal impressions recorded as participant observer in the F.A.L. program. These two questions deal with the perceptions those interviewed had of the nature of transformative learning and of the internal processes learners go through during transformative learning experiences. Chapter 5 considers the results of the research in relation to the two remaining questions which address more practical issues associated with perceptions of the procedures or strategies seen to be helpful in facilitating transformative learning and the implications answers to the first three questions might have for understanding better the learning process.

As indicated previously, in presenting the results of the research and commenting upon them the actual names of the practitioners have been used, with their permission, because of their acknowledged status as adult educators and because of their contribution to the literature in the field, significant elements of which have been referred to in Chapter 2. However, in regard to the participants with whom I was involved as a participant observer over six days in a program characterised by great trust and a deep sense of group confidentiality first names only have been used and they are not the real names of the persons concerned. I have altered and mixed minor details about them in order to ensure their anonymity. Women's names have, however, been given to the women, and men's names to the men. In all cases, the number which appears after the name and colon at the end of each quotation is the sequential number assigned to that paragraph of the interview by QSR NUD*IST. For my own personal reflections recorded at the end of each of the six days of the FAL program, the number 1 after "John" and before the number of the paragraph means days one and two of FAL, 2 means days three and four, and 3 means days five and six.

THE NATURE OF TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

Based upon responses to the first question on the nature of transformative learning there was a substantial level of general agreement amongst both practitioners and participants expressed each in his/her own way that transformative learning represents a uniquely personal way of looking at a particular aspect of how adults learn. Those interviewed spoke of transformative learning as liberating and emancipatory and often more personally demanding than what they described as "normal" learning. Newman, one of the practitioners, focused on this aspect of transformative learning, distinguishing it from other more "normal" ways of learning.

> The normal way is to learn a few more skills, get a bit more information, but the persons who gain the skills, who get the information, remain unchanged. They are enhanced, become more skilful, or with new skills, but they remain who they are (Newman: 110).

Boud made a very similar point, also using the word "normal" to illustrate his point:

> If you have problems you solve them within the normal framework that you have adopted. But for a shift in your assumptions, you've got to have something come along and throw you off course as it were. It's different learning (Boud: 97).

For Sean, a participant, "it works in an inverse way to the normal process, you're beginning with the senses and you work your way through" (Sean: 46). Geraldine found it to be "the most frustrating experience, being challenged ... I was just operating out of my normal way of behaviour which was to give orders and tell people what to do (Geraldine: 6).

There was, however, a distinct difference between practitioners and participants in their willingness and ability to use the specific terminology which in the literature has become associated with transformative learning. Whereas practitioners were aware of and prepared to discuss theoretical concepts using the terminology that has been developed in the literature, and particularly by Mezirow, this was not nearly so evident in the interviews with the participants. For example, the seven practitioners, during the interviews, used the term "transformative learning" 154 times but the seven participants (including myself as a

participant) used it only 44 times - individual interviews being all of much the same length, about one hour. For "perspective transformation" the figures were 24 uses for the seven practitioners and four for the seven participants. The even more technical term "meaning perspectives" was used only three times in all during the interviews, twice by Mezirow in my interview with him, once by myself and not at all by others, either practitioners or participants. The term "meaning schemes" was used twice only, by Mezirow. This is perhaps not surprising, given the lack of exposure of participants especially to the finer points of the theoretical literature. I found that participants on the whole, however, were able to demonstrate their understanding of the idea of transforming assumptions and inculturated ways of considering experience which they recognised as different from "normal" learning, but without using a highly specific terminology.

In illustrating the way in which they saw transformative learning as "different", practitioners were consistent in relating Mezirow's concepts of instrumental, communicative and transformative learning (1989, p. 174; 1990, p. 8-9) to Habermas' theory of technical, practical and emancipatory interests (Mezirow: 80; Boud: 212; Walker: 182). When questioned on the distinction between the three domains of learning, however, Mezirow made it clear during the interview that he now believed the term transformative could be applied to instances of learning which were "technical" or "instrumental".

> I'll use an example of a group of engineers who were getting together to try to improve a paint brush .. the nylon bristles of the paint brush, to make it work better. And they were unable to really figure out how to improve it because it didn't work very well. Until somebody stepped back and produced a metaphor and said 'Let's re-define the problem by saying, it's like a pump'. That's transformative learning too
> (Mezirow: 45).

He went on to explain his current thinking in the area:

> The learning that takes place in either of the first two categories, instrumental and communicative, can either be transformative or not transformative. The notion that there's some entirely separate theory of learning that's transformative learning, I think was an original error on his [Habermas'] part which I picked up and repeated in some early writings. So in my view you should be clear about that, that essentially I see all of these as complementary forms of learning (Mezirow: 47).

Mezirow's comments here constitute confirmation of a substantial broadening of the concept of transformative learning which he had stated first in an article he contributed to Brookfield's anthology *Self-directed Learning: From Theory to Practice* (1985). Mezirow repeated the assertion in his "Response to Collard and Law" (1989) quoted in Chapter 2 (p. 52). I return to this issue in Chapter 6

The idea of a type of learning relating directly to the emancipatory interest only and resulting in transformation of personal assumptions and frames of reference seemed to both practitioners and participants to be something which in their experience did characterise certain instances of quite significant learning in adult life. Tennant for example, whilst maintaining that transformative learning did not constitute a discrete and overarching theory of learning nevertheless acknowledged that coming to terms with deeply held psycho-cultural assumptions was different in kind from instrumental and communicative learning and that it was often a very profound experience:

> I think transformative learning is obviously something that does happen to people. It's not always the result of educational intervention, but often it is. It's a bringing to the surface, bringing to conscious awareness, thoughts and feelings, assumptions and so on for the purpose of exploring and perhaps ultimately changing them. And you can have people changing in quite dramatic ways (Tennant: 181)

Walker agreed and pointed to the significant influence upon contemporary thinking about adult learning of Mezirow's concept of the identification and transformation of psycho-cultural assumptions:

> I feel that transformative learning is a type of learning that focuses much more on the learner, not just in terms of awareness of what is happening, but awareness of why it is happening. We are all shaped by our past history and our inculturation into particular groups. So it seems to me that transformative learning is working at that level. It is not just about the acquisition of new knowledge, it includes integration of new knowledge into the personal foundation of the experience of the person (Walker: 5).

The six FAL participants, as indicated above, although they were largely unfamiliar with the specialised theoretical language of transformative learning did seem to grasp and accept its reality as a form of adult learning which was of a different order from other more

"normal" learning, and which in hindsight they had observed as personally transforming at certain times in their own lives and in the lives of others. In contrast with the practitioners, however, they preferred to use more colloquial language and to describe what they meant through illustration and personal experience. Jane, for example, described a specific or particular change corresponding to Mezirow's 1991 definition of a meaning scheme - "meaning schemes serve as specific habits of expectation" (Mezirow 1991, p. 35) - and then indicated that in her view this could lead to a much more significant transformation - a whole new way of looking at things: "It's not just learning how to read or something like that, that's not what it's about. It leads to changing your whole perspective, changing your whole attitude (Jane: 4).

Two other participants, Geraldine and Marion, also referred to very significant changes in their personal ways of looking at things. Geraldine (112) emphasised how profound the experience was because it "brought to the surface" ideas which she believed had been present in her consciousness for a long time, but had gone unrecognised.

> It was basically ingrained. And I can remember somewhere in this period of turmoil in my life working out that I had never really believed it [a condemnatory attitude to homosexuality]. And that was the strangest feeling for me. It was maybe that 'Aha!' sort of experience Ross talks about. Where I knew it was something that I'd known all along but that I had never known up in this part of my brain. It was something, well, deep down (Geraldine: 113).

The learning Geraldine refers to here seems clearly more profound than the initial change Jane was speaking about above.

Marion too stressed the profound nature of a particular transformation of assumptions which she had experienced, and added that her feelings were strongly involved:

> And there's a real temptation, ohn, to feel a failure, a real temptation - the whole idea of rejection ... as part of the transformative learning process. For me there was rejection. But once the feelings got out of the way I was dealing with the nitty gritty of things, and the logic started to appear, and the reality. I made a big decision. You get to a stage where you think, 'I can't go on like this any longer!' (Marion: 33)

It is possible, of course, that Marion here was simply using the term "transformative" because it was part of the question and because Keane had referred to the concept so often. This has to be taken into account. Nevertheless, Geraldine and Marion do seem to agree with the practitioners that, based upon their experience, there is a significant form of learning which involves reassessment of the personal assumptions and values out of which people operate and that recognising this can be a difficult but valuable experience. It seemed for them to be learning of a quite different order compared with the external and incidental changes associated with normal or "normative" learning. Through it they had each come to entirely new personal perspectives in certain areas and this learning had for them a validity derived from critical reappraisal. In reflecting upon my own experience on the third day of the F.A.L. program I noted that I had myself experienced something very similar:

> I took a bit of a risk today and told the group a personal story, about how years ago I'd been more or less humbled by a fifteen year old who stood up to me publicly as a young deputy principal in a school. It was very off-putting at the time but I told them how after reflection and a bit of pain I'd somehow learned from that kid - that students in schools have rights too. So the stronger the hold, the deeper the value or assumption, the more disorienting the experience of confronting it. Or having it confronted by others. My reaction of 'flaring up' was in hindsight almost a sign of authenticity - that my previous response had been deeply embedded in my values system (John 2: 66).

Several of those interviewed raised the question of whether any learning at all involving change could reasonably and consistently be described as "transformative". Did it depend upon the nature of the learning, or how profound the transformation was, or is the level of emotion the significant factor? Boud for example expressed difficulties with Mezirow's 1985 extension of transformative learning to include certain forms of instrumental learning. He asked:

> Is a little transformation OK or do you have to have a complete lifestyle change for it to be regarded as legitimate transformative learning? You as outsider might think it's transformative, for that person it's just another increment along the same path (Boud: 47).

Jane, one of the participants, was quite graphic in her description of how profound one of her learning experiences was:

> To say it was disorienting would be putting it mildly. I found it really upsetting, I was - what's the term I'm looking for? I felt as though I'd sort of had something slapped right in my face" (Jane: 31)

On the same issue of how profound transformation of personal assumptions can be Tennant was quite definite that he thought the change in an individual's perspectives had to be profound if it were to be described as transformative:

> Well, I think it's learning ... that results in a fundamental change in a person's world view, if you like. I suppose that's the essence of it. It's quite rare learning, to change one's world view. ... I think of it as a fundamental change of world view (Tennant: 131).

When I raised this with Mezirow, he agreed that transformation amounting to a change in world view was "perhaps the most significant learning adults do".

> Transformative learning in my terminology is learning that involves a transformation of one's frame of reference and as you know a frame of reference is described by me as a set of assumptions through which we interpret our experience (Mezirow: 6). ... So transformative learning is simply that, it's learning, it's significant learning, perhaps the most significant learning adults do and it has to do with the transformation of frames of reference (Mezirow 12).

In contrast with Mezirow's extension of the meaning of the term transformative learning in 1985 to the areas of instrumental and communicative learning, something he repeated in the interview I had with him (Mezirow: 47, quoted above p. 110), there was general agreement amongst both practitioners and participants that transformative learning does represent a recognisably different and more personal form of learning which virtually all of the individuals interviewed had experienced at certain times. The key to the difference in their view was that it considers learning from the perspective of the learner first and what the learner already knows rather than from the perspective of new knowledge to be acquired. It involves an increased awareness of the self that influences what individuals learn, what they are prepared to let in, what they filter out. It is often accompanied by

feelings of embarrassment, discomfort and even anger at times, arising from confrontation with personal assumptions about how the world is, or how it ought to be.

The people I interviewed distinguished this form of learning from other more "technical" (Habermas), "instrumental" (Mezirow), or "normal" (Newman, Boud) learning and saw it as provoked by circumstances in which their meaning perspectives, certain accepted personal roles and boundaries which to that point have been unchallenged were suddenly under scrutiny. The fact that in comparison with the practitioners participants preferred to use anecdotes and examples rather than theoretical language to describe very similar experiences in its own way supports the validity of what has been written by the practitioners and others. What the interviews also seemed to affirm, however, was that transformation of assumptions is rarely something which merely occurs, it is often triggered by some personal shock, a disorienting dilemma to use Mezirow's term, and there needs to be some deliberate intellectual process involving identification of the relevant assumptions followed by critical reflection and analysis. It was a form of learning which involved personal transformation.

Personal transformation

The interviews affirmed for me the view consistently expressed in the literature that critical reflection is a significant element in learning for personal transformation, and that it involves more than simply recalling and reflecting upon experience. As was pointed out in Chapter 2, critical reflection does represent a critical revisiting of one's experience (Schon 1983, 1987) but it entails reflection as well upon the self as having the experience. In my interview with him Mezirow made this distinction very clear, describing the nature of critical reflection and distinguishing between its objective and subjective elements.

> I make a distinction in regard to critical reflection between what I call objective reframing, dealing with experience ... and subjective reframing in which we look at our own frames of reference, our own ways of understanding. And we ask ourselves questions about how we arrived at these understandings, what is the context in which they were learned, and what are the consequences of our thinking this way (Mezirow: 28).

Newman agreed with this comment, referring to Mezirow's "subjective reframing" and describing it as "a form of meta-reflection, reflecting on reflection, becoming aware of our awareness" (Newman: 181). Keane agreed, using a very similar term "meta-awareness" - meta being applied in this sense as something over and above normal awareness, as the term is used in "meta-physics" (Keane: 9), standing back, taking the broad view of both learner and learning, with everything up for scrutiny. It is a form of learning which both Keane and Newman saw as requiring a great deal of honesty.

Mezirow's distinction between objective and subjective reframing (28) was supported by the experience of Jane, a participant, who used a personal anecdote to describe how for her a particularly disorienting experience had led to critical questioning and self-scrutiny.

