# CHAPTER 6

## DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

The purpose of Chapter 6 is to reflect critically upon and to discuss the results of the research project described in this thesis. These results have been presented in Chapters 4 and 5 and deal with the issues raised by the research questions, namely the nature, processes and procedures of transformative learning and implications for practice. Chapter 6 considers the findings of the research in all these areas and compares them with what emerged from the discussion of the literature as outlined in Chapter 2. For reasons described in Chapter 3 on methodology, draft copies of Chapters 4 and 5 were sent to each of the seven practitioners interviewed so that they would know how they had been quoted and in what context. As a result of the first six of the replies some minor modifications only had to be made, possibly because the practitioners had already seen and responded to the transcripts of the original interviews. Professor Mezirow, however, replied with a significant letter the central paragraph of which I have included below rather than insert it into Chapter 4 because it came as a response to his reading of that chapter and Chapter 5. It is a significant contribution by Mezirow at this late stage in my work and I believe I must take it into consideration here because it raises some of Mezirow's current concerns about the meaning of key terms associated with transformative learning, most notably meaning perspectives and meaning schemes and their relation to one another. The paragraph quoted is a reflection by Mezirow in response to a query by Tennant (143) which I had quoted in Chapter 4 (p. 126). For reasons of convenience I repeat here the quotation from Tennant:

> 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).

Mezirow's letter makes the following comment on this passage. The words in parenthesis are his:

> The question has to do with transformative learning - the degree to which it is normative. This is a difficult issue because there are so many types of transformation - those involving transformation of points of view (meaning schemes) as distinct from epochal transformations of habits of mind (meaning perspectives). There are cumulative transformations in points of view leading to a transformation in a habit of mind. There are transformations that are objective - focused on practical problems of instrumental learning - and those that are subjective, focused on one's own frame of reference. There are transformations that occur as a result of assimilative learning that may or may not involve a deliberate act of critical reflection; others (which may or may not be precipitated by adult education) occur as a result of a deliberate act of critical reflection. So the question Tennant raises is not easy to answer. Certainly some of these forms of transformation could be considered normative in our culture (Mezirow 1996, p. 1).

These issues will be addressed in the context of the first of the research questions which deals with the nature of transformative learning.

## THE NATURE OF TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

The findings of my research lead me to believe that transformative learning represents a distinct, recognisable and deeply personal form of learning, one especially appropriate in adulthood. It is learning which may be disconcerting and difficult, yet it is often liberating and potentially at least empowering for the individual. It has the capacity to open up new avenues of individual perception and in certain circumstances it can contribute significantly to personal and professional development. That is what individuals I interviewed for my study, many of whom I have quoted in Chapter 4, said to me. I vividly recall the passion of Marion's (33) assertion "You get to the stage where you think, 'I can't go on like this any longer'". I recall Geraldine's description of her release from what she described as her "shackles ... I just came out walking on air", and Tom's (29) "It was absolutely life-changing, it turned my life around". These are people speaking of learning which in certain aspects of their lives constituted a virtual metamorphosis, a radical change of outlook. They saw the use of the term "transformative" in association with such learning as entirely appropriate. They were not speaking of what they called "normal" learning, learning

associated with acquiring new skills or learning through interaction with others. They were talking about themselves as learners first of all, and about radical shifts in very personal ways of looking at their lives and work

The perceptions of those involved with me in this research, interpreted through my own experience at the time and my reflection since then, lead me to believe that transformative learning is learning which is distinct from, yet complementary to other forms of learning. I believe Mezirow (1978a, 1978b, 1981) and the others referred to in Chapter 2 (Brookfield 1986, 1992a, 1993b; Cranton 1992, 1994) are right in insisting that people do not learn everything in precisely the same way What they learn is affected by the context of the learning for them and by what they have already learned. The personal context of that prior learning, whether it be epistemic, sociological or psychological is characterised by associated assumptions or meaning perspectives, ways of perceiving reality built up over time. These personal meaning perspectives, these "frames of reference", and "habits of mind" to use two of Mezirow's other terms for meaning perspectives will almost inevitably affect what individuals learn, what they find difficult to learn and in certain circumstances what they will not learn. My informants gave examples from their own lives which showed that they had begun to grasp how such learning was different from other forms of making meaning out of knowledge because it began with themselves. It was separate from yet complementary to learning involving the acquisition of knowledge, technical skills and even complex professional understandings and capacities (instrumental learning in Mezirow's terminology, technical in that of Habermas), and learning arising from an understanding of the interaction between people and situations in reflection and discourse (communicative, dialogic learning in Mezirow's terminology, practical in that of Habermas).

People told me during the interviews of a whole variety of instances, many of which have been cited in Chapters 4 and 5 and referred to again in the previous two paragraphs, in which their personal consciousness, their values, patterns of assumptions and habits of mind had been strongly challenged by certain events in their lives and in their work. Not infrequently this had constituted for them a "disorienting experience" and I well recall Jane's statement about her own experience - "to say it was disorienting would be putting it

mildly" (Jane: 31). Through critical reflection sometimes aided by the cut and thrust of dialogue with others these people had come first to identify, then to challenge and eventually in some instances to reconstitute certain of their meaning perspectives in relation to the issue that had provoked the disorientation. They said that they experienced this in ways which were disconcerting, disturbing and sometimes painful at the time, yet they recognised also that the experience had led them ultimately to new and rewarding ways of looking at themselves and their daily ways of working and relating. Not infrequently they found such experiences emancipatory and liberating. Geraldine (6) spoke of "that most frustrating experience, being challenged" and for Marion such a realisation led to a sense of personal liberation: 'I haven't looked back. It was really liberating for me because I'm no longer in her shadow. And I was in her shadow." (Marion: 173).

The learning these people were describing was not always easy or welcomed by them. I remember Luke's exchange with Tom (25) on the first day of the F.A.L. program "What the hell is this all about!". I recall vividly my own reaction to the animated discussion by one group of participants on the subject of the films *Educating Rita* and *The Remains of the Day*. Later I found in Cranton (1994, p. 18) reference to *Educating Rita* in exactly the same context. Many of the people I interviewed could identify personally not only with instances of recognising and embracing new perspectives as occurred to the characters in these plays, novels and films *(Educating Rita)*, but with less happy memories of turning their backs upon opportunities for liberation and growth *(The Remains of the Day)*.

I have reflected at length and discussed with others Mezirow's letter to me in which he includes both "transformation of points of view (meaning schemes)" and "epochal transformations of habits of mind (meaning perspectives)" as amongst "many types of transformation" (Mezirow 1996, p. 1). In the letter Mezirow goes on to indicate that in his view the term "transformation" can apply to changes in both objective and subjective perspectives - "There are transformations that are objective - focused on practical problems of instrumental learning - and those that are subjective - focused on one's own frame of reference". This description is much broader than that implied in Tennant's (131) assertion that "It (transformative learning) is quite rare learning". Mezirow had read Tennant's comment in my Chapter 4 and he has clearly picked up on the point Tennant is making.

In his letter, however, Mezirow goes on to reaffirm the position expressed in his interview with me that transformative learning can be both a change in the specifics and particulars of external reality, that is a change in a meaning scheme as in the previously quoted example of a way of looking at a paint brush (Mezirow: 45), and also a fundamental transformation in oneself and one's perception of the world, that is a transformation of a meaning perspective. The participants especially in my research were of the view that it is only the latter more fundamental transformation in outlook which they saw as truly "transformative", as constituting the "growth outcome" which Tennant (143) and those participants quoted above were speaking about. Moreover, in picking up on the difference between his view and that of Tennant in the letter (1996, p. 1) Mezirow goes on to express some disquiet on this issue, pointing out that "The question has to do with transformative learning - the degree to which it is normative. This is a difficult question because there are so many types of transformation". He had raised a similar question with me in the interview I had with him - "But it isn't all transformative learning, maybe it should have a different name added to it" (Mezirow: 38).

