



Transformative learning experiences of adult vocational rehabilitation learners at the Helena College of Technology
by Kirsten Rae Graham

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Adult and Higher Education
Montana State University
© Copyright by Kirsten Rae Graham (1998)

Abstract:

The professional literature is silent on the effects of pain on transformative learning. Additionally, there is scant mention of the effects of concurrent or multiple transitions on the individual experiencing transformative learning.

About 12 to 15 percent of the adult student population at the Helena College of Technology (the College) are individuals who are no longer able to perform their jobs due to career-ending injuries, disease, or mental or emotional problems. This group of adults enrolled in school for education and training to return back to the workforce in the same or a new vocational occupation. Referred to as vocational rehabilitation (VR) learners, they may be sponsored through private insurance companies or the Montana Vocational Rehabilitation (MVR) program. This research study concerned only the segment of VR learners enrolled in the College's computer technology program and participating in the MVR program as a result of career-ending injuries.

The purpose for my phenomenological qualitative study was to investigate what it means for previously injured workers to participate in a vocational rehabilitation program. I obtained vivid descriptions from adult VR learners enrolled in the computer technology program of their experiences from before their injuries to their attendance at the College. What did this period of time mean to them? Did transformative learning occur? If so, under what circumstances and with what effects? Adult VR learners have indeed suffered a serious disorienting dilemma. I found eight core themes - essences - that describe the VR learner's experience: (a) the VR learner once performed physically demanding jobs; (b) a career-ending injury forced the injured worker to make decisions regarding his or her future; (c) initial and following reactions to the career-ending injury vary widely by individual; (d) attendance at the College is an outcome of one of those tough decisions; (e) the recovering individual is forced to deal with myriad systems; (f) while at the College, the VR learner is faced with multiple issues; (g) chronic pain pervades the VR learner's experience; and (h) the recovering individual, once independent, descends into dependency and slowly ascends to regain new autonomy. The adult VR learner emerges from the experience transformed. The injured worker who entered the College is not the same person who graduates two years later.

TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF ADULT
VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION LEARNERS AT
THE HELENA COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY

by

Kirsten Rae Graham

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

Doctor of Education

in

Adult and Higher Education

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
Bozeman, Montana

July 1998

© COPYRIGHT

BY

Kirsten Rae Graham

1998

All Rights Reserved

D378
G755

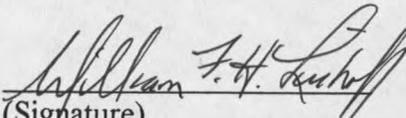
APPROVAL

of thesis submitted by

Kirsten Rae Graham

This thesis has been read by each member of the thesis committee and has been found to be satisfactory regarding content, English usage, format, citations, bibliographic style, and consistency, and is ready for submission to the College of Graduate Studies.

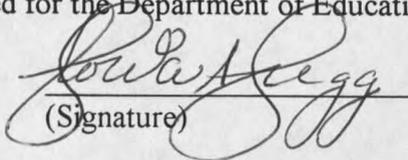
William F. H. Lieshoff


(Signature)

7-22-98
Date

Approved for the Department of Education

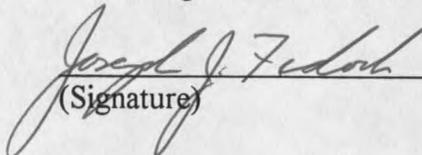
Gloria A. Gregg


(Signature)

7/24/98
Date

Approved for the College of Graduate Studies

Joseph J. Fedock


(Signature)

7/20/98
Date

STATEMENT OF PERMISSION TO USE

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a doctoral degree at Montana State University - Bozeman, I agree that the Library shall make it available to borrowers under rules of the Library. I further agree that copying of this thesis is allowable only for scholarly purposes, consistent with "fair use" as prescribed in the U.S. Copyright Law. Requests for extensive copying or reproduction of this thesis should be referred to University Microfilms International, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor Michigan 48106, to whom I have granted "the exclusive right to reproduce and distribute my dissertation in and from microform along with the non-exclusive right to reproduce and distribute my abstract in any format in whole or in part."

Signature



Date

10 July 98

I dedicate my study to all adult vocational rehabilitation learners in formal institutions of postsecondary education struggling to make sense of their situations and to get on with their lives the best they can.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My participation in the Adult and Higher Education doctoral program was a large undertaking and involved many people in my life-world. Foremost among them was my husband, Frank. For three and a half years he understood my attending classes, writing papers, and being absent on too many weekends. Through it all he maintained a wonderful sense of perspective and humor. An inspiration and example of quiet resolve was Patricia Cranton, author of many books and articles on transformative learning. I will never forget her e-mailed words, "You have found me. How can I be of help?" Patricia nurtured me through the research process and epitomized by her unassuming actions the processes of epoche and bracketing. The many subscribers of the Internet qualitative listserv discussion group may not be aware of the hints, techniques and conversations that helped me in so many ways. The group bolstered my confidence to approach my research study in my own way and in a manner best suited to phenomenological investigation. The five members of my doctoral committee – William Lieshoff (Chair), Gloria Gregg, Bob Fellenz, Sylvia Cobos Lieshoff, and Jennifer Elison – challenged me to meet their high standards yet provided me sufficient support and encouragement. Finally, my acknowledgment would be incomplete without mentioning the research respondents themselves, the men and woman who took the time out of their busy lives to share with me their important stories. They honored me by their trust. To all of you, thank you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Personal History	1
Problem/Curiosity	4
Purpose	5
Definitions	9
Adult Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Learner	9
Helena College of Technology (the College)	9
Incident	9
Life Areas	10
Life-world (<i>lebenswelt</i>)	10
Reflection, Critical Reflection, Critical Self Reflection	10
Transformative Learning	10
Transition	11
Vocational Rehabilitation	11
Voice	11
2. LITERATURE REVIEW	17
Introduction	17
Methods	18
Examples	20
Thematic Review of the Literature	21
Vocational Rehabilitation	21
Transitions	26
Transformative Learning	35
Pain	43
Summary	45
Conclusion	47
3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	48
Concepts	49