> In the meantime of course I questioned myself, I questioned what peoples' perceptions of me were and tried to bring it all together, to have the whole picture. And coming to grips with who I am was very painful. I don't know that I ... well I didn't like who I was at first. But I've come to grips with that and I understand myself better And because I understand myself better ... It made me evaluate how I was with people and what I did and how I did it. And I've changed (Jane: 35).

Sean, a participant, also recognised the subjective element in critical reflection, and its relationship to transformative learning: "It (transformative learning) is about your being conscious of yourself as an operating person, and taking responsibility for yourself and what you're doing" (Sean: 259). My own reflection on the issue at the end of the very first day of the program was very similar, and it re-emphasised my previous belief that assumptions, if unchallenged, may prevent our learning new and more relevant ways of thinking and acting :

> I began to see that critical reflection can often lead to a breakthrough, particularly about how my values and expectations can prevent me from seeing the full picture. And being over-defensive for example may stop me focusing on the real issues out there. Maybe people in such circumstances - it's not confined to me - need to say 'Now why is it that I always seem to react in this particularly inappropriate way?' (John 1: 66).

Both participants and practitioners saw transformative learning as involving critical appraisal of assumptions and values, but such critical reflection was not merely the result

of reflection upon objective experience but more importantly of subjective and critical reflection upon oneself, either voluntarily or in response to some personal crisis or confrontation. Because transformative learning is learning associated with the self they saw their personal egos as involved, including their sense of self. People reported feeling strongly about such learning experiences, which confirms Mezirow's statements (1978, 1981, 1991) about transformative learning being often disorienting, painful and embarrassing. In the experience of my informants, identifying, critically reflecting upon and transforming psycho-cultural assumptions was a profound experience because it was almost invariably an emotionally charged experience.

Transformative learning - an emotional experience

During my interview with him Nelson put forward the view that, based on his research, a way of judging how profound the impact of a transformative learning experience might be was to consider the level of emotion associated with it:

> Some of them (values, assumptions *etcetera*) of course can be small and affect only small things in our lives. Others may be quite fundamental in regard to directions, directions we're taking. On some people this has a type of corporeal, a visceral affect almost ... a kinaesthetic experience. The important thing is that it is often not cognitive at all. It doesn't have to be entirely, or even predominantly or even at all cognitive (Nelson: 50).

Whilst not ignoring the role of critical reflection, Nelson's statement here offers a quite different emphasis from Mezirow's ten largely cognitive steps (1981: 7; 1991: 169) about what is involved in transformative learning. It will be remembered from Chapter 2 (p.59) that Mezirow later added "with feelings of guilt and shame" to 2, and "building self-confidence" to 9 in his list of steps or phases. Participants on the whole supported the views of Nelson, Walker and Tennan ("It's quite rare learning" Tennant: 131) that personal re-appraisal of psycho-cultural assumptions and meaning perspectives was most likely to be a profound and relatively rare experience and one accompanied by significant levels of emotion. They also believed also that the depth of the emotion experienced was likely to be related to how fundamental the challenge to inculturated assumptions was. Marion, in

reference to her own experience of personal reappraisal emphasised the involvement of strong feelings:

> And you get stressed too John, when it's going on and you've got to think about yourself. I've got to think about myself and my position. And it's not just selfishness, it's not that at all. I think it's honesty and you've got to have time, you know to recognise this is important for me (Marion: 141).

Jane too spoke of how personal assumptions about what was acceptable and what was not in her view of the world and her place in it had affected both herself and her professional performance. For her, as for Nelson, assumptions about the self were accompanied by strong emotion which stretched back into her socialisation in childhood.

> I can remember so many times when I was young my mother telling me that I was too independent for my own good, that I was too secretive, I should not be a leader, I should not be bold, outspoken, very much so. That's why it upset me so much, because of my conditioning. It hurt. It was not nice being this person. A very small percentage of the population I was. But I don't feel like that any more. I'm quite content being me now; which is a big difference (Jane: 39).

During the F.A.L. program there were times when the facilitator (Keane) deliberately structured activities to get participants out of their "comfort zones", to get onto the agenda actual experiences that had personally demanding implications for them. In this way he demonstrated his conviction some acquisition of the nature of transformative learning might be possible experientially, even given the artificial conditions inseparable from a training program. My reflections at the time about one such incident on the second day show that I too, as a participant, was affected in this way:

> It was interesting that people said they found this (sustained meaningful communication without speech) a very powerful experience. ... Although they all said they felt awkward and gauche at the time, as I did, and hoped no-one they knew came in, it was clear there was some serious evaluation and testing of images of the self going on. Otherwise I think people wouldn't have spoken about it in such an animated fashion afterwards (John 1: 36-38).

What emerges from the above quotations in my view is that those interviewed believed that there is a form of learning which can involve quite significant re-appraisal of the self, of

one's assumptions and inculturated value systems, and that coming to terms with such re-appraisal can involve high levels of emotion and sometimes feelings of frustration and embarrassment. It was almost invariably described in the interviews as a very complex learning process. An additional on-going result which also emerged and to which I now turn was that even given the high levels of emotion, for many of those interviewed such transformative learning experiences resulted in learning which produced previously unexpected growth leading to feelings of liberation and emancipation.

Transformative learning - liberating and emancipatory

As outlined in Chapter 2, the word "emancipatory" in the literature of transformative learning derives through Mezirow (1978b; 1981) from Freire (1972) and especially from Habermas (1970; 1971). I found that, during the interviews the practitioners who have been amongst the most significant contributors to the literature used such terms as "emancipation", "escaping" and "liberation" in speaking of the effects of transformative learning. In their discussion of the nature of transformative learning it was noticeable how often both practitioners and participants used words such as "liberating", "freeing" and "emancipatory". All interviewees, for example, taken together, used the word "liberating" 29 times. In my personal reflections I used the word three times. Of the two groups, excluding myself, the seven practitioners used the word "liberating" eight times and the six participants used it 21 times. It was clearly a very important issue for them.

There was further information from the analysis of the use of the term "liberating" from a gender perspective. Of the 29 uses of the word made by all interviewees, 16 were made by the three women. This means 16 uses of the word "liberating" were made by the three women compared with 13 uses (of liberating) by the ten men (practitioners, participants and myself) interviewed. It seems reasonable on the basis of these figures to draw the conclusion that the concept of transformative learning as liberating was important to the participants, and particularly so to the women, even given their small number. The interviews do not indicate that the women were given any leading questions on this matter.

The tone of Jane's comment quoted in the previous paragraph is a good illustration of how one woman's re-evaluation of assumptions into which she had been inculturated in childhood was personally painful but had been dealt with in a way which she felt had been liberating for her and had led to a more appropriate and positive self-image with beneficial effects for her professional life. Many interviewees, both practitioners and participants, made use of other powerful images and symbols to convey the concept of personal liberation associated with learning they found transformative. Walker for example said (italics mine in all cases): that

> there are implications in terms of facilitation, for *breaking learners out of constraining frameworks* , which are quite important in today's society. There is a liberating, emancipatory dimension to it that we all need, which is quite important in today's world (Walker: 180).

Newman's description of the same phenomenon was couched in similar terms - "So the idea of perspective transformation is it provides ... the opportunity to escape from the trap of reliving our history (Newman: 179).

When one considers the participants, Geraldine for example used a metaphor similar to that used Walker and Newman.

> Liberating is a really key word. ... I had this image in my mind *of being in shackles* for some reason. It was the most fantastic feeling for me when I started doing that counselling course and somebody said at some stage, 'You don't have to have all the answers'. Because for me that was one of my basic presumptions or assumptions ... I believed that being a parent you had to have all the answers. So when somebody said to me, you don't have to ... I just came out walking on air. I just thought, that's fantastic! (Geraldine: 107).

Marion's description of transformation in her own life makes the same point, using a different metaphor but one just as vivid.

> Yes, as I've said ... I haven't looked back. It was really liberating. It's been liberating for me because *I'm no longer in her shadow. And I was in her shadow.* It's got to make sense or it won't be liberating. I suppose through the liberation you then get the courage to say 'OK I can do this, I can handle it' (Marion: 173).

My own reflections about this on day five of F.A.L. were similar. I referred to the use participants made of stories and films as metaphors of liberation.

> We then returned to the question of transformative learning or perspective transformation as liberating, freeing, emancipating. There was a lot of agreement about this in the group. Formally and informally. People talked about being bound by poor relationships, family problems, being single, losing one's job - bound by oneself. Examples from films came up, like *'Educating Rita'* and *'The Remains of the Day'*. How do some people get out of roles and are freed by doing so, while others are enslaved by them? (John 3: 34).

It seems therefore on the basis of the interviews that transformative learning in the experience of a considerable number of the practitioners and participants is associated with the potential at least for liberation and emancipation. Moreover the women interviewed who were all aged between 41 and 50 seemed to relate to this aspect of transformative learning even more strongly than the men. That is perhaps not surprising given the changes in our society in regard to the roles appropriate to women which have been occurring over the past thirty years, and which are still occurring. One recalls that Mezirow's first published work in the field arose from his research into women returning to formal education in mid-life (1978a, 1978b). The people interviewed for the present study were also interested in the negative consequences for them of not breaking out of the shadow of inculturated assumptions and value systems. A further significant development, moreover, was that several of those interviewed spoke of a more positive consequence of liberation, namely empowerment. The use of the term "empowerment" for them meant not merely "liberation from" but "liberation for", and many of the participants as well as the practitioners showed that this too was part of the learning experience for them. It merits further comment.

Transformative learning as personally empowering

During my interview with him, Keane spoke of his belief that one of the problems associated with neglecting transformative approaches to adult learning was the fact that merely delivering knowledge and skills often fails to "empower" learners in this positive

sense. He saw this as one of the potential strengths of an approach to learning which was concerned with identifying and critically reflecting upon the assumptions and habits of mind into which individuals had been socialised and inculturated. Of his approach in his own F.A.L. program he said

> You see it [transformative learning] is confrontational and it puts pressure on people because their expectations are pedagogical, namely that they have came to this course and paid their money and they expect the teacher to teach them. They think their job as participant is simply to write it all down. But it doesn't empower them, doesn't empower - they acquire knowledge, but they don't learn. If in effect transformative learning processes can be used to empower people to make better decisions, to be better at communicating with others then it has a special value that makes it worthwhile (Keane: 144).

I found that as a result of searching all the interviews using QSR NUD*IST there were several references in the interviews to the empowering aspect of identifying and coming to terms with inculturated assumptions and habits of mind. Geraldine certainly used it and although she may possibly have picked up the word from Keane's use of it the concept clearly had significance for her and she wanted to talk about it. She added other terms of her own - "exciting" , "energising" - which had similar connotations and she explained what they meant for her:

> I mean it's a learning experience, the work I do with parents ties into that but it's much more - I couldn't do what I'm doing now if I hadn't been through those bad times and I can see its strength, I can see its value. And I can see the energising effect it has on parents ... it's an empowering experience and that's exciting So for me when I talk about empowering it's about this wonderful feeling of satisfaction, 'Gee - I didn't think I could do that, and now I can do it. And I can help them do it!' (Geraldine: 165).

Jane too commented on her perception of the potential of processes of identifying and transforming assumptions and frames of reference in her work with adults. She said that

> to change, people need time, support and a supportive but challenging climate. They need to know that it's all right to make mistakes. I now look at any workshop/seminar that I'm involved in as a small part of a much larger process. Each participant will be on her own personal path of learning and my job is to be aware of and support her in that (Jane: 16).

My own comment on this issue as a participant observer recorded at the end of day five of the F.A.L. program was a further reflection on the concept of empowerment arising from considering what one has to learn from the perspective of one's own assumptions and perhaps one's ingrained prejudices on certain issues:

> I guess what they've all been saying is that the ability to empower other adults is much more important than teaching them new tricks. It's about empowering people through awareness, understanding, honesty and choice. And they were saying that the ability to empower others seems to have to come first of all from coming to terms with yourself (John 3: 37).

Cranton in her recently published volume (1994) refers to the importance of group work and discourse in leading to changes in perspective, noting that they have the potential at least to "provide a context that is supportive and empowering". She goes on to make the additional point that

> if rational discourse is a key component of working towards transformative learning as Mezirow argues, then it becomes clear that learner empowerment must accompany the entire process rather than be viewed as an outcome of transformed meaning perspectives (Cranton 1994, p. 45)

Cranton continues that the first responsibility of the educator in working towards transformative learning "is to establish and maintain a working environment in which the learner can become empowered" (Cranton 1994, p. 146). This is precisely what Jane was saying in the interview I had with her, as indicated above - "each participant will be on her own personal path of learning and my job is to be aware of and support her in that" (Jane: 16). Learner empowerment therefore implies "liberation for" new horizons, not merely "liberation from" limiting assumptions about what is possible in life and what is not. It is not only a consequence of transformed terms of personal reference, it needs to be characteristic of the process as far as learners are concerned. But are liberation and empowerment purely personal, or do they have community and social relevance as well? Is transformative learning a possible avenue for communal, political and social change?

Transformative learning in relation to collective and social transformation

As outlined in Chapter 2 the question of the social and communal implications of transformative learning is currently being debated at length in the literature. The issue in question is how broadly transformative learning should be considered and how radical its implications should be. As a criticism of Mezirow's work the issue has been raised repeatedly - by Hart (1990, 1995), Thompson (1983, 1995) Collard and Law (1989), Newman (1993), Tennant (1993c) and others. What critics of Mezirow in this regard have maintained in essence is that if learner empowerment resulting in genuine change is to have any lasting value it must also be subject to critical appraisal the environment, broadly considered, in which the learning takes place. Individuals with no power over their environment, these critics maintain, cannot engage in truly critical reflection. The idea probably has its origins in Freire's well publicised reservations in the 1960s about the value of a literacy which is merely functional and dissociated from the political and economic causes of illiteracy amongst impoverished communities. Conscientisation certainly has a social dimension but it is essentially a process for the individual. In reference to this controversial aspect of the matter Boud commented:

> What strikes me about all that is that critical reflection has become an ideological battlefield and that for example people don't like Mezirow because Mezirow is putting the individual too strongly in the critical reflection frame. ... his (Mezirow's) critics want to argue that it is very much something which has to do with political and social settings rather than with individuals (Boud: 31).

