

INTERNATIONAL ISSUES IN ADULT EDUCATION

Stories of Transformative Learning

Michael Kroth and Patricia Cranton



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Stories of Transformative Learning

INTERNATIONAL ISSUES IN ADULT EDUCATION

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Stories of Transformative Learning

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and

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To adult educators, storytellers all, who engage in transformative learning daily.

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From Michael Kroth

I thank those who, through their example, love, friendship, and wisdom teach and inspire me daily. In particular, I am grateful for my wife, children, all my family and dear friends who encouraged and supported me through this and many other life projects. The older I get the more I realize the importance of relationships in my life. I especially value Patricia Cranton, from whom I have learned so much as we created this book, not only about transformative learning and book writing, but about life. I am a better writer, thinker, scholar, and person because I have had the good fortune to work with her.

From Patricia Cranton

I thank Jack Mezirow who influenced my life tremendously through his writing and his support of my writing. I thank the many students and colleagues who taught me how to listen to and tell stories. I especially thank my colleague Michael Kroth who has helped me to be a better collaborator.

I thank my family, all of whom have four legs and wear fur coats, even in the summer. They sacrificed walks and were patient about delayed afternoon snacks. They danced at the sound of the computer's closing tune each day.

PREFACE

Transformative learning theory was originally based on a research study of women returning to college as reentry students (Mezirow, 1975). At that time, it was called perspective transformation, and it was a stage-based, largely rational description of how these women experienced a transition in their lives. The stages began with the disorienting experience of going back to school, and included steps related to self-examination, critical reflection, feelings of alienation, relating to others sharing the same experience, exploring options, building self-confidence, acquiring new knowledge and skills, and reintegrating into society with revised perspectives. Although Mezirow was criticized immediately, and continually during the decades that followed, about being “too rational” and “ignoring context,” it can be seen even in the list of the original phases, that Mezirow incorporated participants’ feelings and the context in which the transformation occurred.

It was almost 20 years before Mezirow (1991) introduced transformative learning as a comprehensive theory of adult learning. At this time, he drew on variety of diverse disciplines such as social philosophy (Habermas, 1971), psychoanalysis, and social activism (Freire, 1971). In spite of his interdisciplinary approach, the same critiques continued, and, indeed, Mezirow welcomed these critiques and used them to enhance his theory (Mezirow, 2000). The updated comprehensive theory was based on constructivist assumptions—where meaning is constructed by individuals in social contexts and is validated through communication with others. The understanding of experience is filtered through meaning perspectives (later called “habits of mind”) which include individuals’ uncritically assimilated perspectives. When a person encounters an experience which calls his or her meaning perspectives into question, this can lead to critical reflection and critical questioning of the perspectives. Mezirow (2000) sees discourse as central to the process of exploring options to potentially invalid meaning perspectives (this relates back to his 1975 phase of relating to others who share the same experience). The reflection and discourse may or may not lead to transformation; there are many circumstances that can prevent the change in perspective from taking place.

In the years that followed Mezirow’s presentation of transformative learning theory, several scholars responded with alternative perspectives, based on the critiques of the original work. John Dirkx, for example, focused on an extrarational approach that included intuitive and emotional ways of knowing (Dirkx, 2001, 2012). O’Sullivan (2003, 2012) presented a broad vision of transformative learning that spanned relational, societal, and global perspectives. Belenky and Stanton (2000) described transformative learning in terms of relational processes.

Cranton and Taylor (2012) propose the need for developing a unified theory of transformative learning; that is, a theory in which the cognitive and rationale perspective, the extrarational perspective, the emphasis on social change, and

the relational approach can all peacefully co-exist. Cranton and Taylor suggest that bringing these perspectives together and integrating them can strengthen the theory and make it more relevant to those individuals who work toward fostering transformative learning.

The literature that addresses how transformative learning is fostered (for example, Cranton, 2006; Mezirow & Taylor, 2009) focuses on the creation of a climate that is conducive to critical questioning and the deliberate presentation of points of view that are contradictory with each other or discrepant with the views of the participants or both. Discourse or dialogue is generally considered to be an essential component of fostering transformative learning, as are opportunities for critical self-reflection or activities to encourage reflection (journals, role-playing, debates, arts-based activities, and the like). Educators also often work with transformative learning experiences that occur outside of the classroom by bringing them into the classroom for discussion.

Storytelling is one way in which educators and learners can understand the process of transformative learning through first-hand accounts of others' transformative experiences. Telling stories, reading others' stories, and reading fiction all serve the purpose of exposing learners to alternative perspectives, a process that is at the heart of critical reflection and critical self-reflection, which is, in turn, central to transformative learning.

Stories illustrate the process of recognizing that we are positioned within a particular culture with certain privileges and power relations that we can often recognize better in the stories we hear from others rather than in the stories we tell ourselves. This recognition can lead to reflection and in turn to the questioning of previously unchallenged values and assumptions.

Jarvis (2006) uses stories in the form of reading fiction to encourage "particular kinds of transformation" (p. 76). She suggests that reading fiction can offer disorienting dilemmas, encourage dialogue where contradictions can emerge, lead to imagining alternatives, and allow for the trying on of different points of view, all of which are facets of transformative learning. Jarvis derives her ideas from research she conducted in a college classroom using popular romantic fiction. Her participants were women from different ethnic and social backgrounds and women of different ages, who were preparing for entry into higher education. We suggest that telling stories and reading others' non-fictional stories has the same potential.

The adult educator who has a goal of creating an environment that is conducive to transformative learning is interested in fostering healthier, more open, permeable, and better justified assumptions about the world. When an individual is hurt by events in the world, he or she may have a tendency to withdraw and lose trust. Adult educators can help people to test all the reasons behind unhealthy personal strategies and build agency instead of helplessness. In other words, when the events people experience hit them hard, as will be illustrated in the stories in this volume, readers will be able to see what educators can do in response.

The stories are not intended to be used as a “tool,” but rather they are the medium through which readers can understand how adult educators and individual adult learners can promote transformative learning in a wide range of situations – suggesting the universality of the principles and practices available to both learners and educators.

PURPOSE

The purpose of *Stories of Transformative Learning* is to encourage people to explore the potential for transformative learning in their own lives, practices, and communities. Our goal is not to present a “how to” manual for encouraging transformative learning; there are no recipes or strategies that can ensure transformative learning occurs in any context (Mezirow, 1991). In fact, it is potentially unethical to assume that we can “change” others’ beliefs and assumptions (Mezirow, 1991). Instead, what we hope to do is to illustrate the transformative learning process through stories of how individuals have engaged in the process both inside and outside of the classroom. There are at least two ways that educators, learners, and others in helping professions can make use of this approach: one is to set up an environment in a classroom, workshop, or other venue where people are exposed to alternative perspectives through stories; another is to bring stories of transformative learning occurring in real life contexts into classroom and group discussions.

We hope to increase readers’ sense of agency and hope for better and more self-directed, self-fulfilling lives. By demonstrating in a very personal way how others have examined and reconsidered hidden assumptions that constrained the quality and potential of their lives, we will give readers hope that they may do the same.

NEED

There have been many accounts of transformative learning experiences. However, missing in the literature are first-hand stories from the individuals who have personally experienced transformative learning either in formal classrooms or in everyday life. We believe stories told directly, unconstrained by scholarly citations and abstract interpretation, are more likely to resonate with readers and to inspire people to create the conditions where transformative learning can occur in their lives and professional practice.

INTENDED AUDIENCES

The primary audiences for this book are adult educators and adult learners. Transformative learning can occur in any situation where adults learn—in formal settings, informal settings, and in independent, autodidactic settings. It may be the case that adult educators want to incorporate storytelling into their courses but, just

PREFACE

as likely, educators want to draw on stories that happen outside of their classroom and bring them into the course in a variety of ways, depending on the subject area. Adult learners who are not being led directly by an adult educator professional—people who engage in individual and independent learning projects, what Candy (1991) describes as autodidaxy—will also find this book to be useful and informative.