Processes	50
Conclusion	54
4. METHODOLOGY	56
Preparing to Conduct the Study	57
Collecting the Data	59
Brief Survey Forms	59
Interviews	62
Focus Group Sessions	66
Reduced Transcripts	68
Organizing, Analyzing, Synthesizing the Data	69
Meaning of the VR Experience	71
Meaning of the TL Experience	77
Ethics	79
Measures of Quality	80
5. THE MEANING OF THEIR EXPERIENCES	84
Before the Incident	85
Troublesome Past	88
Getting Physical	94
Prior Learning	95
Life Satisfaction	96
The Incident	96
The Vocational Rehabilitation Learner - What it Means	103
Pain	104
Systems	107
Other Issues	110
Family Stress	112
Hidey Hole	113
Turning Point	115
The HCT Experience	117
Support	119
Changes	121
The Good Life	123
The Incident in Retrospect	124
Textural Descriptions	126
Daryl's Textural Description	127
Mary's Textural Description	131
Roger's Textural Description	135
Composite Textural Descriptions	138
Composite Structural Description	143

The Essence of their Experiences	148
Summary	151
6. TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING	152
Introduction	152
Indicators	153
Sample Analysis - Daryl	158
Daryl's Textural Description - A Holistic Perspective	158
Daryl's TL Threads	160
Comparison with Roger's Descriptors	161
Daryl's Own Statements of Change	162
Summary of Daryl's Analysis	163
Sample Analysis - Mary	163
Mary's Textural Description - A Holistic Perspective	163
Mary's TL Threads	165
Comparison with Roger's Descriptors	166
Mary's Own Statements of Change	167
Summary of Mary's Analysis	167
Sample Analysis - Roger	167
Roger's Textural Description - A Holistic Perspective	167
Roger's TL Threads	168
Comparison with Roger's Descriptors	169
Roger's Own Statements of Change	170
Summary of Roger's Analysis	170
Composite Summary Description	171
Summary and Conclusions	173
7. SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS	177
Brief Summary of My Study	177
Comparing and Distinguishing Findings with Prior Research	181
Limitations	187
Implications	189
Future Studies	190
One Study in Some Detail	193
Critique of Mezirow's Theory of Perspective Transformation	195
Conclusion	196
REFERENCES	199

APPENDICES	206
Appendix A. Assistant Dean's Cover Letter	207
Appendix B. Brief Survey Form	208
Appendix C. Interview Guide	209
Appendix D. Consent Form	213
Appendix E. Time Line/Story Line	214
Appendix F. Leave Behind Notes	215
Appendix G. Letter Forwarding Reduced Transcripts	216
Appendix H. Holmes-Rahe Social Readjustment Scale	217

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Numbers of Resources by Category	18
2. ERIC Database (1984 - October 197) Search Results	20
3. Comparison of Phases of Transition	32
4. Basic Characteristics of Survey Respondents	61
5. Before the Incident Meaning Units	87
6. Experiences Indicating Troublesome Pasts	89
7. Meaning Unit Clusters of Incidents	99
8. Results of Holmes-Rahe Social Readjustment Scale	111
9. Support Influences	120
10. Life Area Changes	122

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Hopson and Adams' "Self-Esteem Changes During Transition"	30
2. Fifteen Research Participants	73
3. Four-Way Analysis Searching for Evidence of Transformative Learning	78
4. Vocational Rehabilitation Learner Core Themes	149

ABSTRACT

The professional literature is silent on the effects of pain on transformative learning. Additionally, there is scant mention of the effects of concurrent or multiple transitions on the individual experiencing transformative learning.

About 12 to 15 percent of the adult student population at the Helena College of Technology (the College) are individuals who are no longer able to perform their jobs due to career-ending injuries, disease, or mental or emotional problems. This group of adults enrolled in school for education and training to return back to the workforce in the same or a new vocational occupation. Referred to as vocational rehabilitation (VR) learners, they may be sponsored through private insurance companies or the Montana Vocational Rehabilitation (MVR) program. This research study concerned only the segment of VR learners enrolled in the College's computer technology program and participating in the MVR program as a result of career-ending injuries.

The purpose for my phenomenological qualitative study was to investigate what it means for previously injured workers to participate in a vocational rehabilitation program. I obtained vivid descriptions from adult VR learners enrolled in the computer technology program of their experiences from before their injuries to their attendance at the College. What did this period of time mean to them? Did transformative learning occur? If so, under what circumstances and with what effects?

Adult VR learners have indeed suffered a serious disorienting dilemma. I found eight core themes – essences – that describe the VR learner's experience: (a) the VR learner once performed physically demanding jobs; (b) a career-ending injury forced the injured worker to make decisions regarding his or her future; (c) initial and following reactions to the career-ending injury vary widely by individual; (d) attendance at the College is an outcome of one of those tough decisions; (e) the recovering individual is forced to deal with myriad systems; (f) while at the College, the VR learner is faced with multiple issues; (g) chronic pain pervades the VR learner's experience; and (h) the recovering individual, once independent, descends into dependency and slowly ascends to regain new autonomy. The adult VR learner emerges from the experience transformed. The injured worker who entered the College is not the same person who graduates two years later.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Moustakas says, "In phenomenological research, the question grows out of an intense interest in a particular problem or topic. The researcher's excitement and curiosity inspire the research. Personal history brings the core of the problem into focus" (1994, p. 104). This introductory chapter highlights my personal history and interest in the two subjects, vocational rehabilitation and transformative learning, and links them together to form the basis for this investigative research project. This report manuscript follows a format recommended by Moustakas in his book, Phenomenological Research Methods (1994).

