Transformative Learning: A Passage through the Liminal Zone

Introduction

This chapter will explore the role and contribution of trauma theory and praxis to the understanding of transformative learning (TL). TL distinguishes itself from previous educational models such as the banking and transmission models (Freire, 1993). These earlier models were critiqued for their assumption that students were passive containers into which the teacher deposited content (Freire, 1993). Transformative learning, on the other hand, acknowledges that the container changes its shape—the person reconfigures over their life time. It is not just a matter of adding or re-organizing content (concepts) into an already formed container (self). Rather the true mystery, to which TL addresses itself, is that the self can and often does change its shape. If we think of the self as delineated by the boundary that separates the "me" from the "not-me", or the self from the other, then, as various psychoanalytically oriented theorists (Kegan, 1982; Fairbairn, 1952; Winnicott, 1965; Guntrip, 1968) have pointed out, that defining boundary is renegotiated over the lifespan. According to Kegan (1982) each developmental stage involves a reformulation of what is self and what is other (or 'object', to use the psychoanalytic term). It begins with the realization, "mommy and I are not one person." As this occurs what was once experienced as an aspect of self, the mother, moves over to the object pole of the relationship. Separation anxiety could be more accurately described as not separation from mother, but rather a separation from the self which one formerly was (Kegan, 1982). Kegan claims that at each stage of development a similar

separation occurs where what was once experienced as subject is moved over to the object side. For example, a tired child 'sees' frustrating adults at every turn. Later on she will objectify her 'tiredness' and factor that compensating knowledge into her perceptions. Her tiredness no longer unconsciously conditions her perceptions but rather becomes an object of her perception. In this movement the psyche has undergone structural change. Transformational learning theorists, likewise make a case for structural change in the psyche. Originally, they gave it a predominately cognitive account of this process. Mezirow (1991), the founder of that school, claimed that the fundamental premises on which a person constructs a self are revised by that person during a transformative learning episode (Mezirow, 1991). Kegan corrects for this predominately cognitive approach with his claim that transformation always involves anxiety and depression. That is, as the person realizes that her way of framing the world is inadequate, she experiences anxiety about the possibility of losing her self. Depression, on the other hand, may be the emotional recognition that one's familiar self is already lost. Grieving is a necessary part of the transformational process. Transformation, therefore is simultaneously a cognitive and affective process—existential through and through. In summary this chapter will make use of psychoanalytic and psychological theory to address the pedagogical implications of transformative learning.

To accomplish this purpose I will articulate the micro-processes involved in TL. My hope is that such mapping will aid educators to understand and facilitate those individuals who are embarking on this remarkable journey of self transformation. I will draw support for this investigation from trauma theory. Both trauma and TL engage the core of

selfhood. This is a self not shielded by assumptions or defensive structures but rather directly engaged—a self existentially aware of its own precarious freedom. I will make use of two theoretical foci for this enquiry: firstly, the processes involved in meaning *breaking* and meaning *making* (Kegan, 1982) and secondly, the emotional aspects associated with each. The emotions of anxiety and depression accompany the very difficult process of dis-integration, re-constitution, and re-integration that is transformational learning. My knowledge of the micro-processes involved is drawn from my 40 years experience as a psychotherapist. Jacques Lacan is the psychoanalyst whose work most influences my own. I prefer his emphasis on cultural and linguistic determinates to Freud's biological emphasis on drives. I see humans as primarily meaning making creatures—language and culture provide the material from which we construct our personal meanings. On the other hand, these meanings can be energized or flat, vital or dead. Freud's concept of 'libido' and Lacan's of 'desire' speak to this energy that animates some meanings and not others. The Nobel winning novelist, J.M. Coetzee, said something similar when he claimed that belief was like a battery that we plug into ideas to make them work. Something more than formal concepts is at work in self transformation.

