

LIFE MISSION AND ADULT LEARNING

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The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationships between adult learning and life mission. This was a qualitative, exploratory study intended to generate theory by studying the impact of mission on learning. A model emerged from the research that proposes the relationship of life mission to self-directed learning and to transformational learning. This study suggests that adult educators can improve the learning process by providing the means for learners to understand their life mission and how it relates to their own learning. Life mission explication may also support a change in the learning experience from being more teacher-directed to being more student-directed. The study proposes that emancipatory learning must include not only awareness building but also purpose seeking.

In the musical *Les Misérables*, escaped convict Jean Valjean is faced with a dilemma. Discovering that another man has been mistaken for him, Valjean must decide whether to reveal himself, thus setting the innocent man free but ensuring his own return to prison, or to remain silent, thereby condemning the other man to an unwarranted lifetime of misery. Valjean plaintively cries out, "If I speak I am condemned. If I stay silent I am damned." He asks himself, "Who am I? Can I condemn this man to slavery? Pretend I do not see his agony." He continues, "How can I ever face my fellow man? How can I ever face myself again. My soul belongs to God I know, I made that bargain long ago. He gave me hope when hope was gone. He gave me strength to journey on." He finally answers his own question, "Who am I? Who am I? I'm Jean Valjean!"¹

The question "Who am I?" challenges, perhaps even haunts, each of us as we continue upon our life journey. Within this question is embedded another, equally seminal question: "Why am I?" Every person seeks the answer to this question in his or her own way. We draw conclusions about "Why am I?" throughout the years

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and incorporate them into our meaning perspectives (Mezirow, 1991), often reifying them. Accepted self-knowledge becomes problematic, however, when the events of life cause us to question this embedded, taken-for-granted knowledge about the world and about ourselves. It is during these times that we question our underlying assumptions about what we believe to be true. This questioning is fundamental to adult learning (Jarvis, 1993; Mezirow, 1991).

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationships between adult learning theory and the question "Why am I?" The question "Why am I?" has been described as an individual's purpose (Leider, 1985), mission (Covey, 1989; Stephan, 1989), right livelihood (Sinetar, 1987), or vocation or calling (Rehm, 1987, 1990). Each has different connotations. As the "Why am I?" question is at the core of human seeking, it also has spiritual roots.

For purposes of this study, the term *mission* was used provisionally to represent the question "Why am I?" Although the term *mission* has various overtones, here it is defined simply as the set of assumptions that each person holds about his or her life purpose, reason for being, or what he or she is to do with life.

SOURCES OF MISSION

It was not the purpose of this study to determine the original sources of mission. Nonetheless, to provide context for the research, three possible sources of mission are proposed here: biological, spiritual, and social.

Teleological questions deal with whether things have purposes and what those purposes are. Definitions of teleology include "the study of evidences of design in nature," "a doctrine explaining phenomena by final causes," and "the fact or character attributed to nature or natural processes of being directed toward an end or shaped by a purpose" (Woolf, 1979, p. 1189).

Prior to the 17th century, telic explanations were common; in fact, teleology has been a part of Western philosophy since Aristotle, who thought both inanimate and animate change could be explained teleologically. A falling apple's purpose might be considered to seek the ground, for example. Aristotle believed that teleology is immanent in nature; that is, the source of purpose is to be found from within and not attributed to some external source, such as a God or a supernatural cause (Howard, 1988; Woodfield, 1976).

The point here is not to ascribe to or dispute teleological philosophy, but to demonstrate that the concept of final causes, or, purposes, has been considered for centuries. For humans, life purposes may begin with the instinctual drive for survival. In fact, "It is the very nature of life to strive to continue in being" (Dewey, 1916, p. 9).

Mission also can be viewed as something rooted in the spirit. The word *mission* comes from the Latin word *missio*, which means to send. To many Protestant churches, mission means being sent into the world by God to "proclaim the Gospel" (Wilson, 1994, p. 20).

The word *vocation* comes from the Latin word *vocatio*, which means summons, and *vocare*, which means to call. *Webster's* definitions of vocation include "a summons or strong inclination to a particular state or course of action; esp. a divine call to the religious life" and "the work in which a person is regularly employed" (Woolf, 1979, p. 1301). The term *vocation* was first narrowly defined but has since been more broadly interpreted (Rehm, 1987, 1990). Early Christians believed that only a few people were specially and directly called by God. Today the word *vocation* still has "a special quality . . . if we consider it to be a personal calling that illuminates a meaningful direction for developing one's gifts in all their consequences" (Rehm, 1990, p. 118).

