

**REENTRY: A PROACTIVE COLLABORATIVE STUDY.**  
**THE LONG TERM NEEDS OF AN INDIVIDUAL DURING REACCULTURATION**

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## ABSTRACT

The experiences of many sojourners returning home after living abroad has often resulted in difficulties associated with reacculturation. Having conducted training for and experiencing reentry myself on several occasions, I recognized how unprepared we are for the circumstances which present themselves to us upon returning home. Reentry programs and studies in the past have generally identified the causal effects and provided suggestions in an attempt to enhance returnees' acculturation. Debriefing or reorientation workshops have been offered previous to arrival home or within the first few months afterwards. However, the long term needs of the individual returnee have not been examined.

The purpose, of this study was to investigate the long term needs of the individual returnees which enable them to develop proactive strategies for successful reacculturation. Using Collaborative Participatory Research, the returnee and I co-investigated Tanya's story. We examined her transitional experiences as the story unfolded through the phases of predeparture, arrival home and honeymoon period, adjustment and final integration. This investigation consisted of nine 1.5 hour interviews. These occurred in three series, each containing three interviews which were two to three months, five to six months, and nine to ten months after the returnee's arrival home. Through self reflection and self assessment the returnee was able to identify her own needs of readaptation and develop proactive coping strategies. She was able to recognize that her difficult experiences were part of a growthful experience and that her reacculturation is still on-going. The final chapter of this study briefly examines and recommends further study for the issues of concern which have emerged as a result of this investigation.

This study found that returnees can benefit from an ongoing exploration of their long term needs preferably in co-operation with an experienced support person. Also that past values, perceptions and life experiences are inextricably woven together to create a total experience for the returnee. While returnees experiences are universally similar, they are at the same time uniquely individual. Further research is needed to investigate the aspects of the long term influences and effects of reentry.

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*But it was Art who provided the winds, giving me direction and guiding me through my exploration.*

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO COME HOME?

#### Coming Home: An Unexpected Experience

The millennium is coming to a close and the 21st century will soon be upon us. Today more than ever, human communication is experiencing challenges far greater than learning one another's language. Yet, it has only been during the past one hundred years that technology, transportation and telecommunication systems have opened up new worlds to us. Previously, only a select or privileged few were given the opportunity to experience other cultures. Now, ready or not, the world's citizens are becoming just that - Citizens of the World.

Inevitably, as a result of rapid intercontinental migration and instantaneous communications, many of us will have cross-cultural experiences at some point in our lives. These experiences offer opportunities to develop our knowledge and creative potential. New values, shared meaning, and tools of communication will help to develop a better understanding of our interconnected, interdependent world. Unfortunately, what is not understood by many is how to transfer these new skills and persona into the culture back home. It is becoming increasingly evident how unprepared we are for the life changing psychological effects these total experiences bring to us.

For those who choose to live in foreign countries for an extended period of time, the concept of culture shock has become a recognized reality (Austin, 1986b; Brislin & Van Buren, 1974; Oberg, 1963). Many sense the need for and importance of cultural preparation before immersing themselves in these strange new lands. Yet often these same people are often unaware of a reacculturation experience awaiting them upon their return home. As a result,

many people then suffer the unexpected feelings of reentry shock (Austin, 1987; Sussman, 1986).

Having experienced reentry myself, I recognize how difficult it is to prepare for the circumstances which present themselves to sojourners upon returning home. Before I left on my first work experience overseas, Canadian Crossroads International, the organization which had prepared my work placement in Cameroon, West Africa, also provided me with cultural training. The training enabled me to prepare for the unexpected adjustments I would have to make while living abroad. Since it was a brief four month work placement, I was able to adjust fairly well, for the short term, to living in a foreign culture. This was not a surprise to me as I had moved frequently in my youth due to my father's military career. I had assumed I knew what to expect from myself while making adjustments to living in a new home. What I didn't expect were the experiences I encountered upon my return to Canada. The training I had received did include debriefing and knowledge regarding reentry adjustments. I did understand that readapting would be part of my reentry process. However, at that time, I did not fully understand what that would entail. It was only in retrospect that I was able to realize how valuable that training and the ongoing support of Crossroads had been.

My personal experiences with the phenomenon of reentry have allowed me to understand that, while the unpredictable aspects of reacculturation can be painful, they can also provide growthful opportunities. The intensity of this experience has motivated me to further examine and investigate the stories of others

## **The Problem**

Through my explorations I became aware of universal aspects which affect many returnees, yet at the same time how uniquely different each individual's experience can be. The duration of reacculturation may be dependent on the circumstances that each person faces on their return. It also became clear to me that there is a problem in that reentry research and existing training programs do not address the long term needs of the individual returnee throughout their reentry process. I chose to explore this aspect in a more rigorous manner in order to add to the present knowledge of reentry experience. This investigation caused me to reexamine my own story.

## **Vocabulary**

Before continuing, I would like to define terminology which will be used throughout this paper:

Acculturation: Cultural adjustment in a foreign culture; to assimilate the cultural traits of another group (Martin, 1984).

Reentry/Reacculturation: The process of readjusting to one's home culture after an extended period abroad (Adler, cited in Westwood, 1990).

Adaptation: A gradual change in behavior, values, priorities, even cognitive organizational structures, to conform to the prevailing cultural patterns (Guralnik, 1984; Moore, 1981)

Readaptation: Once again adapting, this time to the home culture, similar to change in behaviors as in adaptation.

Action research: While there are multiple interpretations of action research, for the purpose of this study it is based on the understanding of Collaborative participatory research.

Collaborative participatory research: An approach to research characterized by a systematic inquiry that is collective, collaborative, self reflective, critical and undertaken by the participants of inquiry. The goals of such research are the understanding of practice and articulation of a rational or philosophy of practice in order to improve the practice (McCutcheon & Jung, 1990).

Feeling at home again: A level of comfort achieved emotionally, physically, mentally and spiritually...produces an acceptance of oneself in their perceived home (Austin, 1986a), whereby the returnee is satisfied to be in this *place*.

Home culture: The somewhat self explanatory phrase which designates the sojourners primary cultural experience. The culture in which the sojourner has grown up, and which the sojourner returns to after the cross-cultural experience (Westwood, 1990).

Host culture: Foreign culture has a pejorative element that is eliminated by the use of the term Host culture. For this reason the term Host culture will be used to refer to the culture in which the sojourner lives and or works in for an extended period of time before returning to the Home culture (Greenwood, 1991).

Praxis: The linkage between theory and practice; the theory in the lived experience (Lather, 1986).

Reentry shock: The acute psychological and physiological discomfort associated with reentering one's home culture after an extended sojourn. This is a phase in the reentry/reacculturation process where difficulties are most intense and most problematic (Greenwood, 1991; Martin, 1986;).

Returnee: A person who is in the process of, or has returned home and who is experiencing readaptation.

Sojourn: The extended time period spent residing within another culture.

Citizen of the world or Global citizen: A person who has been able to grasp through personal experiences, the interconnected interdependent relationship with our world and thereby recognize their responsibility within this world.

Sojourner: A person who partakes in a cross-cultural experience, for a variety of reasons, which results in an extended residence in a culture different than the one that has provided the initial and primary cultural assimilation (Greenwood, 1991). This term will refer to the overseas portion of the experience.

Host nationals: Persons living within the host country who are nationals and who give hospitality to sojourners.

### **My Story**

In 1978, I went to Cameroon for what I thought was to be a short four month teaching experience. What I didn't realize was that the extent of these experiences would be so profound for me that it would shape the future. My perceptions, intuition, depth of knowledge and understanding of human nature would be forever changed. A friend, Jacques LeCavalier, described it as "stepping off the highway of life and walking into the forest of humankind."

Yes, I did what I expected I would do there. I broke down many of my stereotypes, developed a cultural empathy and added new facets to my psyche. Through my experiences a new character was created in me. From that point on, I wasn't satisfied in making judgements



based on the culture in which I had grown up, in this case what I had thought was 'open minded' Canadian. Although this was not so clear to me until years later.

When I returned to Canada, I soon discovered that, while it was great to be home, I could only observe and was not really able to participate wholeheartedly in my own culture. I wasn't able to return to the place I had left, that place of comfort, that place where I accepted most things without question, that place that previously had given me little opportunity to think of the rest of the world or even truly care about it.

*But, I was home* physically, at least! While speaking with friends and family, I'd often begin with, "When I was in Cameroon . . . " or "In Cameroon, they . . . ". The patient look on their faces soon changed from, "Oh that's nice." to "Not this again." I hadn't realized was, that apparently we were no longer speaking the same language. My experiences seemed strange to them and my thoughts were foreign. Although they never said it, I could see it on their faces, "You've changed so much!"

I had changed and I was excited about my new enlightenment; I wanted to share my experiences with those closest to me. Even my family, whom I assumed were open minded, seemed somewhat put off by my new persona. Was it me or was it that I had never before seen my culture from this vantage point, with all its cracks and weaknesses? Why couldn't I return to where I had been before? Did I really want to be back in that same mind set?

As mentioned previously, before I left Canada I had had extensive cultural training from Canadian Crossroads International. Reentry difficulties were included in my orientation program before going overseas. About six weeks after my return, Crossroads had a debriefing retreat weekend to examine and prepare for the aspects of reentry. I discovered that I was not alone in my feelings; it was comforting to understand that others were going through similar feelings.

For me, it was a good two years before I was able to discover my niche and gain a sense of normalcy.

The process of developing a comfort level had been an arduous one. Thanks to the support of others who had also gone through similar experiences I was eventually able to feel at home again. I learned how to accept the changes in my life and to appreciate the differences in my new self. I learned that by developing new routines, new friends, new attitudes, new goals I could fulfil the expectations of my desires; but that also meant that I needn't discount or dispel the old aspects of my previous life. They were all worthy in that they were a part of me. I learned to develop coping skills in order to blend the "old me" with the "new me" into something I am Still Exploring.

Twenty years have passed since that experience. I have had numerous opportunities to develop my skills in cultural adaption. Over the years I have lived in India and Japan as well as venturing on shorter sojourns to Hong Kong, Malaysia and Thailand. Surprisingly, with each sojourn the reentry process has not diminished. But as a result of these experiences a better understanding of reacculturation and coping skills has evolved.

### **What Has Compelled Me to Study this Phenomenon**

My story is not unlike that of thousands of others. Over the years I have come in contact with numerous people from varying countries who, like me, have had difficulties in adapting to the reentry process of returning home. I have heard in their narratives a sadness and sometimes even a despair in recounting their difficulties. For some this despair, left unacknowledged, has led to alienation of their home culture or even worse, clinical depressions (Mathews, 1994;

Williams, 1991). As a result of this phenomena I have been led to research the area of reacculturation, more commonly referred to in the literature as Cultural Reentry.

Through my experiences I have come to believe that the processes of acculturation and reacculturation are strongly related. Greenwood (1991), based on the work of Bennet (1977) and Martin (1986) concludes that culture/reentry shock is similar to other transitional experiences in life, in that most transitions involve loss and change for the individual. These concepts will be dealt with further in this paper. Numerous studies indicate that returning to one's own culture is often more difficult than moving into a foreign culture (Adler, 1981; Austin, 1986a; Rogers & Ward, 1993; Werkman, 1986).

As such, I was driven to find out what causes such discordance. Through personal soul searching and an extensive literature review, I have identified a multitude of variables (Smith, 1996). However, throughout the literature three general themes frequently appear to have a significant effect on the returnee. Expectations (Greenwood, 1991; Martin et al., 1995; Rogers & Ward, 1993), separation (Faulkner & McGaw, 1977; Hipkins Sobie, 1986; Sussman, 1986) and identity/self perception (Austin, 1987; Hanigan, 1990; Martin et al., 1995) also appear to have an interconnectedness which relates to the readaption process in a holistic manner. While there are a myriad of variables, factors and elements which express themselves throughout these themes, no one study proposes that expectations, separation and identity are the essential components of reentry. Much of the literature supports the idea that each aspect has a crucial function to varying degrees. These aspects will be described later in this study.

For those who are able to develop support systems and come to understand their own reacculturation aspects, reentry is a matter of patience, time and proactivity. Yet there are countless others who have not been able to endure reacculturation. As a result many seek to

work overseas again, in order to avoid the pain of coming "home" (Austin, 1986a; Martin et al., 1995; Sussman, 1986). "Will I ever again feel comfortable living at home?" was a common question asked by many returnees that I have since encountered.

This reoccurring question has compelled me to research reentry. Throughout my investigation, I have sought to understand what it is and how the process can be enhanced to ensure successful readaption.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW: HOW DO WE PREPARE FOR READAPTATION?

In order to understand reentry, it is essential for the research to fully explore this complex concept of Readaption. Reentry is not unlike many life changes, in that it involves a series of transitions which result in transformation of character (Martin, 1986). In essence it requires adaptation and adjustment. Sojourners can only speculate what the effect of particular future experiences will have on themselves. In reality, personal reactions to such experiences may be quite different from their expectations. Jansson (1986) explains that each person will face reentry with their own fears and expectations. Bochner (1973) indicates that the more a person adjusts to the host country, the more difficulties will be associated with readjustments to the home country.

Conversely, according to Fowler (1970), some returnees experience little shock. Many sojourners live overseas and never really penetrate into the foreign surroundings. They live, eat, work and shop on the base. They don't miss their home because in many ways they never left it. (Hipkins Sobie, 1986). Through this particular experience, the sojourner is able to the best of their ability recreate the home culture and lessen acculturation and therefore lessen culture shock experience. Thus, they will also lessen the need to reacclturate upon their return home. What have these people truly learned of the cultures of their host country?

Another important aspect of returning home is the sojourner's readiness to return. If the sojourner is emotionally ready to leave the host country, he or she will more likely positively anticipate the return (Martin, Bradford & Rohrich, 1995). Readiness to return can affect the reentry experience, with those ready to return having the least difficulty (Brislin and Van Buren,

1974). If the sojourner is not ready to return, yet termination of the sojourn is unavoidable, the separation will cause anxiety. "Unfinished tasks, unfulfilled dreams must be dropped or forgotten. The need to abandon intense friendships and cultural supports frequently results in disturbing feelings characteristic of a grieving process." (Werkman, 1986, p. 11).

To understand their own reentry process it is important for the returnee to examine their own circumstances and identify those elements which influence their reacculturation. Ongoing self evaluation and constant self awareness, combined with patience and flexibility are key factors to successful reacculturation (Anderson, 1994; Sussman, 1986).

Discordance often develops due to a number of factors (Smith, 1994). To begin with, as indicated previously, expectations play a considerable role in affecting reentry. How one perceives and deals with experiences is dependent on how he or she relates to personal expectations, perceived or otherwise. Secondly, loss and separation can cause stress and be a source of anxiety. Symptoms of grief characterized by a sense of loss can sometimes lead to depression. Finally, identity and self perception are directly related to expectations and separation.

How returnees relate to these factors in relationship to their own perception of self will indicate how they will finally integrate in their home culture. The inability to share meanings and make sense of new perspectives produces anxiety. Unrecognized and under-utilized skills often produce a sense of impotence. The feelings of discordance are often so confusing that the returnee learns soon enough not to express themselves. Others, who do not understand their conflict, are unable to give them adequate support. Faced with negative feedback, the returnee feels isolated and shuts down. Their creative energies become paralyzed. As a result, the newly

acquired abilities and talents are not able to be transferred into the home culture (Sussman, 1986).

The following is a more detailed exploration of the aspects of: expectations, loss and separation, and identity and self perception.

### **Coming Home: To A Multidimensional Experience**

#### **Expectations**

*Men [women] are not so much bothered by events but by what they think of them.*  
(Epicthitus, c. 120 A.D., cited in Greenwood, 1991, p. 27).

Going home is often an exciting and overwhelming time. It is an experience filled with preconceived notions and expectations and unanticipated stress. For many people the periods of time spent in isolation during the sojourn have provided ample opportunity to fantasize about home. Remembering the good times gives a person a sense of security, particularly through the difficult times of adapting to the host country's customs and behaviors. While this is a natural and sometimes necessary process, it may increase difficulties upon returning to the home culture. The sojourner may develop a false sense of accuracy and build up their expectations about their new life at home. Levels of anxiety occur when expectations don't match experience (Greenwood, 1991).

Returning to one's original culture is often more difficult than moving to a host culture, due to inaccurate expectations which cause transition difficulties (Adler, 1981; Rogers and Ward, 1993).

Upon returning to their native culture without adequate preparation people are likely to discover much to their surprise, they cannot simply pick up where they left off. Their friends, family and work associates did not go into hibernation

when they were away. Not only that, those who stayed behind have no way of knowing what the sojourner went through or how they were affected by their experiences. Friends remember them more or less as they were when they left. In all likelihood they are expected to be very much the same. (Freedman, 1986, p.23)

Yet both cultures are alive and constantly transforming, just as the people who make up those cultures are also developing. For the sojourner and his or her family/friends, there has been a "time continuum shift". Both view each other from the past and not the present.

In Rogers and Ward's literature review (1993), they explored the significance of the relationship between expectations, experience and discrepancies. They cited Weisman and Furnhams (1987), who stated that realistic expectations facilitate adaptation, and Cochrane (1983), and Furnhams and Bochner (1986), who found that unmet high expectations result in adjustment problems, while overmet low expectations lead to better adaptation.

When discrepancies between expectations and experience result from experiences being more difficult than expected, the likelihood of psychological adjustment problems increases. Conversely, when large discrepancies result because experiences are more positive than anticipated, psychological wellbeing is enhanced. Meanwhile, unmet positive expectations result in psychological distress (Rogers and Ward, 1993). "The sojourner, who can easily adjust expectations so that they are more in tune with the reality of his or her experiences will suffer less culture shock." (Hanigan, 1990, p. 99).

The combination of these concepts has obvious implications for cross cultural training. Attention to training; before, during and after return, can deal with ongoing expectations as they arise. I have found it is also important to be open to all experiences; just as the sojourner must come to expect the unexpected, so too must the returnee. Preparation for specific expectations is necessary, yet unforeseen experiences will always arise. One of the keys to successful



adaptation is in trusting in one's own abilities to cope. Cross cultural training for reentry can teach these skills.

Understanding what can be expected in the stages of returning (reentry) may enhance the sojourner's awareness of their own personal readaptation. Readaptation may be divided into the following phases of reentry: pre-departure, the home arrival and honeymoon, adaptation or reaccluturation process, and the final integration stage (Asuncion Lande, 1980; Austin, 1987; Werkman, 1986). There has been no indication as to the time span of each stage. This may depend on the circumstances of the returnee. The following is an elaboration of the possible concerns within each phase .

### **Predeparture**

The first stages of the returning process generally begin before departure from the host culture. Getting everything done before leaving requires organization and can lead to unexpected stress. Time becomes the crucial element to complete the tasks listed below:

- finishing projects
- packing and sending belongings home
- arranging official documents and finances
- attending goodbye parties
- finding time for special farewells to dear friends
- allowing time for host nationals to show their gratitude and appreciation in their customary ways (Guither and Thompson, 1986).

With final departure preparations in hand, the returnee is now ready to breathe a sigh of relief and begin to relax, only to be catapulted into the next stressful phase.

## **Arrival**

Before having left their host country, the sojourner should have considered taking care of these important aspects:

- securing a job upon returning
- locating a place to live
- finding schools, if necessary, for self or children
- ensuring transportation, such as buying a car, if necessary

"The unprepared individual can be expected to experience chronic migrational shock"

(Freedman, 1986, p. 35). Taking care of physical needs significantly reduces the unavoidable stress related to moving, resulting from changes to one's living environment. Vacation time and travel enroute to home country will provide some down time before the actual stress of returning home begins to set in (Guither and Thompson, 1986). However, this too can also be stressful, as is noted in this study.

## **Honeymoon**

This next phase is characterized by a sense of euphoria. The first few days and/or weeks provide an opportunity to once again see friends and family, eat favorite foods, rediscover past routines and engage in various other nostalgic experiences. The initial feeling of euphoria may mask the incongruities of expectations and experiences. For some it is a great relief just to be home, out of the crosscultural problems they experienced overseas. Jansson (1986) explains the feelings of elation as anticipation of experiencing a new beginning, a new life.

## **Reacculturation/Adjustment**

These feelings of elation may be short-lived. Often the sojourner returns home possessing a different set of behaviors and competencies. Conflict arises because the sojourner may expect to be able to integrate their new language, hobbies, professional knowledge, cultural empathy and new forms of behavior into this new life at home. Those at home are not prepared, for this does not appear to be the same person that left. Friends and family are often not able to adjust to these new facets of character. Just as the sojourner has expectations, so too do those who stayed at home. "The returnees are no longer predictable, the citizens of the native culture become uncomfortable" (Freedman, 1986, p. 23). Koelher (1980) explains that, "talking about it (the overseas experience) is often interpreted as either boasting or criticism (of home culture). Not being able to share their experience at the same time not feeling part of life at home leads to confusion" (p. 93). In recounting her own reentry, Koelher narrates:

I found myself unexpectedly in the depths of despair instead of at the anticipated peak of ecstasy. Instead of enjoying the company of old friends and neighbours, I couldn't seem to find anything to talk to them about. Instead of enjoying driving on familiar roads I was petrified because I often found myself on the wrong side of them... I was miserable, lonely, afraid, confused, depressed, lethargic. What happened? (p. 89)

Many returnees describe feelings of discomfort and vague dissatisfaction with their lives though they cannot pinpoint the basis of their difficulty. They are able to adjust but are not comfortable with the adjustment... Long lasting feelings of being restless, out of place and rootless are typical reactions even for those who are overtly well adjusted to their return. (Werkman, 1986, p. 12)

While many returnees will experience some form of general discordance, countless others experience severe reentry shock.

It is a simple fact that our family, friends and co-workers have the power to influence us. We care about them and are concerned that our behavior might be displeasing to them, they might withdraw from us. We feel that unless we return

to our cultural traditional norms and standards we risk being excluded and isolated. (Freedman, 1986, p. 24)

For a significant number of repatriates, psychological difficulties emerge, weaving a web through academic, cultural, social, political, linguistic and professional interactions and achievements (Austin, 1987). Reentry into the home culture involves readjustments to the returnee's perspectives. The intensity of the experience combined with an alien set of values makes reentry problematic (Faulkner and McGaw, 1977). The authors continue their explanation, noting that an interconnectedness between categories leads to a causal effect.

- 1) Discontinuity in systems of relevance  
Many norms of behavior which enable adaptation in the host culture are not only different but actively discouraged in the home culture. Thus, the returnee must learn to alter their patterns of behaviors and reactions to others.
- 2) Unsharability of the experience  
Having gone through the above experiences of change, the returnee feels qualitatively different from non sojourners back home. Those at home do not understand the uniqueness of the experiences that have created this other person (the returnee).
- 3) Forms of exclusion by home society  
The returnee develops a sense of exclusion and feelings of isolation. (p. 108)

As a result of these categories, unresolved anger can be either expressed or suppressed. Jansson (1986) clarifies that anger can be a result of many repressed feelings. "His [her] euphoria is replaced by anger... at himself [herself], at others, at the system he [she] believes has victimized him [her]" (p. 52). Unfortunately, society does not always recognize anger as a constructive mechanism which allows the individual to express feelings, then go forward in meeting other needs. But the anger must be ventilated. When the returnee realizes that expectations cannot be fully met, he or she can be helped to reestablish more realistic goals (Sussman, 1986).

