



# Journal of Adult Education

Volume 42, Number 2, 2013



## Moving Beyond Mentoring: A Collective Case Study Examining the Perceived Characteristics of Positive Transformational Figures

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### Abstract

The purpose of this collective-case study was to explore the characteristics of transformational figures. This study revealed that interpersonal encounters were seen as a catalyst that assisted study participants through the process of transformation. Ten themes emerged from the cross-case analysis: Imposed and Intentional Influence; Metaphors of Revolutionary Change; Characteristics of Kindness, Caring, and Compassion; Admiration for Transformational Figures; Time and Timing of Transformational Experience; Feeling Special; Positive Emotional Response; Debt to Repay; Reflective Thinking; and Interpersonal Connections.

### Introduction

Good Buffalo Eagle captivated his audience as he told of his personal transformation from being an illegal immigrant who started high school at age 19 to being the co-founder of an organization designed to facilitate healing and positive change in the lives of young people through wilderness therapy. In his life narrative he identifies a significant other who helped facilitate his own personal change. He explained his struggles as a high school student because of his Spanish/English language barrier, and described how he passed time drawing pictures of other students while he was in class. He was haunted by an expression used by the other migrant workers while working the fields, "Once a migrant worker, you die a migrant worker."

That expression changed after he met a transformational figure that recognized an artistic talent and invited him to take art classes. When he entered the art room for the first time he exclaimed, "In that moment I am no longer a migrant worker, I am Michelangelo!"

Why was Good Buffalo Eagle's encounter with this person transformative? This study explored how transformational mentors and teachers assist in the process of transformation. The study uncovered 10 themes that emerged from interviews with people like Good Buffalo Eagle, who had transformative figures in their lives.

The term mentor is frequently used in education to describe the relationship between mentor and protégé. What happens when mentors go beyond facilitation and help shape, change, and transform the lives of their protégés? The problem addressed in this study focuses

on the lack of understanding about the transformational qualities of mentors. What are the perceived qualities mentors possess that allow them to move beyond mentoring to become transformational figures?

The purpose of this collective case study was to discover the qualities that allow a person to be a positive transformational figure in the life of a protégé. Transformational figures were defined by their protégés as persons who helped shape, change, or transform their lives. For the purpose of this study transformation was defined as “reflectively transforming the beliefs, attitudes, opinions, and emotional reactions that constitute our meaning schemes or transforming our meaning perspectives” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 223).

### **Methodology**

In order to discover and describe the qualities of transformational figures as perceived by protégés, the approach was used that Creswell (1998) describes as a collective case study (p. 62) and that is also distinguished by Yin (2003) as a “comparative case” method (p. 14). Collective case studies are appropriate when more than one case will be studied. When multiple units of analysis are being studied, all relevant information would be gathered together to form a multi-case study (Yin, 2003).

Twelve adults were purposefully selected who completed at least 2 years of college or who earned a post-high school degree or certificate and who recognized a positive transformational figure in their own life. Each was considered an individual case. A modified version of Yin’s (2003) case study model was used. The modifications include replacing Yin’s (2003) develop the theory with Creswell’s (1998) purpose, problem, and grand tour question. The purpose, problem, and grand tour question are critical in the design phase of the study as they determine how the participants will be selected as well as the design protocol. Another modification occurred during the analysis and conclusion of Yin’s (2003) model. Merriam’s (1988) steps of data analysis, which included “intensive analysis, developing categories, and developing theories” (pp. 127-145), were also utilized.

Selected participants needed to be able to identify

the transformational figure with little time and effort. The transformational experiences sought were those that left an indelible, positive impression on the mind of the participants. Hence, many people may have had transformational experiences but ones that were not as powerful and memorable nor as positive as those wanted for this study.

Participant-observation was also used. “Participant observation is a special note of observation in which you are not merely a passive observer. Instead you may assume a variety of roles within a case study situation and may actually participate in the events being studied” (Yin, 2003, p. 93). Because of Bean’s personal experience with a transformational figure, it was important that those experiences were shared as well. These were treated as an additional case within the study.