Personal History

Having served a career in the U.S. Army with healthy young soldiers in top physical condition, I had very little idea what vocational rehabilitation meant. Then two incidents brought it into clearer focus: my post-retirement employment with the Helena College of Technology in the fall of 1993, and the horrifying accident suffered by our adult son in May, 1995. Beginning work as a full time instructor at the Helena College of Technology brought me into a world different from all my previous experiences of living and working with people who were fully able-bodied and generally without barriers to

employment and education. Of special interest to me in this new employment have been the adults who had experienced career-ending injuries yet made personal decisions to return to school and learn a new profession utterly unlike anything they had done before. Although the actual population of such adults is unknown due to confidentiality of their academic records, I estimate approximately twelve to fifteen percent of the adult students at the Helena College of Technology receive state or private insurance company vocational rehabilitation funds to attain their associate of arts degree in a recently selected vocational field. These adult students are highly motivated to get on with their lives.

Our son was permanently crippled as a result of a vehicle accident caused by an inattentive driver. His immediate and extended families were thrown into a whirlwind of seemingly callous hospital rules, proficiently busy trauma ward nurses, and snippets of doctors' time during his early stages of intensive care. We had many questions and never enough answers. As he required daily attention, his immediate family also required assistance in dealing with the myriad complex authority systems with which we had to deal. We learned there is more than the one victim in an accident. More people become involved as the ripples from the stone thrown at the victim spread outward to family, friends, work, and community. Recovery and recuperation proved to be a mixed blessing. Severe emotional and physical pain experienced by the victim in the center involves those around him as they moved in and out of his tough life, seemingly powerless to alleviate the suffering. Then came the day in his livingroom four months later, 45 pounds lighter than his muscled weight of 220 pounds, sitting abjectly in his hospital wheelchair, talking non-stop for an hour in a one-way conversation to us, when suddenly he looked up and stated,

“Well, I can be a lump or I can get off my butt and be somebody.” On that day, his real recovery began. On that day, our recovery began, too.

My interest in transformative learning grew as a product of my doctoral program in adult and higher education. I continued teaching at the vocational college while pursuing my studies but with increasing dissatisfaction that something was lacking in our teaching approach. Instruction was competency-based and our students learned good technical skills, but there were pleas for individual recognition. My exposure to humanist principles and constructivist theory led me to experiment with new teaching techniques. My teaching style slowly transformed. I experimented with alternative methods for evaluating students in my classes and was immensely rewarded by their enthusiasm and feedback. Then Mezirow's theory of perspective transformation caught my interest, albeit emanating from discussions of Paulo Freire. Meanwhile, I had always admired our vocational rehabilitation learners for constantly juggling their many life priorities while attending school. It was but a short leap to connect transformative learning concepts with the population of vocational rehabilitation learners in our institution who were experiencing numerous personal transitions as they progress through their program from a previous life to a hopeful new life. Not only was I interested in their experiences as participants in a vocational rehabilitation program, but also in their experiences of personal transformation.

From the multiple perspectives of an educator, a parent, and now as a researcher, I am intimately and inextricably involved with the experiences of people undergoing major life transitions due to significant injury. These personal involvements provide the context

for my curiosity about transformations and serve to explain my undertaking a study that explores what it means to be a vocational rehabilitative learner.

Problem/Curiosity

These two incidents fueled my passion and curiosity to learn more about the world of people adjusting to their new lives after suffering a career-ending injury. The topic is important to me in a very personal way, but it is also relevant to our postsecondary school setting at the Helena College of Technology. Instructor teaching loads in the Department of Business range from about 80 to 120 students each semester. It is not possible to know each student's background and motivations for attending school. But through this study, I could learn about the population of vocational rehabilitation adults and share the results with fellow instructors so they too can have an awareness of and appreciation for the experiences of this special population of learners. There may be more we can do as instructors and as an institution to provide necessary support and understanding as the adult vocational rehabilitation learners struggle with major life transitions. But the first step in helping them is to try to better understand their experiences.

Complementary to understanding the vocational rehabilitation learners themselves is understanding the emerging theory of transformative learning. Transformative learning is about individual change and in its deepest form, provides a basis for emancipation from personal histories that serve to constrain the learner in some way. I anticipate that our adult vocational rehabilitation learners, stung by career-ending injuries and now vulnerable yet open to new experiences, are likely candidates for personal transformations.

Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study is to investigate what it means for previously injured workers to participate in a vocational rehabilitation program. It was my intent to obtain from adult vocational rehabilitation learners their vivid descriptions of the time from before their injury to their attendance at the Helena College of Technology. What does this period of time mean to them? Does transformative learning occur? If so, under what circumstances and with what effects?

Life changes take place within rich sociocultural and psychological contexts (Hobson & Welbourne, 1998). Transformative learning cannot be separated from the people experiencing it. It was important to first develop the meaning of the vocational rehabilitation experience from a phenomenological perspective and then to search for evidence of transformative learning.

Two broad areas of potentially new knowledge may arise from this study and contribute to the profession of adult education: (a) the meaning of the experiences of a segment of the federally-sponsored student population, the vocational rehabilitation learners; and (b) a better understanding of transformation theory and how it manifests itself within the context of a public postsecondary institution with the vocational rehabilitation population of adults retraining for a new vocation. Creswell (1998) states that, "a phenomenological report ends with the reader understanding better the essential, invariant structure (or essence) of the experience, recognizing that a single unifying meaning of the experience exists.... The reader should come away with the feeling that 'I

understand better what it is like for someone to experience that” (p. 55). It is my intent that the reader develop a better understanding of what it means to be a vocational rehabilitation learner at the Helena College of Technology, and how transformative learning fits in with their experiences.

