

Role Play: An Inquiry

by

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Abstract

This thesis is an investigation of “role play” as a pedagogical tool for adult learners. In this research, role play is viewed through the eyes of the researcher, through the eyes of five research participants, and in the context of experiential education, adult education and feminist theory.

The research, while not gender based, uses a feminist methodology to address issues of phallogentric power and addresses the question of whether role play is a tool for replicating or interrupting phallogentric practice.

Dedicated to Kevin

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Finally, to my children, Oliver, Samuel and Anna, who were only beginning their own life adventures as I began this one: you are a constant source of inspiration and delight to me. And to Kevin, who supported me without question, believing and trusting in the work I do. Thank you.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In this chapter I begin with my story, the event that triggered my search for a greater understanding of role play. The story is followed by the purpose, rationale, questions and structure of the thesis.

Motivation

I carry with me a memory of walking away from a workshop I facilitated one sunny fall afternoon. As I walked along the sidewalk I experienced an intense feeling of having failed at my job. It was a beautiful, crisp autumn day filled with the smell of fallen leaves and freshly mown lawns, yet I took in little other than the contrast of such a lovely day with such a profound sense of failure. While I tend to be critical of myself in any professional function, this time it was not the usual critical response or the initial letdown of energy that follows an intense learning situation. This was a new feeling, one of having failed the participants. Yet I couldn't figure out what had failed.

My companion on this beautiful fall day was a migraine headache. This headache indicated to me that I had put myself completely into the workshop by focusing intensely on the learners participation. My notes and flip chart paper were covered with the kind of lines and words that indicate lively participation and depth of connection between theory and experience. There were the enthusiastic discussions between participants following the completion of the workshop that indicated to me the high level of energy that results from

learning. I hesitated to read these signs as indicators of the 'success' of the workshop. I believe that a happy, energized or content feeling at the end of a learning experience does not necessarily mean it was a successful learning experience for participants. My sense of having failed was very strong. I felt compelled to investigate this powerful sense of failure in order to understand what, if anything, had failed.

After a great deal of reflection through journalling and dialogue with friends I was still unable to determine what the problem was. The evaluations that the participants provided were positive, which was helpful to me as an indication that participant expectations had been met. As I considered this I realized that if participant expectations were met, perhaps it was my expectations that were not met. I pursued this thought by considering the focus of the workshop and what expectations I had brought to it.

This particular workshop was a three and a half hour training session for residence life student-staff, or dons, at a University. The student-staff, who were all in a position of helping new students in residence deal with problems, had volunteered to participate in the workshop. I was there as a paid consultant to prepare the student-staff to respond to the students who experienced problems. The topic of the workshop was communication skills for University Residence dons. The workshop was scheduled early in the fall semester on a Saturday morning. Nine participants as well as the coordinator for the program were present. I was familiar with some of the participants because I had worked with them previously in a similar capacity on topics such as suicide intervention and paraprofessional counseling.

The session began with discussion of the expectations of the participants and the different kinds of situations they were interested in developing their skills to deal with. Examples of the scenarios the participants discussed were homesickness, suicide and room mate conflict. The expectations and concerns of the participants were written on a flip chart as were the skills participants identified as important to the position of helper. I presented the skills that I identified as critical to this kind of helping role and the group moved into pairs to role play the scenarios they had created by practicing the skills that had been identified. After each participant had an opportunity to role play a scenario as a helper the participants met again as a large group. There was discussion on what the experience was like for them. As problems were identified impromptu role plays were acted out by the participants, with me facilitating the interactions. Group members were encouraged to help other group members try different ways of dealing with the problem, and the impact of different ways of responding to a situation were explored. As the workshop neared its end I summarized the process and the learning that I had observed, with reference to the discussion and skills identified at the beginning of the workshop. This workshop was similar in structure and composition to many other workshops I had facilitated.

My goal with this workshop was to provide an opportunity for the student-staff to practice listening to more than what they thought the speaker was saying. I wanted them to understand that what they believe they heard someone say might not be what was said, or that it might be what was said but not what was meant. I introduced the skills that I believed would facilitate this kind of listening, which is referred to as active listening, and I provided the structure to

practice active listening skills through role play. I also provided the opportunity to gain insight into the impact of using different communication skills, or reflecting on their learning by debriefing the experience at the end of the workshop. As far as I could identify, my goals for this workshop were not different from the goals I had had for other workshops in the past. At the completion of this workshop, the clarification of goals did not explain the feeling I had of having failed. I needed to pursue the question of what was different about this workshop.

When considering my expectations for this workshop and what was different from others, I realized that I had a history of very powerful learning experiences in other workshops, both as participant as well as facilitator. I carry around with me an image of people glowing with excitement at an insight found, or of a learner saying “Wow! I’ve never understood it like that before!” It is a picture which I think of as the “aha” experience, and I realized that what I had experienced, and what participants in many of my workshops had experienced, was transformative learning (cf. chapter 4). Over the years I had facilitated many workshops in which participants experienced such an event, and I realize now that this kind of a learning experience is the expectation I carried into the workshop that beautiful fall day.

The problem, and the reason I felt like a failure, is the result of the expectations that I carried with me into the workshop that day. These expectations were based on my professional experiences, both as an early childhood educator and as a social worker. I chose these careers out of a desire to make a difference. I want to be helpful. Yet what I saw was professionals, in the name of being helpful, ending up being hurtful. I saw children apprehended

from homes, only to be placed in multiple homes that were significantly more hurtful than the first. I saw adults abuse children in the name of therapy, and children with physical disabilities placed in settings with infants in an effort to integrate the older children. I focused on the investigation of role play, because while role play is a powerful tool, I wanted to know what it was really doing. I wanted to know if I was being helpful when using role play, or hurtful.

I believe that the use of role playing was a significant factor in the transformative learning experiences I had seen and experienced over the years, and I felt compelled to investigate the implications of the use of role play as a learning tool and as a tool for transformation. I also recognized that I needed to explore the impact of carrying an expectation of transformative learning into a learning environment on the learners.

This research is an exploration of the experiences and perceptions of the research participants as well as the experiences and perceptions that form the researcher's biases and assumptions regarding the pedagogical possibilities for role play. Both my professional and personal experiences have developed this research interest, the role play experience for adult learners, and my current work continues to inform this interest. The work I do is tied closely to my thesis topic, and I do not intend this to be an exhaustive piece of research on the uses of role play. Rather this is the beginning of an exploration into role play as a pedagogical tool.

In order to understand each participant's experience of role play I chose a qualitative research approach because it would enable me to gain insight into the perceptions, thoughts and feelings of participants while including myself as learner with them. "Fundamentally, qualitative inquiry is a state of being: a

willingness to engage and be engaged, the ability to momentarily stop internal dialogue and to engage reflectively in a search for the meanings constructed by others *and* ourselves” (Sears, 1992, p. 153). I chose to accomplish this through offering two workshops on interpersonal communication skills interspersed with three individual interviews and concluding with one group interview. Five research participants were involved in this study. My research goal was to learn of the participant’s experience, thoughts, and feelings regarding the role play experience. To do so it was necessary to engage reflectively in a search for the meanings constructed by myself along with the participants.

Purpose

Role play provides an opportunity to try on different responses or different ways of speaking, listening and acting. Role play also offers the opportunity to investigate the impact of these different ways of speaking, listening and acting. Through role play one can try on socially prescribed roles and gain insight into the implications of those roles and how they might conflict with one’s values and beliefs. Role play can also be used as a tool to develop specific skills, which can lead to an awareness of the impact of listening to understand instead of listening to respond. This combination of integrating new skills and at the same time experiencing the impact of using these skills through role play can lead to new insight. There is an inconsistency with these uses of role play, and the inconsistency is what has led to my problem. The problem is that I have an agenda to work for change at a structural level while my mandate, and the expectations of the learners, is the development of skills.

In this research I explore the implications of using role play as a learning tool aimed at transformation. In this regard I will be exploring the possibilities for using role play as well as the dangers of using role play. I investigate the connection between role play and transformative learning, and the implications of having an expectation of achieving a transformative learning event when using role play for skill development. An important part of this research is the viewing of role play through the lens of power.

Rationale

In my career I have developed a commitment to the prevention of physical, sexual and emotional abuse of children and adults. This commitment is the result of personal and professional experiences I have had as an early childhood educator, a social worker, and as a woman. Commitment to violence prevention leads me to an interest in educating for personal as well as social change. My interest is in exploring a learning tool that may facilitate the kind of learning that can lead to change, transformative learning, which is the kind of learning I describe as “aha!” This research is a critical investigation of role play, a pedagogical tool that offers unique possibilities for learning.

I have found role play at times to be very powerful, and I value and enjoy the freedom and flexibility as well as the impact of using role play as a learning tool. My past experience and the feedback over the years from participants indicates to me that role play is key to opening doors for an intense and exhilarating learning experience. After years of using role play, however, I question what it can accomplish, and I wonder about possible dangers of using this tool. There is information available on the structuring of role play but little information

available regarding the implications of its use (Elms, 1969, Hawley, 1974, Tarlington, 1991, & VanMents, 1983). There is no information available on a critical investigation of role playing. I believe that, like the use of any tool or theory, role play needs to be investigated to gain an understanding of its strengths as well as its weaknesses. I had questions that I wanted to try to answer, all of which became clear when I tried to understand what might have gone wrong in a workshop that appeared to have gone so right.

Questions

In my search for greater understanding of role play I draw primarily from literature in the fields of adult education, experiential education and to some extent feminist theory.

My questions are related to role play on its own as well as role play and its relationship to transformative learning, which is learning that is based on a critical investigation of power. I argue in chapter three that there is a connection between violence and power, and because of a commitment I have to work towards social change, which developed through my career as a social worker, I believe there is a need to use a tool that can facilitate the development of insight into the abuse of power. Because of this commitment to social change I have chosen to take a critical approach to the investigation of role play as a pedagogical tool.

My questions reflect the uses of role play from skill development to interrupting phallogentric practice. I use the phrase phallogentric in this discussion because it encompasses the larger context of meaning relevant to my understanding and my work. Lewis stated:

(B)y choosing to use the term “phallogocentric” I wish to expand our understanding of male dominance beyond its operations in the economic and legal spheres of our social organization to its functions within a deeper, more fundamental systemic set of relations of inequality. The term signals the inclusion not only of traditional ways in which women have been subordinated to the “male head of household”..., but also of the symbolic system through which our social relations are organized and maintained, extending beyond but still including immediate familial forms of patriarchic dominance (1993, pp 20 - 21).

I ask, what is role play? What are the factors that facilitate the successful implementation of role play? Is there a connection between role play and transformative learning? What is the responsibility of the educator who has a goal of transformative learning? What are the dangers in the uses of role play? And, finally, is role play a tool for replicating phallogocentric practice, or a tool for interrupting this practice?

I recognize that there are two inherent problems with discussions of role play. First, it is very difficult to describe on paper an interactive and experiential process like role play. Second, I perceive a dynamic that happens when using role play with which the reader might not be familiar. With this in mind, in the next chapter I include a fictional script that simulates a workshop using role play.

I include this role play script in my thesis because it exemplifies what I consider to be a typical interaction when using role play. My intention in presenting this fictional script is to show how a role play might unfold logistically, how the emotions of the participant can become engaged in a role play, how interpersonal communication skills are developed using role play, and how one might analyze role play in order to uncover hidden assumptions or expectations. The script is steeped in my experience and offers data, biases and assumptions in a way that would be difficult to capture with descriptive writing.

I focus on the development of interpersonal communication skills in this research because that is the reason I use role play most in my work with service providers of various sorts. I do this because I believe that developing interpersonal communication skills, especially when using role play, is an avenue for encouraging tolerance and preventing violence.

Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 2 of this thesis is a description of role play and how I use it. Included in this chapter, as noted above, is a fictionalized script of a role play, which has been written based on my experiences using role play. Chapter 3, the Frame of Reference, offers background on the theory and the personal experience that inform the writing of this thesis. The Frame of Reference chapter, together with Chapter 4, Transformative Learning, provide the bulk of the literature review for the thesis.

Chapter 5 provides a description of the methodology, followed by the findings in Chapters 6 and 7. These chapters lead to the summary and conclusion, in Chapter 8.

Chapter 2

Role Play

In this chapter I define role play, discuss how I use it in practice, and provide a script of a role play. This script is fabricated, but its fabrication is based on my experience. The script is a composite of a scenario that has occurred in many of the role play exercises I have facilitated as an educator.

Definition of Role Play

Role play is a technique in which an individual or group of individuals act out a scenario or situation. The roles each individual enacts might be clearly defined or vaguely described, and the interaction among players can be highly scripted or not scripted at all. Role play has a range of uses, from therapeutic intervention to learning a skill like counseling or teaching. Businesses might use role play when training sales staff to more effectively make a sale; consultants might use role play to teach clients to deal with the media; and educators might use role play to assist students with the development of communication skills. The applications for role play are unlimited, as are the structures for using it. Whatever its application, role play is the process of people interacting, either scripted or spontaneous, that involves a perception of realistic behaviour under controlled but imagined conditions.

There are several structures that can be utilized in role play. Dyads, or groups of two, with both playing a role is one possibility. Triads, with either all three playing a role or with the third person acting as an observer to provide

support and feedback to the other two is another option. There can be a group role play in which all members of a group participate, or a single group role play in which a pair or smaller sub-group carries out the role play in front of the rest of the participants functioning as an audience. Role plays can proceed with no interruption or with continual interruption, depending on the intent. One role or character in the role play can be played by one, two or any number of people who might act as an inner voice of the participant or to provide a different response. A role play can be done with an empty chair representing someone or it can be done with one individual mirroring another. A role play can be brief or it can span weeks or months and be replayed in a number of different ways. For example, a role play presenting a patient with specific symptoms might be the same role play from one small group session to another, but the topic might change week to week, from the doctor-patient relationship to dealing with difficult behaviours. The structure chosen for role playing depends on the intent or the objectives for using role play.

The intent of the role play also influences the structuring of the dialogue, whether or not it is scripted or improvised. Techniques or patterned responses may be expected during the role play, which might be the case in the development of sales techniques or, in the example of using role play to increase awareness of one's attitudes or beliefs, the interaction might be non-directive. The decision regarding the role play structure is based on the purpose of the role play. The goal might be behavioural change, such as anger management; attitudinal change, such as reducing prejudice; emotional growth, like the recognition of a resistance to change; or the development of insight into oneself or one's perception of the world. In drama, role playing is different than the

educational use of role play. Sociologically the use of role play is intended to simulate the living of a role and performing it, not for a paying audience, but for a simulated participation in everyday life and interaction (Goffman, 1959) for the purposes of gaining insight, self reflection and understanding.

My Use of Role Play

The role play I use in my practice can be applied in a small group or a large group setting and usually involves dyads either performing in front of other workshop participants or without an audience. One format I have used in a large group setting is a circle role play, in which one person is in the middle performing a particular situation, and the rest of the group circle around the person in the middle. The people in the circle take turns responding to the individual sitting in the middle. The participants in the large circle move in and out of role as they participate, creating an interactive large group drama. This is an example of a structure I have used with a large group, but it is one I do not use often because it requires a great deal of time as well as familiarity and comfort with using role play.

The structure I most frequently use is aimed at a small group of learners, between six to twelve people. Procedure calls for a whole group discussion on the topic and negotiation of group rules and expectations. There is an introduction to the overall topic, to the skills to be developed in the workshop, and to the structuring of the role play. The group members then break into small groups, usually dyads but, depending on the needs of the group, occasionally into triads. A scenario is determined, participants move into a role and they act out the scenario. If it is a triad, the third person is in the role of observer and

support person. For example, there might be one individual acting the role of a student who is failing a course, another individual acting as a support person for the student, and a third person observing the two interact. The third person, or observer, is responsible to sit quietly and note the specific skills used by the support person, and the impact of the skills on the student. At the completion of the interaction the observer provides feedback on the strengths of the performers as well as offering suggestions on what could have been done differently. When the role play is completed the participants switch roles and repeat the process. This way each participant has an opportunity to experience being in both roles.

Because my work is usually focused on the development of interpersonal communication skills, one person is in the role of patient, client, student or friend and the other is in the reciprocal helper or listener role. Examples of different topics upon which these workshops are based are suicide intervention, relationship development, team building and dealing with difficult clients.

I prefer to use role plays in which the participants play themselves. This is the best opportunity to learn and to develop skill and insight about oneself. In role plays that involve two people the participant playing the 'other' might choose to play a role which is not them, but I leave it up to the discretion of the participant.

Regarding the use of prescribed role plays, I feel it is important to provide a choice, to script or to *ad lib* their own role. As well, they can choose to use a prescribed role that I make available. Offering this choice provides the participant with control over the extent to which her or his emotions are involved. For example, if someone chooses to use their own experience others in the group might feel uncomfortable and reluctant to invade the privacy of the

participant. The participant may also perceive themselves to be risking triggering an emotional response if they access their own experience. While the participant might be aware of the risk such a candid approach might also be the reason the role play has so much impact. Because of the risks involved it is sometimes perceived by participants to be safer to use a prescribed role play, especially if they can choose one of several prepared role plays.

Regardless of the format, what is always present in my use of role play is preparation and support for participants, voluntary participation, concrete focus for learning, and thorough debriefing and reflection following each role play. My preference is to create a scenario in conjunction with participants, usually evolving out of the initial discussion. To the extent that they are comfortable, I encourage participants to create the script spontaneously, drawing on their own personal experience. The debriefing and reflecting provide a significant integration of the learning for the participants as well as an opportunity to create some distance between the role they were in and themselves. I feel so strongly about the importance of preparation and debriefing that I choose to use role play only if time permits a thorough preparation and debriefing.

The first experiences I had with role playing were as a social worker working in crisis intervention, when I used role reversal as a therapeutic intervention. I found role playing to be a very powerful tool for therapy, and one which I subsequently have chosen to use with care for that reason. As part of my training as a social worker I participated in role reversal as well, and found it to be dynamic in the possibilities for my own learning. However, I also came to learn that strong emotional support is necessary for role play participants throughout the role play process.

Possibilities For Role Play as a Transformative Process

Role play can access the daily lived experience of the learner, where the point of reference is the learner's world rather than the world of someone in the position of educator. By entering the learner's world I am referring to the need for the learner to access their own experience and perception in order to role play. This introspective approach can be accessed by using the participant's dialogue and actions, which is then coupled with literature, information and/or expertise brought in by the facilitator and other participants. The information introduced by the facilitator and other participants can inform the participant in a manner that supports their learning process within their own frame of reference while still challenging them. This is possible because the nature of role play is such that it is possible to weave process, action and thought with theory.

Role play can freeze frame a process, providing opportunity to step in and out of self, which creates a distance from actions that occur out of habit. Role play can also provide opportunity for playing and experimenting with interactions and identities. Depending on the structuring of the role play, it can also shift the traditional power dynamics to the learner focused setting rather than a teacher focused setting.

Role play can be used to create a space for exploration, delineated by those present, which is unique to each group of learners or participants.

"Space...describes the experiences of everyday life" (Palmer, 1983, p. 70). Palmer explains that "A learning space has three characteristics(:) ...openness, boundaries, and an air of hospitality" (Palmer, 1983, p. 71). The use of role playing can offer an environment that meets these criteria for a learning space,

providing the opportunity to explore action and meaning. The script that follows provides an example of how this space can be created.