I believe Mezirow is right to raise this question and his doing so is supported by my research. I believe it weakens the very significant impact of transformative learning as learning involving fundamental change in personal meaning perspectives if the term is applied at the same time to the incidentals and specifics of instrumental learning. The participants in my study supported Tennant's (131) view that transformative learning is quite rare learning, they did not see it as part of what they called "normal" learning experienced on an everyday basis. From their personal experience, some of which they related to me, they identified readily with the idea that there were certain habits of mind, certain underlying assumptions and ways of thinking and acting, (i.e. meaning perspectives) which they had acquired either in childhood or in other formative years, of which they were not always consciously aware and yet out of which they had over long periods continued to think, feel, judge and act. They recalled instances from their experience of how they had come to understand that learning which involved identifying and evaluating such meaning perspectives through critical reflection, discourse and dialogue, and ultimately transforming them, could be very significant learning. Through examples drawn from their own lives both practitioners and participants showed that they

could understand how the idiosyncratic network of concepts, strategies and understandings people acquire over time inevitably affect their ability to deal with and profit from new concepts, new ideas and new learning. From personal experience as well as from their professional work as educators both groups involved in my study reacted positively to transformative learning as a concept of learning which they saw as having the capacity to empower individuals to identify, assess critically and if necessary reframe the structures of psycho-cultural assumptions in a particular area, i.e. their meaning perspectives, which they had acquired through behaviourist conditioning which had come to constrain the way they saw themselves and their relationships (cf. Mezirow 1981, p. 6).

This view of the nature of transformative learning which emerges for me from my research is consistent with Mezirow's earlier work (1978a, 1978b, 1981) but it sits less easily with his change of view as indicated most clearly in the quotation which I have cited earlier in Chapter 2 (p. 53) that his having designated emancipative learning as a separate and in some sense comparable domain of learning was confusing and that the concept of transformative learning was applicable to both instrumental and communicative learning as well (Mezirow 1989, p. 175). I believe it is this extended definition of transformative learning on Mezirow's part which led him from this time to see transformative learning as applying to changes in "meaning schemes, transformation of points of view" - which in his published work he consistently refers to as "specific" and "particular" - as well as to changes in meaning perspectives, that is "epochal transformations of habits of mind" (1996, p. 1).

The views expressed to me, notably by Tennant (143) but also by other practitioners and participants in my research, support Mezirow's earlier position that the term transformative learning is better seen as confined to Mezirow's third - the emancipatory - domain of learning, that is to transformation of meaning perspectives. They described such learning as different from what they called "normal" learning because its context involves directly the "core" of the self, a transformation of that individual's psycho-cultural assumptions and habits of mind - in short of that person's meaning perspectives. The people I interviewed did not on the whole see transformative learning as associated also with instrumental and communicative learning which they saw as more consistent with particulars and specifics,

the "points of view" (Mezirow: 1996, p. 1) of meaning schemes. It is to Tennant's view on this issue which Mezirow is referring in his letter to me.

## Questions of terminology

To support the views I have here expressed on the nature of transformative learning I believe it is necessary to articulate the understandings at which I have arrived as a result of reflection upon the findings of my research in relation to the precise meaning of the technical terms which Mezirow appropriated to his purposes twenty years ago, and especially "meaning perspectives" and "meaning schemes". Mezirow's understanding of these terms was most clearly outlined in his significant 1981 article "A Critical Theory of Adult Learning and Education". He has continued to use these terms to the present time, (1985, 1989, 1991, 1994) and as late y as in his recent letter to me (1996a). Before going further, however, I believe it necessary to make a brief general comment upon the question of using particular terminology in constructing theories.

The purpose of technical terms such as those Mezirow has appropriated since 1978 in the area of transformative learning - e g. transformation, perspectives, schemes, meaning perspectives, meaning schemes, perspective transformation - is to define, clarify, make accessible and convey the meaning of particular ideas or concepts, and to establish their relationship to one another. The use of technical language to define and describe particular theoretical concepts in this way needs to be precise and it is important that the meanings given to particular words or phrases should as far as possible be consistent with their generally accepted definitions and common usage. Technical terms, if they are to be helpful in clarifying and communicating the nature of and relationships between theoretical concepts must be used consistently. When clarity and consistency characterise the use of technical terms they become available for use in meaningful ways, not only by their original authors, but by others also.

The Macquarie Dictionary (p. 1856) defines the word "transformation" as "a change in appearance, condition, nature or character, completely or extensively, a metamorphosis".

The Oxford English Dictionary (O.E.D. Vol XVIII, p. 400) defines transformation as "a complete change of character or condition". Transformation is thus a strong word in English, especially when used in reference to human characteristics. Transformation and its adjective transformative when applied to an individual imply quite major shifts in personal consciousness. The term "transformative learning", when it is seen as learning different from what Mezirow has described since 1978 as "instrumental" and "communicative" learning, carries with it the strength of the word "transformation". As I have illustrated in Chapter 4, both the practitioners and participants in this study accepted the idea that transformative learning is learning which is quite different from what they perceived as "normal" learning. So the word "transformation" applied to a person's learning means that he/she has learned something which has changed quite radically his/her outlook in a specific area. Such a transformation of personal perspective will in turn be reflected in how that person sees, judges and acts in this regard from then on.

The word "perspective" in English is used to describe a way of looking at things, how things appear to a person from a particular viewpoint. The O.E.D. (Vol.XI, p. 607) in reference to persons defines perspective as "a mental view, an outlook, or prospect through an imagined extent of time, past or future". Macquarie (p. 1323) indicates that perspective means "the relation of parts to one another and to the whole in a mental view or prospect". A cluster of meaning perspectives therefore means a cluster or set of related knowledge, views, attitudes or ways of looking at things. The word "scheme" is not defined by dictionaries very differently from the word "perspective" and it implies a number of organised concepts characterised by inter-relationship. Macquarie (p. 1569) refers to a scheme as "a body or system of related doctrines or theories, a system of correlated things, parts, or the manner of their arrangement; a program of action." The O.E.D. (Vol. XIX, p. 616) defines a scheme as "a plan, design or program of action, a complex unity in which the component elements co-operate and interact according to a definite plan."

Mezirow chose the terms "meaning perspectives" and "meaning schemes" in relation to "perspective transformation" in 1975-8. From the interviews I conducted with them the participants involved in my research grasped the precise meaning of "meaning perspectives" and "transformative" in reference to learning quite readily, and this supports

my contention that these terms were well chosen by Mezirow. I have cited in Chapter 4 examples which indicate that people knew what was meant by these concepts even though they were unaccustomed to the language used by Mezirow to describe them. However, my conviction in reflecting upon Mezirow's earlier theoretical work, and upon his use of the term "meaning schemes" in his recent letter to me, and his distinguishing "transformation of points of view (meaning schemes)' from "epochal transformations in habits of mind (meaning perspectives)" (Mezirow 1996, p. 1) is that the term "meaning schemes" has not always been used as clearly and consistently as Mezirow has done here. As indicated in Chapter 4 not one even of the practitioners who were all well acquainted with Mezirow's work actually used the term "meaning schemes" in his conversations with me.