Strategies of educational research can be linked to three basic orientations or worldviews; positivist, interpretive/constructivist, and critical (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Lincoln, 1998). Positivist research produces knowledge that is objective and quantifiable, interpretive research seeks to find meaning in human experience, and critical research explores power, privilege, and oppression as manifestations of social institutions (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative research arises out of the interpretive paradigm and focuses on process, meaning, and understanding.

Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting (Creswell, 1998, p. 15).

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, and for reporting the results of the research effort. The researcher has made an avowed commitment to study and report on the social world from the perspective of the interacting individuals (Lincoln & Denzin, 1994, p. 577).

My philosophical basis for approaching a research effort of this type and magnitude is constructivist. As a constructivist, I am interested in understanding how individuals interact with their world – are constrained and regulated by their social constructions – to create knowledge. I do not reject the positivist paradigm; aspects of our

world respond to cause and effect relationships. There are problems of our world today that can best be explored and answered through quantitative investigation. But not all problems respond well to quantitative inquiry; science has not been wholly effective in dealing with issues of human experience and communication. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches to inquiry are valid and have application to our world. The questions that should be asked before selecting a research method have to do with rigor. Which paradigm will most rigorously pursue answers to the research question?

During the conduct of this study, my understanding of the experiences of vocational rehabilitation learners deepened as a result of my own serendipitous serious physical injury. The morning after an evening of transcribing a pilot interview, I was unable to stand upright. The pain in my lower back was excruciating. After many visits to the medical professionals and numerous diagnostic procedures, it was discovered I had a problem that could only be corrected by surgical intervention. Following the surgery, I attempted several times to return to my uncompleted doctoral dissertation, but suffered from continued pain and a head made fuzzy by the strong pain medication. It took effort and resolve to reduce the strength of the medication in order to return to writing.

The experience was intense and personal. Without warning, I had been thrust into dealing with the medical and insurance systems. It had interrupted my current work (being engaged in this study) for the surgery. I suffered through the post-operative recuperative period that involved limited mobility, created dependence on others, left me in pain, and subjected me to the influence of strong drugs. I constantly asked myself, "Did I make the right decision?" "Will the pain ever go away?" "Will I be able to return to my normal life

pursuits?" It was ironic that my incident happened during the conduct of this study. But it made me more appreciative of the similar experiences of the adult vocational rehabilitation learners with whom I had contact.

My personal experiences enabled me to relate to the research participants from an *emic* (insider) perspective rather than an *etic* (outsider) point of view. In her article on new methods for creating knowledge of educational phenomena, Lincoln (1998) calls for educational researchers to "seek understanding which is holistic, emic, and intimate" (p. 17). I had personal credibility and *entre* into the life-worlds of the vocational rehabilitation learners. I approached the research participants from the perspective of "one who knows, one who has been there." I could talk with them in terms with which they could relate.

This study is written to be read by four broad groups of people in addition to my doctoral committee: (a) the research respondents, the vocational rehabilitation learners themselves; (b) teachers of vocational rehabilitation learners in postsecondary institutions; (c) other educators of adults; and (d) counselors and other professional staff external to educational institutions who work with adult participants in vocational rehabilitation programs. Merriam (1998) advises to carefully consider the audience for whom the report is written when making choices of narrative style and voice. While remaining grounded in phenomenological concepts, I have purposefully written the narrative to blend the natural language customarily used by the intended audience with the professional language of our educational discipline. This study can help sensitize instructors and administrators in comparable institutional settings working with similar populations to the backgrounds and needs of these students.

Definitions

Adult Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Learner

An adult VR learner is a student at the Helena College of Technology receiving funds, guidance, and counseling services through the Montana State Vocational Rehabilitation (MVR) program. To participate in the MVR, the adult VR learner must have suffered a career-ending injury.

Helena College of Technology (the College)

The Helena College of Technology of the University of Montana is a "two-year institution of higher education dedicated to developing technical expertise in students and meeting the technology-based demands of government, business and industry" (Helena College of Technology, 1996). The school offers 18 programs of instruction in the technologies, trades, business and allied health sciences culminating in either two-year Associate of Applied Science degrees or one-year certificates. The school also offers transfer courses that either culminate in a two-year Associate of Science degree or articulate with baccalaureate programs. Finally, the College serves as a center for higher education of the Montana University System, providing graduate and continuing education opportunities for citizens in Helena and the surrounding areas.

Incident

The incident is the precipitating accident or injury precluding an individual from continuing to work at his or her regular job. For some individuals, the incident was a

single event; for others, it was the final episode in a series of accidents or injuries.

Life Areas

Life areas are broad categories of human interactions or relationships such as career, education, health, leisure/hobbies, religion/faith, and family (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980).

Life-world (*lebenswelt*)

A term first introduced by Husserl which refers to the social world within which a person operates. "It is within the life-world that we learn what life means, what binds us together as human beings and what constitutes an autonomous personality" (Welton, 1995, p. 5).

Reflection, Critical Reflection, Critical Self Reflection

Thinking about the content of a problem, the process or procedures of problem solving, or the assumptions or presuppositions on which a problem has been posed, is called reflection. Critical reflection means to reflect on the presuppositions themselves. Critical self reflection is the process of reflecting on one's own beliefs, opinions, judgments, or assumptions regarding a subject (Cranton, 1998; Cranton, 1994; Mezirow, 1991).

Transformative Learning

Transformative learning is defined as the process of examining, questioning, validating, and revising perceptions of experiences, beliefs, opinions, and attitudes which

results in a more inclusive, discriminating, permeable meaning perspective, frame of reference, or personal paradigm for interacting with the world (Cranton, 1994; Mezirow, 1991).