This script is an example of what I mean when I talk about role play. It is the result of an experiential process I had as part of my graduate studies in which one of the requirements was to create a product. The product I chose was to attempt to capture a dynamic in role play I felt I needed to understand but was unable to articulate. I wrote this script knowing only that there was a picture of a process or interaction that I carried with me and that was influencing my expectations as an educator. This scripted interaction is set in a communications workshop. While the contents of the script are gathered from my own experiences using role play, the actual text presented is fiction in the sense that it is not a description of any one event or experience.

This script is steeped in my experience and is therefore relevant to my research. The script offers data, biases and assumptions in a way that any amount of descriptive writing would be unable to capture. This script, created from my memories of different workshops, evolved from accumulated experience. I intend the script to be a stepping stone into a picture I can share with the reader. I hope that this will serve to facilitate a better communication of ideas from which to spring into the rest of this thesis.

Simulated Role Play Scenario

The Setting

While the setting for this role play could be any number of venues, I chose to locate it within a university residence life environment. In this setting there are often student staff, or dons, who are responsible to support first year students

during their stay within the university residence system. There is usually training for these student staff on a number of topics, from programming to meet the needs of the residents to supporting the residents in crisis. This particular scenario is structured as a university student leader training session on interpersonal communication skills. The students in the workshop range from twenty years to twenty-five years of age. They are participating in the training as preparation for the job of supporting anywhere from thirty-five to sixty first year students.

The room is a moderate sized classroom, with eight comfortable old easy chairs and six monotonous desk chairs arranged in a circle. Open windows are letting in a fresh cool early spring breeze, and a dozen student staff are scattered about in the room in pairs. The facilitator is moving about the room speaking with the small groups privately.

The participants have already had a brief introduction to the interpersonal communication skills of paraphrasing and clarification and have been directed to practice those skills in groups of two. They have been instructed not to problem-solve, but rather to only paraphrase and clarify what the other person is saying. One dyad in particular appears to be off topic. When she joins them the facilitator encounters a discussion on how each morning had gone for the students that day. These two students will be identified as Mita and Anna, and the facilitator will be identified as Susan. Names are shown in bold face type.

The Script

Susan: After sitting and listening to Mita and Anna for two or three minutes, asks "Are you both role-playing"? Looks at each of them, waiting for an answer.

Anna: Looking confused, “ I thought we were supposed to just listen to each other.”

Susan: “What I’d like you to do is role play a student and a don talking about a problem the student is having, and the person role-playing the don is to paraphrase, paraphrase and paraphrase, and occasionally clarify.” Pause. “Which one of you is playing the student”?

Mita: “I will.”

Susan: “Do you have a problem you are comfortable role-playing”?

Mita: . “I think so. Just give me a minute to think about it.”

Anna: “So I am just supposed to paraphrase? Isn’t that just saying what she’s saying”?

Susan: Directing Anna’s attention to a definition on the wall, “Paraphrasing is pretty much just stating what the person said, only saying it more simply. You want to listen for the basic message, restate it as a concise and simple summary of the basic message, and check for accuracy, either by observing a cue like a nod or smile, or by asking for a response, like ‘is that what you mean?’.” Pause. “Is this clear”?

Anna: “I think so. But how is clarifying different”?

Susan: “Clarification is guessing beyond the person’s basic message. You need to do some interpretation or explaining how you understand what the speaker is saying.” Pointing to another definition on the wall. “One way of looking at this is to admit confusion and try a restatement or ask for clarification, repetition or illustration.” Pauses briefly. “Are you ready to start? I’ll stay for a few minutes to help you. Sometimes the most difficult part is just getting started.”

Mita and Anna pause for a minute, thinking and preparing for the role-play, then Mita settles back in her chair, and Anna sits up in her chair and leans forward slightly.

Anna: "Hi Mita."

Mita: "Hi. I hope you don't mind me stopping by. Are you busy right now"?

Anna: "I'm working on a paper, but I'm ready for a study break. I have about a half an hour. Is that O.K."?

Mita: "Sure."

Anna: "So what's up"?

Mita: "Well." Pauses for several seconds, begins to say something, then hesitates. Finally begins again. "Can you tell me how to drop a course? Have you ever dropped a course"?

Anna: "You want to know if I have ever dropped a course"?

Mita: "Yea." A long pause. "You know, like, is it difficult? Will it hurt my record"? Another pause, slightly shorter. "Because if I don't drop it, well, I don't know, and if I do"...

Anna: Waits to see if Mita is going to continue, then begins "Yea. I've dropped a course, and it's really easy. I'll go with you if you want, and help make sure you have the paper work figured out O.K."

Mita: "O.K., Thanks. Gee."

Both of the students sit back, and look at Susan. Susan hesitates, then, glances at Mita.

Susan: "Mita, tell me what that was like."

Mita: "Well, I guess she was helpful"

Susan: "Do you feel that Anna got to the bottom of the problem"?

Mita: "No, not really."

Susan: "Anna, you jumped to problem-solving very quickly, but the goal of this exercise is to practice paraphrasing and clarifying. What do you think?"

Anna: "Well, I tried at the beginning, but I sounded stupid because I wasn't helping her, really. I was just parroting, and not being very clever about it. It doesn't sound natural."

Susan: "No, it won't, but if you keep practicing you'll begin to sound more natural. The point today is **only** to paraphrase and clarify, and you are **not** to come to a solution. O.K.?" Pause, then "Can you start from where Mita says 'is it difficult,' will it 'hurt her record,' and 'If I don't, I don't know, and if I do'..."

Anna: "O.K. I'll try." Annoyed, pauses briefly. "Mita, are you thinking about dropping a course?"

Mita: "Yea. But I'm really scared. My folks will kill me. But if I don't, I know I'm going to fail everything"

Anna: "Are you feeling overwhelmed by the amount of work you have to do?"

Mita: "Well, it's not so much the amount of work, it's just that I can't do some of the work, no matter how much I try. I might as well quit now, because otherwise." Long silence. "Otherwise, I don't think I'll be able to, you know, handle it."

Anna: Fidgets with her hands, looks at Susan, glances briefly at Mita, and sighs deeply. "You are saying that there is some work that you absolutely cannot do, no matter how hard you work at it, and that because of this you should quit university because otherwise you can't handle it?"

Mita: Tears come to her eyes, and she sits forward slightly. "Yes! That's exactly it. Because if I fail anything, I'll lose my scholarship, and then I've let my whole family down."

Anna: Speaking with some shakiness. "If you fail anything, you'll lose your scholarship"?

Mita: "Yes. And I'm the only one in my family who has ever gone to university. And we'll never be able to afford to send my sister if I don't get out and make some money."

At this point there is a long pause, after which Susan leans forward to join the conversation.

Susan: "Anna, do you think you could attempt clarification of everything that Mita has said up until now"?

Anna: "I'll try." Hesitates briefly, then begins "Mita, let me get this straight. You are having trouble with a few of your courses,"

Mita: Interrupting Anna, "Well, just one really."

Anna: "So you are having a lot of trouble with one of your courses, and you have done everything you can to get help, and you still can't do the work, and"...

Mita: Interrupting again, "Well, I haven't done **everything** possible to get help. I haven't gone to the T.A. yet, and I've only made it to one tutorial."

Anna: "So you are having trouble with one of your courses, and you are feeling pressured and scared because you are worried about losing your scholarship."

Mita: "Yea. But I suppose you're right, I should go talk to the T.A. and go to all of the tutorials, because then at least I'll know I've tried everything." Mita pauses, glances down at the floor, glances at her hands, then slowly moves her eyes up to Anna's. "Thanks. I guess I just need to know how long I have before I

can withdraw from a course without being penalized. I suppose I could still manage the course."

Both Anna and Mita sit back, look at each other, then burst into laughter. They then begin to speak quickly and enthusiastically.

Anna: "Hey! It's like magic! Why did you thank me for suggesting that you go to the T.A. or tutorials? I didn't tell you anything about how to find extra help. All I did was say what you were saying. You are the one who suggested going to the T.A. or the tutorials." After a moment, "I thought you were going to tell me you were going to try to kill yourself, Mita!"

Mita: "Well, that was my original thought when I was feeling so helpless. But when I got talking, it changed. I think I just needed to be clear on what the problem was, but I couldn't see it because I was feeling so overwhelmed." A moment passes, and Mita looks up at the wall, frowning slightly, then she continues, "And I don't think I'd believe you if you told me that you didn't encourage me to go to the T.A. and to the tutorials. I really thought you had suggested that I do that. Hmmmm."

Susan: "Mita, how did you feel when Anna sort of summarized what you were saying to her"?

Mita: "Well, it was irritating at first, because she sounded like a social worker, but then I felt like she really understood, and then I understood better too. In the role play, my problem really felt like a big one, but after we stopped, and Anna tried to clarify what I had said, it all seemed to be, you know," pause, "not so bad."

Anna: "Well, it really is weird, because it seems like the less I tried to solve the problem, the more it solved itself!"

Susan: “That’s the beauty of truly listening, and trying to understand what someone is saying. It won’t always work like that, and there are lots of other skills that need to be developed, but if you can show someone that you are truly trying to understand what they are saying, they will feel heard and supported and the meaning or the understanding of the problem can completely shift.” Looking around at the rest of the group. “It’s time to meet back with the whole group now. Good work!”

Once the group has moved back to form a circle, Susan asks each person to contribute a word or phrase to describe their experience of paraphrasing and clarifying. A student mid-way in the circle from Susan begins.

Tom: “That was tough. I kept wanting to solve her problem.”

Janet: “Helpful.”

Steve: “It was hard to do. Our job is to help them, and I didn’t feel like I was helping.”

Anna: “It was like magic!”

Mita: “Really surprising, ... helpful!”

Andy: “Educational”

Rob: “Frustrating. I hated the way I sounded.”

Susan: “Rich. There is a lot of skill and talent in this room!”

Elaine: “Ummm, I pass for now.”

Michael: “Confusing.”

Mark: “Cool! It’s like really, well, sort of almost a meditation, like...”

Charif: “Really really helpful. I’ve done this kind of thing for peer counseling at high school, but there’s always something more to learn!”

Jules: “Awesome! It’s weird, not being able to answer someone, but it’s amazing what happens when you just try to understand!”

Upon completing the responses, and checking quietly with Elaine to see if she would like to say something, Susan invited the group to participate in general discussion.

Susan: “Some of you said this was tough, or that you didn’t like it. Tell me more.”

Steve: “Well, like I said, I didn’t think I was being very helpful by just sitting there and parroting what the student was saying. It would have been helpful if we could have asked some questions or something.”

Susan: “Well, yes. Simply paraphrasing won’t always get people talking.” Pausing for moment, and looking distractedly up and out one of the windows, Susan continues “Michael, you were Steve’s role-play partner weren’t you”? Upon seeing Michael’s nod, Susan asks Michael “How did you find the role-play”?

Michael: “Well, I didn’t really like it. I went to my don because I just found out my parents were splitting up, and I couldn’t concentrate on my schoolwork at all, and was getting really behind. All he did was repeat what I was saying. I wanted advice.”

Susan: “Would you two be willing to try your role play again right now, with the group participating”?

When Steve and Michael both indicate that they are nervous about it, but are willing to try, Susan helps them move back into role, and instructs the rest of the group to listen and think of suggestions they might want to try. At one point

Steve runs out of ideas for responses, and appears agitated. Susan asks if he would like some suggestions from other group members, and Steve agrees.

The input from the group varies, and Susan has each person who has a suggestion try it out in role with Michael. Some of the suggestions appear to replicate what Steve experienced, but two of the suggestions really get Michael talking and moving on a level of insight and spontaneous problem solving. Once again, the students comment on the apparent magic and paradox of listening which creates 'automatic' problem solving and eliminates the need for the listener to 'solve' the problem.

Summary

This is a particular example of one way that I use role playing. It can be used to engage a participant emotionally, physically and intellectually, bringing them to a point of tension or conflict. The participant is then guided and supported through more role playing and discussion to a place of resolution of the conflict. Following all of this process is a debriefing of the overall experience and learning. This process is done in a manner which includes the participants within a group and a depth of meaning and insight is made available for everyone in the group, including the facilitator.

The script portrays a synopsis of the workshops I have facilitated, reflecting dynamics that I hadn't identified until I wrote the script. Examples of those dynamics are the presence of tension, the importance of reflecting and debriefing in an experiential learning environment, the shifting of the power balance in an interaction, and the need to challenge the learner either with a new meaning or skill. This script evolves out of my experience as a learner who has experienced

role plays, as a therapist who has used role play for therapeutic intervention, and as an educator who has used role play for skill development in others.

In the script there is a point where a participant states that 'it's like magic!'. This comment, and the dynamic the student is referring to, is echoed in my experience as I have heard it so many times in so many different situations. The 'it's like magic' comment is a response to the shift when someone in the role of helper feels the impact of shifting from needing to give an answer or solve a problem to truly, deeply listening to the speaker in an attempt to understand fully the meaning of what they are experiencing. Consistently what follows the comment 'it's like magic' is the observation that 'the more I listened and stopped trying to solve their problem the more their problem got solved!'. By using a new set of constructs, or skills, the role play participants become more effective and at the same time less invasive.

I use role play as a tool for engaging a participant emotionally, physically and intellectually. The participant is engaged in these ways to bring them to a point of 'tension' or conflict. When the role play participant, who is present to develop specific skills, has reached the point of tension they are supported through the tension into a place of learning, which is where the reflection, or debriefing, can integrate whatever learning has been created. This learning process is done in a manner which includes the participants within a group. What I have found is that occasionally an exhilarating space is created within an entire group and a depth of meaning and insight is made available for all of us within that group. The depth of effectiveness of the method is indicated by the fact that in my experience there are often tears in this kind of learning situation.

The next two chapters provide the bulk of the literature review through a discussion on the frame of reference, experiential education and transformative learning.

Chapter 3

Frame of Reference

This chapter is the first of two chapters that look at my personal experience and assumptions and how they connect with the literature. The literature is drawn primarily from experiential education theory, adult education and to some extent from feminist theory. This chapter includes a background on my personal experience and how it leads to a commitment to the prevention of violence and abuse. This is followed by sections on the connection of violence with power; social action and the role of the educator; experiential education; and the chapter summary. Chapter 4 addresses the adult education and transformative learning literature.

Personal Experience

In this research, I draw from my experiences as a participant in role play; as an educator using role play as a pedagogical tool; as an early childhood educator who has worked with emotionally, physically and sexually abused children; as a crisis intervention counselor with youth and their families; as a probation officer who has worked with adolescents abused not only in their homes but also by the very system I represented; and as a woman who has experienced abuse and has seen the pain experienced by family, friends and clients who have been abused and violated. These experiences have led me to my commitment to the prevention of violence. They have also led me to the belief that violence can be prevented through education. It is with this commitment to the prevention of violence that I chose to investigate a teaching/learning tool which I believe can

be powerful in the process of educating for intervention in and prevention of abuse. I use role play for such topics as interpersonal communication skills, suicide intervention, and paraprofessional counseling. In this research I focus on the development of interpersonal communication skills because that is the topic for which I have most often used role play for.

In my work both as a social worker and as an educator I have felt myself to exist within a glass case. It seemed there was a world of understanding around me but I was without the tools to reach through the glass to this understanding. The glass represents to me the limitations of language and context, and in my search to find ways for working on the prevention of abuse I have found myself imprisoned by this glass. I believe that techniques of role play can be a tool for removing the glass barrier. Role playing provides opportunity for understanding. Role play provides opportunity for practicing different ways of communicating, shifting the information one provides as well as receives. Role play offers an opportunity to challenge assumptions in communicating, both assumptions one hears as well as assumptions one makes. Through all that role playing has to offer one is given the opportunity to experience a shift, which has the effect of removing the glass barrier. When the glass barrier is removed greater understanding can be reached.

The shift that is made possible through role play reflects the change from an approach of telling and assuming to an approach of listening and checking for understanding. The response I referred to in the last chapter, one that I have heard frequently when I was facilitating interpersonal communication skills for paraprofessional helpers is "it seems that the less I try to answer or solve the person's problem the more the problem is solved". In such instances, I believe

participants have momentarily stopped their internal dialogue with themselves and focused exclusively on the speaker. The apparent paradox is that the more the listener assumes responsibility for the speaker's dilemma the less heard the speaker will be; the less the listener assumes responsibility for the speaker, the more heard the speaker will be.

Another comment I have frequently heard is "they thanked me for the advice to do ..., but I didn't give them that advice. They came up with the solution themselves and didn't even know it." The perception of the listener is that they give up control of the conversation only to be thanked for helping the speaker. These are simplified examples but ones which briefly describe the shift in power to which I am referring. The script provided in the last chapter offers a glimpse of this dynamic that I believe removes the glass barrier. I believe this kind of learning is facilitated through the use of role play.

In my professional training and practice as a social worker I was encouraged to question the very dynamics in which I was immersed. I learned not to make assumptions about another person's reality. I also developed the understanding that "we exist inside ideology, that we are all victims...of political and cultural domination" (Modleski, 1991, p. 35). I have long struggled with the challenge of shifting the imbalance of power within my position as a social worker while recognizing that an imbalance of power is inherent within that role. Because of my commitment to the prevention of abuse I work towards interrupting the practices that enable abuse. The shift from a stance of telling and assuming to the stance of listening and checking for understanding is a key to interrupting this practice. The change in the balance of power I work towards is a shift from the practice of assuming and imposing to the practice of listening and negotiating.

The following is a discussion of the connection between abuse and violence, and power, which underlie the rationale for my choice of role play as a pedagogical tool that can be effectively deployed in defusing relations of power.

Violence and Power

It is clear to me that there is a connection between the abuse of a position of power and the personal pain so many of us experience as the result of some form of violation. According to Rogers' 1990 *Report of the Special Advisor to the Minister of National Health and Welfare on Child Sexual Abuse in Canada*, child sexual abuse is "the misuse of power by someone who is in authority over a child for the purposes of exploiting a child for sexual gratification" (p. 19). In her book about child sexual abuse in Canada, Steed notes that regarding pedophiles "what they all have in common is a sexual addiction that masks a power dysfunction" (Steed, 1997, p. xiv). Physical, sexual and emotional abuse is possible because there exists an imbalance of power.

The connection of abuse with a systemic imbalance of power is consistent with my own experience and understanding, that sexual abuse, physical abuse and emotional abuse are about the misuse of power and its manifestation, or phallocentric practice.

Violation occurs as a result of those in a position of power transgressing and/or violating boundaries of those who are vulnerable or powerless. Understanding that abuse is a violation of power, I believe that a violation of power on a personal or individual level simultaneously reflects and perpetuates a systemic or structural imbalance and violation of power. Lewis states that "violence is a fundamental expression of phallocentric power and as such is

essential to its legitimation and perpetuation" (Lewis, 1993, p. 40), supporting my experience and understanding, that the basis of abusive behaviour is the result of an abuse of power inherent in and perpetuated by a social structure vested in the maintenance of the imbalance of power. Palmer (1991) suggests "Betrayal of trust and violent power have a profound personal impact. Yet such betrayal may be subtly reinforced by traditional practices that inadvertently violate the tenets of trust and authority" (p. 64). If I am working to interrupt phallocentric practice, it is important that I investigate the tools I use, such as role playing, so I don't inadvertently reinforce that practice.