A source of mission may also be social. What society expects of a young woman or man from a specific economic, geographical, or educational background is embedded within the individual self. His or her mission tends to be objectified through a social role: mother, father, son of a doctor, daughter of an inventor, Baptist, or Socialist, for example, and society expects a person from a particular background to be and therefore do something.

ADULT LEARNING AND MISSION

Although purpose, calling, vocation, or mission have been discussed by various authors, the concept of mission has been virtually overlooked in studies of its relation to adult learning theory. Despite the lack of study about mission's relationship to learning, mission may be, however, an unspoken assumption underlying much adult learning theory.

The question "Why?" is the essence of Mezirow's (1978) disorienting dilemma and Jarvis's (1983, 1993) disjuncture because it requires individuals to unfreeze their meaning perspectives, tacit assumptions, and belief systems, and to look at the meaning of their own existence. Most people struggle to understand these larger questions of existence, purpose, and reasons for being throughout their lifetime (Jarvis, 1983, 1993).

Mezirow (1991) claims that learning always involves the line of action in which learning occurs, which has to do with "implementing the purpose and intentionality of the learner and involves the exercise of his or her conative power" (p. 14).

Critical theory, enlightenment, and emancipation (Ewert, 1991) are akin to Friere's (1970/1993) "conscientization" and Mezirow's (1991, 1994) transformation theory. All involve increasing human agency by liberating people from reified value, social, and political systems that constrain their full human potential, by challenging objectified assumptions and making them problematic. If mission has qualities of motivation, volition, and human agency, then mission may undergird the power of these theories. Indeed, Taylor (1997) reviewed 39 empirical studies and concluded that transformative learning theory does not fully recognize the role of unconscious knowing in transformative learning. One study that Taylor (1997)

reviewed suggests that transformative learning means “discovering the irrational and developing life’s direction through visions and dreams,” (Taylor, 1997, p. 48).

Developmental theorists have also incorporated mission concepts into their thinking. Gould’s (1978, p. 78) “life dreams”; Levinson’s (1978, p. 91) “dream”; Sherrill’s (1955) stages of soul development; Fowler’s (1981, p. 290) “vocational dream”; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule’s (1986, p. 16) “voice”; and Cochran’s (1990) phases of vocation all suggest that mission is a part of adult development.

Indeed, from the very beginnings of adult education, philosophers have recognized that learning is at the core of humanity. Eduard Lindeman, referred to as the “father of adult education in the United States” (Lindeman, 1956, p. 12), said that the purpose of adult education is “to put meaning into the whole of life” (Lindeman, 1926, p. 7). According to Lindeman (1926), to find meaning, there is only one guide: “Meaning must reside in the things for which people strive, the goals which they set for themselves, their wants, needs, desires and wishes” (p. 13).

Eighty years ago, John Dewey (1916) wrote that

to find out what one is fitted to do and to secure an opportunity to do it is the key to happiness. Nothing is more tragic than failure to discover one’s true business in life, or to find that one has drifted or been forced by circumstance into an uncongenial calling.

A calling is also of necessity an organizing principle for information and ideas; for knowledge and intellectual growth. It provides an axis which runs through an immense diversity of detail; it causes different experiences, facts, items of information to fall into order with one another. (pp. 308-309, italics added)

Because theorists suggest that mission may be embedded in the work of adult learning and development, further study to validate and clarify the mission construct and its relationship to adult learning theory is warranted.

Significance of the Study

If mission is found to be instrumental in adult learning, then it is the responsibility of adult educators to understand more about it and to then find ways to apply it in learning situations. Understanding the relationship of mission to adult learning and its application might provide a key resource for adult educators who want to make learning meaningful, who want to increase learner self-direction, and who want to strengthen the linkages between the individual, the learning, and the task of the learner.

METHOD

Although the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research is not pure (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984), this study clearly demanded inductive, general-

erative, constructive, and subjective research methodology to discover the concepts and relationships of mission to adult learning. Little or no current theory was found about the relationship of mission to adult learning, so the study required theory building rather than verification of existing theory. Grounded theory, also known as the "constant comparison method" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 101), is a methodology for developing theory. Using this methodology, theory evolves during the study as the researcher alternatively uses inductive knowledge derived from data gathered and then subsequently deductively tests it within the study itself (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1994).