Newman, whose writing (1993, 1994) has a strong social basis, in response to my query on what he had written on this issue, commented:

> Mezirow seems to be content to say that transformative learning is about getting the individual learner to the starting line in a sense. He says transformative learning can help the learner undergo a kind of individual change. And then one can only hope that public change will flow from that (Newman: 130).

When referred to other criticisms of Mezirow's more individual approach to transformative learning made by Thompson (1995), a feminist adult educator who might be described as towards the radical end of the adult learning debate, Newman continued:

> She (Thompson) looks at the women she is working with and formulating a kind of learning process for them and helping them engage in learning which is located in political and economic analysis, and that seems to be transformative learning of a very powerful form (Newman: 147).

The comments of the three women interviewed for this present study, already quoted in this chapter, about liberation and empowerment of women would seem to support this view of the attitude of women generally to the transformation of social structures in present times. Mezirow seemed to some extent at least to agree. However for him it was "both-and" rather than "either-or" and he did not concede the point that Cranton makes strongly that - "powerless people cannot engage in critical reflection" (Cranton 1994, p.165). For Mezirow what first happens to the individual is the thing that is important:

> I think that dichotomising those two things (individual and social transformation) is probably a mistake Most learning is social, it is validated through discourse. So it's other people interacting with you in order to clarify the meaning of your experience, that's the way that learning takes place. And so you can't think of it as individual learning only, it just isn't the way human beings operate (Mezirow: 175).

In other words, without individual change, social change cannot happen. Perhaps, however, Mezirow may not entirely have caught the point here, certainly its political dimension, and one suspects that Freire for one would disagree with him. Transformation of a whole national consciousness may well be much more than a collection of individual changes achieved through critical reflection, discourse and dialogue.

The participants in my research, perhaps not surprisingly because during the F.A.L. program they were very much pre-occupied with their own concerns and those of their small group, seemed disinterested in this aspect of the debate about transformative learning and they offered only incidental comment upon it. However from some of their comments already cited in previous paragraphs on liberation and empowerment they did acknowledge the general role of transformative learning in the social context as having implications for their own work with adults. I would think that Boud (31) is probably right when he says that the issue has become central to the debate in the literature of transformative learning.

If inappropriate frames of reference and habits of mind arising from inculturation in past history surface as problems for individuals as they did in the F.A.L. program (with Geraldine and Jane) then they need to be dealt with. If, however, it arises from widely accepted and deeply inculturated forms of oppression how is that handled by a facilitator? The relationship of such matters to adult and transformative learning is clearly very important and will no doubt continue to be debated, as is being done at present by scholars and teachers such as Law, Newman, Hart and Thompson, but I have no further evidence on the matter here from my present research. I turn now to the question raised by a number of persons of the relationship between transformative learning and personal therapy.

Transformative learning and personal therapy

The interconnectedness of transformative learning and therapy has been referred to in the section in Chapter 2 on ethical considerations and it remains problematic. If transformative learning involves a significant level of personal therapy, is it an appropriate area in which adult educators untrained in therapy should become involved? On the other hand, if it is not, is transformative learning merely being confused with the normal developmental stages people go through? Tennant, whose background is in psychology and whose major professional contributions are in the area of the psychology of adult learning (1988, 1993, 1995) raised during my interview with him the question of whether personal changes in value systems described by theorists and others as transformative learning are merely instances of normal psychological development in response to particular personal and social challenges:

> How do we distinguish between that (normative development) and what we call transformative learning which is a more positive life outcome, a growth outcome? I think it is important, but it's also very difficult, because you can think of lesser versions of what might be passed off as transformative learning, but which are maybe not really transformative at all (Tennant: 143).

When this was put to Mezirow whom I interviewed after Tennant he commented:

> That was one of the things that Tennant said in that article (1994) which I debated with him - I'm not sure that I was right. He suggested that becoming

> critically reflective of the process of problem solving is a normative thing, part of everyday learning. But I would debate that on the grounds that it happens frequently enough to be set off by itself (Mezirow: 48).

I feel sure that Keane would disagree with Mezirow on this last issue - Keane's whole point being that reflective activities such as "becoming critically reflective of the process of problem solving" are not undertaken nearly enough in adult learning. The emphasis according to Keane is too often upon the problem rather than upon the way in which inculturated assumptions and habits of mind inhibit one's ability to identify and tackle the real issues. The overall impression given during my interview with him by Tennant, however, was that he was reflecting upon and exploring the issue of transformative learning and subjecting it as a concept to scholarly rigour, not rejecting it outright. And he was surely correct in being concerned about the need for precision in the use of language, a point which I take up again in Chapter 6.

My experience during the F.A.L. program in which I was a participant observer was that once trust in the group had been established, participants were increasingly willing to discuss their personal agendas at significant depth, especially such issues as how a growing discernment of their own attitudes and assumptions was affecting both their own learning and their attitude to other learners in their work as adult educators. They also spoke of it as therapeutic. Jane for example in reference to how the idea of transformative learning had helped her in her work said that

> prior to that program (not F.A.L.) I looked at education in general as procedural, and adult education as procedures to give information and understandings to people that would then impact on practice ... but as a result of articulating my dreams and visions I've come to a deeper understanding of myself, and how I learn. And I have come to see better how others learn (Jane: 17).

As the days of the FAL program progressed, participants seemed increasingly prepared to take the risk of revealing more of themselves than they might have done in other social and work situations. It was my observation that they were accorded the right by the group to decide when this was appropriate, and the group listened. After the F.A.L. program was

completed Geraldine spoke of the value she placed on her interview with me (during much of which I simply listened) as a means of re-working her own personal agenda.

> To take some time to be with you, well, it's been good. I mean I've got seventy five things to do that I've been putting off doing for weeks, but it's been really valuable to me to speak with you, it's been my reflection time. In a sense it's been therapeutic for me (Geraldine: 457).

While this is not necessarily therapy in the strict sense there was no doubt in my mind that Geraldine found the experience of reviewing what she had learned during the program a helpful experience. Tom too referred to talking things through during my interview with him as therapeutic in this broader sense, commenting that

> in a sense good therapy is something that leads to new learning. I'm not a therapist ... but I think a good therapist and good adult learning teacher would be using very similar techniques. ... I don't know if you picked it up in my body language, but my original attitude to this interview when you arrived for it wasn't very positive. But we I OK, and two minutes into the conversation and whoosh the energy's all picked up (Tom: 225).

By way of summary therefore in addressing the first of the four questions put during the interviews about the nature of transformative learning, the overall impression from the research was that for both practitioners and participants, transformation of deeply held personal assumptions was significant but complementary to learning which they described as "normal" or "normative". The key issue for them appeared to be that it concentrated upon the self as learner first, upon how new information was seen against a background of previously acquired assumptions, frames of reference or meaning perspectives to use Mezirow's terminology. Such transformation was something they had themselves experienced, or observed in others at one time or another. It affected their learning, it often had a strong emotional impact upon them and they had in certain circumstances experienced it as both liberating and empowering. It involved both objective and especially subjective reframing of their personal terms of reference and that is what made it distinct. People seemed to understand that identification and critical reflection upon personal assumptions and value systems had real value in discerning personal truth, and that discourse, that is, sharing at quite deep levels with others in circumstances characterised by confidentiality and mutual respect was a valuable way of teasing out and validating their

individual positions. They recalled and were prepared to reflect critically upon experiences in their own lives which they had found transformative, often referring to the pain, embarrassment and other disorienting emotions that had accompanied such situations. They spoke of experiences of transformation of assumptions about themselves and their world which had been liberating, therapeutic and empowering for them personally and which had significant implications for their work with other adults.

On the whole the practitioners seemed to believe that there was more to transformative learning than normal psychological development because it was not confined in their experience to key points in life but was provoked by disorienting and often emotionally charged experiences which occurred at unpredictable times and which challenged deeply entrenched meaning perspectives and personal assumptions. It was also something which could be therapeutic and liberating for individuals, and the participants, especially the women, confirmed that this was their experience. Such learning often represented personal growth for them. They saw it as learning which might have social and collective dimensions but which was primarily in their experience a very personal and individual thing. They believed the processes were complex, involving critical appraisal of oneself as experiencing, at times the imagination and on certain other occasions ways of thinking and feeling which were lodged at other levels of consciousness. It is the practitioners and participants' perceptions of these processes which must now be considered.

THE PROCESSES OF TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

It will be recalled that in Chapter 1 I indicated that by the "processes" of transformative learning I was referring to what was going on within the consciousness of the learner at the time of the learning. I was concerned in my research to find out, for example, what learners thought and felt amongst other things about the concept of the "disorienting experience", something which in Mezirow's (1978b, 1981) terminology was often the stimulus for transformative learning. What was their perception of what was happening to them? How was the image of self affected whilst disclosure was going on? What was the role of the imagination and what happened to the strong levels of personal and emotional energy often

claimed to be associated with transformative learning? Was there a role for the subconscious in transformative learning and was that where some assumptions are lodged - beyond the threshold of everyday awareness?

During the recorded interview I had with him Mezirow made it clear that in his view the internal experiences of transformative learning were invariably accompanied by two significant processes, critical reflection and discourse.

> There are two central elements, critical reflection which leads to changing frames of reference, and discourse which is essential for validating and justifying beliefs and interpretations that are not amenable to justifying through empirical testing (Mezirow: 26).

Mezirow is speaking of "procedures" also here perhaps but what he is saying is relevant to what is going on within the learner him or herself. Walker's view of the processes of transformative learning was essentially the same, critical reflection and discourse. Walker went on, however, to point out that in his view critical reflection is essentially an internal process of dialogue with the self which for some learning needs ideally to precede dialogue with others. In transformative learning situations such internal discourse focuses upon the self, upon the assumptions, values and inculturated ways of thinking and feeling which form the perspectives on life out of which the person perceives reality, and which external events have challenged.

> I feel we've come out of inculturated situations where people have been socialised into a whole lot of assumptions that need to be challenged. I think that the process is ... it's a process of dialoguing with why one is feeling, thinking and doing the things that one is feeling, thinking and doing (Walker: 39).

Keane supported this view, especially as it relates to an individual's emotional experience. Under the impact of a disorienting experience Keane saw the processes of transformative learning as less concerned with logical explication, as less clinical, less objective, and rather more dependent upon and stimulated by strong emotion:

> Well it's a learning process - a journey through confusion, an experience of being lost, of being in unfamiliar territory, a series of incidents or processes which help you gradually to understand what is going on, a re-organising of

> your cognitive structures about yourself. Some of the re-ordering is going on at the unconscious level ... the thing is disorienting to use Mezirow's phrase (Keane: 34).

Like Mezirow, Keane and Walker saw learning that was transformative as having its origin in some significant personal disorientation and they believed that dealing with such disorientation was crucial if the learning processes were to be truly transforming. The term "disorienting dilemma" has from the beginning (1978) been central to Mezirow's thinking and it is the first of his ten (1981, p. 7) and later eleven (1991: 168; 1994, p. 224) "phases" or steps in the process of transformative learning. Because the disorienting dilemma is so central to the question of process it needs to be dealt with at some length.

The disorienting dilemma and transformative learning

Mezirow has consistently maintained that the process of transformation of one's personal meaning perspectives is often provoked, often stimulated by a crisis in the learner's life, a disorienting dilemma, and this term has featured prominently in his writing. During the interview Mezirow spoke of the disorienting dilemma as

> something that shakes you up and you have to really reorient yourself. It can happen incrementally through a series of related changes in the way you look at the process. And it's certainly less predictable when a significant personal reassessment takes place (Mezirow: 54).

When questioned during the interviews about their experience of disorientation in relation to learning in adulthood other practitioners agreed that they too thought the disorienting dilemma was central. Two of them Tennant and Keane, in speaking of such profound disorientation drew the analogy with religious conversion. Tennant saw it as a "road to Damascus" experience:

> There'll be a re-interpretation of past experience in the light of where they are now. And all their past life events might be seen as leading towards this. All the misdemeanours in their lives are leading down a path, a road to Damascus, which is this new revelation about themselves and the world (Tennant: 141).

Tennant's wording recalls Geraldine's experience, quoted earlier:

> It was an "Aha!" sort of experience. Where I knew it was something that I'd known all along but that I had never known up in this part of my brain. It was something, well, deep down (Geraldine: 113).

Co-incidentally, Keane used the same biblical analogy as Tennant to describe a similar conversion-like experience:

> There is I think, another level of learning which perhaps I would describe as transcendent, where there is an intuitive leap, perhaps a leap of faith, where a radical change in the person takes place. Like Saul on the road to Damascus. ... It's an existential event that suddenly occurs and that calls into question all those things that they have taken for granted and come to rely upon (Keane: 114).

For Boud, however, transformation of assumptions was not something which came very suddenly but was often a more gradual experience - "it can be a slow incremental kind of thing. But after a period of time you might look back and say 'Well I think about this quite differently now than I did before'" (Boud: 63). This seems to be consistent with Mezirow's comment above that "It can happen incrementally through a series of related changes" (Mezirow: 54). Nelson, however, agreed with Keane, commenting "You know transformative learning, personal transformation, can be quite traumatic, quite disorienting, at times" (Nelson: 46).

Although the participants were once again not nearly as familiar with the term "disorienting dilemma", having heard of it only briefly from Keane, when asked about it, and if necessary given Mezirow's definition, they were able to relate to the concept immediately and to provide illustrations, either from their own experience or from their observation of others. Jane, for example, was characteristically forthright supporting Mezirow's description of disorientation and in addition expressing her recollection of strong emotion in such circumstances

> I found it really upsetting. I was - what's the term I'm looking for - I felt as though I'd sort of had something slapped right in my face, that I probably

> knew but never wanted to come to grips with before. ... So that whole process was churning away. Yes, I think churning's quite the right word (Jane: 31).