Social Action and the Educator

I believe an effective means of promoting systemic change is through challenging practices premised on an authoritative system, and I believe I can most effectively do this as an educator. Yet before one can challenge phallocentric practice one first needs to identify it. Role playing, or performing slices of daily lived experience, creates a space for identifying phallocentric practice at the personal level. When using role play, I am choosing to enter the learning/educating process at a personal level. I make this choice to enter at a personal level rather than the structural level for a number of reasons, one being that my interest and area of strength is to work with individuals and groups, and the other is because I believe it is the development of insight into our everyday actions that provides the opportunity to be aware of and challenge the systemic balance and abuse of power. It is clear to me that the prevention of violence can more readily occur when there is a shifting of the inherent systemic balance of power, as suggested by Bricker-Jenkins, Hooyman and Gottlieb who note:

institutional and societal change are vital if violence against women and children is to stop. In struggling for institutional change, we must address not only the service deficiencies, but also the underlying assumptions that contribute to the dominance and coercion of women and others who are less powerful in this society (1991, p. 31).

One way of accessing underlying assumptions is to investigate our patterns of communication. Another is to investigate our roles and the assumptions behind these roles. There is a direct correlation between our interactive patterns and delineated roles and the pain often experienced by us as individuals and these patterns reflect phallocentric belief and/or action.

I hold two political objectives when I am in the position of educator. The first objective is to provide a model of an alternative pedagogy, embracing the values of inclusiveness, trust, and participatory dialogue. This is not a guarantee of safety for the learners, either emotionally within the learning environment or from replication of phallocentric practice. I do believe, however, that this objective, modeling an alternative pedagogy modifies both emotional risk and the risk of phallocentric practice. The second objective I hold is to offer a means or process by which participants can learn to hear themselves, both literally and metaphorically. The role playing of one's own experience can make visible to the individual, the facilitator and any observers the experiences of the person in the role play. Role play offers tangible interactions, making visible the actor's actions and dialogue. This visibility of action and dialogue can make clear the speaker's biases, assumptions, and beliefs. When an individual becomes more aware of their biases and assumptions, they then have a choice - to continue to hold those beliefs, or to exchange them.

If a learner is in a state of readiness to question their underlying assumptions and unquestioned behaviours, then as the educator and as an individual committed to the process of social change I am called to respond in a responsible and ethical manner. The responsibility of the educator is to provide the learners with exposure to a variety of constructs, and it is the learner's responsibility to make their own meaning and to choose how to act on that knowledge.

In the role of social worker I have acted on the belief that it is my responsibility to provide people with the tools to develop their own understandings and the result is that they, not I, are responsible for their healing and their change. I believe this to be the same in my position of adult educator. It is my responsibility to provide learners with tools to become aware of and investigate their own meanings. Once again the responsibility for their growth, learning and actions is theirs alone. It is a learning that is simultaneously personal and political, and it is at that level that role play has such impact. It is the responsibility of the educator to offer new concepts or understandings in order to provide choice of meaning to the learner. The difficulty in offering new concepts or understandings to a learner is the question of how to balance respect and acceptance of the learner's experience and perception with the process of challenging their perception of their experience.

The question of respecting the individual while working to challenge phallogentric practice has been noted by Simon, who questions "how can we acknowledge previous experience as legitimate content and challenge it at the same time? How do we encourage student 'voices' while simultaneously encouraging the interrogation of such voices" (Simon, 1992, p. 62)? I believe this is a question regarding respect and care for the learner, and a sharing of

responsibility for the learning process. This respect and sharing of responsibility requires a balancing of negotiated goals and processes and an articulation of the positioning of power within the current learning environment. As Gale suggests:

Critical thinking, after all, can grow only from dealing with conflict and confrontation of different perspectives. And it is in the process in interacting with texts in which conflicting ideas and values are interwoven and verbalized that students will learn to break away from the confinement of their old, simplistic way of looking at the world. (1996, p. 101).

There is a difference in sharing the responsibility for the learning environment, supporting learners in their own learning and taking full responsibility for what the learner learns. There is also a difference between sharing the responsibility for the learning environment and taking no responsibility for what they learn. I believe the difference is a solid foundation both in the topic or content of investigation as well as skill and knowledge in learning models, styles and needs. I do not see it as inconsistent for me as educator to trust the learning process to the learner while holding myself responsible as an educator for creating an environment to facilitate significant learning experiences.

My goal is to work towards a shared or recreated articulation of the meaning of our understandings, our daily interactions, and choices around those interactions with the learners. If I were to have a goal of teaching learners to shift their belief systems, or to learn how to 'think critically' then I am imposing a particular belief system, and I believe I am then becoming a part of the pattern of oppression. This is the danger of holding oneself directly responsible for the learning of the student; the specific learning, particularly when it is around issues of perception and interaction, cannot be predetermined. If the learning is

predetermined, then it is a learning that is imposed, even if, or possibly more so if, the learning is a belief system. The imposition of a specific learning expectation replicates phallogentric practice. If the educator has the goal of challenging phallogentric practice then they need to introduce the concepts not by imposing them but by offering them as a choice to the learner. The onus is on the educator to create opportunity for exploration and challenging or questioning the learner's constructs; the responsibility of the learner is to challenge themselves as much as they are able or willing using the constructs offered. Role play offers possibilities for creating the space to challenge the learner's constructs while respecting the learner's position.

Role Play as Opportunity to Interrupt Phallogentric Practice

Role play can access the daily lived experience of the learner, with the point of learning being the learner's world rather than the world of someone in a position of educator. Role play in a sense can freeze frame a process; provide opportunity to step in and out of self and therefore provide distance from pre-taped actions; provide possibility for playing and/or experimenting with interactions; and provide the lived experience of the impact of these practices. At the core of role play is the opportunity for participants to observe themselves and explore their own meanings and actions.

If I enter into an environment with a goal of shifting or directing someone's understandings, beliefs or assumptions and it is not a shared goal with the learners then there is the risk of hegemonically replicating the pattern of oppression. This is compounded by the danger of presenting as one who is working to challenge oppression while actually I may be further entrenching it

hegemonically. It is here that I believe the paradox of role play exists. Role play can make hegemonic practice visible through the re-playing of significant moments or interactions that reflect our daily experiences. Role play at the same time has the potential for replicating phallogentric practice through rehearsal of a way of thinking and/or acting.

Hegemonic action is action which is perceived socially as natural, neutral, and for one's own good, yet which is actually constructed and transmitted to protect the interests of the status quo. The value in role play is the focus on slices of interactions creating the opportunity to peel back layers of assumptions embedded in action and dialogue. This supports the literature in adult as well as experiential education indicating that it is not only the reflection or the experience that constitutes the learning experience, but also the framing of the learning. This framing of the learning could be the didactic 'laying on' of ideas or information prior to the role play, the readings required in conjunction with the learning process, or the discussion that takes place throughout the learning process. It is a presentation of ideas or a challenging of statements or action, but either way it is the process of making new sense of the ideas and experiences that provide the learning. It is at this point that the hegemonic action can be identified and contested, or not.

The 'aha' or 'it's magic' experience I described at the beginning of this chapter is a reflection of the liberating and potentially profound experience of learning that restores power to the individual. This power is gained through the awareness and lived understanding that there is choice in perception and that decisions to act can become more truly one's own. Horseman addressed this in her statement:

Although discourses which are made powerful through institutional frameworks are an important form of control, we can also contest and challenge them. As we participate in resistant discourses, we are part of a process of changing perceptions of experience and forming new subjectivities (1990, p. 23).

In my experience, the use of role play has the potential to create the space in which to not only question hegemonic practice but to challenge it through rehearsal. This is the restoration of power from abstract but lived hegemonic practice to the individual. In a discussion on the theatre as discourse, Boal (1979) talks about what he describes as rehearsal-theatre, which he explains is different from what he describes as spectacle-theatre. He suggests that in rehearsal-theatre "One knows how these experiments will begin but not how they will end, because the spectator is freed from his chains, finally acts, and becomes a protagonist" (p. 142). Boal later suggests that, in the poetics of the oppressed, which is his use of drama, "dramatic action throws light on real action" (p.155). When the actor is participating in their own story and experimenting with meaning and action, entirely new meaning can emerge from the action. Boal explains that in this use of drama "the spectator no longer delegates power to the characters either to think or to act in his place. The spectator frees himself; he thinks and acts for himself! Theater is action!" (p. 155). While there clearly are differences in the kind of theatre I am discussing and Boal's theater of the oppressed, there are similarities in the use of the space created through drama, particularly regarding the concept of rehearsal for change.

I use the phrase role play, but situation-play might be a more apt term for the pedagogy I am describing. A situation is developed that emerges from the learner's experience. This situation is framed according to the skill or theoretical focus of the learning environment and played out, with the situation developing

as it emerges from the participants, rather than as it is scripted. This creates opportunity for investigation of the interactions and the assumptions behind the interactions. For example, the question of 'why' one responded a particular way, and what the reaction of the other dramatic player is when they hear the response can be particularly telling of someone's assumptions. The learning opportunity emerges out of the learner's created context and action, yet is also challenged by other perceptions and knowledge, on the part of other participants as well as the facilitator. The facilitator is leading the process and structure, but the learner is leading the content. This offers an alternative to the traditional paradigm of teaching, when the learning is offered, complete, to the learner.

Ellsworth discusses what she describes as "the paradox of authority in the teaching relation - the paradox of attempting to manipulate readers into taking on responsibility for the meanings they make" (1997, p. 152). This begs the question of authority in the teaching relation, because in the role play structure I have describe, each workshop participant, each role player, is an authority in the teaching relation. The facilitator, or educator, is also an expert, but not on the meanings the learner brings, and not on any new meanings the learner gains. I expect participants to take responsibility for the meanings they make, and I expect myself as the facilitator to provide the environment, structure and literature to challenge (albeit gently) their action, meanings and assumptions. This is not a manipulation of learners to take responsibility for the meanings they make, but rather an offer of other possible knowledge.

In my use of role play, the role that is being played is one that the participants are currently experiencing. The experience played out in the role play is based on the participant's daily lived experience. There are many paradoxes inherent

with the use of role play, but not the paradox of manipulating the learner to take responsibility, as Ellsworth suggests. The paradoxes exist because the learner becomes the expert in their playing of a position or experience and the teacher or facilitator becomes an outsider/learner who only happens to be responsible for the timing and structure of the process. One paradox that frequently emerges in role play aimed at developing communication skills is that the more the role player works towards not controlling the response of the other role player, the more power or control they gain over the interaction. It is a paradox of letting go of control and gaining a new kind of control by being more effective in helping the person than they had previously been. An example of this is from the script in Chapter Two. When the character Anna stopped trying to answer the character Mita, the result was what Mita found resolution, based on her own context and need.

Another example is that of the medical student who needs to get specific information from the patient/client as efficiently yet humanely as possible. When asking frequent closed questions, students often find they have a moderate amount of information that they have worked hard to get. Often medical students remark 'it's like pulling teeth', or even 'I feel like I'm just shooting questions at them, bang, bang, bang'. By altering their communication approach the students find they gain all of the information previously acquired plus a depth of understanding and richness of additional information. The change in communication style enables a more thorough diagnosis, compliance on the part of the patient, and equally important, a greater sense of being listened to and cared about by the patient. The medical students' reaction often is to feel they aren't in control of the interaction when using a more open-ended approach that

follows the patient's story, yet the medical student ultimately is in greater control, of the information regarding the patient, and over the interview process. If this is used as a learning opportunity, and the medical student, or in the above example, the helping student, is encouraged to explore what is behind the sense of being out of control when they follow by listening rather than when they listen by asking, then a great deal of learning can take place about the assumptions the student makes about their job or role. It is the exploration of the assumptions behind the actions that is where the space for critical thought is created. And the power shift that I see is an assumption of one being responsible for another, or knowing better than another, which is when the sense of 'letting go of control' enters. The role play participant is not letting go of control, they are letting go of an assumption or illusion of control over another persons' experience, reactions and/or needs.

Similarly, if the facilitator using role play leads the learning experience by drawing out the experience, context and knowledge of the learners, they gain a deeper level of effectiveness.

The greatest effect of role play is the possibility that phallocentric practice is made visible through the practicing of the action. If one is acting out an interaction, one is acting out one's practice. If it is phallocentric practice, for example, the assuming of responsibility for the defining and solving of another person's problem, then before it can be investigated and challenged it needs to be played. The danger is that playing the dynamic may have the effect of further embedding the practice hegemonically through role playing because hegemonic discourse may not, for whatever reason, be challenged. Role play as pedagogic

tool is simultaneously a tool for replication and a tool for interruption of phallogentric discourse.

Experiential Education

The connection between an educational goal such as role-play and the potential for dramatic learning and insight which can lead to change is a link which is pivotal to an exploration of role play. Role play is a means to access participant experience because it draws on their interpretation and knowledge during the process of 'acting out' a role. Even in a scripted role, the participants access their own interpretations of the script emotionally, because when a participant has been provided a script they respond by recreating the dialogue to make it 'more real' or 'more genuine'.

Role play can offer the experience of a situation emotionally, physically and intellectually. There is a depth of meaning possible through role-playing because it draws on past experience to utilize and experience something that is occurring at that moment. The experiential nature of role play is one of the elements that makes it such a powerful tool for learning, yet role play is surprisingly not featured in the experiential education literature. This is surprising because the theory of experiential education is consistent with the conceptual framing of role play.

In the experiential education literature experience acts as a springboard into learning. While experience is significant within the experiential education literature, it is only a part of the learning process, as noted by experiential educator Laura Joplin(1995). Joplin suggests that "experience alone is insufficient to be called experiential education, and it is the reflection process

which turns experience into experiential education”(p. 15). In this literature, it is not the experience which is educative, but rather reflection of the experience and the uncovering of the concepts by which we made sense of the events of our lives.

In order to become educative an experience must be reflected upon. Joplin describes a five-stage model (focus, challenging action, and debrief encompassed by support and feedback) as one of two approaches to defining experiential education (Joplin, 1995, pp. 15 -22). This five stage model, which Joplin explains is also referred to as an action-reflection cycle, “is organized around a central, hurricane-like cycle...as challenging action. It is preceded by a focus and followed by a debrief. Encompassing all is the environment of support and feedback” (Joplin, 1995, p.16). According to Joplin, in addition to this hurricane cycle, there are nine characteristics of experiential education. These characteristics are the following: it is student based rather than teacher based; it is personal not impersonal; it is process and product oriented; it is evaluated for internal as well as for external reasons; it fosters holistic understanding and component analysis; it is organized around experience; it is perception based rather than theory based; and it is individual based rather than group based (Joplin, 1995, pp. 20 - 21). Eight of these characteristics I have identified as central to the intentions of role play. Additionally, Nadler and Luckner (1992) describe what they refer to as ‘edgework’, the negotiation of and movement beyond a point of tension that can occur as the result of an experience. Once someone has negotiated the ‘edge’ or point of tension they may encounter a significant learning experience. This is again reflected in the student’s experience in the role play script.

Nadler and Luckner suggest:

any new learning event can put individuals at the edge of new territory. This is where it appears to be unfamiliar, unknown, and unpredictable. There are feelings of discomfort, disequilibrium, and risk. The person either retreats or withdraws from this edge or “goes for it” and may have a breakthrough or a success (1992, p. 7).

Using an experience to move into a position of reflection, one needs to do ‘edgework’ to shift from reflection to critical reflection. The edgework is the process of meeting a challenge, which is based on tension. The tension might be internal or external. The process of transformation is the shifting of perspective from one of ‘knowing’ to one of ‘questioning knowing’. This emphasis on tension or conflict is a consistent theme for me in the work that I do.

Joplin’s five stage and nine characteristics model, and Nadler’s description of edgework speak directly to the use of role play. An experience followed by reflection on the experience can move the experience into an educative event. Joplin or Nadler do not, however, address the underlying power dynamics or even hegemonic action in the experience. I believe it is the experiential nature of role play that allows the power dynamics to become visible through enacting everyday interactions. The point at which someone gets stuck, or experiences tension is often a reflection of a gap, or inconsistency between ones’ actions and ones’ beliefs. Someone might perceive they hold a particular belief, but the enacting of everyday experiences can provide evidence to the contrary. When there is a difference in ones’ actions and ones’ beliefs there is a gap or a fault, creating dissonance within the individual. Bell suggests that “stopping at these ‘faults’ and identifying the gaps they leave in what we had assumed was the solid ground of our knowledge is necessary activity in developing a critical perspective” (Bell, 1993, p.7).

The faults are what I understand to be the place where someone gets stuck in a role play. An exploration of the dissonance created by the difference in action and belief can identify what the belief is, or what the action is, that is creating the fault. For example, someone might believe that they are inclusive in their everyday behaviour, but when acting out what might be an every day occurrence through role play it might be evident that they will only make eye contact with a certain gender. Dissonance is created because a belief that they held about themselves has proven to be unfounded, creating discomfort.

Bell continues to suggest “it is not enough to be reflective practitioners if the dominant social structures and patterns of social relations which privilege certain groups, institutions, and discourses over others do not change” (Bell, 1993, p. 7). It is the experience and the reflection on the experience woven with an investigation of the underlying assumptions of power that can move an experience like role play from skill development to insight to transformative learning. Making the transition from recognizing that one only makes eye contact with a specific gender to understanding the politics behind that behaviour or hegemonic action is transformative. The individual now has the choice to eliminate the dissonance of that particular behaviour, or investigate further the validity of that belief.

Role play weaves current practice with past experience, providing a praxis for multi-dimensional learning. This, however, is contingent on the learner being in

a state of readiness for such a significant learning event. In his article titled Transpersonal Psychology: Facilitating Transformation in Outdoor Experiential Education, Michael Brown suggests:

Right timing, safety, and an inner guiding principle are also necessary to achieve a comprehensive restructuring of basic patterns within the human psyche. Our clients must be ready and willing to experience transformation (1989, p. 48).

This state of readiness on the part of the learner is consistent with the adult education literature, which I will address in the next chapter.

Reflection of the experience and a context for the role play based on an investigation into power dynamics is what can change an experience from reiteration of the phallocentric practice to a transformative experience. I believe that this is an important point that is connected to my feeling of failure on the day of the fall workshop I described. I entered into the workshop with the agenda of addressing issues of power in addition to facilitating the development of certain interpersonal communication skills and insight. The point of departure, I believe, rests in the absence of negotiation with participants over the agenda of inquiry into power dynamics. This absence of negotiation is even more questionable because I carried the goal of critical inquiry into an established, fairly traditional setting, one which was structured for skill development, not critical inquiry.

In Feminisms and Critical Pedagogy Luke points out:

encouraging critical classroom dialogue and legitimating personal voice *within* the existent structure of schooling and contemporary society and culture assumes that institutionalized interpretive “praxis” will or should somehow enable the dismantling of the contradictions of patriarchal structures and supporting discourses (1992, pp. 36-37).