Data analysis utilized Merriam’s (1988) suggestions of intensive analysis, developing categories, and developing theories during data analysis. Each participant’s interview was analyzed individually and completely before moving to the next participant, following the suggestion of Yin (2003) of conducting one case study and then another for each individual case. A case report was written for each including the categories and themes that emerged from each participant’s narrative. Once the individual cases were analyzed and themes emerged, cross-case analysis of the data began. The three steps adjusted by Merriam (1998) of intensive analysis, developing categories, and developing themes were repeated, focusing on the emerging themes of the individual cases. After a thorough cross-case analysis was completed a final cross-case report was written including the emergent themes that described the qualities of transformational figures.

### **Study Participants**

Each of the participants for this study was purposely chosen. Twelve individuals who met the definitional criteria for this study were interviewed. Participants were categorized based on the type of relationship that they had with their transformational figures. Four relational categories emerged during the study:

- Educational–Relationships between teacher, coach, and student.
- Professional–Relationships between professional colleagues and associates.
- Religious–Relationships between ecclesiastical or spiritual leaders and parishioners.
- Therapeutic–Relationships between licensed counselors, therapists, or social workers.

To provide an understanding of the participants, the following introduces them in the relational categories and summarizes their transformational experience as interpreted through the retelling of their experience.

Because transformation is at the very core of personal life narratives, the telling of transformational stories and our retelling of them became a critical part of the study. The telling of the stories is also crucial as it represents the process of gathering “rich, thick descriptions” (Merriam, 1988, p.11) from the participants through the lens of the researcher.

Each narrative was sent to the participant for verification of accuracy of interpretation of their experience. Participants were encouraged to read thoroughly their life narrative and add any additional information they felt needed to be addressed.

## **Educational Relationships**

### **Tom and Coach Barton**

Tom described his transformational experience as a “moment of discovery” after the death of his father. Coach Barton became Tom’s transformational figure when he allowed him to play on his Little League football team even though Tom was underweight.

Tom’s Little League football team was given the opportunity to play for downs during the halftime of a professional football game. After the Little League team scored a touchdown, Coach Barton sent Tom in to score the extra point. He was elated to hear his name over the loudspeaker. It was a thrill he would never forget, but more important than the extra point was the way that coach Barton made Tom feel Tom expressed that his coach’s confidence took him to “another level.”

Tom recalls Coach Barton as a person who possessed empathy, kindness, compassion, a good

memory for names, and a good sense of humor. He had a genuine care and belief in others. He helped all of the kids on his team feel special.

When Tom was choosing his major at the university, he decided he wanted to become like Coach Barton “and help a kid who feels like a nobody, feel like a somebody.” Tom has worked at improving the lives of youth for the past 35 years.

### **Good Buffalo Eagle and Mr. Marxum**

Good Buffalo describes his transformational experience as a “heart change.” He describes Mr. Marxum and other transformational figures in his life as the “gardeners, who sowed the good seeds” in his life.

Good Buffalo was a migrant worker who wanted a better life. He did not want to live up to the old men's expectation that “once you’re a migrant worker you die a migrant worker.” He enrolled in school where Mr. Marxum recognized his artistic abilities. He was invited to enroll in art classes. When he entered the art building for the first time, he remembered the smell of the turpentine and linseed oil. He saw the paintings on the walls, the paintbrushes, and the easels in the classrooms. He recalled, “They loved my art. In that moment when I met Mr. Marxum, I was no longer a migrant worker, I was Michelangelo.”

Mr. Marxum helped Good Buffalo secure an art scholarship to the university. It was there during a wilderness survival program that he decided he wanted to help people. He teamed up with one of his professors and together they created a youth wilderness survival program that has helped countless numbers of young people overcome the struggles of their lives.

### **Charlie and Professor Dobb**

Charlie had a “pivotal moment” in his life with his transformational figure Professor Dobb. Because their interaction together was so “empowering”, Charlie changed his major and became a debate coach so that he could fulfill his sense of responsibility to pay his transformational experience forward.