Transition

A transition is a time of personal change, a time of leaving something behind and moving on to a new beginning (Bridges, 1980).

Vocational Rehabilitation

Vocational rehabilitation is a public or private program designed to return individuals back to work. Persons unable to perform the job they were customarily doing due to accident or injury, the onset of disease, or other reasons (emotional, stress, learning disability), may be eligible for job retraining in a privately or publicly funded vocational rehabilitation program.

Voice

The positivist paradigm has served as the predominantly accepted means for establishing truth about our world for several hundred years. Scientists and researchers have used that time to agree on format and style for what constitutes a good research effort and a good report on that effort. Qualitative inquiry has its own long history stretching back to psychological and anthropological studies of the 1800s. At the turn of the century, societal interests refocused on the human science concerns of education and psychology but methods of inquiry were influenced by the predominant scientific

paradigm. Through the first half of the 20th century educational issues were investigated using method-comparison research adopted from agriculture. Through the mid- to latter-1900s the social sciences grew to accept qualitative methodologies as appropriate for investigating problems of a social nature, but education lagged behind. Only within the last few decades, since the 1970s, has the education community begun to apply qualitative inquiry to its issues.

For too long, qualitative researchers have referred to their naturalistic studies using terminology from the quantitative realm and forcing their narrative reports into a quantitative format (Meloy, 1993). Typical five chapter reports of quantitative research are written in "the ubiquitous, disembodied voice" (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 74) of the researcher. Schön (1995) uses the term "institutional epistemology" (p. 27) to refer to institutional "conceptions of what counts as legitimate knowledge." Van Maanen (1996) refers to a "writing ideology" as "a set of beliefs that serve to justify or rationalize language use and textual practices in specific fields. When widespread and unquestioned, such beliefs become institutionalized as a matter of local culture writing styles and sink below awareness" (p. 376). Lincoln and Guba (1990) make it clear that the objectivity desired in a quantitative report is not the aim for qualitative research. Qualitative researchers share common characteristics with their quantitative counterparts to "act, interpret, synthesize, and tell" but "also by the very necessity, [qualitative researchers] ... interact, think, feel, try to understand, describe, and include human mixture in the interpreting and the writing. This compendium is the strength of qualitative researchers/writers/readers, not their Achilles heel" (Meloy, 1993, p. 325).

Conducting research is composed of two efforts: the process and product (Lincoln and Guba, 1990). Van Maanen (1996) questions whether the narrative form of the research report, which expresses the content to the reader, should be nothing in comparison to the content. He states that rhetorical choices are often based on a set of unquestioned textual practices typically "devoid of affect, interest, personality, artificiality, or textual construction" (p. 376). Van Maanen continues, "Self-presentation of a researcher as a nonpresence in the text relies on a stock set of textual practices, such as passive constructions, standardized formats, codified descriptions, disciplinary argot, and the avoidance of the first person pronouns" (p. 378). The language of research is learned. Whether we say "20 interviews were conducted" or "I conducted 20 interviews" is a rhetorical choice. The dominant passive writing style is "out-of-date and inadequate" (p. 379). Fetterman (1988) states that phenomenology, a variation of qualitative research, "is supposed to be a first person enterprise" (p. 193). Creswell (1998) suggests when creating a report narrative to use a "writing style that is personal, familiar, perhaps 'up close,' highly readable, friendly, and applied for a broad audience" (p. 170). Lincoln and Guba (1990), in their article on judging the quality of research reports, recommend a simple, clear writing style insuring careful construction of sentences "shunning inappropriate use of third person and passive voice" (p. 55). Recognizing the intimate nature of the relationship of the researcher to the qualitative study, Wolcott (1990) writes his descriptive accounts in the first person and urges that "others do (or, in some cases, be allowed to do) the same" (p. 19). Brookfield (1995), in the presentation of his paper to attendees at the 36th annual American Education Research Conference, advocated critical

analysis of scholarly publications.

As we read the educational literature we can ask ourselves whose voices are heard and whose are silent.... Does the author use a detached, distanced, third person style referring to 'the researcher' or 'this writer' in an objectified way? Or, does she write in the first person and acknowledge the centrality of her experiences and personality to the report? Are the findings presented in a formal, stilted, memorandum style with no sense of the hesitations, leaps forward, feelings of depression, or intuitive insights that accompanied the writer's efforts? (p. 37).

The researcher/author seeks authenticity. "Witnessing and personal testimony shape writing practices. [A qualitative researcher] says, 'I was there,' 'This happened to me,' 'I saw this.' Not being close to the action is suspect. Personal presence – increasingly textualized – is demanded" (Van Maanen, 1996, p. 380). Lincoln (1998), calling for new methods appropriate to social science research, states that the "old ways of gathering data and making meaning of data no longer suffice" (p. 23). One of the newly required skills for effectively reporting the results of qualitative inquiry is portrayal.

Portrayal differs radically from what we ordinarily think of as scientific writing, because the form of discourse is natural language, not the traditional language of social science. Conventional social science speaks with what has been called "the voice from nowhere;" portrayal, on the other hand, demands identifiable voices, voices which come from many 'somewheres.' Portrayal is the ability to craft compelling narratives, narratives which give outsiders a vicarious experience of the community, and which give insiders both a deeper understanding of themselves, and the power to act (p. 26).

Four research texts, in addition to numerous journal articles, provide guidance for writing the research report; Gay (1996), Creswell (1998), Merriam (1998), and Moustakas (1994). Interestingly, all four texts cite examples of research reports written in the first person active voice, and the texts themselves are written in first person active voice. The

American Psychological Association (APA) style manual states quite explicitly,

Inappropriately or illogically attributing action in an effort to be objective can be misleading. Writing 'The experimenter instructed the participants' when 'the experimenter' refers to yourself is ambiguous and may give the impression that you did not take part in your own study (1994, p. 29).