For these reasons I have come to the conclusion that the choice of the word "schemes" as indicating a concept which is quite distinct from "perspectives" may not have been entirely appropriate in the first place. As demonstrated in earlier chapters, Mezirow has in recent years increasingly applied the term 'transformative learning" to transformation of both meaning perspectives and meaning schemes - both in the interview I had with him and in his recent letter to me. Yet the word "transformative" means not merely a change in a point of view but a "metamorphosis", a quite radical change as might apply to a significant movement in a person's meaning perspectives. I believe Mezirow's extension of the term transformative learning since 1985 has caused problems in interpreting and applying the concept. In his letter to me Mezirow highlights precisely this issue - "The question has to do with transformative learning - the extent to which it is normative".

My informants, both practitioners and participants, spoke of transformative learning in terms of Mezirow's original 1981 definition, namely as a transformation of meaning perspectives, "the emancipatory process of becoming critically aware of how the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions has come to constrain the way we see ourselves and our relationships" (Mezirow 1981, p. 6). They did not see it as a change in meaning schemes, that is, as expressed in "how we change our minds all the time" (Mezirow: 83), as a change in the particularities and specifics which apply to meaning schemes. This leads me to the significance of my research for current understandings of the meaning of the two key

theoretical concepts Mezirow has used in his work since 1978 - meaning perspectives and meaning schemes.

**Meaning perspectives and meaning schemes**

A number of definitions of meaning perspectives have been given by Mezirow and others, several of which have been quoted and discussed in Chapter 2. Mezirow has maintained consistently since 1978, and in my view correctly, that transformation of meaning perspectives is what constitutes transformative learning. The interviews I had with the persons involved in my research lead me to accept Mezirow's use of the term "meaning perspectives" as appropriate in this context because the transformations to which they referred did indeed represent for them radical transformation, a metamorphosis of "a mental view, an outlook, a prospect through an extent of time", and "a relation of parts to one another and to the whole", as indicated in the dictionary definition of perspective given above. In my experience of reading his work, and of speaking with him, Mezirow has over a long period used the term "meaning perspectives" precisely and consistently. As I have pointed out in Chapter 4, his definition of what this meant was confirmed in substance by the practitioners who understood the meaning of the term, and by the participants even though they were not familiar with and did not as a result use Mezirow's term. I believe with Tennant that transformative learning is very significant learning precisely because individuals' meaning perspectives are of profound importance to them. Meaning perspectives are in a real sense central to the self, they help constitute a significant part of how an individual sees him/herself and changes in them are of great consequence for that person. That is what my participants told me and it confirms my belief that it inconsistent and less helpful to refer to changes in "practical problems of normative learning", and in "points of view", as transformative in the same sense.

Meaning perspectives are an individual's personal frames of reference, his or her "habits of mind" as Mezirow referred to them in his letter to me. Identifying, critically reflecting upon and transforming meaning perspectives is very significant learning for the individual. In 1985 in his article contributed to Brookfield's anthology of that year, Mezirow used the

word "epochal" in regard to transformative learning, referring to "epochal transformations involving a belief system or ideology" (Mezirow: 1985b, p. 24). By using the word "epochal" I believe Mezirow was seeking to convey just how fundamental to the individual transformation of meaning perspectives is. I find it consistent of him and indeed affirming of my understanding of transformative learning that Mezirow used the same term "epochal" in his recent (1996) letter to me. He clearly sees transformation of meaning perspectives as a profound learning experience for the individual.

The position at which I have arrived as a result of my reflection upon the findings of my research therefore is that the term "meaning perspective" is a valid and important concept in reference to transformative learning and my research confirms Mezirow's thinking in this regard. A meaning perspective is the total structure of psycho-cultural assumptions in relation to a particular learned concept, it is a cluster of expectations, a way of looking at the world which is based upon what an individual has experienced and absorbed from all his/her past inculturation and experience in that area. It involves not just cognitive and linguistic processes but associated emotional and imaginative elements of personal perspectives as well. Transformative learning is the identification, critical analysis and resultant transformation of meaning perspectives understood in this way. Transformation of meaning perspectives is central to the process of transformative learning in which an individual critically and sometimes painfully reflects upon not just personal experience but all aspects of his/her reaction to that experience including feelings and emotional reactions.

I believe Mezirow was less successful in his original choice of the term "meaning schemes" than in his choice of "meaning perspectives", for reasons concerned with both precision of meaning and consistency of use in the sense outlined in the section above on questions of terminology. As indicated there, the word "scheme" is defined in dictionaries as "a number of organised concepts characterised by inter-relationship, a body or system of related doctrines or theories - a system of correlated things" and "a complex unity in which the component elements co-operate and interact according to a definite plan". In 1985 Mezirow connected his two terms, meaning perspectives and meaning schemes by maintaining that a meaning perspective "is a frame of reference made up of a system of meaning schemes" (Mezirow 1985b, p. 21). This is basically the view that Cranton has

adopted in her 1994 volume, writing that the difference and the connection between the two is logical, linear and clear: "Each meaning perspective is made up of sets of meaning schemes: specific knowledge, beliefs value judgments feelings and assumptions" (Cranton 1994, p. 29).

In contrast with the precision of his definition of meaning perspectives, however, I find Mezirow's descriptions of meaning schemes at times obscure, as for example when he defines them as:

> a set of related expectations governing cause effect relationships (blow in my ear and I'll follow you anywhere), roles (teacher, student), social action (democratic activists, radical agitators), ourselves (masculine macho, mother and homemaker), values (bad, good, ugly, beautiful, right, wrong),and making connections between feelings and action (avoid all confrontation or you will become violent) (Mezirow 1985a, p. 22).

From a number of Mezirow's definitions, however, it seems that being "specific" or "particular" is crucial to the concept of meaning schemes even though the generally accepted meaning of that word has to do with systems, correlation and inter-relationship according to the dictionary definitions rather than with the specific and the particular (Mezirow 1994, p. 223). Mezirow continued in my view to be less precise about his definitions of meaning schemes and the result has been for me at least to blur the distinction between meaning schemes and meaning perspectives. By 1994 meaning schemes had become:

> The constellation of concept, belief, judgment and feeling which shape a particular interpretation (e.g. what we think of abortion, black people, the Muslim religion, free market capitalism or liberalism) (Mezirow 1994, p. 223).

In the same article, however, Mezirow retained the connection between the two, maintaining that "Meaning schemes are specific and particular manifestations of our meaning perspectives" (1994, p. 223). Nevertheless, I find it difficult to distinguish the increasingly comprehensive and less specific nature of these latter definitions of meaning schemes from those Mezirow has given to meaning perspectives. The word "constellation" especially seems at a significant distance from "specific and particular manifestations" in

the quotation above. In his 1996 letter to me, moreover, Mezirow has acknowledged that this has become for him an unresolved problem which arises from applying the word "transformation" to virtually any form of change of point of view and he returned to a very clear differentiation between meaning perspectives and meaning schemes:

> This is a difficult question because there are so many types of transformation: those involving transformation of points of view (meaning schemes) as distinct from epochal transformations of habits of mind (meaning perspectives) (Mezirow 1996, p.1).

My research leads me to believe therefore that applying the term "transformative learning" to the transformation of meaning perspectives, that is to transformation of "the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions that have come to constrain the way we see ourselves and our relationships" (Mezirow 1981, p. 6-7), and at the same time applying it to changes in "meaning schemes", when the latter are defined as "points of view", and "the practical problems of normative learning", has not been helpful. It weakens the concept of transformative learning, it blurs the distinction between learning which is truly transformative for the individual and that which in my research both participants and practitioners referred to as normal, normative or instrumental learning. It also ignores the emancipatory, liberating and empowering aspects of the transformation of meaning perspectives which emerged so strongly in the interviews as described in Chapter 4.

