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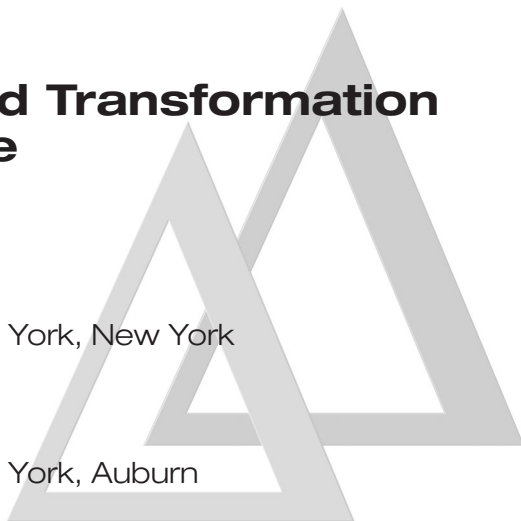
# The Study and Transformation of Experience

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*The academy can be a safe, useful place to learn from and for experiences that occur outside of it. Studies incorporating these experiences become relevant to and transformative for the lives of the participants, both teachers and students. Detailed analyses of two cases reveal the skills, attitudes, policies, and circumstances that make such studies successful. These include improvisation, collaboration, flexibility, the acknowledgement of uncertainty, and the acceptance of unpredictability. We suggest that these conditions of experientially meaningful academic dialogue are also the virtues of association among citizens in a deliberative democracy.*

**Keywords:** adult higher education; citizenship; dialogue; experiential learning; individualization; mentoring; transformational learning

Education is all very fine and large . . .

*James Joyce, "The Sisters," Dubliners (1993, p. 2)*

. . . and go at things as I have taught myself, free-style.

*Saul Bellow, The Adventures of Augie March (1996, p. 3)*

## Academic Learning and Nonacademic Experience

We learn in the university in order to affect our lives in the world beyond it. The value of this learning depends on two conditions: It must be somewhat cloistered

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so that we are free from the buzzing distraction of the outside world; however, it must be somehow relevant to the world so that we can understand and change our lives. The great value of the distance from ordinary experience afforded by academic learning is that it creates a protected space in which the immediate force of everyday life can be turned into discourse.

Dewey (1963) reminded us of the intimate connection between experience and learning. Experience, without reflection and discrimination, is merely fragmented and wantonly habitual. However, these cognitive activities must be relevant to experience to be meaningful. Meaning making depends on connections to the learner's context (Clark & Wilson, 1991; Mezirow, 2000). To preserve relevance, "real life" or nonacademic experiences are often intentionally and easily integrated into university learning in many ways (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 63). Vocational and professional curricula, internships, autobiographical writing courses, field projects in one's community, or just examples from daily experience in the world aptly chosen to illustrate abstract ideas—all of these opportunities, from entire programs to individual assignments and textbooks, connect academic learning to the world. Often these connections transform lives.

However, sometimes making these connections in the academy is not safe. Sometimes students choose to study material from their lives that is inherently risky because it is personally troubling and intellectually bewildering (Herman & Mandell, 2006). Alienation from the familiar (Kegan, 1994, p. 272) and the *disorienting dilemma* (Mezirow, 1991, p. 168) may be necessary conditions for significant transformation. Such studies can be rich with consequences. They also stress the balance between life and learning. Wanting to make their academic learning as relevant as possible for their lives outside of school, students also risk the protection the academic cloister traditionally offers from the press and volatility of ordinary life. They desire the very freedom to live better, to live well, which they came to the university to achieve. How then to sustain the balance between the relevance and the freedom of learning?

Adult students resuming or beginning college to make a career change often encounter this question. For these students, academic tasks, challenging enough in their own right, are often laced with serious personal anxieties about their hopes, abilities, and responsibilities (Herman & Mandell, 2004, pp. 117-139). In this article, we consider two instances of older college students who deliberately choose to incorporate into their studies experiential material that they know to be emotionally and intellectually fraught with difficult personal, social, and professional issues. We present these cases in detail for the sake of understanding them in our conclusion from four perspectives:

- identifying the skills and attitudes the teacher or academic mentor can contribute to this kind of higher education
- considering the educational infrastructure the university can offer to support such changes
- appreciating the inherent complexity and importance of achieving life transformations by intellectual means

- acknowledging that the individual identities and situations of the students will powerfully influence the learning that is possible.