Denzin and Lincoln (1995) write of scholars "slowly coming to agreement on what constitutes a good and bad, or a banal, or an emancipatory, troubling analysis and interpretation," and that a "quiet revolution characterizes this work, a change in outlook, a transnational, transdisciplinary conversation, a change in practices and habits, as persons move away from older, more traditional versions of doing qualitative, interpretive work" (p. 350).

There is no one right way to write a research report (Creswell, 1998; Denzin and Lincoln, 1995; Meloy, 1993; Merriam, 1998). Lincoln and Guba (1990) encourage risk taking and suggest that narrative display of courage is a characteristic of good writing craftsmanship. Schön (1995) advocates trying something new, to "open up new forms of scholarship," particularly for the types of problems "susceptible to a kind of rigor that falls outside the boundaries of technical rationality" (p. 29). Van Maanen (1996) cautions us:

... silence has been the order of the day and such complacency does not serve us well no matter what narrative form we find attractive. Controversy about writing surfaces strongly held assumptions that have been long bottled-up. When they are talked about and debated, what was cultural becomes ideological and the genie is out of the bottle. Taken for granted practices now must be defended with arguments and examples and answered with counter-arguments and counter-examples (p. 381).

Schön (1995), asks, "How do you make [young people] free to do something new and different?" (p. 34).

This dissertation narrative reflects a yet new phenomenological method of inquiry as well as a personal writing style uncomfortable for some readers. But the rationale for proposing such a forward thinking effort are many. I am personally involved in this qualitative research study. The intended audience to whom this report is directed, is varied. Natural language couched within the education discipline and grounded by phenomenological concepts, is appropriate. Since there is no one way to report qualitative research, I offer creativity. The quiet revolution calls for a transformation within the educational community. Challenges to the old paradigm are respectfully offered; pleas for new scholarship are tendered.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Four initial themes comprised the review of literature for this study: the theory and philosophy behind phenomenological studies, data concerning state and federal programs for vocational rehabilitation, descriptions of transition as it pertains to adults, and development of transformative learning leading to illustrations of people transformed by their experiences. Later in the study as the theme of pain emerged, I conducted a search for articles dealing with chronic pain.

The above paragraph depicts a thematic classification of this literature review. The review of literature may also be described by categories or types of information. In fact the literature review is more accurately referred to as a review of the knowledge base as more than just literature is included: monographs (books), journal articles, on-line databases, dissertations, and people (personal interviews, telephone interviews, e-mail correspondence, or "conversations" on the Internet Qualitative Listserv bulletin board) and "other" types of documents (for example, the Report to the Montana Legislature on the Montana State Vocational Rehabilitation Program, 1997). A total of 110 separate bibliographic references were obtained for this study in the categories as shown in Table 1.

Thirteen scholarly journals are represented in these numbers. Although not all items were actually referenced in my dissertation report, they were useful for background information.

The column titled "on-line databases" deserves some explanation. Each of the eight databases provided information for several themes. For example, the PsychLit database returned search results for queries such as "adult learners" and "pain." I was unable to attribute PsychLit to just one research theme, and the same was true for the other databases. Thus, the on-line databases category spans all thematic categories.

Boolean search strategies were used for the databases.

Table 1. Numbers of Resources by Category

Theme Category	Books	Journal Articles	On-Line Databases	Dissertations	Other
Phenomenology		1			1
Vocational Rehabilitation	2	3			7
Transition	8	1			1
Transformative Learning	25	21	8	3	2
Pain	5	3			4
Research	8	11			

Methods

My home is 100 miles from the Montana State University-Bozeman campus and eight miles from Helena. I do not have easy access to university library facilities so I had to be more creative in obtaining relevant, current references. Our local liberal arts college,

Carroll College, had a few good resources. I drove periodically to both major libraries of the Montana University System and conducted on-site searches for books and articles through the computerized catalogs. But my greatest source of information was via the Internet. I made liberal use of the World Wide Web and storehouses of data available through on-line Web sites. Although costly, CARL (Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries) UnCover served as the most comprehensive, responsive source for current journal articles. The UnCover database of journal articles can be searched by keyword, author, or journal title. Since we have a facsimile machine at home, requested articles were faxed to me within 24 hours of my on-line requests. I ordered and received 30 articles in this manner. The local Helena College of Technology librarian was supportive of my requests for interlibrary loan. I purchased numerous books and journals through Internet book retailers. I also took advantage of an opportune trip to the east coast to search the on-line databases at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.. While there, I visited personally with doctors and nurses working in the Chronic Pain and Physical Medicine clinics at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center for their advice on resources concerning pain. I attended the First National Conference on Transformative Learning at Columbia University Teachers' College where I attended seminars conducted by published authors in the field of transformative learning. A highlight of my trip was the opportunity to meet and talk with Jack Mezirow, chief proponent for the theory of transformative learning, and Patricia Cranton, acknowledged by Mezirow as a prolific author in the field of transformative learning. All these various sources of information proved valuable to my research effort.

Examples

Computer databases, available either via the Internet or on-site at traditional libraries, provided a wealth of information. The following databases proved useful: CARL UnCover, Educational Resources Information Center - ERIC (1984 - October 1997), Ovid Medline Biomedicine (1990 - 1998), Ovid SPORTDiscuss (1949 - March 1998), ProQuest digital dissertations (1980 - 1998 (with abstracts)), PsychLit (1981 - 1998), and UMI Dissertations. Table 2 provides search string examples and returned results for an ERIC database search. Search string keywords are purposely not capitalized.

