TOWARD TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING AND A TRANSNATIONAL FEMINIST PEDAGOGY: EXPERIENCES OF ACTIVIST-FACILITATORS WORKING IN DEVELOPMENT

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Educational Studies)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

April 2009

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was: 1) to explore how critical reflection (as part of praxis) is understood and experienced by activists facilitating participatory workshops; and 2) to understand how these activist-facilitators identify and position paradoxes and possibilities in their development work, including the experiences of power and transformation therein. By examining how activists, like myself, understand and practice critical reflection in relation to the facilitation of participatory workshops and how that reflection informs praxis – a key component of transformational learning – this study deconstructs participatory methodological practices within the context of development work. The study is positioned at the interface of transformative learning, activism, and participatory development and framed by transnational feminist pedagogy.

The study used qualitative methods informed by feminist perspectives. The study participants were a diverse group of fourteen Canadian women, including myself, who have varied experiences as facilitators of women’s rights and gender equality workshops in transnational locations. Through unstructured interviews and focus groups, the participants were questioned about pedagogical and political aspects of their work as Minority World activists.

Four key themes in activist-facilitation experience were identified. They are: understandings and misunderstandings of critical reflection as a pedagogical practice; the often paradoxical ways that activist play out positions of power; how activists identify possibilities and paradoxes in working in dominant and participatory development paradigms; and opportunities for personal or social transformation. Working in teams and
with allies, nurturing connections with others, dismantling hierarchies and encouraging collaborative models of learning were all recognized as important ways to build upon a key learning in the study – facilitation as a sustained practice. A lack of conceptual clarity around critical reflection as a pedagogical practice however, demonstrated the need for additional efforts toward achieving a co-intentional practice between learners and facilitators.

The political/transformative components of this research are noteworthy because they seek to validate the work of activists, to share strategies that resist hegemonic practices, and to enhance the development of transnational feminist pedagogies. In this way critical reflection was envisioned as part of praxis and transforming life-long learning.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Obtaining a doctoral degree is not possible without supports and opportunities. I had both.

I would like to acknowledge the support of my committee co-supervisors, Pierre Walter and Jennifer Chan, along with committee member, Shauna Butterwick (and of course, Jean Barman who assisted in the first two years of my doctoral work). Your constant support and validation of my work as an activist and an academic were of great assistance throughout this process. Writing my comprehensive exams and dissertation at a distance had its own obstacles and you made efforts to accommodate these. Thank you.

A special thanks to the study participants (whose names I cannot mention), for the reflections and experiences you shared as part of this study. Your compassion for activist work deserves recognition and serves as a reminder that I could not have done this without you.

To Kathryn, Lori, Dale, and Rachel thanks for reading and editing my writing at various stages.

To all my wonderful friends who gave me support, pushed me along, invested time in reading parts of the thesis and assisted me in completing this journey. These friends include: Marie, Joan, Carol, Diana, Ann, Cheryl, Kaela, Pat, Joanne, Debbie, Pam, Puck, Nancy, and of course, Cathy Ellis who provided me with friendship and lodging in Vancouver.

To my sisters, Yvonne and Lori, thanks for the support and ideas you shared during these past four years of doctoral study.

To Doug Racine, and my children, Vanya Hanson and Cal Lakevold I acknowledge the constant support throughout the process.

Finally, I want to thank Cousin Curt whose words and perspective kept me grounded. When he learned I was doing a PhD he thought the only thing that could mean was “post-hole digger.” This thought kept me grounded in my work, reminding me of what a privilege it is to have the opportunity to study; an opportunity of the few. It also reminded me of my rural Canadian roots and kept me aware of the fact that all we do in life is connected.
DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to activists and educators who work for social change and justice. The dedication especially recognizes the participants in this study.

The study is also dedicated to my parents for saying, “That sounds really, really good Cindy.” Your unwavering support and love for your children does not go unnoticed.
INTRODUCTION: ACTIVIST-FACILITATION AND PARTICIPATORY WORKSHOPS

At the interface of transformative learning, participatory development and activism there is an assumed convergence of values and beliefs based on social transformation and the elimination of inequalities. This study concerns itself with these values in relation to the pedagogical practices of activists\(^1\) who facilitate participatory workshops on topics related to gender and women’s rights. The workshops these activists facilitate range from training sessions related to gender awareness to workshops within projects that integrate gender into other fields of development. Within the workshop facilitation process, I was particularly keen to learn how critical reflection informs facilitation practices and how power is recognized in the relationships between the facilitators and the learners as agents of transformation. In the interview excerpt which follows, an example of this kind of activist-facilitation process is described by Alicia, one of the study participants.

I was working with a team of women from South American and Central America on the issue of violence against women. There were strong tensions due to differences in race, class, politics and whether or not each woman considered herself a feminist or not. In order to resolve the tensions, we spent a lot of time sitting together around the table listening to each other. In the end, our shared understanding of what we were to cover in the workshop broadened. Violence against women had to be defined in broader terms. It had to be defined by the women. The women from South America, who had lived more years in Canada, were more focused on domestic violence; while

\(^1\) In this study, the term ‘activist’ refers to people working for social change and gender equality and to end injustice, including inequitable systems such as patriarchy. The concept of activism and the context of the study are discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.
the Central American women, who were recent refugees, were focused on the violence women experience in war and at the hands of repressive governments. In the end, the analysis for both groups shifted as they listened to each other. If we were to address violence against women, we needed to address all their experiences of violence as experienced in war, torture, human rights abuse, extreme poverty, rape, as well as domestic violence. … The trick is to keep it broad enough to be inclusive of different realities. In my work in Canada, when you talk about crime prevention with Somali women, their main concern is the risk of their youth getting into gangs and committing crimes. So to work across difference it is necessary to keep the basket big enough to include different realities and perspectives, so as to then find a shared focus of action. (Alicia)

This quote from Alicia illustrates some of the complex and intersecting concepts explored in this study including critical reflection, reflexivity, position, power, and lived experiences of activism.

**Introduction to the Study**

As an educator and a feminist working locally and globally on women’s rights and gender equality, I am concerned about how my facilitation practices assist in creating conditions for transformative learning and conversely, how I contribute to dominant knowledge systems. In my practice, I remain fully aware that in a globalized world where corporate, capitalist politics impose homogenized values and dominant knowledge systems, the practices and pedagogies2 that work against systems of domination and oppression are increasingly important (Naples & Desai, 2002; Lather, 1992). Toward Transformative

*Learning and a Transnational Feminist Pedagogy: Experiences of Activist-Facilitators*

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2Pedagogy is the process of producing knowledge (Gore, 1993) or more conventionally the art and science of teaching. Pedagogies described as critical, liberatory, and more recently, feminist (Naples & Bojar, 2002), are often lumped into understandings of transformative (also referred to transformational) pedagogies. Transformative— that is, critical or feminist pedagogies— question and challenge systems of domination. These pedagogies advocate praxis— that is, a process of critical reflection and action informed by theory to help learners achieve critical consciousness. These terms are discussed in more detail in the literature review, Chapter Three. Further discussion of terms used in the study is provided in the terms and definitions section at the end of this chapter.
*Working in Development* is developed around a belief in shared values between feminist-activism, participatory development, and transformative learning. The queries the study embraces occur at the interface of these areas of knowledge, and provide explorations into transnational feminist pedagogies.

Through a process of asking questions about how activists, like myself, understand and practice critical reflection (as part of a pedagogical praxis) in relation to the facilitation of participatory workshops, I hope to deconstruct participatory methodological practices within the context of development work. Praxis—that is, cycles of action (informed by theory) and critical reflection are viewed as essential factors for transformation and knowledge generation in participatory processes (Arnold, Burke, James, Martin & Thomas, 1991; Chiu, 2006). Building upon my personal experience as an educator, feminist, and consultant, the study deconstructs the practices of activists who work transnationally; that is, locally and globally, in facilitating workshops on women’s rights and gender equality.³ Further, by understanding the activist position within development, I assume that the “pedagogical meltdowns” and “praxis of stuck places” to which Lather refers (1998, p. 487) might be further deconstructed and the paradoxes and possibilities for transformation emerging from the work of activists work might become more apparent. Subsequently, in the process of naming possibilities and contradictions/paradoxes,⁴ I was curious to know how

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³In the context of development and social change, gender equality is often a cross-cutting theme. Other times it is considered as a separate topic. In either case, the workshops and content are not stagnant and interpreted widely. Chapter Two provides more detail on what equality-focused participatory workshops might entail.

⁴The concept of contradictions as it is used in critical theory and pedagogy emerges from Marxist concept of “class contradictions.” Using the theory of the dialectic, the idea is that contradictions exist in reality and that understanding them arrives at a truth (Wilde, 1991). A paradox may be a contradiction or it can be interpreted as seeming contradictory but actually meaning the same. A paradox can present an ethical dilemma without binary conclusions. A paradox has connotations of ambiguity and assumptions and is therefore less rigid and less of a binary structured term; for me, it more accurately describes dilemmas in development.
activists find spaces to celebrate, critique, and transform their facilitation practice. The types of questions asked and the assumptions upon which the study is based—particularly transnationalism and praxis leading to transformation\(^5\)—help to frame this study within the realm of a transnational feminist pedagogy. The categories of research literature used in the study included: gender and development, participatory development, participatory methodologies and facilitation, activism, transformative learning (particularly critical feminist pedagogies), critical reflection, praxis, and transnational feminism.

One particular area of training inspired by feminists and an area which influences this study is women’s rights and gender equality. Training in this area, however, is often treated as a technical exchange versus a structural or systematic shift (Guijt and Shah, 1998; Kerr, 2004; White, 2003). As Eschle (2005) notes, the absence of attention (and resources) given to the ways that feminists, in practice, contribute to a re-politicization of training and coalition-generating actions is problematic. While her example was related to the anti-globalization movements, similar criticisms have been launched by other feminists (Naples and Desai, 2002). By elaborating on a discourse about activists working within this system, I am searching for the articulation of experiences where connections are enabled for coalitions or affinity groups, and where agency is occurring, and conversely, for discourse about paradoxes, problems, and dilemmas that emerge in the attempt to develop transformative learning practices in the context of international development. Espousing a transnational feminist position, I realize that binaries\(^6\) are constructs upon which narratives of experience

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\(^5\)These terms are discussed in more detail at the end of this chapter under terms and definitions and in Chapters Two and Three which discuss the context and literature around the study.

\(^6\) Binaries are thoughts or views that present an idea as having two meanings or dualistic meaning. They are rejected by feminists as they propose fixed views and propagate meta-narratives (see footnote 9).
are built, and that lives and pedagogic practices are frequently shifting. So, with this in mind, I hope to explore paradoxes in activist-facilitation work or even the failure to recognize them, as well as the way in which epistemic understandings are developed, reified, and/or dismantled.

**Pedagogical Focus of the Research**

This inquiry is framed around a transnational feminist pedagogy – a form of transformative learning. As an educator and self-defined transnational feminist, I am interested in learning how the practices of feminist pedagogies can extend learning about equality issues and participatory processes—processes that are assumed to have both personal and social transformation potential. There is, for example, an assumption that transformative pedagogies, such as transnational feminist pedagogies, will use participatory methodologies. The criteria for participation in this study included that participants were engaged in using participatory methodologies in their facilitation practice.

Participatory methodologies are inspired by transformative models of education and encouraged in participatory development. Participatory approaches require that facilitators and participants embrace a process of naming issues in order to transform power relations or change conditions of oppression (Brookfield, 2000; Lykes & Coquillon, 2007). It is acknowledged that the values and politics of individual facilitators “influence participatory processes and the extent to which women’s rights are supported” (Kanji, 2004, p. 58). The questions in this study then are built around an inquiry into the practices and politics of transformative pedagogies; that is, critical reflection and reflexivity.
Framed by transnational feminist pedagogies, the study critically interrogates the ways that activists explore the possibilities and paradoxes in working across borders (that is, transnationally) and the ways they understand and apply critical reflection in the process of that work. If, as Gore (1992) suggests, “pedagogy is a process of knowledge production” (60), critical reflection has a pedagogic function as well as an ontological and epistemological function in that it generates knowledge which can challenge ways of seeing or being in the world. Similarly critical reflection and reflexivity on facilitation politics and practices might embellish our sense of self in relation to others—another key component of feminist pedagogies.

Distinctions between reflection, critical reflection, and reflexivity are important for this study. The pedagogic focus of the study directs attention toward an understanding of critical reflection as practiced by facilitators of participatory workshops. Reflection is frequently used in discussing more intuitive or personal responses. Gray (2007) distinguishes between *reflection* as an individual process that “mediates between experience, knowledge and action” (p. 495) and *critical reflection* as “incorporating a focus on the questioning of assumptions and social rather than individual perspectives, as well as attention to the analysis of power relations” (p. 496). Gray’s distinction is supported by Brookfield (1995) and Fook (1999) and frames the perspectives used in this study. Cranton’s (1996) work distinguishes critical reflection from mere reflection and argues that *critical* reflection has the ability to be transformative. In the context of facilitation, it can change the way we react and respond to

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7 Border crossing is a term used by third wave feminists to describe the partial and situated ways our identities are lived. It suggests that we are continually crossing boundaries or borders that define who we are by race, class, education, gender and so on. Recent feminist geography and feminist theorists suggest that borderlands is a more appropriate term than boundary because it suggests fluidity, situated knowledge and movement between locations or positions. For a more in-depth discussion of this see Moss (2002). Gloria Anzaldua’s (1987) writing and theorizing about the personal experience of living between borders of place and representation is also pivotal in this regard.
participants. The vagueness surrounding the concept of critical reflection as evidenced within the literature makes it important to distinguish from reflection as an individual act of introspection. I also bring a concern about *reflexivity*, which more specifically addresses the position of the activist in relation to place and power. Reflexivity is discussed in more detail in the definitions section of this chapter. In a transnational feminist pedagogy understanding these concepts is central to understanding participatory and transformative activist-facilitation practices. Chapter Two provides additional discussion about participatory methodologies and transnational feminism.

Because critical pedagogy assumes that facilitators become participants in the learning (establishing a co-intentional relationship), I wanted to know whether and how facilitators of gender equality and women’s rights understand this relationship with learners (Freire, 1970). How do they, for example, understand and enact critical reflection in their pedagogical practice and what effect does that have on their facilitation practice? Assuming that critical reflection in praxis is central to social transformation (Chui, 2006; Freire, 1970; Gaventa, 1998), I am intent on learning how such activists articulate experiences of transformation and whether they feel that these experiences are nurturing for solidarity, alliances, and connected dimensions of knowing; that is, dimensions that can be described as spiritual, creative, physical, and rational (Smith, Willms & Johnson, 1997). The springboard for this study involves a reflection on my own personal history in critical pedagogy, feminism, and participatory development.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to critically examine the facilitation practices of activists involved in delivering workshops on gender equity and women's rights in the context of development, including how they engage in critical reflection as part of praxis, how they position themselves in development work and how they identify paradoxes and possibilities in that work. I am also interested in how they reflect on their position as development agents from the Minority World[^8] and as facilitators of participatory processes. I seek to acquire a deeper understanding of the pedagogical practices of facilitators of participatory workshops on topics related to gender – from sensitization, to the integration of gender concepts into other fields. I am concerned with how critical reflection informs facilitation practices, and I am also interested in understand how power is operating in the relationships between facilitators and learners as agents of transformation. Accordingly, I then seek to understand how critical reflection is practiced pedagogically, and simultaneously, whether and how it is embedded in the actions of the facilitator. Finally, I want to know about how they understand their practice in relation to transformation. The research questions are the following:

i) In what ways do women’s rights and gender equality activists understand and apply critical reflection in their facilitation work?

[^8]: The terms used to describe different places in the world and groups of people are highly contested. Over the past decade, the phrases “Minority World” and “Majority World” (Esteva & Prakash, 1998) have been used to describe the division between the dichotomous frames that divide the world into haves/have-nots. In this study I use the term Majority World to identify the parts of the world where the majority of people live and the inequitable condition of the people therein. Correspondingly, I use the term Minority World to loosely designate the richer parts of the world where socio-economic wealth and political power are concentrated; Western is used to refer to the values and ideas that emerge from the Minority World and which are often perpetuated through international development. Despite the tensions in naming myself as a Minority World activist, it is a term which describes my position in a thought-provoking and somewhat critical way as many other terms merely reinforce hierarchical relationships that favor Western knowledge and geographic positioning.
ii) How do activists identify and position possibilities and paradoxes in development work?

iii) How do activists position themselves in development work?

iv) How do activists experience transformation?

**Theoretical Perspective**

This inquiry is rooted in a transnational feminist theoretical perspective. Transnational feminism offers a lens through which to explore different ways of examining truth, power, knowledge, as well as how subjects are constructed and represented (Eschle, 2005). In the process of exploring the nexus of knowledge and power, transnational feminism acknowledges the need to pay attention to the way knowledge is situated and localized. By situating knowledge claims within their social, cultural, or environmental contexts, and challenging binary ways of thinking, including the assumption of meta-narratives as truth, feminist theoretical positions challenge dominant patterns of valuing some truths (and knowledge) over others (Haraway, 1991; Narayan & Harding, 2000). Further, through the rejection of universals, they open up space for understanding the multiplicity of experience, being, and identity; inviting plurality and acknowledging that knowledges are diverse and historically, socially and culturally created (Alcoff, 1988; Haraway, 1998; Olesen, 2003). What is unique about this theoretical position is rather than suggesting a rigid or inflexible approach, it invites ideas which are open to shifts, ambiguity, criticality, multi-vocality, and creativity. As Lather (1992) adds, “Such a politics recognizes the paradox, complexity and complicity at work in our efforts to understand and change the world” (p. 132). Within the

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9Meta-narrative is a term, coined by Lyotard (1979) which is frequently used to refer to sweeping narratives or universalizing truths used to explain historical experiences or particular knowledge in totalizing ways.
context of transnational feminism then, the challenges are to recognize the differences, including the epistemological truths, as they are proposed within the dominant development agenda, and as they appear in the complicity we have in upholding that truth.

Feminist pedagogies which borrow from other critical theories in education seek to address inequitable structures and practices by naming and challenging meta-narratives based on dominant systems of knowledge. Such pedagogies, however, are capable of eliciting the same contradictions they seek to address and this presents a conundrum for feminists (Alexander, 2005). Foucault (1980) cautions against constructions of knowledge which function within dominant ideologies, arguing that they can create “regimes of truth” that emanate not only from institutional practices—in this case, international development or education—but also from individuals who operate within these systems. By implication, then, I acknowledge that activist work, including my own, may not always engage in work that is liberating or transformative and that the work of activists can both reinforce and disrupt the inequalities they seek to address. Hence, paying attention to the paradoxes is equally as important as attending to the possibilities.

Some of the ways of recognizing the nexus of knowledge and truth or even of challenging it arise in relation to concepts of situated knowledge and partial connections. These are theoretical ideas that blend well with transnational feminism. Haraway’s (1991) concept of the *cyborg myth*, for example, suggests a way of being that examines shifts in knowledge and truth constructions. It suggests that we live our lives in a state of “transgressed boundaries” and that truths are always partial and should be contested (Haraway, 1991, p. 154). This position blends well with transnational feminist positions which include concepts such as the multiple axes of identity suggested by Barker (2000),
intersectional frameworks suggested by Kerr (2004), scattered hegemonies outlined by Grewal and Kaplan (1994), and Alexander’s (2005) pedagogies of crossing. In the context of development, Marchand and Papart (1995) advocate feminist praxis as a way of naming and changing development practices when they say, “It [feminist thinking] welcomes diversity, acknowledges previously subjugated voices and knowledge(s) and encourages dialogue between development practitioners and their “clients” (p. 17). Alexander aptly warns about paradoxes in practice, however, when she discusses the normative patterns in which Westerners are grounded. She says that even in teaching transnational feminism, there is an overriding tendency by students to make difference static and reify the difference in ways that are hierarchical and place Western values as dominant. The challenge in a transnational feminist pedagogy is therefore to not romanticize the intellectual approaches that influence it, but to engage in praxis that critically reflects upon the different assumptions from which those values arise.

The participants in this study have varied backgrounds and ranges of experiences, although all have worked as activist-facilitators on women’s rights or gender equality in the context of transnational development. The research questions correspond to their practices as facilitators – their pedagogic function – and to their position as Minority World activists working in development. Therefore, deconstructing the subjective positions of the activists and the facilitators in the role of Minority World agents of development is also relevant. Included in this discussion is the recognition that experience is always partial and situated, and therefore the knowledge produced is limited. This challenges positivist positions that

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10I use the term transnational development to allude to work that is done not only in international contexts, but also in local contexts; sometimes the work is shared between these borders, other times it is distinct. I was concerned that activists be able to locate their work in multiple contexts of place as representative of activist politics. Additional discussion on activism occurs in Chapter Two.
argue that knowledge and subject position are fixed. Within my role as the researcher I must therefore continually reflect upon my subjectivity as it re/deconstructs experiences of knowledge and power, thereby resisting the creation of new “regimes of truth” (Foucault, 1980; Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002).

Studies of activism frequently focus on the way activists resist dominant patterns of knowledge and truth-making. In addition to examining how activists resist dominant patterns of development and facilitation, this study highlights the way transnational feminist theories investigate the complex, interconnected and intersectional ways that experience is understood. One way to do this is through exploring some of the paradoxes experienced by activists working in development. By exploring paradoxes, I hope to move away from some of the binary constructs that characterize the field of development such as provider/beneficiary, rich/poor, and powerful/powerless. Additionally, by using a transnational feminist framework, I hope to inspire thoughts and discourse that move beyond nation-state borders; acknowledge the limits of essentialisms; reject meta-narratives; and push connections of power and knowledge beyond Cartesian thought and modernization\(^\text{11}\) practices in development.

Transnational feminisms acknowledge that the representation of borders of identity, agency\(^\text{12}\), and power are often in flux. Boundaries, particularly those set by institutions, all too often shape or constrain individual and collective action. Understanding how these borders can shift in ways that are public, political, and personal, including on a micro-level,

\(^{11}\)The concept of modernization emerges from the idea that societies are developed using a pattern of evolution. It comes from modernization theories that are based on hierarchical ideas which place Western thoughts and values at the apex (Accessed online Jan. 31, 2009 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modernization).

\(^{12}\)The capacity for a person to make choices about acting upon the world in order to create change (Accessed online April 5, 2009 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agency_(philosophy)#Human_agency).
offers a way to understand power and knowledge relationships among participants and facilitators/instructors in learning situations.

In transnational feminist theories, claims to truths or dominant knowledge are challenged as being complex or multiple, and therefore, understanding the complexities and nuances in meaning and binary ways of thinking which rely on the assumptions of meta-narratives as truth, are put into question (Esteva & Prakash, 1998; Haraway, 1991; Lather, 1992; Narayan & Harding, 2000). Additionally, the actual naming of experience as it is lived in multiple and diverse ways, challenges hegemony because it detaches that experience from a systemic truth or norm (Foucault 1980; Habermas, 1987). The categories and linguistic dimensions which denote norms however derive from Western constructs of modernization (McLaughlin, 2004). Therefore, the study questions about how activists understand and name paradoxes and power are significant in understanding how activist knowledge or practices might shift, inform, or change dominant development discourse or de-centre the role of the facilitator in participatory workshops. By exploring the intersection of identities and points of resistance within facilitation practices, I hope to illustrate lived paradoxes in the lives of activists within Western, dominant discourse on development. In analyzing the data then, I must carefully listen for ways that activists resist dominant discourse, and explore ways in which they create more nuanced discourses that move beyond meta-narratives.

The question of difference in transnational feminist pedagogies is important. While international theories are more likely to take the nation-state as a referent, transnational philosophy looks instead at the transfers, connections and displacements across countries, cultures and communities (Tohidi, 2005). Therefore, by embracing a transnational feminist theoretical paradigm I need to pay attention to the way experience is constructed and
understood through participant relationships across and between borders, realizing that the very act of speaking about experience, culturally and discursively constitutes how that experience is constructed (Maynard & Purvis, 1998). My researcher role in listening and interpreting this experience is difficult because people’s accounts of their lives are defined by dimensions such as culture, race, ethnicity, place, and so on: “Their descriptions are, at the same time, a construction of the events that occurred, together with an interpretation of them” (Maynard & Purvis, 1994, p. 23). Pedagogically then, the analysis of how the phenomenon of critical reflection is understood and experienced, is therefore a way of constructing an understanding about how that experience is embedded in individual practice. In this way, such accounts and interpretations can further inform discourse about the work of activist-facilitators in development and draw attention to the paradoxical dimensions of this work.

Ideas born out of transnational feminism suggest opportunities to create imaginings beyond the limits of hegemony. Furthermore, transnational feminist pedagogy demands attention to the complex and intersectional way that activists negotiate their position within development, their role as facilitators, and their representation as Minority World agents. Therefore, the deconstruction of the ways that activists experience these components of their work, may open up possibilities for enhancing transformative learning and developing alternative narratives of development.

**Study Relevance**

Most of the research that addresses feminist pedagogy falls into the category of formal education; within this realm there is an abundance of research on women’s studies and feminist pedagogy (Ellworth, 1992; Mohanty, 2003; Naples & Bojar, 2002; Orner, 1992;
Weiler, 1991). Few studies exist, however, about activists as trainers in non-formal education or about the transnational dimensions of learning, and when they do exist, they tend to focus on the learners or the group dynamics (Connolly, 1999), not on the position or practice of the facilitator. An exception to this is the recent study by Curry-Stevens (2007) which examined the practices of educators who work with privileged learners. Woerkom (2008) suggests that by thinking and focusing on the practice of our pedagogical ideas, we come closer to understanding the learning process. Increased epistemological and political awareness is also, according to Chambers (2005) and Groot (2002) key to effective participatory facilitation. I therefore hope that this study will inform feminist pedagogical knowledge alongside individual facilitation practices.

Praxis that is informed by critical reflection is viewed as essential for transformation (Arnold, Burke, James, Martin & Thomas, 1991; Chiu, 2006), yet the practice of critical reflection is “seldom questioned or examined” (Chui, p.184). Furthermore, critical reflection is considered as “central to many theories of higher-level learning” (Woerkom, 2008, p. 3); however, literature about how critical reflection is experienced or understood is scarce, in particular, as it relates to non-formal education. Brookfield (2008) recently noted that while an abundance of empirical work has been done about transformative learning “few actual case studies exist of critical reflection in practice” (p. 95).

The dearth of literature about critical reflection as part of praxis suggests that there are few studies that demonstrate: a) how critical reflection is understood and experienced by facilitators; b) evidence of critical reflection leading to social change or transformation; or c) how critical reflection informs pedagogy. Nonetheless, within the provision of training on

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13 Non-formal education and other terms used in the study are defined in more detail in the terms and definitions section at the end of this chapter and in Chapter Two.
women’s rights and gender equality or in the delivery of workshops which embrace popular education and participatory methodologies, there is an assumption that transformation is the ultimate goal. This assumption emerges from the critical theories that inform critical and feminist pedagogies and suggest that when learners start to name or interpret their world they enter into a process of conscientization\textsuperscript{14} wherein they engage in a spiral of action and critical reflection that leads to social change and transformation (Freire, 1970). By further exploring the meaning and practice of critical reflection as understood by gender equality and women’s rights activists, I hope to deepen the analysis around the practice of critical reflection but also avoid the simplification of what Chui (2006) refers to as the “nuts and bolts” or lessons-learned approach (p. 183). The literature on critical reflection as it applies to the pedagogic function of facilitation remains weak, and by directly relating the phenomenon of critical reflection to the practice and experience of facilitators working across transnational borders, I hope to inform critically-reflective facilitation with first-hand narratives from experience.

In order to investigate the practice and understanding of critical reflection, the study also asked participants about how they use a reflexive approach to naming issues surrounding their position and involvement in development projects. In this way, the study informs how feminist facilitators simultaneously comply, as well as resist, the ideology of modernization as it is practiced in international development. The study, therefore, aims to broaden the base of knowledge about the implementation of feminist and critical pedagogies in participatory training practices, particularly in the context of shifting and overlapping borders; that is, transnational borders of location and identity.

\textsuperscript{14}The concept of conscientization or conscientização (Portuguese) was originally used by Freire (1970) to refer to the process of developing a critical consciousness about one’s position in the world. It is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.
The study is situated at the intersection of several disciplinary fields, including educational studies, development studies, and feminist or gender studies. The work of feminists on women’s rights and gender equality in development is often excluded from the literature on participatory development in practice.\textsuperscript{15} Additionally, there is a gap in the literature because women’s rights and development are sometimes viewed as exclusive of one another (Kanji, 2004; Matlanyane Sexwale, 1996). Creating such discourse moves outside of the current Euro-centric ideologies on development, including Western meta-narratives on training, to place activist experience at the centre (Eschle, 2005) and to develop a critique of modernity as it is implemented by activists in the field\textsuperscript{16} (Guijt & Shah, 1998). There always remains a danger according to Mindry (2001) that power relationships will be perpetuated which accentuate the politics wherein some women are “benevolent providers and others [are] worthy or deserving recipients of development and empowerment” (1189). I am interested in exploring how the practices of activists within mainstream institutions of development serve to perpetuate, as well as resist, hegemony\textsuperscript{17} (Curry-Stevens, 2007; Ellsworth, 1992; Hanson, 2007), recognizing that practices operate and are legitimated through meta-narratives (Habermas, 2001).

\textsuperscript{15}There are a few exceptions, notably work by Guijt and Shah (1998) and Cornwall and Molyneux (2007) through work associated with the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex, among a limited number of others.

\textsuperscript{16}Modernity emerges from a philosophy of progress that upholds Western thought and values as the norm. The hierarchies upon which it relies are continually played out in the field of development. Despite good intentions activists are sometimes complicit in perpetuating the ideals of modernity.

\textsuperscript{17}Hegemony explains the asymmetrical power relations that maintain the status quo and sustain the leadership of dominant groups over more marginalized subordinate groups. It was used by Gramsci (1971a) as a way of explaining social control between classes. Here it is used additionally to refer to the institutionalized, Western goals of modernization and enlightenment that still dominate much of the practice of international development (Darder, Baltodano & Torres, 2003).
The study also has the potential to address politics on the development agenda. Too often gender training programs are de-politicized and, as a result, neglect to challenge power relations or existing gender roles (Guijt & Shah, 1998; Kabeer, 1994). I hope that by learning from activists, this study might work toward enhancing practices and pedagogies that are feminist-inspired. There are, therefore, political/transformative dimensions to this research because it seeks to validate the work of activists, to illuminate strategies that resist hegemonic practices (and the challenges facilitators experience in engaging with that resistance), and finally, to enhance feminist and critical pedagogies. In addition, my own personal quest is to address how the international work of women’s rights and gender equality activists contributes to transnational feminist pedagogies. I use the plural term pedagogies to suggest there is no “one way” of practicing pedagogy and that multiple understandings from diverse contexts and locations may offer hope for enriching and expanding the field of critical and feminist pedagogy, including transnational (feminist) politics.

**Limitations**

Although my original intention for this study was to engage both women and men who were working as activist-facilitators in development, no men were identified or volunteered to participate in the study. Furthermore, the scope of the study is confined to activists living in Canada but who have worked across transnational borders—defined as local and global on the recruitment poster (Appendix A).

The field of development is diverse, and it is difficult to be representative of the many types of projects and programs that exist as well as the various applications of theoretical and
pedagogical variations on themes related to women’s rights and gender equality that occur. Even the framing of the terms *women’s rights* and *gender equality* represents a division or shift in the emphasis of such work. Consequently, this study is constrained by technical language barriers and English language structures that shape how experience is constructed and how we locate our place within it. Recognizing the limitations of language, I admit feelings of ambivalence about using binary terms throughout this study. For example, despite my attempts to avoid dichotomizations and demonstrate how meanings often intersect and blend, this study uses binary categories such as dominant and marginalized, minority and majority, local and global, centered and de-centered, among others. I am limited by linguistic structural borders and can only acknowledge that these borders are slowly and cautiously shifting. In addition to the attention given to the ambiguities and inaccuracies that surface in language, I acknowledge how I have used this language in efforts to write as an academic. There are frequently times in the writing of this dissertation when my voice as an activist dominated. The academic voice is full of inquiry, doubts and questions; the activist voice is sometimes more radical and advocates definitive changes. I have struggled to find the appropriate voice; this surfaces throughout the inquiry. For me this struggle represents both limitations and learnings, in part related to my ontological position. That is, I recognize that my personal history shapes my perceptions of what constitutes gender training, advocacy for women’s rights, and how this work links to transformational processes. I admit, therefore, that my subjectivity as a researcher and my ideological stance as a feminist influence the data produced and the interpretation of findings.
Research Methods

I defined the research paradigm as feminist because of its concern with lived experience, difference, reflexivity, praxis and emotion. This is a qualitative research study which uses feminist approaches of gathering data, including interviews and focus groups. I also invited participants to write about the phenomenon of critical reflection. The data from these multiple methods (interviews, focus groups and written responses) included the perspectives of the fourteen participants (including myself). The data collected was sorted thematically and organized into categories that loosely corresponded to the research questions. A more in-depth description of the data collection and data analysis process is provided in Chapter Four.

Terms and Definitions

The broad concepts utilized in this study include the following: non-formal education, transformative learning, transformation, critical reflection, reflexivity, participatory methodologies, participatory development, and transnational feminism. The study is contextualized within non-formal education, and while not static, it therefore uses terms such as facilitators instead of teachers or instructors, learners instead of students, and in this case, workshops versus courses. The literature review in Chapter Three explains in more detail how these terms are used and understood in the study and in related research. Here, I present a very simplified description of key terms.

Education is labelled formal or non-formal (or sometimes informal) depending upon where the learning occurs. Formal learning is frequently institutionalized and non-formal
education is often associated with learning outside of formal schooling or education systems (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007). Informal learning is defined as different from non-formal learning in that it is spontaneous and unplanned whereas learning associated with training or community projects in international development programs is considered non-formal education (Merriam et al., 2007). In the context of this study the application of participatory methodologies is associated with learning in non-formal education that can lead to transformative learning. According to Walters and Manicom (1996),

Non-formal education practices which aim to challenge injustice and oppression are variously called ‘community education’, ‘radical adult education’, ‘education for change’, ‘people’s education’, ‘liberatory’ or ‘emancipatory education’, ‘transformative education’ and ‘education for empowerment’. The names pick up on different lexicons and trends. (p. 2)

**Transformative or transformational pedagogies**, according to feminist scholars, Naples and Bojar (2002), are also referred to as critical, liberatory and more recently feminist pedagogies because each espouses a goal of transformation. Brooks (2000) argues that transformational learning and research has been heavily influenced by academic and grassroots activists working collaboratively to challenge dominant discourse and institutional hegemony. She notes that it is through the mixing of multiple narratives about experience, her own feminist experience notwithstanding, that personal opportunities for transformation are created. Transformation in the context of education is associated with learning for change. According to Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner (2007), the main approaches used to describe transformational learning are personal (individual) and socio-cultural (including emancipatory, cultural-spiritual, race-based, environmental); these approaches are

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18Learning versus education here is used to differentiate non-formal versus formal education. Similarly ‘learners’ or ‘participants’ are used in non-formal learning while ‘students’ is more common in formal education.
discussed in Chapter Three. While social transformation or social change is often envisioned as the goal in processes of participatory development or critical/feminist pedagogies, there is recognition that individual transformation sometimes supersedes social transformation. Transformation used in the context of this study refers to dramatic and significant shifts in knowledge (and power) that alter the way people or communities see the world and their place in it. It is adapted from the ideas of Freire (1970), hooks (1994), Guijt and Shah (1998), and O’Sullivan (2002) among others.

Experience, meaning-making, and critical reflection are key components of transformative learning (Caffarella & Merriam, 2000). Liberatory or transformative pedagogies work from the assumption that when learning occurs through a process of critical reflection, learners can experience an expansion of consciousness and actively engage in identifying and searching for solutions to conditions of oppression in their lived experience (Freire, 1970; Lather 1992; Mayo, 1999; Mezirow, 1991). Although much of transformational learning theory has focused on individual change, the social change process is equally valid (Caffarella & Merriam, 2000).

There are many theoretical frameworks from which to explain critical reflection. Critical and feminist pedagogues view critical reflection as a core component of praxis leading to transformation. They assert that by engaging in cycles of critical reflection and action, learners and facilitators become consciously aware of their situation and work to transform it (Freire, 1970). For facilitators, critical reflection is a process of constantly reflecting on how we operate in a workshop or training session—for example, how do we silence or invite voice? How do we create opportunities or constraints for participation? How do we validate opinions? What kinds of questions do we ask? How do we position ourselves
with regard to knowledge and power? What values do we bring to the facilitation experience? Fook (1999) suggests that critical reflection involves three steps: 1) an interpretation of a practice or event; 2) an examination of values and beliefs (including the assumptions or biases from which they originate); and 3) recognition of power and its effects.

According to Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002) *reflexivity* is making explicit power relations about position and place, and as such, it represents a form of critical reflection, albeit this study distinguishes reflexivity as an examination of facilitator/activist positions in development and critical reflection as a pedagogic practice. Emerging from feminist geography (Moss, 2002) the term reflexivity is relatively new. Commonly reflexivity is equated with reflectivity—“the act of reflecting upon oneself and one’s experiences” (Al-Hindi & Kawabata, 2002). A reflexive approach draws attention to the place that the facilitator/researcher assumes and to the ways in which it poses challenges or tensions. It examines questions of power and how they are played out through race, class, education, location, status and position, and so on. Although feminists recognize that positions of power are not fixed, they acknowledge that these positions influence how we interact and how we develop relationships. Consequently, the practices of extending awareness to subjectivity and responding to its role in the creation of meaning are viewed as important to de-centering the researcher (facilitator) positions.

*Participatory methodologies* and *participatory development* are terms that have become normalized in the contemporary development field. However, their origins, albeit contested, stem from early attempts at local empowerment processes appearing as early as the 1930s in the New Deal in India (Hall, 2005); in community development approaches in Latin American in the 1950s (Guijt & Shah, 1998); and in the work of anthropologist – Maria
Liisa Swantz in Tanzania, and President Julius K. Nyerere in the 1970s (Hall, 2005; Smith et.al. 1997). Budd Hall (2005) writes that the latter example marked the beginnings of participatory research and subsequent methodologies were heavily influenced by Freire’s visit to Tanzania in 1971. Participatory methodologies within participatory development begin with the premise of participation wherein learning is co-intentional and reciprocal; that is, it is both a protest and a response to Euro-centric approaches of development as practiced by Western governments and lending agencies. Both participatory methodologies and participatory development engender processes wherein people question their lived circumstances and use local knowledge to inform praxis with the goal of transforming circumstance. These interventions are inherently political in that they address issues of knowledge and power.