As this chapter will demonstrate, metaphor is the linguistic tool that I find most useful in meaning making. When working with patients I register metaphors that are meaningful or vital versus metaphors that are emptied and cliched. That is, desire fills in some meanings and vacates others. By tracking that combination of meaning and vital energy I am able to detect how my patients compose themselves and where that composure is

disturbed. That disturbance is a potential entry point into a transformative experience. In this chapter I will be making use of my clinical experience to elucidate the abstractions of transformative learning theory in the concrete and particular context of the therapeutic encounter. It was through these encounters that I began to map the micro-processes involved in transformation. Later, in my career these understandings informed my pedagogical approach while teaching counseling theory at a number of community colleges in Canada. Finally, I will suggest that both TL and trauma theory, while most often applied to individuals, might have something instructive to say with regard to a rapidly transforming culture—a culture where everything that once was solid "melts in the air".

Shape Shifting or Identity Change

 Fundamental change is difficult because it involves a radical shift in identity. 'Fundamental', 'structural', and 'radical' are terms that highlight different aspects of TL. These terms focus on the synchronic, snapshot in time, whereas 'transformation' highlights the diachronic—change over time—aspect.   An apt metaphor for transformational change is the caterpillar's metamorphosis into a butterfly—not a difference of degree but rather one of kind; not superficial, but rather structural in nature. When we move from the biologic metaphor to the psychologic of TL the structures implicated are those of identity rather than those of anatomy.   The ground of assumptions upon which we construct our identities is remade during transformational learning.

The term 'structure' often implies a solid, static thing; however, I prefer to think of mental structures as repeating patterns. The metaphor of a whirlpool or eddy might be helpful here. The material constituent of the whirlpool, water, is constantly changing yet the pattern persists. Kegan (1982) has a wonderful way of capturing this notion of continual but patterned flux:

> What we know of the way our client holds himself and his world together can help us understand what his experience means to him…. We are especially helped by our awareness of the fact that *the way he composes himself* is at once a kind of achievement and a constraint." (p. 3, emphasis mine)

What fascinates me in Kegan's (1982) account is the activity he names. We are not solid, inert things. Rather our constancy requires continual construction. We 'compose' ourselves. We hold our selves and our world together. This suggests both the notions of agency and of limitedness. With regard to agency, the composition of our identity is an 'achievement'. At the same time, this composition imposes a 'constraint'. The deep structures or fundamental premises form a platform upon which the conscious mind plays. This platform necessarily limits the range of the conscious mind. One's conscious self is not as autonomous as one would like to think. Certain master meanings are anchored in the psyche. Here are some examples: "Adults often hurt you, so be careful"; "If I want it, I should have it"; "Is there a money making opportunity here?"; "What would Jesus do?"; and "Knowing that my approaching death is a reality, how do I want to spend what remains of it?" and so on. These master meanings are often preconscious conceptions that structure or condition a person's conscious experience (Epstein, 1983). They are the touchstones, the basic premises, from which derivative meanings are generated. They produce the repeating patterns that compose identity. They are the

means for orienting to one's circumstances. When in doubt; when a decision is required; when the stakes are high; we turn to our basic premises for guidance. It doesn't take much extrapolation to see how each of these reference points would generate quite different identities. Our hypothetical subject who orients to money will develop a nuanced financial vocabulary whereas his relationship vocabulary might be impoverished.

Lacan makes a useful contribution to my understanding of the process of TL with his concept of a master signifier. A master signifier or primary reference point is the *anchor* that guarantees all other derivative meanings their worth and stability. For example, if my master signifier is "environmentalism" then the derivative values of recycling, solar and wind power, vegetarianism are generated by it. My master signifier must therefore be anchored or else I will begin to feel that I am "going to pieces." That is, the derivative meanings, which once were systematic and coherent become increasingly fragmented. This is a daunting prospect. Consequently many people prefer to reassert their previous master meanings in an attempt to retrieve their coherency. In order to minimize this unfortunate outcome, TL theory needs to acknowledge that as we shift from one set of basic premises to another, we are indeed flirting with the danger of relativizing all meaning. This is the particular danger of liminality—the transitional zone between two ways of being. In traditional cultures rites of passage provided an external structure or container that enabled the individual to dis-integrate one internal structure in preparation for the next to emerge. As one moves through a liminal experience, one can lose the boundary between subject and object—the "me" from the "not me". One realizes how

fraught such an experience can be when we understand that this boundary is the fundamental structure by which we hope to distinguish objective reality from our 'mere' subjectivity.