Returnees may unknowingly be distancing themselves or rejecting those with whom they feel conflict. They may see non sojourners as not understanding their plight. Unrealistic

perceptions may develop what can be called an *Us and them* complex, thus the returnee views those who have sojourned as having more special insights and perspectives much more like themselves.

Just as training in preparation for culture shock addresses stereotyping of the host culture, reentry training might address this problem in order to prevent the *Us and them* complex which may eventually result in exclusion from society. There is a need for support and guidance. The necessity of sharing experiences with someone who has successfully integrated back into their home culture is not only an asset but an essential ingredient to successful reacculturation. True integration begins when the returnee is able to put things into perspective and begins to gain a sense of normalcy.

Westwood and Barker (1990) suggest that peer pairing of host nationals and international students enhances social adaption to host culture and improves academic achievement. Perhaps pairing a returnee with a "veteran" returnee would ease the transition of the reacculturation process.

On my return, the support systems which I had previously been dependent upon were unable to help me cope. Unknowingly, they added to my difficulties of readjustment. While my friends and family were a support in certain circumstances, I had to accept that I could not expect them to understand. "Well meaning as they may be they cannot relate to the experience" (Fontaine, 1983, p. 46). Fortunately, my association with Canadian Crossroads enabled me to be in contact with numerous people who were going, or had gone, through similar experiences. I was able to confer and compare my progress with that of others. Eventually, I was able to develop a balance within my perceptions and would come to understand that my needs could be met.

## **Integration**

Final integration may at last be possible if proactive skills are applied to readaptation. Although for me, it was not a point, but more of a slow dawning of recognition that after some time I was actually more settled in and that I had learned to be proactive in my readaptation. New routines and social networks were developed. Old friendships were maintained, but I had to learn not to expect my old friends to fulfil my expectations of global awareness. Professionally, I developed more of a multicultural perspective.

In coming home, I realized that my previous home had now expanded into many more facets. Unexpected situations, feelings and behaviors are prevalent to re-entry. In order to be able to deal with them as they arise, we must understand that, while it is not always possible to identify them, it is important to anticipate them. One aspect to understanding what is normal is the ability to expect the unexpected. These concepts are key to the process of reacculturation.

## **Loss and Separation Stress**

*Without attachment, there is no loss.*

(Bowlby, 1969, cited in Greenwood, 1991, p. 23).

Closing out an overseas experience is very different than moving from Norfolk to Charleston. When you leave you are leaving a country and people you may never see again... It is a painful experience similar to that of the mourning process. (Fowler, 1970, cited in Hipkins Sobie, 1986, p. 97)

As a result of this personal loss, separation has caused feelings of anxiety, frustration and confusion. Hipkins Sobie (1986) elaborates, suggesting that the stages of denial, anger, grief and

acceptance, while not as intense as experiencing the death of a loved one, are a part of reentry. The returnee is now separated from all that they have come to love and appreciate in their host country. Upon returning home, they experience feelings of loss: lost time, loss of oneness with others, and a personal loss of losing a part of themselves - a loss of something valuable - the individual's perception of the "real home" and the "ideal home" (Faulkener & McGaw, 1977).

Greenwood (1991) delineates, there is an element of anticipatory loss for the home environment which has changed relative to the sojourner. The traveler's perception of time is unaltered while the clocks at home have been running at a different rate of time. This affects the sense of oneness with others in the home community.

Austin (1987) describes nostalgia and homesickness for host country, combined with loss of elite status, under-utilization of skills, loss of some degree of independence and feelings of being in the old "rat race" again create a sense of powerlessness. The changes are so terrifying that it is hard to accept the reality of the real (Jansson, 1986; Moore, 1981; Unseem & Downey, 1981; Zimmerman, 1970).

The most immediate and obvious loss is due to separation from friends and community of the host culture. While friendships are not actually lost, maintaining them now from the home country will take considerable effort. Previous friendships from the home culture must also be considered. As a result of "lost time", those relationships may have changed. During the sojourner's absence, old friends will have developed new routines with new friends. Fitting back into the old networks may not be as easy as expected.

Another aspect of change is that of lifestyle. Leisure time activities and entertaining patterns will undergo drastic changes. Roles and responsibilities of family members may shift. Some sojourners may have had a longing to return to particular routines of the previous life in

their home country. These old routines may now be impossible due to the changes which have occurred while the sojourner was away. The returnee soon discovers that the routines and habits which they valued and were accustomed to in the host country may not be possible to duplicate back home. As a result, frustration and disappointment occurs. In some countries, sojourners may have had servants. As returnees, they now find the organization of domestic tasks creates time constraints which affects the lifestyle back home (Lowenthal & Sneddon, 1981). Personal time is at a premium. Commitments to family and friends in the home culture may consume time. Commitments to a new job or school may now need to be anticipated. In the host country, the lack of commitments allowed for a sense of freedom. Now in the home country, these commitments create a sense of freedom lost.

Some sojourners unknowingly develop feelings of self importance. This commonly results from receiving special treatment or elite status in their overseas placements (Boley, 1986; Guither & Thompson, 1986), rather like "The-big-fish in-a-little-pond syndrome" (Austin, 1986a, p. 126). Opportunities are awarded the sojourner as a result of being unique, a foreigner, honored guest, visible/audible minority or by the nature of their role within their workplace. Host nationals often offer friendship and special assistance since the sojourner is alone. Returning home often means a reduction in status (Fontaine, 1983). This loss of status combined with other losses can seriously affect one's self esteem (Boley, 1986; Fontaine, 1983). Self esteem will be discussed in further detail under the heading Identity and Self Perception.

Hobbies and special talents that the sojourner developed while away are not always easily pursued. Concentrated effort is required to integrate and practice new languages, hobbies and cultural knowledge, to utilize newly acquired professional skills and to discover and develop



networks in these areas. An inability to continue will create a sense of loss and possible anxiety which could lead to depression.

Financial status, in most cases, changes upon return to the home country. Whether the cost of living abroad is more or less expensive than in the home country, readjustments in spending practices will be necessary. Many returnees find themselves with less cash flow and more expenses upon resettling back home. Buying a car or a home are now major considerations. In the host country, often the sojourner had special compensation added to their pay cheques. Commonly, rent and transportation and sometimes domestic help may have been provided. While abroad, the choice to buy personal goods may have been dependant on the ability to "Send them home" later (Hipkin Sobie, 1986; Kendall, 1981). If the sojourner curtailed their spending on personal goods, more money for travel or saving was then available. Upon returning home, these financial opportunities evaporate into living expenses. Stress and anxiety occur as the returnee feels more financially "tight". Some sojourners return home with little finances and a wealth of experiences, as in the case of some volunteers whose living expenses and/or salaries may have been minimal. For those returning with the prospect of no job and no money, the reentry process can be hampered by the feeling of "financial shock".

Lack of information about the host country becomes a source of stress for many returnees. Sometimes the feeling of disconnection from the host country may cause this stress. At home, the kind of information provided by the media is often just very general tourist travel information or "bad news". The returnee needs a lifeline to their former world in the host culture. Daily information about politics, the arts, culture and history is often hard to obtain. If the returnee is unable to acquire ongoing information, they feel cut off, isolated, disappointed by the home culture's lack of interest. Cleveland (1960) explains that home loses some of its

sweetness because people there do not seem to share the returnee's interest in life abroad.

"Being prepared for the indifference may be just as important as preparing to live overseas"

(Guither & Thompson, 1986, p. 207).

The overwhelming stress of separation and loss of the host culture causes shock. In an effort to diminish the anxiety, returnees will often develop a craving for tangible things from the host country such as food, clothing, art, music, movies, reading material and a gamut of other elements. The returnee tries to create for themselves a comfort zone. Habits also reflect a yearning to maintain a connectedness with the host country (Boley, 1986). For example, I found that on my return from India, I preferred a bucket of water poured over my head rather than a real shower. I reminisced, remembering the sense of relief from that bucket of cold water cascading over skin which had to endure 40° temperatures. On returning home from Japan, my own much cherished bed did not bring the comfort that I needed. Sleeping on the floor reminded me of crawling into my futon and the smell of tatami mats. Ahhh, there are the luxuries found in adversity. Were these strange behaviors to my family and friends? I would guess so! And what of other returnees, what strange behaviors do they exhibit? Boley (1986) aptly describes these behaviors as "the outward signs of the inner dream" (p. 69).

For the reacculturation process to begin, the returnee must be able to disengage from the host culture. They must effectively deprogram themselves from their experiences in their day to day life abroad, in order to feel that they are back into their former home world. They must refocus energies and get down to business (Faulkner & McGaw, 1977). The returnee must move forward and begin to control their own destiny to allow for true integration to occur. Austin (1986a) cites Victor Hunter (1985), a returned missionary, who explains: "I do not want to miss the present by missing the past or miss the "here" for missing the "there" (p. 189).

Separation is an inevitable process of reentry. Likewise, in acculturation to the host country, the sojourner may have to develop coping strategies by going through a period of rejection of their culture in order to delve into the new environment. Once the basic understanding of the second culture has been grasped there may be an advantage to striking a balance between the two cultures - that is, becoming bicultural (Hanigan, 1990).

In the same manner, the balance between separation from host culture and integration into home culture also must evolve. This would allow for the returnee to interact appropriately with their home culture while not losing those aspects of competency and values which created this new persona.

In addition, preplanning and a conscious effort to create new routines and networks in the home culture will help reduce the sense of loss which often results in frustration and anxiety.

### **Cultural Identities - Self Perception**

*The most significant shocks' potential in strangerhood are those of self discovery*

(Meintel, 1971, p. 48).

"Who am I?" is a question the returnee is destined to repeatedly ask themselves. In any major transition in life, to question self intensively is appropriate. Reentry is no exception. With a more accurate knowledge of oneself comes a relaxed acceptance of self (Austin, 1986b; Smalley, 1963).

Brave sojourners, like explorers, have ventured forward to meet the challenges of adapting to host countries. Through the process, they must suspend judgement and develop new perceptions, all the while their self concept and belief in sacred truths instilled in them from their

birth culture, are being questioned. Yet through sensitivity, patience, and persistence, the sojourners overcome their distress and discomforts, and thus they adapt. Nobody tells them in a few years they will have to do it all over again. This time it will be more difficult. The sacred truths will once again be challenged, only this time from within their home culture, and this time without the help of the patient host nationals who have no expectations of these foreigners. The greatest cost of the sojourn is that of identity. The sojourner has come home with new values, concepts and behaviors. In contrast, others do not see them as they see themselves. Others are not aware of all of the obstacles they have faced and succeeded in conquering (Boley, 1986). Returnees may have perceptions of their new persona, but are unprepared for the reaction of their significant others at home.

Difficulties associated with returning home result from discordance with oneself. Greenwood (1991) explains this, citing Zaharna's explanation "self shock defined in terms of identity confusion brought on by loss of shared meanings ... the shock to perception of ourselves and the relationship between sense of self and behavior and the other" (p. 19). If returnees accept the view that others have of them, does this not create a conflict within their perception of themselves? "The returnee is in limbo between two cultural identities" (Faulkner & McGaw, 1977, p. 111).

Rejection is a very possible outcome of reentry. Some reentrants cope with the fear of rejection by assuming a differential posture. Others withdraw. "If the reentrant involves themselves minimally with others the possibility of rejection is reduced. The danger is that extreme withdrawal whether motivated by actual rejection or fear of it can lead to regressive or backsliding behavior" (Jansson, 1986, p. 54). Conversely, as Greenwood (1991) explains, "One cannot be human all by oneself and apparently one cannot hold onto any particular identity all by

oneself" (p. 19). How do returnees maintain a sense of self if they perceive that others do not see them as they see themselves? Greenwood (1991) suggests that "a sense of free floating anxiety" exists. He defines this as "any strain on the individual's perception of self, as occurs in the crosscultural sojourn" (p. 20). In other words, the sojourner experiences disorientation and undergoes an identity crisis. To accommodate for this dual existence the returnee must create for himself a third culture perspective (Greenwood, 1991; Hammer et al., 1978). Oberg (1960) indicates that patterns of behavior emerge, which implies skill building rather than change in identity.

The third culture perspective is neither that of the home culture nor host culture, but rather a sensitivity to both, understanding cues in both environments and responding in socially appropriate manners. The returnee who possesses a third culture perspective is a non judgmental and astute observer of both cultures and is able to establish meaningful relationships in both (Hanigan, 1990). While appreciating both cultures, the returnee is also able to accept the negative of aspects of both cultures as just that.

The development of a third culture perspective will help to create a sense of confidence and an understanding of identity. Given a positive self image and successful integration into both cultures, the global citizen will emerge. If the returnee is unable to integrate, "they may acquire through no fault of their own, a deviant identity" (Austin, 1987, p. 128). Jansson (1986) describes this returnee as one who has deviated from that system's social norms. There is a shift in values, a portion of *history* that is not mutually shared and behaviors which differ from those expected within the social system.

A person's work is one of the most crucial components of social identity. Without a job, the returnee coming home may experience a feeling of loss of identity. "I had a job and a good

sense of who I was, coming back I felt faceless and empty” (Hipkin Sobie, 1986, p. 99).

Indications that jobs offer built in support groups explains why non working wives and children seem to experience more reentry difficulties than their working husbands and fathers (Faulkner & McGaw, 1977; Hipkin Sobie, 1986). Another aspect to identity crisis or self shock is that “More established sojourners have less difficulties than younger ones who have not yet found themselves ... Those with stronger identity (i.e., older) will be better protected from reentry shock” (cited in Greenwood, 1991, p. 15).

How such elements as age, gender relationship, personality traits, nature of job and roles within families before, during, and after reentry affect the returnee's self esteem is still not certain (Austin, 1986a; Crystal, 1997; Greenwood, 1991). These circumstances are often beyond one's control and affect self esteem by bringing about a sense of powerlessness. The discordance in identity causes a sense of confusion. Unfortunately, this is a natural phase of reentry.

### **A Model for Reentry**

A summary of these phases of reentry can be found in the description of models of cross-cultural adjustment and reentry. A diagram of the W-Curve Hypothesis which I have adapted from Freedman (1986) is provided (see Figure 1a). This has been included in this section of identity and self perception indicating the sense of self that returnees identify within themselves and within the reentry process.

Over the past forty years, models of cross-cultural adjustment have developed and evolved to include reentry. The initial models (Lysgaard, 1955; Smith, 1955) only took into account the sojourner's experience abroad and therefore the end of the curve was when the

sojourner first came home. This model was known as the U-Curve Hypothesis (Brabant et al., 1990). As it appears on the adapted diagram, prior to the reentry stage the experience would finish on a high peak.

Later, Gullahorn & Gullahorn (1963) included reentry into the curve, by extending the picture into what has become known as the W-Curve Hypothesis. This model gives a more holistic approach to the sojourn and reentry experience. The solid line indicates levels of comfort, satisfaction with the sojourn, and levels of stress (Freedman, 1986; Figure 1b). I have included a jagged line which is recursive during the reentry stage. This indicates the unpredictable, unexpected nature of experiences, feelings and perceptions which leads to the returnee's weak perception of self. Overcoming obstacles and self doubt increases the feeling of positive self esteem. As the returnee begins to adjust and integrate, the line becomes solid once again. Although with further research this concept of line may form into something as yet unknown, for the meantime, this recursive line depicts my hypothesis that the transition is a gradual process in which the returnee reestablishes a sense of normalcy. The jagged recursive line also infers the self examination the returnees undertake. This may explain why reentry is considered to be more difficult than the original sojourn.

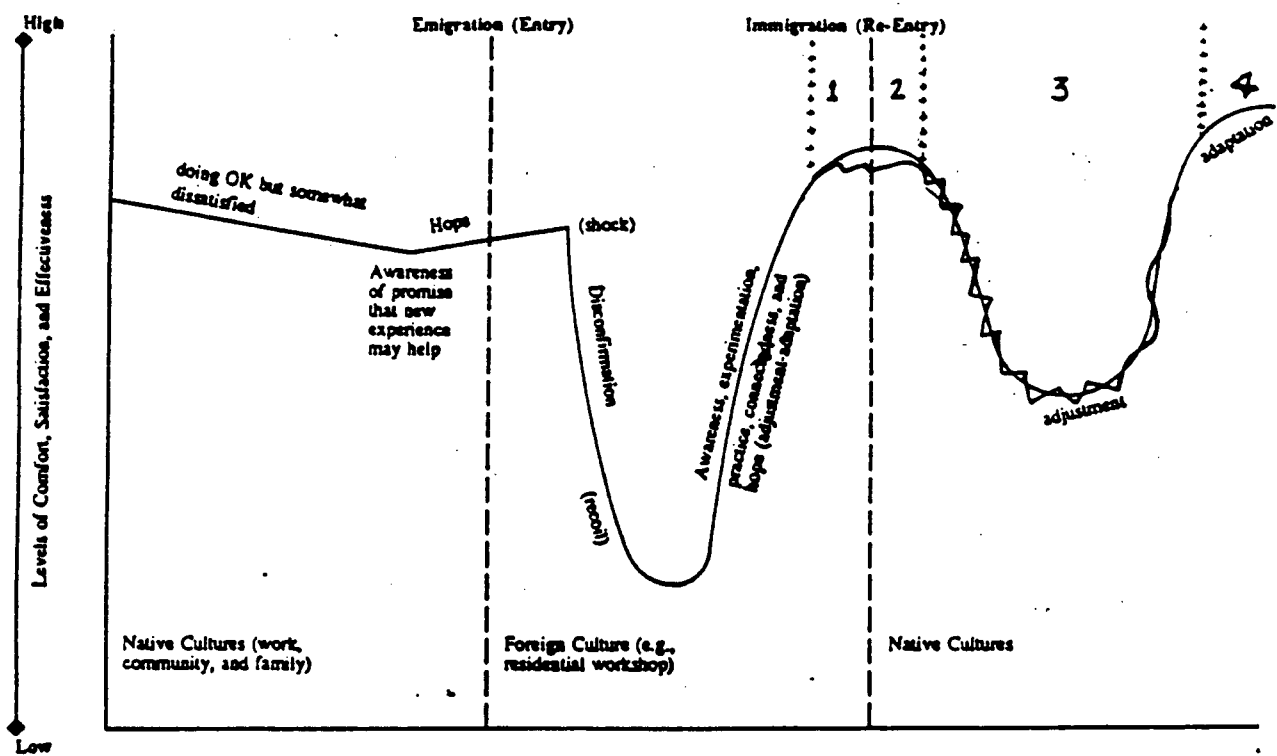


Figure 1a. The W-Curve Hypothesis Model, adapted by J. Smith. (1: Predeparture Stage; 2: Arrival Honeymoon Stage; 3: Adaptation or Reacculturation Stage; 4: Final Integration Stage).



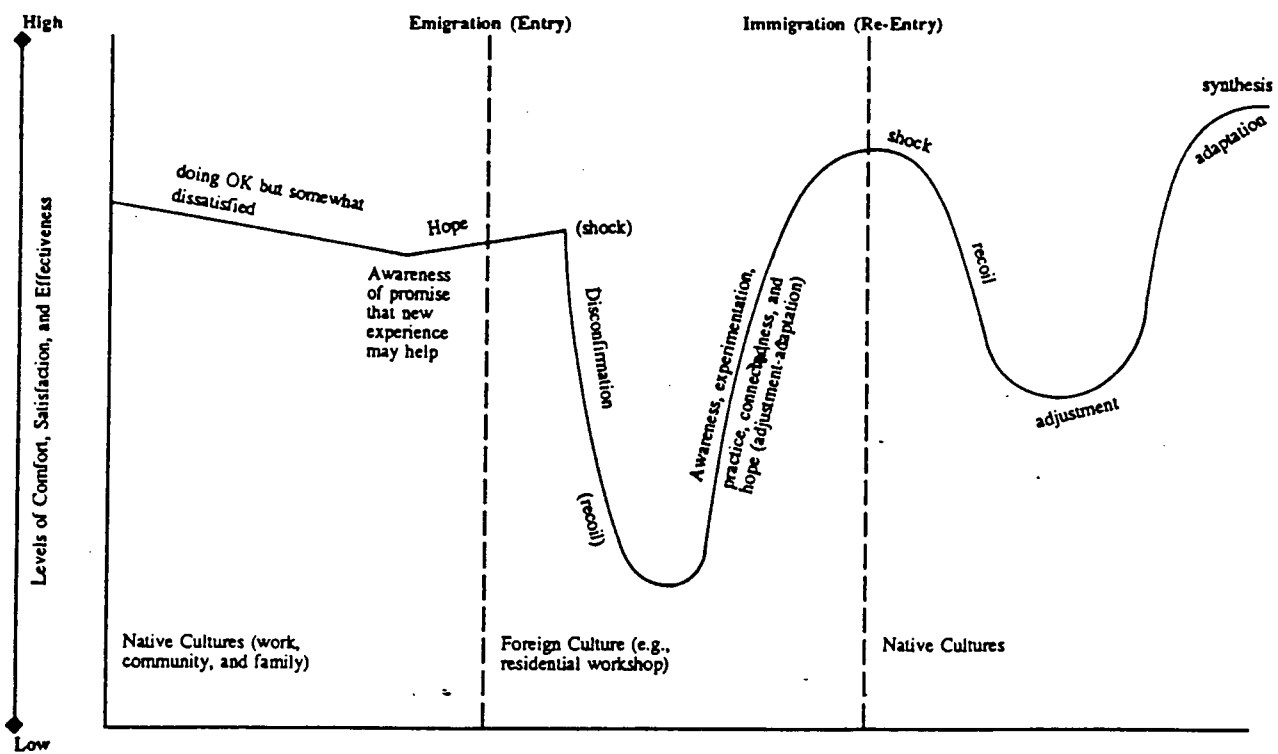


Figure 1b. The W-Curve Hypothesis Model. (Freedman, 1980)

## **Coming Home: The Literature and the Impact of Training Programs**

Reentry research is still in its infancy. Only in the past 30 years has reentry received recognition as a process of transitional change. Austin (1986a) indicates that until recently, returnees experiencing difficulties on reentry were looked upon as having emotional disorders, which, in some cases led to serious depression. Little understanding was given to the reentry transitional period. "Reentry shock comes as jolt to most Americans because it is totally unexpected" (Hanigan, 1990). Many studies to date simply identify the characteristics and causes and effects of reentry stress (Sussman, 1986). While cultural orientation training programs (developed for interaction with host culture) have been operating for many years, only recently has research encouraged the development of reentry reorientation programs (Greenwood 1991; Stewart, 1994; Sussman, 1986).

Research indicates that reentry is a valuable and necessary final phase to cultural sojourning. (Sussman, 1986; Smith, 1994). When dealt with from a positive proactive perspective, it can be a growthful lifechanging learning experience. It can challenge the returnee to interact and view their homeland with new acuity. Unfortunately for some, if left to its own devices, reentry is often problematic and, in extreme cases, can alienate the returnee permanently from their home culture.