One form of delivering participatory development is through popular education, translated from the Spanish, educación popular. Popular education is a form of transformative education in practice, although it was originally delineated by a class analysis. Similar to changes between critical pedagogy and feminist pedagogy, feminists have influenced the development of popular education by inserting feminist perspectives and concerns into it. Doerge (1992) writes, “It is necessary to develop a process of conscientization that breaks with all patriarchal dualisms. Such an integrated critical consciousness includes all aspects of integrated beings: mind, subjective, body and spirit, including our relation to nature” (p. 2).

Transnational feminism is idealistically conceived as “feminism without borders” (Grewal & Kaplan, 2000; Mackie, 2001). Transnational suggests that this form of feminism goes across, beyond, and/or between borders (Mackie, 2001; Schott, 2003). I also associate
transnational feminism with local movements for social change that have transnational manifestations. In addition, transnational feminism includes the process of deconstructing identity boundaries and moving towards a discovery of inter-connections, whilst recognizing the inequities which exist between and among individuals (Mackie, 2001). In the recruitment of study participants, the criteria asked for activists with experience in local and global development, thus suggesting that diverse forms of activism have implications for social change. Further discussion on transnational feminism is provided in the next chapter.

**Study Participants**

The study participants self-identified as activists and facilitators who work across and between local and global borders, and whose work includes facilitating workshops on issues related to gender equality or women’s rights. The context for this work is broad (see Chapter Two for an additional discussion of the scope and context of the work). In this study, the types of activists and the kinds of work they perform, reflects a diversity of practices in location as well as in approach. Using pseudonyms, I provide a few examples here to describe some characteristics of the participants and the work they do. Alicia and Carol for example, have both worked extensively for trade unions and in solidarity movements. They have both lived abroad and written books or methodological guides based on their work. Yvonne’s experience was primarily in a country in conflict. Whenever she facilitated a workshop therefore, a main concern was safety for the participants. Jennifer, Michele, and Carmin work full-time as consultants. Much of their work is short-term and frequently they are engaged in delivering technical training, described by one of them as a “one-off training.” Diana, Patti, Rachel, Kayla, Emma and Wendy have worked in paid positions in Canada as
much as they have worked abroad. Their employers have varied – from universities and colleges to non-governmental organizations (NGO), bi-lateral organizations and government departments. Emma, Patti, and Rachel have worked with indigenous women’s organizations across transnational borders. Sara is a student who facilitates theatre workshops on a diverse range of issues using an approach that gets participants to talk about oppression and how they embody it. Kate is a single parent and she was working for an NGO at the time of the interview. Almost all of the participants talked about being activists in Canada as well as abroad. Their work in Canada ranged from activism and lobbying against logging companies, to indigenous rights, to feminist and women’s rights.

In the context of this study, training refers to non-formal workshops that are facilitated through the use of participatory methodologies. Varied terms are used in this dissertation to refer to the study participants: participants, activists, feminists, and facilitators. This is perhaps a reflection of the complex way that identities form, adapt and re-form according to context, culture, and person.

By using face sheets (Appendix B), I was able to glean information about the demographics of the participants, details on their work or consultancy contracts, and their preferred labeling as a form of identification.19 It is important to note that the study participants are not part of an organized group; they “wear different hats,” although they share, in some ways, similar work environments. Most, but not all, work under short-term contracts and come from diverse and overlapping communities of ethnicity, class, race, location, age, and so on. All live in Canada and work across borders of nation, culture, and location in delivering gender training using participatory methodologies. All describe themselves as activists for women’s rights or gender equality. Naples and Desai (2002)

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19 Additional information gathered from the face sheets is provided in Chapter Four.
explain that “How we explicate and frame our approach to the intersection of global and local organizing says a great deal about our political orientation, disciplinary assumptions, and cross-cultural sensibility” (p. 5). This study focuses on local examples that have transnational implications; that is, examples which include activists who migrated to live within Canada, who work across diverse borders (place, class, race, language, age, culture), and who self-identify in diverse ways.

Many of the participants work as gender trainers within development paradigms that originate from national and transnational governments, universities, and organizations inspired by modernist notions of development. Activists working under dominant, modernist development ideologies must constantly negotiate the dilemmas of position and power despite the fact that attention to how this affects the politics of engagement and relationships is not well documented. Other participants work only in more participatory-style development or popular education that resists ideologies presented in mainstream development. Their experiences in participatory development suggest that communities in the Majority World can define and negotiate the terms of their own development with or without resources from the Minority World. The latter form is frequently organized through unions, non-governmental organizations, and popular organizations and it is more likely to have political overtones. Some of the participants work within diverse paradigms. Chapter Four provides additional detail on the participant backgrounds.

**Researcher Position**

My life as an activist emerges from my rural Canadian working class family roots. I am the eldest of three sisters; a younger brother passed on before my birth. Dad was involved
in the agrarian co-operative movements and the National Farmers Union. Mom, despite her historic, homestead (Ukrainian) roots in Meacham, disliked living a rural lifestyle and finally rebelled by enrolling in university classes in Saskatoon. This entailed her driving weekly to the city, much to the chagrin of some community members, who assured Dad that she must be having an affair; higher education was still resented for women in rural communities. Dad had a Grade Eight education (and later a GED—General Educational Development certificate), and always struggled to understand his daughters and spouse—all of whom valued post-secondary education and entered in and out of it all of their lives. Like many of my friends, I left the farm to attend university in the city (Saskatoon) at the age of 18 years. While I had learned about social justice issues through the co-operative youth program and somewhat rebellious parents, it wasn’t until university that I became politicized.

I was introduced to critical pedagogy and Freire by a professor in my early days of university and always felt that critical pedagogy was a process to address injustices in the world. It was also at this time that popular movements in Latin America were creating the development of activist, solidarity politics throughout Canada—in particular, the 1973 coup in Chile after attempts at reform by Allende’s socialists and then, Nicaragua’s Sandinista revolution. Suddenly, the popular education and pedagogies inspired by Freire were applied on a massive scale. I was involved in organizing solidarity activities in Canada that used non-formal and informal education as a forum for learning about the transformational politics that were taking place in Nicaragua—the learning was reciprocal and as brigades of Canadians headed south, ideas for doing work differently were also transforming social movements in the North. The Nicaraguan revolution was using the redistribution of power and popular campaigns in health and literacy to create social transformation. One of my sisters moved
there to work, while the rest of my family all contributed in some way to solidarity work at home. It was an exciting time for activism.

At this time, I spent eight months travelling in Central America and Mexico (1983-84), learning firsthand the differences between communities living under severe repression—such as the indigenous communities in Chiapas, Mexico—and Nicaragua’s popular movements. I was also aware that the changes in Nicaragua were being undermined in the US-backed contra war, especially after personally experiencing a village under attack. I then understood more clearly how that revolution was in fact a threat to hegemonic politics of the US in the region and the corporate politics that kept its brand of imperialism in place, as well as the vulnerable position of communities within this context.

My activist work in Central America was further informed by convergences between my interest in second- and third-wave feminism and my work in indigenous education at the time. By the late 1980s, I was working as a secondary school teacher—teaching history and developing curriculum in Native Studies—and my community work with women and in indigenous communities at that juncture shifted my pedagogical emphasis to more diverse areas of representation and epistemologies. This work became increasingly international during the 1990s when I won a CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency) Professional Award and moved to Chile to work with a Mapuche women’s organization. In Chile, I employed a Mapuche woman, who on a weekly basis left her children in order to care for mine—Vanya and Cal—and to assist in housekeeping. It was during this experience in Chile that my interest in how we live and shift within and between borders was ignited. I realized that as Lucia moved from her children and rural lifestyle to work with my children in an urban setting, the trans-border connections accentuated my privileges in the world and her
lack of privilege. This was further complicated by her indigenous ancestry from a Majority World context and my European ancestry from the Minority World. My inability to work without this assistance, in part because of my gender and position as a single parent, further demonstrated the way patriarchal, capitalistic societies are structured on inequities distinguished by race, gender and class distinctions. My work in Chile convinced me, too, of the increasingly important ways in which communities could link and work and learn together. I was then, and remain now, concerned about how work in international spheres is treated in a silo approach, and similarly how work in local development is not recognized as having transnational implications. I also continue to be open to a range of diverse possibilities for re-creating the world in more holistic and inclusive ways, for example ways that honour the earth and indigenous-inspired epistemologies.

After returning from Chile, I decided to pursue a Masters in Adult Education at St. Francis Xavier University in Nova Scotia. My thesis, *Responding to Learner Needs: Participatory Evaluation as a Pedagogy of Possibility*, revolved around facilitating a participatory evaluation of a university’s graduate level gender and education class. The study used critical pedagogy and participatory methodologies inspired by Paulo Freire, Ira Shor, Henry Giroux and many others, albeit primarily men. The topic was very much inspired by the origins of participatory action research and transformative educators in the Majority World, in conjunction with my personal interest in gender/feminist education. In some ways it thereby set the stage for the interface of learning, development, and feminism wherein I situate myself today.

Over the past two decades I have worked on diverse local and global projects—often in areas related to gender, formal, and non-formal adult education, and community-based
research. Whether I am working with Aboriginal peoples in northern Canada, farmers in Ethiopia, NGOs in Nepal, with women’s organizations in Saskatoon or at a university, I am increasingly aware of my own changing position in relation to ways of being and seeing and practicing in this world. I also realize this position has shifted and that being aware of where it is now and how and why it is shifting, is part of the epistemological awareness Chambers (2005) refers to. Working with indigenous knowledge systems, for example has challenged my way of working and my perceptions of the interconnectedness in the work I do—here and abroad. I am also aware of the ambiguities and inconsistencies in doing this work; for example, those that result from institutional or funding demands, and the challenges of bridging community (activist) and university (academic) demands. My work across borders has assisted my transition into naming myself as a transnational feminist. I refer to myself as such in order to stress my belief in community-based struggles, solidarity, and transformation.

I have always considered myself an educator. I advocate for and attempt to practice participatory education and facilitation as it is rooted in critical feminist pedagogies. Despite, and in spite of, requests to work in training-of-trainer scenarios on gender equality issues, I am continually reminded in this work that without a theoretical and practical application of the work as participatory, the effect is likely to be minimal. I believe that the knowledge generated by this study can benefit my personal practice as a facilitator, educator and activist, and potentially, the practices of others who advocate for feminist pedagogies and participatory forms of facilitating. The paradoxes are therefore equally relevant and revealing. As a transnational feminist struggling for equitable forms of gender-responsive social change within the context of globalization, my commitment to the research is heartfelt.
Outline of Dissertation

This introductory chapter of the dissertation provided a broad framework and outline of the study including the background, the study’s relevance, the purpose, the research methods, the limitations, key definitions, and my position within it. The next chapter situates the study participants and defines key concepts within activist and development discourse. The third chapter positions the study within related literature on transformative learning practices connected to critical reflection, particularly as it falls within critical feminist pedagogies, and secondly, in non-formal education, including the practices of facilitating participatory workshops on women’s rights and gender equality. Chapter Four explains how the study methods sit in the field of qualitative feminist research and introduces the process for participant recruitment and selection, data collection and analysis, and ethical considerations. Chapter Five is a report on the findings from the collected data. It is divided into five main themes: conceptual understandings, critical reflection, understandings of power, possibilities and paradoxes experienced by activists working in development, and descriptions of transformation. Chapter Six discusses the results of the research. Finally, the conclusion discusses the study methods in retrospect and provides recommendations for future and related research.
CHAPTER TWO
THE STUDY CONTEXT AND CONCEPTS: CONNECTING ACTIVISM AND TRANSNATIONAL FEMINISM

The context within which Minority World activists work as facilitators of women’s rights and gender equality, is neither homogenous or static. This section offers a brief introduction to the different forms of development or contexts within which activists work, as well as the conceptualizations of development inherent in this mix. The central focus of the study—the facilitation work of activist-facilitators in development—is presented in this chapter by examining the key concepts that influence this work: activism, participatory workshops, international development, globalization, and participatory development. In this section, I also introduce literature that discusses the paradoxes and problems in gender and development as key components of transforming development or transforming the transnational. I end with a discussion of transnational feminism – suggesting that it provides a lens from which the context of development can be scrutinized. Within the site of learning for the study—workshops or training sessions in the context of development—I am specifically concerned with concepts such as participation and transnational feminism, and how different patterns and approaches to development may enable or deter learning aimed at praxis and transformation.
This chapter is structured around the metaphor of a circle coming together – it begins with activism and ends with transnational feminism – two of the ways I describe myself and the kind of work I do. The circle in participatory methodologies is sometimes considered an equalizer – it places the participants in equal positions. To illustrate another example I diverge here to a workshop I facilitated recently with indigenous women’s organizations. We were analyzing power using a power line exercise and I asked, “How could we create a structure that equalized power relations?” One of the participants replied, “Put everyone in a circle. That’s how we do it in ceremonies.” So, as this chapter is read, envision the activism finally meeting the transnational feminism – like two ends of the circle joining up.

**Activism**

One of the criteria for participation in the study was that participants self-identify as activists working locally and globally (transnationally) in facilitating workshops regarding women’s rights and gender equality. Similar to my own history in social movements—solidarity movements within Central America, in association with indigenous peoples as well as with feminist organizations—I wanted to recruit other activists from across Canada that had worked in political and gendered movements. Like Maddison (2007) and Eschle and Maiguashca (2004), I equated activism with social movements for change. Individual and community understandings of activism are obviously diverse, however, and are influenced by a multitude of factors including history, class, race, age, geography and numerous combinations therein. As Hodgson and Brooks (2007) point out in the introduction to Women’s Studies Quarterly’s special issue titled “Activisms,” there are diverse

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20The literature on social change movements is broad and beyond the scope of this study; a good starting point for feminist approaches to social movements is Sperling (2002) or Teske and Tétrault (2002).
representations and experiences that produce activisms. They note that “a few women do not even regard what they are doing as ‘activism,’ yet [they] create social connections and social changes that address community problems” (p. 22). The Oxford Dictionary defines activism as “the use of vigorous campaigning to bring about political or social change” (Online Edition, 2009).

Ferree (2006) differentiates between activism that is feminist and activism associated with a women’s movement. She associates the latter with women as a constituency or group taking a gendered position, while feminist activism she equates with a goal or target of social change typically “embedded in organizations and institutions with multiple goals” (p. 7). In explaining how feminist goals intersect with multi-sectoral movements, Ferree (2006) outlines the ways feminism also strives to address varied forms of oppression. By exploring the way local actions relate to transnational politics and how reality is constructed and situated in the experience of everyday lives, feminist conceptions of activism, illustrate how meanings are fluid and subject to shifts (Esteva and Parkash, 1998; Hanson, L. 2007; Naples & Desai, 2002). Within the context of development, Adams (2006) is interested in identifying how regional networks influence transnational conceptions of women’s activism. Some of the participants in my study situate themselves as activists within organizations, and all name themselves as individual activists. In addition, all indicated that their work was linked to other issues that focused on social change.

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22While networking is beyond the scope of this study, her use of the idea of the local informing the transnational, (her example is from Africa) is worthy of mention.
Features of activism that are important to this study were: a) that activists worked across borders of location, that is locally and globally; b) that participatory methodologies were used in facilitation; and c) that women’s rights or gender equality were the goals of the workshops they facilitated. These features emphasize facilitation work as political and as a means of linking local and global work. Like Hodgson and Brooks (2007), I concur that it is important to pay attention to the diverse ways in which this can play out. The sites of activist-facilitation are multiple – this inquiry focuses on practices of participatory facilitation in workshops situated in the context of transnational development.

**Participatory Workshops on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality**

This section provides an introduction to the kinds of workshops facilitated by activists who focus on women’s rights and gender equality. Training and capacity development are frequently viewed by organizations and institutions as ways to increase skills and knowledge that address issues of inequality. Training is often delivered through workshops on gender equality as a technical component of development projects or to satisfy policy or other development obligations such as mainstreaming23 (Smith & Smith, 1999). White (2003) acknowledges that “activists with a background in feminist politics are perplexed by calls for ‘gender training’ as a purely technical intervention” (p. 2) that is uncritical of Western values. Participatory methodologies are thusly named for the manner in which the workshop

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23Following the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, countries worldwide, including Canada, made commitments to support practices that worked toward institutionalizing or mainstreaming gender equality into all aspects of development. Mainstreaming is supported by the UN and reiterated in the UN Millennium Development Goals—the third of which is to “promote gender equality and empower women,” and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The web-site of the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (UN-INSTRAW) at www.un-instraw.org gives detailed information and links about mainstreaming and gender training.
unfolds and the inclusion of high levels of participation; these values are discussed in more
detail in the section on participatory development also in this chapter.

Programs or projects which have objectives related to achieving gender equality
(often overlapping within a certain sector or discipline) frequently include workshops as a
way to increase the participation of women in a certain sector (where they are traditionally
unrepresented), or to increase awareness about the lack of equality in a particular
organization, region, or nation. The *Oxfam Gender Training Manual* (Williams, Seed &
Mwau, 1995), for example, outlines a variety of activities which explore areas such as:

- gender-awareness and self-awareness for women and men; gender roles and needs;
- gender-sensitive appraisal and planning; gender and major global issues such as
  conflict, environment, culture and economic crisis; working with counterparts on
  gender issues; gender and development; and strategies for change. *(back cover)*

In terms of workshops, the range of topics is wide. For example, I recently conducted a
training workshop on gender and water harvesting in Ethiopia. By including an analysis of
how gender influences water harvesting practices through activities such as role play and
case studies, the workshop participants had an opportunity to question gender-blind\(^{24}\)
practices and understand how water harvesting affects men and women, boys and girls
differently. Other participants in this study have given workshops linking gender and
HIV/AIDS, gender and forestry, gender and peacebuilding, gender and policy development,
gender and the media, and so on. The intentions of the workshops include increasing
awareness, changing policy, and building more inclusive movements or organizations. In the
case of participants in this study, the term “workshops” was also interpreted to mean training
women on how to use new kinds of technology in an attempt to increase capacity or improve

\(^{24}\text{Wikipedia defines gender-blind as “a term describing activities undertaken and services provided without regard to the gender of those who participate” (Accessed Jan 11, 2009 at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender-blind).}\)
quality of life. The experiences of the study participants are more fully explored in Chapter Four where additional examples of how training in women’s rights and gender equality was practiced and understood by study participants.

Gender is recognized as affecting the way in which resources are unequally accessed or controlled, as well as the relationships of individuals to social, political, legal, and military structures. Workshops are frequently seen as a way to increase the capacity of individuals and organizations to respond to these inequities. For example, within the context of peacekeeping, a gender awareness workshop might assist in building awareness about how women and men are affected by violence differently. As in this example, however, workshops are all-too-often delivered without attention to diversity or difference, that is, all women are considered homogenous or a single interest group (Kanji, 2004) – this again is where a transnational feminist lens might offer a window of inquiry into the different and intersecting ways meanings are developed. Transnational feminism suggests instead that analyses or ways of understanding should be built on acknowledgements of the interconnections and intersectionalities between, among and within concepts and identities; in this way, it heeds attention to complex categorizations of difference and diversity. For example, within such workshops a critically reflective practice might engage in what Mindry (2001) terms a “moral politic of engagement” (p. 1207) whereby transnational relationships are scrutinized and investigated as historical, social and political and in all likelihood, in need of transformation and democratization. Innovative approaches and analysis of the intersectional links are still lacking however and this presents a challenge for gender activists engaged in development practices (Kanji, 2004).
**International Development**

The context in which the participants described their work on women’s rights and gender equality varied primarily described as local or international; the one field that was dominant was international development. The field of international development stems from a central tenet of modernity that emerged out of Western Enlightenment theories (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002). Modernization theories are built upon the idea of development being evolutionary and hierarchical, with each intervention being superior to the next (Kabeer, 1994). Originally, the goals of development were drawn from economic growth discourse, again indicating that each intervention was expected to improve the situation of the recipient. More recent definitions tend to emphasize development as improving people’s lives and livelihoods in more integrated ways with interventions coming from one country or community to another.

Dominant interpretations of modernization, like globalization, tend to be universalistic in purpose and hierarchical in approach with the norms, values and decisions originating in the North, Western or Minority World (Tucker, 1999). Modernization concepts such as “developing” and “underdeveloped” are value-laden and rampant in the dominant discourse on development. The language of development uses binary constructs, delineating the “haves” (the deserving) and “have-nots” and further, deciding whose reality is recognized, and accordingly, whose is more or less valued (Chambers, 1997).
Participatory Development

Participatory development represents the shift in international development away from a focus on economic growth toward the inclusion of human growth (Chambers, 2005). Participatory development proposed to be more concerned with people-centered practices and concerns for the local context (Brown, 1985). Although participatory development arose in part as a resistance to theories of modernization and in part out of a response to the inadequacies in international development practices, it was further informed by critical and occasionally Marxist theories (Chambers, 2005). Incidentally, these are the same theories which highly influenced the development of critical pedagogies. The differences between international and participatory development are therefore both theoretical and historical.

Relations of power and control are challenged by the methodologies used in participatory development, as Friedman and Cousins (1996) explain:

Participatory development methodologies implicitly challenge single ‘right’ solutions by encouraging multi-vocality and tolerating ambiguity. In other words, these approaches recognize that the question of power is at the heart of the social process; that there are many more than one right answer to every question; that anyone who holds out for only one answer probably has a particular interest in control; that both questions and answers depend on whose voices are heard; and that when enough different voices state and restate a problem we go some way towards changing things. A certain understanding of development is implicit in such an approach. (Friedman & Cousins as cited in Walters & Manicom, 1996, p.64)

While there are many definitions, the main characteristics of participatory development are that it asserts that power is linked to development; that people and diverse groups within communities have their own experience and knowledge; and that local actions can have global implications (Cousins, 1998). While these definitions of development express a North-South pattern, development also occurs in other, more diverse ways. For
example, local and indigenous struggles can be considered part of international movements (Estava & Prakash, 1998). In such seemingly simple ways Chamber (2005), widely known for his work in participatory development (particularly participatory rural appraisal) defines development as “good change” (p. 186). The concern for local examples in participatory development also exemplifies the concept of crossing borders; such ideas are integral to transnational feminism as discussed at the end of this chapter.

**Participation**

Participation is a key concept within participatory development and participatory facilitation. It is also an important concept in adult education, acknowledged as one of the most thoroughly studied areas in this field (Caffarella & Merriam, 2000). For both adult educators and development practitioners, central tenets of facilitation practice include commitments to participation and to learning processes wherein people name their problems or issues and identify and implement solutions (Ewart & Grace, 2000). There are different levels of participation and ideological constructs that frame and define meanings about participation. They include discussions of participation by whom, for whom, why, and so on (Groot, 2002). The scope of the term participatory is therefore wide—ranging from high levels of interaction and sharing to providing benefits through the use of methodologies that are manipulative. A lack of clarity about what kind of participation is intended or what it means in practice has led to “many paradoxes in development practice and the misleading of stakeholders” (Groot, 2002, p. 35). Chambers (2005), for example, notes that, “By the turn of the century, the words participatory and participation were embedded in development speak,” and despite its origins with non-governmental or community-based organizations,
participation was now a concept commonplace within mainstream institutions, including the World Bank (p. 101).

**Participatory Methodologies**

Participatory approaches to development, including participatory learning and decision-making, all demand participatory methodologies, which are, for the most part, adapted from transformative processes and critical theories in education (Guijt & Shah, 1998). Participatory methodologies and approaches to development borrow from Paulo Freire (1970) and liberation movements in Latin America which are premised on a perspective that the “poor and marginalized people are capable of analyzing their own realities and that they should be enabled to do so” (Kumar, 2002, p. 31) and from assertions of the subject-subject relationship between learners and teachers or participants and the facilitator.25 In North America, similar approaches had been endeavoured through the Highlander Research and Education Centre in Tennessee and through the Antigonish Movement in Nova Scotia. The local applications of these movements are significant in that they have links to transnational organizing and change; the literature however, most often associates participatory methodologies and development approaches as related to the Latin American experience. Despite the inclusive goals of participatory approaches, in practice they have not always embraced a gendered approach as I discuss in the next section.

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25 Participants and facilitators are terms more specific to non-formal training and workshops than learners and teachers/instructors, which are more common with classroom learning or formal education.
Women, Gender and Participatory Development

According to Guijt & Shah, (1998), “participatory development and gender have remained far apart, both in theory and practice, despite their shared goals of social inclusion and societal transformation” (pp. 1-2). In this way, practices that ignore the gendered histories and dimensions of participatory development, including educational pedagogies such as popular education, have made the lives and histories of women invisible (Doerge, 1992; Walters & Manicom, 1996). Initially viewed as suspect and as coming from “outsider” views, the engendering of popular education processes is increasingly supported (Friedman & Counsin, 1996) and politicized by feminists (Doerge, 1992; Crowther, Galloway & Martin, 2005; Walters & Manicom, 1996). Feminists now seek to re-politicize practices in gender and development (GAD), as Kerr (2004) argues that feminist approaches and the long history of development with a gender analysis actually provide a more “political and transformative agenda to gender equality” (p. 25) than current human rights approaches. Humble (1998) stresses that if transformative goals such as those espoused by GAD are to be realized, there are three important attributes needed to put them in place: 1) the use of a critical theoretical approach that exposes the power relations, among other things; 2) the use of rigorous forms of participation, particularly in having men involved and women as agents with strategic needs; and 3) the practice of a reflexive methodology throughout the project cycle. As Kerr and Humble, along with many of the popular educators already listed suggest if transformative goals are sought through practices in participatory development (or popular education), there should be efforts to inform the process with critical theory and feminist approaches. An extension of this idea comes from Hickey and Mohan (2004) when they
argue that local approaches require support from broader movements of social change.

Alliances with a diversity of groups and movements that advocate for participatory approaches to development and social change need to work collectively to support changes that politicize gender and development in efforts to halt the weakening of both gender perspectives and participatory approaches (Kanji, 2004). Some of these efforts should be aimed at understanding how to dismantle labels such as gender ‘expert’ because they create dichotomous and hierarchical relationships.

**The Gender ‘Expert’**

Changing the discourse on women, gender and development necessarily includes deconstructing how labels are used in development – for example, the gender expert. As Kaplan (1994) argues the need is for more critical and reflexive practices in development that mediate the diversities between and among women in Minority and Majority worlds. This includes a demystification of “Third World” and “First World” women because these categories are increasingly universalized and “naturalized” (p. 137). Harcourt (2005) argues that global discourse in development erases differences of culture and place and defines ‘developed women’ as those who “represent the wealth and values of the West” (p. 43). Harcourt and Kaplan concur with other feminists (Darder, Baltodano & Torres, 2003; Matlanyane Sexwale, 1996) in noting that the erasure of diversity and difference from development discourse serves to maintain practices of hegemony—that is, educational practices that reinforce socio-political domination, the status quo, and the subjugation of marginalized knowledges in training. In this paradigm, the knowing self—the development agent—is assumed to be the expert, thus suggesting the power of one form of knowledge
over another, and thereby maintaining a hierarchy of knowledge (Foucault, 1972). Therefore, as Kaplan, Harcourt, and Matlanyane Sexwale suggest, understanding the multiple ways that power is manifest and experienced is part of the process of dealing with the complexities of understanding how inequality is lived and experienced.

Feminist pedagogies suggest a questioning of meta-narratives—or universal truths—and thereby open the way for more dialogue, reflection and forms of local resistance to inequality (Naples & Desai, 2002). This directly contrasts with the Eurocentric modernist values which characterize development projects (Tucker, 1999) and it assumes an end to homogenizing views of culture, women, race, and so on, instead, validating affinities of cultures—that is, groups of women and men linked by common interests (Mohanty, 2003; Narayan, 1998; Schott, 2003). Key to this process is a practice of reflexivity.

**Need for Reflexivity**

Chambers (1997) points out that development professionals are part of the problem and we need to “step down, sit, listen, and learn from” those whose knowledge is “put last” in the process (p. 2). This entails questioning the “politics of virtue” which permeate the field of development and reinforce hierarchical relationships between the “provider/expert” and the “deserving recipient” (Mindry, 2001, p. 1193). In many respects, Chambers’ (2005) comments on practicing reflexivity address how this might occur. He says:

Reflexivity refers to critical self-awareness of one’s predisposition, relationships and interactions in the formation of knowledge. We can reflect on ourselves, our mindsets, beliefs and values … Responsible well-being can be augmented by good use of agency, and reflection on the effects of our actions and non-actions, especially on the part of those with power and wealth. (p. xii)
Deconstructing how the hegemonic powers of Western feminists continue to influence the discourse on gender and development and how decisions made in the field are formed, influenced, and funded is an important component of feminist research in this field (Grewal & Kaplan, 1994; Judd & Porter, 1999). Spivak (interviewed by Sharpe, 2003) also alludes to the meta-narratives and hegemonic powers that frame development when she says, “universalism is really not much use in gender training. There is [in gender training] an assumption of bureaucratic egalitarianism—the assumption that people are units that are mechanically equal,” (p. 617) and this is counterproductive. Grewal and Kaplan (1994) warn, however, that hegemony can still occur under the guise of feminism. They argue instead for “scattered hegemonies,” that is, a discourse wherein feminism opens up to creative and reflexive processes that examine tensions and paradoxes. The suggestions by Spivak and Grewal and Kaplan speak directly to the need for critical reflection on the part of activist-facilitators as they construct, re-construct and deconstruct their development work and facilitation practices. Clearly this will not come from the continuing promotion of “quick fix” approaches to development.

**Sustainable Development versus a Technical Fix**

For some women from the South, there has been a definite criticism of the institutionalization of gender mainstreaming and the lack of accountability of development workers to people at a grassroots level:

Gender analysis had become a technocratic discourse, in spite of its roots in socialist feminism. [It is] dominated by researchers, policy-makers and consultants, which no longer addresses issues of power central to women’s subordination. She identified factors underlying this shift as the professionalism and ‘NGOisation’ [sic] of the women’s movement and the consequent lack of accountability of ‘gender experts’ to a grassroots constituency. (Baden & Goetz, 1998, p. 21)
Guijt and Shah (1998) also express concern about the effect of power as it is played out between so-called gender experts and the grassroots or local women’s organizations. They say criticism is sometimes aimed at those who neglect to spend time working at a local level, and instead spend time at conferences and in publishing. McLaren (2002) says, however, that caution should be taken because the meaning of “grassroots” is also subverted by activists to shape an idea or meta-narrative. The necessity of using “theoretical flexibility” by keeping practical concerns in mind is congruent with the thoughts of a range of feminists (Marchand & Parpart, 1995; Olesen, 2003; Udayagiri, 1995; Wolf, 1996). The concern of Guijt and Shah to eliminate the fixed, hierarchical forms of labeling and explore theoretical flexibility is reiterated by numerous feminists and reinforced by the notions behind transnational feminisms which are explored in the next section.

Among other demands that challenge the field of women, gender and development are increasing time pressures and demands for technical reports in the field that further aggravate the situation for practitioners (Hickey & Mohan, 2004; Kerr, 2004; Matlanyane Sexwale, 1996). Kerr (2004) cautions that short-term outputs in development projects are all too often over-emphasized at the expense of social transformation, which tends to be a longer process. The emphasis on individual and technical solutions criticized here by Matlanyane Sexwale, Kerr, and Guijt and Shah tend to suggest that current development practices are elitist, self-serving and not geared toward long-term sustainable development. Hickey and Mohan (2004) suggest this is related to the level of engagement in development and that local approaches have to be linked to wider movements for social change.

Mindry (2001) is critical of what she terms “transnational moralizing discourses” (p. 1189) or “relations of inequality” (p. 1195) because she says these notions in transnational
organizing or development continue to promote relationships of power wherein some women are the funders or givers and others are the recipients. She calls this a “politics of virtue” and suggests instead that attention should be paid to what has *not* [her emphasis] changed in historical relations including enduring “patterns in racialized and gendered relations of power among different categories of women” across transnational spaces (p. 1208). Mackie (2001) asserts the need to develop examples of feminist activism when she says, “What we need, then, are case studies which make connections between language, discourse, cultural practices, political economy, activism, and social transformation” (p. 190). Borrowing from Mindry’s critique, such case studies would additionally need to address the ways that paradoxes, including power relations, are played out. Feminism suggests a way to address some of the paradoxes that challenge the work of activists in development. After all, “feminist philosophy is a philosophy of protest and resistance against the ways in which power negatively shapes human lives and thoughts” (Schott, 2003, p. 136). Understanding the multiple and complex ways that power operates as well as the position of feminism within it, is a central focus of much of the literature on transnational feminism.

Transnational Feminism

So, therefore, international feminism, or feminist internationalism, is not new. It has been there. But I want to argue that transnational feminism is more recent and is more directly connected to the processes of globalization. And several facts, socioeconomic and socio-demographic changes at both the local national levels and international levels, have contributed to the emergence of transnational feminist networks in the mid-1980s and early-1990s, which have networks and which grow out of international women's movement, [and] have also produced their theoretical debates. (Tohidi, 2005, p. 4)

This study positions itself within the transnational which recognizes that experiences cross borders of place, and that geographic borders are not the only framework within which
people are located. The positioning and study of transnational spaces has a historical link to the transnational organizing and resistance to global restructuring (or structural adjustment) associated with globalization\textsuperscript{26} (Naples & Desai, 2002; Tohidi, 2005). Globalization suggests increasing attention to the way global economics and transnational politics are woven together, frequently to benefit transnational corporations at the expense of human rights (Msimang, 2004). The theories and definitions of globalization are broad, diverse and well beyond the scope of this research. They are, however, relevant in the way they merge local and global, including the eliminating and shifting of borders. The transnational politics of globalization have dismantled boundaries, all the while ensuring that corporate, capitalist politics place a greater emphasis on homogenization (Naples & Desai, 2002).

Transnational feminism goes beyond a focus on the role of the nation-state, and questions the political, military and economic structures that legislate national identities and construct meta-narratives (Tohidi, 2005). My own position within and experience of a transnational politic has made me aware that whether I’m working with Aboriginal students using a standardized curriculum, with women on social assistance in the inner core of a Canadian city, training government employees in South Africa, or conducting workshops with the Mapuche in Chile, there are situations where certain people have more power or where hegemonic values are emphasized. In this way, power is never constant and it shifts from place to place and circumstance to circumstance. Similarly, power is not solely based on race, location, class, or gender. The same applies to my position as a facilitator and

\textsuperscript{26}The term globalization is sometimes used as synonymous with a “\textit{global economic restructuring [sic] of capitalism}” (Naples & Desai, 2002, p. 8). Other discussions about globalization define it with the following attributes: the flow of goods and services across borders; the global movements of peoples; the free flow of information; the spread of consumer culture; the deregulation of trade barriers; and the privatization of public services (Mies, 1998; Naples & Desai, 2002). Many feminists are critical of the way globalization has led to corporate benefits from \textit{structural adjustment programs} which allow a “free flow” of goods, services and people without regard for human rights or labour legislation (Estava & Prakash; Msimang, 2004).
includes the realization that despite attempts to use participatory methodologies, there are
times when I facilitate from a position of power and control, and conversely, there are times
when I de-centre my facilitation practice. Therefore, awareness of the facilitator position
requires constant effort and despite the best of intentions, there are always situations where
the facilitator experiences a paradox—that is, position, class, education or some aspect of
location can pre-empt the facilitator from creating an equitable environment. Transnational
feminism scrutinizes connections and relations across locations and between positions in
order to demonstrate the complex and intersecting ways that lives are lived.

Transnational feminism refers to the crossing of national boundaries so that
distinctions of identity overlap or become blurred, flexible, and intersectional (Chan-
Tiberghien, 2004; Pettman, 2006). Transnationalism as a concept sits in contrast to
essentialized notions of place or identity suggested in discourse about international
development or global sisterhood—a discourse which further perpetuates national boundaries
and the idea of the other. Therefore transnational feminism is about multiplicity and
complexity because the construction of a global feminist movement cannot assume shared
values and principles. Examining assumptions and embracing diversity, reflexivity and
agency are therefore central tenets of transnational feminist development that need to be
explored (McIlwaine & Datta, 2003). Eschle (2005) refers to “intersectional discourse” as the
language feminists need to embrace in recognition of these interconnected “axes of
oppression and identity” (p. 1757). This kind of discourse is particularly relevant in the
context of renewed dialogue about the ethics of feminists from the Minority World working
with women from the Majority World (Kerr, 2004; McIlwaine & Datta, 2003; Mohanty,
2003; Wolf, 1996).
Some feminists argue that the creation of an alternative discourse on development, wherein feminists are central to the practice (Eschle, 2005), is increasingly required in the socio-political climate of globalization. This discourse also needs to address the paradoxes experienced by feminists entrenched in development practices (Mindry, 2001). Naming feminism and activism in development discourse can be part of the re-politicization process so desperately needed in gender and development work because naming serves to develop a feminist consciousness which influences discourse by making the invisible visible (Adeleye-Fayemi, 2004; Guijt & Shah, 1998). Many writers concur that documenting examples and providing analyses of linkages and alliances across diverse locations offers ways to explore processes of transformation and explain the conditions of gendered relations and women’s lives globally (Eschle, 2005; Grewal & Kaplan, 1994; Judd, 1999; Kerr 2004; McIlwaine & Datta, 2003; Odysseos & Seckinelgin, 2002; Tohidi, 2005).