A second, and related, audience is those involved in professional development activities. These include human resource development professionals, faculty development, and others involved in training and development activities. They are professionals working in organizations, K-12 and higher education, and areas such as medical education and nursing education.

The third audience is the group of people who are just interested in reading good, engaging, non-fiction stories. This book is filled with short, biographical memoirs that may appeal to a particular group of readers who are interested in individual success stories that also lead to positive societal consequences.

CONTENT

The book opens with setting out the case for making a difference through fostering transformative learning. Chapter 1 includes an overview of transformative learning, with an emphasis on the development of a unified theory of transformation, as called for by Cranton and Taylor (2012), and especially what this means for practitioners of adult education. The chapter establishes the groundwork for the stories that follow and gives a rationale for how we, as practitioners, can foster transformative learning so as to make a difference for individuals, organizations, and society.

In the second chapter, storytelling is introduced as a way of understanding self and society in general. There are several approaches to storytelling in the literature ranging from Rossiter and Clark's (2009) concept of narrative learning, through Tyler and Swartz's (2012) and Boje's (2007) use of storytelling in organizations. We do not engage in a detailed theoretical discussion here, but rather introduce the readers to how we understand ourselves, our experiences, our identities, and the world we live in through stories.

These two strands are pulled together in Chapter 3, as we discuss transformative learning through storytelling. In doing this, we demonstrate how transformative learning takes place through the reading and writing of stories. Chapters 4 through 8 relay stories from adult educators and learners about their transformative experiences. These stories illustrate the process of transformative learning, the context in which it took place, and the role of the educator and others in fostering transformative learning. We have grouped these stories into the following categories: psychological dilemmas, loss and trauma, educational experiences, social change, and spirituality.

In Chapter 9, we discuss and interpret the stories, and in Chapter 10, we provide a summary of what we learned about practice, research, and theory from our storytellers.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Michael Kroth is an Associate Professor at the University of Idaho in Adult/Organizational Learning and Leadership and is a recipient of the university's Hoffman Award in Teaching Excellence. He has written or co-authored four books, including *Transforming Work: The Five Keys to Achieving Trust, Commitment, and Passion in the Workplace* (with Patricia Boverie), *The Manager as Motivator*, and *Career Development Basics* (with McKay Christensen). *Managing the Mobile Workforce: Leading, Building, and Sustaining Virtual Teams*, co-authored with David Clemons, is his latest book.

Patricia Cranton is a retired Professor of Adult Education, currently affiliated with the University of New Brunswick in Canada and Teachers College at Columbia University. She has been Professor of Adult Education at Penn State University at Harrisburg, St. Francis Xavier University, University of New Brunswick, and Brock University in Canada, and Associate Professor at McGill University. Patricia Cranton's recent books include *Planning Instruction for Adult Learners* (3rd edition, 2012), *Becoming an Authentic Teacher* (2001), *Finding our Way: A Guide for Adult Educators* (2003), *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning* (2nd edition, 2006), and *A Guide to Research for Educators and Trainers of Adults* (3rd edition, 2014) with Sharan Merriam as second author. Patricia was the co-editor of *The Handbook of Transformative Learning* (2012, with Ed Taylor). Patricia has edited five New Directions in Adult and Continuing Education volumes, most recently *Authenticity in Teaching* (2006) and *Reaching out across the Border: Canadian Perspectives in Adult Education* (with Leona English as co-editor, 2009). Patricia has taught courses in the area of transformative learning since 1994. She was inducted into the International Hall of Fame for Adult and Continuing Education in 2014.

Michael Kroth, Boise, Idaho, United States
Patricia Cranton, New Brunswick, Canada
May, 2014

ABOUT THE STORYTELLERS

Ten people share their stories in this book. How they were chosen is described in Chapter Nine. They come from different walks of life. Each of the stories is told in the person's own words, with only light editing from us. We gave them the options of using pseudonyms, their first names only, full names, or their full names and affiliations. They made the choices of what to include for their name and affiliation. Each is accomplished in her or his unique way as the stories demonstrate.

FOSTERING TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

To transform something...is to cause a metamorphosis in form or structure, a change in the very condition or nature of a thing, a change into another substance, a radical change in outward form or inner character, as when a frog is transformed into a prince or a carriage maker into an auto factory.

James M. Burns, *Transforming Leadership*, p. 24

When we are children, growing up in a family, community, and culture, we absorb the values and beliefs we encounter in our surroundings. We believe that our parents and teachers know best, and we strive to please those important people in our lives by following their values and beliefs. In turn, parents, teachers, and others strive to instill their values and beliefs in young people, believing these are the best way to guide them. Of course, this does not necessarily hold true in circumstances where young people are oppressed, abused, or neglected, but on the whole, children uncritically assimilate the values and perspectives that are modeled by the adults they trust and believe in.

Starting in adolescence, young people come to a developmental stage where they need to differentiate themselves from their family and sometimes their community and culture. Mainly, they are looking for their own identity as separate from that of their parents. Jung (1971) calls this process individuation. Individuation, though, is not a one-time stage of development; it continues through the lifespan. Individuation, says Jung, is the process of separating oneself from the collective of humanity and reintegrating with humanity with a new understanding of who we are and where we have been. It includes bringing the unconscious into consciousness, and understanding our anima or animus, the masculine and feminine facets of personality. It is a life goal to define one's self as both separate from and as a part of humanity.

In adulthood, people continue to acquire new knowledge and skills and to elaborate on the knowledge and skills they have already acquired, but they also engage in revisions to that knowledge, and perhaps mostly importantly, to their values, beliefs, and assumptions. Mezirow (2000) distinguishes between four kinds of learning: the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, the elaboration on existing knowledge and skills, the revision of meaning schemes (beliefs and values), and the revision of meaning perspectives (a larger view of the world). This is where transformative learning comes in.

When a person has a firmly entrenched set of values and beliefs, often absorbed in childhood, it can take a lot for that person to be willing to question them. Perhaps most often, people simply are not willing to engage in that questioning. But when they encounter an event that challenges their values or beliefs and their expectations of what will happen next, a disorienting dilemma as Mezirow (2000) says, they can be nudged into that questioning process. This can be the beginning of transformative learning. A disorienting dilemma can be, for example, the death of a loved one, the loss of a job, a move from one culture to another, or any major life transition, positive or negatively perceived (Cranton & Taylor, 2012b). A disorienting dilemma can also be created deliberately in a more formal learning environment such as a course, workshop, or retreat, by exposing learners to alternative perspectives through reading, film, fiction, and discussion.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Adult educators are concerned about making a difference in the lives of students. Educators at all levels share this goal, but adult educators are more likely to be helping individuals to transform their previously uncritically assimilated perspectives, and educators of young people are more likely to be engaged in the formation rather than the transformation of values, preferences, beliefs and assumptions. Storytelling is a universal human activity. We see storytelling everywhere—in songs, in fiction, in memoirs, in painting, in music and in theatre. People love to tell their stories. We find, in our teaching, that when we invite students to “tell a story” about their experiences or to relate “their story” to a theoretical concept, the learning is much more meaningful than if the discussion stays on an academic and detached level. In our online teaching, for example, where learning relies on discussion, students sometimes feel that they need to include academic references in their posts, but once they are freed from that expectation their stories become so much more meaningful and interesting. Both the storytellers and the readers of the stories are drawn into each others’ experiences and learn from them; this learning has the potential to be transformative.

In this chapter, we set out the case for making a difference through fostering transformative learning. The chapter includes an overview of transformative learning theory, with an emphasis on moving toward a unified or integrated theory of transformation, as called for by Cranton and Taylor (2012a), and especially what this means for practitioners of adult education. The chapter establishes the groundwork for the stories that follow and gives a strong rationale for how we, as practitioners, can foster transformative learning so as to make a difference for individuals, organizations, and society.