Two focus groups provided preliminary data for the study. They helped to ground the research in the experiences of adult learners and provided background for the initial interview guides. Two University of New Mexico College of Education classes for adult educators were chosen and used to conduct these two focus groups.

As this was an exploratory study, we decided to select participants based on their likelihood of producing evidence of mission and learning over a lifetime. Subsequent studies may investigate broader or more specific populations to test conclusions. The pool of participants was chosen from members of the Albuquerque Senior Foundation's Senior Hall of Fame through reputational case selection. Using this method, experienced experts recommend participants who are subsequently chosen by the researcher (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). Members of the Hall of Fame are individuals over the age of 60 who have been selected because they have had a positive impact on the community's quality of life. The researchers narrowed the list of eligible participants to 10 with the help of the executive director of the Albuquerque Senior Foundation, who was familiar with most of the candidates and provided descriptions of each. The potential list of 10 was summarized into a table. The researchers then narrowed the list to five. The final list of five participants was chosen to maximize demographic, ideological, and experiential diversity of all types, including the diversity of their contribution to society over a lifetime.

Table 1 provides a brief summary of the five people who participated in the individual interviews.

Each participant, throughout the interview process, articulated a simple mission, which they perceived had been formed early in life and had continued throughout their lifetime. Mrs. Burgess's purpose to serve others originated with her mother. Judge Hernandez developed his sense of duty and need to justify his existence from his parents. Mrs. Pino's early experiences in a small mining community culminated in a dedication to justice and equity. Dr. Hsi's mission to contribute to the advancement of science and to promote human understanding evolved from the suffering he observed as a child. Mrs. Gibbs first demonstrated her desire to help others at an early age when she would get up early in the morning to help her neighbors who had the flu. At the time of the interviews, the average age of these five participants was 77 years.

TABLE 1
Individual Interview Participants

<i>Name</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Vocation</i>	<i>Other</i>
Lovola Burgess	Anglo	F	Teacher	Past president of the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)
Fannye Gibbs	African American	F	Beautician	Issues of race and age
Ben Hernandez	Hispanic	M	Lawyer	State Court of Appeals
David Hsi	Asian	M	Research professor	Member, Board of Education
Mandy Pino	Anglo	F	Director of senior information services	Health care reform, legislation pertaining to older people

Interviews

Three interviews lasting approximately 2 hours each were conducted with each person over a 3-month time span. The first interview focused on developing a chronology of each person's mission, how and if it developed, and its characteristics over time. The second interview focused on revelations the participant had discovered since the last interview, and on the relationship of his or her learning to that mission and vice versa. The last interview was used to update the participant's reflections and to validate theoretical relationships or models from the earlier two rounds of data gathering.

Participants were asked to keep a daily journal of their reflections about the characteristics of their mission and its relationship to their learning over their lifetime. These journals were collected after each person's second and last interview then coded and analyzed, after which the findings were incorporated into the previously collected interview and focus-group data.

Each interview was transcribed, and after each set of five interviews was completed, they were read, coded, analyzed and an interview guide was prepared for the next set of interviews. Codes were initially derived from research questions. Once coded, categories were further analyzed until patterns or processes emerged. These themes, processes, and models were validated and enriched through the final (third) set of interviews conducted with each of the five interviewees. Finally, each transcribed interview and journal entry was given to the interviewed individual to check for transcribing accuracy and to encourage modification or elaboration. Individually edited transcripts were then updated and returned once more to the interviewee for additional changes if desired. Finally, themes and relationships were then amended and conclusions were finalized by reflecting upon the results of the entire set of final interviews in relationship to the data that was previously generated.

FINDINGS

The life stories of five people who have made a significant contribution to society show relationships of life mission to adult learning. Several connections were identified.

Transformation and Mission

The learning process can cause adults to revise or to reinforce the set of assumptions that they carry about their life purpose or direction. Through new learning experiences, adults reevaluate and/or uncover their purposes by examining their assumptions about them. Sometimes these new experiences validate an existing direction or broaden the awareness of possibilities, and sometimes they change life direction. Although a person's core mission may remain stable or even unknown throughout a lifetime, assumptions about personal purpose and how that mission may actually express itself may change.