Professor Dobb invited Charlie to be on the debate team and offered him a scholarship so he could stay in

school. Charlie remembers “that belief in me and offering me a scholarship changed everything.”

Charlie described many characteristics of Professor Dobb, including his humor, kindness, acceptance, dignity, and love. He also described Professor Dobb as one who “wouldn’t pull any punches if he didn’t agree with something.”

Charlie has been a debate teacher for many years. His educational philosophy is that “I don’t try to change the world, I’m not trying to accomplish any grand scheme, I just want to help one kid at a time see a little glimpse of who they really are.”

### **Nikki and Mr. Baldwin**

Nikki described some of her struggles in the early years of her education. She did not feel like she was as good as the other students and really struggled with math. When she met Mr. Baldwin, she stated that he “changed the course of her life.”

She was asked to keep a notebook for Mr. Baldwin's class. In that notebook, she wrote a personal note to herself about how she did not feel like she was a very good student. She did not realize that Mr. Baldwin would read her personal note and respond to it. She cannot remember exactly what Mr. Baldwin said, but she remembers that he was complimentary of her and her abilities.

She continued to write notes in her notebook, and Mr. Baldwin continued to respond to them. She described how those responding notes made her feel: “I loved the class and I loved the teacher. It was the first time in my life when I ever really felt like [pause] sorry about the emotions, I have not thought about this for a long time, [pause] anyway, I really felt like somebody really believed in me and encouraged me.”

Mr. Baldwin helped Nikki secure a scholarship at the local university where she earned a bachelor degree and later pursued and obtained a master's degree in speech pathology. Now she works with preschoolers, primarily those with special needs and behavioral problems. She recognizes the “huge” influence of Mr. Baldwin in her own educational philosophies: “I always want them to feel that school is a place where they can come and feel loved and safe.”

## **Professional Relationships**

### **Dallin and Gil**

Dallin and Gil’s professional relationship started out a bit rocky, but after a critical conversation, apologies were offered, forgiveness was granted, and the two of them began to appreciate one another better. They began to form a friendship with one another, and that relationship ultimately led Dallin to a “new way of thinking.”

That “pivotal moment” in Dallin’s life allowed him to learn more from Gil than he anticipated. Dallin began to notice Gil’s interactions with other people, his teaching styles, his facial expressions, and even his fishing style. Dallin tried to incorporate the things he learned from Gil into his own life. Gil allowed Dallin to take chances in his teaching. The two remain good friends to this day. Dallin takes opportunity once a year to write his appreciation to Gil expressing his gratitude and appreciation for what he has learned from his example and how their interaction together changed Dallin’s life.

### **Kyle and Ellen**

Dr. Kyle is a nationally certified teacher who credits much of his success to a fellow teacher, Ellen. All of his success in education was almost stifled in his third year of teaching. As Kyle declared, “I was totally flabbergasted, every day was a discipline nightmare and as time went on it became more and more frustrating.”

On the final day of school Kyle met with the principal and told him, “I can get more enjoyment out of digging ditches than I got out of teaching this year. If I can find another job I probably won’t be back.” Kyle did not find another job, and because he had signed a letter of intent to return, the next year his teaching job was waiting for him.

When Kyle returned to teaching that fall, things were significantly different. A fellow teacher named Ellen had met with the principal and encouraged him to change the classroom environment so Kyle could succeed. Ellen became his mentor. It was not an assigned mentoring but was a self-selected mentoring

relationship. If he needed help or advice, he sought it from Ellen. If she noticed changes that needed to be made, she would approach him with suggestions.

Kyle said of Ellen, “If I know anything about teaching students, it is because of Ellen. She taught me to be a teacher, gently, quietly and skillfully. I would lay any accomplishment that I have, probably, at Ellen's door. All the success I've had as a teacher is a direct result of Ellen's mentoring.” His experience with her began 27 years earlier, but it still remains “poignant” as he recalls with fondness the great lessons that she taught him.