I was encouraging critical dialogue with an agenda of a transformative learning event. With this agenda I was actually reproducing the traditional classroom structure, and therefore unable to dismantle the contradictions of patriarchal structures. Unaware of my “hidden agenda” of a transformative learning event made my practice counter productive to critical learning. Ellsworth suggests “key assumptions, goals, and pedagogical practices fundamental to the literature on critical pedagogy...are repressive myths that perpetuate relations of domination” (Ellsworth, 1992, p. 91). My feeling of failure on that fine fall day may be in response to my increasing understanding that I was failing my intended goal of interrupting phallogocentric practice by perpetuating the dominant structure of authority between teachers and learners rather than challenging it. In a discussion on authority in the classroom, Gale notes:

Unless radical educationists realize how the personal authority they endorse may impose arbitrary limits, exclusions, losses, burdens, and sacrifices on their students in the classroom, their strong desire to democratize education and their good will to serve their students’ best interests would not alone guarantee a classroom free from ideological and psychological oppression (1996, p. 54).

I am drawn to Gale’s description of what she identifies as the edifying teacher, which I believe describes the dynamics in the learning environment I am investigating. Gale states:

edifying teachers accommodate normal and abnormal discourses in teaching in such a way that the tension between the different, very often conflicting, discourses provides a space, or a context, for students to develop their own discourse. Furthermore, edifying

teachers do not try to evade the tension between the authority of the institution and the autonomy of intellectuals but try to find constructive ways to turn the tension into creative power. Nor do edifying teachers try to avoid their conflicting duties of conserving the dominant culture and discourse as cultural agents on the one hand and problematizing and criticizing them as social agents for democracy on the other hand (p. 5).

I have found that the tension and conflict that emerge in a workshop can become energy for identifying underlying assumptions and oppressive practice. The tension, when directly and supportively articulated, acts as a catalyst to the development of insight. The participants in this research project have identified this tension as an energy that became a catalyst for their own learning and growth.

Summary

In this chapter I identify my professional and personal experiences that have led me to a commitment to finding a methodology that can help me to work towards the prevention of violence. I argue that there is a connection between violence and phallogentric power, and that role play is one possible tool for interrupting phallogentric practice. The danger in using role play for interrupting phallogentric practice is identified, along with the problem of challenging a learner's actions and beliefs while at the same time respecting them.

The connections between role play and experiential education are explored, with emphasis on the need to critically investigate the learning experience.

In the next chapter the question of what constitutes transformation will be addressed, with a focus on the adult education literature. I will use an example of a personal experience to elaborate the relationship between theory and experience.

Chapter 4

Transformative Learning

A question I ask in this research is whether there is a connection between the use of role play and a transformative learning event. In this chapter I define and explore transformative learning. I will do that by describing a significant learning event that I had, one that I believe was transformative, and contrast it with the theoretical framing of perspective transformation as identified by adult education author Jack Mezirow. I will then consider the underlying dynamics that made my experience a transformative one with role play through a discussion of critical reflection, perspective transformation, risk, and tension, which is followed by the chapter summary.

A Transformative Experience

In the process of studying for my undergraduate degree in social work in the early 1980's I was introduced to the concept of power and provided with a framework for understanding how power is manifested individually and socially. I struggled with understanding different theories of power and social change, and questioned my own responsibility within the system. This struggle led me to pursue an introductory course in women's issues which I enjoyed and found challenging. I also felt frustrated by the feeling that I was missing a critical element, one that would direct me to the level of commitment to women's rights that I saw in my peers.

Throughout the semester I did the readings, wrote my papers, participated in class discussion, did my part in a group presentation, and reflected through the process of writing in a journal, all required for the women's studies course. I carried with me a feeling that I just did not 'get it', but I was unable to identify what I was not getting. I felt frustrated by the recognition that there was knowledge which led my friends to an intense commitment towards the women's movement that I was unable to access. I was aware of many of the issues that had been identified as oppressive, but I was not able to access insight into the impact this oppression might have on women. This concern escalated for me through the course, magnified by the experience of roommates and friends challenging what I understood to be feminist thought. I found myself struggling to reconcile two divergent sets of beliefs. This struggle manifested itself in discussions both in class and outside of class regarding the use of gender specific language, particularly in textbooks.

When I pursued the question of gender specific language I was told by my roommates, among others, to stop being so 'radical'. I was referred to as a 'feminist' which was construed to be equally as bad as 'radical.' I found myself being convinced by the argument, believing that I was in all probability being extreme and 'overly sensitive.' I had begun to question my own knowledge, intuition and sense of 'right.' At the same time, I was being challenged to understand the problem differently by my classmates and the instructor whose knowledge and insights I had grown to trust.

I chose to investigate the use of gender specific language further because I truly valued the learning I had received within the class and because I had become so frustrated by the feeling that I was not 'getting it.' During a

discussion in the women's studies class, one of my classmates explained that whenever she encountered gender specific language she employed the technique of substituting 'she' and 'her' for the words 'he' and 'him.' I found this intriguing but also considered it a bit radical and unnecessary, because, I reasoned, we all know that 'he' is inclusive of 'she', so could it really make that much difference? However, I was willing to try it, and because I valued the learning I had done in the class, I decided to try the approach my classmate had described.

I remember the moment well. I was in the student lounge and had a textbook in front of me that was required reading for another class. I began to read it, and each time I came across a gender specific word, in my mind's eye I altered it, seeing 'he' as 'she' and 'him' as 'her.' I continued reading this way for an entire chapter, then another. I entered a state that felt almost like a meditation, and as I continued reading I began to experience first a surging sense of power, and then of liberation. I felt as if the entire room were tilting, and that nothing was as it had been.

It was thrilling to read in this way, so I continued through the book. I have rarely read a text so thoroughly and so quickly! I found that even the meaning of the content of the textbook shifted, becoming more important and more relevant to me. It was at that moment that I understood what I had been missing or what I 'was not getting.' I physically felt the meaning of oppression, developing the understanding that how we talk about the world impacts how we act in the world. I realized that language can restrict the possibilities we see, and it can create possibilities. When I read 'he', I was excluded from the possibilities, and when I learned to read myself in the words, through imagining 'she' instead of

what was written I was no longer excluded from the text. Through this process I gained some insight into the level of control and manipulation which can be perpetuated through an activity construed to be 'normal' and 'sensible' or 'practical.' The impact was so powerful that by the time I finished reading the textbook I felt the sensation of an enormous boot stomping down from above squashing me into the ground each time my gender was omitted from print.

From this experience I learned the danger of assumptions and of doubting another person's experience and understanding. I also learned the difficulty of becoming educated about oppression and power. To this day, almost twenty years later, much of my understanding of what I know and of what I know I do not know springs from that moment.

The cumulation of this significant moment along with many other moments has stayed with me over the years, and I entered into the role of adult educator with the expectation of such experiences. I carry with me the memory of moments following a training session when an individual has said "It's like magic! I've never understood things like this before!", and knowing that it was not necessarily anything the facilitator had said, but rather it was a process the learner had experienced. The facilitator, or teacher, provided the opportunity for this learning by creating a structure and an environment, but did not direct what sense the student made of the learning experience. I think of this process as the 'aha' dynamic, or the "it's magic" factor, it is the light bulb turning on for some, and the metamorphosis for others. This dramatic change significantly alters understanding and has become an expectation I developed for myself as an adult educator.

I assumed that the process of perspective transformation I had begun to understand and value as part of my own learning would be an accessible and desirable goal for most workshop participants. What I found is that the provision of such an experience is elusive. As a result, I have chosen to pursue clearer understanding of this kind of learning. I want to gain insight into how I might provide such an opportunity for others when in the role of adult educator. I find the adult education literature on transformation theory (Brookfield, 1990, Cranton, 1992, Mezirow, 1991, 1994) helpful in describing what I understand this experience to be, and am therefore framing my discussion as this; given that the experience I have described is an example of perspective transformation, what are the key elements, as described by Mezirow, that define it as transformative?

Critical Reflection

The professor responsible for the women's studies course in which I participated held a commitment to the process of change through the establishment of trust and through respecting and valuing each individual's context or perceptual interpretation of their world. She created an environment in which I felt safe enough to be honest about my doubts and the questions I had regarding women's issues. This professor acted as potential change agent by providing the environment for learning that is intimately connected with changing.

This environment for learning was established through an opportunity for exploration and reflection of our understandings and interpretations of women's issues. What I describe as true dialogue took place, with emphasis on the articulation of our experiences and beliefs, as well as on investigation of the

presuppositions behind these experiences and beliefs. Respectful critique of our ideas was an expectation in the class, which set the stage for insight into beliefs and meanings often inconsistent with our values and actions. “While all reflection implies an element of critique, the term *critical reflection* will here be reserved to refer to challenging the validity of *presuppositions* in prior learning” (Mezirow, 1990, p.12). In the example of my own learning, my presuppositions, or what I had acquired as knowledge up to that point, were challenged and in the process of providing the rationale for these presuppositions I began to realize I no longer found them valid. Some of these presuppositions I didn’t even know I held until my statements were scrutinized during discussions. Once I established the existence of a held belief that no longer fit with my goals or values, it was up to me to do something about it, either through rejecting the belief or through further investigation.

Fitting with the environment conducive to this kind of learning, it was expected for each of us to create and rely on our own understandings or meanings. Mezirow notes that “knowledge for the learner does not exist in books or in the experience of the educator. It exists only in the learner’s ability to construe the meaning of an experience in his or her own terms” (1991, p.20). My beliefs, such as the understanding that it does not affect women to be excluded from written work, were challenged by others but it was my responsibility to construe the meaning in my own way. I believe that one reason this experience had such impact on me was that it was my responsibility and my responsibility only to make meaning through the process of critical reflection.

I had begun the process of questioning my own meanings around feminist issues prior to taking the women’s studies course, and this was followed by the

challenges to these meanings in the class. Through the development of critical reflection I began to clearly identify a belief system that no longer made sense to me. I learned to articulate what I understood to be true and then to evaluate the justification for that knowledge. I learned to listen and consider alternative viewpoints and then to make a decision regarding their validity. These are the tools for critical reflection that I developed. Mezirow stated that "Critical reflection addresses the question of the justification for the very premises on which problems are posed or defined in the first place" (Mezirow, 1990, p. 12). Not only could I no longer justify the beliefs I held regarding the use of gender specific language, I began to identify patterns to these inconsistencies all around me.

Mezirow noted that "As adult learners become aware of how they have uncritically internalized distorting ideologies, they will often also come to see how social institutions and practices legitimate and sustain these dependency-producing belief systems and will be motivated to take collective action to change them" (1984, p. 120). This, I believe, reflects the experience I had with my women studies class. I had internalized the belief that language was 'only words', and that 'we all knew' that women and girls were included 'automatically' in male language. When at the time I discussed this with the people I knew, people I lived with, friends and family members, I received the message that 'everyone' knew that in a textbook 'he' included 'she', and that the word 'mankind' also included women, so 'what was the big deal about anyway'?

I had believed without questioning that gendered language was 'the way it was' until that belief was challenged. It was when I physically felt the impact on what I knew of my experience of gender specific language that in the concrete

world it did not speak to women's experiences that I began to gain some understanding and make my own meaning of how social institutions and practices legitimate an oppressive belief system. I gained an understanding of the impact of phallogentric language on a woman (myself) through the experience of reading literature inclusively. I also gained insight into the pressure to conform to social beliefs, becoming identified at the time as 'problematic' and labeled 'radical' or 'feminist.' I began to see and physically feel how social institutions and practices legitimate and sustain these dependency-producing belief systems. Did I become motivated to take collective action to change these dependency-producing belief systems? Yes. The motivation I developed at the time has sustained me over the years since I took the course, both in my professional and my personal life.

I continued to question what I now understand to be phallogentric discourse, and this practice has become integrated into my daily life. As noted by Mezirow:

We all acquire the meaning-perspective prescribed by our culture, but we have the potentiality of becoming critically aware of our perspectives and of changing them. By doing so, we move from an uncritical organic relationship with society to a self-consciously contractual relationship. (1977, p. 163)

As I became more critically aware of my perspectives, I began to change them, entering into and maintaining a self-consciously contractual relationship with society.

Perspective Transformation

The process of finding ways to negotiate meanings and purposes rather than passively accepting the social realities defined by others can be a struggle that creates tension. This tension is the result of beliefs that are inconsistent with our

actions, and my experience was not without this tension or conflict. Mezirow defines meaning perspectives as “sets of habitual expectation...(that) constitute codes that govern the activities of perceiving, comprehending, and remembering” (p.4) and meaning schemes as “made up of specific knowledge, beliefs, value judgments, and feelings that constitute interpretations of experience” (p.5). Through the transformation of my meaning schemes and perspectives, I chose not to accept those meanings provided me but rather to investigate the beliefs underlying my actions, or presuppositions (p.5) and those of the people around me. Often the result of this investigation was to choose not to accept the meanings I had held up to that point in time. This was perceived by the people around me as a move towards a radical lifestyle or as a rejection of their own perspectives. Each time I changed or I made a change I took a risk. This risk included the risk of loss and the resulting pain of that loss. The gain for me, however, was a different view of myself in the world and a level of commitment to social action that I had hitherto only been able to admire in my peers. I will discuss in more depth the risk involved, the role of tension in transformation, and some questions around transformation and social action.

Risk

A shift in perspective can be a dangerous transition emotionally and possibly even physically. In the example I provide in this chapter, I was criticised for the visible shift I made in my understanding at a time when I was vulnerable and working to more clearly understand this new meaning perspective. I was able to identify pressure on me to conform and as a result I maintained a sense of perspective and solidity, but along with transformation came the decision to

leave relationships which no longer fit for me. This is one of the dangers of transformation because a new meaning perspective inherently requires introspection and strength to change. During a time of change or transition a person is in a greater need for familiar support to aid in their change, yet the very process of changing one's personal constructs may automatically weaken those relationships that had previously been supportive.

I was moving from a pattern of predictability and certainty to one of unpredictability and uncertainty and needed to surround myself with the support that was no longer available because I was questioning the belief pattern of my usual support persons. This created some degree of danger for me, and it was risky for me to complete the process. The people around me at the time held gendered expectations of themselves and others. When I began challenging their expectations along with mine I felt myself to be in emotional danger and also felt the possibility of physical danger. Mezirow addresses this possibility of risk in perspective transformation, but in my opinion he does not give it the attention it deserves. Changing one's behaviour may well change the response from others, and the reactions to these changes are not always predictable.

In his discussion on the ethical considerations of an educator encouraging a learner to challenge and transform meaning perspectives, Mezirow suggests that there may be the possibility of danger for the learner, but that this is not an argument against such education. Mezirow notes:

The educator may anticipate overwhelming difficulties and dangers that a learner will face if he or she is encouraged to become critically reflective in the process of transformative learning and moves to take action on these insights. This ... is no argument against emancipatory education. The learner should not be denied a full understanding of his or her situation, feelings, and resources, even if it is impractical to act upon that understanding (1991,p.203).

There is potential danger in an experience of changing one's meaning perspectives which should be addressed by any adult educator working towards transformative learning experiences for the participants. I agree with Mezirow that this is not a reason to avoid challenging a learner's meaning perspectives when one is in the role of adult educator, because unquestioning acceptance of meaning perspectives may be equally or even more dangerous for someone. A balance should be found whereby educators providing the opportunity for perspective transformation are provided an awareness of what kind of impact transformation can have on an individual and how to prepare and support the learners through that process.

Brookfield discusses the distress which can occur as a result of what he refers to as 'significant learning', noting:

In critical-thinking episodes or educational experiences described as "transformative," there are times when what was thought to be fixed, true, and permanent is found to be relative, shifting, and culturally specific... This process is not entirely joyful, in fact it is often distressing and disturbing (1990, p. 46)

Brookfield describes this process as grieving for lost certainties, which I believe is a fitting description of my experience. I was grieving for lost certainties and for the loss of the emotional reward of being included and applauded by my friends and family for holding the 'correct' beliefs, yet at the same time I felt infused with an insight and awareness I had not experienced before. This duality created a high degree of tension for me, the tension which provided the danger but which also provided the opportunity for change.

Tension

The tension I experienced, resulting from my awareness of inconsistent meaning perspectives, compelled me to make a decision. I needed to choose either to move away from this learning and reject it, or to take a risk and trust in the opportunity for growth. I chose to take a risk and trust in the opportunity for growth, and as a result I experienced a successful shifting from the process of reflection into critical reflection. This resulted in an experience of transformation.

It was an experience, visually imaging my gender while reading a textbook, that acted as a catalyst for my learning or transformation. Because adults have such life experience to draw on, and because it is the focusing on their personal constructs that is the basis for perspective transformation, it is logical that an educator rely on exercises that draw on the experience of the learners, which role play does. Using the learner's experience serves to draw the person in intellectually, emotionally, physically and psychologically, which increases risk but also possibility for growth.

The tension provides a pivotal point in the process of critical reflection, and I believe the tension is something I have been hoping to provide learners when in the role of educator. The tension is created by moving from the known into the unknown, by taking a risk or facing a challenge and meeting it. This is what I believe caused the sense of exhilaration for me when reading the textbook the way I did. I was risking learning that what I had known and what people I cared for knew might prove to no longer be a valid belief for me. At the same time, I allowed myself to be vulnerable and was rewarded with some exciting learning. I had a great deal invested in the experience, and I have come to believe that the

more the person has invested in the learning process the greater the possibility for learning. It was the very point of tension which created the opportunity for transformation. And it was the experience of transformation that provided me with the passion and commitment to work for social change.

Mezirow stated that "Transformation theory - and adult educators - can promise only to help in the first step of political change, emancipatory education that leads to personal transformation, and to share the belief that viable strategies for public change will evolve out of this" (1991, p. 210). The responsibility of the educator is to provide the learners exposure to a variety of constructs, and it is the learner's responsibility to make their own meaning and to choose how to act on that knowledge. Regarding social action, Friere states:

To surmount the situation of oppression, people must first critically recognize its causes, so that through transforming action they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity. But the struggle to be more fully human has already begun in the authentic struggle to transform the situation. (1995, p. 29)

This kind of learning, insights into our meaning-making and perception can provide insight into the opportunity to choose the constructs by which to understand our experiences of the world. Such learning can facilitate an awareness of how power is played out in our dialogue and actions. The learning, reflecting and experiencing of perception can lead to awareness of choice in our perceptions. Once awareness of choice in perception is experienced, an awareness of choice in action, behavior and/or dialogue is then available as an insight. I have experienced change as a result of this kind of learning, I have received feedback from participants that they have experienced this kind of learning, and participants in this research identified personal change as a result

of this kind of learning. This is a recognition of two different levels of insight that result from a transformative learning event. The first level of insight is the new understanding or perception itself. The second level of insight is the awareness that there are different perceptions available to us. In understanding that we have choices in perception, we can recognize that we have choice in our actions.

Summary

Experiences I have had led me to question the experience of transformation as a learning goal. In this chapter I chose Mezirow's theory of transformation as a framework for identifying the dynamics that create the possibility for transformation. A transformative experience I had was used as the basis for an examination of the key elements leading towards transformation. In this examination of those key elements I identified the following: I was in an environment that provided me with the opportunity for learning and for change, and I used this opportunity in a manner consistent with my own comfort level through to a point of conflict and tension. At this point I chose to negotiate the challenge and risk and entered the unknown, rather than reject the new meanings I had gained and return to the perspective I had started with. With this new perspective, I made changes both in my personal life and my professional life, choosing to live as consistently as possible with this new perspective. I continue to challenge myself through reflecting critically on the understandings and the meaning I make of my world, and I continue to adjust my actions accordingly.

These are the elements of transformation; a state of readiness, learning to question meaning schemes through critical reflection, developing a new meaning scheme, and acting on it. The experience I had was a transformative one. Transformation can be a big moment or a small moment, but it is always that moment when meaning shifts and a new dimension of understanding opens up.