Transformative Learning as Structural Change

Transformative learning implies structural change, a morphing of one's identity, a reconfiguration of one's psychological shape. As Guntrip (1971) put it:

> The problem of having an unquestioned possession or else a lack of a sense of personal reality and selfhood, the identity problem, is the biggest single issue that can be raised about human existence. (p. 119)

Guntrip is conflating "personal reality" and "selfhood" with "identity". I likewise use the terms "self" and "identity" interchangeably. In addition I would like to add the term "ipseity" (Latin for 'self'). Sass (1999) describes schizophrenia as a self disorder or ipseity disturbance. According to his reading, a schizophrenic has lost her self—no longer inhabiting, and living from a self but rather viewing their self as one would view an object. This is not the goal of transformative learning but it is a risk of which the learner is often aware. "What if I turn into someone I don't even know?" Kegan and Lahey (2009) name the consequence of this fear: "immunity to change" (p.48). That is, the rigidity of behavior is generated by the person's "anxiety management system" (p. 48). Accordingly we are immune or resistant to change because transformation might involve dismantling a part or all of our anxiety management system.

Anxiety: the Fluidization of all that Once was Stable

When that system is operating effectively, we are unaware of its presence. However,

when we intend to change our behavior and are unable to do so, we have the opportunity to become aware of its constraining nature. If one persists with the intention to change, the anxiety that has been bound and contained by one's former identity will be loosened until more comprehensive premises are developed and a new identity established. Retroactively once can realize that one's anxiety management system contributes significantly to one's characteristic shape—our dynamic identity. It is a major factor in how we go about composing ourselves. It is as if the subject observes, "I only go so far in any direction before I reach a limit, beyond which I begin to experience intolerable anxiety. Those limits, over time, become my identifying boundary." We may, for example, be limited by a punitive super-ego. That is, our vital energy or libido, instead of seeking pleasure and satisfaction will be repressed in order to prevent anxiety and guilt. I have a colleague who will only allow himself to work and play squash because, for him, those are the only conflict free zones. Of course his wife would identify him as a workaholic.

The Micro-Processes of TL

The organization of the remainder of this chapter will have a three part focus. Firstly, I will claim that identity is formed via   an investment in, and attachment to, foundational premises. These foundational premises are not explicitly formulated nor stated in a propositional form. Rather they are embodied meanings—the "unthought known" is how Christopher Bollas (1987) put it.   For example, an individual comes to the realization that his past three partners had high foreheads—like his mother's. Apparently this "unthought" criteria—high foreheads coincide with nurturing—was operating without his

conscious awareness. In the majority of cases one's investment and attachment to such a premise occurs spontaneously through pre-reflective engagement (Loy, 1988; Deikman, 1963,1966). One's identity is built on this bedrock. This process of psychologic development is distinct from the process of 'identification' which psychoanalytic theory uses to refer to the process of internalizing a role model—that is, attempting to become like someone else (Guntrip, 1971). One of my patients described himself as a caricature of a man—not authentic but rather imitative. Both prereflective engagement and identification contribute to the elaboration of the psychic structure. I then will turn my attention to the crisis or trauma experience where one realizes that one's foundational assumptions are broken (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). Lastly I will describe how the therapeutic encounter provides a holding environment as the person revisits their founding premises; examines them for their continued viability; and begins the process of constructing a more adequate platform from which to live. My hope is that this description will provide some insight into the facilitation of transformative learning in other contexts.

Self Formation: Identification and Prereflective Engagement

 If we understand those processes of identification we could be much more skillful in midwifing someone through a transformative learning experience. The psychoanalytic term, introjection, extends or refines what is occurring with identification. An identification occurs when something external to the person is imported, or introjected, and becomes part of the self. I will start at the back end, with the person's recognition that some of their behaviors are organized by something other than their will; that

sometimes they act in ways that are contrary to their own self interest. Then I will retrace the steps or processes that installed that perceptual-action protocol that the person now finds so distressing.

How does one know that they have been 'colonized' by an agency other than their own?