### **Cher and Sony**

Cher struggled from a very low self-esteem from her earliest recollections. As Cher accepted this category of not being a person of value and carried it into her adult life, she experienced many negative interpersonal experiences. These habits of expectation influenced the types of people with whom Cher would interact and also how she viewed and valued herself. Cher was pursuing a bachelor's degree in education and needed a mentor as part of her upper-level requirements. She looked up an old friend from her earlier educational experiences at the local college. He was teaching at the university now and agreed to be her mentor.

Cher continued to struggle with image issues. She felt like Sony was helping her out of pity. Cher recalls how Sony took it upon himself to convince her that was not the case at all. She recalled how his interaction in the mentoring program also challenged her earlier assumptions.

As they continued to work together, Cher began to feel more and more like an equal to Sony. He treated



her with respect and through his actions convinced her of her personal and social worth. Today, as she teaches her college classes, she recognizes the value of that experience together in helping her change her self-perception.

## **Religious**

### **Darwin and Brother Anderson**

Darwin shared his conversion story as a transformational experience in his life. Darwin joined a church when he was 17-years old, just before he transferred to another university. He was asked to contact a local religious leader in the area as soon as he arrived. He did not meet with that individual for quite some time after arriving at the university, and he stopped going to church completely. “I did not feel accepted by the local congregation”, he remembered, but he felt obligated to fulfill his commitment to meet with the local religious leader.

Darwin described the experience with that religious leader, named Brother Anderson, as “love at first sight.” Brother Anderson talked with Darwin all afternoon on that first visit. They developed a friendship, and that relationship was pivotal in Darwin returning to the church. He also helped Darwin decide the profession he would pursue, and now his students call him Brother Darwin.

### **Lucy and Pastor Leach**

When Lucy and her family moved to Iowa, she met a special friend named Irene. Lucy and Irene did everything together, and they considered themselves like sisters rather than friends. After a family vacation, Irene was on her way to see Lucy when she was in a fatal car accident. The news of Irene's death was devastating to her family and to Lucy. Lucy recalls that Irene's mother blamed her for Irene's death because Irene was hurrying home to see Lucy.

Lucy felt rejected by Irene's family and began to question her own belief in God. During this time, she was aware that Pastor Leach was keeping his eye on her but was also giving her the time and space necessary for

her to grieve. In time Pastor Leach invited Lucy to his office and said, “I want you to come to my office, I think we need to have a talk.” This was a critical moment in Lucy’s transformation as he allowed her to grieve the way she needed to.

Lucy recognized that this initial meeting was a critical turning point in her life. “The whole timing of everything kind of worked together you know. I feel like this was really a turning point.”

Lucy refers to Pastor Leach as “a kind of Guardian angel for me, and that’s what I needed at that point in time in my life. Like I said if he hadn’t been at that point in time in my life, I wouldn’t have been here.”

### **Michael and The Mission President**

There was not much structure in Michael’s early family nor was there much expectation for the future. His family’s circumstance forced him to find a job at the age of 12 in order to help pay for groceries. In high school, he did not focus on grades, and that had a negative affected on his grade-point average. Right after graduation Michael decided to move out on his own where he found a manufacturing job.

When Michael turned 19 he contemplated serving a mission for the LDS Church and decided to go on a mission, “Just for the heck of it. Because I thought well, ‘I’m not doing anything here, and I hate this job, it’s not fun.’ I did not know what I wanted to do, so I just decided to go on a mission.”

It was at this time that something happened on his mission that transformed his life. “My Mission President is really the person that transformed my life.” He offered to give Michael one of the few scholarships he had to offer. Michael recalled, “I barely graduated high school! I mean, I’m amazed that this guy had faith in me, and he saw something in me that I had never saw in myself.”

He recognized how different his life is since that conversation with his mission president 4 years ago. Not only does he describe that moment as a pivotal moment in his life, but he also uses the metaphors of a trigger, a fork in the road, a paradigm shift, and what he describes as a “branch point.” Michael is currently in medical school. He shares his story with others in order

to help them see that anyone can reach their potential.