## Lou: The Overwhelming World

Lou returned to university with promising achievements and interests. Lou had studied physics and math. He did very well, came close to completing his degree requirements, but then stopped. He mentioned “family reasons.” Then, he studied painting and medical illustration, also without completing a degree. Lou worked for a number of years as writer and editor of scientific textbooks, and he published some of his illustrations. When he resumed his university studies, he was working for an organization involved in public policy and international relations. While meeting with his faculty mentor to discuss and plan his studies, Lou described his job vaguely, though he let on that it had something to do with nuclear weapons in southern and East Asia.

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For all his stops and starts, Lou’s educational plans were very specific and vivid. He could easily have completed a degree in physics or in painting. However, he wanted to explore and integrate science and art. To what extent, he wanted to know, do scientific ideas rely on images? To what extent do the paintings and illustrations he made rely on scientific understandings of the world? I understood the academic sense of Lou’s questions. However, I was also beginning to understand that they reached beyond the academy into the everyday world. As though a reminder that our educational endeavor comprehended a larger space, instead of meeting in my college office as I usually would, our conversations occurred at an eatery in Grand Central Station.

I know I can complete a degree in physics. Or, just as easily, complete one in painting.

But that’s not why I’m here.

What will combining these two areas help you do, not just academically I mean?

And then what do you think you need to learn for that?

I don’t exactly know. I’ve already worked in a physics lab. I also know I don’t want to live my life in a painter’s studio. The job I have now calls on things I know something about but not enough to make a big difference. The fact that I have some knowledge of the science and can illustrate what I know gives me an advantage in discussions about nuclear proliferation. But I need to learn more. With what I know now, how can I do anything to make the world even a little safer?

Lou wasn’t a grandiose person; he just wanted to use his academic learning to help make the world “a little safer.” But neither he nor I knew what learning he would need to do for that purpose. This would be something we would explore together.

My colleagues and I were stimulated by Lou's questions and impressed with his academic and experiential readiness to pursue them. We were confident and happy that our college could serve his interests. Here, at this nonselective college in a large public university, Lou could create an individualized curriculum and do independent tutorials with faculty mentors that could integrate his unusual array of interests, experiences, and learning.

By early fall of 2001, he was just beginning to work with a physicist and an artist on a study of color theory. Then, September 11th happened. Lou began to confine his communications to increasingly brief e-mails. He mentioned work demands and moving out of the city. I sensed agitation in his reticence. He would not return phone calls or make appointments. Then, he wrote that he was withdrawing from his studies and asked that his tuition be refunded for the term just begun. I wanted to understand his decision. However, politely and formally, Lou again demanded a refund and would say nothing more. I complied. For several weeks, I sent him an occasional e-mail; however, neither my colleagues nor I received any response. He simply disappeared from our academic life.

What happened? We still speculate about Lou. Was he suffering from some kind of psychological problem? That seems unlikely: The academic work he'd done here and elsewhere was strong, and his brief communications, even during what must have been a stressful time, were clear and pertinent. Did he have some other kind of health problem or a financial crisis? We don't know. Maybe his job, somehow related to nuclear arms, and the tremors of a "post-9/11 world" overwhelmed him. Lou couldn't hold his experience of a "runaway world" within the academy (Giddens, 2000). He couldn't continue to learn what he'd said he wanted to learn. Beyond that, we have no information except his silence.

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Lou and his mentors were beginning to make a lively intellectual community, a space in which he could take his real-life experiences and concerns into academic learning. They were apparently fully engaged in the kind of "conversation" through which familiar experience is at once valued and interpreted in significantly new ways (Ashworth, 2004). However, the learning failed to thrive. Why?