McIlwaine and Datta (2003) argue that transnational feminist and solidarity movements are causing institutions to draw up more inclusive social practices. They write:

There appears to be a gradual elision of feminist theorists, activists and development practitioners that recognizes the importance of celebrating difference in terms of the specificities of local configurations of gender and feminisms, together with the need for strategic partnerships, some of them with men, aimed at improving people’s lives throughout the world. (p. 377)

Although recent literature demonstrates shifts toward transnational feminist perspectives in discussions about the anti-globalization movement (Barlow and Clarke 2001; Bracke 2004; Chan Tiberghien 2004; Eschle, 2005; Ferree & Tripp, 2006; Friedman 2003; Ifekwunigwe 1998; Mackie 2001; Mendoza 2002; Miles 2003; Naples & Desai, 2002), there is much less written about the influence of transnational feminism in development (Guijt and Shah 1998; Hijab and Lewis, 2003; Kaplan 1994; Kerr, 1999 and 2004; Mendoza 2002;
Mohanty 2003). The lack of examples explaining how transnational feminist pedagogy can inform or impact upon non-formal education consequently leaves it less understood or referred to by practitioners. Yet, reading the words of several Asian feminists about building learning movements that are more holistic, reflexive and open, suggests potential links between transnational feminism and transformative learning. They write:

> We therefore need to build learning movements based on principles of critical introspection, questioning assumptions, inclusion and consciousness of our own differences and hierarchies, and being genuinely open to change. This is difficult to sustain without periodic, systematic processes of reflection that are consciously created and protected. Finally, we need to build fluid and open movements, whose constituency has expanded in real and visible ways to include all those affected by hunger, deprivation, conflicts and hate. (Dhanraj, Misra & Batliwala, 2004, p. 95)

**Summary**

This chapter outlines the major influences bearing on the practice of gender equality and women’s rights training within development. It considered how globalization, gender, feminism, participation, and development have influenced and are influenced by international and participatory development contexts. It also suggests ways in which activists who are involved in different forms of development maneuver through and cross the borders of transnational spaces and intersectional geographies. The next chapter explores links between transnational feminism and transformative learning, including ways of democratizing knowledge and opening up epistemological difference and collaborations. It also addresses the role of a critically reflective facilitation practice as a key component within transformative learning.
CHAPTER THREE
TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING AND PARTICIPATORY FACILITATION IN THEORY AND PRACTICE: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Adult education’s major contribution to development may be the concept of critical reflection on experience and its role in community transformation. (Ewert & Grace, 2000, p. 337)

Chapter Three introduced concepts surrounding transnational feminism. This chapter returns to another idea introduced in the previous chapter – the idea of building learning movements that are more holistic, reflexive, and concerned with interconnections, by suggesting links between transnational feminism and transformative learning. I start by exploring theory in transformative learning, and then by discussing the pedagogies of transformative learning – characterized as critical and/or feminist pedagogies\(^\text{27}\) -- and components of these pedagogies such as critical reflection, praxis, and alternative epistemologies. Finally, and given that the study is constructed to explore the role of facilitation in participatory workshops, the chapter concludes with a discussion of the theory and practice of critically reflective facilitation.

\(^\text{27}\) Initially these terms are used as separate and distinct. However as the literature suggests, feminist pedagogies grew in large part out of feminist concerns with universalisms and the binary truths expounded in critical pedagogies, hence ultimately blending into what is frequently referred to as critical feminist pedagogies. Within the study the term critical feminist pedagogies is also used to express shifts away from the dogma of critical pedagogies and toward pedagogy of counter-narratives and multiplicity, including epistemologies of uncertainty (Lather, 1998).
Exploring Connections and Contradictions: Power, Knowledge and Position

The intersections between power and knowledge indicate important sites upon which the literature in this study is grounded. This section is concerned with the way power and knowledge are exercised and regulated, the way differences are positioned and intersect, and the paradoxical position of activism and resistance within this puzzle. In particular, I am interested in the ways these dimensions of learning offer a means by which to scrutinize sites of contradiction, instability and ambiguity. Realms of power as they influence facilitation, sources of knowledge, and ensuing epistemologies, including questions of difference are all central components of transnational feminist pedagogies. Exploring these concepts helps to surface paradoxes and to invite sites of change, creativity, and even spirituality.

Knowledge, Power and Truth

According to Foucault (1972), humans are knowing subjects; however, some forms of knowledge are recognized more readily than others and it is these forms of knowledge that eventually form truths. This function of truth is discursively important in development as it functions to maintain certain regimes of power, such as Western knowledge. Awareness of the ways that truths function enables understandings about how activism or critical pedagogy provides a form of resistance to dominant knowledge systems. ‘Regimes of truth’ are exercised largely by institutions in ways that legitimize certain types of knowledge and de-legitimize or subjugate others (Foucault, 1972). Knowledge thus functions as a form of power. According to Peter McLaren (2003) knowledge, as it is historically and socially constructed, sits at the nexus of how power relations and meaning are created and
legitimated. He stresses that critical pedagogies seek to expose the *social functions* of that knowledge and how it “gets produced and lived out” (p. 72).

Knowledge is not homogenous and may be interpreted in diverse ways by those who have it (Diawara, 2000; Kassant & Tettley, 2003). Thus, if knowledge is constructed socially, then people must act and react to realities in different ways, at different times, and in different contexts (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002). So, although power and knowledge are assumed to be neutral and seldom scrutinized in Western modernist epistemologies, alternative epistemologies are more explicit about deconstructing the power and values implicit in theories of knowledge (Schott, 2003). Using this logic, any system that claims neutrality, namely Western epistemologies, should therefore be immediately circumspect.

In hierarchies of power, the local voices are not heard unless there is a conscientious effort to understand positionality and subjectivity (Bartky, 2002). Grewal and Kaplan (1994) suggest that transnational feminist challenges to dominant goals of development include validating and confirming different epistemologies and and challenging binary thoughts. They also realize this entails understanding contradictory politics. Resistance to hierarchies, patriarchy, and Western values as truth is therefore difficult not only because it involves naming paradoxes, but also because of the need to break down the internalized rules of surveillance that keep such values and positions in place.

Alexander’s (2005) recent work on pedagogies of crossing, suggests that transnational feminism can disrupt the hierarchical practices of knowing (such as those dominant in international development) in order to “cross the fictive boundaries of exclusion and marginalization … from living alterity premised in difference to living intersubjectively premised in relationality and solidarity” (pp. 7-8). To do this, she says, we need to
“demystify domination” (p. 8). Correspondingly, Alexander invites discussions of solidarity and spirituality or power-with and power-within similar to the global activist and feminist spiritual leader, Starhawk. For as Starhawk states:

Power-over, or domination, is the power we’re all familiar with, the power of a small group to control the resources or to limit the choices of others. Ultimately, it stems from violence and force … But the word “power” itself comes from a root that means “ability.” We each have a different kind of power: the power that comes from within; our ability to dare, to do, and to dream; our creativity. … Power-over seems invincible, but ultimately it rests upon the compliance of those it controls. … Instead, the fear of that force causes us to repress and police ourselves. … Power from within is akin to what many cultures call “spirit.” (Starhawk, 2002, pp. 6-7)

Starhawk further discusses power-with or the power of acting together, collectively. Similar to transnational borders around knowledge production, these exercises of power can take place simultaneously, both oppressively (power-over), and as a form of resistance (power-within). The categorizations of power as elaborated by Starhawk and Alexander (2005) provide important links to feminist transnationalism because they move away from absolutes and binary definitions of power as good or bad; they suggest different ways of knowing and being beyond universal definitions, for example in the way they discuss power as internal or spiritual.

Naming sites of struggle becomes increasingly important in the context of the increased homogenization of identity as suggested by transnational and global relations. Globalization threatens local epistemologies and the stories that underlie them—stories that are informed by experience, identity, culture, history, agency and gender (Naples & Desai, 2002; Stone-Mediatore, 2003). Skeggs (1997) expands:

We are always implicated in relations of knowing. These relations have historically produced positions of power for the subjects and objects of knowledge to occupy which they reproduce and challenge. The traditional distinction made between object and subject highlights the role knowledge plays in the (re)production of power and legitimacy. Certain knowledges are normalized,
authorized and legitimated; only certain groups are seen to be respectable, to be worthy objects or subjects of knowledge. Traditionally it was only bourgeois White men who were seen as legitimate knowers, producers and subjects. (p. 18)

Within the context of transnationalism, therefore, the stories of activists engaged in or resisting dominant patterns of development become increasingly important.

**Resistance and Activism**

An assumption of activism is that it is a source of resistance to dominant knowledge, yet activists working within development are frequently embedded in a contextual position of contradiction or paradox. This conundrum is a topic of concern for feminists. Harcourt (2005), for example, says that, “To the extent that women’s movements were part of creating dominant knowledge, they were also creating within it the nodes of resistance … power rests not only in the dominant hegemonic structures but also in the engagement and resistance to them” (p. 45). Similarly Bartky (2002) explains, “Resistance and struggle are co-present with power and that power is continually transformed in the face of such resistance” (p. 37). Kerr (2004) notes, “Simply participating to take advantage of an opportunity to engage with powerful institutions is insufficient without aiming to ultimately transform existing power relations” (p. 27). Kruks (2001) adds that it is only through *intentional consciousness* that activists come to a place of resistance (p.57). For activists working within the institutional boundaries of development, the position of resistance and complicity forces the question how do these activists simultaneously experience resistance, hegemony, and agency? Personal engagement with this dilemma is suggested by Foucault (1972) when he writes, “If one is interested in doing historical work that has political meaning, utility and effectiveness, then
this is possible only if one has some kind of involvement with the struggles taking place in the area in question” (p. 64).

The difficulty in recognizing paradoxes or even possibilities, however, is that sometimes diverse theories, pedagogies or strategies are engaged in simultaneously. Barker (2000) speaks to the importance of recognizing intersections of identity when she speaks about “reassembling a vision of female subjectivity that will recognize multiple axes of identity” (Barker, 2000 p. 180). Kerr (2004) adds that concepts such as intersectionality are essential to understanding diversity and constructions of power and privilege. The challenges of intersectional positioning are experienced in a multitude of ways. For example, explaining the way activists can use training materials homogenously and without regard to context, individual or cultural difference; assuming all learners in a workshop setting have a similar background; and treating the knowledge of local facilitators as subordinate to that of external facilitators and so on. As Kerr and Barker suggest, then, despite the challenges in using an intersectional positioning this is clearly a way of surfacing values or assumptions that might influence, direct or tarnish interactions and learning processes.

Reflexivity suggests one way of consciously understanding and addressing shifting positions of power although it can surface pain, doubt and vulnerabilities (hooks, 1994). Code (2002) explains: “Pessimism is often in order when theorist-activists shift position, attempt to reenact local successes globally, confront the narrowness of their limits, despair about their translatability into other almost-local issues and their effect beyond the limits of locally-knowledgeable imaginations” (p. 67). In a world where dominant knowledge and power systems are created within defined binaries and borders, such tensions are understandable, yet it is likely that only by understanding these tensions can we hope to
“transform the contradictory politics of feminist theory” (Grewal & Kaplan, 1994, p. 149).
The complexities of creating solidarity and working in an enabling environment where knowledge flows in multiples directions is often daunting. A realization that activists can “reify rather than redress existing systems of power and control and fail to reduce the social injustices” (Lykes & Coquillon, 2007, 318) is always a possibility. As the literature demonstrates, the contradictory positions of power and knowledge continue to be simultaneously contested and welcomed. As inferred by the comments from Grewal and Kaplan, Code, hooks, Lykes and Coquillon, it is increasingly important to pay attention to the tensions surrounding transformation. It follows then that pedagogies which explore issues of power and representation can be enriched by learning from sites of tension.

Transformative Learning: Critical and/or Feminist Pedagogies

It is my firm belief that a true pedagogy cannot be based on uncritical acts. On the contrary, it must be founded on an ethic of critical reflection whose ultimate purpose is the education of dignified persons who in turn will contribute to the development of democratic communities. (Fernandez-Balboa, 2007, p. 106)

Transformative learning as mentioned in the first chapter is used to describe learning processes that alter or shift the ways people see themselves in relation to others in the world around them. It occurs on levels that are individual and/or social (discussed in more detail later in this chapter) depending upon the approach or theory being advocated (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007). Edmund O’Sullivan (2002), one of the founding members of the Transformative Learning Centre (TLC) at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, suggests transformation can also be linked to the sacred, and to this end, he (and the TLC) define it as:
Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feeling, and actions. … Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race, and gender; our body-awareness; our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of the possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy (p.11).

Transformative learning involves critical reflection wherein historical and social events are interpreted and reinterpreted, and in the process, the validation of local or subjected knowledges can garner new meanings. That is not to say, however, that such knowledge does not have its own systems of power and truths at play, as all forms of knowledge can become subject to truth-making and the manipulation of power contained within (Foucault, 1972). Nonetheless, this is where a reflexive process and practice, which constantly requires an awareness of positionality and subjectivity, is required (Moss, 2002). An analysis of how knowledge is produced suggests that views or paradigms are subject to shifts—shifts which can expand consciousness and create new meanings. Such shifts, or forms of praxis, can transform how we see ourselves and accordingly, how we relate to others. This relationship and its transformative potential are central to feminism and activism.

Critical and/or feminist pedagogies are frequently cited as processes that can lead to transformative learning. Not surprisingly, then, the discourse about critical and feminist pedagogies overlaps and intersects as one informs the other. There is no single unity in the understanding of these terms; rather, they are “complex and fragmented” (Gore, 2003, p. 332). In the literature which follows, these pedagogies are used in the plural form. I also make a humble attempt to demonstrate certain tendencies or approaches in the literature surrounding critical and feminist pedagogies, specifically in the ways that they frame teaching or facilitation practices; praxis, including the salient role of critical reflection
therein; and transformation. The practices and ideas that have emerged from critical and feminist pedagogy include ideas of praxis, critical reflection and transformation – ideas central to understanding what a transnational feminist pedagogy might entail.

**Critical Reflection and the Link to Transformation**

The link between critical reflection and transformation is widely discussed in the literature (Brookfield, 2000; Chui, 2006; Cranton, 2006; Freire, 1970; Mezirow, 1991). Cranton (2006) discusses this link here:

> Critical reflection is the central process in transformative learning. Clearly, not all reflection leads to transformation; we can question things without changing them. To be transformative, reflection has to involve and lead to some fundamental change in perspective. (pp. 79-81)

Similarly, literature exploring critical reflection as a component of change, knowledge generation and informed thought is broad and diverse. In the 1930s, John Dewey’s theories of democratic education expounded on the need for reflection to improve teaching and learning experiences (Dewey, 1938). Newman (1994) argues that reflection in liberal traditions of education, such as that of Dewey, was quickly politicized and soon after taken over by humanists and more recently, by behaviorists. Reflection leading to transformation is widely discussed in adult education literature in many of these traditions. For humanists or behaviorists, however, the transformation is more likely to be considered personal, but for social constructionists or those using political perspectives it is considered a component of individual and/or collective social change (Brookfield, 2000).

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28 Literature on reflection and critical reflection is somewhat ambivalent or as Brookfield states “conveniently vague” (p. 11) For the purposes of this study I use critical reflection to refer to the reflection that informs praxis and goals of transformation. Distinctions between reflection and critical reflection are made more explicit in Chapter One.
Frequently cited in the literature on transformative education, Jack Mezirow (1991) discusses *perspective transformation* saying, “reflection makes thoughtful, enlightened action and reinterpretation possible” (p. 100). Critical theorists, however, point out that Mezirow fails to link individual transformation and social change (Brookfield, 2000; Finger & Asun, 2001). They note that Mezirow’s work linking individual reflection to critical awareness of a cultural context lacks a connection to socio-political *action*, yet his understanding of individual acts of reflection and the examination of assumptions remains important in understanding transformative education (Brookfield, 2000; Newman, 1994). Ewert and Grace (2000) note that Freire’s approach, with its attention to learning and educational systems and including his analysis of power, adds to his popularity among theorists and practitioners. Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner’s (2007) description of the contexts under which the theories of Mezirow and Freire developed helps to distinguish their respective ideas on transformation:

Unlike Mezirow’s theory, which is based on the experiences of White, middle-class women and concentrates primarily on personal transformation, Freire’s theory emerges from the context of poverty, illiteracy, and oppression and is set in a larger framework of radical social change. In Freire’s approach, personal empowerment and social transformation are inseparable processes. (p. 140)

Brooks (2000) points out however that it is important to maintain suspicion and doubt about learning theories and how they define transformation. A constructivist position advocates that the historical and cultural location of transformation should be approached with a lens of diversity and a questioning of assumptions. Therefore, assuming that transformation is individual and social as well as contextually defined, ideas such as those of Ewert and Grace which address whether Mezirow’s or Freire’s approach has more or less potential is somewhat a mute point, except when individual reflection becomes individualistic,
narcissistic or counterproductive to collective action or social change. Feminists such as Miles (2002), are critical of approaches which centre on either the individual or the social and instead, she argues for integrative transformative learning which “incorporates progressive personal change and progressive social change as mutually constitutive of each other and focuses on the integrality of both” (p. 23). Although Brookfield (2000) neglects to explain how experiences are also a result of history, position and context, (a point justly criticized by Miles) there are aspects of his ideas on constructivist learning approaches and critical theory that are valid to this study. He writes:

Pragmatic constructivism emphasizes the role people play in constructing, and deconstructing, their own experiences and meaning. Constructivism rejects universals and generalizable truths, and focuses instead on the variability of how people made interpretations of their experience. This strand of thought maintains that events happen to us but that experiences—that is, how we understand events—are constructed by us. (p. 37)

As an epistemological position, aspects of constructivism blend with transnational feminist pedagogies through the valuation of critical reflection, transformative learning and reflexive practice (Halen-Faber, 1997). The reflexivity in practice suggested by Halen-Faber and Brookfield is aimed toward understanding our practice and representations of self within that practice, not at developing new meta-narratives or truths. In this way power and knowledge remain situated and in flux—constantly shifting the borders of academia, activism and pedagogy.

**Critical Theory**

The historical connection between critical pedagogies and critical theory helps to explain how the study emerges from the borders of multiple areas of knowledge and philosophy. Critical theory proposes that education is never neutral—it either serves to
domesticate or emancipate (Arnold, Burke et al., 1991; Brooks, 2000; Freire, 1970; Finger & Asun, 2001; hooks, 1994). Critical theories that inform critical pedagogy emerge from the Frankfurt School of Critical Social Theory, and ideas about life-world experiences and consciousness-raising based on adult experiences in the world (Finger & Asun, 2001, Habermas, 1987; Wilson & Hayes, 2000). According to the Frankfurt School and a process called the ideology critique, it is during adulthood that learners distance themselves from power relations and discursive traditions in order to be critical of them (Brookfield, 2005, p. 96). Habermas (2001) also supported the idea that only upon reaching adulthood a learner could experience the potential for critical reflection. In the process explained by Habermas and Brookfield, learning and making assumptions are therefore developmental in process and the development of a critical consciousness is therefore directly linked to critical reflection. According to Brookfield (2005) this process is similar to the way Gramsci was able to identify and offer challenges to hegemony. While acknowledging the important historical role of the Frankfurt school and the ideas of Gramsci and Habermas, I would however, like to avoid the patterns of truth-making and binary constructions which these theories expound. Instead, I suggest a form of reflexivity which, through using a transnational feminist lens, offers a reminder to reflect on differences, power relations, and shifting patterns of meaning.

Conceptual (Mis)Understandings of (Critical) Reflection

Critical reflection, conceptualized by Freire (1970) in his seminal work, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, is envisioned as a space for generating new knowledge about how lived experiences or practices can become more democratic, more participatory, and more dynamic. Freire was concerned with how individuals internalize oppression, how they arrive
at critical consciousness or awareness about that oppression, and then, how they act through praxis to transform inequitable power relations. His discussion of the co-intentionality of practice by facilitators and learners assumes an interactive engagement, particularly in regards to how theory and practice inform action. Freire (1970) discusses critical reflection as an essential component of praxis and action in the world, stating that:

It is only when the oppressed find the oppressor out and become involved in the organized struggle for their liberation that they begin to believe in themselves. This discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection: only then will it be a praxis. … Reflection—true reflection—leads to action. On the other hand, when the situation calls for action, that action will constitute an authentic praxis only if its consequences become the object of critical reflection. (pp. 47-48)

While editing Handbook on Adult and Continuing Education, Wilson and Hayes (2000) made an attempt to have each contributing author frame their discussions around critical reflection on the topic. In discussing this activity, Wilson and Hayes point out important assumptions and complexities that arose. First, they noticed that many authors had difficulty grasping the concept of critical reflection and identifying personal assumptions about it. Second, they concluded that “many of us in adult education do not engage frequently or easily in critical reflection on our beliefs and practices” (p. 666). As a result, they were concerned that the practice of asking people to reflect critically on their practices in retrospect makes the process too techno-rational and fails to capture the human or meanings “from the heart” which are the very ideas they hoped to encourage. They note that academic institutional culture is one of the obstacles:

The lack of time and rewards allocated for such reflection are symptomatic of a broader institutional culture that continues to be enmeshed in technical rationality. A critically reflective approach to practice threatens to challenge the status quo in such institutions, by opening up opportunities for practitioners to question the very values and assumptions that underlie and legitimatize institutional culture and customs. (Wilson & Hayes, 2000, p. 669)
Despite the fact that Wilson and Hayes were editing a handbook, not undertaking an academic inquiry, their personal reflections on critical reflection in the field of adult and continuing education demonstrates important trends and challenges in the understanding and application of critical reflection by adult educators. As Chui (2006) explains:

If we accept that transformation is always situated and that different forms of reflection all play a part in bringing about transformation, it is then clear that the present conceptualization of reflection is inadequate, as it not only takes for granted the different mental aspects inherent in the reflective process, but also fails to capture the complexity and the richness of the underlying processes. (p. 187)

Some authors have used the term “conceptual slipperiness” in discussing the term critical as it relates to thinking, reflection and pedagogy (Burbules & Berk, 1999). In exploring the conceptual vagueness around critical reflection, Chui (2006) argues that reporting on outcomes and lessons learned rather than the complexities of the process has limited the potential for critical reflection in practice. Brookfield (2008) says that what is required is more examples of critical reflection in practice. Kerr (2004) points out that despite pressures on practitioners to produce outputs, transformation takes time and moreover, there is value in the process of being part of a learning movement (p. 24). The responses of Chui and Kerr suggest a need for frameworks to address the absence of critical reflection in order to develop more reflective and ultimately transformative practices. Brookfield (2008) suggests looking beyond adult education; he suggests that Nelson Mandela’s autobiography provides an example of critical reflection worth learning from. Within the arguments of Chui, Kerr, and Brookfield there is a common thread that suggests paying more attention to process and in the case of the latter two, the politics.
Pedagogical Praxis: Critical and/or Feminist

Lather (1992) writes that critical pedagogy “is positioned as that which attends to practices of teaching/learning intended to interrupt particular historical, situated systems of oppression” (p.121). Embedded within, and foundational to, critical pedagogies is a belief that through theoretically-informed cycles of “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (Freire, 1970, p. 33) or praxis learners can experience an expansion of consciousness which actively engages them in searching for solutions to identified needs. *Conscientização* (Portuguese), the concept used by Freire (1970), refers to the process of developing a critical consciousness about one’s position in the world, that is “learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions and to take actions” (Freire, p. 17). Through such critical consciousness or *conscientization* converging with praxis, transformation becomes possible. Freire (with Macedo, 1987), whose work focused on literacy education among peasants in Brazil, spoke about both teachers and learners “reading the world” (praxis) in order to transform it (p. 37); however, literature about critical reflection as it relates to critical pedagogy most often focuses only on the learners and ignores the role of the teacher\(^2\) (Gruenwald, 2003). This incongruent position raises questions. Without critical reflection on the part of a facilitator, how are practices of hegemony interrogated or changed? How does a facilitator acknowledge their complicity in replicating existing practices and ideologies? While recognizing knowledge as hierarchical how does the activist-facilitator perpetuate dominant knowledge and power structures and how do they simultaneously and differently resist propagating these ‘regimes of truth’

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\(^2\)Read instructor in adult education and facilitator or trainer in the context of a workshop. In the context of this study, the term activist-facilitator is used to denote the dual role played by the study participants.
The work of Curry-Stevens (2007) is important here in that it also focuses on the work of community-based educators in the development of pedagogy of the privileged. She points out the links of the work of adult educators to on-going activism beyond the classroom and in building allies as part of an activist practice. Looking for examples, as Curry-Stevens points out, needs to go beyond learners.

Embodying a critical position in education suggests a co-intentionality of practice—that is, the recognition that the facilitator and the workshop participants (in formal education, the teacher-student) are both subjects of the learning practice (Freire 1970). Freire writes:

A revolutionary leadership must accordingly practice co-intentional education. Teachers and students (leadership and people), co-intent on reality, are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge. As they attain this knowledge of reality through common reflection and action, they discover themselves as its permanent re-creators. In this way, the presence of the oppressed in the struggle for their liberation will be what it should be: not pseudo-participation, but committed involvement. (p. 51)

Freire and Shor (1987) also acknowledge that actions often embrace transformation and oppression simultaneously—suggesting that we live in constant contradiction or paradox and understanding these dilemmas is part of conscientization and praxis. After all, as Wilson and Hayes (2000) state, “How do we change if we choose not to see?” (p. 27). Freire explains this further when he writes:

Action and reflection occur simultaneously. A critical analysis of reality may, however, reveal that a particular form of action is impossible or inappropriate at the present time. Those who through reflection perceive the infeasibility or inappropriateness of one or another form of action (which should accordingly be postponed or substituted) cannot thereby be accused of inaction. Critical reflection is also action. (1970, p. 109)

The practice of critical reflection, according to Wilson and Hayes (2000), is a way in which hope for social change is retained because in addition to heightened awareness about
paradoxes and problems, critical reflection enlightens the pedagogical process and opens ways of understanding the possibilities therein. They note, however, that critical reflection is not a panacea for all the problems that face the field of adult education. Chambers (2005) supports this perspective, although he cautions against extreme practices of reflection when he says:

Self-critical reflection and respecting the self are still blind spots in development, even though they are a starting point for transforming practice and performance. There is a danger, though. Things can go too far the other way. Too much time can be taken. Groups themselves can then become addictive, narcissistic and overly inward-looking. Facilitators can become institutions…. (p. 176)

In many respects, the cautionary voice of Chambers presented here, is one that speaks about resisting universalisms and fundamentalisms in a pedagogical practice because such values or motives are counterproductive and contrary to diversity and sustainability.

The values promoted by Chambers are supported by feminists who advocate for reflexivity—acknowledging that positions of power, privilege, race, place and so on project unequal status in learning situations. Although the relationship between critical and feminist pedagogies is not without critique, many acknowledge the relationships between and within critical and feminist pedagogies and the influence of Freire as a theorist central to transformative education (Darder, Baltodano & Torres, 2003; Lather, 1993; Lykes & Coquillon, 2007; Woerkom, 2008; Weiler, 1991). Weiler (1991) describes feminist pedagogy as linked to both Freire and to second wave feminism:30

Thus, like Freirean pedagogy, feminist pedagogy is grounded in a vision of social change. And, like Freirean pedagogy, feminist pedagogy rests on truth claims of the

30 Second wave feminism grew out of the civil rights movement in the US in the 1970s. It addressed gendered inequalities between men and women and to some degree, the global women’s movement with the idea of global sisterhood. In a large part, third wave feminism was born out of protests to such essentialized notions of women and the lack of attention to diversities, including race and sexuality, which are considered part of second wave feminism. Feminisms in the third wave were born out of diverse locations, places, institutions and activisms (Grewal & Kaplan, 2006).
primacy of experience and consciousness that are grounded in historically situated social change movements. Key to understanding the methods and epistemological claims of feminist pedagogy is an understanding of its origins in more grassroots political activity, particularly in the consciousness-raising groups of the women’s liberation movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. (p. 456)

Although social transformation, challenging oppression, viewing people as actors and subjects in history, and the development of consciousness (beyond discourse) are similar tangents in critical and feminist pedagogies, the meta-narratives and binary structures upon which critical pedagogies are built are increasingly viewed as problematic and worth challenging by feminism (Gore, 1993; Walters & Manicom, 1996; Weiler, 1991). Feminist, Jennifer Gore (1992), argues that it is largely the lack of reflexivity in critical pedagogies which perpetuates meta-truths and makes critical pedagogy troublesome. Ellsworth (1989) similarly rejects the utopian views and claims of truth in critical pedagogy by critiquing, among other things, the way it assumes dialogue is experienced equally by all in the collective ‘we’ and fails to analyze power relationships between learners and the critical pedagogues themselves. Ellsworth’s call to reject universalisms is, however, considered excessive by some feminists (Alcoff, 1988; Gur-Ze’ev, 2005). The danger of rejecting all truth-statements of critical pedagogy is that it can immobilize practitioners from attempting to try alternative approaches and thereby completely negate the possibility of praxis.

Therefore, although Ellsworth’s critique is important here, so too is the overall acceptance, albeit with criticality, of Freire’s ideas by Weiler (1991), Lather (1998), Lykes and Coquillon (2007) because these authors suggest spaces for flexibility and change.

Gore (1993) argues that there are no inherently liberating practices or discourses because they all operate within what Foucault calls “regimes of truth.” Her doubts about the meta-narratives implicated in critical pedagogies are reiterated by feminists such as Naples
(2002), Lather (1993) and Weiler (2003). Lather (1998) says further that the utopian rhetoric espoused by mainly male critical pedagogues is problematic and she wants critical pedagogy to “move away from legislating meaning and toward contradictory voices, counter-narratives and competing understandings” (p. 488). Weiler (2003) points to Lather’s work as pivotal in her insistence that counter-hegemony can be built into critical pedagogies through stronger links with conscious, critical materialist feminism, a position that addresses more than gender (that is, race, class and so on). Weiler (2003) acknowledges that although liberal feminists were important in recognizing gender biases in education, critical and socialist feminist theorists are more likely to relate to the complex interplay of different forms of power. By citing other feminists and concurring with their flexibility in addressing pedagogy, Weiler asks, “How are we to address our own contradictory positions as oppressors and oppressed?” (p. 455). By asserting that educational practices are not absolutist, Lather and Weiler demonstrate that the lines between liberatory and/or hegemonic processes are often blurry and therefore, attention to the paradoxes of intent and ambivalence becomes equally important. Moreover, their attention to intersections and complexities within pedagogical practice, suggest attention to shifting borders of knowledge and praxis.

Gore (1993) suggests that although critical pedagogues such as Giroux and McLaren provide hopeful visions of democratic schooling and society, they have failed to actualize that vision because they focus on “pedagogy as politics” (p. 42) instead of pedagogy as practice. Goldstein (2007) reiterates this paradox when she acknowledges that as a grad student she had “grasped what we, as critical educators, were supposed to do, but was unable to put the theory into practice; I was unable to live what I had started preaching. I could practice ‘critical theory’ but not critical pedagogy” (p. 17). She cautions about the dangers of
this position by saying that educators internalize the theory and practice it with learners but they neglect to “interrogate the ways in which they too are complicit in the dominant culture forms and practices that continue to marginalize their students” (p. 19). Again emphasizing aspects of practice, hooks (1994) states that if education is the practice of freedom it “is not just about liberatory knowledge, it’s about a liberatory practice” (p. 147).

Although Freire (1970) clearly speaks about a co-intentional, subject-subject practice, what Goldstein (2007), Lather (1993), Weiler (1991) point out is that praxis is not necessarily the practice of educators who are using emancipatory pedagogies. Rather, they suggest a lack of reflexivity on the part of practitioners or more worrisome, a detachment between critical theory and practice.

Referring to the use of a reflexive feminist pedagogy in research, Lykes and Coquillon (2007) aptly suggest that “processes are not linear, or without conflict, but each example demonstrates how the co-researchers are moving roughly forward toward developing critical consciousness about oppression, the co-researchers role in maintaining it, and possibilities for actions for liberatory transformation” (p. 305). Lather (1998) warns of “pedagogical meltdowns,” wherein the promises of critical pedagogies are not delivered, as equally important (p. 496). Similarly, Ellsworth (1992) writes, “Critical pedagogies are always implicated in the very structures they are trying to change” (p. 101). Therefore, the implication suggested here by Lykes and Coquillon, Ellsworth, and Lather is that facilitators practicing critical pedagogies and using a reflexive approach are frequently embracing contradictory, paradoxical or counterproductive positions—positions, therefore, that are open to doubt and scrutiny. While this struggle might provide insights or lead to critical consciousness about how transformation is possible, it may also suggest that critical feminist
pedagogues need to further explore how personal vulnerabilities and ambiguities can be reflected upon. The “pedagogical meltdowns” referred to by Lather may in fact be part of a process of deconstruction, albeit within a position of discomfort, from which transformation becomes possible, or not. According to Lather (1998), a view that is consistent with transnational feminism, is that practices operate on “shifting ground” (p. 497) and critical pedagogies must also start to re-think how they engage in praxis in this realm.

Lather (1998) and Lykes and Coquillon (2007), along with other feminists, challenge the way praxis is conceptualized as static in critical pedagogies. Curry-Stevens (2007), for example, while still entrenched within the language of binary constructions, framed what she termed pedagogy for the privileged that extended boundaries of identity beyond essentialist notions, for example the idea that only the oppressed needed to engage in praxis. She helped research participants to understand the way their lives were constructed based on plural identities. In the process they were able to reject fixed notions of identity and understand that the experience of being oppressed or privileged, for example, was also contextual. Work such as that of Curry-Stevens in shifting boundaries moves the feminist critical pedagogy espoused by Weiler, and the passion of Freire, toward a more blended practice that borrows from diverse epistemological positions. In this way, perhaps, pedagogy and epistemology work in tandem to deepen the process of conscientization.

Expanding Feminist Pedagogies: Epistemic Openings

Calling for links between pedagogy and transformation rather than total rejections of critical and feminist pedagogies, Naples says, “we need to find epistemological and pedagogical approaches that lend themselves to feminist education without marginalizing the
important insights of early consciousness-raising strategies” (as cited in Bojar, 2002, p. 20). Others suggest that feminist pedagogies can create a (re)envisioning of epistemologies, knowledge, and deepening of meanings beyond the binary, absolutist thinking of critical pedagogies, by engaging and paying additional attention to critical reflection and relationships. (Thayer-Bacon, 2003). This re-creation or re-visioning of knowledges that are outside of the central power of the state or institutional mechanisms might offer hope for resistance to dominant values and ideals as proposed by Western scientific thought and patriarchy (Foucault, 1972). In the view of Foucault (1972) then, subjugated knowledges can only be understood by analyzing power and “detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time” (p. 133). Chambers (2005) agrees, adding that those in positions of wealth and power require epistemological awareness to bring about an understanding of how we “learn, mislearn and construct reality” (p. 196). The components of learning theories and epistemic reflexivity as it is suggested here by Weiler, Naples, Thayer-Bacon, Foucault, and Chambers is central to ways of engaging in critical reflection and transformation as part of transnational feminist pedagogies.

Becoming a critically reflective facilitator assumes engagement in a pedagogy and epistemology that embodies critical and feminist theories, but as the literature illustrates, even these notions are very diverse and contested. The description of engaged pedagogy by bell hooks (1994) offers one such example. She suggests that such pedagogical practices should not separate mind, body and spirit. Rather, in their conscious emphasis on well-being, they should embrace the spiritual and erotic aspects of learning as well. Kincheloe (2007) reminds critical pedagogues that the imbalances in the world have largely resulted from
fragmentation. Thus, similarly to hooks, he suggests that by reconnecting with each other through mind, body and spirit, we can create critical ontologies and synergies that encourage consciousness, agency and praxis to emerge (p. 35). Alexander’s (2005) pedagogies of crossing also similarly suggest attention to these intersections of position in practice.

There is a diversity of epistemological and pedagogical perspectives in the literature which share a belief in transformation guided by a spirit of creativity and interconnectedness with others and the world around us. These perspectives include: Starhawk’s (2002) models of webs and information for shared power and decision-making flowing in different but linked ways which relates to spiritual ways of imagining and working in groups; Kruks’s (2001) suggestions that reviewing how perceptions are formed through emotion which precedes (and sometimes exceeds) discourse; and Code’s (2006) rational imaginings, which provide examples of diverse ways of knowing that deserve additional attention — in spite of, and because of, their challenges to critical pedagogies. In the argument against common or universal knowledge or truths, feminists increasingly point to multiple, ambiguous, and diverse “regimes of truth” or epistemologies (Gore, 1993; Lather, 1992; Barker in Narayan & Harding, 2000; Thayer-Bacon, 2003). Thayer-Bacon (2003), for example, demonstrates that epistemologies must always remain plural (reflecting social plurality) and ambiguous, aptly suggesting that relational (e)pistemologies [sic] are congruent with feminism because “we become knowers and are able to contribute to the constructing of knowledge due to the relationships we have with others … to show how interconnected we all are, not just to each other personally, but also to our social environments, our cultures” (p. 73). Gruenewald’s (2003) pedagogy of place similarly suggests that geographical dimensions permit a melding
of self with place and ecology. The importance of the multiple ideas presented here is that they are linked to systems of sustainability and interdependency. Barker (2000) writes:

Such new epistemologies and methodologies are necessary if women and men from different class, ethnic, and cultural positions are to engage in collective emancipatory projects without reproducing patterns of hierarchy and domination. Third World poverty and debt, profound environmental degradation and unequal North-South relations are integral part of the Enlightenment legacy. Solutions to these problems need to come from feminist positions that deconstruct that legacy and valorize local knowledge systems without romanticizing them. (p. 186)

At the risk of diminishing the complex meanings behind these theories, I offer these only as examples of the rich epistemological and ontological ideas that can inform and suggest epistemic openings that shift boundaries of critical feminist pedagogies beyond binary-thinking and Western epistemological thought—perhaps even suggesting new ways of experiencing and being in the world. In summary, feminist positions embrace reflexivity, challenge fixed identities and discourses, and open and enrich opportunities to name paradoxes and differences, thereby offering potential for alternative discourse and diverse epistemological stances (Eschle, 2005). Finally, as Woerkom (2008) and Chambers (2005) note, there is a need for more epistemological and pedagogical awareness—that is, becoming more critically aware of how we learn to work toward transformation and construct reality, all the while acknowledging that this also opens up to perspectives of doubt and error. This personal awareness will no doubt lead to a reckoning or acknowledgement of integrated or intersecting aspects of epistemological awareness, such as those suggested by Alexander (2005), hooks (1994), Kincheloe (2007), and Thayer-Bacon (2003).
Critically Reflective Facilitation: Theory and Practice

From the perspective of transnational feminism, this third section of the chapter begins with a reminder that the reification of binary thoughts and linear models which are used to develop truths about reality as static are problematic in critical pedagogy. Brookfield’s (2000) concept of developing a critically reflective facilitation practice suggests a way of heeding these dilemmas because it draws attention to these issues and the ways they are performed in pedagogical settings. According to Halen-Faber (1997), transformative learning and a reflexive practice require critical reflection. Brookfield (2000) describes a key tenet of a critically reflective practice as one which focuses on adult educators as inquirers into their own and others’ practice and politics. He says that such practices ask educators/facilitators to examine “the social function of adult education (particularly unchallenged dominant values and social systems) and the way their own practice reproduces patterns of inequity” (Brookfield, 2000, p. 33). Within the context of development, looking at the way activist-facilitators practice critical reflection is therefore important for understanding how power is exercised and relationships are developed.