### **Therapeutic**

#### **Carissa Hanson and Dr. Michaels**

Carissa remembers how Dr. Michaels gently and kindly encouraged her to share her experience without forcing her to disclose it. Dr. Michaels said to her, “Carissa it’s okay, I know what happened, and it will be fine. I will be here for you.” Carissa felt frightened and secure at the same time as she shared her experience with Dr. Michaels.

This was the first time in Carissa’s life that she had talked about the physical and sexual abuse that began in her early childhood and lasted until she was 16. She swore secrecy to herself because of the threats made against her by the perpetrators.

Carissa revealed how during the course of her experience with Dr. Michaels her view of him changed over time as their relationship deepened. She first viewed him as a teacher, then as a therapist, and now as a friend.

Carissa described Dr. Michaels as a “gentle guide” in her life, which was a critical part of her journey because she felt that there was no one else to turn to at that point in her life. Because of this relationship, her thinking began to change. This new way of thinking and communicating allowed Carissa and her husband to begin the process of healing in their own relationship.

#### **John Doe and The Social Worker**

John is 6 feet 6 inches tall and is 250 pounds of solid muscle. He is also a survivor of intense physical and emotional abuse at the hands of his mother. John did not understand that his mother’s behavior was not normal. This was the only thing he had known, and he had experienced abuse his entire life.

One day before school his mother beat him so severely that he bled through his shirt and onto his desk. Other students noticed the bleeding and reported it to the teacher, who in turn reported it to the school social worker.

This terrible day of abuse was also one of John’s

greatest transformational moments. He only met with the social worker for about an hour, and he never saw her again in his life. However, he will always remember how their brief yet powerful encounter changed his life.

The things that the social worker taught him and explained to him were so new that he had never even considered them before. He had never considered that he had the right to defend himself. John described that experience as a “paradigm shift to a new perspective.” He stated:

I went from that victim way of thinking to a proactive way of thinking, where I said, “What do I want to be, what do I want to happen to me?” I don’t know how it happened that afternoon, but I do know that I left that morning as a victim crouching in a corner with my hands above my head, and I came back that night a champion of my own destiny....That day was such a significant turning point in that process that I’ve got it marked in my mentality.

After this experience one thing was significantly different. He never allowed his mother to physically abuse him again. He recalls that she tried on numerous occasions. However, his new way of thinking would not allow him to be a victim anymore because he realized he could defend himself.

## **Themes**

Ten themes emerged from the cross-case analysis. They were Imposed and Intentional Influence; Metaphors of Revolutionary Change; Characteristics of Kindness, Caring and Compassion; Admiration for Transformational Figures; Time and Timing of Transformational Experience; Feeling Special; Positive Emotional Response; Debt to Repay; Reflective Thinking; and Interpersonal Connections.

### **Imposed and Intentional Influence**

The first theme to emerge in the cross-case analysis focused on how the relationship was formed. Almost all of the study participants mentioned a specific instance when their transformational experience began, and they

described the moment of transformation when they recognized their lives began to change. These transformations can be viewed through Kroth and Boverie’s (2009) Integrated Discovery Model, which suggests that transformation can occur through imposed or intentional influence. Imposed transformation occurs, according to them, when something happens to us and intentional transformation occurs because of us.

Most experiences were imposed upon the study participants because they had not actively been seeking change in their lives. According to their life narratives, they were following the course or pattern that had been set for them, which changed when they encountered their transformational figure. Thus, their transformational experience was something that happened to them rather than occurring as a result of their attempt to change even though a number of the participants might have intentionally placed themselves in situations where their transformational experience could take place.

The findings suggest that transformational experiences involving a transformational figure can come from an imposed influence or intentional influence, or it can be a combination of both imposed and intentional influence by the transformational figure as it was the case with 10 of the study participants. Most of the intentional interaction occurred after the initial imposed influence when participants began the process of rethinking their habits of expectation so perhaps there could be a blurring of boundaries shown in the Kroth and Boverie model. This suggests that there may be a progressive nature of transformational influences.