Through both my own personal experiences, research and an extensive review of the literature and training programs, I have come to recognize that essential aspects of reacculturation have been missing from reentry research. Past studies to date do not seem to take into account the variables that influence the individual sojourner. As indicated in the literature review, there are a myriad of variables such as gender, age, marital status, education level, economic situation, ethnicity, language, religion, length of time spent away, previous travel

experience and many more which have an effect on the individual's ability to adapt. However, throughout the literature, sojourners essentially have been treated generically. Anderson's article (1994) is one of the few to consider the sojourner's adaption process from a personal perspective, and to equate adjustment and adaptation directly to the perception of obstacles. It is these obstacles, I believe, the returnee needs to address, in order to progress proactively through the reentry process.

In many programs, Sussman (1986) explains, the individual coping strategies which provide returnees with much needed goal setting plan of action. are frequently omitted. Greenwood's work (1991), derived from Westwood & Greenwood (1990), developed a program which consists of a one day workshop for ten international students about to return to their home countries. Initially the workshop was developed based on what Greenwood viewed as a lack of attention by the counseling community to reentry issues. As well, he perceived a lack of theoretical bases in previous workshops: "with the exception of Westwood (1984), few training programs systematically investigate the effect upon participants" (p.18). His aim, then, was to develop an awareness about individual reentry difficulties and to prepare returnees for potential problems of reacculturation. In his sessions he proposed interventions which allow returnees to confront themselves (conceptualization of self) in relationship to their experiences (cultural and reentry). The workshop is thus designed to help the returnee's cognitive, affective and behavioral perceptions by attempting to alter their perception of events, thereby reducing expectations and lowering dissonance.

Participants in Greenwood's study (1991) were given the opportunity to evaluate the sessions at the end of the program. Many responded that, while they felt the workshop was beneficial, it was difficult to estimate the effect the material would have until it was experienced

in a real reentry situation. It would seem that the efficacy Greenwood seeks to establish would be greatly enhanced if the participants were to also evaluate their learning six months or more after the session. I believe one of the keys to developing proactive behavior is in recognizing the changing perceptions that exist during different stages of reentry. What a returnee views as important during the initial stages of reentry may change in the later stages. For this reason it is important to have an ongoing reassessment and support network to aid in times of confusion (Westwood & Barker, 1990). The returnee must come to understand that feelings of confusion are normal aspects of reacculturation. And if recognized and dealt with, proactively, will develop a deeper understanding of their own values and concepts. Through training programs we should not try to eradicate emotional responses to difficult situations. But, by recognizing these as growthful experiences, training programs can help the returnee to develop "tools" or strategies for coping, thus reducing dissonance.

Mathews (1994) in her final analysis of her thesis indicates:

Interventions identified should be integrated therefore, as a part of a comprehensive package of programs including: predeparture and mid departure as well as reentry programs designed to match the various stages of the adaptation process. Further study should involve determining optimal timing for these interventions. (p. 94)

In short a workshop, or such, at different times of reentry stages would provide for opportunities of reassessment.

### **Preparing to Expect the Unexpected**

While returnees can anticipate problems, it is often those situations which are unexpected that present the biggest adjustment difficulties. Herein lies the general weakness of most

programs which do not include follow up training sessions (six months to one year later). Just as it is difficult to prepare a person for the grieving process they will experience on the death of a loved one, so too is it difficult to prepare a returnee for future adjustments not yet perceived. Feelings and emotions arise due to specific circumstances of each individual. As a result, it is difficult, if not impractical, to prescribe a format for reentry. It is thereby necessary to deal with problems as they arise, or in retrospect, in order to prepare for future problems. As mentioned, returnees must be aware of "expecting the unexpected". They must go through the "emotional roller coaster" which then allows them to select and develop new characteristics of their persona emanating from their experiences. During reentry, like many other transitions in life, people are required to learn new sets of behaviours and ways of being in order to be successful in their new environments (Adler, 1981; Greenwood, 1991).

Due to a lack of longitudinal studies, the individual needs of returnees during the different phases of their reacculturation have not been addressed. Nor has there been any emphasis placed on developing support networks, which would assist returnees on an ongoing basis throughout their readaptation. These aspects have been cited by numerous returnees in theses by Greenwood (1991), Williams (1991), and Mathews (1994).

### **Overview of Training Programs**

While researching training programs, I discovered that reentry programs are far and few between (Smith, 1996). I began this search by contacting a number of local and national organizations, learning institutions and businesses: CUSO, Canadian International Development Agency (C.I.D.A.), Capilano College - Asia Pacific Management Program, Canadian Crossroads

International, International Briefing Associates (I.B.A.), Casa Guatemala, Asia Pacific Foundation, B.C. Trade and Development, Green College of the University of British Columbia, Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of British Columbia (Engineering and Geological Newsletter (A.P.E.G.A.)), International Trade Center and various engineering and forestry companies. Of these organizations, currently reentry workshops which are being held are through Capilano College (in association with C.I.D.A.) facilitated by Margo (Mathews) Sutcliffe, and I.B.A. facilitated by Alan Greenwood and by Canadian CrossRoads, conducted by differing facilitators and held at various regional locations across Canada. These training programs generally consist of one or two day debriefing awareness and strategies workshops, either prior to or shortly after returning home. While training programs do a good job in preparing returnees for the initial stages of reentry, there is also a need for support and guidance at later stages of reentry when for some returnees extreme discordance may develop. As the duration of difficulties can be between six months to three years (Koehler, 1986; Longworth, 1971), training programs which are only provided once and within the first three months of returning do not address the long term needs of returnees who may discover more difficulties after being home for sometime.

While many organizations recognize that debriefing and reacculturation are important components to returning home, many do not have the time, money or understanding of how to implement such a reorientation program (F. Cox, C.U.S.O. representative (personal communication, 1995); A. Greenwood (personal communication, 1996)). In discussion with the numerous agencies, the general consensus was that they would be interested in having work done in this area although cost was a specific factor.

### **Developing a Proactive Approach**

Clearly training programs can be a valuable asset, but it is also necessary for returnees to take proactive responsibility for their own cultural readaption. In order to understand their own reentry process it is important for returnees to examine their own circumstances and identify those elements which influence their reacculturation. Current literature leads me to believe that reacculturation occurs as part of a cyclical and recursive pattern encompassing the phases of pre-departure, arrival and honeymoon, adjustment, and final integration (see model of W curve). As well, it is closely related to the sojourner's cultural experiences in the host country (Austin, 1986a; Martin et al., 1995; Sussman, 1986; Werkman, 1986).

My experiences and past research (Smith, 1994, 1996) have led me to conclude that each returnee goes through reentry in their own way at their own pace. The circumstances which affect one person may or may not affect another in the same manner. While returnees often face similar issues, it is the meanings that they make of their homecoming experiences which have the most impact on their perceptions. The factors which enable returnees to readapt must be viewed from their own personal perspectives. Thus returnees must then be able to integrate personal experiences with personal development, continuously, throughout their readaption phases: before, during and after the reentry process has begun. As well, training programs might benefit by considering the progressive nature of acculturation if they are to be successful in assisting the returnee. Programs, which include differing workshops or assessment periods at various intervals of reacculturation, seem to me to be more effective than those which offer one time only "awareness" training prior to predeparture or within a few months of returning. While the latter type of training is essential it may lose its effectiveness in the later stages of reentry.

Research indicates (Austin, 1987; Werkman, 1986; Williams, 1991) that only having reentry training prior to reentry has limited effectiveness because prior to reentry, some sojourners may not sense the need, nor identify within themselves the potential for having such difficulties. Freeman (1980) suggests that predeparture training or debriefing may not be as effective as anticipated since "The extent to which such learnings are applied and maintained in the participant's back home environment is not clear. These learnings may not hold up over time" (p. 20).

### **Revisiting and Examining The Problem**

Returnees can only hypothesize what effect future experiences will have on themselves. In reality, personal reactions to such experiences may be quite different than their expectations. While the aspect of future behaviour is explored no program I have reviewed has included an ongoing program throughout the phases of reentry. As a consequence I have been deeply concerned about the nature of conscientious ethical research.

Obvious questions have emerged which have plagued me:

- What are the issues that individual returnees face throughout their reentry process?
- Which issues are constant and which issues diminish over time?

As a result of this:

- What new issues emerge at different intervals of the reentry process?
- What strategies need to be developed at different intervals of the reentry process?
- How can individual returnees enhance their own reacculturation process?

In essence, I suppose the question I really want to answer is:



- What would be involved in developing a training program that addresses the needs of individual returnees throughout the various stages of reentry, and enables them to develop proactive strategies for successful acculturation to their home culture and the world?

For this study to be valid the returnee must feel that the uniqueness of their experiences are accurately described. Truthful interpretations are key to their authentic voice.

How then do I do research which takes all of these aspects into consideration? Careful consideration of this question has led me to my methodology, Collaborative Participatory Research, which is later described in this paper. The problem is: Reentry research and existing training programs do not address long term needs of individual returnees throughout the various stages of their reentry process. So what are the long term needs of returnees?

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY: HOW DO I RESEARCH THEIR STORIES?

#### Coming Home to a Collaborative Study

My concern in researching reentry is that reentry is not a static process. It is interdependent and interconnected to past, present and lifelong experiences. It is a total experience involving a metamorphosis of cognitive, affective and behavioural perceptions. (Crystal, 1997; Greenwood, 1991; Mathews, 1994). To be accurate in analyzing the process and developing proactive strategies it is incumbent upon the returnee to be able to self assess their responses at different times throughout reentry. And, with support, devise coping skills which will meet their needs on an ongoing basis.

Future research should continue to focus on perceptions during and after the intercultural experience. We must 'redefine' our standing of how these perceptions are related to evaluations about the experiences (Martin et al., 1995). These longitudinal studies would then provide opportunities for returnees to plan for coping strategies which will enable them to transform into a more developed human being whose experiences can contribute greatly to society and possibly the world. As such the crosscultural experience should be a positive developmental experience.

An important reminder to all trainers and program developers is that the reentry process may take from six months to three years, in general, depending on variables, with some people having more difficulty than others. As well, each individual will go through reentry in their own way at their own rate. Training programs should consider and incorporate these aspects into their designs if they are to be successful in assisting the reentry process. Current empirical research, at this time, has been unable to meet these demands. The format for obtaining data has

been either qualitative or quantitative in nature. Questionnaires, surveys and/or interviews seem to be the common framework (Adler, 1981; Martin et al., 1995; Mathews, 1994; Williams, 1991). While both Greenwood (1991) and Mathews (1994) utilized a workshop format to elicit information, their data was collected via questionnaires. I hesitate to use this format as researchers often extract information which is limited to the researcher's. There is little room to delve into what are alternative issues of concern for the individual. Reentry is not just a matter of responding to a questionnaire: strongly agree; agree; neutral; disagree; strongly disagree. As in the Likert-type response format, there is a full range of generalized options to choose from yet there is no way of knowing the meaning behind each response given by the returnee (Crystal, 1997; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). In addition, what about those issues, which may be important to the returnee (consciously or even subconsciously) but are not able to be expressed nor addressed? The understanding of these issues and information if not attended to becomes lost to the researcher. Yet these issues may be crucial to the reacculturation process of the returnee. Many stories are then left untold.

"The challenge for those who choose to study reentry is to select a methodology that can further describe how this process impacts on repatriates" (Crystal, 1997, p. 28). How then do I conduct research which not only enlightens me in this process of reentry, but also enhances the participant's self development? This has been my question for the past number of years. During my course work on research I have struggled with this and other notions. What type of research would be appropriate for persons experiencing the aspects and phases of reentry? How am I going to do the research which will take into account the vast array of variables that pertain to each person's circumstances? The issues which are important for one person may hold a different perspective for another. How do I allow for their stories to emerge outside of my own?

How do I keep my research authentic and trustworthy in relationship to my theories and their stories, and how do I bridge these two concepts without imposing.

### **Collaborative Participatory Research**

Collaborative Participant Research is a type of Action Research, which seems to answer many of these questions. By allowing the participant/respondent to be interactive in the process, the researcher is then able to check and recheck assumptions. The respondent will be able to interrogate their own experiences, which includes contextual shifts in position and gives a deeper more complex understanding, allowing for more complex data (Holstein et al., 1995). Thus the point of view will more accurately reflect that of the respondent, in this case the returnee.

Richard Winter (1989), a writer of action research, addresses my dilemmas while discussing the separation and unity of theory and practice:

The principle outcome of theoretical questioning is transformation of practice, whatever may seem impractical now may well seem feasible later, when circumstances will have changed. . . . Theory and practice do not, therefore confront one another in a mutual opposition: each is necessary to the other for continued validity and development of both . . . theory separated from practice slips into abstract speculation and ramification of jargon; practice separated from theory slips into self-justificatory reaction or self perpetuating routine. (p. 67)

McCutcheon & Jung (1990) further explain that, in collaborative research:

The researcher has several themes . . . typically concern the meanings people make of what has transpired. However as people talk about these meanings, the researcher might ask probing questions of each person being interviewed in order to understand the interpretations being made, rather than asking identical questions of each person. The kinds of questions . . . are those that have potential emancipatory effects . . . The very asking of such questions can start the emancipatory process in so far as some degree of self reflection can be provoked in those who answer the questions. (p. 150)

Van Manen (1990) also adds that it is in the act of asking your own questions that the emancipation exists: not a problem to be solved, but a question of meaning to be inquired into. Therefore the relevance of this study for me, is in the nature of the questions that we ask ourselves.

As I continued my explorations, I began to see that collaborative participatory action research "fit" with my concepts of self disclosure and praxis. Winter (1987) continues to describe "the possibilities for an increase in understanding is silently inscribed in the space between observation and reflection, between the investigator and the world investigated" (p. 43). Van Manen (1990) calls this Epistemological Silence. What is often not expressed is in moments of pauses, gestures, or shared moments of non verbal communication. "We may have knowledge on one level and yet this knowledge is not available to our linguistic competency (van Manen, 1990, p. 113). While difficult to describe (and impossible to transcribe) these are the spaces of meaning which are valuable to the reflective process. It is these spaces I want to investigate. It is because of reflection we are directed to action thereby causing us to reflect again and to act again, thus the cycle continues, recursive, progressive and never ending.

I have often been motivated by this simple Model (Figure 2) which I learned during my Crossroads experience.

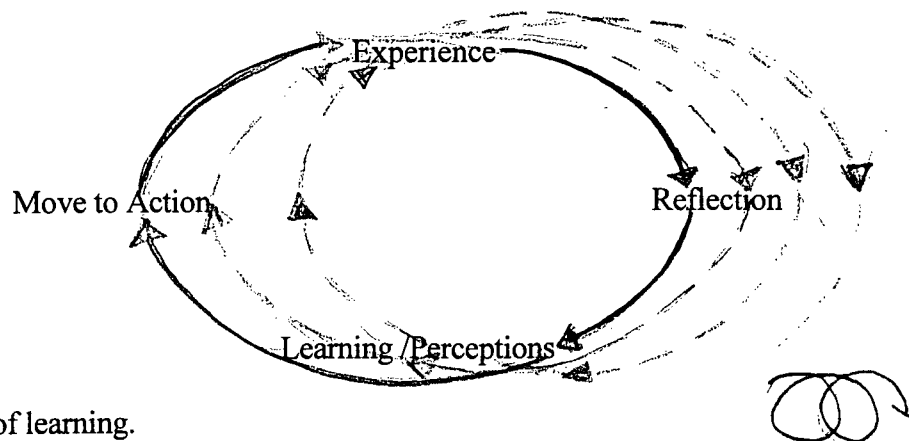


Figure 2. Model of learning.

Lather (1986) explains:

Coming to a new self conception requires an environment of trust, openness and support in which one's own perceptions and feelings can be made properly conscious to oneself. In which one can think through one's experiences in terms of radically new vocabulary which expresses a fundamentally different conception of the world. (p. 55)

### **The Importance of Anecdotal Narratives**

The importance of anecdotal narratives for both the returnee and the researcher is in its power to compel us into their story, to reflect and search for significance, to involve us personally in the teller's meaning, to transform us and to measure a deeper interpretive sense of reflection and usage of language (Van Manen, 1990). It is therefore crucial in how I structure my research in order to allow for the narration to unfold. The design will present the structure through which this reentry experience can be explored. Before establishing my design, it is important to consider the role of the researcher investigator, the voice of the subject participant or coresearcher, the dialogue and co-operative inquiry method, the data resources collection and analysis, and the debriefing and summation by both my own investigation and that of the participant (Park, 1993; Reason, 1994; Winter, 1987). The researcher must be aware that the opportunity to reflect through self-questioning may affect those who are being researched. They may feel discomfort, anxiety, false hope, superficiality, guilt, self doubt and irresponsibility, but they may also feel hope, increased awareness, moral stimulation and a certain thoughtfulness. The possibility of lingering effects may bring about new levels of awareness, possible changes in lifestyle and shifting priorities of living. The transformative effect on the researcher can heighten perceptiveness, increase thoughtfulness and tact, and may bring about a form of deep

learning. If done badly, these methods of self questioning may lead to feelings of anger, distrust, defeat, intolerance and insensitivity (Van Manen, 1990). It is fundamental to this type of study that the researcher be conscientious at all times, being sensitive to these concerns the researcher must be able to provide support to the returnee without judgement.

In order to do trustworthy and authentic research the participants need their voices to be heard: "situations cannot be reduced to a consensus but must be presented in terms of the multiplicity of view points which make up the situation" (Winter, 1989, p. 62). In the case of reentry the voice of the one does not make up the voice of the many. Winter further explains: "Our dialectical, reflexive, questioning, collaborative form of inquiry will create a plural structure consisting of various accounts and various critiques of those accounts, and ending not with conclusions . . . but with questions and possibilities" (p. 62).

### **Notion of Possibilities**

This notion of possibilities has guided me - in order to explore the experiential concepts of reentry while developing my reentry thesis. My intention was to extrapolate new information and examine my own reentry theories. In doing so, the concerns, issues, self disclosures and self discoveries of the participant and myself guide the method of research inquiry.

Reason (1994) advises, "the cycling and recycling through phases of action and reflection, and the application of validity procedures - is the discipline through which the co-inquirers are able to critically see through their subjectivity" (p. 333). Winter (1987) asks vital questions:

- How does the process manage to be developmental rather than merely repetitive?
- How does a 'view' become a 're-view' such that diagnosis becomes much more than a prelude to a repeated prescription?
- How may the self be envisaged such that its 'renewal' is a process of self transcendence rather than self reproduction?

These and many more questions guided me to develop what I hoped would be a sensitive and enlightening inquiry.

This process has two purposes. The first is to examine and develop my concepts of the reentry experience, and the second, through the process of reflection and dialectics, was to enable the participant to feel more comfortable with their own reentry, and to develop proactive skills which will be utilized not only in the home culture but also in this changing world of ours.

## **Method**

For my thesis research methodology, I have chosen Collaborative Participatory Action Research to be the vehicle. The intention of this study will be to, through a series of interview sessions and along with the returnee as collaborator, examine and investigate the changing perceptions of a returnee throughout ten months of their homecoming experiences. It has become evident to me that reentry research and training programs do not address the long term needs of the individual returnee throughout the various stages of the readaption process. As such



it has been my aim to collaboratively uncover some of these needs and devise coping strategies which would aid in proactive and successful reacculturation for the future.

The nature of this study required a deep level of communication to be developed between the interviewer and the returnee. In creating a rapport the interviewer needed to develop trust, sensitivity, keen observation, excellent listening skills and a genuine desire to understand the "truth" (Lather, 1986; van Manen, 1990; Winter, 1989). By "truth", I mean the returnee's understanding of their own experiences, as well, "truth" may also mean for only that moment in time. How and what returnees perceive at the "moment" of the interview is important to their story and its changing perspectives, allowing for, in future interviews, with more reflection and self assessment, diverse perceptions to emerge. As the researcher, I needed to be mindful of these changes, as they evolved throughout the various stages of reentry.

### **Selecting a Participant Co-Researcher**

In selecting a participant for this study, I specifically wanted to investigate the experiences of Canadians who had been overseas for approximately one year or more, and who had also just recently returned, having been home not more than three months. My original plan for this study was to investigate the stories of three distinctly different people: a student, a non-working mother and a businessman. The purpose of which was to exemplify the uniqueness of their individual experiences and thereby examine the personal transitions that each would go through. While acknowledging that this type of study might be enhanced by the use of multiple co-researchers as Crystal suggests (1997), I chose not to use this plan. Shortly after my first interview with Tanya, a student who will later be described in the Results section, I recognized

the richness of her personal experiences while examining her multitude of varied circumstances. It became clear to me that such an in depth investigation would require my full attention for this singular study. I was also fearful that the stories of three different individuals might result in a comparison and contrast, thus jeopardizing the uniqueness of the personal experience. Before proceeding with such a study, I needed to know what the complexities for an individual might look like. I also realized that I had not found, during my search through the literature, such a rigorous longitudinal exploration of the individual returnee. Sensing that multiple stories might risk the focus of my study, I therefore chose to concentrate on only Tanya's story. I recognized I would also need to devote myself to the time required for this intensive yearlong investigation. While I do believe that a longitudinal study of multiple co-researchers would be extremely valuable to enrich the existing knowledge of reentry, I also see this as more of a next step to extending the findings of this current study.

The returnee was given opportunities to examine the data collected and provide feedback which was incorporated into the analysis. Themes, assumptions, perceptions and theories were explored continuously to allow for recursive reflection and a deep and more complex understanding of the nature of these changing attitudes. The development of coping strategies was examined in order for the returnee to view reentry as a growthful learning experience.

The format for this study included a series of interview sessions at three different time periods of the reentry process. The time periods between each interview series was about three to four months. This was to allow for the transformation of attitudes and perceptions which occurred during the different stages of reentry.

In each series, there were three interview sessions, each approximately one and a half to two hours in length. The time interval between each interview session was approximately one to

two weeks. Each series was followed with a similar format. In the beginning, the first interview session discussed general information regarding past placement, historical perspective and initial response to being "home", and each successive interview dealt with more progressively complex issues, as well as responses in the past interview, and the nature of changing perceptions. The intention of the final interview session was to deal with the development of coping strategies and a reflective analysis of the data. A proactive approach attempted to ease the transition phases of the reentry process.

I purposely used the words "intention" and "attempt" in describing the final interview sessions, taking into account that the limitations of this study may cause these aspects to only be assessed superficially. "The lived experience has a temporal structure, it can never be grasped in its immediate manifestation but only reflected as a past experience" (Van Manen, 1990, p.36). In other words, reentry requires time - time for retrospective contemplation - time for concepts to be formed. This ten month study may not be able to offer the same kinds of insights that a longer study would. A three year study or better yet, a life time study, would be more ideal in order to better grasp the reentry process. But then, that would be another study.

My hope for this study was to be able to offer opportunities to observe changing perspectives of the returning experience that might not have been observed in previous studies.

## **Format Overview**

The following format will give an overview of the methodology used.