OVERVIEW OF TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING THEORY

Transformative learning has been defined by Mezirow and others from the beginning as leading to a deep shift in perspective during which habits of mind become more

open, more permeable, more discriminating, and better justified (Cranton, 2006; Mezirow, 2000). According to Mezirow, the process centers on critical reflection and critical self-reflection, but other theorists (for example, Dirkx, 2001) place imagination, intuition, and emotion at the heart of transformation. Generally, transformative learning occurs when a person encounters a perspective that is at odds with his or her current perspective. This discrepant perspective can be ignored, or it can lead to an examination of previously held beliefs, values, and assumptions. When the latter is the case, the potential for transformative learning exists, though it does not occur until the individual changes in noticeable ways. This overview draws on Cranton and Taylor's (2012b) chapter in the *International Handbook of Learning*.

Mezirow's (1975) development of a theory of transformative learning began when his wife, Edie, returned to college as an adult. Her experience led Mezirow to contemplate the changes that women returning to college might experience (Edie sometimes laughingly claims credit for the initial exploration of transformative learning theory). In the context of the women's movement of the time, Mezirow decided to study women returning to college as adults. In general, he found that the experience led the women to question and revise their personal beliefs and values in a fairly linear ten-step process. They questioned, for example, why some women were expected to be home to make meals for their husband, but others were not. Mezirow described the results of his study in a ten-phase description. At this time he called the developing theory as "perspective transformation." The ten steps of perspective transformation were:

- Experiencing a disorienting dilemma (they encountered beliefs that were different from the beliefs they held)
- Undergoing a self-examination (they were led to question their own beliefs)
- Feeling a sense of alienation from traditional social expectations (the women felt isolated and alienated)
- Relating their discontent to similar experiences of others (they recognized that their situation was shared by others)
- Exploring options for new ways of acting (the women contemplated, "what now?")
- Building competence and self-confidence in new roles (they realized that they needed to gain new skills and new roles)
- Planning a course of action (building competence and confidence led to a plan to make changes in their lives)
- Acquiring the knowledge and skills for implementing a new course of action (developing a plan for change often led to the need for further knowledge and skills)
- Trying out new roles and assessing them (the women tried out the new roles and contemplated how well they suited what they wanted to do)
- Reintegrating into society with the new perspective (the women brought their new learning and their changed perspectives back into their everyday life in society)

Not much attention was paid to Mezirow's original study, except for a few critiques in which he was chastised for neglecting the social context (the women's movement) of the time. But 15 years later, Mezirow (1990) edited a book on fostering critical reflection in adulthood, which was really a book of strategies and methods for facilitating transformative learning. And in the next year, he published his comprehensive theory of transformative learning in his book, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* (Mezirow, 1991). At this time, he made certain to give his work credibility, and one way he did this was to draw on the work of Habermas (1971), a German social philosopher who proposed that there were three kinds of human interests that led to three kinds of knowledge—instrumental (technical), practical (communicative), and emancipatory. In this framework, transformative learning is emancipatory knowledge. The critics did not give up, and Mezirow's book was challenged on the basis of his "misinterpretation" of Habermas, but eventually, this philosophical foundation of his work was accepted.

Mezirow (1991) also described three types of meaning perspectives—epistemic (about knowledge and how we obtain knowledge), sociolinguistic (understanding ourselves and social world through language), and psychological (concerned with our perception of ourselves largely based on childhood experiences). He suggested that people absorb each of these types of meaning perspectives from their family, community, and culture. The perspectives are deeply embedded and largely unquestioned until the individual encounters a dilemma that brings this to his or her attention.

As a part of his theory development Mezirow (1991, 2000) created a structure to explain the process of transformative learning. In 1991, Mezirow's structure involved meaning schemes (assumptions, beliefs, and values) and meaning perspectives (a web of meaning schemes that formed a larger world view. In 2000, his terminology changed somewhat. He defined a "frame of reference" as including the assumptions, beliefs, and expectations that influence a person's behavior. "Habits of mind" and "points of view" replaced "meaning perspectives" and "meaning schemes." A habit of mind is a set of assumptions that acts as a lens or a filter for understanding experience (similar to a meaning perspective). A habit of mind is expressed as a point of view and is a cluster of meaning schemes—specific expectations of what people see and how they see it. For example, if I (Patricia) believe that men should not control the finances of their women partners, I may chastise my granddaughter when she tells me her boyfriend is controlling her money. Habits of mind or frames of reference are like grooves in the mind—the way we automatically think, feel, and act without question or further thought. Habits of mind, since they are deeply embedded, are difficult to articulate, let alone question.

Frames of reference act as filters or a lens for interpreting experience. When I interact with my granddaughter, I interpret her decisions about how to manage her finances using my lens related to the roles of women and men and partnership. When an individual comes upon a new experience, it either reinforces the frame of reference or gradually stretches its boundaries, depending on how it conforms to prior experience. However, when an individual has a radically different or

incongruent experience (for example, the death of a loved one or moving to a different country), where the experience cannot be assimilated into the frame of reference, it is either rejected or there is a development of new frame of reference—a perspective transformation.

Mezirow emphasizes rational and cognitive transformative learning, but other theorists include different processes. Mezirow was critiqued for originally explaining transformative learning primarily as a cognitive process, and his later views are more inclusive of other perspectives, such as the role of emotions in the process. Dirkx (2001), for example, substitutes imagination, intuition, and emotion for critical reflection. Dirkx (2001, 2006) draws on the Jungian concept of individuation to describe transformative learning as an imaginative, intuitive, emotional, and soulful experience (the way of *mythos* rather than *logos*). *Mythos* is a facet of knowing that engages symbols, images, stories, and myths, paying attention to the small everyday occurrences of life and listening to individual and collective psyches. Dirkx (2006) suggests that the experience of emotional dynamics in learning come from “largely unconscious issues evoked by various aspects of the learning setting, such as the self, designated leaders, other learners, the context in which learning occurs, and the task that is the explicit focus of our learning” (p. 17). Individuation, suggests Dirkx, is mediated through emotion-laden images (p. 18). This gives us quite a different take on the process of transformative learning.

Dirkx was informed by the earlier work of Boyd and Myers (1988, Boyd, 1985, Boyd, 1989, Boyd, 1991) who called on Jungian psychology to explain transformative learning. Discernment, rather than reflection, is the central process of transformation in this perspective; symbols, images, and archetypes lead to personal enlightenment as people bring the unconscious to consciousness. Boyd (1989) emphasizes the role of small groups in working with unconscious content. The group becomes the archetypical “mother” and influences the way in which people in the group create images and work through personal dilemmas. Boyd (1989) defines transformation as “a fundamental change in one’s personality involving conjointly the resolution of a personal dilemma and the expansion of consciousness resulting in greater personality integration” (p. 459). This goes back to a belief that individuation is central to transformative learning, as mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. In the extrarational perspective on transformative learning, people bring the unconscious into consciousness through imagination, intuition, and emotional experiences. We enter into a conscious relationship with images as we discover who we are as separate from and the same as others. As Dirkx (2006) puts it, “Conscious participation in this process directs our psychic energy toward creative, life-enhancing, constructive, and potentially transformative activities” (p. 19).

Following a different path, psychologists such as Kegan (2000) and Tennant (2012) take a developmental view of transformative learning. From this point of view, transformative learning describes shifts in the way people make meaning—moving from a simplistic reliance on authority to more complex ways of knowing or higher orders or consciousness. Belenky and Stanton (2000) report on a similar

progression, but they emphasize connected knowing (through collaboration and acceptance of others' views rather than autonomous, independent knowing).