Jane's learning focus here is clearly upon herself. Tom too found coming to terms with the F.A.L. program itself, and the level of sharing and expressions of emotion involved, quite disorienting.

> But I mean the first two days! I think a lot of us were in the same boat, having grown up in the old paradigm, hitting this new paradigm of learning was fairly unsettling, very unsettling in fact and I nearly walked out during the first three days. I mean I thought 'This is crazy!' (Tom: 25).

Tom went on to use the analogy of sudden religious conversion in a manner similar to that of Tennant and Keane.

> I mean he (Luke) was saying 'What the hell is this all about?' And yet for me I mean that (other) course was absolutely life changing, it turned my life around. It's like becoming a born-again Christian or something like that. It's like, I've seen the light! (Tom 29).

Geraldine's description of her own experience of disorientation was very similar, and delivered in a most animated way which suggested the involvement of emotion:

> So it was a very traumatic time for me. ... I wasn't at all convinced that what I'd been fed was valid. I was querying all sorts of things. And as soon as Ross said 'disorienting experience' I knew exactly what he was talking about (Geraldine: 46).

My own reflection, by way of summary of all this at the end of day five of F.A.L. was that

> the assumptions that we operate out of are important because they are our safety and survival. They are part of our consciousness and they act in the interest of our survival. And that's maybe why they are very emotional. But I have to remember that they are essentially an avenue to the past from which they come. They are values and norms which have served me well in the past, and out of which I have acted, but they are not about the future and they may not even be valid ways of interpreting the present. And that's the value of the disorientation, to face that (John 2. 18).

From reading and re-reading the transcripts of the interviews it seems apparent, therefore, that both practitioners and participants were saying that the disorientating experience, the experience of personal dilemma, was often painful and disorienting, but that it was also often characteristic of very significant learning leading to transformation of personal assumptions. Disorienting experiences not infrequently marked the beginnings of such whole new approaches to issues for an individual - as in the references to and analogies with religious conversion. Such challenging of inculturated ways of thinking and processing information, such sudden flashes of insight, they believed could constitute the "Aha!" (Geraldine: 113) experience leading to revised personal meaning perspectives.

At the same time, however, as indicated above, some of my informants were saying that transformation of personal perspectives might also be the result of a rational process of careful critical reflection. In other circumstances it might be a combination of both, a sudden resolution of observations and insights that had been building up for some time as in the instance Geraldine referred to. Whatever the process, there was general agreement that such insights often come as a result of dealing critically with experiences of personal disorientation, which leads to critical reflection upon oneself and one's own assumptions and frames of reference, and not just to re-evaluation of the particular issue itself. If these personal frames of reference, these meaning perspectives as Mezirow called them, were transformed at that level then many other aspects of knowledge learned in other ways seem then to appear in a new and fresh context. What then of the emotional component which so many of those interviewed referred to? Is that crucial to the process?

Emotional processes involved in transformative learning

From the comments of both practitioners and participants, cited above, my perception is that strong levels of emotion are often associated with forms of personal disorientation which following a demanding learning process can lead to new and transformed frames of reference and habits of mind for individuals. The challenge of coming to terms with and perhaps changing such deeply inculturated assumptions, value systems and attitudes was not deemed by any of the participants to be easy or inviting. This supports the view of

Mezirow (1978, 1981, 1991) who in describing the steps or phases leading to perspective transformation has consistently seen 'the disorienting dilemma" as the beginning of the process of transformative learning. Moreover it appears undeniable that such experiences of disorientation have emotional connotations and in emphasising critical reflection and dialogue as the two major characteristics of transformative learning, Mezirow (26 - cited above) reinforced the impression gained by many who read his work that he sees the processes of transformative learning as primarily cerebral, an exercise of judgment and will. Tennant drew attention to this during my interview with him:

> The things you hold very deeply ... they arouse you if they're strongly challenged. There are a number of people who say that Mezirow is very cognitive. His approach is cognitive, especially in some of his earlier work. I think the content of the feelings, the emotional issues, is very important. He [Mezirow] tends to talk [of transformative learning] as if it were an intellectual process. Whereas in many cases it's an emotional process (Tennant: 79).

Keane had a similar understanding of Mezirow's position:

> Often critical reflection is presented as if, provided you follow the logical rational line of thought, you will uncover your assumptions. My understanding of it is that it is more than that. It can't just be done at the intellectual level, it's got to be the revisiting of the experience *in toto*. And the meaning of it becomes clearer when you get in touch with the feelings that resulted at the time (Keane: 94).

During my interview with him, Mezirow did not, however, confirm these implied criticisms expressed by Tennant and Keane - in fact he rejected them, and said that he too now considered that sometimes it is the feelings which testify to the depth of one's inculturated meaning perspectives:

> A frame of reference is not just a cognitive way of thinking, it's a way of feeling. It has to do with affective learning, so all of those are tied together. I think it's very important not to reduce the notion of transformative learning to some kind of cognitive process. So much learning has nothing to do with the use of words and making meaning. I mean even intuition is another form of critical reflection, it's essentially a form of non-verbal critical reflection. So there's a lot that goes on that isn't cognition (Mezirow: 62).

This is not entirely consistent with what Mezirow had written in his earlier work and I believe reflects some movement in his position. His ten "steps" as outlined in 1978 and are almost entirely cognitive, intellectual processes. However, Mezirow has encouraged scholarly dialogue on the nature and processes of transformative learning over twenty years and, as already indicated above, in 1991 he made additions to the second and the ninth of his steps to include emotional involvement and the need to identify feelings associated with assumptions as well as the assumptions themselves.

Walker agreed with Tennant and with Mezirow's (62) position as he put it to me in the last quotation cited. Walker then went on to make the very perceptive comment that strong feeling is often indicative of and related directly to the strength of a particular assumption or personal value, and how closely it reflects primary socialisation and inculturation:

> It is not just intellectualised learning. I think that when you find a situation of strong feelings there is a reasonable assumption the issue is about power and possession. It doesn't mean that it's wrong, it doesn't mean that they want to reject it, but it is an indicator that there is something there that is worth looking at and really asking what the assumptions are (Walker: 37).

In my own reflections on day 4 of the F.A.L. experience I came to much the same conclusion:

> I think this implies in effect that when we feel embarrassed or ashamed when reflecting on what the values are that we have been acting out of, then we need to acknowledge that. And maybe the more deeply we feel, the more entrenched the value is. So we're not just looking at a change in behaviour, what we're looking at is the possibility of a change in the value system out of which the behaviour comes (John 2: 70).

In the comments on this issue by the participants during the interviews with them it was clear that emotion for them often formed a significant element of both the disorienting dilemma and the process of transforming assumptions. I refer again in this context to Jane's assertion previously cited on page 125:

> And coming to grips with who I am was very painful. I don't know that I ... well I didn't like who I was at first. But I've come to grips with that and I understand myself better. And because I understand myself better ... It

> made me evaluate how I was with people and what I did and how I did it. And I've changed (Jane: 35).

Tom expressed very much the same opinion, relating an anecdote from his own experience in another learning program:

> I was going through some personal problems at the time and the facilitator said ... he'd go round and how was the week for each of us, that type of thing. 'How was your week Tom?' ... 'Oh, it was all right, all right'. 'Tom, what's this Tom, what's this?' And the old foot's going up and down, up and down. In other words there were double signals. I'd say 'Oh yes, I'm all right', but my body was saying 'It was bloody awful [*sic*].' And so we worked on that and out it comes, you know, my body's recorded all this stuff (Tom: 87).

This comment of Tom's offered a very appropriate illustration of the theoretical point made by Newman on the same issue:

> I mean if we talk about it being at a high level of awareness, a meta-awareness, then there's going to be an engagement that will be very powerful. If we are really going through a change we're not just ... if we're really re-thinking a whole section of our being then clearly there's going to be very strong feelings associated with such a strong engagement (Newman: 108).

It seems clear from the perceptions of many of both the practitioners and participants cited above that transformation of the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions which has "come to constrain the way we see ourselves and our relationships ... reconstituting them and acting upon these new understandings" (Mezirow 1981, p. 6) can be and very often is a strongly emotional experience and this is why the term "disorienting" seems so appropriate. As Geraldine said "as soon as Ross said 'disorienting experience' I knew exactly what he was talking about" (Geraldine: 46). The common thread running through the responses is that despite the two comments of Mezirow and Boud cited on page 132, transformative learning was perceived by the participants as an emotional experience because they saw it as involving transformation of the self and the inculturated assumptions and ways of thinking which are part of the self.

My perception by way of summary therefore is that the people I interviewed on the whole believed that learning which is about particulars and specifics, learning that involves changes in what Mezirow described as "meaning schemes", does not radically involve the self and it does not so strongly involve the emotions. On the other hand when they spoke of more profound changes involving their very self and the self-image they used language, synonyms as it were, for what I perceived to be meaning perspectives. This emerges as a key distinction between meaning schemes, that is, changes in one's view of particulars and specifics, from meaning perspectives, changes in fundamental personal orientation. As cited in Chapter 2, Mezirow (1991, p. 35) maintained and Cranton (1994, p. 29) repeated the view that a cluster of meaning schemes goes to make up a meaning perspective. This seems consistent with the perceptions of those practitioners and participants above who talked about accumulation in regard to transformative learning.

I have no direct evidence from my research that once more radical change of meaning perspective has been made, then the specifics and particulars of meaning schemes may well be transformed in that they will thence forward be seen in an entirely new light. This is an issue which for me arises from my research; it would repay further empirical investigation but I can find no evidence to support it at this stage. I will return to it, however, in Chapter 6. Before moving on I wish to deal with another issue which was raised by several of those interviewed, the surfacing of those perspectives which are so deeply inculturated that people may not normally be always conscious of them.

The subconscious and transformative learning

A number of those interviewed in speaking of learning with the whole person and working at the levels of both conscious critical reflection and honest awareness of personal feelings also expressed the view that the processes of transformative learning might involve meaning perspectives which are held within the subconscious as well as the conscious self. Nelson made the point clearly:

> I picked up from Boyd and Myers (1988), partly from them, partly from my own experience I guess, and partly from Jung, that what Habermas and

> Mezirow were doing was working at the level of the conscious. They (Boyd and Myers) talked about the role of the subconscious in learning (Nelson: 16).

Keane too referred to the role of the subconscious in learning for transformation.

> From my point of view some of the processes have got a lot to do with the subconscious, which are beyond the edge of your awareness, but nevertheless which are guiding what you are thinking and what you are doing. It often has its origins in primary socialisation and I am with Mezirow on that (Keane: 40).

Walker was of the same view and he offered the perceptive insight into the "road to Damascus" experiences described by Tennant and Keane. He said that such disorienting experiences may bring to conscious awareness meaning perspectives that have been held beneath the levels of consciousness They have remained largely unrecognised but are brought suddenly to consciousness by the disorienting experience, whatever it might be. He used an analogy to explain it:

> I often think it (the new learning) may not really be as spontaneous as people think. Maybe it's ... it's like a burp - you know, you burp suddenly but gasses have been building up within. Things have happened that you are not entirely aware of and suddenly it comes into consciousness. The transformation is just the end product of something that has been going on at a subconscious level (Walker: 122).

Geraldine, one of the participants, in a passage already quoted in regard to another concept expressed exactly this idea although not in technical language:

> And I can remember in this period of turmoil in my life working out that I had never really believed it [a condemnatory attitude that she had to homosexuality]. And that was a strange feeling for me ... I knew it was something that I'd known all along but that I had never known up in this part of my brain. It was something, well, deep down (Geraldine: 113).

Geraldine clearly is describing bringing to conscious awareness something held at a deeper concepts held at some subliminal level. Another participant, Paul, also saw transformative learning as sometimes a way of coming to terms with values that are already held, but beneath the level of overt consciousness:

> Yes and that's where ... in many ways that's what I was trying to tell you about, dealing with deep personal values. I think that we were getting to look at what our values really are. Getting them out of the subconscious, getting them out into the open (Paul: 79).

It may be said also that a common perception expressed during the interviews was that the processes by which deeply held assumptions and value systems come from subconscious to conscious awareness, and are then susceptible to critical reflection, is through the use of the creative imagination and symbols. Both participants and practitioners suggested that the use of imaginative symbols was often a way through to values and assumptions held at lower levels of consciousness, assumptions out of which individuals act but of which they might not always be consciously aware.

The imagination and transformative learning

The sixth and last day of the F.A.L. program began with the recitation of Gerard Manley Hopkins' sonnet *The Windhover* by one of the participants, Sean. The recitation was preceded by Sean's setting the scene and was accompanied by a subdued recorded selection from Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*. The experience according to several of those interviewed, and from my own reflection, set the mood for the day which was marked by personal reflection and imaginative sharing between participants. I noted in my recorded recollections at the time:

> It (the reading) was followed by profound silence which I appreciated but misinterpreted. Sean too said he found it difficult to cope with the silence. However when he raised this issue later virtually all the others responded that the silence for them was not disinterest but an imaginative resting with the experience, and that for several this was very powerful (John 3: 44).

and again:

> I noted during the program several times that when there were silences, and Ross waited awhile and then said 'Shall we go on?' quite a few times people called out 'No!' A few moments later someone raised something on which others clearly also were prepared to focus and spend time. So don't fear silence, but after a while, ask! (John 3: 48).

It seems then that there is a role for imaginative reflection in relation to transformative learning, in this F.A.L. group's experience at least. During my interview with him Mezirow also commented upon the role of the creative imagination:

> Yes, you see . . . I don't think that memory is just a matter of storage and retrieval, I think that what happens is that you have some symbolic models in your mind. And that what happens is that when you come to a situation, what you do is imaginatively apply those models, it's like taking a metaphor and saying, is that metaphor appropriate to understand this situation or is this metaphor appropriate? I think that the process that you go through is a creative process of using your imagination to interpret reality on the basis of prior experience. So it's . . . I think that imagination is in many ways a tremendously important dimension of adult learning (Mezirow: 171)

Nelson following his research supported this view. In reference to the linked roles of remembering and imagining in transformative learning which was the focus of his research he responded to my question on the issue by recalling a particular incident from his own experience of working with adults. He then commented:

> I began to ask myself just how is it that we begin to undergo quite extraordinary changes in our lives which involve our deeply seated value systems. How can people be agents of change in their own lives? And I wanted to find out whether imagination could be an instrument in a process of change (Nelson: 7).