## Transformative learning as a process leading to liberation and empowerment

Both practitioners and participants in my research saw the term "transformative" as describing quite profound learning situations. They spoke of experiences of learning involving the core of the self which they experienced also as liberating for the individual and therapeutic in the normal as distinct from the clinical sense of that term. This is a strong theme emerging from my research and it confirms Mezirow's (1978b, 1981, 1991) relation of transformative learning to Habermas' (1971, 1973) emancipatory domain. A number of those interviewed from both groups confirmed that a concept of learning perceived to be transformative, emancipating, liberating and healing had in fact been part of their adult experience and they spoke of circumstances in which their own personal

assumptions and meaning perspectives had been enlarged and transformed. This is entirely consistent with what is indicated in the published work of Mezirow (1978b, 1981, 1991), Cranton (1992, 1994), and Newman (1993, 1994), as outlined in Chapter 2.

A significant number of the people interviewed spoke of experiences in which their self image and self-confidence had been greatly enhanced through transformation of inappropriate meaning perspectives. They saw this as having strong implications for their personal confidence and self-image. There was agreement amongst both practitioners and participants about the appropriateness of such terms as "emancipation", "liberation" and "empowerment" in association with transformative learning. This supports what is written in the literature on the issue, and especially Mezirow's (1978b, 1981) original linking of transformative learning with Freire's conscientisation. Although not all of those interviewed were closely acquainted with Habermas' theory of cognitive interests, practitioners certainly, and most of the participants knew of Freire's work. When Keane raised in the F.A.L. situation the distinction made by Freire between functional literacy and literacy resulting in conscientisation they had little difficulty in understanding and agreeing with its relevance to their own experience of learning.

Another of the findings which emerged strongly from the interviews was that the three women participants interviewed seemed to relate immediately to the emancipatory aspect of transformative learning. This is entirely consistent with the assertion of Hart that women in some areas of contemporary society still labour under certain forms of inculturated repression:

> A more indirect but by no means less powerful mechanism of repression is secured by norms that have been internalised through the process of socialisation. They inconspicuously censor and silence certain interests thus keeping women not only from pursuing but also from perceiving them (Hart 1991, p. 52)

My sample of three women is too small to derive conclusions from but as the figures cited in Chapter 4 clearly demonstrate, all three women in my study seized upon the liberating and emancipatory aspect of transformative learning and applied it to their personal situations. Moreover, although the men too reacted positively to the concept of

emancipation, the women in my research did so far more strongly, even passionately. They appeared very genuine when they spoke of deeply held and inculturated assumptions about their personal roles in relationships, family, church and the workplace, all of which were central to their lives. These social realities represented for them inculturated value systems which had been forged in their earlier years and which in certain areas which they named had in hindsight limited their personal perspectives on life in precisely the way to which Hart refers in the last few words of the above quotation. It was my clear perception that their attitudes related closely in fact to those which can be read in Mezirow's early empirical studies in this field, his research into women returning to formal education in mid-life (1978a 1978b).

A further significant development which emerged for me in my analysis was that in addition to seeing transformative learning as liberating and emancipatory a number of those interviewed went on to speak of the associated concept of personal empowerment. This is not something which one sees treated at length in the literature but it emerged as an issue from my research. The participants especially seemed to be attracted to the idea of transformative learning because they saw it as having the potential to be empowering for them personally. This is reflected in a number of the examples cited in Chapter 4 where terms such as "exciting", "energising" (Geraldine: 165) and "absolutely life-changing" (Tom: 29) were used to describe certain key learning experiences. People reported that they reacted so positively to the idea of transformative learning because it had assisted them in validating their own experience and it helped them articulate and understand many aspects of themselves. They were interested also in the negative consequences of not breaking out of largely unperceived meaning perspectives (Hart 1991, p. 52) and as a result of continuing to be inhibited by them. This leads to the issue of the relationship between transformative learning and "normal" learning - in Mezirow's words (1996, p. 1) the question of "transformative learning, the extent to which it is normative".

## Learning and transformative learning

The approach to learning taken throughout this study has been a constructivist one, namely that when people learn they do so through the appropriation of knowledge some of which they integrate over time into their personal frames of reference. Many of these frames of reference are the result of primary socialisation and they become inculturated for the individual. People may not always be aware of them but they nevertheless influence how an individual looks at him/herself and the world. One of the basic characteristics of learning which emerges from the literature (Knowles 1980, 1984a; Brookfield 1986, 1991; Cranton 1992, 1994) is that individuals, adults especially, do not approach new knowledge from the perspective of a personal consciousness which is *tabula rasa* as it were. A significant contribution of Mezirow's concept of transformative learning to contemporary understanding about the way adults learn is that it highlights the fact that to various extents individuals' capacities to absorb new knowledge, and the manner of its absorption, are influenced both consciously and unconsciously by what those individuals have already learned, by their personal patterns of inculturated meaning perspectives.

Transformative learning considers learning from the perspective of the learner - of what the learner has already learned rather than from the viewpoint of what is being learned at the time. As pointed out in Chapter 2 many of the characteristics of transformative learning are those which are applicable to adult learning generally. Its special contribution, however, is that it focuses attention upon learners coming to understand how new knowledge which they encounter in their day to day experience is not in fact taken by all individuals equally, nor on its face value alone, it is filtered and interpreted by inculturated patterns of meaning perspectives already learned over time. The focus of transformative learning is upon the learner first, rather than upon what is being learned and this is a characteristic which it shares with the humanist approach to learning. Transformative learning involves identifying and becoming critically aware of how and why the existing patterns of one's meaning perspectives influence one's ability to construct new knowledge. Transformative learning is about that process, it is about "looking at oneself looking at the world" to use Newman's phrase (1993, p. 178).

Transformative learning involves the learner moving at times very suddenly, at others by slow increments, sometimes alone, often through discourse and dialogue with others, towards reconstituting personal and idiosyncratic meaning perspectives. The value of acknowledging this process of transformation is that it enables the learner "to permit a more inclusive and discriminating integration of experience" (Mezirow 1981, p. 7). Transformative learning defined in this sense was deemed by the persons I interviewed to be different from instrumental and communicative learning because of the primacy of its orientation on the learner. In instrumental and communicative learning the emphasis is upon what is to be learned and upon one's relationships with others; in transformative learning the emphasis is upon the perspective of the learner first and only then upon what is to be learned.

A related question, however, and one which merits further empirical investigation is that that once an individual has gone through a process of learning resulting in a transformation of a personal meaning perspective then the meaning schemes acquired through instrumental learning and defined as "specific knowledge, beliefs, value judgments feelings and assumptions" (Cranton 1994, p. 29) which together helped constitute that original meaning perspective might well appear in an entirely new light. It is not simply a question of the accumulation of changes to meaning schemes eventually constituting a change in meaning perspective. It is not the fact that the understandings, the particulars or specifics which constitute the meaning schemes have altered in themselves. It is simply that the far more fundamental meaning perspective relating to the core self of which they have been a part has been reconstructed and transformed. As a result these original meaning schemes may take on an entirely new meaning for the learner.

It might be helpful in explaining this point here to give an historical example. When Galileo radically re-developed the very primitive refracting telescopes available to him up to his time he was able to observe the heavenly bodies in far more detail than ever before. He learned much about the surface of the moon and how its phases occurred, he observed the rings of Saturn and he discovered the moons of Jupiter. This was new instrumental knowledge made possible by new technology. However, Galileo was well aware that little of this new information fitted the then almost universally accepted Ptolemaic view of the

earth as the centre of the universe around which moved all the heavenly spheres. Following a process of critical reflection upon his now enlarged understandings, Galileo came to a decision that his whole perspective needed to change, his whole way of considering the basis of his lifelong preoccupation with mathematics and astronomy.