Lou was a curious, questioning, and creative person, apparently everywhere in his life. He enjoyed his university studies and was good at them. He wanted to make an interdisciplinary program integrating science and art. It seemed to us that he was smart and imaginative enough to succeed at this complicated project. At the same time, Lou's work and other nonacademic interests were equally important to him. Even without a college degree, he had shown himself to be successful. Furthermore, Lou chose to complete his university studies and to continue his work at the same time. Clearly, he believed at first that he could integrate not only two uneasily compatible disciplines but also an equally demanding academic and nonacademic life. This effort wasn't just an intellectual and practical tour de force. Rather, his job made the learning meaningful, and the learning was to help him live a socially responsible life. The academic learning would have

given him distance from his rather grave work. In the freedom of his studies, he might have found a way to use art and science to ameliorate problems of war and peace. However, he could not achieve this. It wasn't from naiveté, poor preparation, or lack of academic support that he failed to integrate the materials and transform ways of thinking and acting he was dealing with. Instead, it seems the sheer "weight of the world" took him down (Handke, 1984).

It seems that everyone lost something important. It was as though Lou reminded everyone who worked with him of the human need to make beauty, sense, and justice of living in the world. When Lou disappeared, an opportunity was lost to transform force into discourse. Instead, there is something to be learned about the fragility and risk of that effort. The cloister doesn't control the world.

Another kind of "life learning" offers the same lesson: After many years of laborious psychoanalysis, Freud's patient, "the Rat Man," was cured of an obsessional neurosis. His conflicted inner world is made whole. However, some 14 years after Freud published his original case study, he added:

The patient's mental health was restored to him by the analysis which I have reported upon in these pages. Like so many other young men of value and promise, he perished in The Great War. ("Additional Note 1923," 1955, p. 249)

The poignancy and meaning of Lou's effort is that we undertake admirable projects such as his under inevitable conditions of fallibility and mortality. What we seek to transform—ourselves, the world—resists. It will not succumb to the learning we desire.

## Charlotte: Finding a Place to Stand

Like Lou, Charlotte also chose a difficult path of learning, one that she hoped would significantly transform her life and the professional world of human services in which she had worked as a counselor and supervisor for 20 years. She was nearly done with a bachelor's degree. She decided to devote her last studies before graduation to understanding, as an administrator, how to respond to and prevent staff-on-client abuses in residential treatment facilities for juvenile offenders. Before undertaking this project, Charlotte knew, and she and her mentor discussed, that it would deal with volatile experiential material. They would depend on the trust they had established over previous collaborative studies they had done (cf. Taylor, 2000, p. 154).

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While Charlotte and I planned this independent tutorial, we talked about how we could create a "safe" academic space (Dalo, 1999, p. 209) in which to comprehend the conceptual and practical complexities, as well as the forceful emotions,

that her experience with abuse evoked. At a previous job, she had witnessed chronic sexual and other violent abuses; she discovered that other supervisors were abetting and covering up these crimes; and, once she reported what she knew, she was ostracized and threatened. Although some of the perpetrators were fired and prosecuted, Charlotte experienced such distress that she resigned her position. I was impressed and surprised that Charlotte wanted to “study” these still very raw memories—even more so, when she told me that she planned to return to this work as the director of a treatment facility. Charlotte was determined to learn how to prevent violence and do justice. I wondered and worried how such learning could become safely academic but still relevant? How much institutional flexibility would be necessary to support this project? And, how I could help Charlotte and even evaluate her learning without pretending to be a psychotherapist or a wise and expert judge of perfection in human service practice?

Charlotte and I identified a series of manageable academic questions that would map our inquiry: Why had the abuses occurred at all? How could people in authority so egregiously violate their responsibility to care for, help, and protect those in their charge? Could these things happen again? Was there something about the residential services system which made it easier for abuse to occur? What kinds of training, education, and supervision could prevent abuses? What qualities of leadership promote a culture of systematic care? We would draw on resources from many academic fields, including social psychology, organizational behavior, management, and ethics. However, just as forces in the geopolitical world had apparently overwhelmed Lou, the emotional stresses of Charlotte’s institutional experience could fracture the learning environment she and I were trying to create with this tentative syllabus. Charlotte was trying to find a place to stand.

Charlotte and I realized that the kinds of questions that we were asking couldn’t be readily confined in a single course with a preplanned syllabus. We would need time to pursue the inquiry, probably more than a single term; and we would need the flexibility to improvise assignments and resources as we learned more and more about authority, abuse, and institutional cultures. The tutorial approach to learning at our college afforded exactly these openings to identify and then respond to our emerging uncertainties.