### **Metaphors of Revolutionary Change**

Another emerging theme in the cross-case analysis was the use of metaphors to describe the powerful impact of these transformational experiences in the lives of the participants. The participants were not asked to describe their experience using metaphors. These emerged during the course of the interview and were one of the deepest columns in the cross-case analysis.

Kroth and Boverie (2009), drawing from Mezirow (2000), describe the “speed of discovering” (p. 44) as

evolutionary or revolutionary. Evolutionary change occurs slowly across time as a result of “incremental” changes to one’s habits of expectation. Revolutionary changes are “epochal”, dramatic changes that occur in an instant (Kroth & Boverie, 2009, p. 45). A significant majority of the metaphors used by the participants in this study described epochal changes that occurred in their way of thinking. They also made reference to a “moment” of change that occurred in their lives. One described it as a “discovery moment” while another used the image of a “turning point.” One described it as a “branch” or “trigger moment”, and another called it an “Ah-ha moment.”

The use of metaphors was not only a description of the change, but it was a way of internalizing and making sense of each person’s transformational experience and how they adapted after their disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 1991). Each participant in this study experienced a disorienting dilemma as a part of their transformational experience. Some of those disorienting dilemmas were the death of a father, being sent to detention, not feeling accepted by the religious congregation, and dealing with the loss of a best friend.

### **Characteristics of Kindness, Caring, and Compassion**

Each participant identified numerous characteristics possessed by their transformational figures, which were influential in creating an environment of change. Although the study participants described 63 personality characteristics, they focused on the emerging theme of kindness, caring, and compassion. This was an intriguing finding because the capacity to care for others in society is often overlooked (Bateson, 1989). Almost all of the participants mentioned some characteristic that focused on the importance of compassion between people. Each of the study participants believed that their transformational figure cared for them in some way. They described this by listing the above characteristics as well as describing behaviors that confirmed these feelings in their perception. Many of the participants expressed heartfelt thanks for the kindness and compassion shared by the transformational figures. These experiences had not only trans-

formed their lives and perceptions but also had transformed their relationship. Many of them described how the mentor-protégé relationship evolved into a friendship.

### **Admiration for Transformational Figures**

Without exception all of the study participants admired their transformational figures. The participants described them as people they looked up to and who made them want to succeed. One participant described his transformational figure as a “father figure.” Another described how she had placed her transformational figure on a “pedestal” or a higher plane than she was.

Each transformational figure possessed qualities that their protégés admired and respected. One participant described his transformational figure as a “master teacher” and said that he learned how to be a better teacher by watching her. Another admitted that if she had not had the respect she did for her transformational figure, he would not have been able to influence her. She believed that the qualities he possessed as well as his status in life were a crucial element in his ability to influence her.

Several participants mentioned how they tried to improve their lives by observing and patterning themselves after these transformational figures. As the individual case analyses were reviewed and as categories emerged in the cross-case analysis, it was difficult to distinguish between the characteristics of kindness and compassion and those that focused on admiration. It appeared as though a combination of those two perceptions was important in creating the respect for the transformational figure that would allow them to have such an impact on their lives.

### **Time and Timing of Transformational Experiences**

An emerging theme in the cross-case analysis revealed the importance of spending time with the protégé and the timing in the transformational experience. Each participant, with two exceptions, emphasized the importance of time in the development of the transformational relationship. When transformational



figures choose to spend time with their protégés and assist them in succeeding, they confirm the previously mentioned characteristics of kindness, caring, and compassion. Throughout the interview, one participant mentioned the importance of spending time with his transformational figure. Their time spent together included time in the classroom teaching and learning and time outside of the classroom in more casual and personal settings. Another spent time fishing and traveling together. Another described multiple visits to her mentor that were influential in her relationship development and ultimate transformational relationship.

Another important element that emerged as a theme in the cross-case analysis focused on the timing of the transformational experience. As mentioned earlier, a majority of participants in the study described an epochal transformational experience. This would naturally lead to the notion that transformational figures were in the right place at the right time to assist the study participants through their transformational experience. One person talked about the importance “time and sequence” played in her transformational experience, and she also acknowledged that her transformation may not have taken place had the sequencing and timing not been right. Another participant was ready to end his career as a professional educator before he interacted with his transformational figure. Each of the participants said that their transformational experience “tied back” to that one transformational moment that they identified as a pivotal moment in their relationship with their transformational figure. If they had not interacted with their transformational figure at that time, they do not know where they would be today.