Cunliffe (2004) links Freire’s work with social constructionist views and states that “this [link] is particularly important because critically reflexive practitioners hold subjective understandings of reality and think about the impact of their own actions in creating reality and knowledge—that is, thinking in realities” (p. 410). The vicarious ways reality is described and constructed by those practicing such methodologies is important and so too are the values and assumptions upon which that knowledge is derived. According to Woerkom (2008), using critical reflection in this way is important because epistemological
assumptions, including the role of emotions, unconscious learning and relational learning beyond linear models and dualistic assumptions can point to different ways of conceptualizing learning (p. 9). Within the context of the transnational, suggestions by Woerkom and Cunliffe are central to understanding how critical reflection can lead to an examination of power, difference, and situated, partial learning beyond the limits of materialism. While discussions of a critically reflective practice in theory are more prevalent, discussions of how to implement participatory facilitation in the practice of participatory development are lacking (Groot & Maarleveld, 2000).

Educators who embellish critically reflective practices frequently speak about the difficulties in doing so: “I needed to model a critically reflective practice … how do I engage these future teachers to confront the tough questions without marginalizing their own experiences” (Goldstein, 2007, p. 22). In Knowing Ourselves as Instructors, Bell, Washington, Weinstein and Love (2003) write about the unpredictability and discomfort in using critical pedagogies. They suggest strategies for coping and building a strong facilitator/educator practice which includes: awareness of one’s own social identity, confronting one’s biases, responding to biased comments; inviting challenge and modeling on-going learning versus mastery; giving up control; learning from disequilibrium; using our experiences and modeling self disclosure; negotiating authority or hierarchies; and nurturing each other through team teaching so that institutional risks might be less damaging. Another example comes from hooks (1994), who talks about the need for dialogue to discuss things like difference and border crossing. Additionally, communities of practice\textsuperscript{31} may provide

\textsuperscript{31}A discussion of communities of practice is beyond the scope of this study. COP are essentially groups of people brought together socially because of shared knowledge or experience. For a further discussion on COP see Lave & Wenger (1991); Wenger (1998); Allee (2000); and Heaney in Wilson & Hayes (2000). Of particular interest for this study is the virtual community of practice on gender training started by UN-INSTRAW in 2008.
some insights into how demands for the facilitation of gender training or participatory workshops can be scrutinized and politicized. Because of the isolation experienced by activists working as facilitators of gender equality, communities of practice offer important sites of sharing and networking.

Whereas the training of facilitators is typically taught as the act of applying a magical box of tools and techniques or a tool kit, the actual learning process toward becoming a participatory facilitator is more complex (Groot, 2002; Groot & Maarleveld, 2000; Hanson & Hanson, 2001). The over-simplification and frequent depersonalization of the facilitator role in participatory processes may shadow how critical reflection and ultimately social change occurs (Groot & Maarleveld, 2000). According to Groot and Maarleveld, deconstructing the facilitation practice can de-centre the facilitator role, making learning more democratic and participatory. Deconstructing the facilitation role can include an analysis of the iterative and complex ways epistemologies, identities and approaches associated with participatory facilitation are applied to an educative process.

The emphasis on technical aspects of learning and reporting, frequently required by funders, diminishes the role of critical reflection as a way of achieving a deeper understanding of the determinants of social change (Chambers, 2005; Chui, 2006; Groot & Maarleveld, 2000; Wilson & Hayes, 2000). Instead, Groot and Maarleveld explain, “the strong focus on tools and procedures tends to leave the reader with a picture of a facilitator and his/her magic box. The underlying diversity in intentions, epistemological, and theoretical assumptions underpinning facilitation practices usually remains implicit and unclear” (2000, p. 5). Matlanyane Sexwale (1996) argues that simplifying the complexities of facilitation are harmful to goals of equality because tools and frameworks which are
globalized and “popularized and sometimes made imperative by funding agencies and the development industry …are seldom subjected to theoretical and political interrogation but, rather commonly, they are evoked and sanctified. This freezing of a political issue of male domination, of people’s life and struggle, into techniques, can only serve short-sighted reformism and deliver to patriarchy not even a dent” (p. 60). Groot (2002) adds that the inconsistencies between “the facilitators’ perceptions, values and actions, on one hand and the larger context on the other” (p. 189) cause tension and can result in what she terms *defensive routines*. She warns that if the intended purposes for interventions are already fixed, participatory processes may not be possible. This presents a conundrum for the activist-facilitator and begs the question: at what point do we work almost exclusively for project outputs and how does this impact potential for transformation? Alternatively, it can be assumed that if processes are truly open to authentic participation, critical reflection can play a role in surfacing the values and assumptions of both participants and facilitators.

**Role of Participatory Facilitators**

Cousins (1998) acknowledges that the role of the facilitator in participatory development training sessions is to ask participants to name their realities and to create solutions and actions through a reflective cycle of action and reflection. Similarly, Chambers (1997) maintains that in order to facilitate participatory development, a trainer must reflect critically on how they use power and control in a training situation, thereby suggesting that facilitators have to be willing to model the change they advocate. Groot’s (2002) proposition, which accompanies her doctoral dissertation, in many ways concurs with that of Chambers when she says, “a *participatory method* per se does not exist because whether or not a
method becomes participatory, relies on the frame of mind of the facilitator” (n/a). Although Cousins, Chambers and Groot all point to the role of the facilitator in participatory development, they are not explicitly assuming a co-intentionality of practice between the facilitator and learners as it is envisioned by Freire (1970). Therefore, despite the facilitator role there are multiple conditions, including the frame of mind held by the learners, and the context of the learning which influence the style and impact of the interaction. Nonetheless, statements such as Groot’s and Chambers’s provide cautionary notes. The process of being/becoming a critically reflective practitioner is obviously complex and multi-faceted, demanding attention to theoretical and epistemological directions in an on-going and transparent process.

Among the many settings in which facilitating a participatory process is challenging attention to subjectivity, the factors of participation, and attention to technique, context and procedure play a significant role. Bopp (1994) advises that given the multi-faceted, multi-dimensional aspects of participation, factors such as the following deserve to be taken into account: a) insider/outsider values; b) questions about whose values are being served in the process; c) questions about whose definition of “community” is being used; d) personal responses or attitudes toward criticism and opinions; and e) an understanding of the limits and methodologies appropriate. Walters and Manicom (1996) add that texts do not capture what they consider the most important pieces of the facilitation practice: innovative processes, intuition and critical reflection (p. 2).
Components of Participatory Facilitation

Widely acknowledged as an important component of participatory education, literature on the theory of training participatory facilitators, however, remains sparse (Groot & Maarleveld, 2000; Grudens-Schuck, 2000). Several of the components important to the facilitation process of participatory (workshop) interventions as listed in the literature include: a subject-subject relationship with learners; a valuing of diversity; learning from experience; cycles of reflection, planning, and action; recognition of different learning styles; understanding when to push, pull or compromise; ability to confront fear of conflict; willingness to step back from or defer to others in the decision-making process; humility, openness; and an understanding of adult education (Chambers, 1997; Grudens-Schuck, 2000; Groot & Maarleveld, 2000; Hanson & Hanson, 2001; Schuck, 2000; Walters & Manicom, 1996). Although not explicitly stated in this list, feminists assume that reflexivity is also a key component of effective facilitation, particularly across geo-political borders. Matlanyane Sexwale (1996) explains:

We also have the responsibility to take initiatives to learn and grow, to commit ourselves to transformatory change. Such commitment to combat patriarchal and other forms of oppression should not only be embedded in what we teach and facilitate others to learn, but is also equally important in our relationships, in the way we consistently and constructively challenge each other and ourselves. This can be made possible by looking at power also in more complex, institutionalized and collective and historical dynamics and at (individual and group) identities as they are dynamically and socially constructed and defined over time and space, in the process compounding power relations. For if we hope to change the world, all its levels need to be taken into account, complex as they may be. This is as true for South Africa as it is for anywhere else in the world. (p. 58)

Matlanyane Sexwale’s work echoes many other feminists from the Majority World who are critical of the lack of reflexivity practiced by Minority World practitioners (Matlanyane
Sexwale, 1996; Mindry, 2001; Mohanty, 1991). In effect, a lack of reflexivity can perpetuate homogeneity, hegemonic practices and hierarchies of knowledge. Reflexivity is therefore not only important but must include dialogue, critique, and exchange with practitioners across transnational borders. Using her action research—doctoral work in Africa—as the context for her comments on facilitating participatory processes, Groot (2002) addresses both the complexity and paradoxes inherent in the process when she concludes her study by saying,

Finally, this study shows that facilitators are critical variables in the success of participatory interventions addressing complex issues, involving multiple interrelated factors and actors. Their values and interests strongly shape the interpretation of the issue at stake and its context, the choice of theoretical and methodological perspectives and how these are applied. As such, a facilitator’s own frame of reference highly determines ‘who’ participates in ‘what’, ‘how’, ‘when’ and, very importantly, ‘why’. Therefore, an important step for facilitators who are serious about participation is not to reach for the latest handbook on participatory techniques, but to clean up their own act by critically reflecting on their own assumptions, values, interests and practices. The uncritical application of ‘participatory’ methods in facilitation may ‘get things done’ but may also reinforce the very practices that in theory they were meant to change. (p. 190)

**Summary**

The literature presented here suggests that facilitating participatory processes in the context of development is complex and multi-layered, particularly for activists who advocate reflexive positions and are aware of their epistemological stance. By deconstructing pedagogical practices and the power-knowledge nexus as it is understood within critical feminist pedagogies, knowledge which is submerged or devalued can possibly surface. This can occur through listening for the ways pedagogies are experienced, recognizing that they are not totalizing in the truth they espouse, and examining shifts, intimations and alternatives. Further, if present frameworks in critical feminist pedagogy continue to occupy “a praxis of stuck places” (Lather, 1998, p. 447) then perhaps inquiry into the overlapping and
intersectional spaces occupied by activists offers insight into how paradoxes are realized and transformation is conceived in practice. Perhaps this can add to the dearth of literature related to how a transnational feminist pedagogy might inform facilitation practices in a development context.

I have attempted to illustrate how institutional constructs about knowledge and power also limit possibilities to challenge hegemony or to build transformative learning opportunities. Instead, transnational feminist pedagogies push for a widening of theories of knowledge creation in order to explore the way knowledge is related to connections that are situated and often based on partial and multi-faceted subject positions. By naming paradoxes and positioning activists at the nexus of power and knowledge, the possibility for a counter-narrative of facilitating participatory development processes is created. As the literature substantiates, however, this is only possible by developing a critically reflective facilitation practice and critical consciousness regarding one’s personal and political position. Chambers (2005) aptly suggests that the transformative potentials of development are possible when participation and critical reflection are positioned as central to the process:

The conclusion to draw from experience is not to give up and look for something else. It is, instead, to engage; to commit; to persist (exploring, inventing, taking risks, learning by doing and often failing [sic] forwards); to deepen and intensify self-critical reflection on practice, learning from experience and critiques; and to seek congruence through internalizing participation personally, professionally and institutionally and at all levels. It is to accept participation as an enduring opportunity to form good relationships and to confront and transform over-centralized power. Thus, above all, it is to meet the overarching challenge: to enable and empower those who are marginalized, powerless and poor to gain for themselves the better life that is their right. (p. 115)

In many respects, then, the process of conducting interviews with activists who constantly cross national, cultural, ideological and pedagogical borders involves a search for some aspect of meaning beyond the dominant theories of modernization and development—
that is, an understanding of a transnational practice. As the literature demonstrates, current paradigms of feminist critical pedagogies are moving away from universal attributes and toward increased naming of contradictory politics, especially with the influence of third wave feminism, and the efforts of transnational feminism. A deeper understanding of critical feminist pedagogies may be possible through expanded epistemological awareness, and a more critically reflective facilitation practice.

Using the experiences of activist-facilitators as the participant-subjects of the research, the next chapter explains the methods employed in this inquiry to ascertain meanings about how activist-facilitators experience and understand critical reflection as key to transformative learning and their understanding of power, paradoxes, and possibilities in the process of facilitation and development work.
While the last chapter broadly introduced some of the literature that influences the study, *Toward Transformative Learning and a Transnational Feminist Pedagogy: Experiences of Activist-Facilitators Working in Development*, this chapter addresses the study methodology and methods. The chapter begins by situating the research within transformative learning and transnational feminism, including feminist research methodologies that inform the study. Following the methodology, I explain the design of the study and the methods including: the recruitment of study participants, the data collection, the researcher position, the data analysis, and ethical considerations.

**Situating the Research**

The goal of the study was to explore the practice of transformative learning as it is experienced through practitioners of critical and feminist pedagogies in the context of non-formal training on women’s rights and gender equality in development across and between borders of place and representation. I was particularly concerned about critical reflection as a key component of transformative learning and pedagogical practices – that is, how it is understood and informs the practice of facilitation, including the relationship between the facilitator and the learner – on individual and political levels. Accordingly then, I pursued
methods of investigation that probed into the experience of facilitating participatory workshops across trans/international spaces. In particular, I focused on the experiences of activists, like myself, who delivered training workshops locally and internationally in the areas of women’s rights and gender equality. As a researcher the act of conducting the research in many respects became a critical reflection on my own work as a facilitator of non-formal learning. My closeness to the subject created both a zone of comfort with the participants but also a place of discomfort and uncertainly about the analysis – how was my experience in this study different from that of the participants? My position in the study was at once reflexive because of my position in it as a researcher/participant. There were times in the research process when I listened to and re-read the interviews to try to create meanings from my experiences as separate from, and in relationship with, those of the participants.

The study that was done reaches into adult education and transformative learning in non-formal education as well into more interdisciplinary topics which intersect with these such as development studies and women or gender studies. This interdisciplinary, intersectional positioning of the research bodes well with the way it is framed within transnational feminist pedagogies.

Using qualitative feminist approaches to research and methods such as interviews and focus groups, all-the-while attempting to embrace a reflexive researcher position, I explored how activists make sense of their work within critical and/or feminist pedagogical practices (that is, participatory methodologies) and think about (transnational) transformative learning. More specifically this includes critical reflection in praxis, reflexivity about position, and connections to transformation. Additionally I explored with participants the possibilities and paradoxes present in development work, particularly as it is practiced in
transnational geopolitical locations. Integrating feminist theories, politics, ethics and
gendered stories into the research were all part of the process of implementing feminist
methods.

**Research Methodology**

The study’s methodological approach could be described as feminist because it was
cconcerned with researcher subjectivity and the researcher/researched relationship. Further,
the study moves beyond the questions to also inquire about the ways in which the data will
be collected, analyzed, presented and utilized (Ironstone-Catterall, 2005). By questioning the
actual process of research itself, feminist research illustrates that politics, ethics, and social
locations cannot be separated from methodologies (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002). In
feminist qualitative research, although the method or technique may not be distinctly
feminist, the actual methodology and politics of gathering the data and the
interpretation/validation of results all demand a certain practice and ethic which is linked to
feminist goals of participation, inclusion and social justice. The methodology converged with
the framing of the study as transnational feminist pedagogy – that is, ideas around
representation and reflexivity, paying attention to the way power and knowledge are used in
the research relationships, and understanding the researcher position. By linking both the
epistemological and theoretical positions then, this position also challenges the partial way in
which the researcher is situated within the research. Instead, there is an acknowledgement
that the researcher position is fluid, moving in dynamic ways between activism and academia
and acknowledging the way knowledge and power intersect and are both distributed and
understood.
A feminist methodology assumes that a particular way of gathering information is valid and produces a subjective truth or knowledge based on lived experience (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002). By situating the research in a feminist theoretical paradigm, I realize the importance of recognizing the lived experience of the subjects of the research. Feminist methods used in this study recognize the critical role of experience; the important intersections of identity and diversity; the fluidity in identities, particularly as they are contextually and relationally shaped; and the many ways that oppression is enacted. I define this work as feminist because it values the subjectivity and personal experiences of the study participants, and it openly questions the dominant patriarchal paradigms of research and knowledge. By examining the problematics of feminist pedagogy in practice, therefore, it can destabilize knowledge and create new ways of approaching the practice (Olesen, 2003).

Feminist research demands attention to different perspectives in the act of interpreting the data including: understandings the agency of the researcher and how positions of power are represented in that role, along with reflexivity in listening for the lived lives/understandings of participants (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998). Reinharz and Chase (2002) explain the complexities in doing this:

Interpreting women’s words and stories required a delicate and reflexive balancing act. We need to work at understanding and respecting participants’ interpretations of their lives, particularly if those interpretations are different from our own. We need to identify how our acts of knowing – our interpretations of women’s words – are socially situated, which includes reflecting on our complex social locations and subjectivities as well as our personal, political, and intellectual agendas. We need to embrace the value of feminist social scientific perspectives, the value of locating women’s words within, among other things, gendered, racial, and class-based structures. Finally, we need to be open to the way in which our interpretations, as well as those of research participants, may change over time. (p. 234)

Finally, the practice of doing the research in a participatory way deserves attention. Although this is not participatory research, similar to participatory facilitation, it had certain
guiding principles that either limited or encouraged participation. As Wolf (1996) suggests, any disjuncture between rhetoric and practice suggests a place for additional reflection and action.

Research with a more participatory component challenges feminist scholars to practice what they believe and may preach: more egalitarian approaches to empowerment that are with, and not simply for, the researched population. Yet, feminist fieldworker-scholars have tended not to take up the call of more participatory research and have held onto the reins of research and writing. While this is deeply connected to the structure of power and privilege in the academy, it nonetheless points to highly problematic contradictions among feminist scholars. (Wolf, 1996, p. 28)

The ways contradictions or paradoxes are played out in the research process are critical to understanding how I enact power and knowledge relationships in the process (Heron, 1999). From the onset, the questions that emerge from these positions of inequality beg probing: How and when do I construct positions of ‘other’? What are the struggles and spaces where resistance can possibility surface? Wolf (1996) reminds me that it is important for Minority World activists to explore how their positions of power and privilege influence “what knowledge is produced, under what conditions, about whom, and for whom” (p. 6). Using a transnational feminist framework, I was constantly reminded about the transnational and intersecting borders within which the research was situated. A reflexive stance about my position in the research assisted in identifying issues of power that surfaced; they also opened up an understanding of the ways the participants, self included, avoided discussing issues of power in the Majority World/Minority World dichotomy.

Study Design and Methods

My life experiences as a feminist, an activist, an educator, a facilitator, a pedagogue, and a researcher provide me with a position of comfort in choosing this topic of research. I
resented that I was unable to include perspectives from beyond Canada realizing that the perspectives of people in Canada, as situated in the Minority World, is already skewed as one of privilege (Heron, 1999). The decision to include my experience in the research was personal and political. Many of my decisions were informed by feminist methods of research, such as, questioning what counts as knowledge; how the personal, including identity issues, is also political; how relationships are structured; and how power is understood in the research process.

**Study Participant Recruitment**

Initially, I sought participants through third party recruitment. As per my Tri-council Behavioural Research Ethics Board approval from UBC (Appendix E), the letter and poster requesting participants for the study was distributed widely to development and gender organizations (Appendix A). The recruitment letter, in simple English, detailed the project objectives, limitations, boundaries, and potential risks or benefits. Interestingly, third party recruitment turned out to be easier through women’s organizations than through development organizations. This is plausibly linked to another study that indicates there is a general lack of staffing and resources to deal with gender issues among Canadian NGOs (Collins & Ivens, 2007). Despite the wide dispersal of the letter, actual recruitment also occurred serendipitously when a woman who had already agreed to be a study participant contacted someone else she knew would fit the criteria. Although the recruitment materials referred to activists in women’s rights and gender equality, it never specified only women were eligible, yet only women inquired.
The criteria for recruitment listed in the letter and on the poster were distributed electronically. It included that participants: 1) self identify as activists working for women’s rights and gender equality; 2) were facilitators of participatory workshops in trans/international contexts; 3) were willing to explore how critical reflection occurs; and 4) were willing to discuss the possibilities and the paradoxes that frame development work. Using the face sheets (see Appendix B) which participants filled out at the beginning of each interview and which provided demographic information as well as examples of the kinds of projects participants had worked on, I was able to glean important information about their backgrounds.

**Participant Backgrounds**

In order to eliminate risks of identifying participants, I provide general information about their backgrounds in this section. Among the study participants, linguistic diversity was strong. I learned that the languages they spoke, to varying degrees, included: Spanish, Italian, English, French, Hindi, Farsi, Swahili, Nepali, Finnish, Cree, Swedish and Amharic. The participants had experiences working for a diversity of national and international machineries and organizations including the following: United Nations’ organizations, CIDA (and other bi-lateral agencies), Asia Development Bank, World Bank, Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, Oxfam Canada, university development programs; and diverse non-governmental agencies such as, CARE Canada, International Development Research Canada, Rights and Democracy, Canadian Hunger Foundation, Canada World Youth, MATCH International, Save the Children, Women to Women, World University Services Canada, CUSO, and others. Two participants were visible minorities, three
participants were French Canadian by birth, one was Aboriginal, and a second identified as having some Aboriginal ancestry; at least three emigrated from abroad, and two were from first-generation immigrant families. Again using the face sheets, I learned that all of the participants preferred to be called facilitators rather than trainers and all referred to themselves as feminists; albeit one responded, “yes, but seldom.”

Three of the participants lived in rural areas (although others originated from rural backgrounds) and the rest were urban. Participants were geographically located in four provinces: British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec and Saskatchewan. All of the participants had some post secondary training although this varied widely – three were working on or completing doctoral studies; five held a Masters degree; four had undergraduate degrees and one held a certificate. Participants viewed some background in adult education or participatory development as important for this kind of work, although not all had achieved this formally and for some it was learned in very ad hoc ways.

At least half spoke about growing up in working class families. Three were raised abroad. Ten of the participants had lived in the Majority World for a minimum of six months and for as long as fifteen years of time. Although several participants noted the importance of physically living in the Majority World as an asset to understanding development work, for the purposes of this study, theoretical and pedagogical knowledge about working across transnational borders and using transformative models of education were equally as important. Participants ranged from 25-63 years of age; two were semi-retired (albeit still “taking on the odd workshop”). Almost half of the participants had no children; several had young children at the time of the study and two were looking after elderly mothers in their
homes. The backgrounds and personal histories of the participants ultimately influenced the kind of data produced.

**Data Production**

Attempts to select participants based on diversity and representation, and a history of involvement in participatory development were considerations and ultimately influenced the decision to interview fourteen participants (including myself). For the purpose of this study, I chose multiple interviewing methods including: unstructured individual interviews and focus groups. The complex and diverse ways that participants addressed questions about critical reflection suggested that if I was to extract meaning from these comments, my own bias might be too reductionist, so I invited participants to submit written messages about how they defined or experienced critical reflection. Ten participants responded by writing down additional thoughts on critical reflection.

Following the request to participate, participants received an electronic mail message and a copy of the letter of consent so they could read it in advance of the interview at which time they were provided with a paper copy to sign (Appendix C). Interviews and focus groups occurred in the winter and spring of 2007 – they involved extensive organizing and travel by bus, train, airplane, ferry, subway, foot and car. The decision to be personally interviewed emerged from comments by my committee and by four participants who suggested that because my experience matched the study criteria, I should be interviewed as well. I was able to get a friend from a university Department of Women and Gender Studies, who was somewhat familiar with my study, to interview me. For most of the interviews I travelled to the homes or offices of the participants, but again due to the nature of this kind of
consultancy work, I also met one participant in an airport, spent the night at the homes of a few, and got “stood up” once.

Participation in validating the findings was part of the study design. Involving the participants at this stage was a way to increase participation, diminish researcher control and increase the validity of the data collected. Both the Behavioural Research Ethics Board consent form and a subsequent e-mail offered participants the opportunity to read and make changes to the data collected – five participants offered to take on this role. They were sent a copy of the draft findings chapter and asked to comment on any glaring errors, any interpretations that seemed skewed, or any ways that their quotes did not accurately reflect what they said. In most cases, they slightly altered the text to make the narrative of their personal experience more understandable; in one case a participant asked to have her quote removed because it potentially identified her. None of these five participants suggested changes to interpretation.

Before starting each interview or focus group, the letters of consent, initially distributed by e-mail, were discussed and signed. Audio tapes recorded the datum gathered during the interviews and focus groups. Technical problems with the recorder caused interruptions in the interview process on a few occasions. Interruptions from children, spouses and restaurant staff were also noted – all of these things reflect the complex, multifaceted lives of activists and women. During the focus groups, participants also paused to eat – a time for additional networking and socializing. By holding interviews where the flow of the conversation was less structured and where space for conversation was encouraged, I hoped to make the interview more democratic and less strained. After the face sheet (Appendix B) was filled out and the letter of consent (Appendix C) was explained and
signed, participants were drawn into the interview process by the question, “Tell me a bit about yourself – personally and related to your work…”

**Individual Interviews**

Guided by feminist traditions of interviewing, the study gathered key data through unstructured interviews. This offered participants a less researcher-controlled setting which many feminists assert contributes to greater authenticity and deeper, richer data (Merriam & Simpson, 1984). By shaping the interview in a less structured way, I hoped to get closer to conversations or dialogues as suggested by Oakley (1981) who argues that feminist approaches are based on conversations and establishing rapport and relationships with the research participants. Time for dialogue, including informal talking was also cited as desirable – “the participants interviewed me before I interviewed them” (Miraftab, 2004, p. 599).

Approaching the interview experience can challenge or enable participation, depending upon how power is exercised, and elements of gender, race and class are interplayed (Parr, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) and it too can become an exercise in power relations and as stated by Oakley (1981), operate as a scientific, “masculine paradigm.” Listening with diligence, following conversation innuendos, delivering appropriate prompts, and using a reflexive position are therefore required on an ongoing basis. A reflexive position was especially possible in situations where the situation was not a quick interview. For example, on two occasions I was invited to visit, eat, and stay overnight at the participant’s home. The interview did not occur until we had had several hours of “getting to know” each other. This gave me an opportunity to have time to reflect on my relationship with that
person, and to understand more deeply their life experience as it related to my own and the study. It also allowed me to interrogate how I could pose questions to them in ways that were more likely to gather in-depth responses.

I hoped to create an atmosphere of safety and trust during the interviews, however, I realize safety and trust are, similar to other phenomena of experience, not interpreted equally (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). In part, using a relaxed, non-judgmental structure and applying reflexivity along with listening (for voice and silence) was endeavored as a way to maximize safety and participation (Parr, 1998; Hyams, 2004). I used this idea in deciding that upon agreement with participants, the interviews would occur in spaces familiar to them. On one occasion, at the suggestion of the participant, we met in a hotel restaurant that connected to the airport. Following the interview, she flew off to Lebanon and I went home.

For each interview, I had a few guiding points to ensure that the main questions related to the research were somehow addressed. Throughout the interviews, which lasted from one hour to one and a half hours, I listened carefully, using probes to gather new details and if appropriate, I shared personal experiences in an effort to make the interview closer to a conversation. Although the interviews and focus groups were unstructured and flowed like conversations, the guide was used to ensure that certain aspects of the study were interpreted or talked about (Appendix D). On most occasions however, the interview guide was not pulled out until well into the interview. Usually a comment by a participant was met with acknowledgement followed by additional questions or prompts from me as the interviewer.
Focus Groups

According to Madriz (2003), focus groups are a form of group interview, but they are collectivistic not individualistic as they take attention away from the researcher and move it between participants thus, allowing the focus to move to the “multivocality of participants’ attitudes, voices, experiences and beliefs” (p. 364). Madriz says focus groups encourage participation and diminish the power position of the researcher thereby making them more empowering for the participants because unstructured dialogue provides time to validate voice and stories of experience. Making sense of this participant-activist experience becomes important in validating gendered experience as does the recognition that the data that emerges from feminist research remains subjective and is therefore, prone to contestation (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002).

I used semi-structured focus group techniques with open-ended questioning. I used the same guide for focus groups as I did for interviews, but due to the collective nature of the focus groups, the conversation was more likely to flow without prompts – although I did occasionally interrupt the process to ensure that we had explored all the major areas required in order to address the study question. Information primarily flowed as conversations among the participants. Due to costs, I decided to be pragmatic and hold one focus group in Vancouver (British Columbia or BC) and one in Ottawa (Ontario) and open each group to all participants. The result was five participants at the BC focus group and four at the Ontario focus group. Due to a last minute change, one participant joined the BC group by phone rather than in person and one participant was able to attend both the BC and Ontario focus
groups. The focus groups lasted between two-and-a-half and three hours. Eating and informal networking also occurred.

Like me, most of the women interviewed work on a consultancy basis and have experienced periods of isolation – both because they frequently work on their own and because they are often required to travel away from home. In this way, opening a space for sharing, networking, and learning from others, in particular through the focus groups, became a holistic and unrecognized dimension to the research. In the focus groups, the dynamics involving who was in the room and who was speaking, as well as my own level of participation and intervention, all played a role in determining the direction of the conversation, the way in which knowledge was constructed, and the way meaning was produced. Of course, I acknowledge that the experience was not equal for all and that some participants spoke more or directed the conversation more than others. There were times when I intervened and tried tactics such as going around the table or room to ensure that anyone who had not spoken had the opportunity to do so, or asking all participants to intentionally make attempts to ensure that all voices in the room were heard. I also realize that not all participants in the study attended the focus groups – five of the fourteen participants only participated in the interviews. The interviews and focus groups together generated about 180 pages of single-spaced data transcripts.

**Expanding the Data Collection: Personal Interview and Written Text**

The study had two changes in the methods that resulted directly from the research process itself – the decision for me to be a participant in the research and the decision to open the data collection to include written forms of communication around critical reflection. This
provided insights for me, as the researcher, on how experience is revealed, remembered, sometimes concealed, and shared differently depending on comfort and the way in which questions are posed. My position as the researcher already gave me the power of data interpretation beyond those of the participants, however the act of being a participant also provided me with an opportunity to share my experiences in this field of work and it resulted in the surfacing of unexpected assumptions as well as vulnerabilities; queries that were not unlike those likely experienced by some of the participants. For example, I found that articulating examples of when my facilitation practice might have contributed to an act of transformation was both difficult to conceptualize and describe. The data from my interview is included in the findings and similar to the other participants, I was given a pseudonym.

The second change in the process included inviting written responses to the question on critical reflection. During the process of interviewing, I recognized that the data on critical reflection was sparse. It is possible that participants were unable to think of examples of critical reflection in retrospect, that they needed more time to reflect, or that they were not engaging in it as a practice. As a result of the lack of data and short responses to these questions, I invited participants to submit written responses to the question about their understanding and experiences of using critical reflection as part of a facilitation process. Receiving the written messages provided additional data for analysis and from which to make an interpretation about how participants understood and experienced critical reflection. Along with the data from the interview, the data from the written responses was sorted and analyzed thematically. The use of multi-methods clearly provided an enriched form of data production. Further reflections on the methods are provided in the final chapter.
Researcher Position and Epistemology

In both advocating and studying how activists develop a critically-reflective practice, I was keenly aware of my own position as both a researcher and a *de facto* participant in the study. Unlike positivist research where objectivity of the researcher is assumed along with the disassociation of the researcher from the researched (Mirafab, 2004), I realized that using qualitative methods in feminist research, included naming my subjectivity, and vigilantly monitoring how I used dimensions of power in the process. I hoped that in some small way the use of reflexivity and dialogue could open the potential for new junctures or relationships wherein I worked with the participants to become co-constructors of knowledge. Certainly by being the researcher, and then becoming a participant in the research process, I had crossed or positioned myself as straddling different paradigms of researcher power. In this way, the importance of researcher reflexivity and self-knowledge was critical in constructing both the interview process and analysis of the data (Fontana & Frey, 2003, Skeggs, 1997).

My own bias – in listening and coming to conclusions, in acknowledging the boundaries of hearing and memory (Anderson & Jack, 1991), in establishing trust, and in exploring personal feelings around events – stressed the idea that locating myself, and reconciling differences in the process was as critical as the interview and interpretation itself (Devault, 1999; Fontana & Frey, 2003; Wolf, 1996).

During the study, I was positioned, like the study participants themselves, as an activist-facilitator working in transnational development. This positioning offered me additional insights into the research and enabled me to critically reflect on my biases. As suggested by many feminist researchers (Lykes & Coquillon, 2007; Mendez & Wolf, 2007;
Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002), the researcher’s recognition of her place, theory and involvement within the research gives additional political and practical meaning to the work.

My epistemological position is political, anti-patriarchal, concerned with relationships and methodologically includes what Donna Haraway (1991, p.191) refers to as “shared conversation.” Through methods that use conversation and dialogue, I embrace a feminist research practice that connects the subject of research to a political process and to possibilities for transformation. My life experiences living and working with people from diverse cultures, races, religions, and locations both intrigued and enlightened me to explore alternative ways of being/doing/existing in this world. The global or transnational context of the study blends well with my passion for transformation, aversion to meta-narratives and intrigue in transforming the transnational. Correspondingly, I welcome epistemological notions such as those posed by Haraway (1991) which suggest that we need to open new visions of the world that create a re-visioning of the world.

I am particularly aware of epistemological difference as a result of my work with indigenous peoples in Canada and Chile. For example, in Chile when I worked with Mapuche women, learning occurred through conversation (oral), and always included unspoken components that connected tangible and spiritual ways of being. The term “epistemological humility” described for me a way of engaging in alternative visions because it both suggested that an essentialist epistemology is unstable and that epistemological humility can create open, rich, and subjective spaces.

Epistemological humility means recognizing and accepting the limits not only of “science,” but of any established knowledge; noting the personal limitations of the knowing subject as well as continually delineating the limits of the *logos*. The wise retain their humility, knowing all that they do not know. (Esteva & Prakash, 1998, p. 202)
Through this way of relating, I support Haraway’s (1991) idea that epistemological humility is only valid if it is accompanied by epistemological flexibility.

**Data Analysis**

I concur with Laurel Hanson (2007) when she describes analysis as occurring in visible and invisible ways. The visible is more like the hard analysis – the transcribing of the data, the sorting of the data and the reading and re-reading for themes. The invisible is the discussions with others, the dreams, and the spontaneous thoughts and ideas that emerge in unlikely places. Abram (1996) notes that attention to the way meaning is interpreted in experience – both in what is said and beyond – that is through dreams, fantasy and images is important to observe and analyze. While emphasis is usually given to the hard analysis, I was also aware that the other ways of understanding meaning were equally valid if I was to be open to other epistemological thoughts and values which honoured the spirit of connectedness and transformation. For example, on one occasion my thoughts about my research analysis were validated by having a close, personal friend tell a seemingly unrelated story. The serendipitous meeting of those two ideas, at that moment, was to me a way of honouring epistemological humility by acknowledging how meaning takes place beyond the tangible.

I listened carefully to the narratives, anecdotes, and interpretations of participatory training experiences as they were told during the interviews and focus groups. I reminded myself that in the re-telling of experiences, memory and context of that telling are always partial, subjective and incomplete so I tried to probe for additional details. I transcribed the recordings of the interview and focus groups, then sorted the data into preliminary themes;
then I re-read the data again using the thematic analysis. The preliminary themes initially were: development as an institution; the paradoxes and possibilities for activists working in development; critical reflection; privilege and position; and adult learning and facilitation. After multiple readings, I started condensing themes using colour-coded sticky notes and finally, interpreting and selecting relevant quotes – much of the latter was a process of elimination because the themes were selected, in large part, due to repetition of ideas and values. In the process of interpretation much of the lived context of the interviews and focus groups was lost – that is, the place of meeting, the encounter, the quality of the food served, the smell of the coffee or tea, the silence, the interruptions, and the relationships with the participant(s).

By suggesting participants take extra time to reflect on and write about their understandings of critical reflection I also moved toward understanding critical reflection as a phenomenon. As Denzin and Lincoln (2008) explain, “the use of multiple methods, or triangulation, reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question” (p.7). The written narratives submitted by ten of the participants allowed me to further reflect on my own assumptions about critical reflection – it became, in itself, a form of reflection in practice:

In phenomenology, to explore is to reflect is to think is to write. To write is to put thought on paper. It is inextricably linked with reflection. … To successfully explore and interrogate a phenomenon, the observer needs to look beyond the initial description, needs to peel back the layers of moral, ethical, social and cultural influence to seek the meaning of the lived experience.” (Mostert, n.d., pp. 1-2)

One of the ways to mitigate my researcher control was to get participants involved in reading the findings and if necessary, deciding what to include, when and why. While their involvement was never as much as I expected or hoped it would be, largely due, by their own
admission, to personal workloads, five of the participants read an early version of the findings chapter, and in one way or another, altered the final production of findings. Of these five, however, three had read only their personal quotes.

The research explored both my position within the research in relation to power, agency, and ontology, as well as how other practitioners reflected upon their experiences. None of what we ultimately select to include or exclude from the findings is without ambiguity or uncertainty and while I agree with Wolf (1996) and Nnaemeka (2003) that being reflective about how we form categories, how we intervene, and how we use information provides some consolation, I am also aware that what we eliminate presents a conundrum for feminist researchers because exclusion remains a constant fear (Nnaemeka). Hence, there is a need to be “humble listeners” (Nnaemeka, 2003, p. 374) or to embrace openings for “epistemological humility” (Esteva & Prakash, 1998, p. 202).

As a feminist researcher, I constantly struggled to manage my own subjectivity while rigorously adhering to qualitative research demands identified by Halliday (2002) which included responding to the social context of the study, acknowledging ideological issues, and monitoring the research for new meanings. As I entered into the “interpretive act” of data analysis, I carefully read for expressions of lived experiences and the understandings of participants while trying to continually reflect on my own understandings and agency as a researcher, an activist, and a woman of privilege (Mauther & Doucet, 1998). Using a feminist position in data analysis is challenging because it can lead to confronting issues that expose personal vulnerabilities and anxieties; in the process, therefore, it is important to highlight and validate the voices, knowledge and experience of the respondents (Mauthner & Doucet). For this reason, I decided to use multiple direct quotes from the participants in the
presentation of the data findings. The datum from my personal interview also became part of the analysis and narrative and like the other participants I was given a pseudonym. In some ways my interview helped to surface my subjectivity on the subject. For example, I realized that my interpretation of what critical reflection was in my practice might skew the descriptions I heard from others. Therefore, in choosing which quotes to use, I had to use rigor (sticking to the themes that had emerged in the analysis), tempered with a personal *epistemology of humility* which included not inflating the sense of importance of my quotes and in fact, sometimes deleting them from the findings and resorting instead to the voices of the participants. Offering participants the opportunity to read the data and drafts of my interpretations of the data, was a way to mitigate some of my bias.