To begin, Charlotte completed a variety of readings about conformity, persuasion, social learning, dissonance, and self-justification in group and organizational settings. She demonstrated her understanding of these basic topics in social psychology through our conversations and in a number of brief essays. She was able to connect the academic material she read to examples taken from her workplace experience. Out of this first group of learning activities emerged a focus around the theme of authority and how it can facilitate abusive practices. It occurred to me that Charlotte would find Goffman’s (1961) classic, *Asylums*, a useful way to explore such relevant topics as domination, delegation of authority, and “mortification of the self” as they occur and are sustained within relatively closed or “total institutions.” Once again, she was able to understand the conceptual material and use it to illuminate the disturbing events she had witnessed.

Our comfortingly smooth process did not last. We had thus far easily found relevant reading and exchanged ideas. It appeared that we were constructing a learning experience that nicely balanced academic activities and professionally relevant applications. Then, Charlotte introduced some news from the “outside” world. She told me that she was considering a career move:

I think I might be offered a job as the executive director in a facility quite similar to the one I worked in.

I asked, “Do you *want* to become an executive director?”

She replied, “I’d love to.”

I said, “Really?”

I was taken aback. It had seemed to me that Charlotte had been developing from her readings a healthy, well-informed skepticism about how commonly and easily formal and informal authority in sequestered and hierarchical institutions abets abusive practices. Now, she wanted to become the director of just the kind of place that offered this disturbing potential. So, I asked her,

But, Charlotte, are you ready for this? If you were to take this job, how would you prevent and respond to abuse in this place? You surely wouldn’t be its first executive director.

Her response was clear, matter of fact, and, I thought, much too easy:

I would establish clear policies and procedures. I would make sure proper training occurred. I would make sure to model myself the sort of appropriate professional behavior I expected from others. And, I would fire anyone who violated the standards I had set.

I wondered where all the readings had gone. I was uncomfortable about discouraging her. Did I really have the right to do that, to judge her life outside of school? Yet I was nonetheless amazed that Charlotte was so eager and so seemingly naïve to reenter a workplace of which all her experience and reading had given her every reason to be wary. Did she really believe that she already had the skills of leadership and resources of character to exercise the kind of power she wanted? Did she believe that she was immune from the seductiveness of an executive position, its potential for being abusively authoritarian? On the other hand, did she believe that she would be able to resist and manage the pressures that would be exerted on her to conform to the long-standing culture of the institution she wanted to lead? Despite all she knew, did she actually believe that she could so easily just take charge?

Could I really ask her questions like these? It would be hard enough to do that if I were her friend or colleague. It would be hard even if I were her supervisor at work. Was it my place as an academic to judge how she would perform professionally? To be sure, the freedom and privilege of academic mentoring implies that



exactly these difficult integrations of life and learning become the primary educational purpose. However, now that I was on the verge of crossing that conventional boundary with Charlotte, I felt unprepared and transgressive. Isn't this what transformational learning is all about for students (Mezirow, 1991)? However, as Baumgartner (2001) asked: "What right do instructors have to encourage transformational learning?" (p. 21). At minimum, it would seem only fair that teachers demand of their students only what teachers would demand of themselves.

Supported by my own uncertainty, I decided to keep going.

But Charlotte, you've been doing all this reading about how susceptible even quite normal and ordinarily decent people can be to group pressures and to abusive temptations. As an executive director, you can't just wish and will those things away. Do you believe that you really know now how to help become immune to those temptations? And, that you know exactly what to do when people succumb to them? I mean, would you just make policies and then fire everybody who violates them?

Charlotte fell silent for a few moments. She quietly nodded her head, as though she understood what I was asking.

No, of course. I've learned that I need to train people not to do those things.

Do you think you could describe what such training would look like?

I think so.

So what if we make that your next writing project. Imagine that you're an executive director and then describe a training program that you think would help people not be abusive. Also explain why you think it would work.

Charlotte paused again, and then responded:

I'm not sure I can do that. I mean, I'm familiar with training programs. We had them at my old agency, but, obviously, they weren't very effective.