### **Feeling Special**

The investment of time by the transformational figure provided an opportunity for the study participants to feel special. The result of their interaction allowed them to change their perception of self and allowed them to view themselves in a more positive manner. Each of the study participants identified how their transformational figure did something that made them feel special and increased their self-esteem or

confidence in some way.

One participant loved learning about art, but his transformational figure helped him feel special by taking him “under his wing.” This mentor saw the “seeds of greatness” in him, which was something he could not see in himself. Another described how he could not believe someone would have “faith in me” enough to offer him a scholarship. Still another saw his self-confidence was increasing because of his interaction in class. One person knew his parents believed in him, but he had never anticipated that another person would share that belief in him.

As transformational figures kindly and compassionately focused their attention on their protégés, they were able to create an atmosphere that fostered and encouraged positive interpersonal interaction. These interactions provided an opportunity for the study participants to understand their value.

### **Positive Emotional Response**

According to Mezirow’s (1991) transformational learning theory, individuals who experience transformation usually feel shame and guilt during the process. During the first interview, it was apparent that the participant did not feel shame or guilt during or because of his experience. He described the “relief” he felt when he began to realize that his life was changing. Therefore, an additional question was added to the interviews about whether participants ever felt shame and guilt during or as a result of their transformational experience.

Only 5 of the 13 participants experienced shame or guilt in connection with a transformational experience. Instead, another category emerged during the individual case analysis and cross-case analysis that focused on positive emotions experienced by the study participants. Those positive emotional reactions included blessing, joy, excitement, calm, happy, love, and appreciation. Even the participants who experienced shame or guilt during the transformation also expressed powerful positive emotions associated with their transformational change.

An emotional reaction seems to be a critical part of the transformational process. However, the study

participants emphasized having a positive emotional response to transformation more than the anticipated emotions of shame and guilt.

### **Debt to Repay**

Because of their positive emotional reaction to the transformation, the majority of the participants in the cross-case analysis identified another category which was expressing a desire to repay a perceived obligation to their transformational figure. They felt they “owed” them something.

One participant wanted to honor his transformational figure with the life he lived and by thanking him for the impact he had on his life. Another wanted to do something in her life where she was able to help others. Another described the need to “vindicate the faith” of his transformational figure. He wanted to “pay it forward”, and he described experiences with students who have been touched by his example the way he had been touched by his professor’s example.

### **Reflective Thinking**

Another emerging theme of the cross-case analysis identified the process of reflective thinking in the transformational experience. Each of the study participants described how their thinking changed as result of their experience. The realization of this change in thinking often happened as a result of reflecting upon their transformation after many years. One participant described how her transformational experience has impacted her life “all along the way”, but with time the influence has increased in her perception. Now she is able to see how it still influences her life today. She was able to acknowledge the impact of her experience more as an adult than she did at the moment of her experience.

Participants described this as “a new way of thinking, not conventional”, a “completely different thought process”, and “a new perspective.” These “new ways of thinking” are a critical finding in the analysis of this research. The ability to critically reflect is a crucial element in the process of transformation. The study participants identified how their ability to think was

changed as a result of their encounter with their transformational figure. They all acknowledged the impact this experience had on their lives. Many of them wondered if they would be in their current life circumstance without the intervention of their transformational figure.

### **Interpersonal Connections**

The final theme that emerged in the cross-case analysis identified the importance of interpersonal connection in the transformational experience. This obviously occurred between the study participants and their transformational figures. However, it is important to note that 10 of the 13 who experienced change as a result of their interaction with a transformational figure often mentioned meeting others along the way who impacted their lives as well.

This was not something that had been considered until the cross-case analysis began. It is something that should be considered for future research.