The following aphorism makes it clear:

> Reactive patterns are like little self sustaining engines. The only question is, who is going to lead your life...you, or your reactive patterns? (Andrew Feldmar. Personal Communication 1981)

Feldmar was psychoanalytically trained and his genius resides in his ability to generate metaphors that make intrapsychic realities intelligible to the lay person—the above quote being an example. The patient, on hearing that metaphor, is being shown how to distinguish their personal identity or self from their introjections. The phrase, "little, *self sustaining* engines" discloses that they run without one's conscious volition—and therefore not 'owned' by the self. When a certain stimulus occurs, the same response runs its course every time. For example when someone disagrees with Jack's opinion, he becomes defensive as if they were attacking him personally. One could say that Jack has become identified with his opinions or meanings. A therapist might reframe Jack's defensiveness as a 'reactive pattern' in order to begin the process of dis-identification. If the intervention is successful, Jack might say, "I no longer *am* my opinions; now, I *have* opinions." The process moves from investing in or committing to a meaning, to withdrawing or divesting from that meaning. Instead of being a subject of one's opinions, they become an object which one can notice and critique. This is the intended outcome of

a therapeutic intervention or a well coached, transformative learning experience. I've

started at the back end of the process—the working through or deconstruction of one's

identifications. Now I'd like to turn my attention to the front end, where the

identification was formed. Precisely what is occurring when the self *invests* in a

meaning? Experiments reported by Deikman (1966) offer some clues. His subjects were

to look at a blue vase for a half hour over ten trials. He instructed them to attend to

(perceive) the blue vase without lapsing into thinking (cognition). Subject A reported the

following:

> One of the points that I remember most vividly is when I really began
> to feel, you know, almost as though the blue and I were perhaps
> merging, or that vase and I were. I almost get scared to the point where
> I found myself bringing myself back in some way from it....It was
> though everything was sort of merging and I was somehow *losing my
> sense of consciousness* almost. At one point it felt...as though the vase
> were *in my head* rather than out there: I know it was out there but it
> seemed as though it were *almost a part of me* (p. 83,
> emphasis mine).

I want to suggest that this experiment artificially produced the same qualitative

experience as that of childhood. That is, it encouraged prereflective *engagement* in

contrast twith the critical or reflective *distance* that adult's typically employ. With

the former we fuse with our surroundings whether those surroundings include

one's mother or a blue vase. It is only in reflection, and then only retroactively,

that we are able to separate subject from object; our person from the blue vase.

Returning to the above quotation we see that the subject was losing her defining

boundary and merging with that to which she was attending. That is, she was

investing her self in the vase. In psychoanalytic language, she was introjecting the

blue vase—"it seemed as though it were almost a part of me". With this merging, she felt like she was losing her sense of consciousness, the substrate of her identity. No wonder she attempted to 'bring herself back from it'. Not only did she wish to reaffirm her separate identity but also she wanted to consolidate it on a familiar existential plane. Her process exemplifies, in a simplified form, the emotional vicissitudes undergone in transformational learning.

A child, in contrast to the adult subject above, experiences less self-conscious identity. They may talk *to* themselves but seldom *about* themselves. The latter requires a developed self concept. Instead of being a clearly demarcated self, the child tends to *merge* with their circumstances. It is via this process that a prereflective self is being built, layer upon layer. At a later stage of development this prereflective self resists the intentions of the conscious, reflective mind. It resists because to cooperate would bring about its own dismantling. Yet, what is one to do with the reflexive realization that one has merged with a neurotic mother? What, if on the basis of that foundational experience, one established the premise that anxious attachment was the only one possible? One could predict a complete life style evolving from that basic premise. Metaphorically the child would assume a concave shape to merge with mother's convex. That concave impression would persist after mother had left the scene. And it would provide a snug fit for the next convex person that entered this person's life. How does one transcend that prereflexive conditioning?