Chapter 5

Methodology

The research methodology described in this chapter is a series of three individual audio-taped interviews with five participants. These interviews are interspersed with two communication skills based workshops with the interview questions and discussion largely based on the research participant's experiences in the workshops. These workshops, in which role play was used, were facilitated by myself, the researcher. An audio-taped group interview was also facilitated by me following the third interview. This chapter includes discussion of the overall structure of the research, site selection, participants, interview process, journalling, confidentiality, workshops, analysis, and a summary.

Overall Structure of Research

The research took place in the context of the Residence office of a mid-sized university in Ontario. Once permission was granted from the director of the department to proceed with the research, support was requested and received from the educational coordinator to invite volunteers from the student staff population. This population included Residence Life dons, peer educators and coordinators. A bulletin was posted within the residences (Appendix 1) inviting up to six volunteers for participatory research. It was explained in this bulletin that research participants would be expected to attend two four-hour workshops on interpersonal communication skills, three one-hour interviews and a two-

hour group discussion/interview on the findings. It was also explained that research participants would be expected to keep a journal of their experience.

Five student-staff volunteered for the study and an interview was scheduled for each participant to sign a consent form (Appendix 2) and begin the research process. The consent form identified the confidential nature of the research, the structure of the research process and the right of the participant to withdraw participation without repercussion at any time. A date was also identified for the completion of the research process.

Site Selection

The location in which I had been most recently involved as an educator was a University Residence Life Department where I had been involved over the past four years both as a staff and as an educational consultant. This location was chosen as the research site because it was accessible, because it was familiar to me and I was known to the people in the department, and because a measure of trust had already been established with some of the student population. As Kirby and McKenna suggest, "...the more familiar with the experience the researcher is, the better potential understanding of it she/he will have" (Kirby & McKenna, p. 43). It was my aim to capitalize on this prior relationship.

Participants

There were five participants in this study, three women and two men. The educational background of the research participants was varied, from third year undergraduate student to graduate student. The status or participant position

within the residence life system of these five people varied as well, with representation from a volunteer peer program, first year and second year dons, and coordinator. None of the participants was in a position of authority over any other participant.

My relationship with participants had previously been limited to the role of educator who was part of their training as an outside consultant, and I made it clear to each participant that I had no influence on their position other than that of communication skills educator and researcher.

Each participant, as agreed for purposes of confidentiality, chose a pseudonym for reference purposes in this research. I will identify each participant briefly by pseudonym in this chapter to provide a sense of who the participants are. A more descriptive introduction is provided in the chapter on findings. Participants will only be referred to by their pseudonym throughout this written work in order to maintain confidentiality. Their alias names are Hannah, Chris, Lucy, Katherine and Mickey. Also to maintain confidentiality, any identifying information such as specific position within their work environment or residence building they are situated in is not identified. All five participants had previous experience with role play. They had each been involved in some way with a workshop I had facilitated in the past. Their participation in this research was based on the understanding that I would be the facilitator, and in return for their participation they received additional interpersonal communication skills training. I am aware that the fact that the participants volunteered to participate in the research in order to participate in role play as a learning tool may indicate bias on their part regarding role play.

However, all research that depends on volunteer participants is subject to the influence of self selection.

Interview Process

There were three individual interviews with research participants, followed by a group interview at the conclusion of the data collection period. The first interview was followed by the first workshop, the second interview was followed by the second workshop, and the third interview followed the second workshop. At the conclusion of the third interviews, a the final group interview was done, noted above.

Prior to the first workshop the first interview with each participant was structured to discuss the research process and assure confidentiality. Upon completion of this discussion participants signed the consent form, and the first one-half hour tape recording of the participant's experience of role play was done. Initial interviews were done with the goal of establishing a starting point and point of reference regarding role playing as well as serving to establish the relationship and to build trust between the participants and myself as the researcher. Preliminary interviews also served to structure the interviewing and recording procedures, to develop interviewing protocol and begin the process of determining the questions. The second interview was a discussion of the first workshop and the research participant's experience and thoughts of role play, both within the workshop and in general. This format was followed throughout the research process.

Interviews took place at a mutually agreed upon location, always on university grounds. Initially the interviews, which were taped, were done in an office on campus. Once comfort and routine had been established, participants chose a location within their residence building. Taped interviews were transcribed throughout the data collection period and questions reformulated accordingly.

Prior to the first interview, research questions were developed to begin to identify the role play experience from the participant's viewpoint (Appendix 3), and were either open-ended or focused on clarification of points previously made by the participant. Following some open ended discussion intended to set the participants at ease, the questions asked in the initial interview focused on the amount of role play experience the participant had, what the role play experience was like for them, and what they felt was the purpose of role play as well as the risks, if any, of role play. Participants were also asked what their preferences were in determining the scripting of role plays. At the end of the first interview participants were asked what their learning goals were for the workshops, and if there was anything else they wanted to add either about role play or the research process. The second and third interview, as well as the group interview, did not have structured questions. These interviews followed a discussion format, with themes and questions introduced by me as they emerged from transcriptions, interviews with the other participants, and the literature.

The research goal throughout the interview process was to draw from each participant their description of their experience of role playing in as much depth and detail as possible. There was one interview which occurred with each participant following each workshop. These interviews, all taped, were not

structured and the questioning was open-ended, intended to clarify the experience and the meaning of the experience for each participant. The goal of the open-ended interviews was to reach a point of saturation which “occurs when added information does not reveal new understanding about relations or abstractions” (Kirby & McKenna, 1989, p. 138).

The final interview, also taped, was a group discussion over brunch, which I provided. There was a general discussion by the five participants as well as me on role play, the meaning and possible impact of using role play, and the research process. The goal of this final group interview was to maintain a participatory style of research, to debrief the research experience, and to provide closure to the entire research process.

Data was collected throughout the study. Every interview was tape recorded and transcribed as soon as possible after the interview ended. Notes were kept by myself following interviews, the workshops and transcriptions.

Journalling

A journal was provided to each participant and they were asked to use them throughout the research process to record experiences, thoughts and feelings regarding role play and/or the research experience. The journals were used as an additional data source. I kept a journal as well, to record my thoughts, feelings and assumptions or conceptual baggage. As Kirby and McKenna explain, “Conceptual baggage is a record of your thoughts and ideas about the research question at the beginning and throughout the research process. It is a process by which you can state your personal assumptions about the topic and

the research process” (1989, p. 32). Keeping a journal was designed to bring myself more genuinely to the position of participant-observer.

Confidentiality

Participant confidentiality received a great deal of attention, particularly given the nature of a residence system. Participants played a visible role as student-staff within the residence life system at that time and confidentiality was maximized both to maintain the ethical nature of the research as well as to maximize the level of trust with each participant. Pseudonyms were chosen by each participant, and the year of data collection is not identified in the written work.

Any concerns regarding confidentiality or any other issue were discussed with participants throughout the research process in order to accommodate their needs. Once recruitment of participants was initiated no person other than myself and each participant was aware of participant involvement in the study.

Workshops

The two workshops took place in a comfortable location where much of the residence life small group training takes place. Each workshop was four hours in length which I facilitated in the capacity of educator and participant researcher. The structure of each workshop was consistent with the length of time, style and format that had previously been used for workshops during student-staff training.

Each workshop was designed to augment communication skills introduced in the don and peer educator training earlier in the year. Workshops were structured by myself as negotiated with participants. Traditional role playing structures were utilized, such as dyads and whole group role plays, with some role plays scripted by the group and some scripted individually. Basic skill and theoretical knowledge was offered by myself along with group members as negotiated. The workshops were not taped or documented, and will not be included as part of the data other than as a point of reference or discussion with participants. Workshop topic, as had been advertised when seeking participants, was on interpersonal communication skills.

Reliability was enhanced by adding data from the journals provided by the participants. My perceptions and interpretations as the researcher were checked through participant journal entries and discussion, both individual and group. Participants were encouraged to review the data obtained to confirm or change any of the information they provided, and one research participant took up this offer during one interview. Transcriptions of interviews were made available to participants whenever they wished and a summary of each step in the research process was offered to research participants during interviews as my findings evolved. Participants chose not to focus on the findings or written results but they consistently expressed interest in ideas that I presented during the interviews, resulting in highly interactive interviews. By including the participant in the research process this approach maintained consistency with the research methodology .

The opportunity of the researcher participating as workshop facilitator served to enhance insight into the process, the language, and the setting. There was

opportunity to develop an added level of trust with the participants which I believe was apparent through the depth of personal discussion and insight provided. I also believe that a stronger sense of collaboration resulted from my familiarity with the Residence Life environment. A minimum of time was spent describing the system and experiences within the system because familiarity with the Residence Life environment was common to all participants, including myself. The fact that I have lived within the Residence Life system enhanced data collection and interpretation because of the level of insight inherently available to myself as the researcher. The familiarity I had with the system in which they lived facilitated the establishment of trust in myself as researcher.

Analysis

Methods of organizing, coding and retrieving data were developed during the transcription. The circular process of sifting through the data looking for patterns and themes was followed, categorizing the data, sifting again, sorting, questioning, coding, recategorizing, and so on. The process of reflecting through the use of a journal was used consistently, particularly during the transcription process when thoughts and responses surfaced while I listened to and typed the interviews.

During transcription I became more aware of my assumptions and biases. Also I was able to identify language and ideas that I introduced to research participants. Through close attention, I was able to identify when some of this language and ideas were expanded on and possibly adopted by the participants. As I analyzed the data and accessed the literature, connections emerged which I hadn't expected and, as they did so, these were incorporated into the written

work. These connections and research into the theory behind the emerging data became the results, consistent with an emergent design. It is the search for clarification of my assumptions and biases which have formed a bulk of this work.

Summary

In order to acknowledge and address my own biases and assumptions, I explored the personal experiences that led me to my research topic. As noted by Kirby & McKenna, "...creators of new information must outline why a particular method has been chosen to study the particular research question ...this is the process by which the researcher accounts for her/his personal experience that led to the research undertaking" (1989, p. 44). In addition to journalling, I wrote the role play script, which identified many of my assumptions and biases that I would not have otherwise accessed. Finally, when transcribing the interviews I identified points that I didn't realize I had made. These methods I used for accessing my assumptions and biases.

The tricky problem of finding a methodology that will challenge rather than reproduce the dominant ideology, as Brookes, Olsson, and Kirby & McKenna describe, is a problem with which I struggled. A feminist methodology addresses this problem as it offers the possibility of advancing insight and awareness of issues of power. I chose a methodology that offers the opportunity to educate, as much as possible without replication, on the violation that occurs as the result of an imbalance of power.

Feminist research methodology addresses issues of power, and although I have chosen not to look at issues of gender within the research, this research

arises out of my general concern with the underlying structures of power. Feminist research also offers the opportunity to move from the personal and experiential to the structural level which is a shift that role play facilitates. Lewis suggests that “what sets feminism apart from other forms of transformative practice is its explicit focus on generating suggestions for practice based on experience” (1993, p. 5). Role playing draws on the experience of the participant and can provide suggestions for practice. It is with this political purpose in mind that I chose a feminist methodology.

To maintain the integrity of my research topic I took a critical approach to the research topic as well as the methodology and therefore chose to engage in the research as participant-observer. In so doing I listened to and entered into dialogue with participants about the research throughout the data collection period.

I have a commitment to interrupting hegemonic practice and I therefore need to address the issue of power and its connection with the methodology of this research in order to maintain integrity of research topic with research methodology. This assumption is noted by Brookes in her book Feminist Pedagogy, where she states that “knowledge production is political activity developed to reproduce male academic forms” (1992, p. 59). If my pedagogy is premised on the commitment to interrupt phallogentric practice, it follows that my methodology adheres to the same principles. As noted by Kirby and McKenna:

It is essential to state your assumptions and thereby contextualize yourself in the research. By doing this, you change the traditional power dynamics or the hierarchy which tends to exist between the researcher and those who are being researched (1989, p. 53).

I maintain the integrity of the research topic by choosing a methodology that offers possibilities for changing the traditional power dynamics which tend to exist between the researcher and those who are being researched.

The focus on listening to understand along with engaging in dialogue to create and challenge meanings is a goal I have when teaching interpersonal communication skills. This focus has become the goal of my methodology, and included in my thesis is dialogue both from participants and from myself. The dialogue I use has informed and focused me in my research, and as such I chose to include it. Kirby & McKenna note:

As researchers concerned about social change, it is essential that we consider how certain methods and ways of thinking may not only put limits on our questions or where we look for answers, but also may contribute to organizing the research process so that it remains a specialized activity rather than a resource available to all (1989, p. 64).

I did not structure the research data and process, nor did the data and process structure me. My methodology was interactive in that at each stage of the process I worked to integrate and make sense of new data which would then direct me towards the next stage. The findings, included in the next two chapters, are the results of this process.

Chapter 6

Findings on the Implementation of Role Play

This chapter is the first of two chapters that describe the research findings. Chapter 6 is a summary of the findings regarding how role play is used, organized, and implemented. Chapter 7 contains a summary of findings regarding the learning that resulted from using role play, and the risks and the dangers of role play.

The quotes from participants used in these chapters were transcribed from the interviews, and the categories identified in the chapters are the categories that emerged from the sifting of the data. The categories in Chapter 6 are role play and its structure; advantages to using role play; the influence of trust and risk when using role play; and role play and the function of tension for learners. In chapter 7 the categories are participant learning from role play; and dangers and risks of using role play. By way of introduction, each participant will be described briefly in order to provide a sense of who they are. As explained in the methodology chapter, each participant will be referred to by their pseudonym to maintain confidentiality.

Participants

Hannah is a woman in her mid-twenties who has worked in different positions in the residence life system. She has a background in education and women's studies and has worked internationally. Chris is a man in his early twenties who was completing some post degree studies and considering

graduate school possibly in psychology or social work. He had significant experience working with people in crisis, paid and volunteer, both with the residence life system and outside of it. Lucy is a woman in her early twenties who is part way through a bachelors degree. Lucy has a background in drama, and her community work includes addressing violence towards women. Katherine is the youngest in the group, in her late teens, finishing a degree in science and considering medical school. Katherine had experience as a peer counselor prior to her student-staff position at the university. Finally, Mickey is a man in his mid-twenties who was part way through a graduate program. His degree combined business and psychology, and he had a particular interest in supporting people in the world of business.

Role play and its structure

Initially four of the five research participants identified a preference for unscripted role plays over scripted role plays, but after two workshops and experiencing unscripted role plays the fifth research participant changed her views, noting “I really saw how even in role play your own experience and your own personality really influences the character you take on. You bring all your past history to that character.” This participant, Katherine, explained that as a result of this research experience she felt it was less threatening to have role plays in which she plays herself in a situation than to have a prescribed role play. In initial comments she said it would be less threatening to have prescribed role plays to use, and I had agreed to bring scripts so she would have the choice to use them.

Research participants shared a variety of opinions regarding their preferences of role playing in dyads, in triads, or in a whole group format. All five participants stated that debriefing after the role play was necessary, both for their learning and for their emotional safety. Three of the participants discussed the importance to them of having an opportunity to spend time getting into character by considering the situation of the person and how that person might be feeling. Four of the research participants stated strongly that they preferred to have plenty of time to do the role play without interruption.

Two participants expressed a comfort or willingness to do a role play in front of a group, noting that the opportunity to learn was enhanced by the risks of performing publicly. Two other participants noted that beginning in the dyads with every group using the same scenario, then moving to the large group was very effective for them. They felt more comfortable with this format because the intimate nature of the dyads moved them into the experience quickly and comfortably, and then moving to the larger group offered more opportunity to learn from what the other group dyads had experienced.

Every participant identified greater comfort volunteering in front of the group of five other participants once they had already established the role play and a comfort with another participant, and knowing others in the large group had gone through a similar situation. Finally, one participant clearly preferred the small group for his own participation, yet he suggested that even though he would not volunteer before the whole group, he enjoyed observing and felt he learned a great deal from his observation and feedback. The establishment of trust was considered paramount to the comfort level of every participant to perform more publicly.

Regarding the scripting of the role plays, other than the initial resistance to unscripted role plays by Katherine, the research participants consistently expressed a preference for unscripted role plays. Hannah explained:

there's that kind of role play where you're walking into a situation where actors are portraying (a scenario) and then there's the role play in which you and I both get instructions and we start a dialogue together, which is less stressful.

Chris stated a preference for role plays that evolve out of the person's experience, but he also noted "Prescribed role plays can be good, as long as there's quite a bit of background surrounding them so that people know how to put themselves into the characters." Mickey stated:

the best role play I've ever done in all of the workshops we've had together is the one I had with Chris the other day, and it was me talking about my experiences and my roles, and Chris also talking about his experiences and his roles. And it's because we were playing ourselves.

The amount of scripting also brings up the question of taking on different characters or roles. Lucy presented her understanding of the characters in the role playing we did by explaining:

I know what the experience is like being a don, but if I'm doing it as a student, if I'm doing a role play with you and you're the don and I'm the student, even playing the student, I'm playing the student as I would behave as a student. Even if I was playing an elderly widow, not as a defined character with specific traits that would need to be explored and background that has to be explored, I would do it from my own perspective of what that is. But when we're actually doing role plays where I play a don then I am a don, and I know what that's like, and obviously I'm looking at it from a normative perspective. It almost seems not like a role play, but it's more like a situation play, because we're creating a fictitious situation as opposed to a fictitious character.

Lucy is explaining that the scripting and the role are both misleading regarding the role play in which she has been involved. The role plays she has been involved in are situation play, because it is the participant or performer playing themselves in a situation and with a function or role in that situation.

Hannah explained that the most effective role plays she's been involved in had a context set up beforehand with a discussion of the goals and objectives of the role play. She explained that she needed to have the time framed and to have an idea of how the workshop, including the role play, will unfold. She feels it is important for guidelines to be established about how people are to interact, such as confidentiality and interruptions. Mickey suggested it is important that "the role play is done in front of people who respect one another...(with) an open environment and also personal relevance."

Hannah also discussed the importance of debriefing, stating "there's nothing worse than not having enough time for people to talk about their feelings that have been generated during the role play." The importance of debriefing was noted by every other research participant as well. Mickey explained:

I think the scenario that you put the person in gets them into that role, but it's the debriefing, the thinking and the journalling afterwards that sort of pulls you underneath. Like leaves, they are shallow on top when you describe the role. Talk to the individual and say what does this mean to me as an individual, not what this meant to me as a doctor or a don. What has this meant and what did I learn.

Finally it was noted by the participants, particularly Katherine, that the group process impacted on the learning experience for her, and that each time the group met she felt more comfortable and more able to trust, therefore more willing to take chances and try new things.

Advantages to using role play

The participants identified eight advantages to using role play. I will present each of these in turn. The first advantage to using role play identified by participants is that it is a *good opportunity to practice skill development*, that role play makes a difference by allowing one to practice a skill rather than to just read or talk about it. Chris identified this when he said:

I find it (role playing) very good, because it's one thing to talk about something like active listening skills, but it's another thing to try to implement it, and you need to be trying it yourself. So I find it's a very good practical use of skills...it's a skill like riding a bike, you need to try it and hear things, say things that don't sound right, and catch yourself and then not use them when you're actually in real conversations.