Do you know why?

I'm not sure. I've wondered about that.

I have too, Charlotte. I think I understand something about what causes people to be abusive and I know that being abusive is a bad thing. But, I'm not at all sure

I know how to prevent or correct abuse.

So what do I do now?

Now that I had opened this can of worms, strangely, Charlotte seemed more curious than frustrated about what do, and, for that matter, so was I. We were both "stuck" but ready to learn something neither of us had known or expected (Lather, 1998).

Well, Charlotte, I'm too sure either. But, what if you just tried to describe in writing where you think we are now? I mean, you can describe the training programs you're familiar with, and you can also do some research about other efforts to train staff to be nonabusive. And, you can raise questions, not necessarily offer

certain answers, about effectiveness. Why do you believe, so far as you understand, they do or do not work?  
That's a better way to think about it. That seems fair enough to me.

Charlotte's essay was a thoughtful and informed response to her question. She gave examples from her prior supervisory experience and imagined cases from the work she hoped to do. She was able to compare and contrast training programs that she researched online with efforts and training and the lack of them in her experience. She also described how she had in fact used some of those techniques to help her own children learn to resist peer pressure. Our discussion of her paper helped me see that Charlotte had a reasonable understanding, deeply informed by her experiences, of how managers, supervisors, and trainers might influence behavior in organizations. I then suggested that for the next iteration of her paper she read Cialdini's (2001) book on influence to gain a more conceptual and research-based perspective. One of Charlotte's reactions to Cialdini's analysis was to observe aptly that the techniques of influence that he described could be equally well used for good or evil purposes. She had discovered for herself the distinction between instrumental ends and ends-in-themselves. As she put it to me:

I understand these techniques of getting people to do what I want. But I think they need to rest on a sound foundation, just like when I'm teaching my kids, I'm really trying to get them to understand the difference between good and bad.

We began to discuss what this "sound foundation" might mean and how an agency director might help to create it. Naturally, Charlotte wondered about people who, by virtue of their positions, exercise their authority badly. How does this happen? How does one question or challenge it? And why do people obey or conform? These discussions led me to suggest that she read and view the original Milgram experiments on obedience to authority (Milgram, 2004) and that she read Sennett's (1980) book, *Authority*. Charlotte wrote a final essay on these materials; it contained these lines:

Fear and paternalism do not work; people eventually see through them and leave.

And later,

What I want and what someone may want for themselves could be very different. I have learned through my readings that some people do not feel they are doing something wrong, even though their behavior is obviously wrong to others. I do not know what is best for everyone. I cannot impose my goals on someone else because validation and recognition are necessary for human existence.

Charlotte clearly understood, especially from Milgram, that even ordinary, decent people can be induced to do very bad things. And she had also clearly understood Sennett's emphasis on free will and his claim that all legitimate

authority must finally be collaborative. Above all, I was impressed that she was willing to go right up to the edge of her settled beliefs and poke a small hole in them. It is remarkable that someone who had been so sure that she had done the right thing could now question her deepest assumptions: "I thought I was fighting for my cause, but I now see that just taking a training, punish and purge approach to the problem of abuse won't solve anything." It certainly appeared that in questioning her own assumptions she had achieved one of the most difficult stages of transformational learning (Ziegler, Paulus, & Woodside, 2006, pp. 312-313). Although I could not judge whether Charlotte would become an effective and just executive director, I was sure that she would exercise her authority "mindfully" (Langer, 1989). That is, I believed that Charlotte was learning to acknowledge the inherently imperfect human condition. She was learning to respect the people whom before she had merely intended to train and punish. Moreover, thanks to Charlotte's willingness to risk revisiting painful experiences and the protective understanding she had of them, I was also willing to doubt my own "teacherly" authority and acknowledge of my own ignorance about how to solve the problem she was confronting.

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Like Lou, Charlotte chose to take up a complex project relevant to her life and work, an effort fraught with emotional and intellectual challenges. In contrast to Lou (and, for that matter, Freud's "Rat Man"), Charlotte was able to continue her project in a safe academic setting. It is interesting to note that Charlotte did not demonstrably achieve exactly what she had set out to learn. Neither she nor her mentor could say that she had learned how to be an executive director of an institution who would prevent or properly correct abuse. However, she did find a place to stand. What is this?