Spurs to Change: internal and external

The person who anxiously attached to a neurotic mother might later resolve that their next relationship would enact healthy attachment. After repeated failures they are forced to acknowledge their inability to do so. Such an experience would reveal that their conscious mind was not the only player in the game. Some *other* intentionality exercised more power. That other intentionality emanated from their prereflective self. As a result they are conflicted: one part striving for a healthy attachment; another, mysteriously attracted to the wrong person. This internal conflict is disturbing and therefore can be utilized as the motive for transformational learning. When working with clients who are divided in this way, I ask them to look for a "good reason" for being so constrained. I do this because my client typically identifies with their conscious goals and therefore is not aware of the subjectivity that generates the resistance to change. When I attribute a "good reason" to this resistance, I am inviting them to re-inhabit the existential plane where those premises were originally laid down—their prereflective self. Fink (1995), a Lacanian therapist, refers to this process as "subjectivization, a process of making 'one's own' what was formerly alien' (p.xii). This is the means to retrieve their missing agency. I have a friend who values the experience of emotional crisis. "Why?", I wondered. He replied, "Because I have better access to the motives that are generating my behavior. When I'm well defended I am being controlled by them without the awareness of being so." He is retrieving the subjectivity that designed his reactive patterns. Or, stated differently, he is re-subjectivizing his reactive patterns

This retrieval is not the only mobilizing condition for transformational learning. Crisis and trauma destabilize the self and the imperative to regain one's balance is a profound motivator. Both can be understood as environmental challenges to the person's way of being in the world. The crisis event reveals that one's taken for granted protocols won't address the crisis adequately (Mezirow, 1991). The cocoon of mediating assumptions that were supposed to vouchsafe one's existence has been breached. Janoff-Bulman (1992), the trauma theorist, quotes Epstein (1983) as follows:

> A personal theory of reality does not exist in conscious awareness, but is a preconscious conceptual system that automatically structures a person's experiences. (p. 5)

The traumatic breach in the preconscious conceptual system allows the event to impinge directly on the self. In Lacanian terms, the Real has pierced the barrier of symbolic representation (2000). The symbolic system which had acted as a stand-in for reality has been torn and one finds oneself in the throes of an existential crisis. Previous to the trauma one lived primarily within an internal world of reified representations rather than with the things themselves—or, stated less dramatically, one's experience was mediated rather than immediate. Trauma is similar to but more distressing than subject A's experience. In both cases, there is a sense of loosing one's familiar self.

Transformation: A Liminal Phenomenon

The relative certainties of one's previous conceptual system dissolve as one moves into a liminal zone. The Oxford English Dictionary defines liminality as "being on the 'threshold' of or between two different existential planes". The subject finds herself at a choice point between alternate realities. "Which one will I commit to?" The choice seems to be between the known but inadequate, and the unknown and possibly adequate. As stated earlier, rites of passage are designed to contain or structure that difficult experience. A therapeutic alliance also functions to provide the structure to safely transition from one plane to another.

Feldmar (personal communication, 1988), developed the following biological metaphor for conveying this existential challenge. "When the sperm fertilizes the egg and together become a zygote, we see the first kind of growth—the cells divide and multiply, *each cell exactly like all the others*." The illuminating aspect of this metaphor is the zygote's "free floating" status. Only after the zygote *implants* do the cells begin to develop uniquely. "You could imagine", Feldmar continued, "that as the zygote floats down toward the uterine wall, it would oscillate between two existential planes: 'I'm going to be trapped' versus 'I'm just putting down roots'." I suggest that something like this happens with transformative learning: one realizes that one is being offered an alternate way of being in the world. That offer doesn't come with a guarantee that it will be superior to one's former way—only further experience can reveal that.

Examples drawn from my therapeutic practice include the following: a woman, whose husband left her and remarried, is afraid to sell the family house in case her ex-husband

changes his mind and wants to reconcile. She realizes the absurdity of her wish and knows that she must push off into a new life or stagnate. A step son refuses to bond with his mother's new mate because to do so would betray his loyalty to his biological father. A part of his self remains on hold refusing to adapt to his new circumstances. Trouble and conflict ensue. An immigrant fantasizes her eventual return to the 'old country' and so feels little need to commit to her new one. However, her children are merging with their new circumstances. Trouble and conflict ensue. In order for her to maintain her connection to her children she must open to their new circumstance. In each of these examples the person is entering the "in between"—the liminal zone between two ways of being.

Ortega y Gasset (1985) eloquently describes the defensive maneuvers that one employs to avoid the liminal experience.