Lucy suggested that role play would be useful for developing the skill of conflict mediation, because following a sequence of steps would be more familiar as a result of the practice. She stated, "You're instinctively neutral, even when you don't mean to be," referring to the effect of changing a patterned response because of a skill that has been practiced.

The second advantage to role play, which was identified by all participants, was that it *can place someone as close as possible to a situation without there being any real danger*, either to the participant or anyone else. Chris went on to say:

I think that what makes it effective is just the fact that it is as close as you can get to dealing with someone that maybe really is experiencing some difficulty, or maybe a situation where there is conflict going on, that it's close to a real situation.

Other comments reflected a positive view of role playing by comments like Mickey's when he suggested that "in a training situation or in an educational

situation, it is something I can get involved in, so I find it very positive.” Mickey continued later to say:

I think in a lot of situations it simulates as close as possible to real life as you can get without putting someone in that situation, and I think the closer you can get to that the more applicable you will find the teaching. They’ll have a basis from which to apply any theory you’re talking about so I think it just makes people interact with the training.

This example leads to the third advantage to using role play, one that the participants identified by providing examples. Participants noted that role play was useful to them by *placing them in a situation to prepare them for it*, but without the danger of the situation. Hannah noted that the best example she could think of was in a suicide intervention program, because the learning had a lot of impact on her and the issue was immediately relevant. Katherine stated that “role playing really helps me understand just where other people are coming from, It also helps with my communication skills.” She later identified a fourth advantage to using role play when she noted: “I think it is *very useful at helping people understand a different point of view* that may be difficult to understand for that person, given that they haven’t been in that situation.”

The fifth advantage to using role play is that it is useful *under circumstances where people feel anxious about the situation they’re going into, or very emotional issues*. The learner is not faced with the situation for the very first time if it does happen to them, because they had an opportunity to prepare themselves for that situation.

An example of role playing a situation about which a participant felt anxious was provided by Hannah, who described a workshop on suicide intervention she

attended. Hannah said that there was much anxiety on her part about saying to someone 'are you thinking about killing yourself?', and explained that "to actually say those words out loud...that really helped enormously." Hannah went on to discuss how helpful it had been to deal with the emotions she experienced, which included very real fears of triggering a suicide attempt. She explained that the role play was an opportune time to get more information as well as practice dealing with someone who was suicidal.

Another use for role playing, the sixth, was identified by the research participants as an *opportunity for exploration*. This included exploration of ways of responding in a situation, exploration of the participant's biases, exploration of the many different meanings possible from what is said and what is understood, and exploration of the participant's emotional reactions to the situation. Lucy noted:

I think it's an excellent education technique, because it allows people to recognize where they are going to falter in a real situation, where their personal biases are going to come through. So that when they are actually dealing with a communication situation that is real, or facilitating something that is real, they've already experienced it. But they for sure know what it is that they're likely to be biased towards so that they can prevent conflict then.

Regarding exploration of different ways of responding in a situation, Mickey stated:

I view role play as a very pragmatic approach to learning...putting people in a situation as close as possible but maintaining sort of an artificial training context, and it's also an exploratory process too. We don't necessarily do it for the right answer, more sort of how do we approach a solution, how can we help this person in this situation, and then maybe five people in the room with all five different responses have five different approaches, and it just gives you a medium to do that in.

This describes an exploration of a solution or a way of responding to a situation as well as an exploration of other approaches. Mickey went on to explain,

It (role play) is a method that allows you to intervene and say 'stop, does anyone have any ideas here, can I get some help', so you get the benefit of five people potentially... This might lead to an appreciation that there is no one solution. It gives everyone a chance to present their ideas, especially role plays built around communication where there is no finite answer to anything really. I think it's just an exploratory method.

The exploration of different ways of responding to a situation was explained this way by Katherine when she stated:

A lot of the same information has many different faces, and you can explore it many different ways. And, based on the experience, I think especially if you're doing a role play and you're involved in an interaction, it always takes a slightly different route. And it always allows you to look at a different facet, a different side of really the same question or the same type of information.

Chris also described this opportunity for exploration of internal responses through role play, stating:

role play lets you look at yourself emotionally to say 'well, how was I feeling at the time', and it's really only something that, like, you need to be in the situation and be involved in the role to have those emotions come out. If I read about it, or if I hear somebody do it on the stage I don't have the same emotional attachment that I would if I was actually engaged in the role play.

The seventh advantage to using role play, which was identified by three of the participants, is that it *accesses a variety of learning styles*. Mickey suggested:

for a lot of adult learners, they've come up through an educational system that hasn't really used effectively some techniques to get people involved in learning. I think it (role play) adds variety to an educational setting. I think that role playing just gets people interested.

Chris also commented on the advantage of role playing meeting different learning styles, stating:

I think role playing takes advantage of all the different learning styles. Like, it's not only for people who are visual learners or auditory learners, but it's also experiential and it's also tactile as well, like you're moving, you're not just sitting still. So it's very holistic. It's much richer and it's all encompassing, and I don't believe that anyone is a type of learner, so by covering all the bases it increases the amount that you might retain.

The descriptions of the advantages to role play were diverse but also consistent, as most of the participants described each of the above advantages at some point during the research process. Mickey identified a final advantage to role play, the eighth, when he suggested that role play *can place someone in the position of having their assumptions challenged*. He understood this to be an advantage to using role play, but he also understood that this could lead to danger in using role play. Mickey stated:

I think helping someone shift their approach to thinking, their culture or whatever you want to call it, I mean they can challenge their assumptions about things. So while one side challenges their previous assumptions and what they would have done in this situation which I think in a learning context is great, but it becomes dangerous if it becomes dogmatic, if it becomes 'This is the only way you can approach the situation.'

Trust and risk when using role play

Trust was addressed by each participant, and was also discussed at length during the final group interview. The element of trust appeared to override other issues, such as facilitator effectiveness, willingness to take risks and level of personal experience drawn from during role play.

Katherine explained that she felt greater trust in the group when other group members took risks when role playing in the group. When asked whether she would be willing to volunteer and take a risk in front of the group once others had taken a risk, Katherine responded:

I think part of it is the vulnerability involved and the risk involved, and seeing someone else take that risk makes me feel more comfortable being able to take that risk.

Other participants' willingness to take risks acts as a catalyst for Katherine to take risks. She continued by saying:

the risk I think is... having criticized my way of dealing with people, dealing with problems, dealing with someone who is hurting, that can be quite a private and, maybe not private as much as personal issue, and fear of being inadequate in that area perhaps and having that criticized.

Katherine was concerned about exposure of a weakness on her part in the skills which are being investigated. Some participants have different skills than others and it is certainly possible that they will be judged accordingly. This fear can be transformed to trust in certain environments, as Katherine continued to say:

having other people willing to take risk shows that they feel there is trust, and knowing that they feel trust, that they trust you, for myself really helps me in turn trust them. I think for me that's a big part of it."

It is the evidence of the other participants trusting that they won't be judged that makes it possible for this participant to feel that she can trust as well.

The question of familiarity with others is one that responds to the level of trust and therefore risk taking within a group, as noted by Katherine. In

response to the question 'what is the worst thing that could happen', she explained

I suppose it depends on the group you were working with and how well you know them. And the group where you knew people very well and you interact with them on a regular basis, a daily basis, you may feel less risk, you may trust more. But in some ways, if things go wrong the risk is greater, because you're dealing with these people all the time. And a group like the one we're working with, I suppose the risks involved, the worst thing that could happen would probably be for myself a feeling of inadequacy.

Mickey addressed the question of risk in a manner similar to Katherine, stating: "I think the element that is still always at stake within a role play is personal competency." Lucy describes one of the role plays she did during the research that exemplifies this risk. She noted that, regarding the role play, "I was really disappointed in the way I handled the role play." I believe Lucy was more critical of her performance because it was me who was role playing with her. I didn't question her on this, so I need to state clearly that this is speculation. In every other role play Lucy described herself as having performed well, regardless of whether the role play was unobserved, in a dyad, or played in front of the entire group, myself included. Lucy did not consider this experience as a risk in the same way that she experienced another role play, in another context, which will be described in length.

Lucy was involved in a large performance, created by upper year students as an educational experience for first year students. The following is Lucy's description of the experience, in response to the question of what she felt might be the greatest risk in using role play:

I did a scene that I was to write myself and I did some research where I was someone who was just sexually assaulted. Now, I've

never been sexually assaulted, and so I had no idea how somebody would feel exactly after the person had left, they had just been sexually assaulted. And I had to do a little bit of research to try to find out how that character would feel. And that was kind of scary, because I put a combination of how I think I would feel and the investigative stuff that I did as to how someone does react in that situation. And I think I take the generalizations of how women in that, like University women at that age who have been assaulted by an acquaintance have behaved in combination with who I am, and that's what I portrayed. And that's the character I created. And in general I think that's probably what would happen, so I was able to look at myself and say 'hey, if I'm ever assaulted this is probably how I'm going to behave.' And there's a risk in that. Whereas if someone had handed me a script and said 'okay, this character has been assaulted, this is how they're going to behave, this is their past history, this is how they feel', but for me it was create a character who's been assaulted, and I'm like 'whoa'. So I had to put me and the generalization together which probably is what would happen. It's a pretty good chance that that is a good indication of what would happen. So there I was watching myself as I would behave if I'm ever assaulted. So I think there's risk in that, as opposed to someone handing me a script and saying 'okay, this is how this character has been treated, and this is how they are responding.'

Lucy is referring to the difference in receiving a scripted role compared to a role developed on the performer's experience. The difference is in the emotional connection with the experience, whether past, real, or imagined. The emotional connection when role playing using the participant's experience and context is what underlies both the emotional risks to role playing and the potential for a significant depth of learning.

Regarding the risks that might be involved, Hannah had an interesting view, one which reflects the importance of role playing being voluntary.

My feeling is if people volunteer for this it must be that they're o.k., that whatever discomfort they feel, the opportunity for growth is greater for them, and that they're willing to take that risk, that's what a volunteer is to me. And so my assumption is that the people who volunteered are accepting responsibility and that they

will say if in fact it will make them feel very uncomfortable. ... My hope is that they will say 'this actually is not working for me, maybe someone can substitute in' or something like that.

The comment by Chris, "I think it (role play) has to be taken seriously or else it's not effective at all" is an idea that the other research participants did not mention. I believe that the fact that these research participants volunteered in research that focuses on role play indicates an inherent bias on their part towards this method. In other words, the participants may not have mentioned the need to take role play seriously because their seriousness is taken for granted. In my experience Chris is right, that role playing is not very effective unless taken seriously.

Trust in the facilitator was another topic research participants identified as very important to role play. As Katherine explained "If I doubted the facilitator's competency I would probably step in myself and say 'this is what we're going to do, this is how I would like to do things'. I think I would have more of a tendency to control." Hannah stated "I think there was a comfort level which you helped create in the room which would not have been there if you were someone else." She continued later to say:

If I'm in a group that is being facilitated by someone who I feel lacks that essential human kindness and concern for the wellness of the group members then I shut right off, because...I feel that the facilitator does not have the skills to keep people safe.

Safety within the group as well as trust that the facilitator will maintain a level of safety was identified as important to the level of risks the research participants were willing to take.

The function of tension in role play

In response to a question about what the low point and also the high point of learning was for participants, every participant identified the low point as a point of frustration and tension, and then identified the high point of learning as following the stressful point. Hannah described it this way:

If the tension, and I think that all of this stuff is fraught with tension and that's not bad, but I think of it like going down a corridor, and you know when the door swings open the room is big. And there's just more room to explore and learn.

The tension is the build-up on the way to the door, maximized when the door is swung open, but Hannah felt that the result of getting through the tension, or the opening of the door, is vast amounts of learning that leads to even more rooms of learning.

Katherine explained that “out of that (low point) I would say came a high point. In being able to sit down with people and figure things out.” In discussion about tension, she stated:

I would say tension was good, although it can be uncomfortable and it can be frustrating. In the long run it turned out to be a good thing. It forced people to be a little more assertive. It forced people to be a little more open in certain ways. Not necessarily in a vulnerable sense, but it forced them to be a little more open about ideas and thoughts and feelings.

Reflecting on the experience of the use of silence Mickey explained a similar dynamic:

I couldn't think of what to do, so I just sat there in silence, and she kept on continuing and she sort of solved her own problem, 'well I could do this, well I could engage more with people on the track team, and I could join more on the floor activities', and you know I hadn't said a word. And I thought 'Wow! The reason I didn't say a

word is that I didn't know what to do!' And I'm sitting there in silence as she's solving her own problem.

Mickey found that experience to be very frustrating, but he also learned about the value of silence in a way that has impacted on him significantly. Chris also perceived the tension as an opportunity to learn, noting:

I don't recognize tension in the learning environment as being wholly a bad thing as long as it's not negative tension, because when there's tension it usually means that people are discussing things that are of importance to them...I also think that when tension comes up you have a lot more opportunity to really learn. Because when people feel like they're being challenged they're usually a lot more attentive and they're usually just a lot more aware of things that are being said and things that are going on.

Summary

In summary, the key point identified by the research participants regarding the format, structure and initial thoughts on the advantages of role playing is that it is preferable for role play to be unscripted, drawing from the experience and context of the participants. It was also found that using role play in small groups, for example dyads, and then moving to large groups, was preferred over beginning in large groups because it facilitates the development of comfort and trust between the role play participants. Research participants identified a need to have time to prepare for the role play so they can consider the character or emotion they were to play. They also stated a preference to not be interrupted during the role play, but rather to allow the role play to unfold, with the participants identifying when they were ready to stop and then follow the experience with the analysis, or reflection and then the debriefing.

Prior to doing a role play, research participants stated that a context needs to be prepared thoroughly. Examples of the context are what skills are to be practiced, what are the ground rules for feedback and group interaction, and how the time together will be structured. Finally, debriefing was identified as extremely important to the role playing experience, both to acknowledge the emotion involved and to integrate the experience and learning.

Research participants summarized the advantages to role play as being a good opportunity for skill development, particularly because it is an opportunity to practice rather than just read or talk about a skill; it can place someone as close as possible to a situation without there being any real danger, either to the participant or anyone else; and it can offer insight into different points of view and experiences that might not otherwise be available to the learner. Role play was described by research participants as an engaging experience because of the involvement required, and useful in situations that create anxiety or emotion because it allows the participant to prepare for the situation. Role playing was further identified as an opportunity for exploration, of the participant's biases, of different meanings for what others say, and of the participant's emotional reaction to situations. Role playing was considered to be an opportunity to explore different ways of responding to situations, or problem solving, because it is a group learning opportunity. Finally, role playing was considered an advantage because it accesses a variety of learning styles.

Trust was identified as a very important dynamic in the use of role play, both within the group and of the facilitator. Trust was considered necessary for the participants to take risks, to use personal experience in the role play, and for comfort of participants to expose their current skill level and value system.

Without the trust from participants it was felt that the sense of safety would be compromised and participants suggested they would be less willing to take risks.

Three participants identified significant learning experiences that happened as a result of role play. Each participant suggested that the greatest learning was preceded by their greatest low point, or point of greatest frustration and tension. When they resolved the tension, they felt a sense of great learning which impacted on their lives in different ways.

The next chapter presents the findings on learning that resulted from role play, the risks and the underlying dangers to role play, particularly of replicating phallogentric practice.

Chapter 7

Findings on Learning, Danger and Risk in Role Play

This chapter is a summary of the more embedded aspects of role play. Included in this are significant learning events that participants experienced from their use of role play, and the dangers and risks of using role play.

Participant learning that resulted from role playing

Three of the participants identified significant learning events that they felt were the result of using role play. As I briefly described in the previous chapter, in a workshop outside of this research experience Mickey described a role play when he felt stuck, not knowing what to do, and so he sat quietly, desperately trying to figure out what to say. While he was sitting quietly the other person in the role play continued talking and concluded by resolving their own problem. Mickey explained:

Maybe silence was the best response, so maybe in that role play I hadn't cognitively realized that it was the silence. Rather I just learned from the behaviour. I saw what happened and that's what reinforces the process, as opposed to me saying 'ah, I recognize that silence is an approach I can use in situations', to develop a new cognition and from now on I will refer to that element.

Mickey was suggesting that if he hadn't been stuck and experienced the intense frustration of not knowing what to do or say he wouldn't have learned the impact of using silence as a communication tool. He explained that he learned from the behaviour, rather than from someone telling him that silence

can be effective. Mickey did say that even though he learned a great deal from the experience there was still a problem. The problem, Mickey explained, was that he wasn't directed in the learning, but rather it was inadvertent, or an accident, and despite the significance of his learning he still felt like he had been stuck. Mickey explained:

My only concern in that situation is that I was still stuck, like even though silence was working for me, I was still stuck. I was still at the place where I was going like this, I mean I just couldn't go any further, but that response, that non response was working perfectly for the person at the other end. So it didn't help me sort of become unstuck from that particular point, it just changed the parameters of the situation a bit. And that's the only part I sort of felt was left unlearned. You know, I didn't know what to do in that situation. Maybe silence was the best response, so maybe in that role play I didn't cognitively realize that that was the silence. Rather I just learned from the behaviour, you know, it was 'I saw what happened' and that's what reinforces the process. As opposed to me saying 'ah, I recognize that silence is an approach I can use in situations to develop a new cognition and from now on I will refer to that element every time I feel stuck or every time I feel appropriate.'

So even though Mickey considers this one of the most significant learning experiences he had as a result of role playing, he also feels there is something unresolved about what he went through to reach the learning. What Mickey was struggling with might be connected to his mixed reaction to the significant learning he described above. He had his assumptions challenged, at least regarding how to respond in a certain situation, and has yet to reconcile the difference. Mickey explained that he felt compelled to 'help' the person, and there he was, feeling helpless, and the problem was still getting resolved. The

fact that Mickey continues to feel frustrated about an experience that occurred two years earlier underscores the importance of thorough debriefing in resolving the experience of role playing.

Hannah provided the metaphor of driving a car to explain a significant learning she experienced through role playing. As Hannah noted "The most important thing that I learned, no word of a lie, is to say to someone 'how can I be of most help to you?'... and I have done it several times, and it's lovely because people will tell me exactly what it is that they want." Hannah continued to state that "it's like a little revolution," and when this was pursued in the interview, Hannah said:

It's part of an approach, it's not just a line that you use. It's a way of thinking about communicating with others. Is to build this foundation in which you let the other person drive, do you know what I mean? And I think that one of the scary things that happens here is that the dons or coordinators are so much in their kind of their role that they take over, that they're in the driver's seat. And the resident is in the passenger seat. And I feel like that's wrong, in fact I'm the passenger.

Throughout the rest of this interview Hannah and I continued to refer to the metaphor of the shift in the balance of power as being in the driver's seat or being in the passenger's seat. This discussion evolved out of one response this research participant developed while role playing and the discussions that followed. In continued discussion about helping someone who has a problem the dialogue focused on whether or not to hand over the keys, or to walk up to the car and wait and see who's most interested in taking the keys. Hannah continued "Sometimes they need me to drive. I understand that, and a lot of them will ask me, and sometimes in some rare cases I have to say 'you know

what, I'm driving'." All of this learning evolved from a role play in which Hannah was encouraged to ask "how can I help you?".