When this perspective changes, so does the person's learning focus. An unexamined life mission or a life unexposed to broader or differing beliefs may result in a relatively unchanging mission, which might be quite narrow.

Mrs. Pino's college experience changed her view of the world and her role in it dramatically. Promoting justice and equity had been her mission from an early age, but her perspective of what that meant and her subsequent actions were altered irrevocably once she was exposed to a much larger picture. The refocused purposes also refocused her learning choices and her level of motivation to accomplish them.

When I got to the University of Michigan it was a whole new culture. It also was immediately—well, the war was on, but immediately after the war the AMVETS were very, very active and they were working for justice and equity. During that time, perhaps I told you last time, a Polish Communist came to campus and got stoned. I'll tell you, that really made me start thinking. So then I started reading.

Something besides my zoological textbooks, you know. My intense interest in anthropology also fit right in with the developing philosophy I was developing. . . . The year that I got my master's degree, my best friend in college said, "Let's go to Mexico with the Friends Service Committee." . . . That summer changed my entire political philosophy. I had been developing and moving away from the conservatism of my childhood background but with almost no basis for developing a political philosophy at all. But that summer working with the Quakers, and my friendship with some of the graduate students that I was close to, that began to make me read widely in the whole area of sociology, psychology, political things.

An individual's life mission seems to orient that person's actions whether he or she is aware of it. Learning choices and the motivation to learn are directed by this mission even if it is hidden. Although learning experiences may cause the individual to transform his assumptions about his purposes, they may also explicate previ-

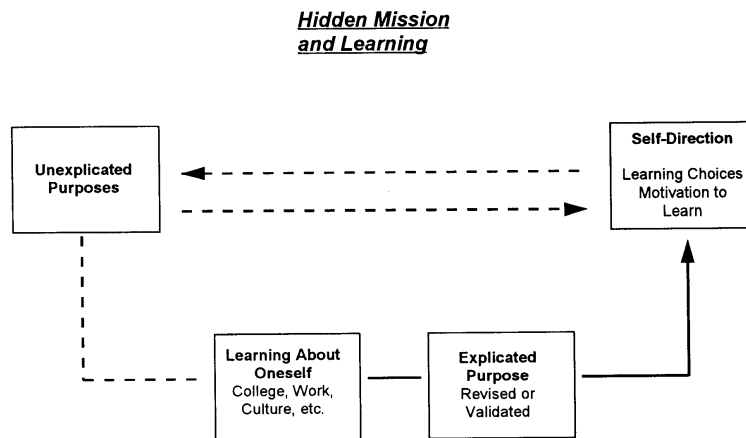


Figure 1. Hidden Mission and Learning

ously unknown purposes. For example, this study caused the five individuals to look at their own mission and to explicate it. Mrs. Pino captured this thought:

Since I've been talking to you as I said before, it never occurred to me that I had a mission in life, or a purpose in life. But now that I've thought about it, almost everything I've done has been in line with what I might call a mission or a purpose.

The assumptions surrounding life purpose are powerful whether they are known. Judge Hernandez's desire to make a mark and to fulfill his civic and family duty influenced his actions regardless of whether he thought about that consciously or expressed it verbally. Mrs. Burgess may not have thought of herself as having a mission, yet, as she says, "It's just there," directing her actions invisibly.

Figure 1 demonstrates how a hidden or unexplicated mission invisibly influences learning choices and the motivation to learn, similar to the way that one that is known does. The learning process, such as this study or other disorienting dilemmas, may initiate a critically reflective process that makes known the previously unknown assumptions that one holds about his or her own life mission and either validates or revises them.

Racial issues are an important part of Mrs. Gibbs's life today. She studies, writes about, and speaks about them. She has accumulated numerous scrapbooks' worth of clippings on the topic of African American history and is building a personal library on the topic. Growing up, however, she was not cognizant of the differences between races. "But it kind of shocked me when I realized that there is such a

difference in the way people think about each other. I guess I was never exposed to having to think that way." Her awareness of these race issues began through personal experience. Her first memory of being insulted because of race occurred during the birth of her second child, which involved several incidents between her doctor, other patients, and their families.