Table 2. ERIC Database (1984 - October 1997) Search Results

Search String	Number of Returned Citations
transformative learning	0
transformations	3,232
critical thinking	3,475
pain	80
learning	22,738
pain + learning	1
adult learning	1,547
pain + adult learning	0
vocational rehabilitation	1,032
pain + vocational rehabilitation	3

Thematic Review of Relevant Literature

The purpose for the literature review was to find books, articles, studies, and people relevant to my investigation of the experiences of vocational rehabilitation adults as a context for transformative learning. My search took me to on-line databases, on-line publisher sites, on-line libraries, on-line dissertation abstracts, on-line journals and books, and traditional libraries, and put me in contact with informants in their respective professions. These professionals became integral to my study by providing me advice and sharing their perspectives. The following four sections - vocational rehabilitation, transition, transformative learning, and pain - summarize my review of resources relevant to this study.

Vocational Rehabilitation

Adults who have suffered career-ending injuries may turn to public or private vocational rehabilitation programs for retraining or job accommodation. Private vocational rehabilitation programs are generally run through insurance companies but the public vocational rehabilitation program falls under the auspices of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services within the U.S. Department of Education. Federal funds are distributed through the ten regions of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) on to state departments of human services where the federal funds are matched with state funds. In Montana, the federal vocational rehabilitation program is managed within the Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) through its ten offices in four geographic regions. The Helena office of vocational rehabilitation services

is a satellite office of the Butte region, and is staffed with two rehabilitation counselors.

Adults applying for federal assistance through the Montana Vocational Rehabilitation (MVR) program must meet three eligibility criteria: (a) have a physical or mental impairment that is a substantial impediment to employment; (b) possess the potential to perform work in the same or another vocational area; and (c) require vocational rehabilitative services to prepare for employment (Report to the Montana Legislature, 1997; C. Drynan [personal communication, September, 1997 and June, 1998]).

Once accepted for vocational rehabilitation, the vocational rehabilitation client works closely with a vocational rehabilitation counselor to jointly develop an Individual Written Rehabilitation Plan (IWRP). The IWRP shows specific, measurable goals oriented towards returning the individual back to employment. The IWRP may consist of formal schooling, internship training, or on-the-job training, and any other related assistance to help the person achieve their goals in the IWRP.

Six steps to the vocational rehabilitation process in Montana (Client Assistance Program, 1991) include:

1. Application.
2. Diagnostic evaluation to determine eligibility. Evaluation may include documentation of current physical or mental impairment, vocational evaluation to determine potential for future employment, and determination of financial eligibility.
3. Writing the Individual Written Rehabilitation Plan (IWRP).
4. The provision of services according to the IWRP. Possible services include;

vocational counseling and guidance, vocational training, work adjustment training, medical services and treatment, income maintenance, and other services based on individual needs.

5. Job placement.

6. Follow-up and closure.

Vocational rehabilitation counselors serve a key function in the rehabilitation process. Their responsibilities are to assist the vocational rehabilitation (VR) client to develop an IWRP that is "within the client's physical, intellectual, and emotional capacities" (Brodwin & Brodwin, 1995, p. 1). The rehabilitation counselor's primary reference document (Brodwin, Tellez, & Brodwin, 1995) advocates a holistic approach to rehabilitation. The holistic approach recognizes the interdependency of the individual and his or her environment and suggests five categories or areas of interest to be considered when formulating the IWRP: (a) the disability itself, and its functional limitations; (b) psychological and emotional factors; (c) vocational experience; (d) educational background; and (e) social issues.

It is difficult to determine how many clients are being served in the MVR due to the manner in which services and clients are counted. Reports submitted from the Montana DPHHS to the federal Rehabilitation Services Administration are based on calendar year data. A client receiving just one service in January, perhaps to close out a case, is counted just as fully as a client who receives services throughout the year. Each client visit to the vocational rehabilitation counselor's office is counted as a service. MVR administrators report having provided 1,538 client services in "Post Secondary Institution

of Higher Education” in 1997 (RSA-2 Report, 1998).

It is also difficult to get an accurate count of the numbers of adults in Montana’s five colleges of technology attending school through MVR funding. Academic records are protected under the FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) law (U. S. Department of Education, 1973) and are inaccessible to be reviewed and counted. None of the colleges of technology maintains aggregate counts of students funded by MVR. Secondly, client records are confidential within DPHHS and are again inaccessible. The RSA-2 report (1998) appears to be the primary means for closing in on the number of adults attending postsecondary schools under the MVR program.

A possible estimate might be made, however, based on the number of adult vocational rehabilitation learners alleged at the Helena College of Technology (HCT) (Please see Chapter Four, “Methodology,” for how the count was determined). I estimate approximately 12 to 15 percent of the adult vocational rehabilitation learners at HCT are there by reason of public or private vocational rehabilitation programs. Assuming the HCT percentage of adult VR learners to be a somewhat representative figure for adults in vocational schools, then the total number of adults in all colleges of technology can be roughly estimated. In 1996, there were 2,589 full-time equivalency students in all the colleges of technology (Montana University System Enrollment History, 1998). By multiplying the enrollment figure by 12 percent and again by 15 percent, I calculate approximately 310 to 388 adult VR learners are enrolled in the five colleges of technology.

There remains a large discrepancy between the 1,538 cited in the RSA-2 report

and the estimated 350 students in the five colleges of technology. Unfortunately, the 350 VR students figure does not include the seven tribal colleges, three community colleges, six university campuses, two private colleges, or any proprietary postsecondary institutions. For the same reasons previously cited, none of the other schools have accurate counts of their adult VR populations either.

Adult vocational rehabilitation learners are hidden from more prominently displayed figures of special populations. The VR learners are a special population that doesn't quite fit anywhere else. They are not wholly able-bodied due to their physical and mental impairments but neither do they necessarily fit the definitions of handicapped or disabled. Dr. Ravensloot of the Rural Institute for disabilities in Missoula, Montana, claimed in a personal telephone conversation with me (17 September 1997) that the world of impaired individuals in VR programs is divided into three parts; (a) people getting along fine without assistance; (b) those who need occasional assistance with the challenges of daily living; and (c) those who need continual assistance, particularly with problems secondary to their primary difficulties. Adult VR learners attending postsecondary institutions are primarily in the top third of the hierarchy though a few are in the top of the middle third.