### **Implications**

Four key lessons were learned during this study. The findings from the study and these lessons suggest a model of hope.

#### **Lesson 1: Interpersonal Nature of Transformation**

Each narrative in this study focused on a powerful transformational experience as a result of an interpersonal relationship. The study participants shared life-changing experiences because of their “live encounters” with transformational figures who increased their ability to learn. This study suggests that interpersonal relationships can foster transformational change in the lives of other people. Interpersonal relations help facilitate transformational learning by supporting and providing companionship during disorienting dilemmas. The protégés learned more than the assigned task or solution that they were initially seeking from interpersonal interaction.

## **Lesson 2: The Importance of Perceived Qualities of Transformational Figures**

One of the purposes of this study was to explore how teachers, facilitators, mentors, and managers influence and impact the lives of protégés. Of all of the characteristics identified by the study participants, caring, kindness and compassion seem to be the foundational characteristics of their experience. The cross-case analysis revealed that these characteristics were significant in that they were identified by all but one of the participants, and they were also mentioned multiple times throughout individual analysis. Other characteristics of transformational figures included empathy and understanding, honesty and trust, knowledge, and enthusiasm.

## **Lesson 3: Authenticity and Admiration Lead to Hope**

All of these described characteristics combined to create the perception of authenticity. Transformational figures discussed in this study were seen as authentic individuals. The study participant's perception of their transformational figure gave them hope in their potential for change because the transformational figure saw in the protégé something that they had never seen before. Each of the study participants expressed an increased hope because of the hope that was shared with them from their transformational figure.

The authenticity of transformational figures is rooted in their own possession of hope for their protégé. Through their experience together, they transferred or planted a seed of hope in the minds of the study participants. This study confirms the importance of hope in the transformational experience.

## **Lesson 4: Readiness for Transformation**

Disorienting dilemmas can occur at any moment and educators must be ready when they present themselves. Until educators are ready to see the potential in other people, they cannot create an environment for change nor can they recognize the con-

texts that lead to change. If they do not question the abilities of protégés and their own abilities as educators, they may miss opportunities to facilitate transformation. Transformational figures realize they must constantly ask themselves if they are doing all in their power to help those in their charge.

## **A Model of Hope**

The 10 themes and lessons that emerged from this study are the foundation for a model of hope. Hope is facilitated as a result of the authenticity of educators. Educators increased their authenticity as a result of the perceived characteristics including caring, kindness, compassion, empathy, understanding, honesty, trust, knowledge, and enthusiasm. The study participants identified these characteristics as crucial elements in their transformations. Hope helps to cultivate a readiness to learn. Readiness on the part of educators allows them to recognize opportunities for transformation in the lives of protégés, who then recognize opportunities to learn for themselves. Readiness and self-reflection create an environment of hope, which is facilitated through self-efficacy and self-esteem. Protégés may lack both self-efficacy and self-esteem. The process of transformation for them may involve the acquisition of both self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986) and self-esteem (Adler & Towne, 1998), which transformational figures can support. Educators, mentors, managers, and supervisors can play a crucial role in transformation. Without them some people might not even begin the journey. Transformational figures arrived at crucial times when the study participants were ready for change. Even when the study participants did not intentionally seek help, their transformational figures helped to induce change and gave them hope.

The study participants described the powerful influence of their transformational figures' belief in them. Because they were able to see the potential in their protégé, the transformational figures of this study created a supportive and encouraging environment that facilitated transformation and a vision for the future. A supportive environment seems a critical element in creating hope for protégés.

## Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceived characteristics of positive transformational figures. This was not a definitive study, but it represents a beginning process to better understand how interpersonal interactions influence the transformational experience. This study focused on positive transformational experiences as a result of positive interpersonal interaction with another individual. This study does not suggest that all transformation is positive nor does it suggest that transformation can only take place with positive individuals. Negative transformational experiences and transformational figures need to be studied as well.

The model of hope is not a definitive model, but it is an initial attempt at trying to summarize how positive transformational figures might influence their protégés. The findings suggest that it is critical that others explore the role of hope in the transformational experience.

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