Without something to stretch or force assumption examination, mission, and consequent learning may remain limited, as Mrs. Pino explains:

Let's take a hypothetical example. Let's take my next-door neighbors when we lived in Las Vegas, Nevada. Went to church every Sunday, pillars of the church, he was a schoolteacher, she was a homemaker, two children, lovely dog, nice house, Lincoln-Continental car.

They fit the cultural picture of their expectations and of the expectations of their families and as near as I perceived, the whole 12 years that we lived next door to them, they were very happy people and they expressed the norms of this culture: "dirty niggers, I kicked that kid in the seat of the pants." And I'm thinking, "My God, and he's a teacher in a Black school." You know, the whole kind of . . . who knows? They were happy with who they were and what they were doing. It takes some kind of dissatisfaction or a yearning to go beyond the satisfaction of who you are.

Regardless of this transformational process, a core mission seems to sit at the center of a person's life. Life's developmental tasks can also shape the "working mission," which may take differing forms during a lifetime.

The working mission represents the more specific purposes of the period set in the context of the core mission. Although the core mission might be hidden, it is expressed in different forms depending on the developmental needs of each period or life. Core mission and working mission are sets of assumptions a person holds about his or her life and can be transformed through experience, although core mission assumptions seem to be deeper and less easily challenged or changed.

The roles that a person plays throughout life and the events that occur during a life impact what each person comes to believe about his or her purposes. In every case in this study, the individual's life mission was initially formulated early in life, even though the person may not have recognized it at the time. Although the mission in each case might be hidden, it provided the undercurrent for the river of each person's life.

Perhaps the clearest example of the relationship of core to working mission is demonstrated by the life of Mrs. Pino. For her, a dedication to justice and equity was embedded as a core mission at an early age. That has remained her life theme. Yet her working mission changed dramatically through the years as she recognized that many assumptions that culture had imposed on her were constraining her. At the age of 12, she decided that God must be an "evil person to let the kind of injustices happen that I saw every day with my own eyes."

Mrs. Pino attributes dissatisfaction with the roles society wished her to play as the cause of much of her learning. When she went to college, her whole life changed.

Her working purposes changed as her assumptions about the world and her place in it changed, yet her core mission, justice and equity, remained basically untouched. Through the years, as she went from student to mother to volunteer to employee to retiree, her working purposes changed as she focused on miners' families, the peace and reconciliation movement, discrimination, and to national health programs, among others. The environment she was in and the roles that she played shaped her purposes of the period.

Mission and Self-Direction

The stronger and more focused that a person's life mission is, the stronger and more focused the learner's self-direction is. Interviews uncovered this relationship in the participants' lives. For Mrs. Pino, finding her life direction gave her both the focus she needed for further learning and the motivation to pursue it. Once she had a good idea of her direction, she was motivated to learn more: "Once I had some glimpse of a direction, then you just go like wildfire in that direction. . . . Until you have something that pushes you in a direction, it seems to me that you're in a quagmire."

Mrs. Gibbs's purpose in life is "to help others." After having to drop out of college at a young age, she returned to school and completed her associate's degree at the age of 67, her bachelor's degree at the age of 73, and her master's degree at the age of 75. At interview time, she was taking doctoral-level classes and was considering pursuing a doctorate. When asked why she went back to school, she said,

I guess, I think deep down inside of me, a lot of things that I do while I want to do them and I enjoy doing them, I'm doing to prove a point. . . . To let people see that my people are not stupid, that my people are not backward. That we aren't all out to be taken care of or to be leeches or parasites. Nothing bothers me more than to hear people talk that way, you know. I not only want to rise up but I do rise up and say, "That isn't necessarily true, you're not looking at those of us who have struggled to do things differently."

This mission, of a woman then in her sixties, impelled Mrs. Gibbs to voluntarily pursue learning. Going back to school opened her eyes to new ways of fulfilling her mission, and her mission motivated her to learn.

The more I learn the more I feel that I am proving my point and the more I learn, and I don't suppose this is a very good thing but, the more I learn the less tolerant I am of people who don't want to learn.

Dr. Hsi described how increased learning focus begets increased mission focus, and how lack of personal focus results in lack of learning focus. People make learning choices based on their purposes and when there is a weak understanding of personal mission, the choices people make about what they will learn is left to chance or to what the environment dictates.