What actually happened to Galileo, I believe, was that having changed this fundamental way of looking at things, that is, his previously unquestioned meaning perspective about the earth and its relation to the other heavenly bodies, all his recently acquired specific factual knowledge about the terrestrial moon, the rings of Saturn, the moons of Jupiter and many other things in the solar system took on an entirely new meaning. Galileo had undergone a transformation of meaning perspective and he now saw the instrumental knowledge and associated meaning schemes he had acquired using his telescope quite differently. It had not previously been incorrect or mistaken knowledge, it simply now made sense in an entirely different way and it had acted as a catalyst for the transformation of a meaning perspective central to his life. On this basis a change in meaning schemes triggered a change in meaning perspective.

At the time the Ptolemaic view of the earth as the centre of divine creation was not merely a scientific theory. It was central to orthodoxy, to the way medieval philosophers, politicians, scientists and theologians saw the world and it involved the power and credibility of both secular rulers and the Church. Moreover the Ptolemaic viewpoint seemed to be supported by sacred scripture - "And the sun stood still in the midst of the sky and delayed its setting for almost a whole day" (Joshua: Ch.10. v.13). When Galileo began publicly promoting his new perspective of the solar system based upon a previous hypothesis of Copernicus that the sun was the centre of the solar system about which the earth and the other planets moved according to laws of gravity he was doing more than putting forward a scientific theory. He was challenging fundamental meaning perspectives on which his own life and that of almost all others in his world until then were based. Galileo became a danger to the accepted order, he was put on trial, found guilty and placed under permanent house arrest. Four centuries later the politicians were long gone and the Church apologised, but that is another story. The point of the illustration for me is the question of accumulation of changes in meaning schemes acting as a catalyst for

transformation of a meaning perspective. As a result those meaning perspectives are subsequently seen quite differently. There is insufficient evidence in my research to justify making a definite assertion on this matter but I believe it merits further empirical study.

## THE PROCESSES OF TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

The word "processes" as applied to transformative learning has been used throughout this thesis to refer to what is going on within the consciousness of the learner at the time of the learning. I believe as a result of my empirical investigation that the processes of transformation of meaning perspectives are best considered not as a logical series of four (Brookfield 1985), five (Keane 1987), ten (Mezirow 1981) or eleven (Mezirow 1991) predominantly cognitive and sequential "steps", but rather as a complex cluster of very personal movements in meaning perspective, not infrequently driven by strong feeling, occasionally very sudden, at other times seemingly cumulative and often quite imaginative in their "epochal" (Mezirow: 1985b, p. 24; 1996, p. 1) leaps in understanding. Each instance of transformation of meaning perspectives described to me, each radical reappraisal of meaning perspectives seemed to have an inherent order and character peculiar to the circumstances and the individual. However the one single process most commonly referred to by the individuals I interviewed was critical reflection by the individual upon certain key experiences, and upon the self as coming to terms with those experiences.

### Cognitive processes of transformative learning

The findings of my research support the view of Mezirow (1978b, 1981) and other contemporary theorists [Brookfield (1992c, 1993c); Cranton (1992, 1994); Newman (1993)] cited in Chapter 2 that transformation of meaning perspectives as I have defined them is associated with discernible cognitive processes and especially with deliberate and critical reassessment on the part of the learner of accompanying emotional considerations. However, despite occasional "Road to Damascus" experiences which at first sight might

seem to be examples of intuitive almost instantaneous transformation of meaning perspective without identifiable cognitive process, both practitioners and participants in my study seemed agreed that the appraisal and reassessment of inculturated meaning perspectives almost invariably has a strong cognitive and rational element, a "coming to terms with who I am in all this" (Tom : 34). As Mezirow said to me

> we looked at our own frames of reference, our own ways of understanding and asked 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: 22).

The importance of adult learners reflecting systematically and critically on their experience is not a new emphasis in the area of adult learning. It has been central to the work of learning theorists such as Schon (reflection on action, reflection in action, 1983, 1987), Hallett (logical reasoning, 1984), Jarvis (rational reflection on experience, 1984) and Brookfield (using critical incidents to explore learners' consciousness, 1990b). The findings of my research support the general thrust of this work and especially Mezirow's (1981, p. 6) original contention that whilst critical and cognitive reflection upon experience is an important part of the process of appraisal and reassessment of experience the emphasis must be upon the self as experiencing and not merely upon the experience itself.

Critical reflection implies cognitive processes and from what the participants and the practitioners told me, cognitive processes even though they are not the whole story, are very significant for the identification and reappraisal of meaning perspectives. This was affirmed by virtually all those I interviewed and they emphasised the importance of group work in the process. Making one's assumptions explicit is a vital part of the process of discerning where they come from and what their consequences are. My research confirmed that learning which involves transformation of inculturated meaning perspectives requires validation, an exercise at some point of judgment and will. Transformative learning is facilitated by frank and open discourse and it almost invariably involves articulation and appraisal of associated emotional considerations as well. However, I am led to believe that although the process of transformative learning varies with the individual and the circumstances it is by no means entirely cerebral and cognitive. It is certainly not a series of

logical steps that a facilitator can "bring on at 10 o'clock on a Friday morning", to use Walker's (122) phrase, and it is not merely an aspect of normal psychological development.

**Transformative learning and normative psychological development**

The idea that particular forms of learning are associated with certain developmental stages of adult life in which individuals look differently at themselves and their worlds is well established in learning theory (Erikson 1959; Kohlberg 1976; Griffin 1988; Mezirow 1991; Tennant 1993). However, my informants whilst accepting that there were similarities nevertheless rejected the idea that transformative learning could reasonably be seen as just another way of considering learning associated with the normal stages of psychological development. Several practitioners, notably Tennant (1988), Mezirow (1994) and Nelson (1994) who have debated this issue in the literature, reflected upon the relationship between these two concepts and detected certain similarities. However, as Boud said "You can't just label learning, you can't go around saying 'Oh yes, that's transformative learning. That's what's going on'" (Boud: 15).

The participants, especially Marion. Tom, Jane and Geraldine, confirmed from their experience what the practitoners had to say. They did not see instances of disorienting dilemmas in their own lives as confined to particular stages of life or the normal times of personal development. These people perceived instances of what they now recognised as transformation of certain of their personal meaning perspectives as having occurred for them often quite unexpectedly, not infrequently triggered by an experience of disorientation. They described them as often charged with emotion (Jane: 25; Marion: 50; Tom: 112) and they believed experiences of disorientation and significant levels of emotion associated with them could be dealt with constructively on the one hand or with embarrassment, anger, prejudice and rejection on the other. My conclusion from this is that transformative learning is something which goes much further than the changes associated with normal stages or cycles in human development. Moreover, in the experience of the participants in my research, changing one's psychocultural meaning perspectives was almost always a profound experience because it was an emotional one.

## Transformative learning as an emotional process

My research confirmed the view expressed by Keane (1987, 1990), Cranton (1992, 1994) Tennant (1988, 1995) and others that so profound a learning experience as the reorientation and transformation of strongly held meaning perspectives which help determine who one is and how one looks at the world is unlikely to be achieved without some substantial emotional involvement. Jane (25) compared it to the experience of "being slapped in the face", for Marion (50) it was an experience of stress, for Tom (112) it was a case of "no pain - no gain", for Nelson (64) it was important "not to hold people back from the edge" and Keane said he was prepared 'to let them cry a bit" (quoted in John 2: 223). Fundamental reappraisal which involves "examining our awareness", "perceiving our perceptions", "looking at oneself looking at the world", to use Newman's (1993, p. 178) adaptations of Mezirow's (1981) language was almost inevitably a process associated with strong levels of emotion. There was no evidence that this was the case for changes in the specifics of meaning schemes. The participants I interviewed indicated that for them, the question of how deeply the meaning perspectives were inculturated, and how difficult learning derived from changing them might be was often indicated by the level of emotion involved. This confirms precisely the point made by Mezirow in 1991 that

> the more intense the emotional content of the learning and the more it is reinforced, the more deeply embedded and intractable to change are the habits of expectation that constitute our meaning perspectives (Mezirow 1990, p. 4)

My research indicates that such feelings need to be identified, faced honestly and addressed appropriately if a new habit of mind or frame of reference is to be integrated with a revised self-image resulting in a restored sense of personal equanimity. The people I interviewed said that a positive group climate greatly facilitated coming to terms with the feelings and emotions associated with transformative learning - for example "The whole group said 'We can really understand how your self-esteem can be tied in with your role'" (Marion: 118), "Oddly enough, I felt the frank admission of embarrassment actually built their confidence in the group" (John 1: 40). People saw identifying emotional issues associated with learning as assisted by group processes and they were also aware of a similar role for the imagination.