Transformative learning theory has long been critiqued for neglecting social change, and this critique is especially focused on Mezirow's writing even though he draws on the works of Freire and Habermas, both of whom have social change as a central goal. But Mezirow sees transformative learning as a *learning process*, and a learning process is an individual undertaking, even though it may have social consequences or be fueled by social change. At the same time, though, social change has long been a goal of adult education, including the Antigonish Movement in Canada in the 1920s, where ordinary people were helped to develop economic independence and the Highland Folk School in the US in the 1930s where the development of literacy skills was seen to be a way to foster both social and personal transformation.

In general, the process of transformative learning is consistent with what is known as constructivism. Constructivism is a view of learning where the learner is an active participant in the learning process, not a passive recipient, creating and interpreting knowledge rooted in personal experience. That is, people "construct" meaning from their own experiences, and different people view the same event in different ways. Learners use their personal experiences in order to interpret their current learning. So, for example, I may respond to a change in my work environment based on my prior understandings of how my work environment affects my daily life. If I encounter a supervisor who is authoritarian in her approach to working with her staff, and if I have negative feelings about authoritarian leadership, I may well respond to this particular supervisor based on my prior experience. Based on the assumption that there are no fixed truths, or at least none that we can fully understand, and that change is continuous, individuals cannot always be confident of what they know or believe, and therefore they need to find different and better ways to understand their world. Mezirow (2000) argues that adults have a need to better understand "how to negotiate and act upon our own purposes, values, feelings and meanings rather than those we have uncritically assimilated from others—to gain greater control over all lives as socially responsible clear thinking decision makers" (p. 8).

Toward a Unified Theory of Transformative Learning

Good theory can stimulate a number of research threads that often lead to promising theoretical inquiry, and it is a normal process for scholars to build upon and to develop initial theory into something more comprehensive and deeper. A powerful and enduring theory builds upon and integrates relevant lines of inquiry. As we can already see, transformative learning theory has spawned a range of theorizing and research since it was originally proposed. Dirkx (2001) has said that "transformative learning represents one of the most generative ideas for both practitioners and researchers concerned with adult learning" (p. 139). Mezirow's original conceptualization has benefitted from increasing depth, lines of inquiry, and

perspectives. Taking what has been learned and moving to a more unified, integrated theory seems timely. In spite of earlier calls to take a more integrative view of the theory (for example, Cranton & Roy, 2003; Cranton, Dirkx & Mezirow, 2005), the research and literature still remains divided. Most of the research uses Mezirow's perspective as a theoretical framework. But Gunnlaugson (2008) describes "first wave" and "second wave" theories of transformative learning, the first wave being those works that build on, critique, or depart from Mezirow's seminal work, and the second wave being those authors who work towards integrative, holistic, and integral perspectives. There are still only a few articles that could be described as being in the "second wave."

Since the late 1990s, transformative learning theory has been described in relation to at least three categories: a cognitive rational approach, an extrarational approach, and a social change approach. But the number of categories grew over time. In 2008, Taylor listed the following: a psychocritical perspective (including Mezirow's cognitive and rational approach); a psychoanalytical approach (including Dirkx and others who describe individuation as transformative learning); a psychodevelopmental perspective (viewing transformative learning across the lifespan); a social emancipatory perspective (helping oppressed people develop a critical consciousness); a neurobiological perspective (based on brain research using medical techniques); a cultural-spiritual perspective (grounded in a culturally relevant and spirituality understanding of transformation); a race-centric view (in which people of African descent are the "subjects" of the transformative experience (p. 9)); and a planetary view (in which the goal is the reorganization of the whole system—political, social, and educational). Taylor distinguishes between perspectives that have the individual as the "unit of analysis," with little consideration being given to the social context, and those perspectives that focus on social change (for example, the social emancipatory approach) where, presumably, individuals are not the "unit of analysis."

It is valuable, of course, to understand the different strands of theory development, especially in a field as new as transformative learning theory, but classification systems can paralyze rather than stimulate the thinking about transformative learning. And where do we go from here, beyond further categorization? As transformative learning theory is in its third decade of development, it seems that we can move toward putting these pieces back together in a meaningful way—a way that will help practitioners and researchers get on with their work.

The ways scholars might move toward considering theory integration might take different forms. Our point here is not to suggest the means to conceptually integrate the diverse strands of inquiry but that it is a timely endeavor. Therefore, in this book, we move toward the unified and integrated perspective proposed by Cranton and Taylor (2012a).

There is no reason that both the individual and the social perspectives cannot peacefully coexist; one does not deny the existence of the other, but rather they share common characteristics and can inform each other. Similarly, people are both intuitive and cognitively oriented. Some people focus on relationships and values;

and sometimes the process is developmental. Different individuals may experience the same event in quite different ways. Also the same individual may experience different events in different ways. It is our intent in this book to rely on a unified or integrated theory of transformative learning and to illustrate the various facets of that learning through the stories people tell.

Michael's story illustrates a transformative learning experience that is in progress and illustrates an integrative approach to questioning and reflecting.

Michael: I am writing this while sitting in my apartment in Torino, Italy. I turned 61 the day I flew here three months ago, and I return to Idaho in just a week. I am teaching here as part of a studies abroad program. My wife joined me for part of this journey but though I had briefly met a couple of people here I really knew no one when I arrived in Italy. I deliberately put myself in a situation where I would be totally immersed in another culture, situation, and a language I did not know.

Why? Partly for the adventure, of course, and to learn about the art, culture, history and the people of this country, a place I have wanted to explore for many years, but mostly to explore myself. I am just a tad past a later-in-life tenure and promotion process, both my parents have died within the last two or so years, and I have had two recent heart surgeries. I have felt lately as if I were on a thoughtless treadmill and that I was ceding my ability to choose my life because of quotidian activity traps. My lack of intention was allowing the situation and not me to dominate my life. Time was moving forward. Planning for my future was not.

To put a point on it, I have been struggling with how to make the most—in every way—of this next phase of my life. I didn't want to waste it by going through the motions of heading to retirement age. So I sought out this opportunity for self-reflection and learning.

But once here the insights did not come. I was enraptured by the frescoes of Raphael, touched by the bravery of martyrs and heretics, and moved by stories of heroic leadership. I engaged myself in learning Italian and practicing it whenever I could. There is something intimately humbling about being so helpless that you don't even know how to order a cup of coffee without asking for assistance.

With the usually-solid moorings of relationship, language, and domicile cast aside, it might seem easy to set also adrift the constraints to thinking as well. Not so for me. As the date of return approached I realized that the journey had been enriching and transforming but not epiphanal. The trip had not reset my sails.

Then, just days ago a friend mentioned an opportunity for learning that I had not even considered before, and as I thought about it pieces started falling into

place and over the last day or so the next phase of my career has been like a jigsaw puzzle picture emerging from the fragments.

It is very early in the transformative learning process for me, and I do not know where this will lead if anywhere, but I intend to reflect upon this, seek additional insight and information and, depending on where that takes me, to try some stuff out. Regardless, this has given me more depth of knowledge about myself and about what is meaningful to me at this stage in life.

What a Unified or Integrated Theory Means for Adult Education Practitioners

At the risk of over-simplifying, a theory from an interpretive perspective has two main purposes: (1) to describe observations of a phenomenon in a way that makes sense of the observations and organizes them into patterns, and (2) to guide practice. A good educational theory should help practitioners with their practice. Practitioners might find it difficult to apply eight or more seemingly unrelated or even conflicting theoretical perspectives related to the same phenomenon. If, however, an adult educator realizes that different individuals may engage in transformative learning in different ways, or the same individual may engage in transformative learning differently depending on the content and context of the process, then the practitioner can set up an environment and select strategies in such a way that they would be supportive of all possibilities.