> Take stock of those around you and you will…hear them talk in precise terms about themselves and their surroundings, which would seem to point to them having ideas on the matter. But start to analyze those ideas and you will find that they hardly reflect in any way the reality in which they appear to refer, and if you go deeper you will discover that there is not even an attempt to adjust the ideas to this reality.*[T]hrough these notions the individual is trying to cut off any personal vision of reality*, of his own very life. For life is at the start a chaos in which one is lost. The individual suspects this, but he is frightened at finding himself face to face with this terrible reality, and tries to cover it over with a curtain of fantasy, *where everything is clear*. It does not worry him that his 'ideas' are true, *he uses them as trenches for the defense of his existence,* as scarecrows to frighten away reality. (p. 75, emphasis mine)

This powerful description depicts a person who is desperately clinging to their reflective mind's conceptions and blocking any emergent news of their circumstances.

From Individual to Collective Change

The concept of liminality has much to offer—understandings that suggest the possible connections between individual and collective transformation. For example, Turner (1969) stated that if liminality is regarded as a time and place of withdrawal from normal modes of social action, it can be seen as potentially a "period of scrutiny for the central values and axioms of the culture in which it occurs - one where normal limits to thought, self-understanding, and behavior are undone." (p. 156) Here one can see that identity is a psycho*social* phenomenon. During a liminal experience the hold of social convention is revealed as arbitrary and therefore potentially revisable. Whereas Turner (1969) places the emphasis on the individual's experience, Horvath, Thomassen, and Wydra (2009) highlight the cultural consequences. They use the concept of liminality to discuss cultures in transition that are characterized by a dislocation of established structures, institutions in crisis and uncertainty regarding the continuity of tradition and future outcomes.

During a crisis, traditional ways of making sense are bypassed by the rapidity of social change (Giddens, 1991). The recent global economic meltdown was paradigmatic in that respect. While listening to the pundits, I sensed that they were attempting to explain the never-before-seen with an old, yet reassuringly familiar, vocabulary. At times their explanations seemed more like invocations - an invocation to summon forth the old reality by chanting its many names. I suggest that in both individual and collective

crises, there is first a dimly perceived threat to one's way of being; followed by a response that invokes and reinforce old meanings as a means of foreclosing that threat. Only later, as one perceives that the crisis is growing in spite of one's invocations, does one realize that what is called for is a creative, existential response. As reported by Thomassen (2009), Turner (1969) was aware that liminality involved "the sudden foregrounding of agency, and the sometimes dramatic tying together of thought and experience" (p.14) During crisis one moves from being a 'subject' to being an 'agent'. One realizes that 'following the rules' will not do it—one must respond with action or behavior that addresses the crisis. Only later will one be able to systematically work out the new meanings that were implicit in that existential move.

The Role of Emotions in Transformative Learning

Crisis and trauma make enormous existential demands and therefore engage core emotions. As Zizek (2009) points out, this doesn't automatically lead to a transformative learning experience:

> While crises do shake people out of their complacency, forcing them to question the fundamentals of their lives, the most spontaneous first reaction is panic which leads to the return to 'the basics': the basic premises of the ruling ideology, far from put into doubt, are even more violently reasserted. (p. 18)

Why would this be so? Kegan (1982) sheds some light on my question with his claim that anxiety and depression are the affective concomitants of transformation. That is, a person retreats into a familiar shell of their former premises because they sense the anxiety attendant on moving forward. Kegan (1982) re-describes an infant's separation anxiety

in a manner that reveals its prototypical nature—the original transformative experience. Theoretically the infant is fused with everything: self and world have yet to be separated. The child experiences his mother as an aspect of self. Consequently, when mother leaves the room, he no longer is the same self. It is the loss of self rather than the loss of mother that is causing his distress. He has become a stranger to himself—one who is 'homesick' for his old self/world. I see the same dynamic at work in culture shock. The person has not only lost 'the old country' but also their old self. Anxiety is the recognition that this is about to happen while depression is the recognition that it has happened. The familiar cocoon of meaning no longer provides the shelter that it once did. Often a similar process occurs during university education.

Therapeutic Assisted Reintegration

In order to overcome the inherently conservative impulse "to get back to my old self", the therapeutic relationship is utilized as a 'holding' environment. For the therapeutic hour, I attempt to join, rather than challenge, the client's reality. I want to understand their dilemma from the inside. I have no concern that by doing so the client will feel that their fundamental premises are validated. An event has occurred that reveals their inadequacy. Being held in relationship, my clients have less need to cling to their old meanings. Instead, they can afford to turn their attention inward and scrutinize their meaning making premises. Discovering the limits to these premises, the client can make the existential choice to adopt new, more encompassing ones. That is, they can exercise agency through making the choice to live their life rather than defaulting to the reactive patterns of their little self sustaining engines.