**Ethical Considerations**

The study followed behavioral research ethics approval at the University of British Columbia (the Certificate of Approval is in Appendix E). Based on its criteria, I anticipated minimal risk to participants. A detailed letter of consent was distributed in advance of interviews, discussed and signed by all participants. A similar letter was also handed out before the focus group. The letter addressed the research purpose and process, as well as its risks, potential benefits, storage of data, and rights to withdraw from the research. A copy of the letter is attached. (Appendix C).

Participants are not named in the findings or discussion, in order to protect their identities, although several explicitly said protecting their identities was not important to them. The participants were all given pseudonyms and their quotes are highlighted in the transcripts so that I can track the quotes if necessary. While I tried to eliminate identifying
aspects in the research, there are times when this was difficult and in these cases, the quotes were first discussed with the participants.

Within feminist research, concerns for the researcher-participant relationship are central. For me this also meant trying to engage in an ethical practice during the research process. This included meeting in a mutually acceptable place and at an appropriate time; providing food or drinks to increase comfort levels; and in some cases, diverging into personal issues in the conversation because they were pressing upon that participant at that particular time. Some of the ethics of being a critically reflective facilitator merged with the ethics of being a critically reflective (feminist) researcher. To create and maintain an ethical practice I remained aware of my position and power in the research process. I tried to listen more than I talked and to apply rigor in the analysis. By having participants check the way the data was expressed and interpreted, the researcher power was diminished, and it ensured participants had some degree of comfort in the way their narratives were interpreted. In this way, the involvement of participants in the analysis stage helped to validate the data, although I realized that only five participants chose to check the data in the findings, and some did not have time to do so completely.

**Summary**

This chapter has outlined aspects of a feminist-inspired research practice that inform the study methodology. It has also situated my researcher position, explained the study design and methods, and laid the groundwork for the description of what ensued – the findings – which are presented in the next chapter.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE FINDINGS: EXPERIENCES OF ACTIVIST-FACILITATORS WORKING IN DEVELOPMENT

In this chapter, I present findings from the data analysis. The first theme that emerged from the data regarded conceptual and theoretical understandings of participatory facilitation. This is followed by four other themes that are more closely linked to the research questions that fall into four main areas: 1) the meanings and experiences of critical reflection; 2) the intersection of power and privilege and how these are reflected upon; 3) the possibilities and paradoxes experienced by activists working in development; and 4) the transformative potentials in transitional relationships. The themes are interrelated, and in many respects, they overlap, that is, the boundaries between them, in practice, are not as rigid as is suggested by this discussion. For the purposes of this analysis, however, I have made these distinctions in order to highlight and emphasize certain issues. This chapter represents my interpretation of the data using the thematic framework that emerged. In the writing of the quotes, I use pseudonyms for the participants, including myself (as a study participant). If the data was recorded at a focus group, the initials ‘FG’ along with a number are used to designate the focus group from which that quote was transcribed.
Theme One: Understanding Participatory Methodologies

Because one of the criteria for participation in the research was that the participants were activists using participatory methodologies in women’s rights or gender workshops, I was curious to understand how the term *participatory* was understood by participants. Hence one of the first questions asked was, “What do you mean by participatory methodologies?” The varied responses to this question made it clear that participants had different starting points or backgrounds that influenced their perceptions of ‘participatory’ – in particular, I noted differences in perceptions among those with pedagogical backgrounds in adult education and popular or participatory education. These differences of understanding also extended into conceptualizations of critical reflection, as those with a background in critical theory and popular education were more likely to speak about critical reflection as part of their understanding of pedagogy.

Politics of Participatory Approaches

Participants described participatory methodologies as coming from feminist, participatory, adult education, and popular education frameworks as guiding principles. The primary differences expressed were in relation toward social change as a political movement or as a personal endeavor. In particular, the participants pointed to the political nature of popular education which they said also brings it closer to feminist-inspired work—thereby bridging the personal and the political. Participants with more background in the theory and practice of popular education clearly stated that while adult educators may use the word *participatory*, they don’t always conceptualize participatory frameworks as having a political agenda. At least two participants also acknowledged the shift in popular education practices
with the influence of feminism, essentially expanding the focus from a class analysis to a pedagogic practice wherein the value of people’s *lived experience* is recognized. When participants spoke about popular education or participatory methodologies as different from practices in adult education a major point of difference was the political emphasis on change and power relationships. Two examples illustrate some of the differences:

There is a difference in adult education and popular education. I don’t want to shy away from bringing myself into the process or my politics into the process and I find for me that’s the difference. I can be transparent on the issue and say where I stand but I’m not going to try to be separate from it and somehow be absent from what we’re having a conversation about. I don’t think adult educators are either. It’s just that’s how it seems to be—that’s how I differentiate. (Sara)

I think a lot of people use the word ‘participatory’ whose background is adult education, but adult education that does not talk about power differences pretends that we can be neutral. If we are honest with ourselves, we can never be neutral. I’m not neutral, I have a political agenda. Part of feminist education is to recognize these power differences and that we can never be neutral. For example, the training in Nicaragua around pesticides—you’re not just doing education about pesticides, you’re doing education about land reform. You’d ask questions about why you are using pesticides in the first place. Why is the United States sending the pesticides that they don’t use anymore? So you’ve got the political, social context as well. A lot of people in that work in the development field aren’t doing that. (Alicia, FG2)

The majority of participants advocated that feminism and popular education practices which embrace, and are inspired by critical theory and pedagogy, are theoretically more likely to use participatory methodologies. They also said that adult education does not have the same foundation and adult educators may or may not embrace a feminist or critical position.

During one focus group, participants disagreed about the differences in participatory and feminist principles—some seeing them as the same, some seeing them as occasionally incongruent. The differences were subtle but reflected a context of work or institutional value that either encouraged or discouraged the overt practice of feminism.
In my own life I’d definitely equate feminism and participatory approaches, too, but when I’m with the groups I’m working with, like under the UN umbrella …, there is not a single feminist perspective behind any of it. (Jennifer)

Differences in how the practices are interpreted also suggest different epistemological ways of understanding and being. These in turn, led to an understanding of knowledge as partial and situated—each understanding emerging from a context and history of difference. It also suggests an institutional practice of de-valuing—by virtue of absence or perceptions of hegemony—alternative ways of knowing. For example, the last quote provided here indicates that Jennifer struggles with a paradox in her development work.

In addition to political orientations, several key characteristics of transformative pedagogies mentioned by participants are that the theory and practice inform each other in a cyclical process of action and reflection; they are change-oriented; and they are based on experience. Kayla used the metaphor of a pyramid to illustrate how and when participatory methodologies are participatory and inform an approach to development that is more people-centered. Two quotes illustrate this:

When I think about participatory development, I think of it always in terms of a pyramid where the tip of the iceberg is the methods, or the tools. These can be completely manipulated within a non-participatory context. Nothing in the methods themselves makes them participatory, and in fact methods that don’t originate within the participatory development discourse can also be used within participatory processes. The next layer in the iceberg is the methodology. This is about how the methods relate to each other, and how they are used to triangulate information that is collected. And then the most important layer for me is the foundation, or the approach in which the tools and the methodologies must be embedded. For me a participatory approach means that there has to be three kinds of engagement: questioning of the subject/object relationship, reflection on how knowledge is constructed, and the relationship of theory and praxis is such that the theory is embedded in the practice and not the other way around [my emphasis]. So if these three pieces build to inform the process in which you are being involved—then this to me is participatory. So that’s like my mental check-list about the practice of participatory methodology. (Kayla)
[It means] how we generate meaning collectively, generate knowledge collectively. It harkens to ideas of shared meaning systems and shared knowledge systems. It brings to mind the group as well as the individual, although they are both present. It doesn’t necessarily bring to mind a democratic process. I’ve been a part of participatory processes that are very facilitator-centered, [in which] the person who is guiding the process is intentionally or unintentionally guiding the process to get desired results and knows the answers even before she answers the questions. It has less to do with finding the way together. It had less to do with finding what the group was emerging with…It can be difficult to follow each train that leaves the station, each thread that emerges from our conversation together. So I can understand the challenge. So I suppose there is a varying degree of participation that I’ve experienced in participatory learning environments. (Sara)

Sara’s comment here about facilitating participatory processes is also significant. During the interview Kayla used the term “partipulation” to draw attention to the fine line between participation and manipulation. In discussing facilitation during a focus group, the term resonated loudly for the participants. The participants noted that despite goals of using participatory processes, there were times when facilitators used facilitator-centered and facilitator-controlled processes to guide or steer conversations in certain ways. This is especially evident in the findings about power which are discussed later in this chapter.

**Theorizing Participation**

When participants were asked about using participatory methodologies as part of a facilitation practice, some participants expressed discomfort in conceptualizing the term or were vague in their description. For example, those that expressed discomfort did so by providing short, curt responses, or they didn’t always talk about participatory methods as linked to participation or de-centering the facilitation role. Sometimes they were equated with activity-based learning which is still very much facilitator controlled. For example, Wendy said that participatory methods meant there was lots of activity involved. She described an example from her workshops and the processes were “much more open, lots of
voices, and the women really training each other, too.” Another example came from Diana, who likened participatory approaches to community development. Other participants suggested it included knowledge of adult learning practices, but not necessarily a practice of using participatory methodologies grounded in theory. For Michele, the description was closer to community-based learning with non-formal education methods, as she indicated that participatory methodologies included:

Non-formal education models, PRA [participatory rural appraisal] tools and being familiar with them. …We used community role play for problem solving. To gain respect of government officers we used government officers in the role play. Some of the actors were community people. The engagement of the local community.

The differences in explaining the term were thus substantial.

Several participants, without prompting, mentioned the influence of Paulo Freire in their practice. Alicia and Patti asserted that for them the pedagogy advocated by Freire always blended with their solidarity work. Carol talked about her involvement with the popular education organization Alforha in Costa Rica and Nicaragua and how influential that organization’s process of working was on her own, and how recognition of Freire’s work was part of that “huge learning curve.” Jennifer related to his work differently, linking it to feminism:

I come more from a gender and development background which I think is a lot different. I haven’t read a lot of Canadian feminism, but a lot is framed around Paulo Freire’s work…. I’m also concerned about the process. For me a lot of my work is a one-off shot and there’s never a continual process which is really very frustrating. So I don’t get the opportunity to work with people over time where we could probably get to lots more feminist perspective of what’s happening and a more critical view. (Jennifer, FG2)

The book, Educating for a Change, is inspired by popular education with trade unions and the theories of Freire. Emma spoke of it as “the Bible for those working for social change.” She elaborated, saying, “It talks about creating equitable relationships and equitable
spaces and deconstructing language and making sure everyone has a space.” The study participants frequently acknowledged the importance of validating the experiences of workshop participants. Rachel framed the sentiment, stating:

They go through a process where they realize how much they know and they start putting things together. They hear the experiences of other people and the links are being made. So one of my goals at the end of the day is that they leave with a better sense of themselves, not just the workshop content.

The richness in using participatory methodologies to create space for understanding and analyzing lived experience was constantly illustrated by participants. Hearing stories from participants and telling their own stories became a way to build understanding, relationships, and sites of hope and transformation. Stories became an important pedagogical tool as well as offering personal healing, validation, and a recognition of difference.

They started to do these dyad interviews… Afterwards, they presented their stories of the [military] checkpoint and what became really clear, when they debriefed the whole thing, was that it was that everybody was affected by this violence, by the militarization, by the threats and intimidation that took place when you stop at a checkpoint. (Kate)

It allowed me to tell the stories that I didn’t think were worth telling. All of a sudden, these stories of violence, of fragmentation and of poverty in my own family could find a space. They could be brought to bear upon the experience of the whole group and together create something new—like a phoenix rising out of the ashes! I was hooked. …It’s only now that I see that as turning point…. I learned about participatory facilitation and it became clear that people involved in their own learning was more meaningful. (Sara)

The process of building consent and relationship-building were considered key to participatory processes. It was often associated with strong communication skills, including the ability to resolve conflicts, effective listening skills, and access and control over resources.

But I think having worked so much on gender issues and particularly having worked on gendered violence for several years, I understand how important consent is. And consent is a really important part of participation. And so it’s not really about putting
somebody’s name on the list, so if we’re going to include another partner, there has to be a participatory process. The partner has to have equal access and control over resources—all those things that come out of Carolyn Moser—the stuff of gender and development. (Kate)

Process was of primary concern to many of the interactions discussed. In feminist pedagogies critical reflection is central to praxis and the possibility of transformation.

**Theme Two: Understanding Critical reflection**

The theme of critical reflection, as it is presented here, is a conglomeration of the responses from interviews and focus group discussions, and unlike the other themes, it includes data from the written submissions. The participants were encouraged to respond to the study question about critical reflection in writing because of their apparent and sometimes voiced discomfort in responding “in the moment” to questions about critical reflection during the interviews. While the questions asked were always specific about addressing critical reflection, the responses did not always differentiate between reflection and critical reflection. As a result, the reporting of the data, and the quotations used do not clearly distinguish the kind of reflection to which the participants are referring.

**Critical Reflection as a Pedagogical Practice**

Activist-facilitators overwhelmingly recognized the importance of critical reflection in a facilitation practice, but responses to questions about what critical reflection is and to those questions asking for examples from their practice were difficult for most to respond to. The responses were often ambiguous and spoke about assessment, critiquing, and/or

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A more detailed discussion of the distinction between critical reflection and reflection occurs in Chapter One.
engaging learners in critical reflection. It was not clear from what was said that the participants were making a differentiation between reflection and critical reflection, and more often than not, the response was at a technical rational level. By techno-rational, I am referring to a focus by study participants on techniques and activities that would increase effectiveness or help meet the stated goals of the activity (which may be pre-determined and not always the goal of the participants), not on the role of emotions or an analysis of power relations in a learning situation. A techno-rational response can be differentiated from a perspective of praxis in its attention to techniques rather than more ethical or political questions. Fewer study participants spoke about engaging in critical reflection as an integral part of pedagogy or transformative learning or change—in their own practice and/or in the workshop design and delivery. Only one mentioned praxis. In other words, being a critically reflective practitioner was not an obvious or voiced concern. A few participants linked theory and practice and Kayla noted the importance of “the theory [being] embedded in the practice, and not the other way around.”

Rather than explaining a deliberate process of integrating theory and practice toward achieving a new praxis, or a way of analyzing assumptions or power relations (three important distinctions) participants described reflection at a techno-rational level by saying that it made them think about “what went well” and “what had to change.” The majority of the study participants linked critical reflection to some kind of assessment or critique of the work, that is, as something that took place after a workshop.

Part of what’s influencing my process now is having had all those experiences. Because in fact, the team needed to know that this had happened, I needed to know from them. We needed to debrief this and put it in its own little coffin and where it belonged, and kiss it goodbye. So it’s somehow ensuring there is enough of a wrap-up on processes. (Carmin)
It comes down to going to my room at the end of the day and reflecting on, “How did that day go?” “What needs to change tomorrow?” It’s much more of an informal process for me. … definitely depends on whether I’m by myself or with a co-facilitator. More of asking myself, “What are people thinking?” “Why is something not working right?” (Jennifer)

In the interview process the participants confirmed the integral role of critical reflection to the work of activists and learners in the development process. Yet, when asked to give an example of using critical reflection in their practice of facilitation, the responses included pauses, laughter, sighs, and often comments related to how important it is but indicating that they weren’t able to think of a response. Frequently the focus was on the participants (the other) not on individual facilitation practice. There was an overall sense of the need for an expansion of energy and commitment in this area, including an analysis of what kinds of structures and barriers were mitigating the use of critical reflection.

Participants felt that the critical reflection enhanced the process or pedagogy in various ways and as Carmin put it, “I don’t think that a lot of training or facilitation objectives are actually achievable without critical reflection.”

There is a movement within all of the internal agencies toward results based management, and how that intersects with pedagogy. What counts again is what’s visible. The action part of education is what matters. The reflection part is gone and I think that connects to the analytical absence that we were discussing earlier. (Kate, FG1)

One participant spoke about how critical reflection for learning and facilitation differed and while acknowledging that the facilitator is also a learner, she said that critical reflection on the facilitation of training itself requires a conscious effort. She also discussed the importance of being in the moment and continually reflecting on design, process, intent, and choices during and after the workshop.

I’ve never done a workshop where I haven’t learned something new. Like this workshop—a different way of seeing something, something new while I’m doing the
workshop. The work for me is what keeps me in the work. But that for me is different than critical reflection on my practice which is thinking about the where and how you have to do that. You really have to consciously decide to build that in. You do some of that yourselves. You go back home and think, “Oh, I’ll do better on that,” but it’s not the same as reflecting on your practice in the moment and your design—for example, like the way we put this together—did this do what we wanted this to do? And if it didn’t what else could we have done? And this we have to do outside of the context of the learning. (Carol)

I’m not critical of myself, okay (laughs). Oh no, not me! I think it always is a process of trying to listen to when something isn’t working or when you get back negative feedback. … It’s like being able to hear things or tune into where things are not or where you hear a thing is, or when something seems to be off the rails. Sometimes it is easy to gloss over these things, but we have to be perceptive and tuned into when something might be a little bit off the rails. (Alicia)

Participants like Carol and Alicia who were grounded in popular education methodologies were more likely to speak about critical reflection as an ongoing process and the need to be perceptive in the moment, although it is not clear in these examples that they are conceptualizing beyond the techno-rational level.

**Reflection in Teams or Through Collaboration**

Examples from practitioners are perhaps one way of getting closer to the meaning of a critically reflective practice. Several participants noted that, other than journaling, well developed examples on how to practice critical reflection are not widely known to them, so this section may offer a starting point in filling that gap. Communicating with others about an experience was an important way for many activists to exercise critical reflection. This often occurred by meeting with another facilitator or with a team, in both structured and unstructured ways. A few participants had built in critical reflection by having regular retreats with colleagues where, “We would work separately, then come together. We would share food for a few days and it was like a little retreat” (Carol). The following examples,
including conversations and formal writings, illustrate different ways critical reflection is practiced:

I suppose when I come back here I always write a report about the workshop and I talk to my colleagues about the workshop and I usually talk to [the] Board so, there are many stages of reflection. (Rachel)

With [colleague], we used to always reflect on drives home. We talked about what we would do differently; then one of us would agree that when we got home we would write it up and send it back to whoever organized it. If we were re-writing a course, and we had to do a re-vision, we would use it. Otherwise, we would send it back to whoever had organized it so they would have feedback on what we would do differently. So that’s the best practice. When you have time and energy to do that—it’s by far a best practice. (Carol)

I think what worked really well was facilitating with my sister and being able to sit down afterwards and say, ‘Let’s talk about what happened at that workshop.’ Saying things like, ‘When we were co-facilitating and you said this, I felt that it set up a real power imbalance in the co-facilitation.’ Saying that versus carrying it around with you makes us so much more conscious about what we do—when do we step in, when do we step out, all of those things. It made us better facilitators. And then writing an article made us focus and think of examples. (Patti)

Levels of trust in the relationships also seem to determine the depth of reflection. Examples that included team or collaborative approaches were common. This may suggest an ontological preference in critical reflection; however, it is not uniform for all activists—some prefer a more private reflection. The examples here also illustrate how working with others is dependent upon relationships—the more knowing you are about the person or group of people you are working with, the farther your analysis or practice of critical reflection will go. There are occasions, however when the relationship was operating simply on a technorational basis, that is discussions of power dynamics and de-centering the facilitation practice were not present.

Sharing stories from the field was also deemed an important pedagogical tool for doing critical reflection. Even when critical reflection was part of a process, the participants
lamented that it hadn’t gone farther. The following are examples of co-facilitation or team approaches, or as one participant described them, “grupitos”:

With UNESCO we had a drink or tea at the end of each day and de-brief and sometimes the beginning of the next day. I think de-briefing is the best. I think I like to say to another co-facilitator, “Can you make notes on my strengths and weaknesses and I’ll do the same for you?” I haven’t done that enough but it’s been really useful when to have reflection on yourself from another professional done with respect and sometimes if you get something about dynamics you can help the relationship between the two of you as a result—sort of formative as you go into the next day. (Michele)

It was so rich. There are a number of us that still get together often. Not necessarily as a big group. It’s sort of grupitos—clusters of people. … On another level, but on a deeper level of critical reflection, I don’t think I have many opportunities to do that anymore because with somebody you don’t know and with whom you’re facilitating for the first time, you just go so deep in terms of reflection after your work. Maybe we just don’t allow time—I’m always after people in the labour movement—they’re strung out, they’ve got way too much work to do anyway, so they don’t have time to sit back and reflect on the course that they’ve run for five or six years and say, “Okay, what’s happening?” (Carol)

When critical reflection was requested or built into the assignments either by another party or through a mutual understanding between the facilitators, it was definitely considered a rich learning experience by those involved. There were, however, only a few examples among the participants where critical reflection was intentionally considered part of the process.

**Critical Reflection as a Personal and Professional Practice**

Without doubt, participants understand that critical reflection is a way of improving their own personal and professional practices and self-growth. For some it is more long term; for others, particularly as facilitators, it includes immediate actions and “being in the moment.” As one participant expressed, “[It] will make your actions more thoughtful, more strategic, and more careful” (Yvonne). Others called it an honest assessment of self or a “reflection on choices” (Sara). Kate said that as activists, critical reflection means taking time
to “stop, reflect, take stock and identify what worked, what didn’t, and what we learned.” One participant called it a “systematic, structured process of reviewing, reflecting on and critically analyzing experience with the specific purpose of learning from it, to become more effective” (Carmin).

The study participants defined critical reflection as a way of assessing the process dynamics, the facilitator-participant relationships, and the impact of their work. The emphasis on self improvement or techniques was still approaching critical reflection as techno-rational. Yvonne, for example, noted that the process of monitoring for participant engagement and responses is also a way of improving oneself as a facilitator. For several participants it was not only a question of asking, “What am I doing and for whom?” but also questioning the ethics and politics of the work. Actually questioning the power relations in the facilitation process was a way of defining critical reflection as an aspect of praxis. Alicia gave an example of this when she said, “Critical reflection is the process of coming to understand an experience within the context that is shaped by power relations.” Jennifer linked it to the paradox of being a feminist working in mainstream development:

Then there is what I really feel … trying to meet both needs [donor and self] and not trying to feel like someone who has compromised my own beliefs too much. Wanting to shake the earth and only making a ripple in the puddle … that’s how critical reflection feels to me. (Jennifer)

Several study participants defined critical reflection as a process of examining assumptions, choices and interventions. In this way, it presents both big political or ethical questions about the work being done and smaller questions about the strategy, techniques, and so on. As one participant put it, “It means not taking anything for granted” (Rachel). Participants also suggested that the process is continuous and once you choose a direction as a facilitator, then critical reflection “adds to the atmosphere of openness, encourages deeper
analysis of facilitator-participant dynamics, and helps keep facilitators from getting into well-worn ruts” (Michele). A deeper analysis was frequently used to describe critical reflection, but only the relationships of critical reflection to analysis of power relations was not common. Ultimately, one participant suggested, critical reflection and analysis function on making a difference which, albeit slowly, works to achieve change. She elaborated through re-telling a story about a Nicaraguan acting troupe:

At the end, one of the people in the audience said, “How do you keep doing that work? It is so hard and so awful! He [the actor] responded by saying, “I’m glad you asked that, because we always analyze what happens to us, so we will understand it, and because of that we know that the timeframe for change we’re working on is a 200-year one, so every step we take means those who come after us don’t have to take it.” That illustrates for me why critical reflection matters so much in work for a better world—it helps people locate the little bit that any one of us can do into the wider context of space and time for change, seeing clearly without losing hope or direction. (Carmin)

As illustrated in Carmin’s story above, critical reflection contributes to a vision of change.

Part of that change often involved relationships with others and relationships with self.

Participants also discussed how it improves the practice of facilitation. Within the discussions, the ways participants explained challenges to taking on a critically reflective facilitator role were noteworthy.

**Challenges in the Pedagogical Practice of Critical Reflection**

The data collected also illustrated challenges that need to be addressed in order for one to be a critically reflective facilitator. Three main challenges are discussed below. First, there was a lack of time and a sense that agencies did not value critical reflection. Second, closely tied to the first struggle with time and devaluing, was participants’ experiences with
agency reporting requirements. Third, participants also spoke of a sense of vulnerability and fear about being critical, in part due to their isolation.

**Finding Time**

Participants complained that development projects often demand rigorous schedules that don’t permit time for reflection. Still, a common finding from the activists in this study is that finding time for reflection and enhancing the way it is done would actually result in more effective work in development. Similarly, the consequences of not doing this can actually be devastating for organizations, the people they work with, and their professional capacity. A sense of pessimism about institutional willingness to engage in critically reflective processes was still dominant. For example, Patti said:

We don’t do it often—seldom. We have this 12-hour thing, this 24-hour thing that ticks at us all the time and we’ve got funders asking for a different kind of relationship. It’s not about things being meaningful in people’s lives. It’s about an output at the end. I think about the potential when people have time to engage in a discussion, in a dialogue. We are so lucky when we have those moments when we can critically reflect about what’s going on. Seldom do we have people who understand that need for critical reflection participating in that event. All of those things have to work in tandem or synchronously. It seems like such a low priority. We pay lip service to it but I don’t know how much we practice.

And Carmin further illustrated:

One friend estimated that after six years in [organization name] he would be so de-skilled … For those who are paying attention, there is a big risk of deskilling precisely because of the absence of critical reflection and accountability for it, in the organizational culture. (e-mail)

The amount of time provided within the institutional structures or in relation to donor demands was one consideration, while another factor was making the time to integrate critical reflection into their practice. For some it was simply the pace of life and the advent of making choices to critically reflect, and perhaps, move in another direction or to get through
the agenda. Other participants related it to the immediacy of a response required in facilitation, despite the realization that sometimes the reflection is *de facto* and the moment for a significant intervention is lost. Critical reflection on facilitation was seen as especially relevant *in the moment* and immediately after the training event.

Part of the problem is the pace of our lives and being so, so busy and not really valuing reflection as much. (Yvonne)

But part of that is what you were talking about in being a facilitator—having to take on so many roles that you can’t reflect in that moment because there’s just no time. Yeah, it really does have to be in the moment when you have to recognize, then think about what it is, what is appropriate, how to respond and use that moment, right? So that it doesn’t leave something hanging, either. … There is a real contradiction in terms of the amount of critical reflection and analysis that we do in our own practice—both the design and the actual facilitation—and what we preach to other people that they should be doing in their own practice, lives, or whatever it is that they’re trying to deal with. (Carol)

For other participants, a lapse of time was useful and enriching as they were more likely to realize the value of an experience. There was a clear difference in the way participants explained critical reflection as responding “in the moment” and taking time to reflect about the practice of being a trainer.

I find this longer term hindsight feedback really valuable in how I design or refine tools, processes, simulation games, et cetera, that I have used in the past. (Kate, e-mail)

Michele was critical of how academics can take the time to write about critical reflection, claiming that the reality in the field is quite different. She obviously felt academic and activist efforts at the community level were not connected. Her example also alludes to how poorly documented critical reflection is in practice, including in technical reports.

I think that leaves a hole. Academics having other commitments and having time to write often don’t get as deeply in the grassroots or in the intricacies of the policy environment to draw on the data or document. So there is a piece of practitioner work that is poorly documented. (Michele)
Critical reflection, as a way of nudging out the assumptions upon which activist work is based, was considered relevant for self- and professional growth, but participants noted that it is also impeded by institutional obstacles, such as time and funding pressures to produce outputs rather than reflect on process, creating a disconnect between personal needs and institutional demands.

When you’ve got globalization’s tentacles creeping further and further into more remote areas, what sort of power do these farmers have? … I think there is a naivety in some of the approaches we propose or put forward….I constantly reflect critically on the ‘gender training’ I do in terms of, “Am I really getting people to question the status quo or is this just a blip on the screen that won’t make a difference a week from now?” There is the donor (or other agency) requirements for a workshop, and then there is what I really feel. (Jennifer)

Participants felt that critical reflection made them more responsible for their actions—in many cases this meant taking care of themselves and their activism within organizational structures and institutional practices that were not conducive to this practice. The interventions they take to create a space for critical reflection are not grandiose but humble. Carmin, for example, spoke of activism in this regard as disguising critical reflection, and Sara discussed the importance of asking questions and using agency as a way to encourage praxis.

Taking ‘critical reflection underground,’ so to speak—incorporating critical reflection in other methods/techniques and session design …Even getting people to reflect on patterns and draw conclusions from pooled inputs in a plenary session, for example, for five minutes can trigger critical reflection—“seed” it for later sessions. (Carmin)

It means that I take time to pause to assess the rationale and assumptions behind my actions in relating to others. I reflect on the truths [sic] or texts … I place emphasis on the questions and on the ways in which I contribute to group conversations. (Sara)
Reporting on Critical Reflection

One of the areas where facilitators meet challenges is in reporting on critical reflection. Often this was associated with institutional or structural obstacles. Several activists spoke about their need to include this aspect, but noted difficulties in getting it to be accepted by funders. Most, however, did not report on this aspect of their work. Frequently the lack of reporting on reflective elements of the work was related to the demands of the funding agency or time restrictions. There were a few exceptions. The ability to report on critical reflections also requires the willingness of institutions to accept that material. Projects not funded by bilateral or multilateral funding institutions were more likely to be accommodating of critical reflections in the discourse. When there was time and commitment toward critical reflection the response was favourable.

Q: Have you ever reported on critical reflection in your reports? We cannot get it through….
   The more politics, the more political the process, the less success we’ve had in getting any kind of critical reflection or even willingness. We were told they’d re-write anything we wrote anyway. (Carmin)

   I don’t report only for donors. I report to capture nuances, to digest and to deepen my learning. I have the critical thoughts, processes and reflections built into my training reports and mission reports so that when I come back, the things I need to go the next step are in that report. …I over-report because my reports are for me as well as them. (Michele)

Vulnerability: Two Trends

When study participants associated critical reflection with criticism, their expressions of pain or vulnerability were more transparent. Yvonne, for example, said, “Part of the reflection process is being able to absorb criticism.” Wendy also construed critical reflection as meaning critiquing or being critical. She said, “One thing about feminism is that it
critiques everything. You need a certain resilience to be able to work within it or you get hurt’’ (Wendy).

Participants frequently mentioned the isolation in doing this kind of work. Sometimes the isolation, coupled with critical reflection, left participants feeling vulnerable and disappointed in their work.

I was told that there was difficulty accepting GBA [gender based analysis] [by Aboriginal people]. I thought about how to approach this in the best possible way but I was disappointed and thought I didn’t do a good job of it…. I had no one to talk to about it. … I feel that I missed the mark. (Wendy)

When critical reflection was associated with theories of transformative pedagogies and professional growth, however, those feelings were less evident.

Critical reflection helps me improve workshop structures and dynamics. … It also lets me look at myself within a larger context, and grasp what I can influence and what I cannot influence. Critical reflection helps me grow as a person. (Rachel)

Within the context of doing participatory development, Kayla expressed a different emphasis on how she practices critical reflection. She reiterated the importance of using theories of transformation and participation to inform her work. She explained that having a base in theoretical knowledge helped her understand the constraints and enabled her to conceptualize facilitation in ways that were more dynamic and that questioned the assumptions of privilege that are too often left out of the discourse. Her example in this case was getting Canadian (privileged) students in the setting of an international development workshop to realize their privilege by doing a walk-through of an area of town beset with issues related to poverty and racism. In this way, critical reflection was conceptualized as dynamic and involved; continually examining relationships – between facilitators and learners; and between the learners and the community. Examining relationships was directly linked to examining power.
Theme Three: Shifting Power

The interviews always included a question that asked participants to comment on their feelings about power and privilege in cross-border dynamics. It frequently led to stories that demonstrated how power was played out in complex and multi-faceted ways.

Development Workers: Playing Out Privilege and Power

Despite the questions and probing, the participants did not often speak about their position of privilege or power as originating in the Minority World. Most of the participants interviewed referred to power as the power of the development institution or of patriarchy and men. Their discourse clearly placed their subjective position as outside of the institution even when they were working for it, perhaps demonstrating the multiple positions that activists occupy or the ways in which they are marginalized by dominant institutions. For example, Yvonne spoke about the frustrations in not being taken seriously, “being female and young,” and that she felt like she was “really the bottom rung.” Participant expressions of feeling powerless because of age, gender and race were regular occurrences. In the following quote, the position of a young woman is represented alongside that of mainstream development agents, illustrating the complex and contradictory positions that development practitioners can occupy:

My first ever mission was to Sudan. … The government had figured out that the project wasn’t connecting to the community and they wanted to evaluate the community participation elements of the project. I arrived at three o’clock in the morning in Khartoum and there was no one to meet me. I had to find this project office in Khartoum the next day—I was so tired at this point. When I arrived in the office, the first conversation I hear is these ________foresters asking “How do you train your dogs to guard against Blacks who come into your compound?” I was thinking, “Is this one of the community participation elements?” because, to me, this
was serious. They sent me off for six weeks with this trainer, this guy who was drunk
in the evening and I had to lock the door at night because I wasn’t sure what he was
going to do. It was extremely unpleasant. As a young woman in this situation, I think
in those early days, I felt extremely powerless in my own role. (Kayla)

Emma said, “It was quite liberating being in Latin America,” when she acknowledged
the privileges she experienced by being an Aboriginal (Canadian) in Latin America because
by virtue of her racial and gendered history in Canada she did not experience the same power
here. In addition, Kate and Kayla spoke about using their positions of power (that is, coming
from the Minority World) to disrupt the hierarchical practices or power inequities operating
in the Majority World. In this way, they said they could use their position of privilege to give
voice to those without power.

In many contexts where people are more comfortable with having big experts come in
and out—a tea party in the capital versus getting their boots dirty in the country. …to
help grassroots people understand what policy to use and help policy people
understand what grassroots people are about, and that’s how you can disrupt and
create communications that wouldn’t ordinarily happen—it’s an important privilege
that you have when you do that kind of work. (Kate)

Power is right at the heart of what development is. If development is not about
shifting power, what is it about? It is about, by definition, changing how people live.
So you’re changing the power they have to participate in the society in which they
are. So if you’re working to change the power of some group, it’s almost certain that
there will be certain people that feel that their power is threatened. I would say that in
almost any situation, negotiating that is an issue. This is where the short-
term examples are useful. You can say, agitate things in a different way to some extent,
sometimes. (Kayla)

Discussions of shifting power relations were important to the dynamics of
development. Sara described the possibility of generating new epistemological knowledge as
a result of making such shifts. Although Sara mentions this ironic positioning of race as a
paradox, the same understanding of race and power or privilege was not widely elaborated
upon or discussed by participants. Sara advocates for bringing paradoxes into the dialogue
surrounding activist work in development:
Just wanting to shift our bodies of knowledge or the epistemologies, to be able to be open to other ways of learning and doing and knowing. Even as we try to create that kind of exchange or that kind of relationship we still found ourselves in quite a quandary because our students are from marks of privilege—it’s hard to escape the colour of your skin, the clothes you’re wearing. We speak—they know I’m not from there—I can still look like them but I’m not from there and they know that immediately. That creates tension that I still find hard to navigate. … there’s tension, but there’s tension about where powers lay historically—our job is not to pretend that that is not the case, but to bring that into the conversation. (Sara)

Kayla also described how shifting the locus of power and control by using participatory methodologies can serve to open new sites of knowledge and transformation.

The way power is situated here also illustrates how privilege is contextual and that participatory workshops can work to transform power – for example, through using creative, vigilant facilitation skills.

We were working on gender training in the context of the Shiva Puri watershed catchment, which is the catchment where Kathmandu’s water comes from. This is an area in the hills where lots of people live but the government, in its attempts to protect the watershed, designated a huge part of the area a conservation area, forbidding people from entering it. So then what happened, for example, is that the women who collect firewood had to risk their lives running into the forest at night, and there’d be wild animals, and armed guards and so on. So we tried to break down this conflict somehow, so we got together this group to work through these gender issues and in that group was the Minister for Forestry and the Head of the Forestry Department. And there were development people who worked in the Shiva Puri watershed and there were nursery people and local people who worked in the nurseries who were from the area and then there were these women. All of these people were brought into one huge room in Kathmandu—in a hotel. There were people in that room who had never sat on a chair. It was obvious -- there were people completely disadvantaged because of the circumstance and the situation. So I was scrambling, you know, thinking how can I make this … in an extremely hierarchical society, and what do you do?

We decided to go around the room and have everyone introduce themselves by saying only one name and how long a time they had spent in Shiva Puri. So someone woman from the Ministry would say, “I am so and so and I have worked in Shiva Puri for 5 years,” and then it comes to the woman from Shiva Puri who says, “My name is A---- and I have been in Shiva Puri for 42 years.” So right from the beginning that was a sort of methodological tool, it was important because it set the optics and it set up the meeting in such a way so that it is clear who the experts of this topic are. In fact, by the afternoon, the meeting had been lost to [the women of] Shiva Puri. It became obvious that we were in the wrong place discussing these issues. I
think in fact the Minister was trying to save face by getting cars and getting the people to move there and trying to show interest in this area—some people had been killed in this conflict—so it had to be dealt with on some level. So, that’s been an important example. (Kayla)

Kayla’s example illustrates how embracing a position of facilitator control and power actually diminishes the power and control of local hierarchies. It also demonstrated how power can be exercised in paradoxical ways.

Some participants noted that facilitator attention to process is critical, but in addition they needed to be aware of issues of power that stem from structural inequalities and from hegemonic educational practices which place the facilitator/educator (i.e., the expert) in the position of control. If the facilitator of a participatory process is attentive to the subject/subject position they embody, then letting go or de-centering the facilitator/educator role becomes critical. Several participants expressed the difficulties in doing this, yet philosophically they knew it was more likely to achieve authentic participation and mitigate the power and control of the facilitator.