In other words, a unified theory of transformative learning would allow educators to draw on those aspects of the theory that fit with their context and their goals. For example, an adult literacy educator may draw on a social emancipatory perspective along with a psychocritical perspective. A trainer working in an organizational context, where the acquisition of skills is the primary goal, may choose to support critical thinking and critical reflection so that the possibility of technical learning spiraling into emancipatory learning exists. A teacher in a graduate adult education program may set up readings, discussions, and a variety of resources that are relevant to individuals' styles and preferences as well as the content and context of the program.

In order to frame practice with an integrative theory of transformative learning, an expanded definition of transformative learning is called for. We began our overview with the following definition: "Transformative learning is a deep shift in perspective during which habits of mind become more open, more permeable, more discriminating, and better justified." This definition is open enough to accommodate the processes discussed here, but we could make this clearer and more explicit.

Transformative learning is a process by which individuals engage in the cognitive processes of critical reflection and self-reflection, intuitive and imaginative explorations of their psyche and spirituality, and developmental changes leading to a deep shift in perspective and habits of mind that are more open, permeable, discriminating, and better justified. Individual change may lead to social change, and social change may promote individual change.

From another perspective, it is interesting that Mezirow's ten phases, listed above, still incorporate all the theorizing we have just described. Phase one, experiencing disorienting dilemmas, (encountering beliefs different from ones they held), might include a range of beliefs about psyche, spirituality, philosophy, science, and so on. Phase two, self-examination, might include critical reflection, discernment, or other processes which scholars have yet to discover or describe. This simple list remains a useful way to look at a unified transformative learning process for adult practitioners in the field.

Transformative learning can occur with the help and support of educators, counselors, coaches, and other helping professionals, or it can occur informally in individuals' lives, often without being recognized or named as transformative learning. When educators deliberately foster transformative learning, there is one central facet to this process, regardless of context—learners are introduced, in some way, to points of view that are potentially discrepant to the points of view they hold. It is this discrepancy between what can be and what is that leads to critical reflection, exploration, questioning, and possibly a shift in perspective.

As we know, there are many ways that this discrepancy can be created or discovered (see, for example, Cranton, 2006). Journals, role plays, critical incidents, debates, questioning, experiential activities, films, and thought-provoking readings all have the potential for setting up the circumstances that are conducive to transformative learning. In recent years, attention has turned to arts-based strategies, narrative learning, and storytelling (Jarvis, 2012, Lawrence, 2012, Rossiter & Clark, 2007). In this book, we are especially interested in the telling and reading of real-life stories (in other words, storytelling and narrative learning). In the next section, we provide an overview of the role of storytelling and narrative learning in fostering transformative learning. We return to this topic in more detail in Chapter 2.

The Role of Storytelling and Narrative Learning in Fostering Transformative Learning

Rossiter and Clark (2007) provide an excellent overview of narrative learning and narrative knowing with a focus on the practicalities of facilitating narrative learning in the classroom. Clark and Rossiter (2008) describe the essential features of narrative learning: hearing stories, telling stories, and recognizing stories. They see stories as a way of understanding our experiences, a means by which we form our identity, and a method for making sense out of larger social and cultural issues. They describe different kinds of narratives—cultural narratives, family narratives, individual narratives, and organizational narratives. They are not writing specifically about narrative learning in conjunction with transformative learning, but it is easy to take the small step from one to the other. If people tell and read stories to make sense out of their experiences, understand their identity, and understand social and cultural issues, this is all a part of how transformative learning takes place. Tennant

(2012), for example, introduces the concept of the “storied self” in his discussion of understanding the potential for transformation.

Jarvis (2012) suggests several ways that fiction and film can have the potential to engage people in transformative experiences: they can connect with others who live very different lives from their own; they can have intense emotional responses and fears; they can stand back and see the world from a distance; they can identify the discourses that shape their lives; they can be led to ideology critique; and they can actively construct their role as a reader.

In keeping with our storytelling theme, Patricia tells a story about her engagement with reading a story (Cranton, 2012).

Patricia: I am an indiscriminate reader of fiction. I become as engaged with a thriller in which corpses show up on every other page in various states of disrepair as I do with John Updike and Margaret Atwood and Alice Munro (our celebrated Canadian recipient of the Nobel Prize of Literature), Jane Austen and Thomas Mann. As I was contemplating how reading fiction has the potential to foster critical reflection, critical self-reflection, and perhaps transformative learning, I happened to read a novel that disturbed me deeply. It was a simple enough story, really. A young woman was homeless and struggling to remain a university student. She camped out in a cold, deserted, abandoned farm house with her dog. She and her dog kept each other warm at night, shared food, and gave each other love and companionship. There was a dream-like quality to the novel, the writing was lyrical, and symbolic animals and birds populated the pages. But then, the young woman fell in love with one of her professors, a man considerably older than she was. As she spent more and more time with the man, I read faster and faster, worried sick about the dog. I skimmed over the development of the human relationship, the revealing of dark secrets between woman and man, not giving a fig what they were up to. What about the dog? The woman went out to see the dog less and less frequently. The dog grew thin, matted, and sad. In a scene I could barely look at long enough to read, the woman killed her dog.

Initially, I did not understand why I reacted so strongly to this particular story. I did not understand it, in fact, until I realized the meaning of Clark and Rossiter’s (2008) suggestion that we position ourselves in the stories we read. I have lived with dogs for my whole life. During this time, there have been many different dogs, and some tragedies. Positioning myself in this story brought to consciousness a great fear that I have neglected or could neglect my dogs in such a way so as to put their lives in danger. This was an important (and difficult) insight for me, and one that I could relate to reoccurring dreams, and fears that I experience in relationships in general.

The chapter establishes the groundwork for the stories that follow in Chapters 4 through 8 and, we hope, gives a strong rationale for how we, as practitioners

CHAPTER 1

can make foster transformative learning so as to make a difference for individuals, organizations, and society.

SUMMARY

This chapter is intended to provide an introduction to the book as a whole. We opened the chapter with a brief discussion of how making a difference is a goal of adult educators. We included an overview of transformative learning theory as it currently exists in the literature. We then made a case for developing and acting upon a unified or integrated theory of transformative learning. We included a section on narrative learning and learning through reading fiction and writing creative non-fiction. In the spirit of storytelling we included brief stories of our own experiences with transformative learning and stories. In the next chapters, we turn toward a more detailed discussion of storytelling and transformative learning, and then turn to the first-person stories we solicited from adult educators and learners.

UNDERSTANDING SELF AND SOCIETY THROUGH STORYTELLING

One of the best gifts you have to offer when you write personal history is the gift of yourself. Give yourself permission to write about yourself, and have a good time doing it.

William Zinsser, *On Writing Well*, 2006, p. 146

“Did I tell you the story about the time a raccoon carried off my old cat?” “Could you tell me the story of how you became a teacher?” “There must be a story behind that!” “Remember the time our Aunt Gertie told us just what she thought of our garden?” So often, in conversations with friends, families, and students, we rely on stories to communicate important events in our lives, tell funny anecdotes to amuse listeners, or use a story to illustrate a point in a teaching and learning situation. When I [Patricia] encounter a lull in a discussion in an evening class when everyone is tired from a long work day and possibly suffering from missing supper as they drive straight from work to class, I tell a story. As soon as I say, “Would you like to hear a story about....?” students lean forward and smile and nod. The story may only take a few minutes, but the simple act of storytelling re-energizes, encourages laughter, and refocuses participants’ attention on the group.

One time, I went overboard with my story. It was a fairly typical story about my dogs, one of whom killed a groundhog. I have lived with dogs all of my life, and I grew up on a farm, where the dogs were less civilized than “city dogs.” I still prefer uncivilized dogs, dogs who are closer to nature, dogs who tend to reject wearing bows and bandanas and don’t much like walking on leashes. They would rather run through the woods and be dogs rather than possessions. So, I embarked on a story of my dog killing a groundhog. I didn’t scrimp on the details. I told how the dog got the groundhog by the back of the neck and shook him to death, which is what dogs do. I then went on to tell how my dog ate the groundhog, *the whole thing*, I said. I was prepared to go on with how my dog then threw up the groundhog, but I noticed a few of my students looking quite pale, so I caught myself, and ended the story before the ending. I explained, we laughed, and everyone was engaged for the rest of the evening.