Educational Implications

These same processes get played out (often covertly) in educational settings. William Perry (1970) developed a model of the epistemological stages that college students experience during their undergraduate years. The developmental poles ranged from the most dualistic and absolutistic to the most relativistic and contingent. Somewhere along this developmental path the student comes to realize that there is no "right answer" because all knowledge is relativistic and contextual. "It depends..." prefaces an answer that acknowledges contingency. The way forward, therefore, is not launched from a platform of irrefutable knowledge. Rather it is based on making a commitment.

Loevinger (1976) summarizes this stage as follows:

> The student makes a commitment...accepting its origin in his own experience or choice, and deciding *how much he will seek continuity with his past values and how much he will break away from them.* (p. 130, emphasis mine)

In the emphasized phrase, I see an existential choice: "Do I make the leap of faith or stay with what has served me up to this point?" Perry gives an nuanced articulation of the emotions that accompany this journey.

> At every step, the movement required the students to "face up" to limits, uncertainties, and the dissolution of established beliefs, while simultaneously it demanded new decisions and the undertaking of new forms of responsibility. (p. 52)

This is the same liminal zone which was discussed earlier. Perry recognizes that there are countervailing forces that work against further development. He identifies the same conservative impulse to which Zizek pointed. Among these is the desire to maintain community with one's previous friends and family. The most important of these countervailing forces is the

wish to maintain a self one has felt oneself to be. Pervading all...motives
of conservation lay the apprehension that one change might lead to another
in a rapidity which might result in catastrophic disorganization. (p. 52)

That perilous journey will be undertaken more frequently if there are mentors and teachers who understand and appreciate the affective component of transformation. Anxiety and depression (as well as excitement and courage) are legitimate aspects of the journey and should be seen as that rather than as signs of pathology.

The times in which we live seem to require a fundamental change in the way that we think of education. It seems archaic to think that knowledge and goodness are accumulated bit by bit through obedience and hard work as the banking and transmission models of education assume (Freire, 1993). On the contrary, it would be wise to keep in mind that individuals who are in a liminal process are often not able to act rationally "because the structure on which 'objective' rationality was based has disappeared" (Szakolczai, 2009, p. 154). The banking and transmission models rested on the assumption that that structure was immutable. Transformational learning theory recognized that wasn't always the case. There are indeed times when one must reflect on, and even replace, one's basic premises if one is to live more effectively. Moreover, by mapping the processes involved, TL provides the necessary, perhaps temporary, reference points, for navigating this fluid zone. Both the educator and student would be empowered by the knowledge of those reference points. In traditional cultures, rites of passage provide a framework for negotiating difficult transitions. These rites communicate: "Others have been here before you and others will follow". Moreover, there is a communal aspect to those rites that reassure the transforming individual that

their community continues to support them and will recognize and affirm their new way of being. With these supports the individual is more likely to experience the confidence to exercise their agency and see the process all the way through.

Finally, TL showed up at a historical moment when the capacity to make structural change has become an urgent requirement. The accelerating pace of social change seems to require the ability to self transcend more than once in a life time. Perhaps the role for today's educator is to model that process and midwife it in her students. This is line with the aphorism that we teach what we are. This places more emphasis on the educator's style and behavior over and above the transmission of content. Behavior expresses fundamental premises. Over time, one's behavior also expresses one's willingness to reflect on and transcend those premises. Actions speak louder than words.

I am aware that the majority of this chapter articulates the processes leading up to and occurring within transformational learning. It offers virtually no description of what comes out on the other end. This may leave the reader feeling like they are experiencing a meaning vacuum. Yet I can't help but feel that it is a necessary vacuum. What is the shape of the emerging self? It depends….
on the circumstances in which the person finds themselves and the amount of courage they bring to bear on addressing those circumstances.

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 I hyphenate these words because I want to emphasize the denotative meaning of disintegration rather than its connotation of complete destruction. It is not destruction but rather a loosening of the associations between elements of the psychic structure.