He then went on to relate through the image of dance his own understanding of the value of the imagination in coming to terms and perhaps critically reviewing deeply held psychological and inculturated assumptions:

> I think transformative learning really is a synthesis, a moving somewhere between critical reflection and imagining. They are like dance partners. You know when people are dancing, who's leading and who's not it doesn't really matter, there's a time for everything. There's a time for imagining, and a time for critical, rational reflection (Nelson: 22).

For Keane too, "symbols and images are often the basis of transformation" (Keane: 42), and Newman said that it was his practice

> to get people to work on developing a metaphor for what they do, developing a metaphor for their organisation and then getting them to work

> in pairs say, in which they unpack each others' metaphors ... I mean one is trying to get to a position where they reflect not so much on the reality but the values and assumptions behind the reality. I then get them to write another metaphor so they have the opportunity of revisiting their practice, but with a different set of values, in a different metaphor (Newman: 165).

Tom, gave his view of the value of just such use of the imagination in group work, reflecting upon his own experience of it in the F.A.L. program:

> I suppose the thing that I like about it is that it's a sense of adventure, because it's like ... it's a bit like a dream, you never know what's going to happen and anything can happen. And the other thing is that particularly in the way that it's processed through the small group, then the large group and especially the journaling, it seems to throw up new things, new ideas (Tom: 77).

Sean, the participant who had done the reading from Hopkins, commented in response to his own reflection upon that experience, and of the role of the imagination for profound personal evaluation:

> That's why I think imagining is so powerful, that if you do get into that, if you do let yourself into that situation where images are called up, it's very powerful. I would lay no claim to understanding the process, or why it happens, but I've certainly experienced it. The image occurs quite independently of any rational thought and indeed the two processes can be going on simultaneously (Sean: 58).

This seems a particularly valuable insight and it supports the views of Keane, Tennant and Newman that transformation of meaning perspectives is not something that follows an orderly application of cognitive steps or procedures such as those suggested by Mezirow and quoted in Chapter 2. Marion was positive about the role of the imagination in this type of deep personal learning, commenting that its influence upon her was profound:

> For me, the biggest things was the imagining exercises because out of them I've got confirmation, affirmation. For the first time in my life I'm fighting against order, conformity and logic and I'm liking the experience (Marion: 21).

Jane however, whilst acknowledging the power of imaginative evocation of symbols also sounded a warning:

> I for one believe that you'd need to be heaps more skilled at guided meditation and have some notion of counselling skills as well before you could go into that. Even from . . even from the point of view of just being a facilitator and not using guided meditation, just imagining. There are other considerations too. The level of confidentiality for example (Jane: 186).

The whole question of structuring the creative imagination as a procedure for facilitating transformative learning and also the matter of ethical considerations will be taken further in the next chapter in the section dealing with the implications for practice of the research. There seems little doubt however, that the people being interviewed for this study clearly did believe from their personal experience that a creative use of the imagination has a role to play in helping learners bring to the surface and come to terms with some of their deeply held psychocultural assumptions and ways of looking at the world. The perception was that such creative uses of the imagination sometimes makes possible critical evaluation with a view to exploring new horizons and opening the way to possible change. They saw such a process as an approach from a new and far less cognitive angle than logical analysis. It promoted alternative ways of looking at things, enlarged the range of possibilities and enabled meaning perspectives to be identified and discussed in an ethical non-threatening atmosphere with a view to possible transformation.

CONCLUSION

My decision to use interviews rather than written questionnaires as a way of gathering data in answer to my questions appears to have been vindicated by the results. The give and take of dialogue during the interviews helped bring to what was previously for me a largely theoretical discussion of the nature and processes of transformative learning an added richness derived from narrative and example. The interviews have a colloquial flavour arising from actual learning experiences which gives them a sense of immediacy and authenticity not always evident in reading the literature. Although this sense of immediacy was to be expected from the participants in the F.A.L. program it proved to a significant extent to be characteristic of interviews with the practitioners as well. They seemed to welcome the opportunity to relate what they had published to their own learning and to their experience as educators.

The persons interviewed by me perceived learning as the acquisition and processing of knowledge on a day-to day-basis, much of it arguably in the instrumental and communicative domains, and much of it involving changes in those particular and specific areas which Mezirow refers to as meaning schemes. Such changes - it seems to me not entirely logical to call them transformations - may or may not contribute to the transformation of the entire meaning perspective of which they are a part, of those inculturated assumptions, frames of reference and habits of mind a person has acquired in that particular area during his or her lifetime up to that point. It is to this second form of learning - a significant change in a meaning perspectives - that people saw the term "transformative" as applying.

My informants confirmed that they had experienced themselves and observed in others transformation of what could be described as meaning perspectives arising from certain experiences of disorientation. They saw such learning as involving levels of emotion because of its deeply personal nature and because in a very real sense the individuals involved were being compelled by circumstances to challenge meaning perspectives which for them had become part of their very self, part of how they saw themselves. There was general support for the view that transformative learning so described is not merely a cognitive process and it was unlikely to be achieved by following a logical series of sequential steps. The view was expressed by a number that the levels of associated emotion often reflected the depth at which the psycho-cultural assumptions concerned were held.

Critical reflection and discourse in a context in which there is respect and trust were described by many of those interviewed as positive in their effects and likely to assist the identification and clarification of assumptions and an opening of possibilities for transformation. Others saw transformation of meaning perspectives as something which at times occurred over a period and as not necessarily the result of sudden or particularly disorienting experience. However, still others indicated that they believed that an apparently sudden transformation might in fact be the result of a realisation or conviction about something which had been quietly building up at lower levels of consciousness for some time, as it may have been for Saul of Tarsus when he had that extraordinary experience on the road to Damascus. This raised the question of the role of the

subconscious in regard to the transformation of inculturated assumptions and meaning perspectives and the issue emerged for me as significant enough to warrant further examination than it has been possible to undertake in my present project.

Both practitioners and participants agreed with the appropriateness of the use of terms such as "emancipatory" "liberating" and "transformative" in association with transformative learning and in this they supported Mezirow's original linking of such learning with Habermas' emancipatory domain of knowledge and human interests. There was a clear indication also, especially from the women participants, that transformative learning had the potential to be empowering for individuals and this has been taken up in a recent book by Cranton (1994) to which I have referred in Chapter 2. There was little evidence in the interviews, however, to support the view expressed in the literature by Collard and Law (1989), Hart (1990a) and Thompson (1993) that transformative learning ought also and more appropriately be seen as associated with community empowerment and political and social change. Although the practitioners believed this latter issue was at least arguable it seemed to be outside the experience or at least the immediate interest of the participants involved in my research.

Both practitioners and participants on the whole supported the view that there was more to transformation of inculturated assumptions and meaning perspectives than could be attributed to normal psychological development. They saw the term "emancipatory" as including experiences which were healing for individuals and therapeutic, in the everyday as distinct from the clinical sense of that term. Several participants confirmed that this had in fact been their experience of learning which had transformed some of their own personal assumptions and attitudes. Based upon their experience they too believed that transformative learning as an approach to learning had potential for healing and personal growth which they had experienced in their own lives.

From participants there was a favourable response to Keane's use during the F.A.L. program of the imagination and evocative symbols as ways of bringing strongly held assumptions and value systems from subconscious to conscious awareness where they might be susceptible to personal critical reflection as well as discourse and dialogue with

others. Keane's approaches in this area were supported by Nelson's recent research and the comments of Newman and Walker. Such processes may however require levels of skilled facilitation beyond that of most facilitators of adult learning and reservations were expressed by a number of those interviewed in this regard.

It seems appropriate now to bring this analysis of the interviews from the perspective of the nature and processes of transformative learning to a conclusion. Chapter 5 deals with more practically oriented considerations associated with the perceptions of those interviewed regarding the procedures which facilitate transformative learning, and their implications for practice.

CHAPTER 5

THE PROCEDURES AND IMPLICATIONS OF TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

Chapter 5 considers the results of the research in relation to the third and fourth of the four questions which formed the basis of the interviews with the practitioners and the participants, and my own perceptions recorded at the time as participant observer in the F.A.L. program. These questions deal with the procedures of facilitation and implications of transformative learning. Of their nature they are more practically oriented than those addressed in Chapter 4 which have dealt principally with theoretical issues arising from the nature of transformative learning and perceptions of the internal processes through which learners move in identifying, critically reflecting upon and transforming their meaning perspectives.

In Chapter 1 the term "procedures" was defined as those strategies or structures perceived to be effective in enabling and promoting processes of transformative learning. Although the question of the implications of transformative learning was raised with all those interviewed their responses indicated that they did not on the whole consider treatment of this issue to be separate from the quite lengthy responses they were already giving in regard to their experience of procedures or strategies. For this reason, and in order to avoid unnecessary repetition, I have decided to treat the questions of procedures and practical implications together. The one additional and very significant implication which was raised by many, however, was that of the ethical considerations in regard to facilitating transformative learning. The findings of my research in this area are dealt with separately in the latter part of Chapter 5.

PROCEDURES FOR FACILITATING TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

In my use of the word "procedures" I emphasise once again that by that term I do not mean contrived strategies or structures designed to enable facilitators to manipulate learners into

making transformations in certain directions which they (the facilitators) deem desirable. A number of those interviewed were at pains to point out that this would be unethical, and during the interviews I ensured that all those to whom I spoke understood the way I was using the word "procedures" and that I was concerned with their perception of strategies effective in providing opportunities for learners to discern "how and why the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions has come to constrain the way they see themselves and their relationships" (Mezirow 1981, p. 6).

Much of the discussion of procedures and implications in this present chapter will be seen to derive logically from the understandings the people interviewed already had about the nature and processes of transformative learning. However, as in the previous chapter, the nuances which personal experience and anecdote gave to the theoretical concepts being discussed made the concepts more intelligible and more relevant to actual learning situations. The analysis of the responses given in this chapter endeavours to differentiate wherever possible between the perceptions of the two groups - practitioners and participants. It has in addition endeavoured to take note of what I myself recorded and those things which were not said, or said by few. It was necessary also for me as researcher to bear in mind that the perceptions of the participants in particular would to some extent at least have been influenced by the views of Keane whose F.A.L. experience they had so recently completed.

On this basis expectations that the practitioners and participants would in response to the question about procedures speak of the creation of appropriate learning environments, of the implementation of strategies which have to do with critical reflection upon personal experience, of critical reflection upon the self, of attendance to personal feelings, of engaging in discourse and dialogue of journal writing, autobiography and the use of metaphor and the creative imagination proved to be true. However, it bears repeating that the findings of my research are limited to the extent that as a qualitative study, they are based not upon absolutes but upon peoples' perceptions. The strength of the study, however, is that the practitioners include many of the leading contributors to the literature in the field who are also teachers and adult learners in their own right, and that the

participants' views were based upon recent personal and reflective experience as learners over a substantial period, much of which I myself observed.

Creating an appropriate learning environment

One of the very first issues raised in regard to the strategies appropriate to facilitating transformative learning by a significant number of those interviewed was that this form of learning is not something which can be easily structured, or turned on at will by a well-intentioned facilitator. It was seen to be far too complex, too intimate, too much involved with the self- image and self-understanding of individual learners. Transformative learning involves identifying and subjecting to critical analysis one's own meaning perspectives, and deciding to change them. In the final analysis that can only be done by the individual learner. Walker pointed out:

> I don't think you can bring it (transformative learning) on at 10 o'clock on a Friday morning. But I think you can within the context of an educational program create situations where you would expect the people to have that type of experience (Walker: 122).

Boud's view was very similar:

> The idea that there's something called transformative learning for which you or I could design a learning activity or event and put people through it and they'd come up transformed at the end ... I'm rather more cautious and sceptical about that. But I think that there are things that facilitators can do which create a climate in which transformative learning is more rather than less likely to occur. But it's a bigger step to say that you can design a process to make it happen (Boud: 23).

Mezirow had much the same view:

> You can't just ask someone, 'Do you want to become critically reflective of your assumptions?' It would be ridiculous to do that with people. But what you can do is say, 'We're going to look at the problems, including the problems that I see as well as you' (Mezirow: 158).

Newman whilst agreeing with these reservations pointed out that in his view it was nevertheless possible for facilitators to develop optimal learning situations, favourable learning climates where the very personal shift in assumptions and values involved in transformative learning might be rendered more likely, bearing in mind of course that it is always an essentially individual and personal experience. Newman saw Mezirow's great contribution as moving the debate from where such transformation was simply observed to more formal learning situations structured in such a way that people could be challenged and could challenge themselves to consider the real values, motives and assumptions out of which they were operating. Newman continued:

> The other side of the coin is of course that by promoting and helping develop the concept of transformation in learning and trying to give it a central role, a more encompassing role, he (Mezirow) has shifted us away from just observing and given us the opportunity to examine environments which encourage it (Newman 33).

Keane said that he consciously worked at creating an appropriate learning climate for his F.A.L. program right from the beginning:

> One of the things I believe in very strongly is that the norms of a program are pretty well set very early and I know that as a facilitator I can shape those norms by what I do and how I do it. It's very important, for example that these norms are positive and welcoming and respecting and supportive, as well as challenging when they need to be (Keane: 140).

Participants strongly endorsed Keane's efforts in this direction, seeing them as very significant for the success of the program. Jane, for example, volunteered that in her view

> Ross' climate-setting started the whole thing ... when you look at all of us individually we're such a disparate group of people. But the climate brought us together in a non-threatening way. It was a liberating feeling, allowing yourself, freeing yourself to be you. He worked very hard on getting that dialogue going between people (Jane: 122).