In this chapter, we introduce the second framework for the book—storytelling. There are several approaches to storytelling in the literature ranging from Rossiter and Clark’s (2007) concept of narrative learning, to Tyler and Swartz’s (2012) and Boje’s (2007) use of storytelling in organizations, and to Clark’s (2012)

understanding of “embodied narrative.” We do not intend to engage in a detailed theoretical discussion here, but rather to introduce the readers to how we understand ourselves, our experiences, our identities, and the world we live in through stories.

NARRATIVE LEARNING

Narrative learning and narrative knowledge are commonly referred to in the adult education literature, as is narrative inquiry, a research methodology using stories that has become popular in recent years. Rossiter and Clark (2007) provide an excellent overview of narrative learning and narrative knowing with a focus on the practicalities of facilitating narrative learning in the classroom. They open their book with individual stories from both authors, an introduction which gives an idea of how narrative learning can facilitate learning. The authors describe narrative as a “basic structure through which we make meaning of our lives” (p. 13). They remind us that human life is more than a “list of happenings,” but rather it is a process of understanding what those happenings mean within the context of our lives and within the context of the larger picture—the society within which we live. Clark and Rossiter emphasize the importance of stories in our individual lives and also in our cultural and social experiences, an emphasis which fits well with our goals in this book. As they say, “our lives are steeped in stories” (p.20)—cultural narratives, individual narratives, family narratives, and organizational narratives. The concept of a “storied life” suggests that the nature of individuals’ identity is an “unfolding story” (p. 44).

Clark and Rossiter (2008) describe the essential features of narrative learning: hearing stories, telling stories, and recognizing stories. They see stories as a way of understanding our experiences, a means by which we form our identity, and a method for making sense out of larger social and cultural issues. The hearing of stories draws us into an experience “at more than a cognitive level” (p. 65). They engage learners at a deeper and more holistic level (though the groundhog story might be an exception). In the telling of stories, the learner is at the center of the narrative; he or she tells of experiences and links those experiences with the content of the discussion. In recognizing stories, learners see how they are positioned in narratives, including narratives that are related to their culture, society, race, gender, and background.

Learning from fiction is a somewhat different spin on narrative learning, but it is closely related and worth mentioning here. Jarvis (2006) says that fiction can offer disorienting dilemmas, encourage dialogue where contradictions can emerge, lead to imagining alternatives, and allow for the trying on of different points of view. Jarvis derives her ideas from research she conducted in a college classroom using popular romantic fiction. Her participants were women from different ethnic and social backgrounds and women of different ages who were preparing for entry into higher education. Jarvis (2012) suggests several ways that fiction and film can have the potential to engage people in transformative experiences: they can connect with others

who live very different lives from their own; they can have intense emotional responses and fears; they can stand back and see the world from a distance; they can identify the discourses that shape their lives; they can be led to ideology critique; and they can actively construct their role as a reader. We discuss the ways in which transformative learning can occur through reading and telling stories more fully in Chapter 3.

STORYTELLING

There are differences among scholars who write about storytelling, but aside from some debate about terminology, most seem to be talking about the same thing. We find Nelson's (2009) discussion of the purpose of stories in learning to be a good place to start. She lists the following purposes of telling and listening to stories:

- Respect for all of life, including respect for self, family, community, tribe, and planet.
- The interconnectedness of all life.
- The coherence in one's life from the past and the hope in one's life for the future.
- The awareness that adversity will come in life.
- The goals of building a life in harmony and balance with nature.
- The ability to laugh at pitfalls.
- How to stay safe.
- Identification with a group or tribe.
- Character traits such as courage, perseverance, ability, and bravery.
- Role modeling by characters withstanding negative forces and overcoming adversity.
- Acceptance of one's role or destiny in life (p. 210).

In other words, stories are used to address most of the things we think about (or could think about) in our daily lives. Many of us may not think about "respect for all of life" on a regular basis, but it is there, somewhere in the back of our minds, as is the interconnectedness of all life. Stories bring these issues to the fore of our consciousness.

Nelson points out that many stories use the hero/heroine journey as an outline for a plot. She suggests that understanding the stages in a story show how listeners and readers gain a sense of emotional resiliency through being involved in storytelling and story listening. The hero's stages as documented by Campbell (1972) include:

- *Normal*. Life is in a steady state, but then a "call to adventure" changes everything.
- *Separation*. The character leaves home to prove his or her character or to help others.
- *Tests*. The character goes through a variety of serious tests (for example, battles, journeys into the unknown).
- *Return*. The hero or heroine returns and brings back the knowledge to the community (p. 211).

In Canada, on Sunday at noon, people from across the country tune into *The Vinyl Café* to listen to Stuart McLean tell stories. He has been doing this for decades, and most Canadians are familiar with the lives of Dave and Morley and their son Sam, and a whole host of supporting characters who live in the neighborhood. The stories are often funny, but not always, and they always contain a central gem, a meaning that all listeners can connect with—conflicts between neighbors, love between spouses, the trials of raising and caring for a child. Perhaps best of all, the stories are told to live audiences in different cities and towns, so people can go and listen in person; but those listening to the radio are quite aware the audience is present as Stuart McLean hesitates to wait for an audience reaction, or unexpectedly laughs at his own story. The purposes of storytelling that Nelson (2009) lists are evident in Stuart McLean's stories as are the stages or elements in a story. The “adventure” may be Dave trying to get up on the roof of his neighbors' house with a magnet to erase a rude message he inadvertently left on their answering machine; the separation may be Sam running away from home; and the test may be figuring out how to work through difficult family problems. People living ordinary lives are living heroes' lives.

The Storied Life

People use stories to shape their identities. We are the stories we tell. In his workshops and conference presentations, Bill Randall, who writes about how we story and restory our lives (for example, see Kenyon & Randall, 1977), often tells his “iron lung” story. He remembers being in an iron lung as a child, which was, at the time, a response to polio. For years, he told this story to colleagues, to students, and to friends at parties. On one occasion, he was telling the story to an audience which included a family member. The family member was shocked. “What? An iron lung? You were never in an iron lung!” But Bill was convinced he had been. The family member proved to be right, and Bill came to understand how individuals restory their lives as they search for meaningful ways of understanding themselves. We said earlier, in Chapter 1, that transformative learning is based on constructivism—the notion that individuals construct meaning from their experiences in different ways and that different people see the same event in their own ways. Storytelling shares this foundation. Two siblings, for example, may have quite different memories of shared childhood events. Two people in a long-term relationship may have different perceptions of how they met or how they felt about each other when they met.

Tennant (2012) says that autobiographical stories are usually related to a particular problem or issue, and they lead to “concerns about the self, such as self-esteem, self-satisfaction, well-being, self-doubt, and self-efficacy” (p. 89). But then comes the interesting issue. An educator (or any listener) can accept that the story is true for the person who told it and respond accordingly. Or the educator can challenge the story in order to encourage the storyteller to explore alternative interpretations. Going back to Patricia's story in Chapter 1, the listener could say, “I understand how deeply you were affected by what was happening to the dog in the story; this must

have been so difficult for you.” At this point, the educator or listener supports the storyteller and that is really the end of that. But if the educator asks, “What did the dog mean to you? Why was this fictional dog so important to you? What did the dog represent in your life? Have you ever experienced or thought about killing your own dog?” Then the storyteller is provoked into seeing her story differently. She may react with anger or distress and close down the conversation, but it also may be the case that she continues to think about the questions.