## Transformative learning as an imaginative process

Reflection on the results of my research confirm for me that there can in certain circumstances be an important role for the imagination in making the transitions involved in transformative learning. The perception of a number of both practitioners and participants was that the use of the creative imagination is often a way of coming to terms with values and inculturated assumptions never before articulated by that individual and held perhaps almost inadvertently, assumptions out of which individuals are in fact acting but of whose full implications they are often not consciously aware. For Sean (58) "imaging is so powerful", for Marion (21) "the biggest thing was the imagining exercises because out of them I got confirmation", for Newman (165) "I get them to work on developing a metaphor for what they do ... to revisit their practice". For Sean (58) "The image occurs quite independently of any rational thought and indeed the two processes can be going on simultaneously" and in Tom's view (77) the creative use of imagination "gets me in touch with a very quiet and a very deep place inside".

These comments and others referred to in Chapter 5 support the research of Nelson (1994, p. 262) that "imagination is as significant for adult learning as memory". The people I interviewed spoke of the value for new learning of encapsulating their experience in images or metaphors within which context it could more easily be critically examined. They were confirming that not all the processes of understanding and transformation are logical, linear thought progressions and that there is a role for the use of the imagination in considering one's ways of looking at oneself and one's relationships to people and reality. T.S. Eliot (1951) once described images and symbols as "the objective correlatives of thought" and as indicated above a number of my informants confirmed that for them images and symbols were powerful and non-cognitive ways of encapsulating meaning leading to new and revised ways of perceiving. Eliot was talking about poetic imagery but the point he was making was that an image or symbol is more than an illustration of what can just as well be articulated in prose language. Images and symbols can sometimes encapsulate and convey meaning in different and more holistic ways than language. We do not always understand rightly and articulate rightly our experience and convictions in prose language.

The processes of transformation themselves were on several occasions described as beginning at lower levels of consciousness and the use of the imagination seems particularly helpful in this regard. It is often a particular occurrence, for Mezirow (1978b) a disorienting experience and for Cranton (1994, p. 77) a "trigger event", which suddenly brings such concepts from sub-conscious to conscious awareness. Walker's graphic but illuminating metaphor of the "burp" referred to in the Chapter 4 comes immediately to mind. I recall also Geraldine's reflection on surfacing assumptions:

> And I can remember in this period of turmoil in my life working out that I had never really believed it. ... 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).

I recall Paul's reflection: "I think that what 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). My research confirms for me the views of Nelson (1994), Newman (1993) and others that creative use of the imagination can be a way of identifying, reflecting upon and transforming assumptions and frames of reference whether they be held consciously or sub-consciously.

In summary therefore, based upon the perceptions of those involved in this research and bearing in mind its limitations as outlined in Chapter 3, my perception is there are certain identifiable processes involved in transformative learning. Although they include critical reflection upon the self and at least some of the "elements" or "phases" identified by Mezirow (1981, 1985, 1991) the processes of transformative learning are by no means always cognitive or perceived as occurring in some logical and predictable sequence as Mezirow had suggested. The processes of transformative learning identified from my research involve the following:

- accepting that particular life experience or clusters of experiences may cause distress, confusion and a profound sense of personal disorientation because the learner begins to be aware of inculturated patterns of acquired meaning perspectives related to the image of self that appear no longer to make sense

- identifying, making explicit and questioning the meaning perspectives involved in such experiences, reflecting critically upon them and more especially upon the self as experiencing them, and honestly facing the reasons why the experience should be so disorienting

- becoming aware of, naming accepting and reflecting upon personal feelings and emotional reactions to the disorienting experience, and considering honestly and if necessary in dialogue with others the reasons why such emotions have been so strongly aroused

- reflecting upon the imaginative and symbolic meaning of the total experience as it relates to the self and the images of self, including in certain circumstances identifying awarenesses until then not consciously acknowledged

- acknowledging and accepting aspects of the self and of new learning which can be inserted into a revised pattern of meaning perspectives out of which an individual will in future perceive reality, make judgments and act.

As indicated above, my research with practitoners and participants in the F.A.L. program, and my own reflections recorded at the time indicate that there is a role for Mezirow's "phases", "steps" or processes of transformative learning (1981, 1985, 1991) but not all are involved on all occasions, nor in linear sequence. From what has emerged from my research I believe an understanding of the nature and processes of transformative learning as outlined above will be of substantial value to persons involved as facilitators of adult learning. However, transformation along certain lines pre-determined by a facilitator is manipulative and neither appropriate nor ethical as an approach to be adopted by facilitators. The research has confirmed for me that adults will inevitably have inculturated meaning perspectives, ways of thinking and acting, assumptions, prejudices and habits of mind out of which they habitually perceive things. Such meaning perspectives, some at least of which may well be inappropriate or no longer appropriate, influence and filter their perceptions. Individual learners will profit from these personal meaning perspectives being identified, acknowledged subjected to critical and imaginative reflection and if appropriate,

transformed. Although the actual transformation is likely to be so personal that it can only be the prerogative of the individual learner it may be assisted by discourse and dialogue in a trusting and ethical environment. I turn now to a consideration of appropriate procedures or strategies for facilitating the identification and critical reflection upon meaning perspectives and associated feelings, and the implications such strategies have for practice.

## STRATEGIES CONDUCIVE TO FACILITATING TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

Just as the term "processes" has been used in this thesis to define what is going on within the consciousness of the learner at the time of the learning, the term "procedures" has been employed throughout to mean those learning strategies or structures which may be used by facilitators to assist in creating transformative learning opportunities for the people with whom they work. However, although the word "procedures" was initially adopted in one of the four basic research questions and that term was used consistently during all the interviews, in the latter stages of writing this thesis I came to the conclusion that "strategies for facilitation" is a better description of what was actually intended and one more consistent with how I defined the word "procedures" to those I interviewed. Irrespective of whether the term "strategies" or "procedures" is used, however, I wish to reiterate that by the use of either term I do not mean activities deliberately contrived by a facilitator for the purpose of manipulating people into changing their meaning perspectives in certain pre-determined directions. Particular strategies did, however, emerge clearly from the interviews, most notably those related to critical reflection upon all aspects of learners' related experience and certain group procedures which individuals believed from their experience to be helpful to themselves and others in assisting the identification and owning of personal meaning perspectives and subjecting them to critical examination. I consider now the most significant of these strategies and review them in the light of what was discerned earlier in the literature as outlined in Chapter 2.