Tom made a very similar comment about his experience of F.A.L. - "the environment was conducive and warm and friendly (Tom: 104) ... a whole new energy arose and we (he and Luke) both agreed how very different it was from when we began" (Tom: 120). For Paul it was "an experience of feeling included, the creation of the environment was such that

people began to share, and the sharing was rapid and all-embracing" (Paul: 124). For Jane the sense of trust within the group made possible genuine critical reflection upon personal attitudes and assumptions about learning:

> I really think it was those group processes, allowing people to own the group, giving the group control. I'd say that I felt as close to the group at the end of the second day as I did at the end of the sixth. I told them, people in that group - I've even told you today - more things than I would have ever spoken about even to my closest friends. Because there was this feeling of respect (Jane: 130).

The perceptions of these participants supported the practitioners' view that setting an appropriate group learning climate was very significant for transformative learning. Participants saw openness characterised by trust and respect within the group as important, with the facilitator being creative and perceptive yet somehow also on a similar learning curve to the participants. Little of this is new in the area of adult learning of course and implicit in many of the comments made to me, such as those above, was the assumption that transformative learning is part of the general area of adult learning and it is facilitated by many of those established strategies which one associates with adult learning in group situations as outlined in Chapter 2. They are consistent with the model of conditions for the learning of teachers postulated by Holliday (1995) for example. Holliday found that there needs to be genuine commitment of the self to learning, learning for meaning which has personal significance for the learner, collegiality and support from discourse with peers and positive action by the learner.

There was, however, something more in Keane's F.A.L. approach. I noted, as a participant observer that he too joined in the various activities, for example that involving communication through miming and eye contact rather than language. It was clear to me that he like the rest of the group was not entirely comfortable in the situation but it was a valuable contribution in that he offered a role model and others were encouraged to follow suit. The collective awkwardness began to bear fruit in that participants reported that they felt more free to challenge themselves and one another and although feeling vulnerable, they were also encouraged by the honestly expressed vulnerability of others. Setting such a learning climate for the F.A.L. program right from the beginning where all were accepted

as equals was important if the process of critical reflection upon the self followed by discourse and dialogue were to be fully effective. Both Keane and Mezirow stressed the necessity of critical reflection upon the self if inculturated assumptions and meaning perspectives were to be identified and subjected to critical scrutiny.

Structuring critical reflection upon the self

Bearing in mind the virtual unanimity amongst practitioners about the crucial role of critical reflection upon the self in regard to transformative learning, as outlined in the previous chapter, it is perhaps not surprising that these same practitioners emphasised the necessity of achieving in-depth reflection upon the self which would get learners past the specifics and particulars of meaning schemes and instrumental learning in order to identify and acknowledge meaning perspectives and inculturated assumptions about themselves and their worlds. It is worth repeating that what is being referred to here is structuring for critical reflection upon oneself and one's assumptions and inculturated value systems (meaning perspectives), not merely specific attitudes to particular issues (meaning schemes), much less chit chat and reminiscence about one's experience. Mezirow in addressing my question about appropriate procedures for critical self-reflection was very definite on this point:

> Well yes, there was a series of exercises to force people, to force them, and I use the word advisedly, to become critically reflective of their assumptions - at first critically reflective of assumptions outside themselves and then critically reflective of their personal assumptions. There was a series of exercises that had that as an objective (Mezirow: 104).

Mezirow did not however, enlarge upon what these exercises were. Keane made the point that whatever the procedures were they needed a sense of immediacy, they needed to be about real experience. He saw little value in role plays and simulations.

> The way that I run the program I'm trying to help people think through to their own entrenched positions What I find is that people come to these courses expecting to get procedures. They want to know how you go about presenting this or that, what makes a good lecture. But you've got to be

> about real experience. I don't think you can give another person your cognitive framework. They have got to come to it themselves (Keane: 104).

Newman by contrast did see some value in role plays, but with qualifications, because he too insisted on true-to-life situations and the need for careful debriefing:

> In debriefing you can get them to examine and discuss the values and assumptions underlying their actions in the role play and the values and assumptions underlying their actions in real life. You can get them to examine what informs their decisions and their actions ... and how they can subtly alter them (Newman: 173).

Tennant (244) said that "using questioning to probe for assumptions is very important". Tom, based upon his experience, supported this view but for him the challenge was to get the group to ask the questions as well as the facilitator:

> Somehow, I need to get the group asking the questions and answering them. I need not back away from the tension of providing a threshold or impasse for them to work through, to process, because it is in the processing that real learning will occur (Tom: 34).

Boud's comment on the need for such strategies was similar:

> So it's a question of getting people to respect their own experience but creating events which enable them to go beyond their normal way of doing things. So that not only do they feel the need to review their previous practice, but there's some forum whereby they can explore and try things out. Be different in some sense (Boud: 212).

Neither Tom's nor Boud's comments apply exclusively to the transformation of inculturated meaning perspectives and they represent sound learning procedures for virtually any adult learning context. But Mezirow, like Keane, was unapologetic about structuring situations which would get learners "out of their comfort zones" and virtually compel them to put themselves under pressure to assess their assumptions: "I deliberately try to make people uncomfortable about being critically reflective of themselves, simply so that they won't approach that task in a routine way" (Mezirow: 120). My own perception at the time was that the approach of Mezirow and Keane was more likely to raise the stakes and get people into the area of identifying their real assumptions and taken-for-granteds,

their meaning perspectives in short. Only in this way could they become sufficiently involved to experience exactly how transformation of meaning perspectives was different from what they were calling "normal" learning.

Structuring procedures to get adult learners to reflect critically upon themselves and their assumptions therefore, for the people interviewed emerged as a priority for genuinely transformative learning to occur. And as indicated in the earlier discussion of processes, getting people involved and out of their comfort zones was not something which could be achieved easily, or without quite significant involvement of personal feeling. It seems appropriate and logical at this stage therefore to consider what my informants' perceptions were of procedures which might take into account and turn to advantage the emotional aspect of adults coming to terms with psycho-cultural assumptions and value systems through critical self-reflection.

Attendance to personal feelings

Accepting the perception of many of those interviewed and cited earlier in Chapter 4 that personal emotion and feelings are a significant element in the processes of transformative learning, practitioners might have been expected to comment upon how this realisation affected the procedures they used in its facilitation. This proved to be the case. Keane put his view strongly and gave his reasons:

> Critical reflection is reflection when you bring into play the whole self and especially the feelings, when you go through the whole of the experience that you are revisiting, including how you felt about it at the time. This can't be done just at the intellectual level, it's got to be the revisiting of the experience *in toto* and the meaning of it becomes clear when you get in touch with the feelings that resulted at the time (Keane: 94).

Tennant too was quite definite about the procedural implications which resulted from his belief that strong feelings were often associated with revisiting one's assumptions. Moreover he saw such feelings as primarily arising from conflict:

> My view of learning generally and transformative learning in particular is that there's always some internal psychological conflict involved. Without

> that internal psychological conflict you can't progress. Either it's an internal emotional conflict or an internal cognitive conflict which requires resolution. Often that internal conflict is engendered by some kind of external conflict between people, so that's an important element, to have some kind of conflict, a different point of view. ... Conflict generates new ideas, as does the attempt to resolve conflict (Tennant: 73).

When asked what he considered the procedural implications of this might be Tennant indicated that he believed that facilitating transformative learning when it involved significant levels of emotion required considerable skill but it was very important to deal appropriately with such feelings. "If in effect you anaesthetise feeling out of a learning session then you're going to lose something, aren't you?" (Tennant: 79). This is in part at least an ethical consideration and Tennant continued "How can we disorient people without totally disorienting them? How can we get them a little at least out of their comfort zones?" (Tennant: 237).

Keane agreed with Tennant's view about the significance of conflict and tension and indicated that as facilitator he did not automatically step in and help people cope with the stress arising in particular learning situations because therein might well lie the possibility of change and growth:

> I mean you don't like a situation where you are feeling confused or put down, or not coping very well. Embarrassment maybe. And it is those feelings that will drive you to try and make sense of it all. The thing that drives you on to keep working it out, to keep approaching it, to keep trying to make sense of it, is the emotional bit (Keane: 66).

Nelson made reference to an "edge" by which he meant an emotional indication of readiness to begin the process of critical reflection

> I think it's important also not to hold people back from the edge. A sensitive approach, but nevertheless not to hold them back from the edge. You need sensitivity but there's a need for tension sometimes and you've got to hold things, while people work their way through it (Nelson: 64).

Tom agreed but took a more pragmatic view, showing that he understood the issue, the fact that pain and embarrassment may provide avenues for personal growth:

> That's why I guess a therapist is always interested in an edge, because as soon as you've got an edge, you've got something to work on ... It's the old, 'No pain, no gain' type of stuff I think. I look back on my life and often my major learning experiences were ones where I had to say 'Gee, I stuffed that, what am I going to do now!' You know ... being in a place of great discomfort (Tom: 112).

In reading my personal reflections at the end of day 4 of F.A.L. when we had been considering this issue for some considerable time I found that I had used a very similar phrase.

> People can get over-pastoral. He (Keane) said ...'Let them go to the edge, don't let them go over, but let them go to the edge a bit, let them cry and don't give them too much comfort because that's important to them and if you're too comforting, maybe you stop them confronting the things they need to confront.' I think Ross is right on this. And he trusts the group to look after one another (John 2: 223).

My experience during the F.A.L. program was that the group followed Keane's model in this, people began to work through some of their own agenda and the groups of which I was part grew to be less intimidated by silences for example. Individuals as a result were given space and time by the groups of which they were a part to explore their thinking, not infrequently with the help of perceptive comments and questioning. They were able to share stories about their own learning and their facilitation of learning experiences, and not infrequently what they perceived as their failures - which required some courage.

My general conclusion from all this was that procedures for facilitating adult learning do need to take account of associated emotion and personal feelings. People in the groups began to acknowledge that conflict and tension at times may indicate where assumptions are perhaps deepest, with possible change affecting self-image and one's sense of personal equanimity. They saw the question of maintaining an emotional "edge" as significant, both as an indication of readiness and as possible focal points of new learning about their own ways of looking at the world. They began to see that such pressure points, if honestly explored and faced, had the potential at least to be launching pads as it were for movements towards honest reappraisal and resolution. Implicit in their comments too was the view that the group was very important as a means of dealing with emotions associated with

transformative learning. This goes right back to Mezirow's original assertion during my interview with him that the key procedures for transformative learning after critical reflection are discourse and dialogue.

Group work, discourse and dialogue

As indicated in Chapter two, a central theme in virtually all the literature of adult learning is the key role given to group work, discourse and dialogue. As a context for adult learning, group work is at least as old as Plato's *Republic* - and it is assigned a central role in adult learning in the work of contemporary writers such as Knowles (1980, 1984), Brookfield (1991b), Merriam (1991), Cranton (1992) and the practitioners interviewed for this study. Adults learn from one another through challenging and being challenged and in a well structured and well facilitated group they find it increasingly difficult not to face such issues as the validity and the implications of opinions they express. Such implications will at times include the basic assumptions and concepts which underlie their opinions and this can be quite disconcerting - Luke's comment already quoted by Tom (p.136) comes readily to mind - "What the hell is this all about?" (Tom: 29). The question is whether the challenging which occurs in discourse and dialogue has value as a way towards identification and genuine transformation of perspectives.

Mezirow during the interview described discourse and dialogue as "essential for validating and justifying beliefs and interpretations not amenable to empirical testing" (Mezirow: 26). My own experience of a particular incident during the F.A..L. group on day five is interesting in this regard and in fact confirmed Mezirow's view:

> The group were on the topic, interacting and interested. Not only one person's wisdom was being used. I thought the best part about this was that I was actually learning from a dissection of others' experiences - from their honest expression of feeling - that they have the same problems, the same anxieties at times. *En masse* they all look perfectly composed and in command, yet in the groups it was clear that often this was not so. And they seemed to welcome the chance to test things within the group (John 3: 14).

Earlier, at the end of the second day, I had recorded similar recollections of a group evaluation of the day's work:

> 'The atmosphere made it OK', one person said. Tom, the chap who was leading the activity, said that he was a little put out and felt self conscious when people were laughing. But the group told him 'No, that wasn't our reaction at all, we were just enjoying ourselves in an embarrassed sort of way. We were totally preoccupied with ourselves'. Then people talked about the question of risk in learning, that miming wasn't something that they normally did. Oddly enough, I felt the frank admission of embarrassment actually built their confidence in the group (John 1: 40).

When I raised this with her Marion made a very similar comment, and gave an example of just such a significant experience for her:

> We were in the big group and I can remember I said something about it being easy to do some things when you have a role to play. Like when I was a school principal. But when it's just me ... I find it really hard to come to terms with that. And I said 'Gosh I'm a bit of an idiot'. And Chanel jumped straight in and said 'Yes I understand that.' Because her experience in Chicago was very similar. The whole group said 'We can really understand how your self-esteem can be tied in with your role' (Marion: 118).

Walker too, agreed during my interview with him that whilst from his perception, transformation of values and assumptions was intensely personal, nevertheless a significant role had to be assigned to group work in the process:

> Group work I think is a very important dimension of it. It is often recognised that it is in group work that we realise we are perceiving things differently. If you are in a like-minded group or like-minded culture you think there is only one way of doing things (Walker: 29).

Tennant expressed much the same view, agreeing with Mezirow about the role of significant others in justifying beliefs and interpretations. He too made the point that he believed the group often had a key role in validating transformation for the individual:

> There often needs to be some kind of person outside the self who anoints. It has to be socially endorsed. That's where I think it's important for transformative learning not to occur one to one, but to occur in a group

> situation where the facilitator doesn't play the guru role at all, doesn't do the anointing. It's so often the group that does that best (Tennant: 179).

This view was supported by Geraldine who said that in this sense she had found the experience of group work very helpful in clarifying ideas about her personal commitment to her church.

> So I decided after that that I don't want a church that isn't on about healing and I'm not interested in the rules, laws and regulations. I'm very determined that this shouldn't be decided for me ... it has been transformative learning for me just talking that through (Geraldine: 433).