Charlotte's place to stand was, simply, the academy. She read many books and wrote essays about their content; she talked with a faculty member about her ideas; and she received an evaluation of her learning, which allowed her to graduate. However, her learning wasn't strictly academic, and that was by design. From the beginning, Charlotte wanted to acquire academic learning that would enable her to change her life and change the organizations in which she worked. She was looking for some relief, some enlightenment, and some power. Her mentor understood that, and he was excited by the project. However, he was aware of and worried about exceeding his role. He couldn't slide inappropriately and incompetently into doing psychotherapy. He couldn't let the success of the academic learning depend on the achievement of wisdom, which he couldn't judge, much less reasonably expect. And, however successful the postacademic results of Charlotte's learning, he couldn't certify that she would fulfill her ambition through the very best and most just human service practices.

Instead, Charlotte and her mentor crafted a place between books and actions. Between acting in the world and learning outside of it, they engaged in dialogue.

These conversations showed four qualities: improvisation, provisionality, reflection, and reciprocity.

Neither student nor mentor was following a syllabus; instead, they identified topics and agreed on assignments as their conversation developed. Also, they didn't know the outcome in advance (not even exactly what it ought to be), nor did they come to rest securely or certainly in their conclusions. Instead, they realized that they were wrestling with concepts (e.g., justice) and problems (e.g., what prevents abuse) that no theoretical or practical expertise can completely solve. And at every turn, critical reflection was required of student and mentor. The mentor frequently worried and wondered whether he was overstepping his bounds, what criteria were fair for evaluating the learning, and if, in the interests of academic rigor he could rely on, he was pushing the student too far beyond her intellectual and emotional capacity. However, the mentor's very hesitation actually opened up possibilities of learning (Langer, 1997). At the same time, the student had to turn back to her traumatic experiences and not only to ask why and what could be different but also gradually to reconsider and revise the determined and severe conclusions she'd once come to about the prevention and correction of abuse. Indeed, her ability to encounter and tolerate this unsettlement was one of the more remarkable features of her learning.

Finally, mentor and student created together the academic space they worked in. Moreover, their relationship was reciprocal. The mentor contributed suggestions for reading and writing, academically manageable organization, some insights and thought-provoking questions, and perhaps most important of all, institutional legitimacy and safety for the discussion. Simultaneously, the student evoked questions about responsibility and authority that applied not only to her but also to the mentor as well. Especially, the student's revelations about herself and an aspect of a professional world often kept secret gave life to a study that otherwise would have been merely "academic." It was the accomplishment of these delicate and trusting transactions that give reason to believe that their lives and the small circumferences of the worlds they inhabited—in the academy and in human services—just might have changed.

## Conclusion: Learning and Citizenship

Lou and Charlotte let the world into their academic studies. They tried to elevate deeply troubling and important events into discourse that would help change themselves and the world. So far as we know, Lou didn't succeed. Charlotte does seem to have found a place to stand above the crisis she endured. She learned new ways to think about her experiences and how she might influence future events, even though the practical consequences of her learning couldn't be predicted. Acknowledging these uncertainties, we can look at some of conditions that made Lou and Charlotte's efforts possible.

What skills and understanding did the mentor contribute? What opportunities did the university itself provide? What worldview allows one to appreciate these efforts at transformation? And, last, who are the students?

The mentors who worked with Lou and Charlotte welcomed them with a free-wheeling style and lightness of spirit. Although not always easily, they could sometimes rise above whatever might have been an attachment to customary academic authority, control over syllabus, and their presumption of expertise. Seeking to cultivate the critical self-consciousness they were hoping to inspire in their students, the mentors were willing to improvise the content, process, and organization of learning to take their students' interests seriously and recognize the limits of their own professorial understanding. These learning projects were genuine collaborations between faculty and students, a sharing of authority conducive to transformational learning (Cranton, 1994, p. 147). Together, their minds could be capacious and nimble. They were able to entertain a variety of troubling things that didn't make easy sense at the start. They moved, even played among and around them—working them over, trying out ideas, and gradually creating some stable, even if provisional, coherence. They were practicing an “epistemology of intimacy and participation—that is, an epistemology of love” (Zajonc, 2006, pp. 1744-1745).