### **Series A:** *(Three months after returning home)*

- **First Interview Session** (one to two hours)
  - conversational exploration
    - regarding placement experiences
    - life story and perspectives
    - present perceptions and possible issues
- **Second Interview Session** (one to two hours; one week later)
  - exploring learning experiences
  - delving into changing perceptions  
(use of Validationgram as a tool)
  - reviewing past interview issues
- **Third Interview Session** (one to two hours; one week later)
  - review past interview and issue/perceptions
  - continuing analyses of process and development of coping strategies
  - development of "Mind Map"

### **Series B:** *(Six months after returning home)*

- **First, Second and Third Interview Sessions**
  - follow a similar format to Series A, based upon the needs of this Collaborative Participatory Research

### **Series C:** *(Ten months after returning home)*

- **First, Second and Third Interview Sessions**
  - follow a similar format to Series A and B, based upon the needs of this Collaborative Participatory Research
  - a retrospective look at the reentry process thus far, including the impact of this collaborative research
  - use of the Mind Map to encapsulate this experience and envision future endeavours

While I use the term "interview", the investigation more accurately resembled a collaborative exploration. The returnee's learning experiences were unraveled and through reflection, elicited perceptions. Upon examination of these perceptions, new emerging learnings, issues and concepts unveiled more new learnings. Thus the recursive cycle proceeded. By assisting the returnees in researching their own reentry process, the linkage between my theory and their experiences is woven together. Ideally I would like to continue this interview format every six months after this point for up to three years. But, as I said, that is another study.

### **Details of the Format**

The following is a more detailed version of the previous format, exemplifying the objectives of each of the three interviews within a series. All interviews were audiotaped, transcribed and were available for the perusal of the returnee and/or myself.

### **First Interview**

After a brief introduction of myself and the purpose and process of this study, the returnee was asked to describe her experiences before going overseas, living abroad, and upon returning home and how she perceived these experiences, and her reasons for returning. The interview, while conversational in style, often took the form of a narrative described by the returnee. Little interruption or probing occurred at this time, allowing for the returnee's complete thoughts and possible themes to emerge. At the end of the interview the returnee was asked to prepare for the next interview sessions by reflecting back on this conversation, and, by extracting

the learning experience which had seemed important to her, prepare something which would help her portray these perceptions. This portrayal could be in any form she chose. It could be depicted by a simple narrative, drawing, poetry, musical piece, or in any other manner that she would choose. Van Manen (1990) explains that employing literary material allows subjects to reflect hermeneutically on their experiences. I would like to add this notion, that it is also important that the "medium of the tool" be appropriate to the style of the person being interviewed whether it be literary, musical, artistic, poetic, and so on. The returnee's portrayal of her perceptions were to be shared in the next interview. The results of this are described in the data analyses of this study.

Before the second interview, I transcribed and examined the audio taped conversation for emerging themes and issues which I perceived the returnee deemed to be important. At the same time, I created an outline including trigger words or phrases, related to specific conversations, which I perceived might be of value to her. This was made available for possible use in all sessions. I also kept a journal, and encouraged the returnee to also do so.

## **Second Interview**

The returnee was to have begun with a presentation of her "portrayal" of her perceptions, followed by a discussion of the emerging themes from the returnee's point of view. A Validationgram was then employed to further investigate the issues. An explanation of this tool can be found in the Appendix. During this activity, guiding questions were asked to check my assumptions and to elicit more detailed information. The returnee was then asked, once again, to reflect back on this session and during the following week, to identify perceptions, important

learning experiences and any changes in attitudes which are evolving throughout this process. The returnee was also asked to think about possible strategies which she perceived might possibly be enhancing her ability to adapt to her home environment. I continued to write my journal and explored the changing perceptions and emerging themes, weaving both the returnee's concepts and my own together to form a more complete picture.

### **Third Interview**

The returnee was invited to begin the conversation by discussing her changing perceptions and emerging themes. We explored my observations of her experiences. The returnee provided me with feedback to ensure an accurate description of her perceptions. The intention of this was to develop an inventory which would create self awareness and recognition of growthful experiences, assisting the returnee in devising strategies which were of use for adaptation during the next phases of reentry.

At the end of the interview sessions the data and collaborative process were deconstructed and analyzed. The returnee and I worked in concert to ensure that the final information recorded reflected the reality of the returnee. At the same time, we wove the theoretical aspects of reentry research throughout her story, while being cognizant of trying not to influence her natural reentry experiences.

This format of interviewing was somewhat consistent in each of the series of interviews in order to meet the needs of this study, although some unforeseeable changes did necessitate rethinking, thus resulting in a change to the format.

### **Guiding Questions**

Questions emerged from the data in conjunction with new information or new ways of looking at issues. Before starting the inquiry, I did however, create a list of questions I wanted to investigate. These questions served as a guide to my interview questions. A sample of these guiding questions is as follows:

1. How would you describe your experiences living in the host culture?
2. What were your reasons for returning home?
3. How did you feel about returning home?
4. Since you have returned home to Canada, how would you describe this experience?
5. What were some of your expectations before leaving \_\_\_\_\_ (home country + host country)?
6. In what ways have these expectations been met, unmet, or changed?
7. Do you see a difference in your perceptions after being home for 2 weeks / 3 months / 6 months?
8. During self reflective writing and/or the Validationgram did you see issues of concern repeatedly being displayed? What might these issues be?
9. How would you describe your relationships with family / friends / colleagues since your return?
10. What are you able to do which helps you adapt to your present situation?

One particular question seemed to plague me throughout the interviews: How much of my past research, specifically relating to the pattern of reentry and its phases, should I reveal to



the returnee? Surprisingly, this was answered very early into the sessions by the returnee's perceptions and the natural course of her reentry experiences as well as by this style of collaborative research.

At the end of the data analyses of this study is a reflective chapter which brings together my own experiences with those of the returnees. An examination of my theories in collaboration with the returnee's and in relationship to the data collected is presented. Recognition of new concepts will hopefully enable further studies in this field to be more accurate and sensitive to the needs of the returnees as they progress through the readaption phases of reentry.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS: WHAT DOES A REENTRY EXPERIENCE LOOK LIKE?

#### Coming Home: Tanya's Story

While reviewing the data, I recognized this concept of total experience. It's simply not a matter of separating out their values and perceptions from their lived experiences. Our data collection will further explain that it is more complex than that. It is an unfolding, a revealing and an emerging experience. I realized that it would not serve Tanya's story to explain her passage through reentry transitions if I were to pick out only those examples which served my concepts. The myriad of aspects, variables, perceptions, and circumstances can not all be analyzed in this one study, yet they are valuable to the truthfulness and authenticity of Tanya's story. I therefore included, in the data, much of what was discussed in our interview conversations. What little I did choose to omit related to circumstances that were sensitive in nature and not necessarily pertinent to this study. I purposely excluded Tanya's telling of some events to allow for confidentiality as well as to preclude unnecessary discourse. However, it was important for Tanya to discuss these issues, as it gave her an opportunity to reflect, in tandem, and allowed us both to develop a deeper understanding of her experiences.

Yet, I am still left with the question of: How do I authentically and truthfully tell Tanya's story? I'm not sure that this is entirely possible. For in the end it is still by way of my perceptions, having been viewed and reviewed collaboratively with Tanya, that her voice will speak through our data analyses.

First, who is Tanya? To be honest, Tanya is not Tanya, only a pseudonym. For the purpose of this study, her name has been changed, not solely for the protection of Tanya's privacy, but also for the freedom it has allowed us in order to explore the many facets of her character and personal experiences.

So now, to begin my story of Tanya which began on the day we first met. Any of her experiences before this time are mere speculation and assumption on my part. I can only surmise what has occurred, before our first meeting, by what Tanya has revealed to me in our interviews.

It had been suggested to me by a former professor of Tanya's, who was also colleague of mine, that Tanya and I might be a good match for this study. Our initial introduction was via the telephone. Finding that our joint collaboration would be mutually agreeable to both of our needs, her reentry process and my study, we decided to commit ourselves to this intimate and intensive nine-month study.

#### **Series A - First Interview Session – November 2, 1997**

Tanya and I met officially for the first time when our first interview occurred. The location was in a coffee bistro, which was on neutral ground and in a comfortable setting. As I had discovered on the telephone, Tanya was a 26-year-old, first year graduate student. She had received a fellowship to attend the University of British Columbia and had returned home to Vancouver at the end of August, just one day before university started. At the time of this first meeting, it had been five months since she left India. During the first three months of that time, she had traveled between India, Canada and Africa before returning home to Vancouver. Now, two months later, she was still settling into school life after being away for a year. Her nine-

month work placement, from July of 1996 to May of 1997, had been in the state of Gurjurat, India. There she worked for an Internationally Sponsored Children's Health, Education, Training and Nutrition Association. During her time there, she was to learn how indigenous peoples managed and negotiated with their Non-Government Associations (N.G.O.'s). Following her placement, which ended May, 1997, Tanya and Tom, her boyfriend of five years, spent the month traveling through India before arriving home to Canada in June. While in India, she had been notified that she had been selected for a two-week placement in Tanzania the following July. The program was a Canadian partnership program with Tanzanian schools. This meant, however, that she would only be spending one and one half months in Canada before going overseas again. Upon leaving India, she returned to her family home in Ottawa for three weeks to visit with her parents. This time might be considered the "honeymoon period" of adjustment, except that while she was in India, her grandmother had passed away and as a result of her death, her grandmother's beloved cottage where Tanya had spent many of her summers was sold. At the same time, she also had been having difficulties reconnecting with her boyfriend so she made a trip to Vancouver to visit him during this time. As such her homecoming in June, as brief as it was, was not altogether happy times. She had been looking forward to resting after spending a stressful last month traveling with Tom in India, where, on the first day of the journey, she had also been robbed of all her money. However, there was little time to rest in Canada as she had to prepare for her trip to Tanzania at the end of July. Tanya described her time in Tanzania as feeling "a little unreal at first", but she was "happy to be away again. Away from all the stress of home". Her final return home from Tanzania in August, was a bit of a whirlwind. From Tanzania she went to London, England, for a four day visit to see a friend, then home to Vancouver for a week. Following this, she returned to Ottawa for two

weeks to visit her sister who had also returned from being in Africa. Finally, it was home to Vancouver to start school at the beginning of September. Seven places of residence in two months can be a bit taxing: "I just didn't have adequate time to adjust, moving from place to place".

### **Readiness to Return**

When Tanya left for India the previous year, she did not know what she would be doing in the following year upon her return. "Vancouver was the place I had chosen to make my home", since it was her place of residence for the past six years, as well as the place where her "partner", Tom, had resided. Tanya had graduated at the top of her class the previous year. "The only prospect I had was to go back to University to start Graduate School. If I hadn't had the trip to Tanzania, I was thinking I would have stayed in India". Much to her surprise, a Fellowship was awarded to her to study Adult Education. This now provided the much needed money for school. "School was a choice because there was nothing else, money was a big thing, and that was a part of the reason I chose school. It was a bad idea".

Early into the first interview, Tanya explained,

I hadn't been ready to return to Canada, leaving India had felt so abrupt, I felt quite panicky about the idea. I didn't have a sense of who I would be there [in Canada]. I wasn't ready to come back to my Old Self and that way of life, always thinking about the next step, which I see my has been about **playing the game**.

She explained that in India, she didn't have to know all the rules and perform. As mentioned previously many things were "on her plate" at the time of her departure from India. The death of her grandmother and her uncertain relationship with her partner, Tom added to her stress. A very hectic three months of travel, between leaving India and returning to school, combined with

indecision about her future left Tanya feeling overwhelmed. “I needed something that was going to direct me in where I was going”. School then became “an easy option”, but not necessarily one she wanted to make. “Because of this decision, at least I knew what was going to happen to me, where I was going to call home”.

### **Old Self vs. New Self**

In India, Tanya had discovered aspects about herself that she, “wasn’t ready to go back to being, in Canada”. She recognized that her “personal drive to perform, to be on top, to be a winner”, had affected her life in Canada. This drive she felt tended to make her “live in the future”. These aspects were all part of “Rules for Playing the Game”. This, she felt, had led to stress in her past two years. The year in India she felt she had been able to “ditch a lot of this baggage” about herself, and “that I’d had enough of a break away from this way of being. It’s not the way I like to live, that’s what I learned about myself in India.” Tanya found that she could be happy, living in another way. Yet, she was scared! “I was worried that when I returned I’d become that same old person that I wouldn’t be able to change, based on the strength of that experience in India. It almost didn’t seem long enough to work that through.” She hoped that she would be able to find a different pattern, a different way of being, back in Canada. However, at this point, having only been home for two months, she didn’t know of any other way to live at home. Her former pattern now created a conflict for Tanya back in Canada. Previously, the old self had been very successful and consequently, she received external validation for her achievements, resulting in success, awards, and recognition (S.A.R.).

## **Developing New Talents**

In India, she felt that she didn't need that kind of external validation or that type of success. Other things had replaced it: the ability to take the bus to work one half hours each way when none of the other foreign interns did so, her ability to cook Gujarati food quite well, the ability to develop genuine friendships with her work mates and other Indians, as well as working in another language which at first she didn't understand. These were successes for Tanya. The challenges of everyday living brought about a sense of accomplishment and developed respect from her host nationals and perhaps even created a sense of being unique. Above all this, it established for Tanya, a sense of belonging, and a sense that she "fit in" quite well. The Indian experience provided her with "an opportunity to learn, to be ensconced in an organization and to have an exciting social experience". At her work placement, Tanya had a chance for career development, "an experience I certainly couldn't have gotten here [in Canada] with the kind of background I have." At the same time, she learned about her strengths, weaknesses and being in situations that were very different.

One of the major things I learned about myself is, I like being in a situation where I don't know all the rules and therefore don't have to perform up to standard. In India I made strong connections cause I tried not to worry about the fact that I was confused. I was able to use it as an excuse to act genuinely. At first people thought I was a little reserved because I was just feeling my way around. I think that quietness at the beginning, and getting a better handle on how things worked, helped me to fit in with the people I worked with and played with. I could contribute at the same time, learn, without being intrusive or invasive. I could connect in a different way. No one expected me to be an expert.

Tanya found India a grounding experience,

grounded with everyday practical life, like making chapaties while listening to music. I also danced a lot, sang a lot, and participated in everyday celebrations. There was more value attached to these things. I like being a busy person, at the same time very creative and very practical. I had a lot of energy in India and

work was very engaging, being involved in change oriented programs, dealing with perspective transformation. I liked being part of a group of learners – part of a team.

While Tanya's job placement had been "exciting to be involved with transformational educational situations and connect in a way that was useful to other people", a conflict arose within her. She didn't see these aspects as changes in herself, but more as a realization "that I'd learned a lot about myself." She was happy with this new awareness yet, being in graduate school and back to playing the game didn't fit within this picture.

I see no meaning in theory. I feel I'm being pressured into saying something in a theoretical way about something, which I don't feel I have any theoretical connection. I may have a personal connection but I have trouble analyzing it. It's been a struggle. Work [in India] was very practical, very hands on. I enjoyed that. I'm kind of tired of thinking about it, theorizing about things I'd rather just do.

## **Confusion**

Upon returning to Canada, Tanya fully expected she would need some time for adjustment "about a week or two", but she had not expected to be confused for so long (at the time of the first interview, now after being home two and one half months). Much to her surprise, there were some fundamental things that she would have to deal with. She was now discovering that the things she had previously enjoyed doing, both in Canada and in India; she no longer had the time to spend doing them. "It's been a constant struggle trying to get back into a routine". Activities such as cooking, sewing, painting being creative and generally "home oriented", now had to be put on the back burner as school had become a priority.

But I wasn't connecting with school. It was frustrating me. It wasn't energizing me like it had in the past and that was doubly frustrating because it should. I'm too busy. I'm always playing catch up. Coming home, I suffered a huge loss of



confidence academically. I'd read something and then I read it again trying to relate to it. I don't remember anything, I don't know anything. Even the things I know, I know I feel, I don't know. My whole way of life, I'm not back in a pattern that I feel comfortable with. I'm not reconnecting with friends; many of them have moved on, they graduated and are no longer here. I feel I haven't connected with Vancouver, being home yet. I need to spend time doing things that make me feel human.

In this first interview Tanya mentioned briefly reconnecting with her partner Tom had been difficult. "I had expectations about my relationship and that was pretty central." Unfortunately, we were not able to delve into this issue during this interview as it was almost the end of our allotted time and, coincidentally at that moment, Tom arrived to pick up Tanya. More information about this issue is provided in later interviews.

Another important aspect to this first interview had to do with identifying the confusion Tanya experienced. "I can't separate things out right now, where things are difficult and where things are coming from. I haven't systematized them yet. I tend to forget that I've had this experience, that I haven't quite digested it yet." Tanya explained that friends, who had also been on the placement, and had returned before her, were still experiencing some difficulties. "So, this at least helped to not feel inadequate."

### **Health Concerns: Tanya's**

Tanya explained:

But in terms of me, I think this is maybe having some sort of effect on ... well ... something is wrong with my health from being over there and I think that's wearing me down also. I was sick twice in India, and not particularly sick in Tanzania. However, since I've been home I've had problem after problem. I keep having this recurring mouth infection. They can't figure out what it is and it's not something that a normal doctor has seen before. Small infections after infections like cystitis, which they can't figure out. All this suggests that my immune system is low. I've had myself checked out for parasites and I don't have

any. I think I'll go to a tropical disease clinic, because it seems to be happening every three weeks ... Lesions all over the top of my mouth ... It makes it difficult to eat or to talk for about ten days. Definitely this could be making me tired too.

At this point, Tanya and I discussed the aspect that health can be a concern for a number of returnees. None of the literature I have read covers this aspect in any detail. However, from my own personal experiences and that of other returnees I have met, as well as my Crossroads reorientation training, I have come to believe this issue of health concerns should not be overlooked. Tanya's health was a continual concern to her throughout the future interviews. More details will be provided as the data unfolds.

### **Health Concerns: Jan's**

In my own case, I came home from India with chronic fatigue and regular gastrointestinal problems. It was a year and a half before I was diagnosed as having a type of parasite, which was not common to Canadian doctors. On the other hand, when I returned from Africa I had no physical health concerns. Yet seven years ago, after one and one half years of living in Japan, I came home with a chronic respiratory condition that was later diagnosed as severe allergies. I am still dealing with the treatment for this today. Fortunately, it is well under control. At the time of this interview (November, 1997), the aspect of health concerns and its affects on returnees' experiences became an emerging issue, and I feel it is definitely an area, which requires further research.

## **Preparing for Next Interview**

Before the end of our first interview, I asked Tanya if she would be able to describe and portray her reentry experiences thus far, by the use of any medium with which she was comfortable. As she had mentioned earlier in this interview that she was creative and she liked to paint she thought she might be able to do this and would be able to share this for the purpose of discussion next interview. We also discussed the aspect of journal writing. I explained that I would be keeping a journal, and at some point in the interview we could explore where my thinking was going with her data. Tanya said that at times in her life she does keep a journal, however she was presently very busy, but would also try to keep one.

Thus ended our first interview.

## **Series A - Second Interview Session – November 21, 1997**

Our next interview was postponed one week as Tanya had to go to a conference in Los Angeles to present a paper on Gender Issues in India. On November 21, 1997, almost three weeks after the first interview, our second interview took place. It had now been three months after Tanya's arrival home. Tanya had just returned from her four-day conference in Los Angeles. While this had delayed our interview schedule by two weeks, it had also been a good chance for Tanya to explore some of her issues. While in Los Angeles, she had also had an opportunity to stay with an Indian friend who happened to have visiting family members at the same time as Tanya's visit.

The purpose of this second interview had been to delve further into the aspects, which were issues for Tanya. Here she was to share her Portrayal of her reentry experience as she saw

it. Due to the circumstances related to school and her presentation in Los Angeles, she had so little time that she was unable to prepare her Portrayal. This was not a problem as I had also anticipated using the Validationgram (Ishiyama, 1995; see Appendix), in order to explore deeper aspects of values and validation and allow for other issues to emerge.

We began the second interview with an assessment of our first interview, regarding levels of comfort, and any questions or areas of concern not covered by our first session. Also, we briefly discussed my previous research and questioned how much I should reveal to her based on both our comfort levels. I also explained that I didn't want to influence her thinking about her own reentry experiences. She should have the freedom to express her concerns to me, particularly if she didn't agree with something. We both acknowledged it was probably best not to discuss my perceived phases of reentry or patterns of behavior so as not to inadvertently define a "Norm" for comparison.

### **The Need to Talk About It**

Tanya began by explaining that the first interview had been good for her. She recognized that she was now experiencing some problems.

It was good for me to talk about it. I needed to do it. I've been seeing a counselor at Women Studies since our last session and I told her about it [these interviews and study]. She thinks I have a lot of things I need to talk out so it's good to have a forum to do that. It gives me a chance to talk.

Tanya was now able to look at her reentry with a more proactive approach.

I have a new idea about this confusion. I'm not sure that I should try and sort things out. I think I should just go with it ... I'm not sure, I've been fighting it for a month now [the confusion], but I just have this gut feeling.

When asked if this concept had come up with the counselor, Tanya replied,

Not really, she's from a different perspective. We talked a bit about the hierarchy of academia and the power dynamics which I believe, but I'm not sure that's what is happening to me. Counselors are there for short term solutions, but I like it because it gives me a chance to talk.

Tanya then expressed something, which had been puzzling her.

Did you find, I mean there were times when somebody asks me about it [the overseas experiences] and you can't get rid of me and there are other days when I'm so desperate not to talk about it, sometimes I just forget, that's how confused my head is. I have a bad memory. It's funny that it works at school. Sometimes the same thing I can remember very clearly and sometimes not. I have quite clear moments and quite fuzzy moments. Now all I have is fuzzy moments. I call it, 'fuzzy head'. That's how I've felt for months now [It's now been six months after leaving India]. Although sometimes I had it in India, I recognized the confusions soon after I got home from India but then I got this money [for the Fellowship] and I got some direction. But I think it's growing [the confusion].

Tanya then explained that soon after returning home, she had drawn a diagram of her life experiences since leaving high school. This Mind Map, as she called it, was an attempt to sort out some of the threads of her life that had affected the decisions she had made. She described her feeling "like a moving elevator where I just get 'pulled along' and then sometimes I float till I decide things". When asked what she had expected might be adjustments in Canada before she left India, she said "I didn't expect this – to feel incredibly lost, not thinking clearly. It's tough to live this way and not do anything about it". We then discussed the fact that it does take time yet people eventually can come to a different perspective and see this as a growthful experience.

Tanya explained,

I could see that when people are dealing with it [the reentry experience] and that if they had a very intense experience they would either push that away or wouldn't be able to and ... if you could recognize it as part of your past experience then it might make it easier. It didn't really occur to me until around the time of the first interview, before going to the counselor, that some of this was culture shock. I thought there was something else going on and I couldn't see how it could be related and how it could be going on so long after being back in Vancouver. People don't know that it takes this long! But why shouldn't it, because it does take that long when you go into another country.