I’m thinking about one workshop on multiculturalism where rather than starting with the guest and their expertise—to shift it so that “what brought you” is part of it. … to create multiple learning opportunities or options in the same design sequence. How to create options for people who learn differently to be able to follow a thread if they want to? (Sara)

We try to be very cautious about who’s up front, we tried to have two facilitators and try not to make them two white facilitators, but in this case, we do have two white facilitators, but one is in Anglophone and the other is a Francophone, so that in this case it’s not about race, but it’s about language diversity, and the ability. (Alicia)

You know it’s funny, the agendas I do for workshops, I always leave them extremely open, with very little description, because otherwise you get people saying, “Well we haven’t done this,” or “It’s four o’clock and we haven’t done this…” So some people are extremely rigid that way…. Some appreciate that because they know it’s built on their own issues. They know they need more time to discuss issues that develop and to be flexible. (Jennifer)
For some participants, despite efforts and beliefs about de-centering facilitation, the facilitator control was omnipotent. They recognized or referred to letting go, but struggled to do so. The struggles were based on fear of the unknown, fear of being seen as inept, and fear of letting go. For example, Carol stated, “Well, [the] whole control thing is huge, right? I mean, agendas are just things that you use to control things, because you’re scared to see what might happen.” A few participants who were trained in formal education noticed that that training was almost an impediment as it placed the facilitator or educator in the position of being central to the process and therefore encouraged them to be in control. As Kayla explained, “Even when you think you’re holding back, you really are directing” (FG2).

Although intimately linked to facilitator control, the use of reflexivity to examine personal positions of power and the assumptions and values therein was not obvious. In the cases where participants expressed using a reflexive lens that examined their own position within development and in facilitation, the tone was one of struggle. Frequently those struggles leave the activist-facilitator with feelings of doubt, vulnerability or guilt.

Not wanting to look in, not wanting to—it’s about critical reflection. It’s about fear of something you’re doing, it’s about losing control, it’s about power. … We need to think about how to get people to talk about these things in a way that’s not confrontational, that’s constructive. I think that’s something I myself need to work on. How do I name my power and use it in a way that doesn’t maintain hierarchy? I think it’s a group of people committed to a sustained process. (Patti)

Reflective spaces for people to shift in their deeply rooted perceptions of who other people are, who people are, to work with people with a respect as equals…. That guilt can stymie any action. … getting lost in that quagmire of, “Wow, I’ve got privilege. I’ve got guilt, guilt, guilt,” and the time is taken up by that and that needs to be part of the process, definitely, but it maintains the power and inequity because I recognize my power and privilege and I’m going to sit here with this privilege with others who have privilege and we’re going to talk about how rough it is and [it] still doesn’t change the fact that you don’t have access to water and we do because we have a bottle of water in our rooms. It doesn’t change the fact that I see myself as better off than you. (Sara)
About half the study participants were critical of looking at ways in which they might exercise a form of power-over, perhaps viewing themselves as outside of the institutionalized forms of power or control or at least outside of decision-making positions. For example, some participants clearly felt that their origins as working class or as racialized minorities in Canada qualified the kind of privilege they held in working overseas. Several participants advocated for a different analysis—that is, one that examines privilege as male or institutional but not necessarily personal. Kate suggested an alternative to looking at analyzing privilege.

I’ve seen exploring privilege fall completely flat. My most recent experience is working in South Asia where people are very conscious about having that sense of privilege and they were very conscious about using it. …I guess sometimes I like to go back to women and development days and think about access and control, and participation. Participation was often much more helpful to me, I think, in helping to make agency more vivid. I could actually get the water boys to see that young women are the ones planting the rice out there and irrigation systems are not being maintained, because women are not the ones being trained in how to use them and are not part of the water users groups and that was much more effective than saying, “I’m the one that has the PhD, the Masters” or whatever. It didn’t change things the same way as walking in the rice paddies with them and saying, “Who is doing the work here, and how will the project be successful?” So I think the focus, and I’ve especially seen this with the agenda of policy, where there is always questions about decision making and access to decision-making, and that’s been the magic bullet for a lot of people. I don’t know that that is necessarily always the best way to go. I think sometimes getting people to understand who is participating and who is doing the work and has knowledge can really be a vivid kind of principle in how we approach developing back. (Kate, FG1)

In a few cases the participants spoke about using power and deliberately creating a rupture in the development apparatus. Kate’s example here is clearly about using position to engage in power in a responsible way. As Kayla explains, this position can be both personally liberating and a vantage point for activism.

I don’t have any need to put myself in those positions anymore where I have to take the crap about being a woman with no technical expertise in agro-forestry or engineering. I mean, how much do you have to know about road-building to take part
in development, in fact? So in some ways, I’ve decided very cautiously to take on consultancy work where I was the one with power—power to decide what my team needs when they go, how we carry out the mission, who to talk to and who sits around the table, where the exit is, what we report on, and so you could probably say is that, that’s not so different from what the men were assuming was theirs. By doing that, it is a way of shaking up things. (Kayla)

Shifting Positions: Hierarchy and Intersectionality

Personal reflections on position and power frequently brought out examples of hierarchy and power and how they intersect with position and identity. The examples of young women or racialized women discussed in the last section reflect this. Frequently, however, the borders of place (for example, local, global, transnational) or identity are not as obvious. Patti explained, “When you’re working across those borders you cross those boundaries all the time and sometimes you know it and sometimes you don’t.” For some participants crossing borders was very personal and for others the shift was part of what working in development is all about.

You have to shift. I guess the big thing about boundaries too is power. How do you work with that power? I really think the other thing is solidarity and I think that gets lost all the time and I think that’s Central America talking. Have you read Gloria Anzaldúa? [She writes about] crossing boundaries—when I first went to Latin America, I lived in Mexico, [and] that meant a lot to me. She’s talking as a Chicana woman so that’s very different, but here I am, a white woman. But that idea of having your feet in both places. I feel that ever since I’ve lived in Latin America that some part of me is going to be there. I come from privilege but there’s still something in me that shifted from all those years of living in Latin America. That will never be the same. So now I meet with all of these women here locally. When I spend an afternoon working with Muslim women here, my own privilege and power [are there] but maybe some little piece of my toe—something shifted in me in terms of how I stand and that is solidarity. (Alicia)

I think there’s a new reflection of the power differential that we live in all the time. I’m always trying to enable or support people at a more junior level to have a place in processes that they might be shut out of because of traditional hierarchical managers don’t make that place. The institutional structures themselves are so hierarchical and those people [managers] have spent their lives getting that amount of power, and they
know exactly how much power they have. I’m more interested in helping them try to do something differently with that and challenging them about that, especially in development. I heard somebody working on the MDG [millennium development goals] poverty campaign say—this had a big impact on me. He was orientating 30 new leadership candidates for -----. He could see that participants were not there, that they weren’t engaging, and he stopped right in the middle of his presentation and said, “And look, I’m not talking about people like you. You have to learn to step outside of the life of privilege that you live, because you are going to be working for people whose life’s experiences are so different from yours. You have to stop thinking that you know what I’m talking about; you don’t know what I’m talking about and you will not know what I’m talking about. You don’t know it now and you will not know it when you’re working in those places. You have to listen to the people who do know what it’s like.” There is so much work to try and get people who think they know what it is like—people who come from a place of privilege. I actually do think a lot of people still ascribe to the idea that those people are poor because they deserve it and that they can help them. It’s so patronizing and so awful. (Carmin)

Carmin’s example here is also relevant in the way it suggests an examination of how power is used in development and the role of the development agent.

Living within and between positions of oppression and privilege simultaneously highlights how intersections of identity, not just hierarchies, are expressions of how power and privilege are both lived with and struggled with. Rachel describes how normalized categories are actually ones that shift:

We tend to just put people into different groups. For example, it’s not just about immigrant women—not only are there immigrant women who are also living with disabilities and who are not heterosexual and all of those differences and the differences between them—their geo-political origins, their languages, their facility in dominant languages. … Then it’s really difficult to deal with categories when/without entrenching the categories. But to also recognize that these are also social constructions. … No matter how small you get, you’re talking about status difference among people. (Rachel)

Participants also talked about how these hierarchies shift and how sometimes an activist-facilitator can alleviate tensions around local hierarchies by modeling, building alliances and providing attention to those most left out by local hierarchies. Frequently the hierarchies were institutional as well as related to social positions and locations. Advocating
for local facilitators was one way the participants suggested they could shift the power
dynamics. Therefore, the examples of how local hierarchies are constructed or modified or
interrupted explained paradoxes as well as places for resistance by activists:

[There are] tensions about who is paid what and who has the car and the driver, but there is also the case, for example, when you’re working through the women’s national machinery, and I come from a working class background in Canada, so you know no matter what your background is, when you come there, you intersect in a very weird way in hierarchy because you don’t really fit; you don’t really fit into any of them. In fact, it in some cases, like when I was working for rural development and water and soil conservation projects with farmers, of course, I was highly privileged. [At that point] I had access to people in the hierarchy that those people would have never have access to, so I could use my position of privilege to get access for those people to actually go to the Ministry of Education and have a talk about what a great culture they have and then ask for money for a school because the people have no school in their village. There are ways you can use that disruption around local hierarchies to help their relationships and their communication capacity, and build capacity to help people understand what the needs and aspirations are, to bring those forward. (Kate)

It didn’t matter whether it was Kosovo, or Timor Este, or the RCMP, the women, mostly women, or a couple of men who were speaking from their own experience as police officers—who are genuinely committed to this—they can’t even get a toehold in their own hierarchical structures. What they need most are allies that encourage them, who are coming from their own national context. (Carmin, FG1)

Sometimes shifting power also involved recognizing local knowledge and
degitimizing the dominance of Western-style knowledge. Ironically, the recognition of
Western knowledge as superior or dominant was not just pertaining to the study participants.
Frequently it was noted that facilitators or organizations, whether local or international, will
try to use Western knowledge and present it as a norm or the standard. Patti explained that
this offers activist-facilitators an opportunity to engage in resistance. She said, “I think we
can also be subversive in that role. For example, in Ethiopia while giving training I tried to
use local examples – examples that originate in Ethiopia – while the local trainer was using
examples from away.” Not using local examples or culturally-relevant examples has the
effect of diminishing the validity of local or indigenous knowledge and according to Kayla and Jennifer, this is where activist-facilitators can make a difference.

I often train people whose job it is to train at the community level. … I have been taking down assumptions that people who have been trained in colonial traditions have of their very own people. So typically, I might be training in Namibia with trainers who have been trained by the German elite or South Africa during the Apartheid era or have got some training in England or Europe somewhere, and who come back with Western perspectives about what knowledge is and [they are] almost always positioning local people as ignorant and needing more education. So when I’m training this kind of group of people, the struggle is to get the emphasis onto appreciating different sources of knowledge. (Kayla)

There is so much push for Western style agriculture, Western ways of thinking, modern … I’ve always pushed an alternative view. I took that into the FAO when I worked there—trying to push for an indigenous knowledge system, indigenous rights; I did a lot for the gender aspects of farmers’ rights. (Jennifer)

For Sara the practice of delegitimizing hierarchy consolidated in doing a participatory workshop that aimed at assisting participants in realizing that they had the knowledge to respond to a local situation and that their actions were more important than waiting for a government response. Interestingly, her analogy to the “empty vessels” was used by at least three different participants—again a reference to the ideas of Paulo Freire, as presented in Pedagogy of the Oppressed.

Do we think of people as empty vessels that only the government can remedy or a higher power can remedy, and how does that activism change when we start working from a common interest? Start moving from sympathy, to empathy to solidarity. What does that shift mean? And how do we get there? Anyway, so we did some critical reflection in our own group together and then we started taking that and building images and short themes dealing with the water crisis in India. (Sara)

Emma criticized the way that forms of knowledge become fixed categories and limit possibilities for cross-border exchanges. She discussed this in the context of Aboriginal women, saying that if an Aboriginal woman tries to get work in development, assumptions are made that “if it is a women’s project, it would have to be indigenous women, it couldn’t
be gender and development.” She felt limited and disempowered because of this apparent institutional barrier.

Understanding the interplay of power was associated with tension. The tension was physical and expressed, for example, through long pauses or laughter following the question itself. Sometimes the participant would use a story that expressed difficulties. Making the shift to a more intersectional analysis of power and its manifests was a painful process for Carol, albeit one that made her more effective as a facilitator and one that she explained as ongoing:

Young women of colour were very militant. I was an older white woman, along with several of the rest of us who learned a lot of lessons very painfully. And I’m glad that I did. A lot of this learning tends to be painful, it would appear. It was really important for my facilitation because before that I was—well, I’m a product of my upbringing—but in terms of power relations in the classroom, I really learned a lot about those dynamics and trying as a facilitator to be much more present and with the people in the classroom, to leave behind that power. (Carol)

Shifting the power dynamics and working toward solidarity and change was perceived as a difficult and arduous process, frequently one that took more time or effort than projects or workshops permit. Participants acknowledged that in order for change to occur it had to be internalized but the potency of patriarchy and power-over limited possibilities for change.

Whenever I do training that is gender-related there is still a lot of laughter about gender or women’s rights. There are some who don’t think women should have any rights in society. It happens in every workshop. A lot of jokes about men beating women or that kind of thing comes out … Sexism is still one of the last bastions that is okay—I mean, racism is not okay but there are still problems with sexism there and that’s okay…. It’s not a one- or two-day training. I think it’s a much larger process that’s required. It also has to come from within. I don’t see how it’s going to come from consultants coming in for two weeks, five weeks, whatever and then leaving. It has to be internalized—there has to be a willingness to change. (Jennifer)
Theme Four: Paradoxes and Possibilities for Activists Working in Development

Participants were frequently critical of the multi-faceted ways that they ended up engaged in technical “quick-fix” approaches, or in development practices that ignored gendered dimensions. They were also critical of institutional approaches where participatory methodologies were difficult to enact and highly unlikely to be transformative. Therefore, the paradoxes they felt were many. Conversations about hope and possibilities for transformation, along with the need to make a living, were big factors for staying in the work. This section explores some of the paradoxes and possibilities that arose from the interviews and focus groups.

Naming Paradoxes in Development

Participants in this study were solicited using criteria which established that they were involved in facilitating workshops in transnational locations—described on the recruitment poster as locally and globally. While participatory development was considered the norm for a few participants, the context and practices within mainstream development programs still dominated the practices of the majority of participants.

In many cases, the study participants did not distinguish between what paradigm of development they were referring to, however, the goals of their activism most often indicated support for participatory methodologies within participatory development. Additionally, while they recognized development as institutional, they saw themselves as outside of the institution and saw doing the work as a source of income or livelihood.

She was an NDP candidate … She said, “I have not trusted male institutions since I learned to value my place outside of them.” And I think of that, the entire world development as a male institution. I don’t think what it’s actually doing is what I’m doing. I don’t think the goals are in the same at all. I think the concept of tied aid is
fundamentally repugnant. It is not aid all. And the fact that we’re not able to reach 0.7 per cent of our GDP is a shame. I mean, I heard the author Martin Amis interviewed recently and he talked about something that he calls species shame. That’s what I feel in relation to the entire development world, is shame. And I think the only thing I can do is to be the best activist that I can be. I am on the outside of it. I have no idea, no sense that what I’m doing is changing anything in those institutions from the inside. I am on the outside [my emphasis] and I do this for paid work. (Carmin)

Frequently paradoxes were referred to as inconsistencies between what the donor or international agency was demanding and what local communities were needing. As Sara noted, “There is no thinking across borders about what we can do together.” Participants were cynical about the decisions that have been made by development organizations and the individuals in them—from NGOs to multi-lateral organizations. The participants quoted here express considerable anger and disillusionment toward those decisions.

I’m an ex-community developer so it’s clear that the community needs to be involved, but the [international] organization was created by a really nice young man doing a degree in agro-forestry and he married a young Nicaraguan woman and brought her to Canada and he wanted to help her village. His assessment of the community—he thinks they should have a community oven so he wants the community to build the oven but the community doesn’t think it’s a problem that they don’t have an oven. Their priorities are elsewhere. My problem was not with the community but to come back and tell [him] that they don’t want a community oven. Now if you send students to build a community oven, you’ll piss people off. To me, that’s an example of someone well-meaning … but self need and perceived needs are different. I think there are probably a lot of [people like him] all over the world. (Diana)

One person [in a workshop] wrote as a [workshop] expectation—income generation (per diem, sitting fee, allowance). So it’s important to get people engaged about the issue not just being there for a fee. I think there are a lot of issues there to be addressed… dependency on donors that we’ve created. I mean they won’t do anything until the next donor comes along. Trying to get people to validate their own experience, their own capacity, their own abilities and to say we can do this—whether or not you’re here we can do this. That’s a huge paradox. (Jennifer)

The economists still do have an overarching control over shaping what is defined as development priorities for all of sustainable development. The mainstream of development is still very much defined by that very traditional economic paradigm. The rest of us are just what my friend in Ottawa, [name], once called the barnacles—we’re always on the outside. And I don’t think the language of mainstreaming
[gender] or the selection of that approach is working. It’s been badly evaluated. People still don’t even know what it is—we’re having orientation workshops in 2005, that’s 10 years after Beijing. (Carmin)

The participants were also aware of how local politics as dominated by the macro-politics of globalization were influencing practices in development. The changes brought by globalization and its accompanying forms of economic restructuring through structural adjustment, for example, were consistently rejected or considered disastrous by the study participants. Jennifer explained:

I mean, in Namibia they’ve talked about how the private sector has just stripped people from the public sector. Structural adjustment in the 1990s just came and stripped down government. As soon as people get more opportunity or a consultancy they’re gone from the government. Especially in Africa there are also a lot of people dying. So I think there are even more changes in the field…. Of course there is a lot of positive stuff happening in Africa as well, but sometimes the death is just overwhelming. I talk to some of my colleagues, African women, and they say that the first thing you say when you meet a friend, especially if you haven’t seen them for a few years is that you’re happy to see them alive and you talk about who is dying, who is this, that, etc. I guess it also pisses me off because there is so much we could be doing and we just waste, God knows, billions of dollars in Iraq and wherever else. We need to be addressing this issue in Africa. HIV is one thing but we also need to address poverty and gender inequality which is really pushing forward HIV. It’s frustrating on a more monumental basis. I think that’s why I started asking you know, what’s changed in the twenty years that I’ve been going to Africa? Well, maybe a hell-of-a-lot more people have cell phones. (Jennifer)

The technical demands of funding institutions for timely reporting and rushed missions in the field based on producing outputs were frequently cited as obstacles to a good practice.

We so often rush in and we have X amount of time and we have to have the beautiful framework, and the people are still, the key people were still standing there with their mouths open. Because they are these are new terms, these are new processes. They need a culturally appropriate amount of time to think and express and we’re not giving it to them. (Michele, FG1)

I mean, some people don’t even get to the communities, they don’t even see what’s happening with the women, men or children. I think they get very removed from the people they are supposed to be working with. I know that for sure with policy makers
and decision makers—they are so removed from what’s happening at the ground. (Jennifer)

The study participants frequently cited paradoxes and gaps when they spoke about their feelings about how gender was integrated into development practices and ideals about how it could be. While most participants did not explicitly connect the practice of working on gender equality with feminism, Jennifer noted that in “feminist discourse there is a disconnect with gender and development. Gender and development realm in the field is much less critical.” Participants noticed that the politics of gender equality were not easily integrated into the development interventions, frequently due to institutional barriers. In the first focus group, several participants used the metaphor of “barnacles on the edge of a big freighter” to discuss how gender is viewed in development. There was also an overall acknowledgement that many of the issues have not changed significantly in the last one or two decades and there were also plenty of questions around whose priorities were being served.

But in terms of really cracking the nut on mainstreaming, it’s really the bees around the hive of the central planning agency or the NGOs that get access to that are the policy kind of think-tanks. That’s something for me that has been disappointing. I thought by coming back to work with civil society, I was looking forward to getting out of that vortex and finding out what was really happening at a grassroots [level]. I still see women in women’s organizations still struggling with the same things they were struggling with 15-20 years ago. Still trying to crack the same nuts. [Laughter]. It’s the same thing with women’s organizations in Indonesia, in Sri Lanka, in Nepal. Same old, same old. (Kate, FG1)

In the Pakistan earthquake for example, the Pakistani military was very good at organizing to fly into these very remote communities to fly down wounded people down to healthcare but they had all male soldiers in those ‘copters and this is in an area of honour killing. So women were bleeding to death and saying, “No, don’t touch me.” So they were left. We didn’t need a female doctor, we didn’t need a nurse, we needed one local woman who could speak the language and knew her ability and had permission to be there or maybe two local women to be on the ’copter, to give support and to protect the honour and dignity of women and their right to healthcare.
So we can save lives. The nay-sayers were saying, “We’re too busy to do gender analysis.” But gender analysis will save lives (Michele).

Participants expressed a sense of isolation in doing transnational work around gender, but the feeling of loneliness and inadequacy when they didn’t have work was cited as a reason to keep doing the work. Conversely, support for each other was viewed as one way of breaking this isolation.

I think it doesn’t happen a lot because we work in isolation. The nature of the work, the scheduling, you hit the ground running and you don’t even have time to get around to networking. On the down side when you’re in a dry period, it is a real bummer and it’s hard to reach out to people. So I think there is a dynamic ferret that isolates. I think also you need to find the right mix of women in this case who share a philosophy and a kind of work. (Alicia)

A Quick Fix

During the focus groups, the participants expressed sentiments of being adamantly opposed to development practices that presented themselves as a quick fix, a buzzword, or the “flavour of the month.” The number of times activists spoke about development projects as being a quick fix or short term grossly outnumbered the times development was discussed as sustainable. Emma stated, “To a certain extent everyone has their priorities and these priorities come into place, but that doesn’t address structural issues.” Michele noted that the practice in delivering participatory training in this kind of working environment was also fraught with contradictions or what she labeled a “cookie cutter” approach.

Jennifer argued that the whole approach needs to change to something that has more long-term goals. While this was a common sentiment, it was by no means universal. Kayla commented that in her personal experience she had also gained skills/knowledge from very short-term specific workshops that helped her do a particular piece of her work more
efficiently. There was an acknowledgement, however, that it was difficult to actually measure the success of either short- or long-term gender training interventions because of the lack of assessment or any real measure of the impact of training. Participants also related the lack of follow-up to a superficial push for change.

On a personal level, I think my involvement is best when it is either very short, or very long. If it’s long enough for me to be able to communicate with people in their own language, and really get involved and become part of the processes and so on. … there is a better chance for more honest, open discourses to take place. You know, it goes both ways. … Some very short interventions can completely alter the way I think about something. I don’t see patronizing the issue and saying that the community development workers in Namibia wouldn’t benefit from that same kind of interaction. (Kayla)

Participants were critical of the way development institutions changed priorities. Despite the lessons learned that overwhelmingly emphasized the need for more long term integrated forms of development, there was a sentiment in the first focus group that Canada was subsiding into the 1950s or 1960s style of military-led development—citing Canada’s aid shift toward Afghanistan as an example.

Kemal Dervis, the new UNDP administrator from Turkey, is talking about “economic growth with re-distribution.” Anybody awake in the 1970s knows those phrases. They are associated with tired, traditional and yet still unproven economics and economic language. We know, for example, that “trickle-down” theories in which economic benefits are supposed to trickle down to benefit the poor have not worked. There is no evidence that these approaches work. (Carmin)

I don’t know that there really are more conflicts than before; we don’t know that. It’s just that we have a media that brings those conflicts into our home and computer instantly. So there isn’t a long-term focus anymore. It’s like, we send in the DART teams to Sri Lanka and now Sri Lanka is off and Lebanon is on the screen and we weren’t even in Sri Lanka long enough to finish the project related to tsunami relief and the people in Sri Lanka cannot believe how this has totally destroyed the NGO community. (Kate)
Connecting Personal Roles with Development Politics

Recognizing the contradictions between working on gender issues in development and being affected by personal gender issues at home was one of the ways the participants connected their political or professional work to their personal lives. From a feminist perspective this reflects the lived borders of the political and the personal which frame the lives of many women and the double and triple duty roles women frequently lead. These lived contradictions and shifting borders of identity explain some of the complex social positions occupied by the study participants and how balancing all of these positions places a burden of uncertainty and introduces struggle into their lives. Several participants compared the stress of caring for children and elderly parents in their own lives with similar stresses experienced by the women they work with. An example:

In Slovenia … the women who came from the villages were all 40 and over, into their 50s and 60s. Some of the participants were saying, “Why are they older?” They’re older because they’re not looking after children. Their children are older. They have time to devote to community now but they didn’t have time before because it was devoted to kids and working. I think that’s pretty much the same for me – I have time for my work, barely, and that’s even a struggle and a personal issue. And then my kids – the house is a mess. Just trying to do all of that … just to have the time or energy to work on that! (Jennifer)

After the focus group, Kate lamented in a written message, “I [wish I] had more quiet moments of reflection like being involved in your focus group – than the constant feeling that I am driving forward with both feet on the gas with work and child/elder care juggling… and rarely getting to put on the brakes!”

Beyond the personal, participants also mentioned how the context of the work presented additional tensions. Contextual elements such as political or social insecurity, fragile states, top-down structures, bad management, bad relationships at a local level, poor working conditions placed additional stresses on the participants, particularly in the way they
made them examine the politics of their work and how they were embedded in the politics of the work. In the first example, Carol talks about working in the context of war and in the second example, Jennifer questions her own work in a local context.

I was working with AMLAE [national women’s organization] but they also had put some of their gender analysis aside; because of the US imperialism at that time was just so strong so for a various reasons we didn’t bring those elements to the workshop, they had to come from the people in the workshop. And they did, in some locations more than others (Carol).

I left thinking what is my role in all of this? Why do I stay involved?... But I get the positive feedback, and I’m charged again. But always the questions – What am I doing here? Am I making any change? Then I look around at my own country and I ask “What the fuck am I doing in my own country?” (Jennifer)

Despite the recognition of weaknesses in project designs or implementation practices, the study participants were implicated in interventions that they personally felt at odds about implementing. Ironically for Kayla, this experience of discomfort resulted in a deeper understanding of her role in development.

Now get in there and deliver it. … I understood what was being said on either side before any of the participants. Because whenever it had to be translated from Tamil or Singalese it had to be translated first into English, so I understood. Yeah. So, the way that we intersect in local hierarchies makes it difficult for us to come up with this unless we have a team of local people to work with and very frequently, again it’s not structured in this way. You’re supposed to come in with your toolbox full of tricks [my emphasis] (Kate)

I think my epiphany about my role in development was a workshop where some of the women came to me and talked about an improved stove that some of them had heard about. So I went and found out more about the stove which was made of sand and cow dung and water. So I went to the workshop where I was to teach the women how to make this stove. I remember standing in front of this group of women, any one of whom could have been my mother. I knew nothing about cooking on any kind of stove – it wasn’t my kind of thing. And I knew nothing about building with cow dung and sand and water. I thought, this is absolutely ridiculous – here I am standing in front of these women, who know more about just about every aspect of this stove than I do, and I’m 24 and they are, you know, my mother’s age, and I’m here pretending to be the expert to tell them about this…. So, I think that was the point where I began to see my role much more in the development process more as a dialogue. I still don’t. It annoys me sometimes that people say that only local people know the best. If you
have nothing to contribute to a process, you shouldn’t be there. … I think there is something to be gained there mutually through these kinds of dialogues. They can be very empowering and solidarity kind of building and so on (Kayla).

One participant who worked in popular education acknowledged having time to discuss the contradictions in what they were doing.

We really felt commitment to the region. … So that was one piece and the other piece that we did was that we were there as an international NGO and we had money. We were CUSO staff. Then we had a budget to spend in the region. And the kind of resources we had were Canadian volunteers. We had to place these Canadian volunteers in the region – many people wanted to come to Central America at that point and then we had the money for projects. We spent a lot of time talking to people about that contradiction – first how to recognize a contradiction, which was not such a difficult task, we were sort of there when we went there. But how to manage it – that the relation of power are basically – but luckily we had this other relationship which was probably a relationship balanced the other way – where we were actually the learners in the educational context. How to deal with that relationship in a respectful way and how to move that toward a more equal relationship? All of these questions for which we never found real answers. (Carol)

The position development workers frequently hold as ‘experts’ from the Minority World was rejected firmly by all participants who mentioned it. Rachel pointed out that for her learning was reciprocal, adding that, “although I have a particular set of expertise, I’m not an expert. I am also here to learn.” Kayla provides another example here:

She came and stayed with me and I remember following her around as she came to talk to people – first of all by her fluency in Swahili. She would always communicate with people in their own language. She was never pretending to be any kind of expert – she was always asking lots of questions, making connections to the kind of information that she had access to and making that as accessible to the people as possible. Then this ridiculous situation of this 24 year old standing there as some kind of technical expert – it always seemed a joke to me that in ----- development that you became an expert on that ----- flight to Africa. I mean it had to happen somewhere because you weren’t an expert in [your home country] but you became an expert when you arrived in Tanzania. (Kayla)
Similar to the rejections of the expert label, Diana, challenged the term “specialist” and the practice of assigning labels and positions to women who clearly do not understand the politics around gender.

In Russia I was working with someone considered a gender specialist from an executing agency and this woman doesn’t have a background in gender. She was asked to be a gender specialist and she accepted. She’s not a feminist and she said quite clearly she’s never had any discrimination. (Diana)

The sense of contradiction about being a feminist and implementing ideas that were contrary to feminism was obviously personal. Jennifer’s concern was about the lack of a feminist analysis in development work was more personal.

The other day I was talking with someone about HIV and AIDs and it’s a horrible thing but I find that it’s a way to talk about gender. So for people who don’t have lot of understanding about social issues in general, I try to integrate how gender plays into the power relationships. In my work, there is such delineation from feminist politics which is part of what I was talking about earlier about where am I crossing my own personal boundaries? Am I giving up things to fit into this mould of international development? (Jennifer)

Understanding how a gender or feminist analysis can fit into a process or elaborate on the social situation was obviously important for participants, but they did not equate this with being an expert.

Participants also challenged the assumptions upon which development discourse was built, and how these assumptions distorted practices that could be more participatory. For example, Jennifer said, “The assumptions that people don’t know anything, that they don’t have any knowledge already – anything going or systems working for them.” Patti challenged the assumption that oppression was experienced equally by all women when she talked about her work with women leaders in Africa. She said, “They may be women but they’re privileged and in high positions of hierarchy – in fact they represent patriarchy.”
Sparks and Fire: Activists Identifying Possibilities in Development Work

Despite the many frustrations and doubts experienced by activists working in development and the multi-faceted and multiple paradoxes they also experience, hope for change, for relationships including solidarity, and possibilities for transformation kept them in the work. Metaphors using fire imagery were conjured up by study participants to describe how they identified possibilities in their work. For Alicia, the spark was ignited by the Nicaraguan revolution. She wasn’t alone. In terms of social transformation, Nicaragua’s revolution was an important historical and political landmark and half of the study participants remarked on how they were influenced either pedagogically or philosophically by working there or in solidarity projects for or with Nicaraguan popular organizations. Only one expressed disillusionment with the Nicaraguan revolution; she felt indigenous people were left out and not recognized as distinct. During the second focus group and in response to the question, “What keeps us doing this work?” Alicia passionately responded with the following statement:

I was going to say that one of the things that affected me was the Nicaraguan revolution. … I was living in a society [Nicaragua] where all the people believed in the potential of creating an egalitarian society, and the enthusiasm. And to be part of that in a moment of history was such a gift. And then to have that destroyed by the US military. And to have that lost was such an incredible loss. So we learn from that moment in history. I think that everything I do, in some way or another, is like the phrase in the Nicaraguan song – “the spark that’s been lit will never be put out.” When a progressive candidate, Alex Munter, recently lost the mayoral election in Ottawa, I felt such a deep sense of loss. I could cry right now just thinking about it – what it meant that he did not win. And I can’t tell you how much I cried after the loss because it brought up feelings of the loss of the Nicaraguan revolution. My point is that the spark of that revolution is alive in many different places, and we work to keep it alive for all the people who have died standing up for justice. You try to carry on what they couldn’t carry on. It’s a real fundamental commitment to the friends that were killed. It’s about the injustice, but it’s also about the possibility. I was talking with a woman from Rwanda, who is having the hardest time feeling integrated into Canada. In the end she said, “You know I was so quiet all weekend, but it’s given me
so much to think about. I’m just going to think about it. It’s given me so many ideas.”

Just that possibility. This new person working with us and the possibilities for her and others; just having her say that makes the whole weekend worthwhile. Those are the sparks that cannot be put out. (Alicia)

Participants spoke about change and the hope for change as being experienced on an individual or personal level; less so on a social level. Michele said:

One strategy I have is to focus on peoples’ individual stories. It’s now been a decade that I’ve been doing this, and I still don’t feel like I’ve seen any macro level change. … Where I can see change, is in individuals – in individual life stories.

*Connecting with Others in the Practice*

Often possibilities for change were not easily recognized or presented. They were frequently associated with high levels of commitment and persistence. Carmin remarks that often those allies are found in unusual partnerships or places.

This one woman said, “They ignore me, so I highlight it and send it again in a different colour and different points and every time there’s a meeting, I send it again.” I think it’s the same thing we’ve learned from a number of standpoints – it’s never over – you have to keep on and on again. You have to use what you have. I think you have to find the people invested in those institutions and get them to be allies. I think that’s how people are doing it. Linking, allying with each other – improbable partners – lots of times. You know, I never expected to like a police commissioner. … I do have a sense there are enough individuals or at least momentum, if not critical mass, within large institutions.

Carmin also spoke about experiencing a kind of betrayal in identifying and working with allies when she said, “In my youthful days I might have thought it would be easier – I don’t think I’m so adept now at figuring out who would be an ally. People who I’ve thought were allies are totally not.”

Allies come in different forms and for at least some participants, possibilities were more visible when there was a community response. Alicia expressed this saying, “I think it’s also about creating a community of people around you. That’s what’s so hard about
individual contract work.” Her comment also suggests the difficulties in practicing in isolation. For Carol extending communication became a way of sustaining that community.

The other piece was around Central America solidarity work – some of that was just new ways of approaching doing international development work and trying to make some of those links and again, there’s no personal responsibility here or credit, it’s of a group of people that had that and over the years we’ve tended to communicate a lot with each other in various informal ways. That I think there was somewhat of an impact there as well. (Carol)

For some of the participants, such as Kate, allies came in non-traditional ways such as cultural kinship lines appropriate to a particular context.

Really my best allies were men who were connected to women’s issues through kinship lines, men who cared about their younger daughter, sisters, etc. (Kate)

Carmin talked about having allies in the inside of the organization.

I think it’s always happening. I mean, I don’t think they make any progress if there isn’t somebody on the inside of whatever the institution is, or the organization, who responds when what we say resonates with them, in my experience sometimes my absolute best ally has been the secretary…. I treat them the same way I treat their boss.

In addition to allies, two participants mentioned mentors that had assisted them in coming to a participatory way of practicing development. Others mentioned mentors as well, but usually in reference to a specific part of the practice or as part of a larger support network. The examples of working with allies and mentors included possibilities that are perceived through the development of connections – both tangible and spiritual. Participants talked about making connections and understanding the interconnections in all we do. In some cases the discussions around connections led to examples of pedagogical support that was reciprocal – this is discussed in the following pages as solidarity education. In other cases, the connections were more about epistemological and ontological practices of facilitation. Here is one example:
Sometimes I think that being exposed to Aboriginal ways of learning, being and knowing have really helped me with that – being able to think that if it didn’t work the way it was supposed to then maybe it wasn’t supposed to work that way. That’s okay. I think the greatest learning doesn’t come from something that is planned. I think that’s where we need to open up a whole other dialogue – that’s ways of knowing that are intuitive, that are spiritual, that are connecting. Those don’t fit in agendas. Those aren’t part of agendas. That is where I want to go. (Patti)

Several participants spoke highly about relationships in facilitating participatory processes and doing political work. Although Carol wanted to believe and practice within horizontal relationships she felt that most relationships in development were hierarchical. Carmin here speaks about relationships in another way:

Outside of the technical is something of what I think of as an energy field – the relationships. It’s part of why the processes I mention are so important to me… I mean there’s a recognition that each of us has to have of ourselves – what do we really believe? Unless someone challenges us, or we have an opportunity in our lives to question that, we never really do. So I see a piece of that being what I like to do in a respectful way. We can all do that. Part of that has to be looking inwardly, but part of that, is also a relational analysis. When I was first disposed to it in terms of gender equality it changed my life. I did start to see things relationally. I did start to think se things differently and I think once you’ve crossed that threshold, you can’t go back. It’s like constantly having to push for widening and deepening the relational lens that people are bringing to their own work. There is something you can’t coordinate if people aren’t even in the same forum or within the same kind of force field. You have to have a foundation of a relationship before you can help them. (Carmin)

Collaborative efforts, reciprocal learning, and solidarity education were all terms used by participants to describe how the process of educating or learning abroad led to learning that was applicable for the Canadian context and vice versa. Here are two examples:

The focus at that time was very much about solidarity education and Central America, and for me southern Africa. And our idea was to take all the things we have learned about popular education and actually think about how we would use those in solidarity work. So the focus of those workshops was really methodological. We were aiming at solidarity groups, and we were saying, look, there’s other ways to do this work besides putting on films which people leave, you know, totally de-energised and depressed. So we tried to move towards more mobilising education. (Carol)

It was very much a collaborative effort. The initiative came from the South, but then was developed in the North and came back and they decided they wanted to adapt it
for Latin America and so, we also translated into Spanish, and it was adapted to the Latin American context. (Alicia)

Kate was critical of how possibilities for transformation were often only considered at a grassroots level. She advocates a multi-level approach:

You’ve got a light the fire from the top and the bottom and anywhere you can in the middle and everywhere else in between, and that’s exactly how I feel. You have to do work at the grassroots level, but my work in Indonesia showed me that if you’re only working at the grassroots level and the big boys are developing policy that will drag all of these women out of villages to work as domestic helpers or all the women out of the villages to work in factories to make shoes for export, all the work you do at the grassroots level can just be dismantled very rapidly with the force of the state. (Kate)

**Personal Activism and Political Work**

There was a clear relationship in the interviews and focus groups between the participants’ personal work as activists and linking that work to larger forms of political work and networking. In some cases it was about personal feelings of affinity or connecting with others and in a few cases it involved the broader context of activism, including coalition building.

I called all these older women my sisters or my cousin, and when that permeates your thinking, because you’re working in another language, you develop familial bonds with those people. Its professional, but it’s also personal (Kate).

Synchronicity that drives people to work together and keep working together despite all odds – I mean she’s a Muslim woman fighting arranged marriages, fighting FGM. Part of all that – for me that’s not my life experience but we had enough of a connection in our work and the way we did our work. (Patti)

Also young women not very far from where I live, gathering around anti-poverty movements locally and because of workshops that try to link these issues, of poverty here at home with international issues … There’s more coalition work going on now I think and people moving across those old boundaries. (Carol)
The expressed sense of connection that the participants felt with each other in the focus groups, toward the people they worked with in many cases, and toward the movement they were trying to create or work within, meant that frequently discussions centered on connections, relationships and sometimes building solidarity movements. For some participants this still remained a somewhat elusive goal, while for others it was a process they understood as a part of and about their own experience.