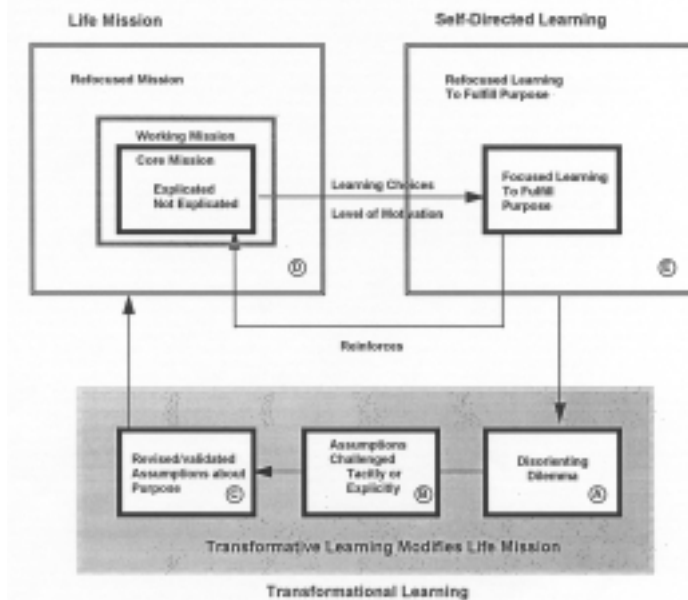


Figure 2. Life Mission and Adult Learning

You have to like the kind of thing you're doing. And also you have to focus on what you want to learn. In my field of specialization, you have to have a very strong focus to learn what it is and also the technology and the knowledge expansion is so great that you could easily get sidetracked with a lot of other knowledge, so if you don't have a focus, if you don't want to learn you have to narrow your thinking and go deeper instead of getting too broad.

Without that focused mission or goal, Dr. Hsi believes, a person would be less motivated to learn and learning choices would be diffused.

Life Mission and Adult Learning Model

Figure 2 summarizes the entire set of relationships that have emerged from the data.

The causal conditions that lead to transformative learning begin with a disorienting dilemma such as a life event, an adult education experience, or a new or revised life role. At this point, assumptions about life purpose are examined, either tacitly or explicitly, and are revised or validated, leading to a similar or refocused core or working mission. This life mission may be explicated or unexplicated (clear or hidden). Life mission then provides a source of self-direction for learning choices and motivation. As mission is revised, so is learner self-direction (see Figure 2).

Until a disorienting dilemma presents itself, mission continues to direct learning and learning continues to reinforce mission, limiting both purpose and the scope of learning. This process is constantly at work, therefore mission is constantly evolving to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the magnitude of assumptions that are revised. The core mission may remain essentially unchanged however, as the more hidden assumptions about purpose are embedded deep in the individual's stock of knowledge.

For example, Mrs. Pino's college experience changed her view of the world and her role in it dramatically. Promoting justice and equity had been her mission from an early age, but her perspective of what that meant and her subsequent actions were altered irrevocably once she was exposed to a much larger picture. The refocused purposes also refocused her learning choices and her level of motivation to accomplish them.

DISCUSSION

Mezirow (1996) has said, "I would assume that all learning is shaped by a purpose or is directed toward an end and hence is teleological" (p. 238). The key word in this sentence is "assume," as there has been little study concerning the relationship of learning to purpose. A literature review revealed that whereas the concepts of purpose, calling, vocation, or mission have been discussed by various authors, the concept of mission has been virtually overlooked in studies of its relation to adult learning. Mission may lie at the heart of the purposes of adult learning, yet the relationships between them have heretofore gone unresearched.

This study suggests a relationship between adult learning and life mission. Humans seem to be purposive beings with a core mission that may be uncovered as individuals go through a "process of becoming" (Rogers, 1961, p. 196). Learning may thereby deepen the understanding and meaningfulness of one's life or working purposes.

This study suggests that transformation theory might be broadened to include life mission, reinforcing Taylor's (1997) suggestion that the "affective, somatic, intuitive, and spiritual dimensions" (p. 52) need to be understood as to their impact on transformative learning. Without the continuing interplay between directed purpose and inquiry into that purpose, life mission may become rigid, or life itself may become directionless. Emancipation leaves an individual adrift without the accompanying adoption of newer and hopefully healthier assumptions about personal purpose.