## Validationgram

At this point I introduced the Validationgram (see Appendix), which is a convenient tool devised by Dr. Ishiyama to explore areas which the subject recognizes where they are able to receive validation, while at the same time helping them to recognize those aspects which they value and those which they do not, or no longer value. At the center is Self with three concentric circles surrounding it. Those aspects of most importance are listed closest to the center and those of least importance are to be placed progressively outward. I used this tool intentionally as a vehicle to delve into Tanya's perceptions and aspects that she had previously expressed were issues for her. It also allowed us to delve into new aspects, which possibly had emerged through association. Finally, it brought about an opportunity for deeper communication, as we were still in the process of developing a "confidant" relationship. The Validationgram also vicariously directed the focus away from Tanya or myself, while encouraging a somewhat more objective level of conversation, that being the reentry experience itself (see Figure 3). Underlined words in the following text indicate words that Tanya inscribed on the Validationgram.

Tanya started by explaining that her family was "her fundamental support", thus she placed Family closest to Self at the inner circle of relationships.

Alot of my supports have caved in while I was away. I'm rebuilding them now, but I feel my family was a stable one. Alot of my friendships have changed, my relationships, acquaintances, work contacts, interest contacts have changed because I ended alot of things when I left. Even my home, I lived with a family before I left and those relationships are tricky reestablishing. People have moved on and are different. I'm different; certain Friends have kind of changed too. You know, in coming back, certain things were different for me and that took them a little while to realize, and vice versa. So now it's a little difficult to realize who the other person is. I guess I'm talking more about a particular friend. Things were a bit strained when I got back. I was so busy trying to figure out what I was doing back here. I think she was a little frustrated because I tend to crawl into myself. Also she is my partner's sister, so there is an interesting triangle ... stressful.

[illegible]

of: \_\_\_\_\_ name \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewed by: J. Smith

SAR.

**Relationships**

[illegible]

**Increasing Importance**

→  
NAVID ENTINANK  
THE POSTMAN  
DECEASED  
RENDER

**Places**  
A/Houahou

© F. Ishu Ishiyama (1992)

**Figure 3. Tanya's Validationgram**

So now when I look at Places. I guess that would probably be my little home". [Home she places close to the center of self under the title: Places]. "I love it, it's a Space of My Own, my retreat. I need my shell, my home on my back, my things around me, my pictures, my books, I like to be alone a lot of the time. In India the way I established my home was by being very domestic, I cooked, I ... Just doing my laundry took hours. Just being domestic really grounds me, I belong. Certain things are always with me, my Pictures, my Books, things that I'm attached to. Oh, but then there's my Cottage in Northern Ontario, My favourite place in the whole world [Grandmother's cottage in Northern Ontario], but it sold this summer. I'll probably never go to it again. It's funny, even when I was in India, when I thought about being homesick, that's what I would miss. One thing I really miss in India is my place of Work. It was my first experience spending a whole day with a Team of women. It had its ups and downs, its office politics, but it was nice.

I noticed this because I'm not feeling at home in my faculty. Since I'm not feeling comfortable, I don't go to school much. But I loved my undergraduate program. I loved the building the place, the people. I have pretty special connections with places. Which is why I spend alot of times in Coffee Shops. I work better in the midst of Chaos.

You know I just realized this, how I like to be in a situation with People, but not necessarily engaged directly with them, just have something going on above and beyond Being with People. Pretty non-demanding. Like in India, at first the interaction was verbally superficial and initially stressful because you felt you should be making a verbal connection. But once you know you can't then the stress diffuses and it's actually a very easy way to be with people.

At this point in the interview, Tanya expressed that she was having difficulty with the Validationgram. The categorization of ACTIVITIES, RELATIONSHIPS, PLACES, and THINGS, combined with the direction of lines and their importance seemed to be somewhat limiting to her.

Things sort of spill over and I don't spend much time thinking of things that aren't important to me. So things that are on the periphery are really on the periphery in my mind. It's funny, I can only think of things that are important to me, right now, because I'm, gathering my sources of strength. I'm trying to figure out what is important to me right now. Like my Paintings [which she puts close to the center of Activities], I just paint colours, Christmas cards, collages and stuff like that. I did that in India, I brought my paints with me. It was something I realized I had to do. It's grounding, creative, hands on experience.



In Grad school, Tanya found that she was so busy with her readings that she had little time to do all these things. While our discussion continued she sporadically would write these aspects on the Validationgram, under whatever category seemed appropriate.

In telling the story of her Los Angeles experience (which she listed under relationship in the Validationgram), she mostly discussed the opportunity to visit with her friend and family from India. Spending time with them brought back feelings of intimacy which she had experienced in daily living in India.

It's a way of Being, which is very intimate and having a lot of fun together all the time because you are together all the time – you even sleep together. That's what we did. The first day [in Los Angeles] they perceived me as fitting right in. They didn't have any of that awkwardness. It helped me to realize how much I had missed that kind of relationship. I almost yearn for it.

It was important to me that they were comfortable with me ... a very high compliment. It freed me to be how I want to be, which is to Physically Connect. In India, people tend to touch each other, but they also connect without touching, just by the way they speak. It's a different kind of intimacy and what comes from that is a real genuineness for what you are Feeling Emotionally. It's an Intimate Way of Being With People, that I don't find here really, not the same way. Maybe it's easier for me to be with them because it's normal for them. But trying to be that way here, I can just imagine what my friends would think.

Some of this is very emotional with me. I was telling the counselor that it's very emotional to think about some of these things since I've come home. Something will hit me and I'll just start to cry, out of sadness or happiness. Things just seem to be affecting me very profoundly. It's nice in some ways, but it leaves me feeling very out of control.

This concept of feeling out of control led me to question the support offered by her organization. I asked Tanya how they had dealt with debriefing. She explained "there was really nothing, I was so surprised".

Reflecting on this, I wondered about the aspect of inability to speak about a situation sometimes after an intensive experience. In my journal, I wrote:

Over the years, I have come in contact with returnees who have said that at first they couldn't talk about their experiences. Is it because they are trying to keep themselves together or is it that talking about it only brings about more memories,

sometimes causing pain, which further causes them to lose control? In either case is it better for them to talk about it or better to leave them be, allowing for a suitable time for them to reflect, while at the same time respecting their necessity to keep it together?

At this point while still working on the Validationgram, Tanya began to branch out and explore her values of Success, Awards and Recognition (S.A.R.), which she wrote in the right hand corner top of the Validationgram. In India, she felt she had developed a respect and closeness with her Indian friends because of the way she dealt with everyday life. This also affected the way she viewed her own accomplishments.

The Challenges of Everyday Life were so satisfying because they were so hard. The fact that I could take the bus an hour and a half each way to work in a city of five million people, that I could deal with people on the Bus. It was stressful, but it gave me so much strength to be able to do it. People were developing a respect for me within their own cultural values. It gives you a different level of acceptance, a type of validation, success in other way. [Anyone having been to India would understand that this challenge of jumping on a crowded moving bus is not the same as taking a bus in Canada.] It's such a little thing, but it's a huge thing. Maybe that's one reason why I felt that I didn't need to Play the Game. There is something about the definition of success that is definitely not these things [Tanya draws an arrow back to being Genuine]. I don't think that my values have changed as much as they are becoming more apparent. I've come to this realization that if I don't make them part of my life then I'm not going to be living the way I want to, I have to be responsible to myself. There is a real tension between these things: family, friends and relationships [F.F.R.] versus success, awards and recognition [S.A.R.]. I want them both. However, when I'm Working very hard and I gain a lot of these [S.A.R.], then I'm very tired. When I'm very tired, these things [F.F.R.] are very difficult for me. I don't know how I can reconcile the person I need to be. I've been struggling with this whole idea of running away – mentally. But I need to fulfill certain responsibilities. I need to have enough money. I need to feed myself. I have social responsibilities that I need to ... this tension causes anxiety in some way that prevents me from being these ways [she points to being genuine and intimate way of being with people].

Tanya then began to look at the differences in her manner of working in India and in Canada.

My schedule in India was much more structured. Even though it was busier when I left the office, I had to leave my work. Here I don't have a schedule so I have to prioritize my time into work. When I'm not at work, I'm engaged mentally at work. I'm really trying to take time off now.

I worked very hard in India but my whole reason for working was different. It wasn't working to get somewhere. There was no Ego involved in it at all. I was part of a team. It was exciting and these things [relationships] were easier. I remember thinking I would be more spontaneous and by the end I felt like I had a lot of permission. I guess that's what I mean about this culture and the way we are with people and not being very genuine. People here are very awkward in the way that they say meaningful things to each other. It's a weird thing to me now it didn't seem weird to me until I went to India.

Continuing the interview, we then discussed a phrase Tanya used in the last session:

"connected with being away". She explained that in India she felt grounded.

I had a lot of energy and I was engaged in my work. It was exciting, exhausting and a new set of experiences. I was involved in things that were real. In CHETNA [the organization where she worked in India], I was involved in programs that were participatory. We were playing with information that the participants brought up. We experienced new ways of looking at things. It was very much perspective transformation – by this I mean – what it means to learn – and it speaks to me of inspiration – a new way of seeing things that gives you energy the way a breath of fresh air does. This has influenced me in my way of thinking about many overseas programs, which speaks from a Western dominant voice and that fact that we tend to homogenize other people. I now value certain writers like Majid Rahnema, and Annie Miller, when they talk about being genuine with people. Once you figure out that you don't really know anything and get over it, then you can really start to behave in ways that are genuine".

### **Series A - Third Interview Session – December 2, 1998**

At the time of this interview, Tanya had now been back in Vancouver for three months.

This interview took place one week following the last session. I started the session by describing my purpose for investigating reentry experiences. Then I explained that through my own experience and those of other returnees, I have formulated some concepts about reentry.

However, I needed to find out what the academics say, what had not been explored, and to investigate new emerging ideas, combined with my concept that each returnee will go through their reentry experiences in their own way. While there may be some universal experiences,

each returnee is unique. I explained that I was not going to be marking her experiences off on a checklist; her feedback was very important. It was also very important that she saw herself as a co-researcher who has an influence on the direction of this study. She should not feel as if she was a guinea pig or lab rat, trying to meet my expectations, that whatever she felt or experienced was valid and important.

### **Pros and Cons of the Validationgram**

Due to her involvement with school, Tanya had not been keeping a journal. Therefore, at this time, I volunteered to read to her my impressions of the past interviews:

I had felt good about the interviews and information I was getting but ambivalent about my own technique. Maybe that has to do with experience because the more you do something the more you feel that you are on the right track. I was concerned though, for what I sensed was Tanya's apprehension about doing the Validationgram. My interpretation is that you're not thrilled with a graph or a chart or something that slots you in an area. I noticed that you had expressed hesitancy in the past interview. I did think, however, that the Validationgram served its purpose for me by opening up a depth of conversation and bringing out issues we might not have been able to achieve at this point.

Agreeing that she had felt uncomfortable with it, Tanya then explained why she had difficulties with this tool.

One reason is that it's difficult to break things down. But more than that since I've come back I have fallen into a distrust of these kinds of things. I wouldn't want to see the stages of my development. These things don't do a lot of explaining. What they can do is set up this idea that there is a normal way to do things.

We continued to discuss the use of the Validationgram. While considering that it might make some people uncomfortable it had also been valuable to me in that it brought out aspects that I hadn't thought of and highlighted issues which were concerning Tanya. I agreed with her

in that it was a trade off to consider the value of this versus the comfort level of the participant. If it appears to influence the participants view of what is normal then it isn't of value. Tanya suggested if there were other mediums that people could use, that it might be helpful and compatible to their own style. This was actually my original reasoning for doing a "portrayal of reentry". Later in the interviews, we see Tanya's Mind Map also serves this purpose. "But it's good that you're not setting a scale," Tanya said, "I've been thinking a lot about this. It goes with my vision of counselors and their concept: Are you normal?" Tanya then described a situation that a friend was going through while dealing with issues of grief, and that a counselor had indicated that her friend should be at a certain stage after a year. "I just wanted to wring that counselor's neck". This brought up another emerging theme for me. That is the returnee's comfort level with the idea of seeing a counselor. This issue will be discussed later in my analyses.

### **Tanya's Perspective of Training for Cross Cultural Experiences**

Tanya then described her perception of training for overseas placements. "The purpose of an overseas experience should focus on these issues. The so-called normal way to do things doesn't work everywhere. It doesn't even work here, or even for you. So I struggle with these things." Tanya then clarified what she had meant in the past interview by overseas programs speaking from a Western dominant voice.

Three things that would be important to an overseas program would be to take ourselves out of the center, cause I think we tend to do this in an overseas context, we tend to see ourselves as the dominant voice, which is the Western voice. The second thing is that we must recognize the multiple voices. As young people we tend to homogenize everything that happens in the third world. Everyone's poor, everyone's backward or corrupt or some kind of variation on it. Then the third is

the grand story; it's really a combination of the two. It isn't three separate points because it's really about this [taking yourself out of the center and recognizing the multiple voices] helping that [to complete the grand story]. I see this as being very complimentary with the work you're doing the whole process of reentry is valuable for orientation. What has concerned me about my program and cross-cultural experience is that the value of the cross-cultural experience is being minimized in lieu of the new skills focus programs. Young people are being left on their own to do it. My organization talked about entering a country but never about leaving. They didn't address the other issues. Like what happens when you come back. Their focus was extremely academic and skills based and didn't deal with who you are or what you are when you come back. Their (the organization which had sent Tanya overseas) focus was on management – we were learning about how they (Indians) manage so that when we come back, there will be an understanding of how they (Indians) manage. There was no concept of learning from them, so we can improve our own management practices in Canada.

Before Tanya had gone overseas, in her undergraduate program, she had taken a course from Ellie Bains, in which the concept of Othering was discussed.

We looked at ourselves as professionals and how we behave as professionals. We looked at what kinds of choices we are making when we choose to behave in particular ways. We looked at how people assume that's the way things are, and how that sets up what people feel is normal ... then we looked at the consequences of all of these things.

Tanya felt that these concepts ingrained in her before she went to India were very helpful, enabling her to adapt and integrate within their culture. It was important to see these concepts in action. Yet, on returning home, it was as if nobody cared. People often don't know what to make of their cross-cultural experiences. "Suddenly this whole idea of cross-cultural exchange in becoming less attractive," Tanya proclaimed.

### **Tanya's New Insight**

#### ***It Takes Time***

Maybe I should share this thought with you that I had today, about what's happening I think things are starting to trickle into my life. I've come back home here to start a life that I'm accustomed to, so you are who you think you are. But

really slowly, things start to trickle into your life, in the ways that you've changed (seven months after leaving India, and three and one half months after being home). People say to me I'm a changed person. But when I came back, I felt different but I didn't feel like a changed person. This is the first time I've realized that things are changing and this is maybe why I'm having such a hard time. I don't know when it started and I don't know when it's going to end ... I'm changing and I'm not comfortable with pretty major things ... I just haven't been aware, that's why I don't know what to do ... I can see why people go away to another overseas placement, to avoid it. I know that's not the thing for me to do, I'm far too aware that is what I'd be doing.

It's very confusing. I don't have a vision of myself anymore. It's unsettling. Unsettled is what you're supposed to feel when you come back. I think this goes back to this whole concept of normal. Anyway, I can see why people would go back cause that would be the easy thing to do right now. It's very uncomfortable and confusing, like I don't know why suddenly I'm not interested in the things I used to be interested in. I'm not sure exactly what, but I used to be driven ... way more than I am now. I'm more of a loner now. Oh well, other people [some of her friends] are going through this too, at least I know that it's beyond my own feelings.

In my journal, I had written:

This is the first time Tanya has spoken of her awareness that she herself has changed. It's been three months now since she has been back. I wonder if it's the same for other returnees, to take this much time to recognize the changes within themselves. It did for me. And like Tanya, for me it was also a slow dawning of awareness, although I knew from my training that I probably would change, I just wasn't aware of the subtleties of that change.

I shared with Tanya another point I had written in my journal: "much of what Tanya talks about in these past interviews has to do with India. I wonder if she has time to think about things, other than school, if her head is still in India?" In fact, Tanya explained,

I've sort of been wondering about that over the past couple of days. It's not that my head is in India, it's just that it doesn't know where it is. It's sort of a non-vision. I've been having a difficult time visualizing myself ... I know that I'm not here. But certainly I've been thinking a lot about it.

Tanya talked about a friend who had experienced something similar just moving to Vancouver from Kamloops.

Although it wasn't an overseas thing for her, she'd been doing something she really loved. You know, it doesn't have to be connected with a place. For me it's

a whole combination of things. Like my job placement – I was doing an exciting job, that I don't have the potential to get here, where here it is absolutely not the case. I felt really, really useful and part of a team. I know that when you're away, you tend to idealize, suddenly you only remember the good times. I know that I idealized my relationship with my partner while I was away. I do find myself thinking and dreaming a lot about my experiences in India, but I still have a grip on the fact that it wasn't all peaches and cream.

### *It Takes Time To Digest Things*

I reminded Tanya, as we had discussed earlier, that things take time to develop and that is part of the problem of adjustment. I then described how the impact of moving frequently had had an effect on me and my understanding of adjustment. No pain, no gain. "Well, that's exactly it," Tanya explains, "I was so forgiving of myself in India with the time that it would take. As much as I established many intimate connections, it was at least three months before I was comfortable anywhere".

Our discussion continued on the topic of Proactive approach to reentry. We began an exploration of "what might make it easier for Tanya to adapt to the changes she is experiencing". At this time, she wasn't able to come up with suggestions. She described:

Your concepts grow within you and they connect with other things, it's not an immediate process. You have to digest something before you can express it. I know that I feel things very profoundly and that they affect me very profoundly so that I cannot dissociate things. I'd like to be able to live in a particular way and I don't know what that way is. It's more that of being genuine. But I know that's not the way I've been doing things. I've been doing a lot of reading lately and realize that there is another layer of doing things that I'm not getting at ... but that I need to get there.

This has led me to wonder about periods of gestation needed to digest experiences. An idea I have been playing with since analyzing these first interviews. There seems to be a sense



of timing, which may affect the returnees' ability to conceptualize their own experiences. How this works, I'm not sure at this time. There will be more discussion about this later in the data.

### ***It Takes Time to Develop Routines and Feel Comfortable***

Tanya continued,

I think it's important to have things like routines or rituals in your life. It's sort of a rooting, a grounding. That's what I'm trying to find. It's funny, I've sort of noticed that all these things I like to do, like baking and painting, well, what happened is that I thought I wasn't doing them because I didn't have time but actually now I have some time and I'm still not doing them. I don't feel like doing anything so it's not just a time thing. I don't feel that there is something I'd rather do. I'm kind of depressed. I've also not been very good about hiding things like my confusion and all the new things about me. What I've been doing is avoiding seeing people, more or less. Because I don't feel I can explain it and I don't feel it's comfortable for them. It's like this new way of being just isn't working here or I'm just slow to find where it works. It's not other people necessarily it's more me not feeling comfortable anymore. I find it difficult to talk to people at school in an academic situation. I'll be speaking about something and then suddenly I realize that I don't know what I'm talking about cause I realize I've only learned so much. Sometimes I have difficulty understanding how people can see things in a different way.

### ***It Takes Time to Develop Relationships***

I asked Tanya about her support networks, which we had spoken about in the last interview. She reiterated that her family in Ottawa was the main one, that she was very lucky they were so supportive but that they weren't here. Her friends with whom she had intimate relationships had moved out of the city after graduation. She felt that she definitely needed them for support. In addition, she had lost many contacts with school acquaintances and volunteer organizations when she was gone for the year. Tanya interjected that

I think that's kind of telling when you end something and then you come back again, then you have to ... all over again start again. Definitely, my support network has changed a lot. It's probably something I should work on but those things take time.

Tanya had not voluntarily mentioned her relationship with her partner, Tom, as part of her support network and I hesitated to ask her directly, sensing that it may have been a sensitive issue at this time. That perhaps further into the next interview it may come up more naturally in conversation. I did however, ask her, near the end of this interview how she would describe her relationship with Tom? However, once again my timing was poor as he again arrived to pick up Tanya. She was only briefly able to explain before she saw him, "I think it's people's most important one [relationship], if you think about it, so what happens with it is certainly an interesting part of reentry". She was able to explain that:

He travels a lot and is gone two-three weeks out of every month. I've probably seen him a total of twelve days in the past month and a half. It's not a lot of time so it's pretty difficult to figure out where you stand when every time you get together it's like starting over again.

### **Health Concerns Continue**

The question of Tanya's health arose again as we explored the issue of her mouth lesions.

I definitely know there is something wrong with my health. It came back again this weekend and it's still swollen and discoloured again as you can see [there appears to be something that looks like a cold sore or impetigo on her upper lip]. My doctor sent me to a dermatologist, so of course, it starts swelling when she is not there. It seems to be associated with a few other things and comes back every four weeks. Above and beyond that, I've had other chronic infections. I'm convinced that I now have to go to a tropical disease clinic. I can't remember being like this in India, but you see that's me. I just tend to write things off as being something else.

## **Tanya's Assessment of Our Collaborative Research**

Before the end of this session after reading out my journal notes, I asked Tanya for some feedback, such as how this style of interviews was working for her, any pro's and con's, or suggestions. As mentioned previously, Tanya did have difficulty with the Validationgram, whether this was a personal preference or my delivery or even a matter of timing, this will all be taken into consideration. On the whole, Tanya said,

I enjoy doing this, I don't think that it's invasive, I think that you think things through before you approach them, by the questions, you have the way of explaining what you are doing ... and you're pretty clear on everything. You're flexible. I'm a pretty unstructured person. It works for me.

### **Series B - First Interview Session – February 6, 1998**

In this second series of interviews, six months after Tanya had been home, we continued to explore her multitude of issues. The perceptions that Tanya had expressed in the first interview, three months before, took on deeper and richer significance. It had been eight months since Tanya left India. The issues regarding separation and feelings of loss had changed while at the same time aspects of being more settled in her home became more evident. How had Tanya adjusted, by what means and what strategies had she developed to facilitate her adaption were explored in this interview series. Emerging issues continued to be a focus and new conceptions of reentry were unfolding.

This first interview occurred approximately two months after the last interview. Tanya began this interview by describing the return experiences of her friend Trina. Unlike Tanya, Trina came back to much the same structure she had left in Toronto. She had come back to her

fiancé, her corporate fund raising job, her house and her family. This was seemingly all routine, but for one exception, she had to leave her placement in India abruptly due to the sudden illness of her father in Canada. As a result, she had regrets about leaving India and desperately missed it. Her family and fiancé who have never had this kind of experience could offer her little support and she felt she had no one with whom she could talk. When Tanya and Trina got together in January, Tanya explained that Trina was very thankful to have the opportunity to share her experiences with her. As Tanya compared her experiences to Trina's, she recognized the vast differences in their experiences and how the things she felt she had been lacking, family and friends and stability, didn't seem to make it any easier for Trina, who appeared to have those things.

Just when I was thinking more structure would be nice, I looked at Trina and realized that's not necessarily true. Her reentry isn't any easier than mine and I do get a chance to talk about it here. What we both realize now, is that it does take a long time. I told her about these interviews and said it was like therapy. Well, at least she says she's feeling more settled, since December, and she's getting a clearer view about what's happening – that's my interpretation, anyway.

### **Sense of Belonging**

Tanya then began to talk about the changes she has noticed in herself over the past two to three months. Although this was the same question I had asked her in past interviews, when she had previously been unable to clearly define this aspect, she was now able to articulate her concerns without hesitation.