The adult VR learners, for the most part, are not distinguishable from the general population. They may limp a little, or sit down and get up gingerly, but otherwise they have accommodated their difficulties. Their limitations, though hard to detect by simply observing the individuals going about their daily living, are very real and often prohibit their enjoyment of normal life's activities with which they have become accustomed.

Generally, the VR learner has a combination of problems which could include chronic pain, personality disorders, adult learning disabilities, criminal behavior, alcoholism other substance abuse, and difficulties associated with dysfunctional family life (James, 1989). Compounding their difficulties is a possible "relationship between the client's previous failed learning experiences and the problem that is preventing vocational success" (p. 27). Professionals who work with VR clients encourage a holistic approach to their rehabilitation due to the myriad interrelated issues the VR client faces (Brodwin & Brodwin, 1995; James, 1989; Materson, 1997).

Possibly because they are in a "hidden" population, I could find no study directly addressing adult VR learners in the top third of Ravensloot's hierarchy. Typical key word searches using "rehabilitation," "rehabilitation" modified with "adult," and "vocational rehabilitation," returned results addressing the medical aspects of rehabilitation, the severely disabled, or handicapped adolescents. Later while exploring the key word "pain" modified by "adult," I found studies of working age adults oriented primarily to workers' compensation insurance and back-to-work issues. None of the studies concerned adult workers returning to postsecondary institutions following major injury.

Transitions

Transitions are a time of personal change, a time of leaving something behind and moving on to a new beginning. The in-between period of time, referred to as the "neutral zone" by Bridges (1980), is a time of emotional withdrawal, of "inattentive activity and ritualized routine" (p. 114). Bridges views transitions as "the natural process of

disorientation and reorientation that marks the turning point of the path of growth ... [and] involves periodic accelerations and transformations" (p. 5).

Gould (1978) links growth in adulthood with difficulties of transition.

... adulthood is not a plateau; rather it is a dynamic and changing time for all of us. As we grow and change, we take steps away from childhood and toward adulthood - steps such as marriage, work, consciously developing a talent or buying a home. With each step, the unfinished business of childhood intrudes, disturbing our emotions and requiring psychological work. With this in mind, adults may now view their disturbed feelings at particular periods as a possible sign of progress, as part of their attempted movement toward a fuller adult life (p. 14).

In their national study of 2,000 Americans 25 years of age and older, Aslanian and Brickell (1980) summarized 18 conclusions:

1. We have indeed become a learning society.
2. We have become a society in which adults learn everywhere.
3. Many adults learn in formal educational institutions.
4. Many adults learn in institutions for which education is not the primary function.
5. There are virtually no kinds of voluntary organizations ... which do not arrange some kind of instruction for their adult members.
6. Some adults take private lessons.
7. Some adults learn completely on their own.
8. Adult learners differ in several respects from nonlearners.
9. Most adults do not learn for the sheer pleasure of learning.
10. Adults learn in order to cope with some change in their lives.
11. Learning can precede, accompany, or follow life transitions.

12. Transitions - and the learning needed to accomplish them - occur unevenly in several areas of adult life.

13. The number of transitions in each life area corresponds exactly to the amount of time adults spend in each life area.

14. Adults who learn because their lives are changing more often learn several things at once, more often learn career skills, and more often learn in formal educational institutions.

15. Every adult who learned because of a transition pointed to a specific event in his or her life that signaled, precipitated, or triggered the transition and thus the learning.

16. Triggering events occur unevenly in the several areas of adult life.

17. The number of triggering events in each life area corresponded closely to the amount of time adults spend in each life area.

18. While the topic an adult chooses to learn is always related to the life transition requiring that learning, the topic is not always related to the event triggering the learning (p. 107).

Conclusions 10 through 18 directly address adults in transition and connect transitions to learning. In response to a triggering event, adults move from one status to another, seeking the benefits of the changed status: a childless woman becomes a mother; a college graduate becomes an accountant. Triggering events precipitate the transition and hence, the learning.

Two authors, Herman and Janoff-Bulman, studied trauma victims. Herman (1997)

concentrated on the phases of recovery of victims following psychological trauma of domestic abuse, combat, or political terror. She identified three stages of recovery; (a) establishment of safety, (b) remembrance and mourning, and (c) reconnection with ordinary life. Although relevant from the point of view of a traumatic event, her studies of psychological trauma concentrated on human-perpetrated events - terrorism, rape, war - as opposed to the more typical workplace accidents experienced by most of the adult VR learners.

Janoff-Bulman (1994) has conducted research of peoples' reactions to traumatic life events. She suggests there is a common process underlying all reactions involving the shattering of fundamental assumptions about one's life-world. "At the core of our internal world are abstract, generalized views of ourselves and the external world, our broadest schemas ... these are our fundamental assumptions - those that we are least aware of and least likely to challenge" (p. 59). She has found that most victims are unaware of three fundamental assumptions about (a) about themselves (the self is worthy), (b) their world (the world is benevolent), and (c) the relationship between the two (the world is meaningful), until becoming victimized. These deep-seated beliefs originate in infancy and are confirmed and reinforced through caregivers, often resulting in a sense of invulnerability. The psychological shell that protects and cares for us "is fractured and broken by the experience of traumatic life events" (p. 62) and thrusts the person into a new state of vulnerability.

Hopson and Adams (1976) sought to answer the question, "Is there a general model of transition?" They were heavily influenced by findings of three studies, a model of