Geraldine appears to be using the word "transformative" very generally here but she is making the point that in the final analysis the identification and transformation of meaning perspectives is always going to be a very personal thing - the individual chooses to make a change or chooses not to do so. Much of what I have reported above about group process would apply to group work in any effective adult learning situation and what people were describing were in many instances appropriate and well-established adult learning strategies. As I have pointed out above, with F.A.L., Keane was conducting a program whose aim was to introduce experientially this group of people involved with the learning of adults to a variety of learning strategies, including those which made transformative learning possible. What Keane told me that he especially wished the participants to understand, however, was the nature and processes of transformative learning and how a grasp of this particular form of learning can be very helpful to them in structuring their work with adults. But he emphasised that the F.A.L. program is not designed to get people to change in particular pre-determined directions.

From my experience of interviewing at length six of the participants the F.A.L. program I believe the program did in many cases help these people to become critically aware of some of their personal meaning perspectives which in hindsight they perceived as having come to constrain the way they saw themselves and their relationships (Mezirow 1981). I have given above instances from the interviews which support this conviction. However, transformation of one's personal meaning perspectives is always the decision of the individual and I agree with Tennant that "It [transformative learning] is quite rare learning,

to change one's world view" (Tennant: 131). The F.A.L. groups were places for affirmation as well as challenge, and concepts about which individuals might be uncertain could be identified, checked and modified. and often were. But ultimately transformation of meaning perspectives is deeply personal and individual - it is not in my view a group process although Tennant's comment that the group can help validate and endorse transformation is perceptive. The question arises therefore of whether any procedure or effective learning strategies emerged from the interviews and the F.A.L. experience that seemed to be effective in enabling individuals to move further once certain assumptions and meaning perspectives were identified. One answer to that question which certainly did emerge from the interviews was the writing of personal journals following group learning experiences. This needs now to be considered.

Personal journal writing

The writing of personal journals was used a good deal by Keane and it was mentioned by a number of those interviewed as a significant procedure. It was perceived as offering personal space for focusing critical reflection more directly upon the self. Journal writing as presented by Keane involves adult learners taking quiet time to write down honestly and truthfully the results of critical reflection upon their assumptions and personal situations. Keane, the facilitator of F.A.L., urged all participants to keep a journal during the program and I noted that he often chose the moment for allocating time to journal writing after a particularly demanding activity or period of group work. He described journal writing as most relevant and valuable for transformative learning because "what it makes you do is articulate to yourself what it is that's actually going on for you" (Keane: 122).

Because it was significant for my research, during the program I devoted more time and attention to recording reflections upon my own assumptions about learning than I might have done in other circumstances. In his regard I noted at the end of the fourth day:

> It strikes me more each time I write in this journal that it is a very valuable technique because it stops what I'm learning just flowing away. It stops the learning being incidental only. it makes it rather more specific and more

> conscious, more focused. Fror i my having to reflect on it and write it down honestly I think it's more likely to get right through and to last (John 2: 74).

Walker too said that he recomme ided journal writing in his work and thought it particularly valuable for transforma ive learning, commenting that it was not only an intellectual experience but that one's feelings too should be recorded:

> Once you engage people at the actual level of their experience, feelings begin to emerge and I find wit i journals you are often working at transformation, you can actually ask them what their feelings are, feelings that have been there as they ha ve worked through the material. And why they think they are there (Walker: 132).

Sean, said that he found journal wri ing a procedure which was for him stimulating and conducive to personal growth:

> Yes, and the beauty of that is, that it helps you get it out. You can then say, 'What does that represent in te rms of my feeling and experience and my attitude towards this thing, ho v much of it do I want to share?' It leads you to another level of decision making. If you write the same thing ten days later, maybe it'll come out diffierently. But that's growth (Sean: 251).

The perceived value of journal writing was also endorsed by Marion in a very personal anecdote:

> I went home on the Wednesda y night and I thought 'I'm going to write about just a few things that have been on my mind the last twelve months.' And I sat down and I wrote for two hours. You know, what you write at midnight isn't necessarily what you think the next morning at seven o'clock when you re-read it. But I read it the next morning when I was having my breakfast, and I didn't tear it up. And it's been really very liberating. The things that I wrote down that I just haven't had the courage to deal with (Marion: 89).

The type of learning Marion is descr bing here sounds very much like the identification of basic assumptions and meaning pe spectives, especially in regard to her last sentence "things that I wrote down that I just haven't had the courage to deal with". Several others, both practitioners and participants. said much the same thing. The only significant difference of opinion on the issue of journal writing as a procedure for evaluating personal

experience including one's values and assumptions was between Keane and Boud. Boud maintained that if a journal was as intensely personal as it should be, people ought not be pressed to share it with others, whereas for Keane it was an exercise which he asked people to submit to him. If Boud is right in saying that having to submit a journal might adversely affect the absolute candour of what is written it is also true that submitting a journal to a facilitator is in a sense a continuation of a dialogue. That was Keane's view. Boud did say, however, that he often asked participants in his programs to submit to him towards the end of a program a personal written evaluation of what they had learned - how they viewed and felt about their learning experiences and especially about things that had changed for them. He said that he encouraged them to support what they said by quotations from their journals. It remains a moot point, and there seems value in both arguments. The general view of journal writing, however, from both practitioners and participants, was that it was a helpful procedure for adults in regard to learning, one which could at times be personally transforming. So also was the support for writing down all or part of one's life story.

Autobiography and critical reflection

A specialised form of writing related to the personal journal which elicited a positive response from many of those interviewed in regard to its relevance to the present discussion of strategies which promote transformative learning was autobiography. Autobiography as a procedure for identifying, re-examining and perhaps transforming psychocultural assumptions can take a relatively straightforward form, such as that referred to by Mezirow in my interview with him:

> One of the best devices that we had for that was life histories, life histories where they really get deeply involved in each others' stories. ... what were the turning points in these peoples' lives, what were the influences, what were the learnings that brought them together in this kind of self identification (Mezirow: 108)?

Nelson had much the same view of the value of journal writing but his research took it much further. He submitted his doctoral thesis on the role of the autobiography and the imagination in transformative learning early in 1995. During my interview with him later in

that year he spoke of his experience of facilitating the re-creation of life stories and expressing them through autobiography as a procedure which he had found very powerful - often for those with whom the story was shared as well as for the writer her/himself. By way of illustration he referred to a contemporary autobiography written by the Australian-American academic and former president of Smith College in the United States, Jill Ker Conway, commenting that

> autobiography will so often be an account of transformative learning if it is in any way genuine. It's the way in which I've traced my own transformation. ... I think another good example is Jill Ker Conway's *The Road from Coorain*. I think it's a very seminal book and that's why it's so popular. She seems to connect the people and the influences in her life and she explores how that has framed her life. And people relate to that. It's what fascinates us (Nelson: 42)

Nelson went on in reference to his own research to extend the concept of autobiography in creative and imaginative directions:

> I began to see that one's life story wasn't just fuzzy data, it was constructed and re-constructed reality. As these guys began telling and re-telling their stories they began changing them (Nelson: 14). ... And their stories began to be characterised by an increasing sense of reality and also comfort. Through writing and sharing their stories they gradually come to the stage where they could see through what was going on (Nelson: 18).

Nelson found that the people he worked with said that autobiography had helped them come to terms with why their assumptions, value systems and 'taken for granteds' were what they were, and how they saw such assumptions as finding expression in their lives, for both good and ill. Nelson saw this deeply personal articulation of cogent forces in a person's life as a powerful stimulus for personal growth and coming to terms with change. It opened the way for transformation made it possible for people to think laterally as it were and to explore alternatives to attitudes they had and positions they had taken, principally because of inculturated assumptions about what was right and what was worthwhile in life. Crucial to this exploration of their own life story was sharing it, and critically reflecting upon it with others in an environment of attentiveness and mutual respect.

At the time of my interview with Jim Nelson's thesis had been submitted but not yet approved and only Boud and Tennant seemed aware of his work. I had private access to the thesis but not permission to quote from it. However I did have access to Nelson's 1994 journal article which describes his research and why it was undertaken. None of the other participants in the F.A.L. program spoke of formal autobiography in relation to transformative learning. However from the quotations already cited in many places above it is clear that they did bring to their learning critical reflection upon aspects of their own personal histories which they felt free to share with others. It was my perception that as a result they were helped to understand better their own life experience and the assumptions and value systems which had shaped it.

Structuring the creative imagination

Nelson's research referred to above is concerned not just with the autobiography but with the creative imagination often associated with it, and with the potential of both together for personal transformation. Nelson saw the use of the imagination as spontaneous at times but also as open to being creatively facilitated:

> What I'm saying is that one of the ways through transformative learning or through critique to transformative learning is the imagination. There are two types of imagination, there's spontaneous imagination which is outside one's control and the other is controlled (Nelson: 56).

Nelson's point here of moving "through critique to transformative learning" is particularly apt. The point he is making is that it is not the images or symbols that achieves the transformation but rather the experience of critical reflection upon them from an entirely new angle or perspective. He went on to speak of his view of the transformative potential of an imaginative interpretation not only of one's own story, but of what an individual can see of his/her personal story in the stories of others.

The learning strategy of using the creative imagination for transformative learning was raised by others, both practitioners and the participants, during the interviews. Keane made considerable use of participants' imagination during the F.A.L. program, both as a way of

helping them come to terms with their own deeply held assumptions and meaning perspectives and as a creative avenue towards new personal horizons. Tom reported that he found Keane's use of the imagination as a learning strategy particularly powerful in getting him in touch with the values and ideals which had motivated his life - "It gets me in touch with a very quiet and a very deep place inside. I suppose the thing that I like about it is that it's an adventure, it's like a dream" (Tom: 77). Sean too found the use of the creative imagination particularly powerful and inspirational, quoting from Coleridge, 'Weave a circle round him thrice, for he on honeydew had fed and drunk the milk of paradise' (Sean: 80).

At the end of the F.A.L. program I recorded my own impressions of listening to Tom describe to the group what he saw in the life of Martin Luther King as the enormous potential of using the imagination in appealing to his audiences to transform deeply inculturated positions on race relations and national identity - the reflection speaks for itself and seems worth quoting in full:

> The story of Martin Luther King raised by Tom was for me a significant breakthrough in regard to the value of the imagination for transformative learning. It helped me see that learning isn't only achieved rationally, with the mind, the judgment and the will. The imaginative language of King's well known phrases - 'I've dreamed a dream ...', 'I've been to the top of the mountain ... and I've seen ...' appeal as powerfully now as they did to people in the United States during the 1960s. These are archetypal images of great strength, straight out of the Old Testament, so strong in fact that they helped change the attitude of a whole nation. And motivated people for whom the challenge was too great to kill the man - a closing of doors, a closing of minds, a refusal of transformation (John 3: 74).

By way of summary, it would seem then that what practitioners and participants were saying about procedures for transformative learning was that if learners were to become critically aware of "how and why the structure of their psychocultural assumptions had come to constrain the way they saw themselves and their relationships" (Mezirow 1981: 6), it was important that facilitators first be fully aware of the internal processes through which adults move in such learning. Those interviewed seemed to be saying that appropriate procedures would grow out of such understandings. They told me that the implications of the learning strategies they were suggesting and in many cases describing from the

perspective of personal experience of both teaching and learning were clustered around creating an appropriate learning environment, structuring for critical reflection upon the self in group situations, getting people to attend to their personal feelings, writing journals and telling one's story, listening to the stories of others, providing opportunity for sharing through discourse and dialogue, and encouraging learners to use meaningful symbols and their imaginations in order to create and share personal experience. It now seems appropriate to turn to the ethical implications associated with these procedures or strategies.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

There was general agreement amongst virtually all those interviewed by me that because transformative learning concerns the identification and re-appraisal of very personal and deeply held psycho-cultural assumptions, ethical considerations emerge for facilitators as of great importance. The whole process can affect profoundly an individual's self image and personal equanimity and there is a sense in which this is "sacred ground" (Marion: 193). The point has already been made that it would be inappropriate and unethical for a facilitator to employ strategies similar to those outlined in the earlier part of this chapter with a view to bringing pressure to bear upon individuals to change in certain preconceived directions. There seemed to be agreement, however, that it was legitimate for facilitators to create situations in which individuals might find themselves challenged to take responsibility for their own learning and if this involved considering what their assumptions were in relation to certain situations, and subjecting those assumptions to considerable scrutiny, this could well constitute important learning for them.

In regard to these ethical responsibilities both practitioners and participants pointed to the need to have clearly established learning contracts, to the obligation upon facilitators to respect learners and for learners to respect one another, to the importance of creating an atmosphere of trust within learning groups and to the paramount obligation to observe confidentiality within the group. They also spoke of the need for adult learners to take responsibility for their own learning, for the establishment of a clear interface between

learning and therapy, and of the importance of facilitators not loading their own personal dilemmas, problems or agendas upon learners. These ethical responsibilities apply in all adult learning situations but especially in the area of transformative learning and what the research revealed is considered now in further detail

Learning contracts

A number of the practitioners spoke of the importance of establishing at the beginning of any program involving transformative learning strategies a clear understanding of what was involved and definite contractual arrangements between facilitators and learners about what the boundaries were. Tennant put this very directly:

> The contract must be clear and the students must know it ... and there's a common bond with and between the students - to look at themselves and at the contents of the current problem. Because these things put pressure on individuals (Tennant 32-34).

Walker supported Tennant's position, pointing to particular ethical obligations of facilitators:

> To use education in an evangelising way I think is a violation of professional ethics. You are not there to promote your line and to manipulate people into following that line. By all means have your line, make that public. But I feel that education always has the possibility of being manipulative. ... There has to be consent. It's contract learning, and people need to know that (Walker: 207).

He (Walker) went on to make a positive suggestion on this same issue:

> It seems to me that active involvement in professional groups can help adult educators, belonging to professional groups that have an active charter that is in some way enforced if people deviate from it. I think that acknowledges your responsibility to your peer group to keep within the parameters that are acceptable to that peer group Walker: 156).