At Christmas time, it was a very bad time for me. I was quite depressed and my parents were worried about me. I found out from my grandparents about our family history and a relative who had clinical depression. This started me thinking about my own depressions and some of the issues that are related to my India experience. Like the question of who I am, playing the game and running

around. Having a sense of belonging to someone, to something, to someplace and what I don't experience living here. I've been very transient for the past one and one half years and I've been feeling very lonely. Not lonely for friends. I just don't have a sense of belonging anywhere. In India, the sense of belonging was stronger there. I had instant feedback that friends and people in my community wanted me around. Maybe it's because I was a foreigner and they make you feel welcome, or maybe it's this whole external validation thing. I've felt this way for a long time. It isn't something new but it was different when I was in India.

As Tanya spoke with more clarity about her sense of belonging, she explained that it had been since Christmas that she had had a better understanding of her issues. She was starting to realize that she was developing an awareness.

We then discussed my observations of the first series of interviews. In the first interview, she expressed concerns of belonging, connecting, and attachment. In the second interview, she had difficulties articulating when asked about these aspects. In the third interview, she was clearer on these issues: connecting with her partner, attachment with people and being a part of things.

Tanya's response to this was "See, they are all things of belonging".

These issues started us examining the feeling of belonging that some people achieve when they are overseas. Is it because you are a foreigner and people feel the need to look after you? Is it because maybe you are alone and in some cultures, this aspect is not usual and therefore, people take care of you? Or is it because you are involved in something that demands your whole focus, these new experiences may require your thoughts to remain occupied with other things, allowing little time to think about yourself. Tanya explained, "For me, I think I was on a pretty big energy high a lot of the time that I was there. Everything demands more attention. I really enjoyed that kind of high."

## Heightened Awareness

This notion of a “high” caused me to wonder about a concept I’ve been formulating regarding heightened awareness when first living in another country. In my journal, I wrote:

Along with that goes the aspect of heightened senses, where new smells, sounds, feelings of the air and of course the visual effects combine to affect our senses in a way that actually overwhelms us. We live at such a high level of energy that after a while we become numb to it. For me it also affected my emotional responses in that I tried not to let myself react immediately to situations in order to allow for me to be able to make sense of them. Nevertheless, the heightened awareness is still there.

I wonder how long this feeling may last, while you are trying to adjust to another culture? I’m speculating to say four to six to possibly even eight months and then it dissipates. To this date, I have not seen any research on this aspect. To my surprise when I returned home for a short visit, after living eight months in Japan, I also experienced this heightened awareness in Canada. I was equally surprised when I returned to Japan three weeks later that I didn’t have that initial experience, it had been replaced by a sense more like being at home. Tanya said she also experienced this heightened sense of awareness on her return home from India. However, it didn’t last long; Tanya explained “maybe for only a day and an half.” Perhaps it is this energy high that returnees feel is missing in their “at home experiences”. So I question this level of energy and wonder how it relates to this “feeling of being special”. I assume that this energy would be hard to sustain for a long time. Perhaps this is what attracts some people to living in new places. This heightened sense of energy and feelings of being special. A more intensive longitudinal study might begin to discover the nature of these aspects.

## Revisiting Perspectives

This issue of journal writing emerged from these questions, as it dawned on Tanya that she tended to write more often in her journal in India.

Maybe there's a difference. I write a lot more when I was there (in India) than I ever did in Canada. Here I only write when I'm in a panicky situation. There's a pattern of loneliness and feelings of being out of control that don't really come across in my journals in India. My journals there are more about my daily life.

At this point, I asked her if she was able to put things more into perspective than she felt she had in the past.

When I first got home I was feeling run ragged. Now I'm doing about a hundred more things and I still feel that way. So I'm wondering if I'll just feel run ragged no matter what I do. In terms of things falling into place for me, I don't think so, but I wonder if they ever would. I remember saying that I'm not necessarily looking for solutions or to be unconfused.

It's strange to talk about reentry as a process. It's true that your experiences before (coming home) are a significant part of your life and you have new experiences now which you have to adapt to, but to put it in a context of where you are now, it almost gets diffused. You keep on living and having experiences and it gets more difficult to imagine the direct connections, yet at the same time it's hard to imagine how it could not be connected.

I then brought out the Validationgram (see Figure 3) for Tanya to look at what she had done two months previously and questioned whether she saw any benefit to having done it now. "I have a very bad memory," she replied, "I guess I like the drawing but I'm not sure I like the framework." In discussing those aspects which she had indicated on the Validationgram, such as feelings of being genuine, belonging, cooking and painting, playing the game, Tanya exclaimed:

I can't believe that I'd been thinking so clearly. I'm not thinking very clearly at all these days. Well anyway, in thinking about playing the game, in one of my classes we are collaborating on writing a book on the World Wide Web and Adult Education. I have to write a chapter, so I'm basically writing on a perspective of development, what it means to me and how we in our Western Society look at it. What I'm trying to do is Intellectualize this gut feeling. I feel very trapped in the scheme of things. My India experiences gave me a very different perspective of

what you can actually do with very little. So how do we get off this road? It's an academic thing, an intellectual thing and a personal thing. I see that in my life all these things speak to the ways in which I'd like to slow down and change directions. And like everybody else, I don't know how to begin. You're going so fast, you're running just to keep up.

Since I've been home and now that I'm writing this book, I see the way that this personally affects me. It's this whole being out of control because you have to spend so much time just to keep up. I spend so much time at it and I get a high from it, being successful in other people's eyes. I spend so much time at it that I never have time to change directions. Like driving down the Autobahn – you have to actually put your foot on the brakes, stop and look at the map before you change direction.

I know that I'm feeling quite overwhelmed with this concept that nothing could ever change, that everyone's on this track and that they are trying to coerce other people on to technological development. Of what, exactly? Bigger is better and more is better, that information is all you need or information is what you need! I get quite passionate about this whole idea”.

### **Feeling Neither Here nor There**

When asked if there were other people she knew who felt the same way and who she felt she could talk to about these ideas, Tanya's response was:

I don't think so, I'm sure they are out there. But what I need to do, is overcome and get on with it. If you're feeling overwhelmed and it's causing negative feelings that are paralytic, then you have to come to some sort of balanced realization about it.

While Tanya didn't seem to express it as recognition, it became much more apparent to me that she seemed to be clarifying these aspects and was trying to find a perspective for herself. While I don't necessarily agree with this concept of overcoming, however, she was talking about moving forward. Later in future interviews, Tanya further explored this concept of getting on with it.

I feel like bowing out and leaving, taking off, I think that I feel this need to change things but I just don't know how to. I feel a bit lost where I ... If I was



going to play some of the traditional games, why didn't I become a lawyer or something. I'm neither here nor there. I'm frequently feeling confused.

### **Relationship with Significant Other**

This seemed like a natural time to bring up the subject of Tanya's partner Tom and how their relationship has affected her return experiences. "Well, it certainly has been in the works," Tanya explains. "It's changed since our last interview, and has only been articulated since January. It's sort of like this whole idea of belonging. It was pretty confusing when I got back, as we hadn't made any decisions about our relationship."

Tanya then gives me a bit of history about their relationship of almost six years. At the time she left for India, they had been seeing each other for four and one half years. They were at a point where they were needing to work out some of their difficulties but when Tanya discovered she was going to India, in the last months, they didn't deal with any of their issues

Instead we just had a happy time together. We sort of put off discussing it, hoping that it would sort itself out while I was away. Let this be a lesson to anyone reading this, when you are away you are in two completely different worlds. We spoke to each other for 15 minutes about every two weeks. There wasn't time for anything else but warm fuzzies, and our letters were happy letters. Well, maybe I sent a few mournful ones. But basically I was having a good time and he was having a good time, so we made the decision to travel together. We tossed around the idea of living together. But when Tom arrived in India, I was having a difficult time having just been robbed and feeling pretty harassed and tired. When I returned home, we had miscommunications and he was pretty reluctant to talk about things. But I decided to work things out with him. So that is where I started when I got home. It was pretty uncertain. I had expectations about our relationship but I also had insecurities about being back and the need to sort of immediately belong. That would have helped.

When asked if Tom had had any understanding of her feelings around these issues, Tanya explained

Not particularly but at that point I don't think I was aware of it at all. But we both realize that Tim has particular issues around belonging and responsibility and that has to do with his family. For a long time I thought it was me and now I don't feel that way anymore after talking about it.

I asked Tanya if Tom was open to some of her experiences now, such as her feelings about development, and where she was going.

He's amazingly supportive. He's quite respectful of me and my ideas and he has his own ideas about these things, although I have the benefit of the readings. We can actually discuss a lot of these things, and he's very articulate about his feelings. Tom has been with me through this whole reentry and my experiences in India, but he has also been with me since I was 19. He is nine years older than me, so he watched a lot of changes. I had to make a decision if I wanted to be in this kind of a relationship with him and that I had to make it clear that I wanted to be in a relationship with some sort of belonging.

So Tanya and Tom's relationship as it stands at this time is; they're working on it. When I asked what effect she felt he had on her reentry experiences, Tanya replied:

It's tough to know I don't know if things might have been easier if I'd had a steady relationship to come back to. I thought maybe this was true. But after talking to Trina, I don't know. But it was important that he came.

When I asked how she thought his coming over to India affected their relationship, she replied, "It was definitely a big bonus that he did come. We can talk about things and he knows what I mean. He can picture things and we can share experiences about people he knows".

Shortly after this discussion, I wrote in my journal:

This also brings to mind another notion I have, of how to make the reentry experiences easier. If friends or families are able to visit returnees in their place of work, see where they live and meet their friends and acquaintances, this ability to share memories will enhance the communication back home.

My own experiences were quite different in returning from Africa where no one had visited me and then returning from Japan where my father and several friends had come to visit. I still relive those experiences with them today and often discuss ongoing political and cultural aspects with them.

## **Health Concerns Revisited**

Before we ended our session, I asked Tanya how her health had been. She explained that her mouth infection had come back, at Christmas time, and had been quite painful to the point where she didn't go out of the house because it was so ugly and hurt so much. As mentioned in the first series this seems to be a chronic condition and we will continue to revisit this issue throughout the following interviews.

### **Series B - Second Interview Session – February 21, 1998**

Almost six months after being home, Tanya began this interview by describing her view of community work in Canada and it's relationship to her placement in India working for an International N.G.O. By the time she had returned to Canada, she had come to the realization that if she wanted "to get into social issues and issues of change", then she had to do that here.

Canada is my place. I'm not Indian and the amount I can do there is really limited, the amount I can do here does have an effect. I was in the hot bed of activity of N.G.O.'s in India. That sector in India is huge, it's massive and there is lots of money in community work, but not that much here in Canada. What struck me was the crossover factor of involvement of corporations in India. All I needed to do was step out of the N.G.O. sector and step right into the corporate sector. It also goes with this status thing. I was privileged enough to work with a core group and I suppose because of my foreigner status, I was invited to go to meetings with the president of my organization, whereas those who I considered to be my superiors, were not invited.

## Tanya's View of the World

As we continued to discuss this issue and its ramifications, Tanya explained:

When I'm here in Canada the way I live means I don't interact with the N.G.O. world and when I was there that's all I was doing. But now I'm in an academic community and I realize that nobody in my class gets what I'm talking about, sometimes not even the professor. This makes me believe that I will really have to search out people who have similar energy around the same issues that I do. I'm writing about the concept of development and the technological effects that have been thrust on this world. It's not that it's deep, it's just that it's different. Because I've had this overseas experience, it makes me realize, that other people don't think about the way they are thinking about things, such as poverty. They think about *ifs*: if there's a way, then it's solved. No one has addressed: *Why Would We?* And that the issues relevant in developing countries are also relevant here. I think my concept of these issues definitely has to do with being away and I don't know how to articulate it very well. So writing this book chapter is making me realize that I don't know a lot about development history and I don't know a lot about Adult Education. So how do I go about articulating in an intellectual way something that I feel has come out of my experiences?

Tanya and I discussed her previous idea expressed in the last interview, that her gut feelings were rooted in her experiences.

What I mean by gut feeling is something that causes me to react in a certain way without being able to describe it or to express it in an intellectual way. It sort of goes with this concept of playing the game. That we are on this track and people are not really aware of it.

Tanya went on to describe her reaction to seeing a film, called *Wag the Dog*. This movie depicts the President of the United States fabricating international political events in order to diffuse domestic political problems within the U.S. In a sense, it's the media who produces these international events. Tanya continued, "It does crystallize for me that we just don't live in a real world anymore."

## Recognition

I have to tell you something that I have experienced just recently in the past couple of days. I've suddenly started to get very sharp visual recollections. Where as in the past it's been a blur, Maybe it's that I've had no time for reflection and now ... I was feeling a sort of homesickness for India, although most of it's gone away now. It was more of an emotional homesickness, thinking of smells or people and my work. When I first got back I was just missing being there a lot. I was very home sick for several months.

What interested me about this statement was that previously Tanya had not articulated homesickness for India. While she talked about India she had clearly said that what she missed wasn't the place but rather specific aspects. Now she sees this as a whole experience. As well, her visual memory has become clearer. I asked her when she felt this feeling of homesickness had begun to dissipate. She replied that she didn't know exactly, maybe sometime in November after seeing her Gujarati friend in Los Angeles and staying with her family. "Just maybe feeling a reconnection helped. Feeling that it wasn't all gone, that it was still there and that I could still be that person".

Tanya again explained that feeling of connection and how valuable it had been to her.

In India I had been very accepted, there was no strangeness about me. People would forget to speak English to me and apologize saying, I forget you're not Gujarati. So visiting Sonal and her family helped me realize I was still able to be there. It was one of the most important things to me.

Tanya and I then discussed this aspect of inability to articulate experiences. I pointed out to her that while she felt homesickness for India, she had never expressed it that way before. That I also noticed her explanations were becoming clearer as she herself had said, *more crystallized*.

In my journal, I wrote:

This gave me cause to think about my own inability to express myself. That sometimes when emotions are intense or new, they are not definable by words. There is a delay in time, then later; I am able to verbally express what I've been thinking. I also wonder how this may be linked to the aspect of digesting of experiences. Perhaps there is a gestation period, for some people.

While Tanya and I mulled over this new emerging concept, Tanya explained:

I think it causes chaos in my life. Like when we had our first sessions, I couldn't share a lot about India because at that time, I couldn't get far enough away from it emotionally to talk about it and really explain it to people. I just couldn't talk about it. I'm actually quite an open person, but I don't think I would have talked to anybody about it except maybe people that I'd been there with. Maybe because I just couldn't understand it well, and I still don't know how I was feeling about this.

I'm beginning to think about this concept as a pattern for expressing experiences first there is a need to digest the experience, then a gestation period. Only later is the person able to articulate. What is also becoming evident is that the helpfulness of having someone to talk to, isn't just that person's ability to be able to listen, but also their ability to share in that experience, such as a person who has been there with you or at very least someone who has had a somewhat similar experience.

### **Assessing Our Collaborative Research**

At this point, Tanya and I discussed this participatory collaboration of research. I read to her from my journal some of my concerns about getting at her issues, not mine, and the assumption I might be making.

With each interview I had expected there would be more and different issues, more and different revelations, what I got was an unraveling of Tanya's Psyche. Not different issues, but more of the same, at a deeper level. This to me was a good thing. However, I was concerned about having expectations around her issues. That I shouldn't be getting answers that I want, need or expect, and that discussing this with Tanya would be a good idea.

In sharing this with Tanya she was extremely validating and said that she didn't get the feeling of my expectations but that she felt that I was looking for particular things. She also felt that being aware of this was a good thing, that it was a pretty natural thing to question yourself, and that this process wasn't linear, "I also think there will be times when I will be a lot more specific because as you are experiencing reentry you are also experiencing life", Tanya explained.

We then discussed the implications of the word reentry process. As mentioned before, Tanya didn't see a separation of her reentry experiences from her life experiences:

For instance, my depressions didn't come because of reentry, I've had them for a long time, but they've changed in certain ways, because of being away, because of being back and what I'm doing now, all these things are interconnected. I'm wondering about the word *process* as directional change, to me it implies finished product and I don't think reentry has a finish.

This goes along with my thoughts about experiences before during and after, which are all a part of the whole. I then suggested the term reentry experiences. "It's less directional", Tanya admitted, "I like the word dilemma, it makes me think ... there is no answer. I'm also having difficulties with the thought of my depressions being legitimized. I hope you don't think my depression is a part of my reentry". While I didn't say this at the time, I was thinking that it was a part of her reentry. The cause however, may be rooted in her life long experiences and her reentry is interconnected with her life long experiences. So, as we discussed, how can you separate out the issues or reentry? They are part of the whole, before, during and after. As I was thinking this, Tanya explained that she had a friend who had recently committed suicide and that she thought she could identify with the things that he had been going through. Having had a similar experience myself while living in Japan, I realized that how we relate to our experiences is part of how we relate to life long experiences.

## **Tanya's Perception of Her Own Ability to Adapt**

After these sobering thoughts, I asked Tanya how she perceived her ability to adapt to new situations. "I like it. When I went to India, I knew I was going to give it a good go. I was so content, because I think I'm resilient". I then asked Tanya, in looking back at her reentry experiences, if she could only say a few words, how would she describe them? "Challenging, unpredictable and unpredicted", Tanya declared and then went on to explain:

I thought this culture shock on returning would be different, that any changes that I had when I was there would be immediately apparent and would very nicely weave themselves into my life. Certainly no one prepared me for anything different. One really big thing I noticed was how long it takes to realize you are in culture shock. It isn't just doing things like getting used to shopping in a grocery store again. By the time I realized I was in shock, I was on my way to Tanzania.

This would be two months after Tanya had left India.

Up until this point, we had not spent much time discussing Tanzania. As it was only a two-week placement, Tanya felt that it had not had the significance of impact on her that India had had. It rarely came up in conversations so I asked her about this experience.

Well I certainly made comparisons, but I was involved in a new experience. In some ways I had been longing to be away again and in some ways, 'not this again'. I didn't get that attachment to Tanzania but it had been a good learning experience.

Tanya felt that because of her experiences in India and Tanzania that she had developed a deeper understanding of her values and perspective on Technology and playing the game. "I don't think it's that my values have changed, it's just that they have become more crystallized".



## **Health Concerns, Ongoing**

Before the end of this interview, I again checked the state of Tanya's health. It seemed that still the doctors didn't know what was causing her mouth infections along with other symptoms. They had been treating her for Erytherma Multiforme (E.M.) and now realized that it wasn't that. Tanya had gone to a tropical disease clinic and there they had diagnosed her problems as E.M.. Later, she had a biopsy done, which showed nothing conclusive, but that it wasn't E.M.. So at the time of the interview, she was looking into herbal medical treatment. The Chinese doctor believed that she had low blood circulation and that her liver function may have been weak. Tanya felt "The medical profession isn't getting to the bottom of this. It may just be one of those things they don't know about. But I am feeling quite discouraged."

## **Series B - Third Interview Session – March 10, 1998**

It had now been seven months since Tanya came home. In this interview, we explored more of her past history before leaving for India. We examined the interconnections between those experiences and her placements as well as continuing with the exploration of her return experiences. Tanya provided us with her Mind Map (Figure 4a), that she alluded to in earlier interview sessions. This map was a graphic depiction of significant experiences in her life, from the time of her leaving high school up to and including experiences in Tanzania. In this interview, we also extended this Mind Map (Figure 4b) to include her reentry and where she located herself at this time. We were also able to further explore how some of her significant life



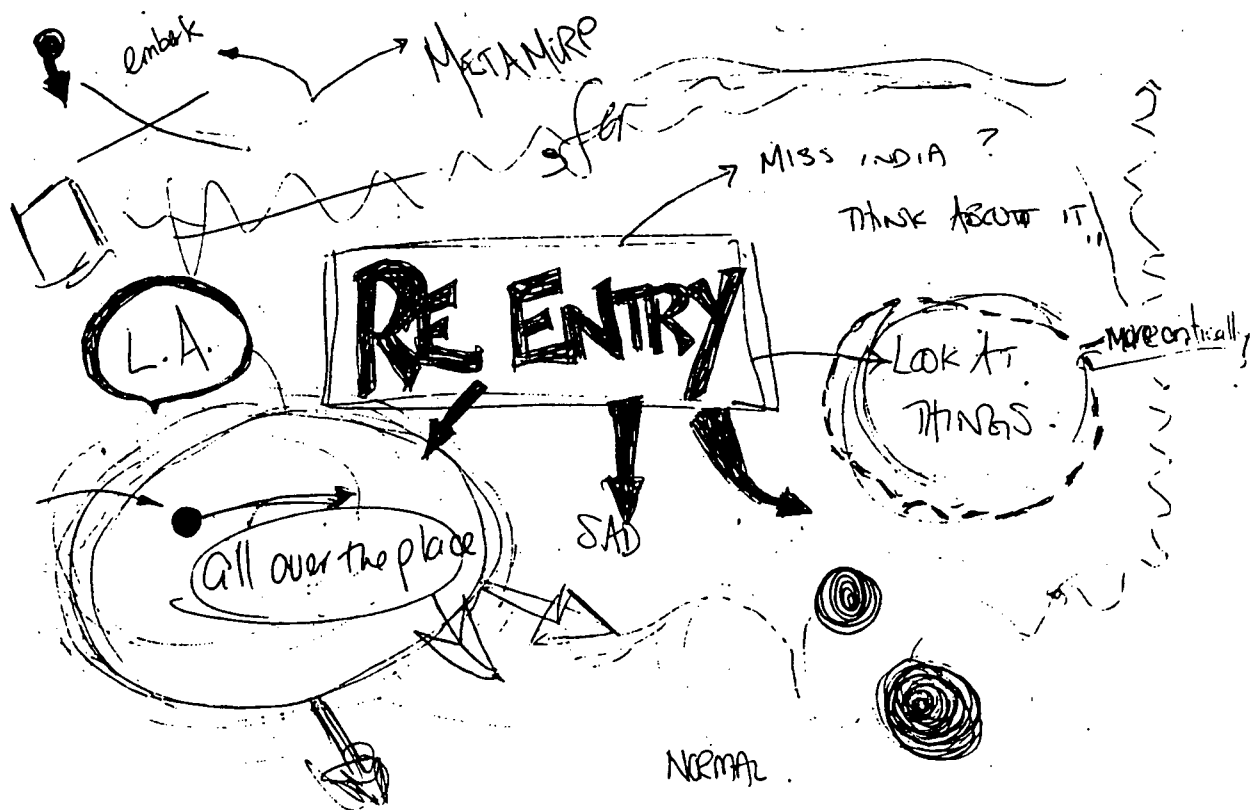





Figure 4b. Tanya's Mind Map #2 (extended).

experiences influenced her reactions to her reentry experiences. We looked beyond this into Tanya's realizations and revelation. Here we examined a deeper and more clear level of coping skills and strategies that Tanya had begun to develop.

### **Tanya's Mind Map**

When Tanya was a guest speaker for an undergrad class, she developed this Mind Map (Figure 4a) as a way of explaining how all the different aspects can eventually lead you into some other experiences. "Some people like this because it shows how much you can jump around and still have a thread in your like, threads I didn't even know about" (a thread that ties things together).