A few years ago I (Patricia) had a storytelling experience that stays fresh in my mind. I was attending a meeting of adult educators at Teachers College in New York City. The purpose of the meeting has faded from my memory, but the storytelling exercise has not. Jo Tyler led an activity on storytelling. We worked with a partner, and my partner was my colleague, Victoria Marsick, from Teachers College. Jo asked us to think back to a significant event in our practice as adult educators; she gave us time to reflect on this on our own. We were then asked to tell the story of the experience to our partner. The partner was asked to listen without interruption. Next, our partner told the story back to us. Inevitably, the story sounded different. Jo asked us to re-tell our story. This time, our partner could comment and ask questions. Finally, Jo asked us to tell the same story from the perspective of the main character in the story. I had told a story that I have written about before—the story of Jim, a tradesperson who was taking a course in adult education in preparation for teaching his trade. Jim was older than other learners in the course, and he was desperately frightened of being in a university course. He coped with this by being the “funny guy” in the group. But Jim broke down in about the second week of a six-week intensive residential course. He said, “I can’t do it! I can’t be a teacher! What am I doing?” I quickly broke up the class. Jim was not especially comfortable with me, a female instructor. The class included mostly men, so I asked some of the guys to take Jim for a walk in the woods or to the pub, or whatever they thought best.

When I told my story from Jim’s perspective, an astonishing thing happened. I truly felt like I was Jim speaking. I even adopted his strong Canadian Maritime accent and his language choices. This was not a conscious decision, and I hardly realized it until my partner Victoria pointed it out to me. I had put myself into Jim’s reality, and I spoke his story. I had reflected on Jim’s story extensively, but this experience of telling the story, having a good listener, retelling the story, and telling the story from Jim’s perspective gave me insights I had not had before. I can’t say that I fully understood Jim’s perspective, but I came much closer to understanding it when I spoke the story in his voice. I was able to position myself in his story by making a connection between his experience and the experiences of my brothers, my son, and my father, all of whom were tradespeople. I think this illustrates the centrality of the storied life. My storied life was, on the surface, very different from Jim’s storied life. But when it came down to it, I could see

the way that our stories overlapped and gain a much better understanding of his experience than I ever could have had without the stories.

Identity is that sense of a core self that essentially remains the same over time even though there are multiple facets to individuals' lives that change and are constructed in response to life events. Identity is expressed in a person's authenticity (being real and genuine in the expression of oneself) and becoming authentic is also a transformative learning process (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004). In this way, the strands all come together. Storytelling defines a person's identity and sense of self. There is a core self that is relatively constant over time. Yet, that self or aspects of that self may be challenged by other events and experience. In this case, the person may choose to question her assumptions and beliefs, and may challenge her story or her restory. If this happens, transformative learning is a possibility.

Jo Tyler, the excellent facilitator of the activity Patricia described above, has worked with storytelling in organizations and has written about this extensively. We turn to this application of storytelling next.

Storytelling in Organizations

Tyler and Swartz (2012) follow the work of Boje (2001) in distinguishing between "stories" and "narratives." As they define it, storytelling is the oral telling of a personal experience. It is not mediated by technology and it does not get told in print. It is not a performance, but rather it is a relational and emergent exchange that "depends on both listening and poststory conversation" (p. 455). Storytelling is a natural form of human communication, and we can all recall telling and listening to stories. Stories turn into narratives when they are told and retold. During that process, they become practiced and edited. Bill Randall's "iron lung story" would be considered a narrative under this definition, as would Patricia's story of Jim. A narrative ends up with a crafted plot—a beginning, middle, and end.

Stories are dynamic rather than static, organic rather than mechanistic, and emergent rather than linear according to Tyler and Swartz (2012, p. 459). What we find particularly interesting about Tyler and Swartz's perspective on stories is that stories are alive—they are changing (as Bill Randall's concept of restorying addresses), they possess a sort of life force, and they are inspired in the telling. At first, this sounds just a bit silly. Stories are alive? What might that mean? Boje and Tyler (2009) explain that stories have many authors, stories have a collective force, and stories have shifting meanings. If we think about this using ordinary language, it means that we tell stories differently depending on who is the listener. The listener has the potential of shaping the story, and the meaning shifts. This is demonstrated well in Patricia's experience of telling her story to a partner, hearing the story told back to her, and telling the story again with the listener's perspective in mind. If I (Patricia) tell a story to my brother, with whom I share decades of memories and experiences, it will be quite a different story from one that I might tell a colleague or a student, even though the topic of the story might be the same.

Boje (2006) is interested in how all of this plays out in organizational learning through storytelling. He maintains the distinction between narrative and story as mentioned previously. Narratives have a “proper” linear plot, something that Boje believes is rare in storytelling in organizations. He proposes that “one is well advised to also be studying the more “improper,” less linear stories, and more to the point, study *systemicity* of story-dialogicality behaviors of people in organizations, in relationship to more petrified narrative-coherence “behaviors (p. 3)”

Boje writes:

While teaching at UCLA’s management school (1978-1986), I began sneaking off with the Folklore and Mythology faculty and doctoral students; they were tucked away behind the library of the Anderson School of Management. Professors Georges and Jones, for example, were pioneering a new approach called “organization folklore,” a rebellion against traditional obsession with collecting fairytales, Native American coyote tales, and working-folk-stories, and then meticulously classifying them with motif-index, or showing how my themes migrated with population from old world to new.

Something was being missed. Organization folklorists weren’t looking at the *behavior of people* telling stories in organizations. That sounds simple enough, and I am not saying it was never done, only that the narrow definitions of story-must-be-narrative plot put blinders on researchers being able to see systemic complexity of story behaviors. (p. 5)

Boje (2006) went on to describe the “storytelling organization” (p. 8) using case studies of several organizations, including Disney World, Nike, and Enron. He defines a storytelling organization as “a collective system[icity] in which the performance of stories is a key part of members’ sensemaking and a means to allow them to supplement individual memories with institutional memory” (p. 7).

The practical side of telling stories in organizations receives less attention in this literature than does the theoretical side. But when we think of how Jo Tyler brought out our stories in the session described earlier, it is easy to imagine how this activity and similar activities could work within an organization to bring people together and understand each other’s perspectives in a way that could not be accomplished without stories.

Embodied Narrative

“The body has many stories,” writes Clark (2012, p. 426). Embodied learning emphasizes that knowing is not only a cognitive process; we “know in and through our bodies” (p. 426). Some scholars suggest that learning begins and occurs in our bodies, not in the cognitive reflection on our experiences. It is through narrative knowing that we make sense of this experience by storying it. What does this mean? If we ask ourselves where we feel fear or anxiety or joy in our body, most people can easily respond to this question. I feel fear in my lower back, for example; another

person may feel fear in his arms or legs. I feel joy in my blood, coursing through my body; another person may feel joy in his heart.

Clark (2012) tells a story about physical decline associated with aging: her experience with osteoarthritis. In Chapter 5, we see a similar story by Laurence Robert Cohen, not associated with aging, but with illness. Clark had her knee replaced with a mechanical device. She personalized this new knee by naming her “Daisy,” and she writes about life before and after Daisy, describing this as a transformative learning experience. In her chapter, Clark provides a series of vignettes: rewinding the tape (where she looks for but cannot find the beginning of her story), claiming agency by giving in (where she realized she needed surgery), becoming an object to be fixed (the events leading up to the surgery), and being overtaken (being a body to be acted on). Then her story shifts from “I can’t” to “I can,” which she describes as “more than a little wonderful” (p. 434). But at the same time, she recognizes that she is disabled and enmeshed in the narrative of a physical disability.

This story introduces a facet of storytelling we have not yet recognized in this chapter. Clark concludes:

So welcoming Daisy has meant that I’m in a new narrative now, a narrative that is embodied in a way that I didn’t know was possible when my body was well and able, qualities that kept my body distant, and often separate, from my understanding of myself. That distance is gone now. I don’t *have* a body as I once did—I *am* my body.