The university within which Lou, Charlotte, and their mentors worked provided a physical place with organized expertise, policies, and procedures that made the learning possible. It gave to their activities the legitimacy of habitation, public credibility, and acknowledged academic learning. However, within this firm structure, far-reaching flexibility was allowed to promote and accommodate the improvisations that were necessary for these people to pursue their own learning projects. The institution provided permeability to and filtering of the outside world. It accepted the individual curiosity and abilities of these students, as well as the real situations in which they lived. Foregoing curriculum committees, this university trusted its faculty to spontaneously invent and supervise meaningful academic work. By implication, this trust was given to the students themselves, for they too were allowed and encouraged to participate in creating their studies. In other words, the university did not claim to have identified and possess all the knowledge worth having nor all the ways it could be learned. It permitted the transformation of its own curriculum by listening to the student (Herman & Mandell, 2004; Minnich, 2004). These features amount to the “admission” and “even . . . the celebration” of “uncertainty” as essential to an academic program (Smith, 2005, p. 139).

Still, an important formality accompanies these freedoms, improvisations, and uncertainties. The conversations between mentors and students occur within an anciently traditional and well-recognized structure. These are not entirely spontaneous dialogues arising during chance encounters in the agora or a household. The air of the academy reaches even to the scheduled meetings between Lou and his mentor at Grand Central Station. That is, though university doesn't constrict the freedom of the learning, it does endow it with the rituals of public legitimization: The students will receive academic credits toward degrees, and those credits will have been certified and awarded by the faculty. For all the relevance of this learning to ordinary life, the university is a cloister within which cognitive rites of passage occur. It is a liminal, sacred place that creates leisure for learning (Pieper, 1998; Turner, 1969; Van Genneep, 2004).

The attitudes and skills of the faculty, as well as the policies and procedures of the university, all rest on and participate in a particular view of the world. It is a worldview holding that citizenship is not only in the academic community but also in civil society is democratic, inquiring, and deliberative. "Citizens" are people who "participate meaningfully in the complex decision processes that define contemporary policy-oriented politics" (Fischer, 2005, p. 2). The dialogues we've illustrated are little models of citizenship. And it is interesting to note that it was at least the hopeful intention of the participants, students and mentors, that the academic microcosm in which they were learning would move and change the social macrocosm in which they lived. Even with the unfortunately premature end of his efforts, Lou tried find a way to integrate art and science to make human life more secure. And, even with her modest and uncertain success, Charlotte began to find a way to comprehend abuse with justice and mercy. The ideas, improvisations, questions, and reciprocal creativity and respect they experienced in their dialogical relationships gave them and their mentors practice in citizenship. The propositions they entertained and the associations they cultivated in the cloister were prologue to the policies and politics they might foster in the outside world (cf. Welton, 2005). As Mezirow (2000) wrote: "Adult educators create protected learning environments in which the conditions of social democracy necessary for transformative learning are fostered" (p. 31).

However, even as the acknowledgement of uncertainty was essential to the learning, the optimism of this worldview must be tempered with the awareness of overwhelming accidents and powerful tyrannies that smother the purpose and consequence of just discourse.

Our final thought is cautionary and hopeful. One might conclude that a proper worldview, a flexible institution, and a skilled faculty are sufficient conditions for producing learning that matters. However, it is necessary to pause and acknowledge it is the students—who they are, what they want, how they live—that hugely affect possibilities for learning. The experiences the students unpredictably bring into the academy evoke and stimulate the content and pathways of the inquiry. If Lou had not been so intellectually ambitious and so unlucky, we very likely would not be pondering the integration of art and science or the fragility of the cloistered life. And, had Charlotte not been willing to recollect and reconsider some painful experiences, even at the risk of her own moral certainty, would we have had so compelling an opportunity to examine our own presumptions of authority and the reach of our skill into the outer world? Remembering that we do not and should not control who learns, frees us to live better in the world, even the part of it that is academic.

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