Tanya's Mind Map, while visually difficult to understand is probably even more difficult to explain. Therefore, I will not try to describe the diagrams as you can see them in Figures 4a and 4b. Tanya's significant experiences will be outlined and explained as she described them, in order to make this comprehensible. The arrows indicate different feelings she was going through at the time:

a regular arrow		indicates that "something came up"
a bold arrow		indicates that "I want to do this"
a squiggly arrow		indicates that "I am going nuts"

## ***Going to Europe***

All I could think of in high school was, after graduation going back packing in Europe. I wanted to know what it was like to live in other places and what it was like to think of things in other ways.

So Tanya turned down a big scholarship to University and went off to Europe for a year.

It was a big disappointment. I was too young; I was scared, lonely and broke. When you're 17, a woman with a backpack and travelling alone, the people you meet are not necessarily embracing other cultures. I really didn't know how to travel and I found out backpacking is not the way I travel best.

So after four months Tanya packed it in and came back to Ottawa.

## ***Back to Ottawa***

I came home crushed, but it was a big learning experience. I started working, but then I was going crazy in Ottawa so I thought I should apply to some universities. Then U.B.C. came up with this Arts I program.

## ***U.B.C. Arts I***

Arts I was a cross-cultural interdisciplinary program. It was a cross between Eastern and Western cross-cultural studies. The program was good, but University was a disappointment in terms of all the people, I was just a number. It didn't seem practical for what I needed. Sort of what I'm experiencing now in Grad School. I was looking at a lot of ideas but wasn't rooted in anything. I needed some kind of mentor or direction. I had so many ideas but I couldn't find anybody to talk to. I would get this – oh, you're just a first year student you don't need counseling or guidance. Amazingly, I was told the same thing going into my graduate program. You don't need an advisor until you start your thesis. It's getting better now for me. But back then I hadn't realized how faceless you could be in a big institution. I found it so frustrating that I didn't go back to school the next year. Then I found chef's school and I got a grant to go.

### ***Chef's School – DeBrule***

I applied through the Employment Center, at the time I'd been working in a kitchen so the grant wasn't difficult to get. I loved Chef's school. Then I got a job at Saltimboca.

### ***Saltimboca Restaurant***

It was a fancy little place in Yaletown. It was excellent experience but once again, this wasn't what I really wanted to be doing. Six days a week, 12-14 hour days, the money was O.K., but I never had time to spend it. Then I found this awesome program, Home Economics, at University.

### ***U.B.C. Home Economics***

This amazing program was about design and culture and family but it was also about food. It just seemed so practical. They geared you for types of jobs you could do when you finished school. They had a mentoring program where you would meet professionals in the field. They also had a program about ethics and professional practice. This is where I got most of my understanding and sensitivities to others. In this program, we talked about ways of knowing and thinking. How that plays out in the world, what is technical, rational, professional, and what does that mean the way you help, and what does that mean to the people you are helping. Understanding you are accountable for what you do. I really loved it because it did all of this challenging of concepts".

Tanya continued on explaining how through Home Economics, she became involved with developing the Tanzania project. It was here that someone said to her that if she was going to consider going into International work that she should start in Canada.

You have to learn and through that you learn why you are interested. So I did that, I worked. I worked on this Tanzania Project from Canada; I helped organize a conference. I did other volunteer work.

So then after graduation...

### *After Home Economics*

It was kind of a brutal time. A difficult two months when I didn't know what I was going to do. I had applied for this position in India and didn't think I gotten it. So I was thinking about writing a book about my great grandfather, then I got the phone call saying I had gotten the position in India and it was a bit of a relief not to have to think about what I was going to do. Sometimes I just sort of get pulled along in my life. So off to India I went.

### *India*

(Nine months of placement and one month of traveling, starting August to May 1996-1997.) So, India just sort of happened for Tanya. It was, as mentioned throughout this study, a wonderful grounding and enlightening and practical experience. Here she felt useful. Before Tanya left for India, she was not aware that she would be going to Tanzania as the two-week trip was to happen in February of 1997, but then it was postponed until August of 1997. Although Tanya had helped to coordinate the project, she felt she wouldn't be eligible, as she hadn't been on the committee for the past year. "But since I'd had this international experience I guess I was considered the safer bet". Then it was off to Tanzania but first a trip home to Canada.

### ***Ottawa-Vancouver (two months)***

A stressful whirlwind trip as explained in the first interview.

### ***Tanzania***

Two weeks of work with a Canadian Partnership Program and Tanzanian Education.

### ***Back to Canada***

Tanya went first to Ottawa and then returned to Vancouver to begin Graduate School.

### ***Continuing On With Reentry***

I asked Tanya if she would like to complete the picture on the Mind Map.

Well this is what happened, when I did this Map in October, I wasn't all that sure that I would stay in school, in fact I was pretty sure I wasn't going to.

Now when I look at what I've learned, all these experiences, the loneliness I experienced in Europe, and the struggles and the loneliness in coming to Vancouver by myself, these were all things that made me stronger, strong enough to handle all these other things. Europe gave me a clear idea of why I wanted to go to university and now I could better achieve that, which eventually was through my India experience.



## Revelations

Tanya reiterated her desire was to learn from the people about different ways of thinking about things,

... and the best way to achieve that would be to work in a collaborative experience, with me as the primary learner.

One thing I have learned in my life is that I need a purpose. In Europe when I was backpacking, I didn't have a reason to be there, all these other things [indicating going crazy lines on Mind Map, see Figure 4a] are about not having a purpose. Even since I've been back, maybe that's part of the reason for some of my difficulties. Maybe purpose isn't the right word ... an engaging activity that has some kind of vision or something to work towards probably is a better way of putting it. I like to be fully engaged in something that is going somewhere. That's probably why I left Saltemboca, there was only so much I could learn and for my purposes I'd learned most of what I'd felt like learning.

I wrote in my journal:

At this point, I am quite excited about Tanya's revelations. It seemed this simple map had put into perspective those aspects which I have theorized about. An awareness, understanding and self assessment of her experiences before, during, and after had provided Tanya with insights in to what her needs might be. How she develops proactive strategies is yet to be discovered. I sense it is difficult to express this as a direct question since Tanya has explained her hesitancy with categorizations. It is possible this question could be misunderstood.

It appeared to me, as seen in these interviews, that allowing the events and thoughts to emerge and unfold naturally as Tanya discovered her own revelations, seemed to be more effective than *digging and probing*. As she, herself, said, "I want to work in an atmosphere of collaborative experiences with me as the primary learner". Now it had been seven months since her arrival back in Canada. I asked Tanya if she could continue to extend the map to see where she was at this point (in March 1998).

Well, after the question mark [see Figure 4a], this is the painful part, the uncomfortable part before you go on to the next thing. This is my first year back so I'm not going to commit to all of it. I could have all these kinds of arrows [squiggly arrows denoting 'going nuts'], by the way, they might seem completely

unintended. If I look at the Arts I program the East Indian studies really really affected the way I could be in India, I mean breaking the cultural barrier and connecting.

### **Coming to New Version of Self**

Continuing on with the discussion of extending her Map, I asked Tanya why she was still at University when she had been so close to quitting months before. What had happened to change her mind?

Basically, I'm lazy, I didn't have the energy and now I have a job organizing this conference for my professor. It might be that I'm enjoying my courses this term. I'm taking Program Planning Practice, I can avoid theory, and we do all the things I love. Like drawing metaphors for planning and interviewing program planners. Then there's the book chapter I'm still writing. And I'm starting to feel grounded again. I like doing the things I'm doing. I'm starting to think about things like my thesis.

What I'm really starting to learn about myself is that I don't have one particular vision of myself. I have a lot of different directions. The thing is that whatever ends up happening to me I usually launch myself into. I work fully engaged and that's what grounds me. So maybe it's not the things that I'm doing but the fact that I'm doing something that fully engages me.

It seems strange though; I'm still playing with the idea, quite a bit actually, of leaving school. Not that I can't take it anymore but if the right opportunity came up, I probably would. In fact, right up until the middle of January I was pretty much going to quit. My mouth was so bad, I called the doctor to get a medical certificate. I phoned to see if I could get my fellowship deferred.

"So what's changed?" I asked Tanya, as it was now March and she was still at school.

She replied:

These things, these projects, because they are actual projects, not courses. Also this conference I'm coordinating. Maybe it has something to do with responsibility. Actually all these things do come together, in some ways it's all part of the whole thing. The paper and the Los Angeles conference were about India, the book chapter is connected to my India experience, or ... Maybe it's about the newness becoming less new. Like graduate school, and like that paper [Los Angeles conference] was the first major thing I'd written, getting more used

to the challenges and just the whole routine. Remember our discussion on routines ... but you know you don't just create routines. It took me six to seven months to get comfortable with these routines.

Tanya and I discussed this idea that now she was just beginning to be comfortable, it is not that, now she is comfortable and life will be easy.

It's taken this long to get used to a pattern, so at the time of our discussion (in November), I thought routine was something different. To me the things that make my routines are very small, like walking in my building, walking around, knowing where I'm going and why I'm there. Running into people, they're a familiar face and I'm a familiar face. In India, it was the same thing; I wasn't really comfortable until I could communicate with the receptionist of my building in a very genuine way. So it's more like a genuine experience being there and being a part of the sum of the whole experience. It's an organic thing. It's familiarity, almost like feeling grounded again, and being connected to where you are.

I'm starting to feel this way in my department. Because of this conference I'm organizing I've had to make connections with the secretaries. So it's really little things. I see them in my head as benign little things and they are the things that make me feel happiest.

### **A Proactive Viewpoint**

If Tanya was feeling this way about herself, I wondered what kind of advice she would offer someone whom was struggling with reentry. I posed this question to her. She replied:

It takes time. Things worth doing take time and things will only emerge with time. This is the biggest lesson I've learned in my graduate work. I'm learning a lot. I'm learning what I need to do. I'm trying to get beyond that external thing, feelings of being judged from an external source. I'm trying to develop from within.

Now if you're talking about reentry with an educational focus, I've been thinking about that a bit lately. These are only half thoughts ... I like your philosophy that everyone experiences things differently. So the last thing you would want to do is to say to these people: here are some of the patterns that people might go through, because it could jeopardize the way they go through their experiences. They might then start to think, I'm doing this right or I'm doing this wrong. I think I would have been very resistant to being told what I might experience. Although there might be people who would be interested in

experiencing how things might be, but that might not be how they would originally experience things. I think it's such a huge challenge.

Tanya and I continued this discussion related to training programs. I mentioned to Tanya that from my perspective, one of the challenges training programs face is that they are trying to prepare returnees for the experiences to come. I'm not entirely sure that that is possible because we don't really know what that is. Nevertheless, what programs can do is prepare returnees to expect the unexpected, at the same time being able to offer support. Tanya exclaimed:

That's so true, and that's the same as going there actually. What I found helped me was that I needed to talk. I needed people to listen. I needed to tell people what I was feeling about my experience and what I was missing. I needed to talk about what was going on. And it occurs to me, because I didn't have a forum or educational experience, whatever you'd call it, for reentry, I needed to go out and find people who would listen. I've come to this realization that I need to take it on myself. I need to figure out what's going on, how I'm changing, what's happened since my experience and how it can rule my life.

The Mind Map was a valuable thing for me. I'd rather do this than the Validationgram. It was brilliant; I needed to do it. Some people might find this a whole lot easier but there are also people who would not. I guess you either like this kind of learning or you don't.

### **Tanya's Hindrances to Reacculturation**

I asked Tanya what she felt hadn't worked for her over this past year.

People trying to focus me, what I needed to do was talk and have people just listen. That can be very difficult for people to do. Even the counselor when she started to talk – I shut up. I mean when she started saying ... here are some things you could do. There was also a fine line between the times I wanted to talk and times when I didn't want to talk to people. Maybe it's a timing thing.

As we were nearing the end of this third interview, I wanted to check with Tanya about how she felt about certain aspects now that she had been home for seven months. I asked her if she had had a job when she first came back, did she think it might have been easier for her.

It's hard to say. Amazingly enough I knew that I would feel better when I got a job, we talked about routines and with a job there are more routines, but a lot of this situation might have been the same. So who knows, maybe it would have been a little easier. Financially it might have been smoother. In India, I was better off. I never had to worry about money, it's really aggravating here.

Then I asked how she felt about her status in relationship to being here or to being there.

Well, I came back to a completely different situation here. There I was teaching a lot of people by the end of eight months. I felt very useful. When I came back to school, I wasn't at all useful to anybody.

In terms of social networks, as mentioned previously, Tanya felt it had definitely changed. "I was very lonely, I have a lot of acquaintances, but I had the experience that most of my good friends had moved away".

### **Be Gentle with Yourself; It Takes Time**

We had also talked about time previously. Tanya had said:

Things take time. One thing I noticed about India, was, that I went there knowing that things would take time to feel familiar, to be on solid ground, know my organization, make friends, understand what was going on. I knew that it would take time to be any kind of a useful person.

But when you come back, you're back in the same old place and you're supposed to be going again. You lived here before, why should things take time [to adjust]? I know I didn't give myself a break! In India, I was so happy for the first little while because I was always giving myself a break. I think that most people don't give themselves the time that they need to readjust to their own place. So it's like give yourself a break, allow for time and be gently with yourself. Now I see where you're coming from in telling them [returnees] it's O.K. It's sort of that fine line again between telling them it's the way it might be for them and time is very important, you might not know where you're going, but it's O.K.

I was incredibly gentle with myself in India, but it's something I have a hard time with here, in my own context. Knowing ahead of time what I might expect when I returned might have made it a little easier. But the expectation by everyone, who went to India with me, including me, was you'll have a little culture shock and then you'll be back at it again. Everyone I talk to is blown away by the amount of time it takes us to get on your feet again. But I thought I'd

given myself permission not to rush into things. In hindsight, I really don't think that I did.

### **Series C - First Interview Session – June 2, 1998**

This is the first interview in the last of the series, carrying on with the same format as in the past. We investigated Tanya's comfort level, her emerging issues, her perspectives and her strategies for coping. In this interview, Tanya seemed more and more to be examining her past experiences in relationship to her present situation. She attempted to define and redefine aspects of her life. She seemed now able to put into perspective how this was affecting her total experiences.

By the time of this first interview, June 2, Tanya had been home nine months. She explained that, since the last interview, it had been a busy time during these past two months. "It really screws up my reflective practice". The conference she had been working on had kept her completely occupied. As a result, she felt that she had had a lot to deal with recently. We therefore made the decision to review her Mind Map again (see Figure 4a) to see if it might trigger more reflections which we could then incorporate, along with any new additions.

### **Learning Curve**

Looking at her Mind Map, Tanya explained that going to Europe at age 17 while not an enjoyable experience gave her a set of learning tools which she later was able to use in her other experiences upon moving to new places. The first year of her undergraduate program at U.B.C. had been awful but some of the best learning experiences aren't always the most enjoyable.

Here she felt she had worked hard and this reminded her of the type of hard work she experienced at her work placement in India.

I get a high when I work hard, and I work well with people. It's almost like I become an extrovert. Maybe I need support when I'm doing things so I engender that in my relationships. This is one of the things I learned about myself while doing this conference. I reflect back to my India work experience and it's the same thing. With this conference, I've had to handle 125 people establishing a relationship with each of the registrants. They all know me. When I look at conferences now, I realize people have committees. I didn't do that. It's unreal the amount of work I've done, but it certainly tends to improve my experiences of living. So, the learning experience, when I'm fully engaged I'm better at being with people.

Continuing on with the Mind Map, Tanya had dropped out of first year U.B.C. and then went to Chef School. Here she found the work had been practical.

I learned by doing things by listening to others, when I'm learning I can see things, I can touch them in my head, and I get things done.

At Benny's Bagels, it wasn't that I learned to cook. I was engaged in practical work. I was learning about everything else that was going on around me, how to treat people, how to communicate with people who were buying things, and a philosophy about how to run a business. It was very interdependent work. I think in Program Planning [the course Tanya is presently taking] it's the same, you learn a lot more than any kind of technical expertise.

So then Saltimboca Restaurant was another practical experience. Then I decided to go back to school – Home Economics. It was really a hands on experience, dealing with the everyday issues of life, relationships, human management and decision making. Interesting, if I look at all these things that I get pulled into they all have to do with money. The door opens and money comes with it. I got money to go to U.B.C., to Chef School, to India, to Tanzania and a Fellowship to go to U.B.C..

Tanya then explained she is often in a sort of limbo land when she is indecisive and has no plans. So when she lets go of control, spaces open up for things to happen that she had not even thought of before.

When I left U.B.C., the first time, I had no thought of Chef School. When I left Home Economics, graduated from U.B.C., I had no thought of India. But Grad School was one that I maybe should have waited out to see what door might open for me. I don't belong in this academic world. In talking with my mother, I

realized that I was motivated by the fact that I write well and I do well in school. I always think – I can do this, so I'd better.

### **Looking Ahead and Finding Questions**

For the future outlook, it appears Tanya is intending to continue with school as she talks about her fall program, which looks more optimistic.

I had enrolled in the M.Ed. program because I thought it had a practicum and was shorter, but it doesn't, so I'm making one. In September, I hope to be taking a course through Simon Fraser University on Community Development. It will probably be on the downtown eastside on one of those projects. Then there is a possibility I might be a research assistant for a federal policy job. This could work into my thesis and I could get paid for it.

This brings us around to the question, which Tanya consistently asked:

What does reentry mean exactly? "I'm also living my life now, so what part of that is my experience of reentry and how does it blend with just everything else? How do I think about it, how has it changed me? It's changed me in the way that I look at things, I'm still unclear about that, but I'm not sure that it will get clear. I guess I'm being more critical, taking more of a global context into account, whenever I look at any issues. How that looks in a real world, from my own experiences. I'm still not certain about, how we categorize things, like the term Third World; those people, those parts of the world. Also how we cut up the world and the way we do that. So it changed my impressions of how we think about things. I feel sort of like I have something to say in terms of challenging that. But I'm just one little person with one little experience, I'm not a spokesperson. I'm not even very knowledgeable on this. So in thinking about ways of bringing that into conversations with people, I think about different ways, an awareness that there is a mutual and respectful learning relationship. I realize that most people just don't think that way. I'm feeling like people don't get it. I don't remember if I was thinking about these things in or talking about them to people in India, but you've probably noticed that I'm really liking questions right now and not finding the answers.



## **Developing a Comfort Level, Feeling Normal**

Tanya and I then discussed how she was feeling at that point, in terms of my impressions that she was feeling more content in general. She seemed to have direction and appeared to be more comfortable, as she said, not having answers.

Definitely, I would say that I'm much more comfortable than I was before. Maybe not in all my circumstances. I'm still not comfortable in my program. I sometimes catch myself, a lot more in the last couple of months actually, noticing my way of life here, how strange it is. How much space we live in, how much we take for granted, and how much I eat out a lot. I have a profound sense I'm pretty wealthy. I figure that's a perspective thing. Maybe what's making me think about this is that my friend Sonal, from India, is coming to visit.

It's interesting though, this aspect of money has been coming up a lot lately. My friends who are looking for work are looking at \$50,000 jobs. I live on \$1,000 a month and I can't imagine having more.

But yeah, in terms of my everyday life I'm much more ... I don't know what you call it ... is it that I'm feeling normal? Is it that I'm getting over something? I'm not sure how to think about it, I think it's just now a part of me and ... what? ... I'm more comfortable with that part of me.

As we looked back at how Tanya felt when she first arrived in Canada, she remembered being very nervous about being here and doing things.

I don't remember telling you that I had big knots in my stomach, just thinking about doing normal things. Like walking down the street and getting coffee. That's what I remember. I think it was because I wasn't sure what I was about to embark on, I was unsure about what had just happened to me. The nine months back here went really fast, I can't even believe how fast the trip to India was. I feel I need another two years so I can crystallize some of these things. I always need more time to get a grip on these things. I don't know how to do that. I just remember being overwhelmed when I first got back, not really belonging anywhere.

I reminded Tanya that she had used the words not belonging, not connected, not feeling very grounded. "Certainly, if you think about being all over the place," Tanya added, "that's not very connected, I guess, sort of floating". Interestingly, I recalled this was the term

Greenwood's participant's used in his thesis, *a floating anxiety*, although I didn't mention this to Tanya.

### **Health Issues In Retrospect**

Tanya continued, "My parents wanted me to come home after Christmas, because my mouth was so bad. But it seems to have burnt itself out since March". I questioned Tanya about her health condition, as it had been an ongoing concern. She answered:

I was sick for a month and a half in February and part of March. They discovered that I had Hepatitis A, which is the one you get over. I'm still pretty tired, but I think it's because of work. I'm supposed to be taking care of myself, but I'm so bad at taking care of myself. Funny that I should get hepatitis after I come home and not when I'm in these exotic countries.

This made me question again the aspect of health and it's influences on the returning sojourner. I wondered how common it is for illness to occur upon their return?

### **Transforming Perspectives**

Tanya and I continued to examine what I had presumed were her perceptions of the past interviews through my transcriptions and journal notes. At one point when I read her comment about *playing with the idea of moving home to Ottawa*, she was quite surprised. "Did I really say that? Well, I guess I would have right up until the middle of March". Then Tanya expressed an interest in getting a copy of the transcription. Up until this point she had expressed no interest in perusing the interviews herself, and had emphatically explained she didn't want to listen to the

tapes. While I had shared some of the transcriptions with Tanya, I had not given her a copy to peruse. In hindsight, it might be something to consider for future investigations.

Reading further through my notes Tanya exclaimed

I just couldn't crystallize the different ways that I was looking at things. I need time to weigh things before articulating. The paper [Los Angeles conference] was so difficult to write. I love writing for myself but I hate writing for school. I'm in the wrong program for sure.

I'm trying to get all these things together in my head. Maybe this is how I've changed, in the last little while I've been saying to myself, O.K., you're a smart person so if you're not getting it then there's something more to it than that, I can't take anything at face value, anymore, I have to go and look up the etymological roots to the word, before I write on a research problem. My papers get high marks but I'm having problems writing them. Maybe it's not my time to be in Graduate School.

I've been thinking about this idea of perspective change and how that plays out over the long run and where that ends up going. Since I've been home, I've seen a clarification rather than an actual change. I think the change started the minute I got to India. Actually I like the word 'transformation'. So anyway. If you come home with this craziness in your head, as I did, I lived through it. It was painful, living with craziness. But if you try to stop it, if there are ways, you can push it away, or systematize your life. However, people deal with being overwhelmed, then do you jeopardize eventual coming to a place, I mean going through the process is necessary. I think change is painful, but I needed to go through that painful process.

I couldn't have said it better myself. At this point, I noticed that Tanya was speaking in the past tense about this pain. Although I didn't believe that she was finished with all of her adjustments, so to speak, she seemed to be integrating her experiences into her new life. This, I didn't discuss with Tanya for fear of influencing her experiences.

"If I were to imagine a training program works," Tanya postulated, "it would happen at the beginning and would try to manage the craziness of your life, but I'm wondering if you do this would you limit, constrain or even jeopardize the event, or push away that kind of learning, that I did".