Chris also described something he learned as a result of participating in the role plays in this research. He was in role as himself as a don, and a student who was very upset wanted to talk to him about a problem she was having. The research participant in the role of student, Lucy, lashed out at Chris aggressively for not being available when she first wanted to talk to him and Chris's initial response was to apologize for not being available. The result of the debriefing and discussion was recognition that Chris did not need to apologize for not being available at all times and was not required to account for his time to the resident. Chris practiced focusing on the student's frustration and sense of urgency instead of rationalizing why he wasn't available earlier. Chris referred to this example when discussing what he had learned from role play, explaining:

I actually used that example the next week with one of my students that came to talk to me, and they weren't nearly as aggressive as Lucy was but they had said 'oh, I popped by to talk to you a couple of days ago but I haven't been able to find you in'. They weren't confrontational at all but they were throwing that out, and I immediately thought back to the role play, which is kind of funny, and I said 'that's too bad. Do you want to talk now?' But normally I would have probably apologized and explained to them where I've been when that's really not necessary, it just detracts from whatever it is they want to talk about. So that's actually a good real life experience. Of drawing from the role play.

Through these comments Chris identified a dynamic I have seen when using role play, that when a role play participant plays them self frequently the thorny issue that surfaces is representative of an underlying struggle the participant is having in their daily lives. It offers an opportunity for the participant to observe the problem from a distance and also to receive feedback, suggestions and

opportunity to practice ways of dealing with the problem. Again, this reflects a shift in the balance in power between the two people involved. Chris verbally positioned himself in a submissive stance by apologizing, when there was nothing to apologize for. By recognizing that the student felt frustrated because Chris was not available when she wanted his help, Chris was responding with care and kindness but not submissiveness. During the role play, when the scenario was acted out a third time and Chris calmly said “That must have been frustrating not to be able to find me. Can I help you right now”?, he positioned himself in a more clear position with the student. The effect this had on the student both in body position and verbal tone was to diffuse her anger in a way that he hadn’t otherwise been able to accomplish. Chris did not identify the insight as a shift in the positioning of power, but he referred to this moment several times in the debriefing, the following interview and the final group interview. It impacted significantly on him in a manner that permeated his professional and personal capacity to cope.

Dangers and risks of using role play

Participants identified several possible risks and dangers to using role play. These ranged from the emotional risk of showing vulnerability while doing a role play to the danger of replicating phallocentric practice.

An interesting finding is someone learning about themselves when they didn’t intend to. Mickey stated:

if someone feels uncomfortable participating then they feel like either they’ll potentially learn more about themselves that they don’t want to know, or they’ll feel that other people will learn things about them they don’t want them to know; or that their

competency will be questioned; or if they have low self-esteem and they don't think they can actually do it.

There was concern expressed by every participant about experiencing anxiety over the lack of predictability in role play, such as Hannah who said "you could think you are in a situation where you feel like everything's going splendidly, and suddenly the situation veers off to the right." There were concerns expressed by research participants about having a particular thought process imposed on them when role play is used to prepare people for a specific function or role. This was suggested by Mickey who, in a discussion about using role play to prepare someone for a job, whether in business or a helping role, commented "you're framing the way they think, and so it's building walls...around the way that they handle a situation." Mickey went on to say that the difficulty is that these walls, or boundaries, are usually based on experience, and are probably for the benefit of the learner, but that there is also a danger "if we are looking for behaviour that stepped outside of those boundaries." This dilemma speaks of the vulnerability of the learner, which is a theme that surfaced persistently throughout the interviews.

There were four different areas of vulnerability identified by the participants: emotional vulnerability; the vulnerability of having one's beliefs and/or values publicly identified; the vulnerability of not having control or a sense of predictability over the learning process; and vulnerability to experiencing uninvited change. Hannah's statement about thinking "all is well and then suddenly everything veers off" identifies the loss of predictability that offers a sense of control, creating a sense of vulnerability. Hannah went on to say, "and that's what happens in real life." So it's not that the danger of unpredictability or

lack of control over the interaction is unnatural, or even that it is a “bad” kind of risk, as it is a risk that this participant encounters in her everyday life. The problem is that there may be an assumption that the learning environment is controlled and so it comes as a surprise to find it so real or unpredictable.

Hannah suggested that this is a risk that might be greater for some people than others, and she believes that as a result it is important to provide the opportunity for any participant to talk about the role play experience afterward.

When asked what the nature of the risk might be in not having control over the situation, Hannah addressed the next area of vulnerability responding “Perhaps in role play you actually expose that you have different values or beliefs than some of your dons.” In other words, the risk is not only that someone cannot control the interaction, but also that peers or supervisors might learn of a value difference held by the participant, presumably one that is considered undesirable by her peers, or her supervisors. Hannah suggested two ways of dealing with this concern, which are to establish clear rules around confidentiality within the learning environment, and to allow participants to pass on participating in role playing whenever they wish.

Mickey suggested that the exposure of oneself in front of an audience through performing could be risky. He noted that participants might be encouraged by other participants to understand that people are not there to make judgments, stating, “I still think that there’s a certain level of self-esteem that people have and that appearing foolish, in quotes, in front of a group can have negative consequences.” Mickey suggested that to deal with this risk it was important for participants to have the choice to stop at any point and ask for help.

Lucy noted “depending on the role play it can become quite personal. It’s very easy to assume the character of the person who you’re role playing, and become quite passionate about that character.” She goes on to explain that regarding the risk:

although you are not that actual character, if you’ve assumed the role of that character, for myself anyway, at times it’s as though I’m almost protecting the character. And if someone then is aggressive or attacks that character verbally, I can take that personally and I think that is a risk involved in role play, that you can become too attached to a character.

My understanding of this statement is that it is possible that, in role, one becomes emotionally connected with a character, and if someone, presumably also in role, attacks that person then it is difficult to disentangle from the character enough not to personalize the attack.

Regarding emotional risk, Katherine said she felt the risk is if it is a role play involving conflict. She noted, “the danger comes from being too attached to a character,” and when the role play was determined to be with a person who was supportive there was no danger, but “there’s a much greater risk if it is a role play involving conflict.” Katherine felt that with the personal attachment with the character she might not be able to separate aggressiveness or hostility towards her character from an attack on herself.

Another danger in the use of role play was identified by Chris, who discussed an experience he had two years earlier. There was a group of one-hundred and twenty new dons at a communication skills workshop, and early in the process, before breaking into small working groups, a role play was staged for the entire group. The role play modeled different styles of interacting when dealing with a

resident who had a problem. Chris explained that “some of the comments that came off I felt a little bit uneasy with because I didn’t agree with what some of the people were saying.” He explained that he didn’t speak up during the large group discussion because:

I was going through dons training and there were so many people there, including people from residence life staff, that I didn’t know if in making any comment or concern that it could have been taken either personally against the two people on the stage, their performance in the role play, or maybe something about dons training week in general. It’s a difficult situation to give any negative feedback or concerns in that type of a forum.

With these comments Chris identified three important issues regarding large group role plays. First is the enhanced level of danger of saying the wrong thing in front of so many people. Second is the question of who those people are, possibly administrators, who might perceive any critical comments as a challenge to the established protocol. Finally, there is the concern of the criticism being felt by the performers as a personal attack. What Chris explained he was most concerned about was that the strategies exhibited in the role play that are problematic might become entrenched as the right way to respond rather than the way not to respond. This could happen because, like Chris, individuals with a criticism might hesitate to express it publicly and the goal of interactive and group learning is missed.

Lucy identified risks of a very different nature when using role play by suggesting that “the element of risk there is in role play is that we learn a certain formula and maybe that formula isn’t all right for everybody.” Lucy went on to explain that with role play there hasn’t been enough time to move further than the formula aspect of interpersonal communication. She continued:

I almost wish that I didn't have the skills that I've developed over the past two years. Like communication, because when I am dealing with my best friend I can recognize things when before I couldn't. And before I kept on the relationship the way that I liked it, and now, you know I see too much and I don't want to.

Lucy provided examples of interactions with friends and family that have changed because of the skills she developed through role playing, and the changes were not welcomed by her or them. Lucy explained:

I had a point in my life where I had these skills, and I only used them in certain situations. I think the problem now is I feel they're filtering everywhere. I think in most places it's probably really good, but it's like I haven't even realized that I've become quote a good communicator with everybody, and I think the role play really does that. I think it's a very powerful tool because of the fact that you could subconsciously learn things...I used to be like it was a role play thing where and when I needed it, and I had control over when I used it. And now I use it all the time.

This disadvantage, experiencing uninvited change, is paradoxically considered to be an advantage by Lucy, who further stated, "I feel like I've been given the skills and (my friend) hasn't so I can jump from one to another and decide and he can't." What she means jumping from one to another is the choice to jump from the pattern her friendship has always followed to a stance of active listening, or whichever skill she has practiced through role playing. Lucy is describing a grieving process for the way things were, and for changes that affect her relationship when she didn't ask for changes. The ambivalence was evident because each time she discussed the changes she had experienced she would make a comment such as "I recognize the damage that I could do if I behave the way that I used to," followed by a comment like:

I had an interaction with someone who, before, I could say right off kind of the top of my tongue whatever I wanted. Now I think,

'well if I said that, because of this and this experience in their life, and they are going to do this'. I filter it through this huge pile of... knowledge that I have shoved in my head. And I think 'you can't do that to them', when really before it was probably effective because then I'd get back something totally raw from them as well.

Lucy appreciated the changes and skill development as well as the insight gained from this kind of learning. At the same time she perceived that the learning and changes placed her in a position of more knowledge and skill and she could therefore be more manipulative than her friends and she doesn't like the effects of some of these changes.

The concern over the danger of learning a formula which creates personal change is reflected similarly from Mickey, who said:

I think the danger ... would be eliminating people's innovation, because what you're doing is framing the way they think, and so it's sort of building walls, albeit thin, around the way that they handle a situation.

The learners are learning a 'how to be' as well as a 'who to be'. The problem-solving skills they develop are predefined, minimizing the opportunity for creative problem solving. Mickey also suggested, "If we don't do that (follow the recommended protocol), people would just go way too far...the problem would just take them over, you know? They'll start ignoring other roles, they'll become physically, mentally, socially, spiritually a wreck." Mickey is concerned that the use of role playing to develop skills for student-staff will lead to restrictive techniques for dealing with residents, yet he also identifies there to be a danger for the student-staff, the students and the entire organization if this kind of structure is not provided.

This reflects an ambivalence inherent in role play, that it can serve a creative as well as practical function and at the same time restrict creativity and create set

modes of thought and/or behaviour. Mickey noted that guidelines for student-staff are based on experience and are there to protect both staff and residents, but the learning of techniques and guidelines takes away from opportunities for creativity. Mickey also suggested that the culture of the organization becomes entrenched when the organizations' techniques, approaches, and attitudes are taken on by the student-staff through role playing. It was during this particular interview with Mickey that I stated as a summary of what I understood him to be saying:

So there are two things. One is easing the person into being themselves, and in a sense exposing themselves to learn from that. But then another is easing them into a culture, so in a sense rehearsing and putting on and taking on a culture, which is different.

Mickey felt this was exactly his point and it is a danger that was identified by other research participants. The danger, they explained, is that role play is more than the playing of a role. The danger in role playing is the prescribing, indoctrinating or rehearsing of a role, thereby in a sense initiating someone into a culturally prescribed way of being.

Summary of findings

In summary, the key points identified by the research participants are related to the learning they experienced as a result of participating in role plays as well as the dangers and risks to using role play. The risks or dangers to role playing were identified as the vulnerability one exposes themselves to when role playing. This vulnerability was articulated in four areas: vulnerability of emotional reaction or exposure; vulnerability of having one's beliefs made public; vulnerability due to a lack of control over the process; and vulnerability to

change. There was a risk identified in entrenching questionable modes of interaction if a poorly modeled role play has observers who are uncomfortable publicly questioning what they had observed. The danger of emotional attachment to a character who might be attacked as part of the role play was identified, as was the risk in learning a formula for responding to situations. Finally, the danger of becoming indoctrinated into a certain mode of thought or behaviour was identified, leading to the danger of hegemonically replicating phallocentric action.

Chapter 8

Summary and Recommendations

The Problem

My story begins one fine, sunny fall day. I had a workshop scheduled on campus and was anticipating it like I anticipate most of the workshops I do, with eagerness, curiosity and a steady underlying current of anxiety. I walked away from the workshop having received positive feedback from the participants and the education coordinator who hired me, yet feeling like I had failed. This experience triggered a search, to try to understand why I felt I had failed the workshop participants that beautiful fall day. What was different about this particular workshop was an expectation, one that I wasn't aware of having. The expectation was that the participants would experience a transformative learning experience. I didn't see evidence of that kind of learning experience for workshop participants that day. The workshop participants did not identify the same failure, because they did not have the same expectation of a transformative learning event.

The workshop participants entered into the workshop with expectations of skill development and strategies on how to respond to someone who was in crisis. These expectations, as the evaluations identified, were met. Role play was used to facilitate the development of specific skills for workshop participants that day, and it clearly was effective. However, with the use of role play I work towards change not just at the level of skill. I use role play to facilitate change in specific skills, to support emotional or therapeutic growth, and for social change.

These goals are not necessarily compatible with each other, nor are they necessarily compatible with the goals of the learners or even the people who pay me to do the work.

I wanted to understand better how to facilitate transformative learning, a powerful educative experience. This desire has been fueled not by a need to have impact on people in general, but rather by a commitment to prevent physical, sexual and emotional abuse of children and adults. This commitment is the result of personal and professional experiences I have had as an early childhood educator, a social worker, and as a woman. Commitment to violence prevention leads me to an interest in educating for personal as well as structural change, hence my interest in a learning tool that may facilitate the kind of learning that can lead to change, the kind of learning I describe as “aha!”

The Questions

In this research I explore the function of role play when used as a learning tool, the possibilities for using role play, and the dangers of using role play. I investigate the connection between role play and transformative learning, and the implications of having an expectation of transformative learning event when using role play. An important part of this research is the viewing of role play through the lens of power and authority, or phallocentric practice.

The questions regarding the use of role play reflect the many applications of role play, from skill development to interrupting phallocentric practice. I ask what role play is, what the factors are that provide the successful implementation of role play, and whether there is a connection between role play and transformative learning. I ask, what are the dangers of role playing? Finally,

I ask if role play can on the one hand be a tool for replicating phallocentric practice, while on the other it can be a tool for interrupting phallocentric practice.

There are many dimensions to role play, some of which draw me to question its use, others that support its use. Role play can be a device for challenging oppressive practice; for creating the space for discourse; and for transmission of phallocentric practice through replication. A person who is participating in role play for learning may experience, as identified by the research participants: skill development; intrapersonal insight or understanding; an integration of skill and insight; development of critical thought or reflection; or a transformative experience leading to personal change. A person participating in role play may also, as identified by the research participants, experience change that is not invited or wanted, learn a formula that might restrict their innovation, or entrench techniques, approaches and attitudes provided by an organization. The potential benefit of using role play is personal growth, skill development for improved competency, or a transformative learning event. The potential problem is change that hinders relationships, indoctrination into a prescribed role, or transmission of phallocentric practice. Role play is a pedagogy of complexity, and the challenge in doing this research was to capture that complexity in a manner that was responsive to the depth of thought required in critical inquiry.

Methodology

This methodology involved five research participants who attended two workshops on interpersonal communication skills, both workshops involving role play. The research participants were interviewed three times, once prior to

the first workshop, and once following each workshop. At the conclusion of the final interview a group interview was facilitated, with participants discussing their experience with role play and the research process. Each interview was taped and transcribed and research participants kept a journal of their experiences with the research, which were provided to me at the end of the data collection period. The data collected from the research participants directly informed the research findings, as do the stories and experiences from the researcher.

Research Process

In order to provide an understanding of role play I included a script of a role play, which I fabricated from my own collection of experiences and memories of using role play as an educator and experiencing role play as a learner.

The specific interaction identified within the script is an example of the dynamic I hope participants will learn, the skill of listening to understand rather than listening to respond. It is an interaction that reflects a shift in the way power is played out in a communicative interaction between someone with a problem and someone in the position of helper. This shift in power is a movement from the position of listening to control, to a position of listening to understand. The movement reflects, in the case of this role play script, a small but significant shifting political stance, which is a change from trying to control, or assuming control, to leaving the power with the subject.

It is interesting that in the search for the common elements between the many dimensions of role play I found, paradoxically, that I had to let go of the search for common elements in order to find them. In the same way that the skill I hope

to teach, active listening, is a skill of listening to understand rather than listening to give an answer, the methodology was based on investigating to understand rather than investigating to give an answer. In doing my research I got caught up with what I understood must be the right way, which translates as the culturally prescribed or traditional way, and I lost my focus of investigating to understand. I spent months trying to define the chapters and findings and getting stuck. When I recognized that I was getting stuck because I was trying to control the data rather than working to understand it, and wrote what I found without trying to connect the ideas into a package, the ideas merged themselves and offered the insights and connections.

What each of these chapters has in common is a shift from controlling information to responding or listening to information. In the first chapter, I identified my challenge by describing an experience of feeling like a failure. I entered graduate studies in order to attempt to explore that struggle, and I identified role play as a point of entry. Because of the nature of my subject areas, interpersonal communication skills, suicide prevention and prevention of abuse, and because of the nature of my personal and professional experiences in social work, early childhood education and community education I chose a methodology which addresses systemic patterns of oppression.

The research process I chose is difficult, because I was continually determining the question while at the same time gathering data both from within and without. Gathering data from within included sifting through my assumptions, biases and frames of reference. Gathering data from without included examining the theories and writings of others along with the experience, assumptions and biases of research participants. I did not determine

the outcome of this research. The outcome of this research evolved out of the sifting and sorting of all of the data described above. By not determining the outcome of this research, but rather trusting the research process itself to determine results I found, once again, that control of the process is different from control of the information. When I was able to stop looking for a certain kind of answer the more quickly unexpected answers arrived!

The answer I found was in the form of three elements, which were: looking out from the inside; looking around on the inside; and opening the door for a depth of learning through trusting in the process. These elements emerged in the question of methodology, the focus of learning content, and the use of role play. What these elements reflect is a measure of control, both of the information and the process. I discovered that the element of tension is pivotal in making role play such a powerful tool, just as the element of tension in the defining and application of research is what has moved me into an exhilarating place of learning.

This methodological choice reflects, to me, a shift from a traditional research paradigm of researching to control, to one of researching to listen. It was in the writing of this thesis that I uncovered many assumptions and links I was making that I was unaware of, in the same way that role play makes visible contradictions, assumptions and unrecognized actions. Role play participants are guided in a role play but the role play is determined by them, not by the educator. The final learning is one that emerges, not one that is imposed.

My greatest struggle throughout this process was responding to the feeling that there was a thread I found which couldn't be threaded into the needle. It was connected to role, critical theory, feminism and experiential education. I

continued to ask myself, 'what is the connection'? What was the connection? Why did I choose to weave these differently situated frameworks for understanding together? I trusted that there was a connection and that it was floating ethereal in my consciousness. I trusted that if I backed away from trying to force the question, if I engaged in taking a critical look at the data then I would find the links, and I did. The connection was that I didn't need to try to force a common thread through the different ways of viewing the data. That is the answer, and that is the conclusion I have arrived at from this thesis. In hegemonically replicating the traditional research norm of smoothly flowing the fabric of information together in a 'logical' manner and with authoritative smoothness and ease I was trying to control the data, to tie it together, make a stronger argument, make it pretty, clear, consistent. But that is not true to the nature of the learning I was exploring, or to the methodology I was using.