**Creating an appropriate learning environment.**

Throughout the literature relevant to the learning of adults, and especially within the humanist tradition there is very clear agreement about the need for a learning environment conducive to effective adult learning (Maslow 1970, Knowles 1980, 1984a; Brookfield 1985, 1990a; Cranton 1992, 1994) This same issue emerged clearly in regard to transformative learning in my research. However creating a learning environment which facilitates the identification and critical examination of inculturated meaning perspectives which profoundly influence one's attitudes and perceptions was seen as no easy task and one almost inevitably involving risk-taking. I found that for some individuals with whom I spoke, and even for myself, meaning perspectives which an individual has acquired over time and believes in implicitly do in fact inhibit and may on occasion prevent entirely, identification, revised interpretations and personal transformation. Individuals described instances of this very human propensity to me and it matched what Mezirow had pointed out some years ago, namely that:

> We all trade off perception and cognition for relief from the anxiety generated when the experience does not comfortably fit our meaning structures. When experience is too strange or threatening to the way we think and learn we block it out or resort to psychological defence mechanisms to provide a more compatible interpretation (Mezirow 1988, p. 226).

We are all in fact attached to our meaning perspectives, they form part of our self-image and of whom we and identifying them involves risk. This was confirmed by the actual experience of many of those I interviewed. As June said:

> I questioned myself, I questioned what people's perceptions were and sort of tried to bring it all together, to have the whole picture, rather than a subjective one. And coming to grips with who I am was very painful (June: 36).

The interviews I conducted made it clear to me, however, that such transformation involving "coming to grips with who I am" is possible and quality facilitation can assist in creating the circumstances which make it even more possible. Appropriate exercises designed to build trust and confidence in the group and identification of areas requiring

confidentiality constitute a vital preparation for group work and meaningful dialogue. As outlined in Chapter 2 all of this forms part of the theoretical position of writers such as Brookfield, Mezirow, Cranton, Tennant, Keane and Boud and Walker, and it was confirmed in the interviews I had with my practitioners and participants. Learning groups can become places of affirmation and trust as well as challenge, and concepts about which individuals might be uncertain may be checked, modified and validated by the group. In the final analysis, however, transformative learning involves critical reflection upon oneself and my research confirmed for me that it is very much a question for the individual learner. There needs to be an appropriate blending of personal work with work in groups

**Structuring critical reflection upon all aspects of experience**

In Chapter 2 I outlined the literature which strongly supported learning from experience as characteristic of the learning of adults (Boud, Keogh and Walker 1985; Brookfield 1985, 1990a, Merriam and Caffarella 199 ). I went on to distinguish between learning from experience and critical reflection upon experience arising from the work of Schon (1983, 1987), Mezirow (1878b, 1981), Svenunggaard (1993) and Cranton (1994). My present research confirms this general position and Mezirow summed up the situation when he said to me during the interview that there were

> two central elements, critical reflection which leads to changing frames of reference, and discourse which is essential for validating, justifying beliefs and interpretations not amenable to empirical testing (Mezirow: 23)

In common with so much of the learning of adults, the critically reflected experience of the learner is often the point of departure for transformative learning and from my research I believe the more immediate and pertinent the experience the more relevant and valuable the learning may be. Honesty in identifying and using one's actual personal experience in the here and now emerged from my research as very significant for transformative learning. I recall the activity involving communication through body language which Keane used and which almost all the participants in the F.A.L. program spoke positively to me about afterwards. Their experience strongly confirmed Mezirow's own practice when he told me

that "I deliberately try to make people uncomfortable about being critically reflective of themselves" (Mezirow: 120). Transformative learning occurs "at the edge", as so many of the participants (Tom 112; Nelson 64) said, and each person's edge is peculiar to him or her. My research confirmed that critical reflection upon personal experience and upon the self as having that experience begins with real agenda, with the actual disorienting dilemmas of life in areas of significant importance. The effective facilitator builds on such immediacy.

A surfacing of feelings associated with disorienting dilemmas, followed by critical reflection upon them, and upon the self as experiencing them, has been identified in the theoretical literature (Keane 1987, 1991; Brookfield 1990a, 1992c, Cranton 1992, 1994), in the research (Clark 1993; Elias 1993, Nelson 1994) and in the later work of Mezirow (1991, 1994), as of particular significance as a strategy for identifying and critically reflecting upon inculturated meaning perspectives. Transformative learning is not simply a cerebral or cognitive experience and as cited above in a number of the interviews (Jane: 25; Marion: 50; Tom: 112; Nelson: 64) practitioners and participants were agreed that effective facilitators will endeavour to get people to focus upon not only what they think in certain areas, but upon what they feel in that regard. When convictions and assumptions are held very deeply and when anger, pain or embarrassment are involved it is important that the learner explores why this is so. People said to me that they felt that time for reflection alone and then writing things down, feelings as well as thoughts, was a most helpful strategy, especially if it preceded sharing in pairs or small group work. I recall Marion's (193) reference to the "sacred ground" of the group at the end of the program, and Sean's (80) quotation from Kubla Khan "weave a circle round him thrice". They were all saying how important critical reflection upon one's total experience, including its emotional aspects was, and as a result how central the integrity of the group and the trusting environment are to this form of learning.

The participants I worked with seemed to grow in their understanding of the importance of immediacy and reality in transformative learning, but it also emerged as important that they not be pressed by a facilitator beyond the extent to which they were confident and willing. For them the readiness was all. Perceived pressure points, experiences of disorientation, of

being "at the edge", if honestly explored and faced, emerged as having the potential to be launching pads for movements towards honest reappraisal and resolution. The facilitator's role is to contribute by setting up situations for transformative learning but if the learning is to be genuine it will be the learner who ultimately decides. This is especially the case in regard to autobiographical detail.

## "Telling one's story" and using the creative imagination

As outlined in Chapter 2 there is substantial reference in the literature to the effectiveness for personal transformation of re-creating life experiences and recording one's convictions and assumptions about the truth of things in relation to particularly significant aspects of one's personal history. A number of writers whilst not speaking specifically of transformative learning (Finger 1988; Powell 1985; Lukinsky 1990) have written positively of journal writing as a learning experience leading to personal growth. As outlined in Chapter 2 Nelson was led by his research to postulate a positive link between autobiography and transformation of inculturated meaning perspectives, the whole experience leading to personal peace and reconciliation. Keane in his 1985 research came to much the same conclusion. Keane said to me about journal writing that "what it makes you do is articulate to yourself what it is that's actually going on for you" (Keane: 122). My own comment about journal writing on the fourth day of F.A.L. was that "it keeps me honest" (John 2 .74). Marion told me that it helped her "write down the things that I just haven't had the courage to deal with" (Marion: 89).

Both Keane (1990, 1993) and Nelson (1994, 1995) have suggested in the theoretical work arising from their research that the sharing of personal journals and life experiences can make a significant contribution to the transformation of meaning perspectives. In a sense these activities constitute a sustained exercise in critical reflection and they are effective strategies for facilitators to use. We did not during F.A.L. engage in autobiography - there was not time for that - but a re-reading of the quotations from the interviews cited in Chapters 4 and 5 clearly indicates how much of the story of their lives and learning people

in the F.A.L. group were prepared to share once an environment characterised by trust and confidentiality had been established.

The use of imaginative symbols and autobiography to encapsulate existing and possible future situations connected with personal transformation also emerged from my research as helpful, even in bringing to mind assumptions and attitudes which may initially be held below the level of overt consciousness. This has already been discussed previously in this chapter and it is unnecessary to refer in further detail to the work of Ricoeur (1971, 1984), Deshler (1990, 1991) and Nelson (1994, 1995). The fact that the participants I interviewed and Tennant (233) especially believed that facilitators need significant levels of skill, training and experience before using such procedures seems to endorse their awareness of its profound potential and this in itself is an implication of the research. It also draws attention to the ethical issue for facilitators in not using strategies of whose full implications they may be unaware. This leads us to the question of the interface between transformative learning and personal therapy.