This understanding of storytelling underlines the holistic nature of stories and narratives. A story is not a simple cognitive recollection of a series of events. It involves emotions, imagination, and our bodies. For this book we are less concerned about whether stories are called stories or narratives and are more concerned about how they can demonstrate the ways people change. In this way, as we explore in Chapter 3 and also in Chapter 10, storytelling supports an integrated theory of transformative learning.

My Day In Italy

This is a story of a typical day during my (Michael) three month stay in Italy. An earlier version was published in the University of Idaho’s College of Education *Envision* magazine.

I wake early and the story of my day begins. I want to go over my lessons for the day and sometimes that takes some time. My second floor apartment is roomy – a living room, two bedrooms, kitchen, bathroom, and laundry room. The laundry room is my favorite because there is a table where I work and eat, and an open window with a rack outside where I hang my laundry to dry. I had not used clothespins for many years but the apartment has no dryer. Dropping a sock or pillowcase is not unusual. The very small washing machine takes a

couple of hours per load. I laugh to myself, imagining someone from the street below spotting the brand and current status of my underwear, shirts, and other garments.

Out the expansive, open window sits the FIAT headquarters and sometimes I see a helicopter landing atop. More pleasing to me is the ebb and flow of people walking by, perhaps on a Sunday stroll, perhaps headed to the Lingotto mall sitting next to the FIAT building, or perhaps hurrying to the metro or bus stop just a block and a half away. It engages my romantic spirit to be in the midst of Italian humanity and to imagine the lives of those who live here. I linger at my window often.

The lessons I review are sometimes for classes I am teaching. Other times they are for the Italian courses I am taking. At age 61, learning a new language is hard but so very rewarding. It is, just a little, transformative for me to take on the Italian persona through the language. I feel more “in the role” of an Italian wannabe, just as I have felt when an actor in plays years-past, and I find myself “speaking” with my whole body – hands and arms and even eye brows.

I attempt to speak Italian everywhere I go and the Italians are unvaryingly helpful and appreciative that I am giving it a go. Once, endeavoring to find lodging for the night in Venice, I walked into a hotel I knew was totally booked and the manager not only found a room for me but dropped the room rate by 20 Euros just because I was talking with him in Italian. Or trying my best to do so. On the way to my room I chortled to myself, prouder than I should have been for someone who knew almost nothing. My hard work studying prepositions, verbs in their many forms, phrases; looking up word after word after word after word; asking for help constantly – had paid off. I realize I can take care of myself.

Leaving my apartment each morning I walk across the street to a “bar” where I order a cappuccino, brioche, and a sprumata, which is fresh-squeezed orange juice. Luciana and Geno, the proprietors, know me well, greet me warmly, and help me with an Italian word here and there or share travel directions to places I am planning to visit. They were excited when my wife Lana arrived for five weeks – they fell in love with her and vice versa – and sad when she left for home.

On the days I teach or take classes, I then make the five minute walk to school. I arrive just in time for my Italian class, enjoying the luxury of being a student. Class lasts two hours and then, 15 minutes later, I teach for three hours. The long stretch is tiring but rewarding.

On the way home (I think of it as home) I stop by a small restaurant for lunch. The simple plate of spaghetti is inexpensive and scrumptious. Unlike most of my hurried meals in the United States I take all the time I want. Feeling the luxury of experiencing the moment fully. Reading – trying to read – a newspaper, perhaps *La Stampa*. Listening to the conversations surrounding me. Reflecting. Basking in just-being. After, if I need to buy food, down the

street is the neighborhood grocery store. If I forget and my timing is not right I am out of luck, the shop closed for an extended lunchtime period well into the afternoon. Again, I laugh at myself and my habits of 61 years.

If I have a free afternoon I hop on the metro or bus and head to downtown Torino or other nearby locales. I do not drive a car for the three months I spend in Italy. I do walk. A lot. An Italian once told me that despite the delicious food many visitors lose weight during their time in Italy because they walk so much. This was not my experience.

Torino is filled with history, museums, palaces, and awe inspiring churches and I am enthralled with the richness of experience I receive during my stay. My last evening in Italy I went to downtown Torino to say goodbye in my heart. Walking there, I decided that I would visit every church I passed along my way. Each touched my soul and I can't explain why. Perhaps it was the beautiful artistry. Perhaps it was knowing that I was interconnecting with centuries of worshippers who too had sought solace and inspiration and hope. Perhaps it was the sadness of leaving combined with the anticipation of heading home, symbolized by Christ on the cross, that made each church meaningful.

On days I don't have classes I might catch a train and take a day trip to a town not far away. Those trips, to places like La Sacra di San Michele (St. Michael's Abbey) are sometimes as meaningful to me as more extended visits to Rome, Florence, Venice, Milan, or Cinque Terra.

I am not a food aficionado, so dinner is simple. My favorite, a margherita pizza, is said to have been named after Queen Margherita over a century ago. It has three colors – red (tomato), green (basil), and white (mozzarella) - representing the Italian flag. Occasionally I get an urge for home and on the way to my apartment I drop by the cinema not to see a film but to pick up some movie popcorn and a diet soda.

My last stop is the neighborhood gelateria where I buy a gelato, which is Italian ice cream. Many do the same, strolling down the street with cone in hand, which I find a very civilized practice. The store is run by Gio and Giovanna. Gio always makes friendly fun of me when I try to order in Italian but after a certain number of times I remember the correct word, gender, and number and we have a nice laugh. It seems that everyone in Italy is my language teacher. As everyone's student, I am a humble learner and grateful to each person who takes a little extra of their time to help me. It is interesting, but the simple act of trying to speak in Italian, with the laughs and missteps and the help of others, connects me with people in ways I would never have been able to otherwise.

Walking up the stairs to my apartment I unlock the heavily bolted door. I have a television but I don't watch it. Why waste the time? Instead I transfer pictures I've taken during the day to my computer. I drink un bicchiere di vino rosso o una birra italiana. I try to read an Italian novel I bought, tediously translating most words. I check my iPad to see what is happening around the world and especially in the United States. Since Torino is eight hours earlier than Boise

this is a good time to Skype or to carry on an electronic conversation with folks from home.

I am on my own most of my stay. Lana is there for five wonderful weeks, arriving with two of our close friends who visit for a week and then leave for Rome. We see much together until she leaves for Boise and then I am by myself again. But I rarely, rarely feel alone. I begin to feel – just a little – like I am part of the neighborhood. Even though we all know I am a passing stranger, I get to know a bit about what it means to live less as a tourist than most and more like a piece of the interconnected community. People I see often know a little of my life and I know a little of theirs. This great country has opened up its arms to me and I have seen a fleck of it, enough to enthrall me.

Regardless of weather, I open my windows wide and watch the Italian night. I try to remember how to conjugate the word *fare* and review the tricky Italian prepositions. Buses rumble by. I climb into bed and close my eyes, content.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, we provided an overview of the second theoretical framework for this book—storytelling. We paid attention to the work of Rossiter and Clark who have been leaders in bringing the attention of adult educators to narrative learning and narrative knowledge in their books and articles. Clark and Rossiter describe the essential features of narrative learning: hearing stories, telling stories, and recognizing stories, all of which play a significant role in how storytelling contributes to and fosters transformative learning. We included Tyler and Swartz’s work and Boje’s theoretical development related to storytelling in organizations. What is especially interesting about their approach is the way they distinguish between “narratives” and “stories.” And finally, we have addressed the recent trend to incorporate embodied learning in our understanding of adult learning. Carolyn Clark’s (2012) chapter in *The Handbook of Transformative Learning* is an excellent illustration of the connection between these two constructs. We have included stories—our own and the stories of others—throughout the chapter to illustrate the power of storytelling.