To write in a manner that respected the unique possibilities role play offered I chose to follow the evolving process which became a conversational story of the research process. The questions are honored and the style is subjective yet informed by various others, including authors representing various theoretical frameworks, myself the researcher, and the research participants. I used quotes from participants in full and authentic manner in order to best hear participant perspective. This is the form I use by which to honor the content. Anne-Louise Brookes notes "In making transparent, through story-telling, the divisions of socially constructed dualities, I think it is possible to better understand how our collective and individual identities are culturally produced" (Brookes, 1992, p. 31). Given that the research was about a pedagogy directed at making visible socially constructed dualities through the re-creation of our making of our own

stories, I chose to investigate the data through eyes and pen in a consistent manner. I attempted to document the data with integrity through the process of my own stories.

There is a connection to the telling of the story which is common to each dimension of this research. At the point at which I got stuck I was encouraged to 'start with your own story'. The question was placed before me, 'where did all of this begin'? This question reminded me to locate the experience that the research process began. In a similar fashion I was encouraged to 'write your story, your experience' regarding my script. 'You are describing something to me. Write about that. That is your story'. This offered me the insight into what assumptions I make regarding role play. I was able to draw from the experience of writing the script the underlying questions and dynamics I was struggling to understand. Finally, it is in the process of identifying our own stories, whether through role play or the written word, that we are in a position to understand the dynamics that inform us. Dorothy Allison illustrates this beautifully when she suggests that "If writing was dangerous, lying was deadly, and only through writing things out would I discover where my real fears were, my layered network of careful lies and secrets" (Allison, 1994, p. 90). We are in a position to understand hegemonic discourse, because in the playing of small significant bits of our lives the gaps between action and belief become visible, and if explored can identify the work that hegemony does. I have learned to start with the story or experience, question, explore and interrogate the concepts, and to use this to articulate understanding.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Role Play

The fact that what is learned is based on the participant's own context is the strength of role play. For example, an educator can tell a learner that the way one communicates impacts on the negotiated or assumed balance of power between the two people, particularly in a helping or teaching situation. If the educator provides an example of this, perhaps even models it through role play, they might believe they understand what the educator means. But if the learner uses an example from their own life, one that holds meaning and possibly even inherent contradictions regarding the way power is played out in their communications, they they will feel the learning at a level not otherwise accessible to them.

This final learning, based on the participant's context, is a weakness as well as a strength of role play for the very reason that role play is the replaying of lived experience. If the lived experience is hegemonically reproducing phallogentric practice then role playing this practice will only serve to reproduce and further entrench the practice. For example, in the script provided in chapter two, the model the student was following was one that holds the person in position of 'helper' responsible for the problem solving and, despite directions clearly not to solve the problem, she still did so. This is an instance of an expert assuming to know better than the person with the problem how to solve it, and it may well be that the student experienced this on occasions over her lifetime. However this student acquired the model of an all knowing, problem solving expert, when role playing the scenario she played out this understanding or assumption. If the facilitator in this script had not been in the position to recognize and challenge the expert based model, then the students in the role play will have reenacted the

practice, in a learning environment, and understood it to be condoned. In this example, role playing can be used to create the space to interrupt and examine such practice.

In the interruption and examination of this practice, the educator or facilitator is responsible to maintain a structure and provide external theoretical frameworks from which to move into a deeper level of understanding. It is not the educator's responsibility to create the meaning for the learner. Another example of the creation of space for the exploration of conflicting models or assumptions through role playing is the example the research participant Mickey provided, when he got stuck in a role play and inadvertently learned the impact silence can have on an interaction. Mickey felt frustrated that, at that moment, the less he said because he 'didn't know what to say', the more the other role play participant continued, effectively resolving her concern. The space was created for an exploration of why that was so uncomfortable for Mickey, which may have led to a number of insights into his assumptions of control in an interaction, particularly when he is in the position of helper.

Tension and Role Playing

The most powerful experiences I have had regarding the use of role play were those in which a conflict was played out. Because the learning focus was for the participants to more effectively deal with situations they encounter, the conflict used in the role play was based on the role play participant's experience. What has happened at those times has been an experience of playing with an interaction of tension or conflict for somebody, based on their experience. In the findings, tension or conflict are an important part of the learning process. It is

the experience of negotiating beyond the point of tension that moves the learner into significant learning. This is consistent with both the experiential education literature as well as the adult education literature.

The tension and conflict that often emerges through using role play can become energy for identifying underlying assumptions and oppressive practice. The tension, when directly and supportively articulated, acts as a catalyst to the development of insight. The participants in this research project have identified this tension as an energy that became a catalyst for their own learning and growth.

Educator Responsibility and Role Play

I believe it is the educator's responsibility to ensure that the maximum depth of learning occurs even though the workshop participants do not expect and are not aware of the possibilities for learning. This belief led me to the question, even though the 'learners' are not aware of the possibility of critical learning, of whether or not it is the educator's responsibility for opening the doors. Allison states that "As feminists, many of us have committed our whole lives to struggling to change what most people in this society don't even question"(Allison, 1994, p. 114), and I seem to be questioning the integrity of being an educator working to change what often the participants, including myself, don't even question. Ethically, I am compelled to challenge that which is not questioned; ethically, I am compelled to be honest about acknowledging what it is I am doing because otherwise I am replicating the violation of secret agendas or hegemonic practice that I am wanting to challenge.

As an educator I expect change, but I do not expect change by handing a new understanding over to a learner. I do it by challenging and creating tension. I provide the opportunity for participants or learners, myself included, to be challenged at the boundaries of their and/or our understanding. I do this by moving into the participant context, without taking their context on, creating a space for challenging ourselves at the level of our lived experience. I create the space for learners to challenge themselves through critically reflecting and investigating, through role play, the experiences, or stories of the learners. The space for transformative learning is created when there is dissonance between the lived experiences or actions of the learner and their beliefs. As an educator I am responsible to provide the space for this dissonance to become visible to the individual and offer the tools to understand the meaning behind the dissonance. This is what creates the space for transformative learning, and this is what role play has to offer in making transformative learning possible.

Transformation, Phallocentric Practice and Role Play

There is danger in my choice of methodology, just as there is danger in creating an opportunity for questioning and challenging a learner's beliefs when in the position of educator. Change inherently creates tension, and resistant discourse is a process which promotes change at a deep level, therefore becoming a threat not only to those who have an identifiable vested interest in maintaining the status quo but also threatening those very people who are promoting the change. My conclusion is that I can offer the learners an informed choice, let them know of the possibilities of and possible risks to transformative learning. I can let them know that my underlying passion for work in

interpersonal communication skills is the prevention of violence, and that one of my goals of using role play is to encourage awareness of the impact of power in helping relationships for the learners. I can further state that the skills I teach are important for a number of reasons, two of which are that they do not perpetuate the dynamic that leads to abusive relationships, and that they are particularly effective in helping people continue to develop the strategies to solve problems for themselves.

I investigated role play, a pedagogy that is powerful, that has the potential for transformative learning and that is often used without critical thought or preparation and that offers possibilities for interrupting phallogocentric practice. I continue to be concerned about the danger of role play re-constructing oppressive practice, and after completing this critical inquiry into role play I am now even more excited about the possibility for practicing a learning approach that has the potential to sidestep the dominant structure and shoot swiftly to the underlying structural assumptions. This potential, both for the creation of space for critical investigation as well as for replication of oppressive practice, became the focus in this research. These findings point the way for the need for further investigation into the possibilities and the dangers of using role play.

The taking on of responsibility for the meanings we make offers different possible learnings, all of which I believe are significant in shifting a perceived need to judge or control other individuals. One of these learnings is the lived/felt awareness that what we understand to be true knowledge can hold many different meanings. Another learning that can happen when individuals take responsibility for the meanings they make is the recognition that meaning is created. The final learning is that we have choices in our perceptions or the

meanings we make. It is a multi dimensional process because there are ripples of meaning and context that can enter in at any point in the role play process.

When individuals act themselves in a scenario that is developed from their experience, they have an opportunity to develop insight into what it is that they really are acting. For example, if I am in the position of helper I might not be aware of a difference in the positioning of power between myself and someone I am helping. If I role play myself in the position of helper, and replay an interaction over a few times, I can step in and out of the situation being played. By doing this I have the opportunity to realize or experience the interaction from the position of being in the role and also outside the role. I am then in a position to recognize there is a difference in the positions of power when helping another. Whether or not I identify or label the difference in the positions of power is dependent on the learning context, the debriefing or the extent to which I am challenged regarding the role play. But regardless of the contextualizing around the role play, I will feel the impact of the difference in the positioning of power.

This kind of learning, how power is played out in an interaction, provides insight into one's choice in interpreting or perceiving interactions. The awareness of choice in perception can lead to insight into how power is played out in our dialogue and actions. I believe it is this point which indicates the strength and possibility for role play, and I believe it is this point that indicates the vulnerability of using role play. My reaction when becoming more aware of how power is played out in my actions is to become diligent in my behaviour. It is possible, however, that some might not choose diligence in their use of such a powerful tool, but rather they might choose to develop skills for violation. This possibility leads to a new question, does the amount of control of information

and process on the part of the educator determine the level of risks in role play, particularly the risks of replicating the abuses of power?

Conclusion

Thinking back to what brought me to this search, the sense of failure I experienced after a workshop, it was the feeling that something was missing and a question of why I felt something was missing. I had expectations of the outcome of the workshop and the workshop didn't meet my expectations. I expected evidence of a transformative learning event at some point for workshop participants. This expectation was clearly an inconsistency given that the strength of using role play effectively for me is the absence of a specific or predetermined outcome, an inconsistency in integrity and intent which was eluding me. For me, the advantage of using role play effectively is that it draws on the participant's experience and perception in order to create interactions and in a sense examine, experiment or play with their own experiences.

I now recognize that I can choose to understand the sense of failure that I experienced that fall day as a success, because I clearly did not impose my expectations of a transformative learning event on the workshop participants. I recognize now, considering my past experiences as an educator, that I can provide an environment for a transformative learning experience; it is now clear that even when I have an expectation for transformative learning I do not impose it on the participants. What I believed was my failure was that I did not see evidence of a transformative learning event during that workshop. I can, and do, choose to reinterpret this as success.

In the workshop I described in the first chapter I felt like a failure because I expected something to happen that I had experienced in other workshops. I imposed the expectations from the previous experiences on the workshop participants on that beautiful fall day. I expected the participants to have similar learning as the participants have had in the past, and I felt I had failed because I didn't see the same kind of learning happen. I realize now that I held that expectation, and just as one cannot repeat context, experience and/or perception, I could not duplicate or recreate learning that had happened in the past. I did not fail to meet the learning goals of participants. I failed myself, however, in breaching principles integral to the intent of my work.

The workshop participants on that fall day did not carry the same expectations that I had. They had other expectations and therefore didn't experience the sense of failure I had. Because I continue to structure the workshops in a manner that draws on the expectations and experiences of participants and uses those expectations and experiences to move into learning, the participants perceived that they had their learning goals or expectations met. This presents an important question of inquiry to me, the question of the educator's expectations of the learning process for participants. The question was raised, how much responsibility does the person in position of educator hold for the learning that takes place. For example, I understand that it is possible for transformative learning experiences to take place in an adult learning process, and that I have been able to provide that in the past. The participants might not understand the potential depth of the learning experience possible in this particular pedagogical approach. In answer to the question of educator responsibility, I do not see it as inconsistent for me as educator to trust the

learning process to the learner while holding myself responsible as an educator for creating an environment to facilitate significant learning experiences.

I don't know how the process will turn out in a workshop, just as I didn't know what I would find in the writing of this thesis, or what the reader will find in the reading of my thesis. There is a danger that someone who participates in role play develops the skills to be abusive. I have come to the conclusion that if a participant is someone who violates others, and they either do not have their assumptions challenged or they do not choose to change their patterns of abuse, then they are in a stronger position to further violate, and are simultaneously strengthened in their resistance to change. As much as I worry about the possibility of creating resistance to change for violators in my choice of pedagogy, role play, I am even more worried about the possibility of no change happening at all. It is fear of no change that fuels my desire to proceed despite the possible dangers identified when using role play. I recognize that the learning process will continue, and if I maintain diligence in identifying my agenda and offering informed choice for participants regarding my underlying goals of investigating and interrupting phallogentric practice then I will be interrupting the practice at a deeper level than before. I am aware that the mention of power and phallogentric practice make people uncomfortable. I am willing to risk that in order to maintain the integrity of my work.

Audre Lorde has stated:

(s)urvival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish (Lorde, 1996, p.112).

My interpretation of what Lorde is saying is that survival, and therefore growth and change, is the result of taking a risk and moving into one's own experience and understanding, and that by so doing one is setting aside the master's tools, helping to chip away at the master's house. I created tension by moving myself into a situation without rules and where I could only rely on my own process and experience, and I may well be creating tension by stating my goals in teaching communication skills and using role play. As Lorde suggests "It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths, *For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house*" (Lorde, 1984, p. 112). In response to a discussion on the dangers of using role play, the research participant Mickey questioned "are you going into this...to produce a right answer, or are you going into this to explore the process"? I chose to go into the research to explore the process of role play critically, and I choose to go into the learning experience to explore the process critically. I can only do that by making clear my underlying goal of investigating the dynamic of power.

Role play can be a tool for change as much as it can be a tool for replication. I am excited about the possibility of continuing to use a learning approach that might sidestep the dominant structure, but I will be more diligent about my goal and agenda when using role play. The research participant, Chris, stated

There's so much that you can learn, because everyone's experiences are so different that, like if you were role playing with a particular person, like I think you find a time before too long that it wasn't being effective any more, but as long as you kept switching partners and role playing with someone else you'd always be gaining because you're not only learning about active listening skills or how to be supportive for someone, but you're drawing from their experiences, and you're drawing from their strengths, and I don't think there's really a different set up where you could do that.

Just as role play can facilitate a depth of learning by offering multiple understandings or meanings, research can offer a depth of learning by offering multiple understandings or meanings. There are dangers and risks in using role play, there are dangers and risks in doing research, and there are dangers and risks to do skill development in interpersonal communication skills. In my mind the dangers and risks of not doing these activities are greater than those of doing them. The danger of not making the shift from the outside in to the inside out is not the greatest danger. The greatest danger is that of stagnation, of not continuing to challenge ourselves to grow and question our understanding of the world around us. I have a goal of challenging oppressive practice. If, however, I attempt to shift the power dynamics in a workshop, uninvited, then I become a part of the pattern of oppression. To deal with this, I will open the invitation to learners by offering them possibilities for learning, and make clear the possible discomfort of being challenged.

As an educator I entered into a learning environment without a definition of what was to be considered critically. I entered into a learning environment knowing only that I needed to be prepared to respond critically to dynamics as they emerged from participants or from myself. I entered the learning environment with the intent to explore language, experience, meaning and context. Unless articulated and negotiated with the participants, I did not define the nature of oppression or try to develop critical awareness on the part of the participants. I entered into a learning situation with specific skills to spring from and with the goal of being prepared to respond in as much depth as possible to whatever emerged within that environment. Role play is one tool for transformation, but I didn't articulate that as an intention when I entered a

learning situation as an educator. Because I have a personal goal of social justice and change I will continue as an educator working towards change, but I will do so by making clear the possibilities and my personal agenda. I will not impose a social justice agenda on participants, but I will make it clear that I will challenge underlying dynamics of power as I see evidenced in the playing out of a learner's experience.

Like I asked in the first chapter, what was different about the workshop when I felt I had failed. Had I failed that fine fall day? I failed to meet the expectation I carried with me into a workshop. What failure was that? It was a failure to meet unidentified expectations I placed on the workshop participants. This is what was different about that workshop, my hidden agenda, hidden so deep it could only surface in the form of writing and the research process. The agenda I was carrying was one of structuring a process to control it, while calling it collaborative and responsive. This hidden agenda, or expectation, that I carried with me into workshops was a tool of the most insidious, dangerous kind. It was a tool that on the surface appeared to be designed to dismantle the masters house. This tool, however, could only serve to strengthen. The problem was not my agenda, the problem was what I did, or rather did not do, with my agenda. I did not make it clear, because I wasn't clear myself.

My conclusion is that role play can be used to replicate phallogentric practice, it can be used to challenge and interrupt phallogentric practice, and it can be used to explore possibilities for change. In all probability I will continue to do all three when using role play. I will continue to use role play for skill development, and I will maintain my commitment to interrupting phallogentric practice, working towards transformation. The difference is that I will be aware

of my goals, and I will invite participants to consider the possibilities by being open about them. I will use role play with a new awareness and a deeper level of responsibility, and I recommend that other educators working for change do the same.

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Appendix 1

Invitation to Participate To Peer Educators, Dons, Floor Seniors...

ENHANCE YOUR COMMUNICATION SKILLS! GAIN EXPERIENCE IN PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH!

As part of my Masters of Education program I am researching the experience of role play for adult learners and would like to invite up to six residence life student-staff to volunteer as research participants.

Participants will be expected to attend two four-hour workshops on interpersonal communication skills, three one-hour interviews and a two-hour group discussion/interview on the findings. Participants will also be expected to keep a journal on their experience.

There are no risks to participants, the interviews will be scheduled at the convenience of participants, and it is expected that the data collection will be completed by the first week of December.

I am a social worker with experience in community education and crisis intervention, and I will be directing my inquiry towards the participant's understanding of the experience of role play. The workshops will be designed to meet the identified learning goals of the participants.

If you are interested please contact either Julia Blackstock, Residence Life Education Coordinator at Victoria Hall, extension 4201, or myself, Karen Wood, at 531-7891. A copy of the research proposal will be supplied to you at your request.

Appendix 2

CONSENT FORM

I, _____, agree to participate in a study by Karen Wood, Master of Education student at Queen's University.

I understand that the purpose of the study is to investigate the adult participant's experience of role play, and that participation in this study consists of two four-hour group workshops, three individual one-hour interviews and one two hour group interview, and that the interviews will be tape-recorded. I understand that I will be expected to keep a journal to be included as data, and that my participation will be concluded by December 11, 1996.

I am aware that there are copies of the proposal made available to me by the researcher and that there are no risks involved in the study. I am also aware that my participation in the study is strictly voluntary, and that I am free to withdraw without repercussion at any time.

I understand that an alias of my choosing will be used to identify my input and that my identity will be held confidential and will not be used in the research report, and that if as a research subject, I have (now or later) some concern or questions about the research I am free to discuss this with the researcher, her supervisor, Dr. Magda Lewis, or the head of graduate studies at the Faculty of Education, Dr. John Kirby.

Signature _____

Date _____

Appendix 3

Questions

1. How many opportunities have you had to role play?
2. What was the experience of role playing like for you?
3. How were the role plays structured?
4. Is there something you felt was positive about the role play experience?
5. Is there something you would like to see done differently from the experience you had?
6. What purpose do you think role playing is useful for?
7. If you think role playing is effective, what is it about role playing that you think makes it so?
7. Do you believe there are risks to using role playing? If so, what are they and how might I support you through?
8. Would you find it useful to script your own role play scenarios for your learning in the workshops I am providing, or would you like to have prescribed role plays? Why?
9. What are your learning goals for the communication skills workshops I am preparing for you?
10. Is there anything else you would like to add, about role playing or about the research process in general?