**Transformative learning and personal therapy**

In Chapter 2 I indicated that in his anthology published in 1990, Mezirow included an article by psychoanalyst Roger Gould entitled "The Therapeutic Learning Program" which acknowledged the therapeutic value of learning which helps individuals identify and explore their personal meaning perspectives. Keane (1985) Tennant (1988) and Nelson (1995) have done research in this area and they support Mezirow's position that transformative learning can be liberating and healing for individuals. Tennant and Pogson's very recent volume (1995) *Learning and Change in the Adult Years* makes substantial use of Mezirow's work in the area of transformative learning, pointing out its potential for personal growth. Several practitioners, notably Tennant, but also Walker, Nelson and Boud made reference during my interviews with them to established principles and strategies of adult learning and then discussed the distinction between such learning and transformative learning. They saw the latter as learning of a quite different order and not simply as a process of acquiring new information or skills, important as that may be.

Whilst acknowledging and even giving instances from their own lives - "I came out walking on air" (Geraldine: 107) "it turned my life around" (Tom: 29) - of therapeutic outcomes for themselves from experiences of transformative learning, participants were on the whole cautious about how far facilitators were justified in using more sophisticated strategies. They were hesitant for example about involving the interpretation of images and symbols for drawing upon incultured meaning perspectives in such areas as personal prejudice which may well be held in the subconscious or even the unconscious. Practitioners on the other hand despite Tennant's reservations in the area of suppressed memory (p. 172) and perhaps because of their greater experience and more thorough education and training in the field were on the whole prepared to extend further the boundaries of transformative learning in the direction of therapy. Boud (286) and Walker (50) as quoted in Chapter 5 expressed the view that many of the principles of effective learning were entirely consistent with good therapy and that their experience as adult educators was that learning resulting in transformation of inappropriate meaning perspectives could be truly liberating for individuals. It was in their view worth the pain sometimes experienced by learners.

There is no question in my view from the experience of listening to so many accounts of personal experiences that transformative learning can offer opportunities for personal growth which is therapeutic even though there is necessarily some risk of the process being personally stressful for some individuals. However I am convinced by what was said to me during my research that it is ethical and indeed necessary for facilitators to discuss this issue at the beginning of learning programs. It became clear to me, however, that some of the processes of personal therapy involving the emotions, the imagination, painful memories and in certain instances the subconscious are so personally complex that facilitators might well be cautious about using strategies more appropriate to the skilled therapist. My view after reading the research of Keane (1985) and Nelson (1994) and after conducting my own research is that transformative learning can indeed be therapeutic for individuals and that provided a facilitator is ethical in every respect it offers significant possibilities for liberation and empowerment of individuals.

## Transformative learning and social transformation

A rather more radical approach by some contemporary writers which involves linking transformative learning to social, economic and political transformation has been instanced and discussed in Chapter 2. The work of Freire (1971, 1972b) was recognised by Mezirow (1978b, 1981) as seminal in this area and it has been followed by that of Hart (1990a 1990b), Thompson (1980, 1983), Newman (1993) and others. Many radical transformations have occurred in our society and in other parts of the world in regard to such subjects as racial issues, land rights, political positions and the role of women in society in which transformations in the way whole communities see themselves and their collective relationships can be socially and culturally liberating.

This question is another of the areas of the application of Mezirow's work on the transformation of meaning perspectives which would repay further empirical investigation. There is little evidence, however, from my research to support the contention of Collard and Law (1989), Hart (1990a), Thompson (1993) and perhaps Newman (1993) that transformative learning ought more appropriately be seen as associated with community empowerment and social change rather than as primarily individual and personal. As indicated in Chapters 4 and 5 there was no consensus on this question amongst the practitioners although several of them, Newman and Tennant particularly, were aware of the controversy and did speak of it. The participants in my study were not really interested, they were far more concerned with how what they were learning about themselves could promote their own personal equanimity and improve their professional work as facilitators of the learning of others. The question of the processes of social and communal learning and their relation to the transformation of personal meaning perspectives and value systems, however, is clearly important and offers a rich area for further research and debate.

## Ethical considerations

A good deal has already been said above about the importance of ethical considerations in relation to transformative learning especially in areas dealing with the learning

environment, group work and the relations between learners and facilitators. Merriam and Caffarella (1991, p. 285 ff) deal with the general ethical dilemmas in adult learning and Mezirow treats the issue in relation to transformative learning in his 1991 volume (p.201 ff.), as does Cranton in her 1994 book (p. 199ff). The question of the ethical responsibilities of facilitators emerged as a key issue in my research also and supported the positions of Merriam and Caffarella, Mezirow and Cranton. My informants saw it as essential that an environment conducive to transformative learning be characterised by agreed and clearly articulated ethical standards and cited this as a major responsibility for any facilitator who sets out to assist learners in identifying, critically reflecting upon and validating their meaning perspectives. At the same time, however, their perspective was that adults must be encouraged to be assertive and to take responsibility for their own learning and they emphasised the primacy of the learner, equality between all concerned, confidentiality and mutual respect.

## CONCLUSION

Chapter 6 has had both a theoretical and practical emphasis. It has presented reflections upon the results of the research into the nature and processes of transformative learning and related them to what had previously been discerned from the literature of learning and transformative learning as outlined in Chapter 2. It followed the same process in regard to strategies for the facilitation of transformative learning and implications of the research for practice. Mezirow's initial position that transformation of meaning perspectives is what constitutes transformative learning was supported by the research. His use of the same term "transformation" in reference to changes in meaning schemes, however, was questioned. The view was expressed that Mezirow's re-definition of transformative learning in 1985 as applying also to instrumental and communicative learning has led to the extension of the concept of transformative learning to include changes in the "specifics and particulars" of meaning schemes as well as the far more complex transformation of inculturated meaning perspectives. This re-definition was not supported by the research and it appears to weaken the concept by over-extending it.

Chapter 6 has put forward the view that once a meaning perspective has been consciously altered, many of the component matters of fact, the specifics and particulars of meaning schemes which were constitutive of the original meaning perspective may well appear in an entirely new light. They are the same meaning schemes, but they are seen from a different perspective and are meaningful in a different way. Whilst this latter position was not able to be established from the data there was evidence in the comments of a significant number of those interviewed to indicate that the issue merits further empirical investigation.

The point has been made in Chapter 6 that precisely because transformative learning is learning about meaning perspectives held in the core of the self, all aspects of that self, including the emotions, the imagination and the self image will almost inevitably be involved in their transformation. Transformative learning is not merely an intellectual process. My reflection upon the findings of the research is that transformative learning rarely follows a logical and consistent sequence. Although certain patterns can be discerned, particular and individual progressions and processes by which transformations occur appear to be as varied as the individuals who experience them.

In regard to strategies which may be conducive to facilitating transformative learning the point has been made that for reasons arising from the very nature of transformative learning for a facilitator to attempt to manipulate certain transformations in pre-conceived directions would be unethical. What facilitators can do is to understand the processes of transformation and create opportunities for critical reflection upon ideas and emotions, strategies for group work in a trusting and ethical environment, imaginative re-creation of experience, journal writing and "telling one's story". Such strategies provide the means by which meaning perspectives can be identified and subjected to critical scrutiny. The way is then open to transformation but that decision is for the individual. The role of discourse and dialogue can be significant. Ethical considerations especially in regard to learning environments characterised by respect, mutual trust and confidentiality are indicated as important. Chapter 6 concluded with a discussion of how the strategies appropriate to facilitating adult learning can take into account two topical issues raised in the literature - the interface between transformative learning and therapy and the issue of whether or not the application of the principles of transformative learning might be appropriate to the

transformation of meaning perspectives held by a community collectively. There is potential for further research in both these areas. The thesis moves now to a summary presentation of the overall conclusions from the research in response to the four original research questions.