In working with a team of women from South American and Central America on the issue of violence against women, there were strong tensions due to differences in race, class, politics and whether or not each woman considered herself a feminist or not. In order to resolve the tensions, we spent a lot of time sitting together around the table listening to each other. In the end, our shared understanding of what we were to cover in the workshop broadened. Violence against women had to be defined in broader terms. It had to be defined by the women. The women from South America, who had lived more years in Canada, were more focused on domestic violence; while the Central American women, who were recent refugees, were focused on the violence women experience in war and at the hands of repressive governments. In the end, the analysis for both groups shifted as they listened to each other. If we were to address violence against women, we needed to address all their experiences of violence as experienced in war, torture, human rights abuse, extreme poverty, rape, as well as domestic violence. … The trick is to keep it broad enough to be inclusive of different realities. In my work in Canada, when you talk about crime prevention with Somali women, their main concern is the risk of their youth getting into gangs and committing crimes. So to work across difference it is key to keep the basket big enough to include different realities and perspectives, so as to then find a shared focus of action. (Alicia)

There was a pretty difficult moment in one workshop where with Iniqualit – with women from small communities in Nunuvut. At one point somebody was talking about priorities for research and somebody talked about suicide and within a minute everyone in the room was crying because everyone had lost at least one person and some more than one. Everyone broke down in tears, so we just stopped with the workshop just to talk about our experiences and to get those emotions out. I think that actually served to build a lot of solidarity among participants because we all had this in common and this was a safe space where they could bring it out. (Rachel)

A few of the participants talked about the possibilities that emerge from a participatory process and the role the facilitator can play in it.
So it’s gone somewhere that you didn’t anticipate and it’s gone somewhere that’s probably good for a lot of the people involved. That’s hopeful. And I think they also humble you in some ways because you realize that you might have had a part in getting something started, but you don’t have to have a part in keeping it going. It’s not all about you. (Patti)

My designs are extremely complex but in the end at some point you have to let go and say that it really ultimately doesn’t depend upon us…. I just want to go but it is facilitating and connecting with the people and ultimately it doesn’t depend upon us, right? (Alicia, FG2)

There is a fine line between being a facilitator and a therapist – we’re talking about people developing healthy relationships. And in order to develop relationships takes a certain tolerance of proximity – to be seen; being able to hold the contradictions of who we are. To let that be seen by somebody else. (Sara)

Carmin also alludes to the importance of the process however she also speaks about the facilitator bringing a change lens to the process.

I think a change lens is as essential as a relational lens. Because if you’re not contributing to change and you don’t know what that change is, then you’re not really contributing to development work…. How does it roll out – the networks, the relationships, because that’s the challenge. Even if you have the best training of trainers in the world, how can we actually support the second and third and tertiary levels of influence and impact. And if people aren’t thinking about change, if they’re thinking about the content and what they’re delivering, they’re not thinking about change. And they have to be thinking about what change is going to result from your intervention in this area. When I mention a weak analytical capacity, it’s precisely at that nodal point of the link between activities people are doing and the incremental contributions to a change. So that’s constantly where I will challenge people.

There were cases when participants felt outside or on the periphery of the process of change. They saw themselves involved however as pushing or supporting the change through their facilitation practice. Safety, trust and belonging were all factors.

I know that to get together with others you commiserate. I feel I cannot be exposed to that so much. I prefer to sometimes go to lunch with individuals --- analysts in departments and to try to problem solve. But to go to the meetings where they lament – I think it is a form of solidarity but I don’t want to support that and people have a right to complain – the work is hard. … fear is justified because anyone who does this is open to criticism by – specialists who will trash it…. This field has a lot of fear. (Diana)
Theme Five: Opportunity and Transformation

For the study participants, both social and personal transformations were cited as goals for staying involved in activist work. The examples of social transformation, however, were few and there were fewer examples. Facilitation as a sustained project emerged as a key lesson in the study, linking sustainability to transformation.

Personal Transformations: Small and Humble

For the participants in this study, transformation occurred on both personal and social levels with the trajectory of their training experiences leading to different forms of transformative learning; sometimes it was small and individual yet their vision was often based on extensive social change. Transformation was not as Kayla put it, “the powerless to the powerful,” but there were stories of personal transformation and examples where seemingly impossible situations changed into sites of envisioning hope or possibility. For the participants, a sense of optimism toward believing change was possible despite all odds seemed to pervade, although when the change did occur, it was never experienced equally.

I was so moved by the experience we had in Ethiopia working on participatory methodologies of integrating gender and HIV/AIDS when we [facilitators and workshop participants] went to Arha Amba and heard what that community was trying to do. It’s an incredible example of community development from an illiterate group of rural people in a food insecure area. When we came back we did a reflection. I just asked everybody to take five minutes and critically reflect on what we saw and heard and it was so moving. There’s no question that for some people it was transformational. In that context and that is the context of Ethiopia where people have no construction of imagination because they live in fear and oppression, Arha Amba represented something totally unfathomable yet possible because it was there. (Patti)

I can think of quite a few examples of individuals. I can think of a few examples organizationally where there is no huge transformation but I think there’s been an impact and I think it’s cumulative over the years. When we started to do work for the
unions for example, nobody was interested in talking about popular education or participatory education because this was the way education was done and there was an incredible amount of resistance largely because there were a lot of men and very few women. There was a whole group of us who started to do that work in the labour movement and that’s had an impact on education in the labour movement beginning with the Congress itself. (Carol)

When the participants talked about incidents or examples where they felt there had been some kind of transformation, it was almost as if they were surprised themselves. Frequently the measure of change was small, humble, or as one participant expressed it, “even imagined.” The ability for people to open their minds, to think or say “ah-hah” and to envision change was considered by several participants as a kind of transformation.

Reflecting on those moments and sharing them with others was considered important as well.

On personal levels – yeah. And that’s where I measure my success; making a difference to one person. I’ll run into someone a year later and they’ll say, “That that really changed things for me, I started to see things in a different way.” There was a guy who did this socio-economic and gender training in 1989 in Zambia. I saw him a couple of years later and he said, “You know, when I did that training I thought oh, that’s a bunch of shit, or whatever, this is ridiculous. But I went back to Copperbelt and I looked around at who had resources and it started to make sense.” … He started to incorporate the training into his practice and to train other people as well, so that kind of personal exchange … I get e-mails but in terms of greater impact on the government itself there is no measurement. All of my work is short-term. … part of the problem is funding, lack of follow-up, it’s really difficult to measure the impact. (Jennifer)

We can create a physical image of where we’d like to go. Just the act of putting one’s body into the space of that ideal, no one’s ever done that – to say, that’s what a healthy relationship might look like. I’m thinking about a situation in India when we were looking at situation of violence against women and we would create images of power over, man hitting and neglect, abusing, threatening and then we shifted our tactics all together and thought what would our images look like, what would a healthy relationship between men and women look like, what would respect look like, starting with a heterosexual relationship. Just struggle with that – that’s hard work. And when we started to create images around us and say “Now I know what we’re working towards,” that’s transformation for me…just being able to imagine what we’d like, to create images of that, to know, to name it. (Sara)

She said, “I was sitting outside my window shelling peas when they brought my son in,” and she said, “I knew I didn’t have to live this way anymore.” That’s my stellar
example of how humble we should all be when we think about transformation and change. Because it’s at that level, where I think it really happens. That’s what I want more of – that woman. (Carmin)

The context or group dynamics were also envisioned as elements that influenced the possibility for transformation.

When they can see how they can change their situation. I don’t know if its transformation – maybe with a small t … But I think that’s what I’m working toward I guess but I don’t think the context I work in is a transformative context. …It’s reform not transformation. (Diana)

I’ve seen how very, very important it is to have the right composition of the group. To have that group be a sustainable group for a certain period of time because transformation is all about self-directed, self-decided change and it takes an environment, it takes the fertility of an environment around you; the ability of others around you who can appreciate and recognize and support your transformation. …where the real transformation comes, usually, is in sustainable groups because they can sustain and support each other for the change and transformation of all. (Michele, FG1)

The validation of marginalized knowledge was frequently acknowledged as a way of generating possibilities for transformation. Within that production of knowledge there were clearly issues of power – both surrounding facilitators and institutions. There were variances however in whether the process resulted in transformation, and if it did, whether it was personal or collective or both, or planned/unplanned:

I think it’s a personal transformation for a lot of people just validating their own experience or their own knowledge because they come thinking they know nothing about this but they learn through using participatory approaches that they actually have a lot of knowledge. … I think that’s a big part – just validating their experiences. Usually they are used to going into settings where ‘the expert’ - someone with knowledge comes and talks at them. Like I say, it’s very basic and it’s been talked about in popular education but it definitely has been my experiences. An ah-hah around your own validation, around your own knowledge, and that you actually have a lot to offer. (Jennifer, FG1)

I had a similar thing happen in some work I was doing with the churches and the Aboriginal Rights Coalition around Aboriginal people. We brought together Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and we had this exercise called the blanket exercise. It’s an experiential thing where you put blankets on the floor. You talk about
the history of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and slowly you fold back the blanket until no land is left. In this one case, three-quarters of the people were Aboriginal, and it was so powerful. The whole workshop just stopped and it became a healing circle. We had to sit back and look at our workshop goal and our preconceived images and so on. (Alicia, FG2)

Participants also referred to moments of transformation as being personal and points of learning for themselves in conjunction with the workshop participants. Again, the image of the spark was used by Patti.

Although sometimes you just see it by the spark in someone’s eye. Sometimes those moments seem so few. I guess sometimes it’s as much my own learning as it is learning of a participant in a workshop that would connect me into believing that something is happening that is giving people hope for change – personal, collective, regardless of how small or how large it is. (Patti)

This room was filled with women who were in shock and crying. I felt that way. But I think, what is really key is to transform those moments into what did we learn? (Alicia)

Like the powerless to the powerful? Seeing yourself in those terms. I do think that’s happened. You have to believe it is possible. Otherwise you’d be absolutely sidetracked…. because of technology we can now have solidarity and strong links to parts of the world we never knew about before – we can learn about life struggles we never heard of before. There are opportunities for solidarity, cooperation, for passion in ways that there never was in previous generations – that’s the world in which I live. (Kayla)

Facilitation as a Sustained Project

While the participants elaborated on immediate or quotidian facilitation challenges, they also conversed about long-term dreams or possibilities for transformation, solidarity and hope. During my personal interview as a participant in the study, the interviewer said, “That brings us full circle. I hear that facilitation is a sustained project for you even though the site of facilitation may not be.” The possibility that facilitation is a sustained project for activists involved in delivering participatory training workshops was shared in many of the
discussions. Accordingly, the study offered an opening for discussion of the search for a wider, deeper analysis that provides lessons in compassion, lifelong learning, and optimism. The art of participatory facilitation was illustrated through the experiences of the participants as a changing and weaving of intersecting epistemologies, identities, and approaches. Participatory facilitation was viewed as demanding, never constant, sometimes rewarding and always challenging. Facilitating a participatory process demanded responsive attention to subjectivity, participation, technique, and procedure. Two quotes illustrate:

I treat myself as someone that can open doors or as a bridge. I don’t have ions and ions of knowledge that I can give them either. Sometimes I just help to provide access to get the knowledge. (Rachel)

There are a lot of tools that I have that I can rely on once I know what their needs are. I have to do just play it by ear, each time. (Yvonne)

Excerpts from the interviews provide some examples of how activists situate themselves in the process of participatory facilitation and how they reflect on methods of facilitating that provide good practices toward participatory facilitation, feminism and transformation. Some of the excerpts also express personal tension, vulnerability and paradoxes in the praxis of participatory facilitation. Communicating openly and meeting frequently, including at the end of each session with the co-facilitator, were considered important for ameliorating any tensions that developed.

Many of the participants spoke about the opportunities for critical reflection and learning that emerge from collaborative efforts or experiences of co-facilitation. This occurred not only in the workshop itself, but also in the planning, on the internet, and in the development of teams. For the most part, facilitation teams were considered desirable but they frequently had unwritten rules like providing time for each other. One participant explained how she worked with other facilitators by posing questions on a wiki (an
interactive internet site) or posting her workshop design and having other facilitators comment on it. None of the participants spoke about negative experiences in co-facilitating or working with teams except that it had to be intentionally built in or it was unlikely to happen. Conversely, several participants noted feeling lonely or isolated if they had no one with whom they could share their facilitation/workshop experience. The participants shared a few ideas about practices around co-facilitation and team approaches which follow here. These ideas are clearly about more than just co-facilitating a workshop and they illustrate the visions and goals for transformation that are at the core of facilitation. The collaborations and co-facilitation ideas are also about being able to dialogue, co-learn, co-teach and support facilitation as a sustained project.

An extended facilitation team – it’s like the idea that you’re trying to get the whole room to feel that they’re part of the facilitation team. I like to have the person who’s recording also on the extended facilitation team. Or a bad idea that you’re trying to get the whole room to actually feel like they’re part of a facilitation team. But their role as an active participant includes a contribution to the success of the event. So it’s that tone around the relationships within the event. The other thing I like about this whole co-facilitation approach we’ve tried, is over time -- I’ll have a primary role in the first day, a declining role in the second day, and by the fifth day, the design idea is that the people for whom we’re designing the process will be fully “in the face” of the process. (Carmin)

In response to a question about how activists can mitigate the power, control, or the privilege of being the facilitator, Carol replied:

On your feet a big thing for me and so is co-facilitation. First of all with someone you trust, but also someone that can help with that. …. One of the moments that really came to me was a very particular moment when we were piloting a popular education workshop methodology … There was a historical timeline that we had as part of the workshop. It was just before lunch, I can remember just pushing people through this thing. We were going to do this and we were going to get those cards up; you could feel that it was like pulling teeth. So we got to the end of it, we went for lunch, and by then I sat down and I said, “This is just like pulling teeth.” She said, “Yep, so why did you keep going? Why didn’t you stop and ask people what was going on?” I said, “Because I had to get through the agenda.” I just blurted it out. I never ever thought of myself before, at that point as being tied to the agenda. Before
that I always thought you put together a good design that you are very clear about how you want to move but at any moment you’re willing to let it go. The important thing about having a good design is so that you can let it go when learning is going to take place. … I’ve also learned a lot about just slowing down so I don’t just bulldoze my way through the workshop. Working with different styles, I suppose, is part of it. And then just sitting down afterwards and in a couple of minutes hearing about how I totally invaded the other person’s space.

As Carol demonstrates, shifting perspectives, paradigms and remaining open to new ideas from other individuals, sectors or movements was viewed as very important in the facilitation practice. In this way facilitation was never fixed or static, but designs and ideas were constantly emerging. Sometimes the shifts were small; other times they involved facilitators questioning their methodologies and the epistemologies that lay beneath them. Here is another example:

So anyway …there was a guy, an Indigenous guy in my class, and he/we went through this thing [diagram of “talking heads” on how adults learn] and he said to me at the break, “That doesn’t really apply to how we would look at learning. Because for us the ears are most important because we do a lot of learning in a circle, so he started to talk about that.” So suddenly I started to think about people with all kinds of disabilities. So let’s say, you’re blind. Or let’s say you’re deaf. … We had a long go at this. I really thanked the brother for that contribution because it’s only with that that you discover these blind spots or ways of looking at something that just require somebody to shoot a hole in that so that you can look at it in another way. (Carol)

In the face sheet, used to obtain demographics and basic data about the participants, all study participants spoke about personal experience in using the label feminist and how it was contextual, adding that it did not bode well in many locations and with many groups. Participants frequently mentioned, however, that feminist influence and the use of feminist principles guided their facilitation practice. There was however a difference in the way facilitators named their practice – some preferring more general labels while a few thought naming the politics of the process was more important. Perhaps this in some way suggests
that facilitation is not only a sustained project, but a sustained feminist approach to transformative learning.

It’s [feminism] such an integral part of who I am and the work I do that I almost don’t think about it. I mean in light of the work I did in the past, and now I don’t even use the words feminist. We go into that work with the word gender. I think very much it’s about using feminist principles. (Alicia)

From a facilitator point of view my work is not to work on substance. It’s to try and help design processes through which people can work on something. I keep that part of myself there but not particularly disguised. These last few years have made me realize that the strongest, most important thing for me is a feminist perspective on this work….. It’s the existence or absence of a feminist approach and not just sustainable development. It’s who is willing to stand up beside the hard stuff and say, “As a matter of fact, I belong here too.” And they are unexpected people too. They’re people who’ve had experiences that you don’t even want to think about. They end up being allies on equality issues or race issues. (Carmin)

Summary

This chapter discusses the five key themes identified in the data analysis. The first includes the concepts of participatory methodologies and critical reflection and how these concepts are framed by the theory of learning and development from which they emerge. The second includes understandings of critical reflection and how it is experienced. The third key theme was how power is played out in facilitation practices and in representations of identity and difference. In the fourth theme, the participants discussed paradoxes related to their work as activists in development, along with the possibilities they envision within that work. The possibilities that actually led to transformation, the fifth theme, were fewer in number, yet significant. Finally, viewing facilitation as a sustained project demonstrated the long-term commitments and dreams that activists hold in relation to transformation. Throughout the process many participants explained how they are guided by feminist values or goals. In the next chapter, I discuss how the findings from this study support, refute, and build upon the
literature as it pertains to the queries addressed in this study. That discussion will look more closely at how the findings here correlate with, add to, or present additional gaps in the literature.
In this chapter, I present a discussion of the findings, particularly in regards to how they relate to the literature. Opening up a space for discussion on critical reflection as a facilitation practice, and for identifying possibilities and paradoxes in activist work in development is in many respects an effort to bring these topics out of the shadows and into the light of theoretical and practical discourse on transformative learning and participatory development. Moreover, discussion on critical reflection, transformation and power as they are experienced and understood in the context of transnational and pedagogical practices may enhance practices towards a transnational feminist facilitation approach.

This chapter is loosely structured to correspond to the themes identified in Chapter Five. I begin by addressing some of the paradoxes and issues of power experienced by activists working in development. Then I review the connections and conceptions of adult education and participatory methodologies which surfaced during the study. Following this I move into a discussion of critical reflection. This includes addressing challenges in applying critical reflection and through providing insight into how some participants applied critical reflection. The final section deals with how participants addressed or understood transformation. When I refer to participants in this discussion, I imply that my voice as a study participant is included. Occasionally, I insert personal comments and which I will identify as such.
Contradictory Politics and Paradox

The paradoxes experienced by activist-facilitators involved in development were many. In fact, aspects of resistance, agency, and compliance operated in almost all areas where power was exercised – from facilitation to feminism. Along with participants in the study, and many others, I realized that despite my efforts as an activist-facilitator, I am responsible for reifying and contributing to existing systems of knowledge, power, and control (Chambers 2005; Code, 1991; Kerr, 2004; Kruks, 2001; Lykes & Conquillon, 2007; Skeggs, 1997). I am reminded of the thoughts of Grewal and Kaplan (1994) regarding the tensions that surround the position of the facilitator and how understanding the tension can help to transform the ensuing contradictory politics. Although not explicitly named as such, several participants in the study noted situations where they felt pain, angst, or tension because of situations that caused them to examine contradictory politics. According to Freire and Shor (1987), understanding contradictory positions is part of consciousness-raising and praxis. Kruks (2001) writes that this form of intentional consciousness can actually expand activist positions of resistance. In any case, the realization and naming of a position of paradox appeared to be part of the process of using experience to guide actions for change. The lack of opportunities to network (a sentiment expressed in the focus groups) or to deliberately name experiences could then conversely limit opportunities for critical reflection.

As Goldstein (2007) and hooks (1994) explain, we need to interrogate our complicity in producing dominant forms of knowledge by looking at our practice, not just theory, and I would argue that this includes looking at how practice is informed by theory and the position
of critical reflection (and praxis) within that. Undoubtedly, part of our complicity involves the way that we continue to iterate universalisms about communities, learners and relationships, such as the static and binary concepts of ‘self’ and ‘other’ (Ellsworth, 1992; White, 2003). While study participants participated in this dichotomous positioning, they were also critical of it. In some ways it also demonstrates how activists, while rejecting labels such as expert in theory, reinforce binary relationships between “the provider/expert” and the “deserving recipient” (Mindry, 2001) by accepting the label of expert or specialist from development institutions in practice. These universal claims are counterproductive to sustainability (Chambers 2005); reinforce hegemony in training (Spivak with Sharpe, 2003; Naples, 2003; Matlanyane Sexwale, 1996); privilege homogenous identities (Eschle, 2005); and reify the “politics of virtue” in development (Mindry, 2001). Despite the examples of facilitator interventions that illustrate how power may be operating in a way that we find oppressive, we contribute because “we inevitably participate in these power relations, making conscious decisions about what to do and how to do it” (McLaren, 2004, p. 220).

However, the roles of activist-facilitators in development are not static. Weiler (1991), Lather (1993), and Gore (1992) along with other feminist pedagogues, reject meta-narratives and insist on recognizing the multiple roles that activist-facilitators can occupy. In the study, there were various ways in which participants positioned themselves as facilitators – sometimes attempting to de-center the process, while other times they talked about taking control in order to manipulate the circumstances. This demonstrates complex ways in which activists develop counter-narratives, enact paradoxical positions, and on another level, sometimes support and sometimes challenge meta-narratives in development. Naming paradoxes, which included privilege and oppression (Curry-Stevens, 2005), offered
opportunities for clarity around how activist-facilitators occupy multiple sites or intersectional positions. These positions are complicated by a multitude of factors and representations including country, site, age, class, education, ethnicity, nationality, status, and so on, and frequently these factors intersect.

Furthermore, by acknowledging the ways in which activists contribute to sexual, racial and class oppression, the reflexivity and naming of such experiences, opens opportunities to inform change (hooks, 1994). This recognition, while often painful because it generates feelings of betrayal and paradox, was liberating for participants who opened up to discuss their lived contradictions and what they learned from them. Carol’s encounter with a group of “young, women of colour” (p. 138), for example, was admittedly painful for her but also an important learning experience. Participants also spoke about how experiences, frequently associated with tension and pain, moved their analysis of oppression beyond class to a more intersectional analysis, in which gender was integrated and understood as one of many inter-related forms of identity. My own experience facilitating in Panama had resulted in a similar angst when I was personally confronted by one of the indigenous participants because I had spoken about tricksters and according to her, this was not culturally appropriate. Her verbal attack toward me came after I had just been honoured by a medicine woman for a workshop I had conducted the same morning. In spite of my position of power in that setting, I was left with feelings of pain, tension, and simultaneously pride.

Looking for alternatives and making choices about how to use feminist agency to transform the world was cited as a value of some participants but it was frequently muted by personal and institutional pressures to finish one contract and move onto the next. Participants were also affected by competing pressures between contracts and responsibilities
at the household level (including with aging parents and children), pressures to make an income, and institutional pressures for technical approaches often described as a “quick fix.” In this way the participants in this study both developed counter-narratives to Western style development and perpetuated its biases by enacting the role of Western development agents. However, their acknowledgement of the need to be guided by feminist principles suggests a possible rupture in this homogenous style of development and a move toward more inclusive, reflexive practices. Despite their involvement in the “quick fix” approaches, participants were definitely critical of that approach and longed for involvement in more participatory, transformative structures. This may have been why experiences in Nicaragua, where broad transformations were taking place, were so memorably and fondly reflected upon by many participants. The social change process underway during the Nicaraguan revolution also raises questions about the context for transformative learning which as Hickey and Mohan (2004) suggest, is more likely to occur in situations where widely accepted social changes are already taking place. This idea was, however, challenged through Emma’s frustration with the Nicaraguan Revolution because she felt indigenous people were not included (see page 149). This view was different from that of the other participants, thereby providing an example of how knowledge is situated and partial. In this case, transformation, like other concepts or knowledge in the study, was not experienced homogenously by all participants (Diawara, 2000; Kassant and Tettley, 2003).

**Feminism and Re-politicizing Gender Training: Paradoxes and Possibilities**

Along with feminists such as Grewal and Kaplan (1994), Kanji (2004), Kerr (2004), and Marchand and Papart (1995), the participants tended to support the need to re-politicize
gender and development work. Most participants did not explicitly connect the practice of working on gender equality with feminism, but they acknowledged the role of feminism as part of their own activism. Again, institutional pressures sometimes meant that participants were too enmeshed in satisfying the funders (and keeping their contracts and sometimes livelihoods) to address the way in which compliance with goals of modernization and Western hegemonic practices were taking place. Isolation, lack of supports, and having to constantly justify the role of gender in projects led to a sentiment of being, as one participant put it, “barnacles on the edge of the freighter.” The idea immediately reminded me of being involved in a water project in Ethiopia with more than a dozen engineers—at times exclusively men—and attending an interview for the local gender expert. When it came time to make the final decision, I, the foreigner and the only woman, was asked to leave the room so that the men could decide who would get the job!

Brookfield (2000) discusses a critically reflective facilitation practice as one in which educators are able to name their politics, values, and assumptions. Feminism also assumes a personal and political involvement in the work. Consequently, I assumed that through reflexivity, activists could examine paradoxes and tensions in their practice; not unexpectedly, the degree to which participants were willing to examine their own contradictions varied. Although, for the most part, participants were unlikely to discuss their complicity in maintaining power inequities, they openly discussed how they used power to disrupt inequitable situations, something Heron (1999) also found in her study. The nuanced discussions on how power was used as a form of resistance (power-with) (Starhawk, 2002) offer insights into disrupting traditional patterns of development and dominant discourse on development.
I realize that our subjective realities and social positions as researchers, activists, facilitators, and study participants are not stagnant hence the importance of reflecting and naming how these subject positions are situated and changing. Grewal and Kaplan (1994) and Lykes and Coquillon (2007) write that transforming contradictory politics will require a re-thinking of the way in which power is exercised and a re-visioning of epistemological possibilities. This includes a deepening of the analysis around how power relations are lived asymmetrically, including an understanding of our position as Westerners or Minority World representatives or what Grewal and Kaplan (1994) refer to as the “politics of location.” The discussion about how activists understand power and disrupt local hierarchies, including the patterns by local facilitators to model Western truths (Mohanty, 2003), is demonstrative of some of the asymmetrical power relations this study investigates.

**Deconstructing Power in Development**

Many of the participants interviewed referred to power as the power of the development institutions or of patriarchy and men. The participants clearly positioned themselves outside of the institutions they were working for and whose mandate they were serving; some positioned themselves as outside of the role of women with privilege. The findings, however, demonstrate that the participants both continued to reify the dichotomies posed by patriarchy and development ideologies and to resist them. Among the participants who did look at their position critically, there were comparisons to local hierarchies, for example, discussing how they could use their Minority World position to assist people at the grassroots level in the Majority World in responding to local hierarchies. Playing out contradictory politics in this way ensured that power and privilege were not played out as
binary positions. In fact, by using the power of the development *expert* to challenge local hierarchies there were examples from participants where the facilitation practice of taking power in a development context actually redistributed the power in the local hierarchy from government to a grassroots level. This shifting of boundaries is central to discussions of transnational feminisms (Mackie, 2001; Tohidi, 2005). Kayla’s example from Nepal is also significant in terms of the way power was shifted and redistributed in paradoxical ways process (see page 130).

Many of the participants had criticized the use of the *expert* label but were using it in gender and development practice. They also admitted that they wanted to know more theory but did not have time or opportunities to learn more. In the context of feminism, this raises important questions about how one is named an expert without a theoretical background in the area and whether training for gender equality is a feminist practice. Therefore, while Guijt and Shah (1998), Kanji (2004) and White (2003) offer important commentary about strengthening the links between gender and participatory development, additional attention to feminism and participatory development is required.

Criticisms of patriarchy and how it functions to exacerbate hierarchies within institutions usually at the expense of the marginalized groups were also present. Participants viewed their position as outside of these hierarchies, although they acknowledged that power is not exercised dichotomously as “power-over” or “power-with.” Likewise, Lykes and Coquillon (2007) suggest that processes are not linear and that sometimes tensions are part of the process of conscientization. There were multiple perspectives evident in the naming of power in the politics of location: some participants were clear about embodying privilege in development paradigms; others suggested that power was embodied in multiple ways (for
example, local facilitators who had been trained in Western institutions); and others were critical of using power and privilege as a way of invigorating change – they suggested instead, an analysis of participation or examination issues of access and control. On at least one occasion, a participant spoke about being in a position of power and using that location responsibly in her decision-making; that is, using power to create power-with. What many of these discourses have in common is that they challenge the dominant development discourse on power.

In the few instances where participants talked about creating conditions for solidarity to occur they were forthcoming about how their interactions as Minority World women mitigated or reinforced potential relationships of reciprocity. In other words, they were able to name their contradictory practices and engage in power-with (and within) as categorized by Starhawk (2002). The participants demonstrated that they occupy diverse and shifting positions both by using power, thereby maintaining that structure of power, and simultaneously, deconstructing it. In at least one case, it was very much about de-centering the facilitator role which is considered central to participatory workshops (Groot, 2002). Grewal and Kaplan (1994) suggest that examining the tensions and paradoxes in development practice can take place by re-visioning some of the “scattered hegemonies.” The ideas on power presented by the participants in this study are well placed as part of that discourse.

According to Foucault (1980), the rise of professionals—the “experts”—serves to normalize power, ensuring that the hegemony of the West is yet again legitimized. Because of the relationship between knowledge and power, how power is exercised influences how knowledge is produced. Thus, if power is exerted to control, whether consciously or
unconsciously, then presumably it can limit participation, and delegitimize popular knowledge. Participants in the study pointed out, however, that the power of the facilitator can be used to level the playing field with local facilitators who, in some cases, devalued local knowledge as a result of their training in Western institutions. They acknowledged that hierarchies shift and that sometimes an activist-facilitator can alleviate tensions around local hierarchies by modeling, building alliances, and paying attention to those most affected by unequal structures. In this way, the participants played a role in validating local knowledge and difference, thereby disrupting dominant patterns of power.

By challenging the “expert” role in development, transnational feminism poses a threat to people involved in the field of gender and development. It questions the position of power they gain as authors of training materials, as those who get paid, as trainers, and as those whose knowledges (and powers) are legitimated. Deconstructing knowledge or meaning, however, invites agency. Therefore, advocating for an activist, reflexive position in the practice of gender and development is central to working towards self-actualization and community engagement. The naming of paradoxes thus demonstrates resistance to dominant patterns of knowledge and truth-making, including the binary constructions which this knowledge eschews. To a large extent, therefore the participants were concurring with Harcourt’s (2005) idea that “To the extent that women’s movements were part of creating the dominant power knowledge, they were also creating within it the nodes of resistance … power rests not only in the dominant hegemonic structures but also in the engagement and resistance to them” (p. 45). Thus, the overlapping borders of resistance, compliance, power and agency were, at least for some participants, drawn out and facilitative toward transformation.
Ambiguous Concepts and Interfaces

Within the study, the politics, theories, and ideologies surrounding development and pedagogical practices were not always clear. For example, the different ways participants discussed the concepts of “participatory” and “critical reflection” was noticeable. The literature suggests a couple of reasons for this phenomenon. According to Brookfield (1989), Woerkom (2008), and Lather (1998), there are ideological and political reasons that critical reflection is conceptualized vaguely and diversely. Of note is the way critical reflection is differentiated from reflection in general through its link to praxis and its demand that facilitators explore how they use power and make assumptions (Brookfield, 2000; Fook, 1999; Gray, 2007). Few participants, however, named this distinction or some version of it; those that did tended to have a theoretical background in critical pedagogies, popular education or participatory development. Clearly, the theoretical knowledge behind critical pedagogies, including the concept of conscientização and praxis, as discussed and advocated by Freire (1970), Fals-Borda and Rhaman (1991), Brown (1985), Chambers (2005), Hall (2005), Lykes and Coquillon (2007), Smith, Willms and Johnson (1997), and others who embrace participatory methodologies, was neither widespread nor always embedded in practice. Participants acknowledged the importance of having an understanding of theory, and lamented in not having the time to study it.

While I assumed that the meanings of participatory as referring to people-centered development, democratic participation, and change (Lykes & Coquillon, 2007; Chambers, 2005) would be commonly understand, the term, as Chambers (2005), and Hickey and Mohan (2004) have noted, has been co-opted and altered by mainstream institutions. Thus, in
practice, it has multiple meanings, many of which have become depoliticized. As a result, participatory methodologies are less likely to be understood as part of transformative paradigms, and are more likely to be enacted through a technical fix—what some participants called a “one-off training.” The term *partipulation*, an apparent merging of participation, manipulation and facilitation, resonated with several participants. In this way, they acknowledged how, as facilitators, there were times when power was used to manipulate or control a learning situation and conversely, to alter power dynamics.

Participants recognized that the links between participatory development and gender training or feminism are weak. Feminists have argued that the struggle for women’s rights becomes lost in the debates over gender mainstreaming (Baden & Goetz, 1998; Kerr, 2004). Certainly the distance between feminism and gender equality work was felt by some of the study participants. If the interface between feminism and gender equality is weak, then the interface between critical reflection and praxis, participation, and gender then becomes even more convoluted. This may explain why, according to Guijt and Shah (1998), in spite of shared objectives of transformation, a gap exists between gender equality work and participatory development. Guijt and Shah further conclude that there is a lack of training in participatory methodologies used by gender trainers in the field. While this was true for some of the participants in my study, the study further suggests that challenging or dismantling structural, institutional barriers must be overcome in order to close this gap.

A few participants expressed the perception that popular education is explicitly political whereas adult education is not always, acknowledging that politics are an important tenet of participatory workshops. That is, by way of design, facilitation, content and/or process, popular education or participatory development is more likely to promote
transformation and challenge dominant ideas and values. I assumed that activists who engaged in facilitating gender training using participatory methodologies would have significant background in: 1) adult education; 2) educational theories behind participatory methodologies; and/or 3) transformative learning practices. After all, I concur with Groot (2002) that frequently the responsibility of garnering participation is placed on facilitators. Yet, this was not always the case. There was a range of experiences and understandings of participatory methodologies and transformative learning. Some participants discussed how they could use tools or techniques that were considered participatory in ways that were clearly manipulative. Hence, they recognized that within practices deemed participatory, facilitators can still operate in paradoxical ways. Other participants openly admitted a lack of pedagogical knowledge or training in participatory methodologies.

Alicia’s comments about clearly linking methods and politics resonated for me when I was analyzing my data. I was concerned that the lack of clarity about participation and participatory methods in some cases might lead to, in Groot’s (2002) words “many paradoxes in development practice and the misleading of stakeholders” (p. 35). I was also aware from my own educational practice that the term participatory had been co-opted and de-politicized by mainstream development organizations (Chambers, 2005) and therefore in practice participants may actually reify that discourse, albeit unintentionally. One of the most obvious ways this was illustrated by participants was in discussions about the difficulty experienced in giving up on pre-planned agendas (de-centering the facilitation process) if the process demanded more time and the participants were engaged. In my own facilitation practice I have had to struggle with letting go of pre-planned agendas and trusting in participatory processes. Part of that struggle, like that mentioned by one of the participants may have come
from my formal education training as a teacher—referring to education as an institution and the teacher as the one in power and control.

**Critical Reflection**

During the process of conducting the interviews and then transcribing them, I realized that the participants both understood and practiced the concept of critical reflection in very diverse ways—in fact, for some, the concept of critical reflection seemed very personal and not always part of a pedagogical practice; having more to do with introspection. In this way their conceptualization was closer to reflection than critical reflection as distinguished by Fook (1999) and Gray (2007). According to Freire (1970), Lykes and Coquillon (2007), Woerkom (2008), Chui (2006), Brookfield (2000), Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner (2007) and many other critical and feminist pedagogues, critical reflection is key to praxis, a process that can lead to transformation. In this study, however, only about half of the participants linked critical reflection in some way to transformation.

One of the key research questions in this study was how activists understand and experience critical reflection. During the interviews, I realized that very few of the study participants were comfortable answering questions about critical reflection. For example, Alicia started by saying, “I’m not critical of myself, okay [nervous laughter]. Oh no, not me!” Others started to hesitate, smiled awkwardly or engaged in long pauses. For these reasons, I invited participants to submit written responses to the questions on critical reflection. Their initial reluctance to respond may have resulted from their discomfort with the term, or from the fact that they were actually not engaging in critical reflection, whether for personal and/or institutional reasons. For example, according to the participants, critical reflection

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33The distinctions between critical reflection and reflection are made in Chapter One.
reflection is often not required; in some reports it is even disallowed, and funders are usually not responsive to practices of critical reflection. Wilson and Hayes (2000) echo this absence due to institutional restrictions and hegemonic practice. My experience with activist-facilitators resonated with their finding and Carol’s comment that “[there appears to be] a real contradiction in terms of the amount of critical reflection and analysis that we do in our practice – the design and actual facilitation – and what we preach to other people.” I was also surprised at how difficult it was to articulate examples from experience when I was asked about critical reflection in my interview.

After the interviews, ten of the fourteen participants provided written follow-up to questions about critical reflection. As in the initial interview data, participant responses varied significantly. The understanding of critical reflection as part of a pedagogical practice tended to be clearer, although not uniformly, among those with a background in popular education. For many of the participants the response was about reflection as an assessment rather than a consideration of social and power dynamics in the facilitation process. For the five participants versed in popular education, speaking about participatory methodologies was almost synonymous with their pedagogical work in popular education. This is not surprising given that these practices were both historically influenced by similar theories (Walters & Manicom, 1996). Therefore, participants grounded in popular education usually knew both the theory and practice underlying critical feminist pedagogies, although only one participant mentioned praxis. Participants more frequently described critical reflection using a techno-rational response, that is, asking “what went well” and “what had to change.” This finding correlates with Wilson and Hayes (2000), who admit that although they had hoped to explore critical reflection on an emotive level and to associate it with transformative learning,
they instead found that the supports, conditions, and to some extent conceptual clarity around critical reflection were not realized. This is not surprising on several levels – institutional structures and pressures minimize opportunities for critical reflection or analysis and sometimes actually discourage it; participants were not all well versed on the theoretical knowledge behind transformative learning and praxis; and finally, participants frequently noted an absence of critical reflection because of lack of dialogue or co-facilitation opportunities (possibly suggesting that the presence of the other was necessary for critical reflection to occur. Hegemony and dominant knowledge is thus not only maintained by the power of institutions (Foucault, 1980), but also by the individual actions of activist-facilitators and their relationships with others. Participants working in academia, for unions, in popular organizations, or on feminist projects were more likely to apply critical reflection as part of their facilitation work than were participants whose work was primarily with mainstream, bi-lateral, or multi-lateral organizations or institutions. The study suggests the need for collaboration among and between individuals representing various organizations as well as the need for training programs that increase the theoretical and practical levels of pedagogical knowledge aimed at transformation.