If the intent of conscientization is to make people aware of their oppressive situation and to show them how they can transform their situation (Freire, 1970/1993), then the individual's personal purpose is inherent in the process. The individual must answer to the internal "Why am I?" question before being moved to act. Freire writes that the purpose of education is to liberate, but liberation is toothless without

the accompanying personal purpose that provides the commitment and direction required to actually act in the world to change it. Thus, praxis must include not only awareness building of the oppressive situation, but awareness building of personal purpose.

If emancipatory learning is, as Mezirow writes (1990), the process of making new or revised interpretations that guide ensuing action, with action defined in transformation theory as "praxis, the creative implementation of a purpose" (p. 12), then emancipatory learning is simply awareness building, the personal purpose presumed. Awareness building does not go far enough to fulfill the action requirement of emancipatory learning. A process of asking and finding answers to the "Why am I?" question is implied, and this study suggests that it should be explicitly included in the transformation theory process.

Implications for Practice

Generally, educators can improve the learning process by recognizing that learners come with a set of assumptions about their life purposes about which they very likely are not even aware. Adult educators can improve the learning process for adults by facilitating the examination of life mission itself and its associated assumptions. The growth of learners who are constrained artificially because of societal expectations and internalized psychological beliefs about who they are and what goals they might pursue can be facilitated. At a minimum, educators can improve the learning process for adults by providing the means for them to understand how their life mission relates to the learning topic. Learners' missions exist at different levels, core and working, and if educators are sensitive to this, they will recognize that there are links not just to the learner's immediate developmental role or stage, but to the deeper forces that drive a learner to discover and live out the "Why am I?" question. This linkage would increase learner self-direction, helping the learner to make meaningful learning choices and maximizing motivation.

THE ADULT EDUCATOR'S OWN MISSION DEVELOPMENT

It is difficult to promote deep internal passion in others when one's own lifework is a hollow shell. The slick veneer of empty enthusiasm for one's profession or the material being taught is usually transparent to learners. If educators cannot make the personal connection between what they are teaching and what they passionately view as a lifework, then students will find it more difficult to seek their own. Educators must examine their own reasons for teaching and strike out the weary reasons, the imposed reasons, and the reasons that are so far afield from real sources of passion that the connection is illusory. Having struck those out, each educator must see what remains. If there is an opportunity to find deeper sources of passion then the educator must seek her own fountainhead and "drink from the waters there" (Brookfield, 1990, p. 28). If the educator cannot find her own connections, she must

look until she finds her own lifework. The words of Dewey (1916, 1938), Lindeman (1926), Freire (1970/1993), and Mezirow (1978, 1990, 1991, 1994, 1996) convey a spirit of commitment to causes, philosophies, and actions. The adult educator who wishes to facilitate real learner growth would do well to aspire to a lifework of like devotion.

Self-Direction, Meaning, and Mission

The findings in this study suggest that the stronger and more focused a person's life mission, the stronger and more focused the learner's self-direction; a person's mission provides a source of meaning to learning activities. Life mission directs both the level of motivation to learn and the learning choices that the individual makes. Educators seeking to change the focus of the learning experience from being more teacher-directed to more learner-directed can start by helping students illuminate their life mission, and then provide the means for them to pursue learning interests that are spawned by the dawning of new or enlarged awareness.

Implications for Further Research

This was an exploratory, qualitative study intended to generate theory. The conclusions reached were based on a population of five people. Although the people were selected to maximize diversity of all types, the findings can hardly be considered generalizable to a larger population without further research. This research might take four directions.

One direction would be to continue to qualitatively enrich, validate, and modify the theoretical relationships that have been proposed by using more specific populations. Another direction would be to quantitatively examine the assertions of this study. For example, a study might be devised to test the correlation between level of self-direction and sense of mission. Another direction would be to both test and add to our understanding through action research, seeing what actually works in an adult learning situation with adult learners. Finally, despite the fact that this study has focused on adult learners, the implications for children and youth should also be explored. Would mission exploration and illumination improve school performance? What are the best methods for developing a strong, yet supple mission in young people? These questions call for further research.

NOTE

1. "Who Am I?" from the musical *Les Misérables* by Alain Boublil and Claude-Michel Schönberg. Lyrics by Alain Boublil, Herbert Kretzmer and Jean Marc Natal. © Alain Boublil Music Ltd. (ASCAP). Reprinted with permission.

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