This is an important practical suggestion which operates well in other professions and one worth noting in regard to the implications of the present research. Walker's comment was supported by Boud who cautioned that

> there may be a problem (in regard to transformative learning) with informed consent, the facilitator doesn't actually know exactly what's going to happen. We just need to explore these things together a whole lot more than we have done in the past (Boud: 323)

Thus the overall position of the practitioners was quite clear. From the outset facilitators need to be frank about the objectives of a program using transformative learning approaches. Their general position was well summed up by Newman:

> I think the responsibilities are heavy ones in that ... you need to be absolutely clear to people what your objectives are ... I think your responsibility is to say 'This is going to be difficult stuff and we will be examining some of our values and assumptions. We will be examining some kinds of ideologies that you perhaps hold dear' (Newman: 185).

Newman then added by way of example:

> I'm always clear about my political position with people I work with. Usually when I'm meeting a new group I make a joke about my union experience. I say 'Look I used to work with unionists and if I happen to just call you all comrades by accident it's just because I have slipped back in time a moment' ... it gets a laugh (Newman: 187).

My own reflection in regard to the use of the creative imagination about which I felt some concern as a participant observer at the end of day four of the F.A.L. program supported the above view put to me later by Newman:

> Memory imaging, especially of disturbing, embarrassing and difficult images, may have painful consequences. There's got to be a limit on how much of this as a facilitator you want to do. Getting in touch with deeply held assumptions and feelings about the self is not without danger. So in a sense, it's very important in any exercise where people are talking to one another for example that you emphasise that everyone shares only to the extent that they feel they want to share. They're adults and they have to decide (John 2: 72).

So the implications of these and similar comments are that facilitators need to be well trained in interpersonal skills, they need peer support and perhaps on occasion peer accountability, and they need to make very clear to participants what the agenda is and the type of learning strategies that are going to be used. Both practitioners and participants made the point, however, that adult learners in the long run need to take responsibility for their own learning and that they should feel obliged to share only as much about themselves as they are willing to do.

Respect for learners

Respect for learners was an ethical consideration which was mentioned frequently by both practitioners and participants. Boud made it clear that in his own case:

> I want to be respectful to where people are coming from ... especially where there's a level of acceptance, where there's a level of energising, provoking, confronting, challenging, but all within a supportive context ... a micro-climate as it were (Boud: 187).

And again:

> The things that facilitators do can touch peoples' lives in ways that they never imagined. And at one level it should make us a bit more humble than we often are about the effects of our work. Unless you operate with a great deal of sensitivity, very closely attuned to the learners, you can be just creating an awful lot of extra pressure in peoples' lives when they've got an awful lot of pressure anyway (Boud: 258).

Tom agreed strongly and referred to the need for respectful attitudes to confidentiality:

> Ethics really gets down to things like respect and valuing and building trust - valuing - it's valuing the people and developing trust with the people, that's what's important. What is unethical is to betray that trust (Tom: 210).

My own experience at the end of the second day of the F.A.L. program reflected my awareness of this issue, based upon my two days experience of the group:

> So there was as a result a sort of communal consent that we were doing this course together and we could trust one another to share a bit. We had in a

> sense established something of a safe zone. We had prepared the ground for dialogue and discourse, and felt free about doing only as much of that as we wanted to - but actually people shared a great deal (John 1: 44).

Marion expressed what the issue of confidentiality meant for her:

> Something Andrew asked, what had it been like for us ... it was our final thing and he spoke about the sanctity of each person and that we were on sacred ground. I got this great lump in my throat. I think that's a real responsibility (Marion: 193).

Both practitioners from their perspective, and participants based upon their experience, believed that there were strong ethical implications for facilitators in using transformative learning approaches - getting people to probe their assumptions. There was a general consensus about the ethical obligations upon facilitators to respect learners, to observe confidentiality and to do all that they can to ensure that group members do in fact show respect for one another. In the final analysis, however, both practitioners and participants believed that there had to be a realisation that adults are in fact adults, they have obligations to and rights to expect from the group, but they must ultimately be themselves the arbiters of how much and at what depth they want to be involved.

Learners accepting responsibility for their own learning.

Whilst practitioners were strong on the need to treat learners with respect they were equally definite about the need for adults to take responsibility for their own learning, especially in situations where there was likely to be significant difference of opinion - at least initially. Newman's comment in this regard seemed apt:

> In one sense you have to say 'Look, you've got to look after yourselves' (Newman: 193). ... And given there is a lack of coercion and a reasonable ability to contest and question and criticise, I'm saying we (facilitators) must not take too much responsibility for what happens. Because if we did we'd never take risks and you can expect learning to be risky (Newman: 197).

Tennant pointed out that there are dilemmas here, however, which may need to be negotiated frankly with learners:

> You invite people to express a view and if you do some people for example will come up with very racist views. ... they come out with things which other people find offensive. We have a regulation here (at U.T.S.), you can't use discriminatory language in the University. But in this sense what is the contract? Is the contract that people can really say what they want to say or are some things prohibited in the conversation? (Tennant: 64).

Newman considered a similar dilemma and his method of resolving the dilemma was to be absolutely frank with the group:

> And so if something comes up that I have a strong view about, just because I'm the teacher why should I not have a go - they can write to the Vice-chancellor if they don't like it In a sense I have always adopted the position that I am not responsible for learners to the n'th degree. So I reckon that if I am operating with a kind of integrity, that is, an integrity to my own beliefs - then I need to let them know that. But they have got to take the risk if it's bad news (Newman: 195).

As a participant observer I was not aware of any strong levels of disagreement within the F.A.L. group over the six days and in fact this was probably one of the limitations in choosing just such a cohesive group They were on the whole employed people of mixed genders, from similar socio-economic backgrounds, and even though their previous life and employment histories were diverse they seemed on the whole to be at ease with the goals of the large organisation to which they belonged. If they had been overtly differentiated by race, gender perspective, employment level and political or industrial persuasion things might have been more turbulent. But ultimately the same principle would I believe, have applied, as adults they would have had to take responsibility for their own ethical attitudes to one another and to participating in the program.

The interface between transformative learning and therapy

If it is clear that adults must in the final analysis take responsibility for themselves and their own learning are there, nevertheless, implications arising from particular constraints upon

facilitators in regard to what strategies can be used in particular circumstances? One such issue which was raised repeatedly during the interviews and referred to earlier in this chapter was the question of the interface between transformative learning and therapy. When questioned on the issue Tennant responded with a question:

> At what point do we begin talking about therapy, because transformative learning implies a major change in a person - often as a result of bringing to the surface things that either they were unaware of or that they'd rather not talk about (Tennant: 22)?

Tennant went on to give as an example a particular strategy for recalling suppressed memory which he had discontinued using because it seemed outside the contract he believed he had with adults in normal learning situations:

> I used a technique to get them thinking about the notion of the unconscious, to give them a feeling for what it was we were talking about when we talk about the unconscious, bringing to the surface forgotten memories and things like that. But I stopped doing that because in normal learning situations I think it goes beyond the contract ... I've done those kinds of things in the past but I've decided not to do that, because of the contract (Tennant: 233).

This is a clear and informed statement to which attention must be paid. Boud commented that "a lot of therapy is actually just good educational practice" (Boud: 288). Other practitioners were quick to assert that because the emotions and the imagination are so strongly involved, transformative learning often occurs only "at the edge" - "no pain no gain" to use Tom's (45) phrase referred to earlier. Boud clearly agreed with Tom and continued that because of the very nature of transformative learning it was important for facilitators to take risks at times.

> Psychologists have been rather over-successful in scaring people off. I think first all we in the education business need to be a lot more comfortable with the bits of therapy that are up our end of spectrum. I'm not talking about dealing with profoundly distressed and disturbed people. I'm talking about the normal levels of distress and emotional discomfort that we see everyday in our lives, with people that we work with (Boud: 286).

For Walker this was a very genuine issue, and he commented:

> The fact that you are not going into therapy doesn't mean that adults in learning groups can't deal with their assumptions at quite a deep level. Some people of course can't learn because they have major blocks that only therapy can remove. It is at least worth noting that there may be some areas where therapy is necessary. We are really confronted with ethics here and the basic ethical consideration is, 'Do you have a right to work at this level with people?' (Walker: 50).

Jane, one of the participants, supported Walker's view, using three times the word "fear" to convey her reservations:

> I think there's a lot of fear. Fear of disclosing ourselves. But I mean ... you know a lot of people wouldn't - don't feel comfortable with doing that within the large group. I actually think that even within individuals there's fear in allowing ourselves to know what the source of our fear is (Jane: 75).

In repeating the strong word "fear" Jane I believe, was implying that facilitators must be sensitive to and discern such fear. And by fear Jane seems to be referring not only to fear of exposing oneself to others, but as well in the second of the above references to fear of making admissions to oneself. Tom too acknowledged this, and saw the issue as one involving both personal judgment and ethical integrity - "I think the ethical question is one really of understanding your audience, the participants as well as the teacher, really reading what is happening" (Tom: 190).

My own written reflection in this regard at the end of the first day of the program is interesting in hindsight:

> It suddenly struck me that assumptions, not just rational assumptions but psychocultural conditioning and non-rational assumptions, are very powerful "blockers" of the process of innovative thinking. It takes courage to face these blockers, and to work through the disorienting experiences and powerful feelings associated with them (John 1: 36).

So the implication for practice appears to be one of discerning relatively profound levels of feeling as indicative of personal and deeply held assumptions that may need to be surfaced and re-valued, yet at the same time exercising great respect for the person and great

professional integrity. On the whole the collective judgment of those questioned seemed to be that provided care was taken by the facilitator in the early stages and from time to time during the program in building a group climate characterised by mutual respect, consideration for one another, active listening and confidentiality, there was value in challenging the group itself to take collective responsibility for its own ethical standards. Such climate building takes time and involves risks. Moreover, the general consensus was that transformative learning often does take place "at the edge" and that it is only in the risking perhaps that learners will find the courage to face and evaluate those deeply inculturated psycho-cultural assumptions about themselves and the world from which transformation of personal perspectives may come. I recall Marion's commented cited earlier - "The things I wrote down that I just hadn't had the courage to deal with" (Marion 89). After all the caveats expressed in the last few paragraphs are taken into account, if such honesty involves some level of personal distress but is potentially a genuine source of transformation and growth those interviewed seemed to be saying "So be it, they're adults, they have to make the decision!"

Facilitators' own agenda.

One final ethical issue on which there was virtually unanimous agreement amongst all those interviewed was that facilitators would be acting extremely unethically if they were to "dump their own agenda" (Boud: 264) on learners with whom they were involved in a privileged learning relationship. This is of course an ethical principle which applies in any learning situation but it would seem to be particularly important when people are working at a deeply personal level and are as a result correspondingly vulnerable. Boud was very clear on this issue:

> I think that one of the things that facilitators need - especially when you're up this end of the spectrum - is not to be in a position where you're working through your own material. You've got to be there for the people that you're with and you need some means of dealing with your own personal distress elsewhere. I think it important not to dump it on other people. Either directly, or indirectly (Boud: 264).

Tennant agreed:

> You have group dynamics to consider. And your own psychological dynamics. But of course the other end for an educational practitioner is constantly to look to yourself and to explore your own agenda elsewhere (Tennant: 259).

The practitioners did not make any other comments on this issue although I have the impression from re-reading the transcripts that it is implicit in so much else they said. Within the FAL group it was not an issue, partly at least I believe because of Keane's modeling of a very professional attitude throughout which as a participant observer in F.A.L. I could not fault. His practice of constantly checking with the group about procedures, of allocating time for quiet reflection followed by sharing in pairs or small groups and then with the whole group provided an opportunity for issues such as this to surface and be dealt with by the group itself. In the final analysis it was clearly up to group members as adults to make such decisions - and from my observation they did.

CONCLUSION

Chapters 4 and 5 have been concerned with the results of the research, that is with what was said by the thirteen persons interviewed, both practitioners and participants, and my own perceptions as participant observer, in response to the four original research questions. Chapter 5 has dealt more particularly with the "procedures and implications for practice" of transformative learning, that is, with those strategies considered appropriate to learning situations in which individuals may become "critically aware of how and why the structure of their psycho-cultural assumptions has come to constrain the way they see themselves and their relationships" (Mezirow 1981, p. 6).

At the beginning of Chapter 5 "procedures" were defined for the purposes of the research as those individual and group strategies perceived to be helpful in enabling, making more possible, the identification by individuals of their own personal assumptions and habits of mind, the frames of reference out of which they habitually operate which they sometimes take for granted and of which until some disorienting experience or appropriate learning

situation arises they may even be unaware. It emerged from the analysis that in the opinion of those interviewed, and for ethical reasons, no facilitator would be justified in devising strategies for the specific purpose of manipulating learners into surfacing and transforming personal meaning perspectives in certain preconceived directions. However, both practitioners and participants did identify certain other procedures which they deemed to be both ethical and effective in encouraging individual learners to identify and consider closely all elements of their own personal frames of reference, their meaning perspectives, but very definitely with a view to making up their own minds about the transformation of them. The point was made by many of those interviewed that such procedures or strategies can result in highly significant learning for individuals and for this reason they believed it was important that those who work in the area of adult learning should be aware of them.

The procedures or strategies which emerged as a result of this process involved the creation of appropriate learning environments, the identification of relevant personal feelings, individual critical reflection, experiences of group interaction and learning, personal journal writing and the creative use of autobiography and the imagination. All of these learning strategies have implications for practice and for reasons explained at the beginning of the chapter these two issues, that is procedures and implications, have been taken together. Implications arising from ethical issues involved in adopting some of the procedures were not at first part of the agenda as expressed in the original schedule of questions but they emerged strongly in virtually all the interviews. They have been outlined and discussed in the latter part of Chapter 5. Chapter 6 moves to the writer's reflections upon the findings of the research and their relationship to the current literature on adult and transformative learning as described in Chapter 2.