**Applying Critical Reflection**

Institutional demands were cited as a major barrier to applying critical reflection. As noted by Chui (2006) and supported by the study participants, the demands to produce outcomes at the expense of participatory processes presented an often-identified obstacle to applying critical reflection. Similarly, the technical reporting did not support and sometimes actually discouraged aspects of critical reflection. Wilson and Hayes (2000) similarly note
that institutional cultures do not support critical reflection because it “threatens to challenge the status quo in such institutions” (p. 669) and to open up underlying values and assumptions. Wilson and Hayes (2000) also note that critical reflection is all too often technical and instrumental rather than creative, open, and encompassing. Chui (2006) notes similar experiences in documenting participatory research results, this time however, referring to how critical reflection gets lost in the reporting on outcomes versus process; that is, it becomes a technical fix instead of a transformative process. Kerr (2004) and Hicky and Mohan (2004) make the same criticism. These authors also point out that while not all adult education is about transformative learning, similarly, not all development is about “transforming existing patterns of power relations” (Hickey & Mohan, 2004, p. 13). While it was possible that some participants had personal goals of achieving transformation, their suggestion that institutions are the main obstacle to critical reflection is still problematic. Within a feminist discourse, there is a suggestion that the personal is intimately tied to the political. There were few examples where participants tied their own personal politics to critical reflection except when theorizing about it. Brookfield (2008) suggests that educators need to deliberately uncover and challenge not only their assumptions, but the purposes and perpetuation of hegemony therein (p. 96). In this way a deepening of the analysis around individual facilitation and complicity in hegemonic practice still leaves questions unanswered.

In addition to the lack of institutional supports, epistemological and ontological awareness was clouded by multiple and often depoliticized notions of participation which are endemic the field of international development (Guijt & Shah, 1998; Kerr, 2004). A couple of the participants, for example, advocated for uniformly applying best practices from one
context to another context. The lack of assessment, training, or accountability required for actual implementation of participatory training and facilitation in the field represents a further conundrum for funders who are truly committed to a participatory approach.

Another obstacle to practicing critical reflection is an understanding of the theories behind transformative learning and the ways they intersect with participatory development, including women’s rights and gender equality. Participants who understood this theoretical knowledge noted that such knowledge helped them understand constraints and enabled them to question the assumptions and values that informed their facilitation practice. In other words, understanding the theory or critical reflection made the participants more likely to embrace a reflexive practice, to conceptualize facilitation as dynamic and subject to shifts or changes, and to continuously examine relationships between facilitators and learners—a process defined by Freire (1970) as co-intentionality of practice. Ironically, much of the literature on critical pedagogy begs for examples of practices of critical pedagogy and for a focus on the educator and not just the learner (Goldstein, 2007, Gore, 1993, Gruenwald, 2003). By offering an example of how facilitators understand critical reflection and how critical reflection informs a pedagogical practice this study fills a gap in the literature. Meanwhile however, it points out that there is a need for more theoretical knowledge in the application of critical reflection or praxis by facilitators working in non-formal education. Correspondingly, a synergy or sharing among formal and non-formal critical feminist pedagogues may be a way to enlighten these pedagogical processes.

The most common way that participants discussed applying critical reflection was through co-facilitation mechanisms built into their practice. Frequently it was informal – just
time together after facilitating to discuss the issues that arose but on at least one occasion it
was more formal, “like a retreat.” A few also wrote critically reflective perspectives either in
journals or reports. Several authors have noted the gap in the literature regarding ways that
critical reflection can be applied in practice (Cunliffe 2004; Chui, 2006; Gray 2007). This is
especially true in regards to the dearth of literature on developing a critically reflective

Tensions, Intersections and Pedagogic Meltdowns

For some of the participants in the study, an understanding of intersectionality and the
adoption of a reflexive position had resulted in a pedagogical shift toward a practice that was
more nuanced and inclusive of scattered hegemonies (Grewal & Kaplan, 1994). Feminism
and recognition of local knowledge were central to this shift. This also supports the positions
of many feminist critical pedagogues (Gore, 2003; hooks, 1994; Naples, 2002; Lather, 1993;
Weiler, 1991) who say that a feminist approach may result in more opportunities for
transformative learning. Such an approach might challenge the way that critical pedagogies
are currently practiced, in that they provide opportunities to address some of the paradoxes,
can be inclusive of inter-sectional identities, suggest attention to ambiguity, and can
encourage reflexivity. This study is therefore significant in adding to the literature about
how transformational pedagogies can be linked with transnational feminist practices.

One of my remaining concerns is that a lack of critical reflection suggests less
opportunity for transformational praxis or learning. This idea is supported by a range of
critical pedagogues and feminist educators including Curry-Stevens (2007), Goldstein
and Hayes (2000). The findings here suggest that examples of transformation may have been more forthcoming if in fact praxis was occurring.

**Transformative Learning**

The study participants spoke about experiences of transformation in their practice primarily as ones which occur at a micro-level, although relationships were also discussed and recognized to be important components of broader changes. In discussing the way transformation was personal they used words such as “humble” and “even imagined” to describe it. Participants spoke about triggers or points that assisted in realizing transformation or the potential for it. These included independently and co-jointly the following: 1) delegitimizing hierarchy and through a reflective process building local, community-based solutions; 2) validating local knowledge and experiences with workshop participants; 3) letting go of facilitator control, regardless of whether it is unplanned or structured; 4) learning in conjunction with participants—a co-intentionality of practice as suggested by Freire (1970); 5) developing horizontal relationships and forms of analysis; and 6) taking a feminist approach. Participants also supported collaborative efforts, reciprocal learning, and solidarity education. Such ideas are important for the development of a transnational feminist pedagogy and alternative discourses on development that are linked to transformative learning.

As a form of transformation, solidarity was considered to be reciprocal and emerging from multiple sources simultaneously; however, with one exception, it was only named by participants with a training background in popular education. In this way, sites where political education was linked to political movements for social transformation seemed to be
the most likely places for social transformation to take place (Hickey & Mohan, 2004). This also suggests that the ideological and theoretical base on which the participant was grounding their pedagogical practice, also influences the kind of narrative produced and the way transformation is conceptualized. This has a direct implication for transnational feminist pedagogies.

Transformation as it was named in the study was largely personal or individual – sometimes merging individual acts within contexts of social change. This suggests that despite the meta-narratives around transformation being personal (Cranton, 1996; Mezirow, 1991) or social (Freire, 1970), it is frequently experienced asymmetrically or as Miles (2002) suggests in integrative ways. If transnational feminist pedagogies are about transformative learning then an integrative approach bordering and intersecting personal and social boundaries, or as Alexander (2005) points out, pedagogies of crossing is closer to the reality experienced by participants in the study.

**Summary**

The findings suggest that the interface between participatory development, transformative learning, and feminism is one where activists are likely to situate themselves, but where practices of participatory facilitation are diverse, fraught with tensions that are both political and institutional and complicated by intersectional interests and issues of power. When paradoxes were explored, the complex ways that power operates—as resistance, compliance, and a form of agency for activists—emerged as a key finding. Commonplace among all study participants was the recognition that critical reflection as a pedagogical practice would enhance facilitation practice and increase effectiveness of
facilitation and development, however there were definite structural and institutional barriers that prevent it from being supported as a development practice. The participants were, however, less clear on how critical reflection might be enhanced and what it means as part of praxis. In other words, the conceptualization of critical reflection as distinct from other forms of reflection requires additional attention.

When critical reflection was understood, participants were able to give examples of facilitation practices that challenged dominant hierarchies and forms of knowledge; sometimes this was done by intentionally engaging in positions of paradox. Frequently, however, participants found themselves embroiled in “quick fix” approaches to development and techno-rational approaches to critical reflection.

Aspects of activist-facilitator practice that were considered important in terms of enabling possibilities and transformation included taking a feminist approach, developing relationships with other facilitators and activists, working in teams and with allies, nurturing connections with others, dismantling hierarchies, and encouraging team-building and collaborative models of learning. In addition, the opportunity afforded to participants through the research, both interviews and focus groups, was, for many, quite significant and illustrated their desire to connect and reflect on their practice. Meanwhile, there was a recognition that within the contradictory politics and positions activist-facilitators occupied in development, ambiguities and tensions need to be treated as both possibilities and as paradoxes; that is, activist-facilitators practices suggest that there are multiple ways to re- vision and understand how we construct reality, and that frequently activists are embroiled in actions where power and knowledge are operating in intersecting ways and from diverse perspectives.
The next chapter provides recommendations for how some of the ideas from the discussions can be further studied or explored and it concludes the study.
CONCLUSION: BARNACLES AND BRIGHT LIGHTS

The final chapter in this study begins by reviewing the research questions. I respond to the study questions by summarizing important findings that emerged in the research process. Then I move to a discussion of the research and research process, including gaps and limitations. This section provides recommendations for further research including ideas on transforming facilitation practices; taking a more interdisciplinary, transnational feminist approach; and locating spaces for shifting practices toward more transformative learning models. The chapter concludes with personal comments on how I benefited from the research.

The Study in Retrospect

The key questions for this study were framed around the practices of activist-facilitators working on women’s rights in development, notably, the processes by which that work links with transformative pedagogies. The research questions are:

1) In what ways do women’s rights and gender equality activists understand and apply critical reflection in their facilitation work?
2) How do activists identify and position possibilities and paradoxes in development work?
3) How do activists position themselves in development work? and
4) How do activists experience transformation?
I found that study participants had nuanced and diverse conceptions of critical reflection. Some participants saw critical reflection as intuitive, others as a technical-rational process, and still others as a part of pedagogical praxis; however, the borders between these categories were never fixed. These differences between reflection and critical reflection are significant because they indicate that distinctions were not always clear, and this had implications for how critical reflection is understood and experienced as part of a pedagogical praxis and as part of a facilitation practice. The structural and institutional barriers to applying critical reflection as part of praxis are also important in this regard.

Finally and linked to the technical-rational responses, while participants noted institutional obstacles to applying critical reflection or the theoretical links between critical reflection and transformative learning, they seldom spoke about how it related to their personal politics in practice.

Discussions of paradoxes in development as well as how activists position themselves, revealed that activists resist, reify, and also use power in multi-faceted ways. Thus, as part of a transnational feminist pedagogy, the ways activists used their own power to disrupt power in local and situated ways was noteworthy. Finally, activists continue to demonstrate possibilities for transformation in their work, but again, the context of larger movements of social change or social environments appear to limit or delimit opportunities for transformation. Consequently, many of the examples of transformation were considered small and personal, although relational aspects of activist experiences suggest possibilities for other forms of social transformation. In this way personal and social transformation intersected in the work. Power and transformation were experienced in multi-faceted, intersecting ways, rather than narrow binary constructions and this has implications for
creating nuanced constructions of knowledge or challenging dominant discourse on
development. In the practice of facilitation the way power was understood led to examples
where macro-power constructs were challenged however, there were also many examples of
how participants engaged in what they themselves understood to be *partipulation*. In this
way, questions about connections between activism and facilitating for social change as part
of a larger political project, and activism without a broader analysis of social change remain.
Throughout this chapter’s discussion of the research methods and recommendations that
emerge for further research and changes to practice, I integrate other key aspects of the
findings. I now move to a reflection on the process of conducting the research.

**Reflections on the Research Methods**

Despite acknowledging moments of difference, frustration, and doubt, the knowledge
generated in this study was of value to my activist-facilitation practice and, I hope to the
practice of other activists working in the field. Among other things, having participants
cancel their participation or interview in the study (mainly due to work commitments) *after* I
had booked my airline tickets caused some angst. Most of my struggle in the researcher role
related to the way I straddled multiple roles—including researcher, participant, activist, and
academic. This was perhaps most accentuated in the struggle to interpret the data—clearly a
subjective exercise, and often one where one piece of data could be looked at in multiple
ways. Also, because my voice as a participant was included in the findings, I had to temper
lived experience as an activist-facilitator with the interpretations as the researcher.

Sometimes this was as simple as deciding to eliminate one of my quotes in favour of one by
another participant; still, it clearly demonstrated the way knowledge is partial and situated.
In addition, in spite of efforts to diminish my researcher form of power, I was aware that I was enmeshed in subjectivity and paradox. This was especially played out when tensions between activists and academics were brought up. For example, participants discussed academic privilege as a way some people were inequitably granted time and space for writing about phenomena such as critical reflection, while for activists in the field, the pace of training, projects, consultancy work, or responsibilities at home afforded little more than time to find another contract. As the “academic” researcher in this case, I personalized the comments. I wanted to be the activist—one of them—not intentionally positioned as the other. Again, reflexivity in my positionality assisted me in realizing how I was straddling different positions and how representations of identity are always situated, partial and frequently overlapping. I also resisted the universalized definition of academics that were implied in these instances.

The focus groups were particularly effective in delineating some of the researcher-position of privilege as the participants engaged like a “community of practice” (Wenger, 1998)—feeding off each other’s ideas and, intentionally or not, at times ignoring prompts from me in favour of what was important to them. With respect to the researcher position, this begs the question that if I truly believe in the merits of a participatory process, then I also had to be willing, at times, to relinquish control. In this way the focus groups became a space of activist inquiry, reflection, and mindfulness, in and of themselves. This sat well with my personal epistemology which is that we are always acting and being in multiple and diverse ways—that notions, ideas, and representations or of being/becoming are always multiple, shifting and situated—a perspective reiterated by Haraway (1991), Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002), and Barker (2000).
My interview was a moving process for me personally because I realized how seldom I had had the opportunity to discuss my work in any depth. The interview validated the work I do while providing insights into my perspectives and personal experiences with the study questions. As a feminist researcher, validating the knowledge and experiences of women is important to me. By validating and developing a discourse about activist-facilitation work in development, I believe that in humble ways, potentials for change in individual activist practices and development discourse are created. After listening to my interview on the audio recording, I realized that I would have to mitigate my bias on responses that were different than mine, for example on questions about understanding critical reflection. I presumed I would hear about challenging hegemony, resisting hierarchy, and about experiences of praxis and transformation that were about broad, social change. This was usually not the case, but the multiple ways of interpreting and understanding the stories were nonetheless, every bit as worthwhile. Listening to my own interview had allowed me to let go of my researcher control and to really listen, or as Anderson and Jack (1991) put it, to “learn to listen in stereo, receiving both the dominant and muted channels clearly and tuning into them carefully to understand the relationship between them” (p. 11). I acknowledge that my subjectivity in listening, interpreting and writing was always present, although following my repositioning as both the researcher and a study participant I became more reflexive about how this subjectivity affected the research process. I also heightened my awareness of the ways in which learning occurs from memories and retrospect. Wilson and Hayes (2000) suggest that writing in retrospect may have been one of the reasons why the stories they received from adult educators (about the concept of critical reflection) were so conceptually blurry. Likewise, because all the memories or experiences I report on here were told by study
participants in retrospect, it is possible that this also affected the anecdotes or stories I heard and the ones I missed.

I realized the study has been relevant on many levels because it had: 1) focused on facilitators and not on the learners, thereby informing the practices of activists in development and feminist pedagogical knowledge; 2) created new understandings of the application of critical reflection and deepened knowledge about how it is practiced in non-formal education; 3) clearly demonstrated the need for an interface between participatory development, training, and feminist-inspired gender training – a need that is linked to politicizing and challenging power relations in development practices; and 4) linked transformative learning and transnational feminist pedagogies demonstrating how such links can develop counter-narratives in dominant development discourse.

Limitations of the Research

There are several evident limitations in this study. Not all participants were able to participate in both the interviews and focus groups. Not all participants contributed written submissions of data on critical reflection and, finally, not all participants spoke or participated equally. The gaps in participation are accentuated by memory, understanding that knowledge is always partial, and the way participants interacted in the focus groups—whose voices were heard and whose were diminished in the process.

Other limitations included the position of the study as originating in the Minority World and the fact that the study included only participants from the Minority World (although some originated from other locations). I am also aware that there are limitations in defining the study as transnational without inter-nation involvement; however, I also
acknowledge that nation-state borders are only one of the borders in transnational discourse and that exploring the intersections between communities, representations, and groups is part of using a transnational lens. Further, the voices of men who work in this area are absent.

Holding an epistemological position that recognizes knowledge as partial, I acknowledge that even within the stories that were told, there are gaps and that my interpretations are subjective and subject to contestation. Additionally, a decision to hold only one focus group in each location meant there were fewer opportunities for sharing experiences. While this was done because of the uncertainties around who was able to attend and the costs associated with holding focus groups, I also realize it was and will remain a missed opportunity. Given the positive post-script responses to the focus groups from the participants who had attended them, the focus groups were undoubtedly important for networking and for sharing experience about pedagogical practice.

**Recommendations for Further Research and Action**

The recommendations for further research and enhancing practices that emerge out of this study fall into the categories of 1) transforming activist-facilitation practice; 2) connecting the interface of development, feminism, and transformative learning; and 3) building transnational feminist approaches to transformative learning.

**Transforming Activist-Facilitation Practice**

The recommendations around activist-facilitation practice include aspects of praxis, facilitation, reflexivity, and networking. A central starting point includes developing tools, frameworks and discourses to create conceptual clarity around critical reflection and how to
enhance it in practice and praxis. As one of the participants stated, we need to create demand from all levels and starting with ourselves seems like a good initial point. Given the dearth of literature on how critical reflection is applied in practice (Brookfield, 2008; Chui, 2006; Cunliffe 2004; Gray 2007), it is also critical to improve the way it is reported, even when it is not encouraged. Deepening the practice of praxis, that is the cycles of theory and action or practice (informed by critical reflection), includes increased knowledge-sharing and documentation on how learning is co-intentional and increased understandings of critically reflective feminist facilitation theory and practice. At the conclusion of this study, my concern about applying critical reflection beyond a technical rational response remains. If a transformative praxis is only possible when critical reflection as a pedagogic practice is involved, attention to critical reflection may enhance opportunities to experience transformative learning. Additional attention, research, and commitment into deepening and sustaining a practice of critical reflection (and praxis) are urged. Also, I recommend more inquiry and applied research into facilitation practices, particularly at the level of de-centering the facilitator role and creating a co-intentional practice. Case studies could also be written as examples of how relations of power are played out in the process. Finally, given the dearth of examples about critical reflection in practice, this study both contributes to, and demonstrates the need for, examples of critical reflection in non-formal education. Examples from a wide range of practitioners and researchers located in transnational sites would both serve to inform the process or de-centered the facilitator role and to building models of co-intentional practice.

Viewing facilitation as a sustained project asks activist-facilitators to engage in facilitation critically and dynamically, as well as with passion and commitment. The
understandings that transformation often involves pain and vulnerability, should strengthen resolve to resist dominant patterns of putting the facilitator at the centre of the workshop, and instead include a commitment to de-centre the facilitator role—that is, to have a critically reflective facilitator role that engages in authentic participation and processes that surface what Foucault (1972) refers to as *subjugated* knowledges (p. 82). The study suggested several ways of doing this, ideas too exhaustive to mention here, but which included co-facilitation, open communication, letting go of the agenda, and imagining alternative ways of practicing in the world. If we are serious about working toward transformation and becoming more facilitative and less manipulative then shifts toward a transformative praxis (Lykes & Coquillon) and deepening our pedagogical practice requires committed energy. Openness to exploring personal epistemologies, politics, and reflecting on values and assumptions that inform our work, as well as the political implications of our actions, is one of the lessons I personally take from the research and one which I would recommend to others in the role of activist-facilitators.

More strategies for putting critical reflection at the centre of facilitation practices is required, but so too are intentional shifts – personal and institutional (Groot, 2002). Understanding more clearly the place of critical reflection at the interface of activism, transformational learning, and participatory development may in practice be a first step. Individuals, and the institutions for which they work, need to consider strategies for opening up opportunities for democratic and analytical engagements, for distributing power, and for encouraging alternative knowledges and epistemologies—ideas that can merge and converge from multiple directions. Engaging in a transnational feminist pedagogic practice may be one of the ways this can be enacted. Further documenting and dissemination of knowledge about
the practice of such pedagogic experiences are needed. Case studies and narratives are suggested as methods of documentation.

**Connecting the Interface of Development, Feminism and Transformative Learning**

Further analysis and scrutiny of the interplay between gender training and participatory workshops are required to enhance the practice of participatory (and by implication, critically reflective) facilitation (Guijt & Shah, 1998; Humble, 1998). This interdisciplinary approach to learning is a key component of re-politicizing women’s rights and gender-related projects with the goals of putting feminist principles at the heart. Theories of transformative learning, for example, that link feminist pedagogy and participatory methodologies, invite practices in development that disrupt meta-narratives which locate patriarchal, Western values in a dominant position. University departments or institutes, non-governmental organizations, unions, government bodies and other organizations committed to changing social and gendered inequities should consider encouraging multiple forms of discussions that link critical reflection, transformation, and power as components for enhancing pedagogical practices in development.

The study points out the need to enrich and document critically reflective facilitation experiences within feminist-centered participatory development because these approaches politicize the work in the field; suggest that activist-facilitators name their epistemological positions and assumptions; and collaborate and link our learning to that of other social inclusion movements. Using a transnational feminist lens can help us to approach the

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34Discussions are possible on formal and informal levels including, but not limited to, courses, institutes, conferences, workshops, study circles, seminars, and so on. Such discussions linking the interface of feminism, development and transformative learning should also be encouraged.
multiple and partial ways that we learn about, identify, and respond to issues of facilitation and development. Finally, the intersectional and interdisciplinary understandings within transnational feminist positions may provide an important link toward praxis within and between the interface of feminism, transformational learning and participatory development. This interface could additionally be expanded through teaching and research avenues more traditionally associated with formal education. In this case, university departments, institutions, or nongovernmental organizations that support interdisciplinary approaches to development, learning, and gender would be the most likely sites to engage in this kind of study or practice.

**Transnational Feminist Approaches to Transformative Learning**

Gaps within the literature on transnational feminist development and transnational feminist pedagogy invite additional research. There is an absence of literature linking transnational feminism and transformative learning, but I am hopeful that some of the guiding principles that emerge from this study might inform such an interface. Strategies might include: 1) attending to critical reflection and praxis; 2) encouraging practices of co-facilitation and co-learning; 3) providing opportunities for naming paradoxes and possibilities; 4) merging feminist principles with critically reflective facilitation practices; 5) developing processes that address intersectional thoughts and practices; and 6) encouraging epistemological and ontological difference. Perhaps these ideas will reinforce and support what Eschle (2005) refers to as “intersectional discourse” or epistemological positions that recognize multiple and shifting “axes of oppression” (p. 1757), and as per the influence of Curry-Stevens (2007), I would add privilege to this list.
Some of the nuanced ideas and experiences about power, paradox, and transformation that emerged from the study assist in developing an intersectional and multi-layered discourse that is central to transnational feminism and to challenging the dominant discourse in development. By using inquiries such as this one, additional discourse about activist challenges to dominant knowledge about development can be debated and explored (Eschle, 2005; Mindry, 2001). Realizing the ways that participants shared knowledge and validated their work through the opportunity to network during the focus groups (albeit not an intended outcome) further demonstrates the need for such corroborations in the future. Funding agencies that support participatory development and gender equality should support and advocate for increased opportunities to have networking and development processes that encourage this. Communities of practice, such as the UN-INSTRAW Working Group on Gender Training mentioned in Chapter Three, albeit still not evaluated in terms of impact, may provide important directions for enhanced networking between and among activists.

Reflexivity about positions of power in development work was controversial for several participants. Further questions regarding how activists position themselves still remain from the study. In the process of doing the research, the study participants had self identified as activists, however not all were taking up issues of power in their practice. In discussions around critical reflection for example, the location of understanding was frequently within a techno-rational framework, that is, a framework where the focus was on personal or technical improvement. In this way, questions remain about conceptualizations of transformative learning and feminist-centered development in practice. Additional study about how activists practice reflexivity in development is required, but so too are dialogues and programs that engage learners in understanding these complex dynamics within
development. A clearer linking of the macro dynamics of socio-political power that influence the micro dynamics of workshops in development would also be an important component of this dialogue.

When participants used a reflexive position, it clearly demonstrated some of the paradoxes in development and how they are often situated within contradictory politics. In spite of the cases where the power and privileged position of the facilitator was paradoxically used to redistribute power relations among groups, there were also cases where study participants lamented that they had inadvertently eliminated an opportunity for workshop participants’ empowerment by staying in control, instead of letting go, for example, by rigidly sticking to the agenda. Investigations of the ways that power is used to create more equitable situations and the ways in which power reinforces existing patterns provided equally interesting results. Enhanced pedagogical practices might emerge from this dialogue or research that could assist in moving praxis away from stuck places. Further work or study on techniques and intersectional approaches are required to increase awareness, and to analyze and deepen the study of paradoxical positions and pedagogies, including the way power is represented and exercised in facilitation and by the position of Minority World activists working in the context of the transnational. This work might include knowing how our personal values and assumptions shape the work we do (Chambers 2005; Groot 2002), how we operate within different types of power (Starhawk 2002), including how we can disrupt local hierarchies and patterns of domination, and how we can pursue transformative praxis in more systematic, analytical and rigorous ways (Lykes & Coquillon, 2007). The

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35 Lather (1998) frequently alludes to the contradictions in critical pedagogy as ones that limit possibilities for praxis. I am suggesting that research and dialogue which addresses some of the ambiguities within pedagogical practice might get closer to releasing creative potential or unleashing new ideas currently bound by what she termed “a praxis of stuck places” (p. 487).
development of frameworks and guides to support activists in integrating critical reflection into their pedagogical practice might also assist in eliminating some of the doubts, or lack of clarity, or the prevalence of the “nuts and bolts” or toolbox approach (Chui, 2006; Groot, 2002) which often characterizes facilitation work. Collaborative work among and between individuals representing various organizations as well as the need for training programs that increase both the theoretical and practical levels of pedagogical knowledge aimed at transformation are additional areas for applied research and practice.

A course or training program that offers both a theoretical and practical application of transnational feminist pedagogies is additionally recommended. This is possible through non-formal or formal educational institutions and the context would in some respects, determine the content. Because a lack of assessment or accountability is frequently cited as a barrier for funders justly committed to using a participatory approach, new and re-designed programs need additional attention to assessment and evaluation. Additional research and evaluation might also look at the gaps in this and develop strategic evaluative frameworks to assist in the process. Finally, in advocating a transnational approach, I hope that more researchers from the Majority World might have the opportunity and take up the challenge to look at some of the issues addressed here and inquire into how they are addressed by activists within and across different worldviews. This might include addressing some of the same study questions named in this study as well as looking at hegemonic practices applied in the training of facilitators, and the use of materials which originate in the Minority World. Focus groups, such as those used in this study, are highly recommended for similar studies about activists working in development and if possible, having them meet twice instead of only
once would strengthen the research and the opportunity for networking and sharing information—the collectivist-activist element of such research.

**Influences on my practice**

The key learning for me in this study was something that was named during my personal interview as a participant in the study—that is, the concept of facilitation as a sustained project. I had never conceptualized it as thus, but I now see facilitation very much in this light. Admittedly, there are times in my practice as a facilitator or in my work as an educator where I have not applied critical reflection in my work. This study has made me more aware of the necessity of embracing a critically reflective position. Rogers (2006) states that it is possible that approaches using critical reflection and reflexivity might enhance transformative life-long learning. As an educator with a passion for pedagogy, I therefore feel that each step I take towards becoming a critically-reflective feminist practitioner makes transformation that much more possible. Furthermore, through the links to transnational feminist pedagogies within which I have framed this study, I have developed a more solid understanding of what a transnational, transformative, feminist-centered facilitation practice might mean and the role that I can play to enable feminist praxis and transformation in the field of development.

The ideas expressed by participants in this study indicate a willingness to be creative, to dream, to explore, and to build relationships that move beyond patriarchal structures and development hierarchies. Their passion for and commitment to their work as activist-facilitators in development was iterated through analogies to bridges, sparks, fires, barnacles, doors opening, bees around a hive, trains leaving stations, bulldozers, and threads woven
together – metaphors that ran through their experiences of working in development. Further, the activist experiences shared here suggest lessons in using intersectional approaches, widening epistemic knowledge, and deepening pedagogical practices. These are lessons that are important for me in my continuing role as an activist-facilitator working in transnational development. I also believe that this kind of activist knowledge provides small and humble examples of changes in activist-facilitator practices that can take root.
REFERENCES


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APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT TEXT

**Call for participation of Women’s Rights and Gender Activists**

If you are actively working (locally and internationally) as a trainer using participatory methodologies, please consider participating in

**Possibilities and Paradoxes: Exploring Practices of Critical Reflection through Activists**

**A PhD Graduate Research Study**
for UBC Dept of Educational Studies by
Co-researchers: Cindy Hanson (UBC Grad Student);
Faculty: Dr. Pierre Walter & Dr. Jennifer Chan-Tiberghien

The study sets out to examine the possibilities and paradoxes that emerge from the training practices of activist-trainers working internationally and to investigate how critical reflection is experienced.

**Please consider participating if you are:** 1) an activist working for women’s rights and gender equality; 2) a facilitator of participatory workshops in transnational/international contexts; 3) willing to explore how relationships are played out in international projects; and 4) willing to discuss the possibilities and the paradoxes that frame the work of activists who facilitate participatory workshops in the context of international development. *Although benefits are not guaranteed, this may be an opportunity for networking and learning with other activist-trainers.*

The research includes 12 participants meeting for a sequence of individual interviews (approx. 1 hour ea.) and at least one focus group, and a limited document review of training reports (voluntary participation). A second focus group will include 6 participants. The format is informal and *conversations are encouraged.* Some funds are available for travel, but remuneration is not possible. Refreshments will be served. The study is minimal risk and part of a PhD graduate thesis. *Participant selection attempts to represent diversity, and a history of activist involvement in participatory development.*

If you are interested, please contact the co-researcher, Cindy at (306) 651-2424 or cindyhanson@sasktel.net All inquiries are confidential.
APPENDIX B: FACE SHEET

Possibilities and Paradoxes: Exploring Practices of Critical Reflection through Activists

(Cindy Hanson’s research in fulfillment of a PhD in Educational Studies at UBC)

FACE SHEET – Information about participants – used in the dissertation to describe in general terms the kinds of work and activism that participants in the study were/are involved in.

Name:___________________________________________

Contact Information (include e-mail):
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

Phone: ________________________________________________

Personal history:
Age group (circle):  20-30  30-40  40-50  50-60  60-70

How long have you worked as an activist and a trainer? __________________________
For how long has this work been international in scope?
Languages spoken ____________________________________________
Ethnicity/religion____________________________________________
Level of education achieved ______________________________________
Do you prefer the term trainer or facilitator? _____________________________
Do you describe yourself as a feminist? Yes _____ No _____ Seldom _______
What is your background in training, adult education and international development?
_________________________________________________________________________
Training history
List three regions/countries where most of your work has taken place and for each name in what sector: ex. (Tanzania – HIV/AIDS and forestry)

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________

Name 5 work/training contracts (including the place and funding or executing agency) you’ve held in the last two-three years (most current first):
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

Have you published documents or articles or presented at workshops/conferences about your training work - that is, outside of those requested by funders or a workplace? If so, please name one or two that are significant to your work as an activist and a trainer (facilitator).
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

Training reports submitted for this project: yes______ no ______

Would you be available for a focus group in May? ____________________________
Would it be possible for you to travel for a focus group for example, to another province? _______________________________
THANK-YOU
APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Department of Educational Studies
Mailing address:
2125 Main Mall
Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z4

Tel: 604-822-5374
Fax: 604-822-4244
http://www.edst.educ.ubc.ca

CONSENT FORM

Study Title:
Possibilities and Paradoxes: Exploring Practices of Critical Reflection through Activists. (Research for public dissertation and in fulfillment of a PhD in Educational Studies at UBC)

Principal Investigator: 1) Dr. Pierre Walter
Professor, Adult Education
Department of Educational Studies
Ponderosa Appendix G, Room 11
Tel: (604) 822-9231
E-mail: pierre.walter@ubc.ca

2) Investigator: Dr. Jennifer Chan-Tiberghien
Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Studies
Tel. 604 822-5353. E-mail: jennifer.chan@ubc.ca

Co-Investigator: Cindy Hanson
PhD Candidate, UBC
Dept of Educational Studies
(306) 651-2424

cindyhanson@sasktel.net

Purpose:
- To examine how activists identify and position possibilities and paradoxes in their involvement in international development; particularly through their practices of critical reflection.
Study Procedures:
Please read this section carefully as it applies to both your rights and responsibilities. As a participant in this study, you should understand both how you inform the research and what your rights are in the process. If you have any questions about the research, please ask them.

Your experience as an activist-trainer (specifically involved in work related to women’s rights and gender equality) in an international context is the reason you are part of this research. You are one of 12 activists who are considered study participants in this research. You will be asked to participate in one individual interview and at least one of two focus groups. In addition, you will be asked to contribute technical training reports that you have authored or collaborated in writing. The information that follows describes the procedures in each of these.

Interview:
You will first be involved in one interview that will take about one hour of your time. Your personal involvement and work as a facilitator/trainer in providing participatory training with a focus on women’s rights and gender equality is the focus of this unstructured conversation. The researcher may also ask you to provide a few demographic details about your background in this work.

The interview is a way to question how facilitators reflect upon their work and the process of delivering participatory training, including whether or not actual transformation occurs – if so, how, when, for whom, etc. In general, the interview will be a conversation between us. A tape recorder is used to record the interview. All of the information from the tapes is transcribed (written out) by the researcher and then sorted into themes. Four of the study participants will be involved in reflecting upon and providing feedback about the information categorized by the researcher; to ensure that the bias of the researcher is reduced.

Focus Groups:
In general, the focus group will use a semi-structured process; a conversation between the group members. The conversation is recorded with a tape recorder. The information from the tapes is transcribed, sorted into themes by the researcher, and then, fed back to the same four volunteers from the pool of study participants. The focus group will be three-four hours in length and refreshments will be served.

A second focus group will be held with six participants who participated in the first part of the study. If more than six participants want to participate, a random draw will be held at the end of the first focus group. During the second focus group, an interactive interview technique will be employed – using this technique, participants will be asked to reflect on the stories of the group members that were presented in the first focus group, and use select information to construct a story about an issue that collectively is important to the group.

Document Review
A secondary part of this research is the collection and analysis of technical training documents by the researcher to see if these documents reveal additional information for the study. If you have technical training reports which you have authored or
collaborated on, please consider lending these (or submitting them electronically) to the researcher. Please do not submit more than 3 documents. These documents will be returned to you upon request, or destroyed along with other data collected (after a period of 5 years). Please submit as an e-mail attachment or in hard copy.

Confidentiality:
Any person involved in this study will not be identified by name; although pseudonyms may be mutually agreed upon if they are deemed necessary. Any aspect of information that could identify you will be omitted or only used with your written permission. All information you provide will be kept in a locked storage box and computer documents will be password protected. Although confidentiality in focus groups cannot be guaranteed, I ask for your cooperation in keeping this information confidential.

Remuneration/compensation:
Regretfully, no remuneration is available. Mailing costs, for example in mailing training reports, will be covered and limited funds are available for your travel costs (please submit gas receipts or public bus receipts for reimbursement).

Contact information:
If you have any questions or require further information about the study please contact Cindy Hanson at (306)651-2424 or cindyhanson@sasktel.net

Contact for concerns about your rights:
While some of the results may not benefit you directly, they may benefit others. Potential benefits include information sharing and networking. Participation in focus groups cannot be free from risk; however, confidentiality is encouraged and risk is not anticipated. Your contributions are voluntary. This applies to participants who withdraw from participation in the study prior to its completion date as well as those that complete it.

If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line at UBC Office of Research Services at 01 (Canada code) + (604) 822-8598. The information used in this study is in fulfillment of Cindy Hanson’s PhD thesis. It is also anticipated that a book (with information from the thesis) and articles may be written. However, if the data is used for other purposes, you will be notified.
Consent

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without jeopardy to your employment, involvement in other projects, etc.

If you agree to participate, please place your signature on the line below. Your signature indicates your willingness to participate. I will provide you with a copy of this agreement so that you have it for future reference.

___________________________________________________________________________
Signature of study participant

___________________________________________________________________________
Today’s Date

___________________________________________________________________________
Please print your name on this line
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide

(Face sheet and letter of consent first)
These are not linear points but guides for the conversation and to ensure research questions are answered.

Tell me a bit about yourself—personally and related to your work

What do participatory methodologies make you think of, what does this mean to you?

What are the education or training influences you’ve had—eg. Paulo Friere, others? Non-formal education, certificates, degrees and so on

What guides your work as an activist in development?

Specific questions. (Make sure these get asked or deliver prompts):

1) How do you as a gender activist understand and apply critical reflection in your facilitation work?

2) How do you identify and position possibilities and paradoxes in your work in development?

3) What do you understand/experience in regards to the way power and privilege get played out in international transnational relationships? How do you reflect on those understandings?

4) How do you position yourself as a woman from the North in development work?

5) Have you experienced transformation in your work? How?

6) What key lessons from your own participatory training experiences might be useful for further informing participatory workshops (critical & feminist pedagogies)?

7) What kind of activist work do you do locally?

Prompts

Work in International Development—areas of comfort? Discomfort?
- working across borders—how do you recognize or accommodate similarities, differences
- when do “connections” or “affiliations” occur?
- Examples of Solidarity? Transformation?
What does critical reflection mean to you? Examples of application? Experiences using it?

What are the lessons for you personally that come from your work in development and from your facilitation practices? What have you learned? How does what you know/have learned inform pedagogy, critical thought on development, the practice of international development? Feminism?

Give examples of specific work
## Certificate of Approval

**Principal Investigator:** Walter, P.  
**Department:** Educational Studies  
**Number:** B06-0849

### Institution(s) Where Research Will Be Carried Out

Co-investigators: Hanson, Cindy, Education

### Sponsoring Agencies

Unfunded Research

#### Title

Possibilities and Paradoxes: Exploring Practices of Critical Reflection through Activism

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<th>DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL</th>
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The application for ethical review of the above-named project has been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

Approved on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board by one of the following:

- Dr. Peter Suedfeld, Chair
- Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair
- Dr. Arminee Kazanjian, Associate Chair
- Dr. M. Judith Lynam, Associate Chair

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the experimental procedures.