“Are you saying,” I asked, “that people need to go through the process in a way that is normal to them?” She answered:

Yes, and I’m also saying, that if people think they need to manage their reentry so that it’s not painful, then I wonder how much they jeopardize experiencing the joy that comes with the pain of learning.

I’m also saying that I think everyone should do this kind of thing [collaborative participation]. What this has done for me is, in the beginning it was like therapy. I also had someone I could talk to who had had similar experiences. I received immediate validation ... so I’m confused but at least I’m not the only one who’s been through this. Then for me it was like a time, a space that I could put aside to reflect, and I reflect better in tandem. When I’m talking, is when I think best. So this was really a helpful thing for me. I don’t know if it would be for everybody, cause maybe not everybody could talk about their experiences.

I explained to Tanya how much I appreciated her thoughts, that I felt she was asking questions which I too had been asking. Although I may not know the answers. In an interesting way, it verified that it wasn’t just me that was concerned about these issues.

In thinking about Tanya’s perceptions, I wrote in my journal:

I felt validated, that much of what I’d been exploring she had made comments on. As we had discussed very little of my previous research except to explain the history of my exploration, I was quite surprised how clearly she was able to articulate some of the same notions that I held. I was also quite amazed that after nine months, she was able to so clearly put things into perspective for herself. This was the first of the last three interviews so it will be interesting to see where the next two will go.

### **Series C - Second Interview Session – June 15, 1998**

The nature of this second interview seemed to be more of an unraveling, a redefining of our perceptions. We looked into Tanya’s processes of reflection, and how that had affected her in her adapting process.

## **Self-Assessment**

### ***Playing the Game***

Tanya began by describing her reaction to “playing the game”.

I know how to play it, so I’ve always done it well. There’s also this funny definition of success that I strive for. What I learned talking to the counselor in October, November, is that none of those things (S.A.R.) really mean anything to me. Academically, I can write well, but it has no meaning to me. I’m trying to say to myself that, well, that doesn’t matter that I impress those people, but I’m still ... so why am I still playing the game? That’s a good question. Because I don’t know any other way to live.

Tanya then brought up the concept of the Imposter Syndrome. She explained that it was found typically among academics who’s thought processes are so abstract that they don’t have any grounding in the real world and they begin to feel like imposters so they feel the need to disguise it. “I could see that happening and it seems to me it could be very easy to get swept away in it,” Tanya explained.

At this point, Tanya and I discuss our philosophical approach to doing Participatory Research. Tanya explained:

One of my interests is how to make research accessible to anybody. So it goes back to the question of ‘What is research?’ Is it the thesis that sits on a shelf? Or is it a process of inquiry that people can understand and critique the process, as well as the results? And that anybody can do?

I would also like to add that the process of inquiry could not only be accessible, but be in a form which would be of use to other people. I then explained my multidimensional vision of Collaborative Participation to Tanya. That on one level it was about Tanya and myself reflecting on her experiences. On another level, it was about giving her an opportunity, a vehicle to express her experiences, at the same time acting as a catalyst. Then, on yet another level, it was about me reconstructing my thinking around this process. “And the researcher is changed,”

Tanya added. "But, which one is the researcher since both are participating?" I interjected, "Both are co-researchers".

### *Our Own Perceptions*

Tanya then explained how she felt about her own adapting process.

When you come back, you're not totally aware, things haven't jelled, it's that uncomfortable feeling. Then things start to come together and you try to make sense of things in your own context. Things start to jell together and create forms that you can better access. I wonder how that works differently ... depending on what you end up doing afterwards? I wonder if you are able to reflect, in ways that you are capable of reflecting, if you're given an opportunity to do that, then do your learnings take shape, in a easier process for your reentry?

Not being sure of the answer to this question, I explained to Tanya what I think this reacculturation may involve:

For some, as a result of the profound impact of the overseas experience, it affects that person in a life long way. It's not as if you complete reentry. Maybe it's more like developing a comfort zone. Therefore, when you're traveling through experiences it's not like you have an experience in isolation. Its influence impacts on you at that moment. However, I feel it's also recursive, these experiences in the form of reflections will influence your future perceptions and experiences again and again, it's almost a circular pattern. At certain points in time I wonder if a person becomes more comfortable living with these experiences in their own context, wherever they may be.

I then explained to Tanya how I saw this long-term study benefiting my concepts. That if I had stopped the interviews after her first three months of being home, I would have only been looking at her. I would have assumed, based on my experiences with her at that time, that's how she was feeling about her reacculturation experiences. I would have had a very different picture than I do today. I wouldn't have had the opportunity to see how she'd grown. In respect to our collaboration, now I see us researching, not me researching this process.

This aspect of time for digestion kept coming up. I'm still wondering if, at certain times, a person can't tell you how they are feeling because they haven't had time to incorporate it into their processes. "The reason that doesn't surprise me is because that's how I learn", Tanya comments. "I learn in discussion with other people and build upon their ideas and on those ideas I build upon my own ideas – eventually I come to learn".

When I asked Tanya what she thought she had learned about herself now, there was a long pause.

Funny how I always stall when you ask me this question. I guess I'm still not ready to put the pieces in the puzzle, but I'm not sure I have all the pieces. I know I have different ways of looking at things now. But it's still unclear to me and it's very difficult to explain. I can explain some of the pieces to other people, and they say they understand. Then something happens and it indicates to me that they don't actually understand. I haven't made myself clear. Take for instance the use of language. I know a lot of people don't think about the words they use, like poverty and need, like international development and the use of Gender and Power Relationships. But we talked about this before. This has something to do with being away, maybe because the use of language is different in India. I don't remember thinking about it in India, but I do remember thinking a lot about it when I got back.

I wrote in my journal:

This was an interesting point Tanya was making. I too had a similar perception after returning from Africa. I became more aware of word choices in my language and the hidden implications which I felt many people are not aware of.

Reflecting back on her experiences, Tanya said:

When I came home from India, I was thinking a lot about it on the plane. But once I was home I was trying not to do a lot of thinking about it because it was very uncomfortable, it was too difficult, I missed it. I was tired. It was an experience that was over now, that's always painful. It made me sad.

Also, I'm just now realizing how badly shaken up I was when I was robbed. It shook me up for several months and I'm just realizing it now, that's been a year now. I guess it's because I felt like I'd been able to grow really good attachments with the people in India, very connected. Then when I was robbed, I felt crushed, almost like a betrayal.

You see, in India, I'd been very different than the other foreigners in that I never really got frustrated with stuff. I tried to take it as it comes, have low

expectations and enjoy being flexible. When people were trying to rip me off, I'd make a joke about it. Being robbed changed everything. From that moment I started getting frustrated and would yell at people.

Tanya then described how she had been on a commuter train. It was so packed that her feet weren't even touching the floor. Her money belt, which had been on the outside of her pants but under her tunic top, had completely disappeared, along with it identification and money. It took a day and a half of dealing with police and other authorities to get things settled. "Through all this frustration," Tanya explained, "I became discouraged and disillusioned. My magical India was gone".

### **Bursts of Reflection**

Tanya continued her reflections:

So when I first got back I didn't have anyone to reflect with, Tom was gone for two weeks. Because I don't reflect well alone, I guess I avoided thinking about it. I didn't have the energy and it was too difficult to make sense of things. Like where do you begin, there was too much there. So unraveling it was just too overwhelming. Then I got busy preparing for Tanzania and I stopped thinking about it. When I got back from Tanzania, I got busy again, with school. Maybe this is how I avoid things, I get busy.

I asked Tanya when she first came back from Tanzania if she was reflecting on Tanzania or India. She explained:

Predominantly India. Well, you know, nine and a half months of experience compared to two weeks. It just didn't have the same impact. But you know, things just start to trickle in when I'm too busy to think about it. I finally get to the point when I have to get it down. It's like I just get possessed with this need because they've finally crystallized. Maybe that is why I draw, because it's fast. So that's why in October I did my Mind Map.

When I look at this process I find I get bursts of reflection. Experiences from my everyday life crystallize reflections about my India experiences. I mean, it will hit me about something that happened from my experiences overseas, but it was catalyzed by something in the now, everyday life. Then my revelations rush



in, and my reflections lead to a flood of other kinds of revelations. Do you think this is common?

I explained to Tanya that again I didn't know the answer to this. I hadn't seen anything about this in the literature. I would also have had to think about incidences that caused me to reflect. As I thought about this it also occurred to me that Tanya's level of questioning was bringing about an awareness which was leading her to self assess her reacculturation process.

She admitted:

Sometimes it's too confusing to be back here. I can understand how people feel the problem would be solved, if they moved back overseas. You put yourself in a new situation. If it's too confusing it's O.K., because you are in a different culture. You have permission to be confused! When you come home, you're supposed to be normal. But you know what, nothing feels normal. So you say to yourself, 'What's wrong with me? What's going on?' Going overseas doesn't solve that problem, it just displaces it. I felt that pull, I felt it very strongly, during the first part of our interviews, October, November, December.

I asked Tanya what prevented her from leaving. She explained:

I could recognize it immediately for what it was. I just didn't play that game; it will get better if you just go away again. I realized that I was having this confusion and things were supposed to be normal and they weren't feeling normal.

### **Developing More of a Global Perspective**

Tanya then went on to describe how she could see that her overseas experience had affected her thinking at school. That it had peaked her interests in issues related to International Development, and the global approach to it. She was interested in how we, here in Canada, think about other parts of the world and its people. How C.I.D.A. relates to its youth programs and the overall aspects of Internship programs.

I'm still not solid in my own way of piecing together these relationships. Learning from practice is my other interest. I can see how these things weave together, but it's very difficult to see how it happens. I'm still not in a place where I'm so clear about these things.

Tanya and I continued to talk about where she saw herself going with her thesis work and the catalytic experiences of her everyday life. As we came to the end of this interview, we realized that we had only one more interview to go and it felt somehow as if we weren't ready for this to end. We discussed the possibility of continuing the investigation even after my thesis was finished. There was so much more to learn, as we mutually agreed there is no end to reacculturation.

### **Series C - Third Interview Session – June 24, 1998**

This was the last formal interview for the data collection, although Tanya and I do anticipate continuing to get together for further personal study. For the purpose of this study, she will of course have a chance to read my written analysis in order to provide further feedback. Neither of us see an end to this research and we fully intend to complete an epilogue. However, more about that later.

In this interview, ten months have past since Tanya arrived home. It becomes quite evident that Tanya has reached a stage where she is investigating and analyzing her own coping skills. We continued to explore the issues that have plagued her through this past year. Tanya is also becoming aware of her differences and better yet gaining a sense of acceptance of herself.

## Continuing to Develop Perspectives

Tanya and I began this interview with a discussion of a previous issue, that of practical versus theoretical. We also examined her need to be involved in work that is practical.

Or at least some kind of glimpse into practice like a synergy with practice,” Tanya added. “I find theory on its own dense and purposeless. I just finished reading this book by a major theorist, Majid Rahnema, who writes about ways of thinking of International Development. He articulates all this stuff that’s in my head that I don’t seem to be able to get out in an accepted way. It seems that this way of getting stuff out is no longer the way that I really do things, so I get confused. For me, it’s the wrong forum for exploring ideas, writing papers and summarizing theory.

I asked Tanya if she knew this about herself before she went to India. She replied:

No, not in the same way. I had a particular perspective, before I went to India, about who I was, and how I would be in the world in an International Development context. I’d done some work in this area, in Canada. So I’d started that reflective process before leaving. I went to India with an open mind and questions ready. I’d cracked open a space in that door, like expanding a space for thinking. Now that I’m back, the questions are still very much the same. But they are different in the way that they are thinking about things, and whatever I do, what I do. So my questions would be like: Who am I? How am I being in the world? How do I perceive others? How do I interact with others? What are my relationships like? What are they based on? Where do I find meanings in these things? What does it mean when I say I’m helping? How do they experience my help? Now my questions have expanded. Like the space for thinking about things has expanded. I’m learning, more than that, it’s not only an acceptable way to think, but it’s an important way to think, to keep expanding that space. There is a reason for me to feel like an idiot when I write a paper. It’s not that I’m dumb, but it’s very difficult to do things and think things that are outside the box. My thinking is sort of different than what is expected in this world.

At this point, Tanya and I discussed the fact that there seems to have been a change in her perception in that she is now able to look at her way of thinking as positive. She explained:

In fact, I was talking about this yesterday. I was writing my paper and explaining that when you experience some kind of shift or expansion, then there is some change in shape of ... like when I came back from this international experience, with these ideas and experiences fresh in my mind, but all jumbled and tangled and formless. Reading The Post Development Reader by Rahnema, really helped

me to crystallize some of those ideas about the relationship that I'd established with my work. He talks about Woo Wei, a concept of a sort of non-intervention but change that occurs through non-intervention. He contrasts Woo Wei with International Development and calls it Actomania. Where you see a problem and you have to address it with a project or some intervention. So when I think about what I want to do, I think about all these questions and it paralyzes me from acting. Because who am I to help, who am I to intervene in these peoples' lives? I find Randema takes these challenges head on. So how do you tell people who are well intentioned who want to help and who see millions of people who need help ... how do you tell them they are being Actomaniacs with their interventions? How do you do that with respect? So that's my feelings about Actomania.

## **Coping Skills**

Tanya and I then discussed the concepts of coping skills and strategies that people develop, often unconsciously, in order to find ways, that are natural for them, to adjust to the changes they are experiencing. I asked Tanya, if from her own experiences, she were to tell someone how to prepare themselves and what to be aware of when experiencing reentry, would she tell them? She replied, "I would probably tell them to let go of their expectations, to be gentle with themselves and then to let it wash over you".

Then I asked Tanya if she were to go overseas again what would she remind herself about doing, or what would she do differently than she had done before, during her reacculturation period. She explained:

Well, I think I'd remind myself to be less busy. I'd prepare myself by preparing a space for me to go, where I could spend a little time with my experience, instead of getting right back into life completely.

I didn't have a lot of time to reflect. So I'd need to remind myself that it takes time and be prepared to accept that. I'd also say to myself, you've been back two months, but there is no reason you should be feeling normal. It's O.K. to have a long experience of discomfort. Giving yourself permission to have it, and having it validated, even by someone else like a peer or someone who's been through the experience. It really helped me having friends come back three

months earlier than I had. After three weeks of being home, I was just waiting to feel settled again, and they said no way, they weren't settled at all, so just knowing that was helpful. It gives you different kinds of expectations, not worrying that you're hung up, or something is wrong with you. It's a dilemma. How could I have avoided getting back into the swing of things? It wouldn't have been something I could have easily have solved. How could I have given myself more time? Where? In Ottawa, well, Tom was on the West Coast. If I stayed in Vancouver right away, then I wouldn't have seen my parents. So, you know, what could I do?

## **Strategies**

Tanya continued:

But in thinking about this, I like the idea of retreats. A friend of mine went on a Crossroads placement and said that her retreat was helpful. It gave her more closure from that experience. Being together with a common bond, reminiscing, that's an important aspect. Sharing experiences creates a validation, but not by a professional, more of a peer group experience. And coming to the same idea that it's a similar process for everyone and that it's taking time. So you feel your reentry experiences are normal.

I asked Tanya how much time after being home, did she think, would be a good idea to go on a retreat? She answered:

The problem is feasibility. Our closure for the program was in India, and it wasn't even all of us together. After that, everyone was spread all over; I'm not convinced that the organization even cared. They were on to their next project. One of the things I've found is that the organization specifically chose people that are very independent. People who are independent are typically, independent. It's also probably difficult to get people together for a second time.

This gave me cause to wonder about the selection process of N.G.O.'s and corporations for their overseas employees. I realized that many of them consider the character of their employees as factors for overseas placements. But it concerns me whether they consider the aspects of returning also takes a certain knowledge, which may not necessarily be the same as

the ability to adapt to foreign experiences. As mentioned in the literature review, those who are most easily able to adapt to the host culture, often have the most difficulty returning home.

So considering the feasibility factor, as I explained to Tanya, the question is no longer: Should reentry training (for lack of a better word) be done, but rather, How should reentry training be done? I feel that there is a need to do programs or at least revisit a program, more than once at different intervals, as well as having some sort of peer network developed. Tanya and I discussed the aspect of E-mail networks, and as she explained:

From my own experience it was wonderful but it wasn't constant. It doesn't lend itself to long conversations. Also the aspect of body language being 80% of communication, E-mail loses some of the impact that talking to a real person has.

I also added, it doesn't lend itself to the diversity of meaning.

### **Living "Outside the Box"**

I mentioned to Tanya in the last interview she had talked about crystallized moments of thought, where a flood of other kinds of revelations about her experiences would rush in. I then asked what other kinds of revelations had she had since she'd been home. She declared:

A very important one I know I've been struggling with, being outside the box, playing the game and all that stuff. I'm trying to live inside the box and the thing is, I can't. Part of me wants to be there. I always likened it to a tape in my head. You know, the idea of Id and Superego. My tapes are very powerful, they tell me what I really need, when I'm confused, and that I'm not just dumb. My tapes say you're just too stupid to know what theory means, everybody else understands. But I'm starting to come to the idea, it's not that I'm stupid, but maybe I just don't think within the box. I know I'm not stupid, but last night while writing this paper, I was feeling that I'm just not doing this right. But, you know, I was doing it in the only way that I could!

Tanya then asked me about my realizations and how they affected my relationships.

How did I make them fit? She said:

Cause that's what I'm struggling with here. I went to the slums and it was ... well, very poor in my understanding of poor. But it was a real community of the sort I have never had the privilege to live in. So then how did these kinds of experiences affect your life here?

I explained to Tanya that I didn't have an easy time of it either. When I first came home, I had a great desire to learn more, and a desire to observe different ways of thinking. I just wasn't getting it from my friends and family because they had never had this kind of experience. My experiences with Crossroads, after my returns really helped me to understand that I wasn't abnormal to think and feel this way. I watched a couple of people, who had come back from their overseas placements, having real difficulties. So when the opportunity was presented them to go back overseas, they were gone, within a six months of being home. I realized then that going abroad again wasn't going to solve the problem of adapting to life in Canada, and that maybe it would just create a bigger schism for them. So then I started thinking of ways of making it work for me. I needed to find ways of getting my needs met so I had to identify my needs. At that time, I was in university, so I sought out the company of international students. Their ideas about the world were being shared and explored and it was a really good thing for me to be with them. My old friends were still important to me and I continued those relationships but I realized they couldn't relate to some of these experiences so rather than expecting them to change, I kind of lived within the box when I was with them. However, I looked for opportunities of getting outside the box. Getting more experience, doing volunteer work with Crossroads lead me to exposure to other N.G.O.'s and involvement in conferences and eventually facilitating overseas cultural training workshops. Eventually, I realized that I was meeting people who were like-minded. At the same time, I was developing skills for organization and training. Being involved in Developmental Education, I felt that I was doing my little bit and helping others to find theirs, at the same time gaining a better understanding of

this world. So gradually, I found individual ways of meeting my needs and finding a balance. But I believe everybody finds their own way differently. I asked Tanya if she had found things that she needed to do for herself. She explained, "With time you were able to see things that you did that brought you particular meaning I'll have to think about it, what I did or do for myself. Things are still confusing for me".

### **Giving Yourself Permission to Be**

Tanya and I carried on this discussion related to her confusion writing papers for school and the difference of her confusion in India versus her confusion in Canada. I read to her my version of her statements from the last interview and one that I had noted in particular struck her: "When she was in another culture, she had permission to be confused." Tanya exclaimed:

You see, that whole thing is my tapes – my super ego tapes. It just strikes me now what it is that's given you permission. It's not the external society! It's the tapes in your head that tell you how you're supposed to be. When you go to another culture, those tapes say, well, we don't know anything about this. We, we're just going to leave you alone, till we get our bearings, and then we'll start. So when you come home again? Oh, they're right back there again, ready to go. So you see I'm struggling with things everyday and something new every week. It's my personal hypothesis that you never stop struggling, because if you stopped struggling, then you stop living. I think I talked to you about how do you identify what's the problem because of reentry and what's the problem with things you deal with in your life? Are they so enmeshed that it would dishonor them to pull them apart? We don't function very well unless we have tangible things we can pin down for the reason that we are experiencing particular things. We don't respect moments of pure emotion. Emotion has to be attached to something. My mother was great, not that we believed her all the time, but she believed that things aren't necessarily always attached to the concrete. So you're depressed! Live with it!

"This, too, will pass," I added.



“I like ‘the universe is unfolding, as it should’,” Tanya said, “except for the ‘should’ part. And it’s very important to take time and be gentle with yourself. Take the time to reflect to be in this world.”

“So we’re really talking about self validation,” I added.

“And it’s about self worth,” said Tanya. “You are a person worth taking care of.”

I asked Tanya if she felt more positive about things. She explained:

Well, that’s difficult to say. Things do get clearer but also they change. As they become clearer, they become less confused and as they change, they expand. So it’s like this big cycle and you realize you’ve got a lot more to do. The more I know, the more I know I don’t know. So things haven’t dramatically changed. More like awareness raising. I believe true awareness raising grows from within and from your own experiences and knowledge.

Having said that, there is really not much more I can say except that there really is no conclusion to these interviews. Tanya and I discussed this was an on-going experience which she is still processing, what ever that means. So rather than coming to answers we have come to many more questions, and maybe reentry is like that. You may not come to answers, but you can come to satisfactory places.

“I will anticipate that!” were Tanya’s last words.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION: WHAT WAS TANYA'S PERSPECTIVE OF HER REENTRY EXPERIENCE?**

#### **Coming Home to Transforming Perspectives**

As a result of this collaborative exploration I have been able to reexamine my past reentry experiences and ultimately, reflecting further on my own ability to adapt and develop coping strategies. This has resulted in a better understanding of the complexities of the themes, issues and circumstances which unfolded throughout Tanya's experiences. The many aspects of expectations, loss and separation, and changing perceptions, referred to in the literature review, can clearly be observed in Tanya's story. Yet, it is the emerging questions in our interviews, which revealed themselves to have the most impact on my concepts of reentry. It is these questions which cause us to further investigate our own experiences.

Tanya's perceptions of her reacculturation and the many meanings she will make of them are still a work in progress. In the final interviews, she had come to express herself with increasing clarity. She seemed more capable of not only visualizing her past experiences, but also of putting them into a present perspective. Tanya indicated that she had reached a certain level of comfort, yet at times, her confusions still persisted. The transitions, through which she had gone and will continue to go through, are at best complex. Thus, I find it difficult to extricate those aspects which are specific to reentry and those that are not. As Tanya queried, "How do you separate out what is reentry and what is just life?" Good Question! In reality, I don't believe that we can. We may credit certain aspects or issues as contributing to reentry

experiences and difficulties, however, the past values, perceptions and life experiences are inextricably woven together in a manner which creates the whole of the experience. We have seen this in glimpses throughout Tanya's interviews. I am convinced that the blending of these aspects has a causal effect, producing discordance for many sojourners, who are readapting to their home culture. It is therefore necessary for returnees, as it has been for Tanya, to discover the many meanings and understanding of this total experience. This totality is what makes reentry experiences unique to each person, yet, universally similar to others in particular ways.

On reviewing Tanya's experiences, it became clear to me that many of the concepts I had formulated through my experiences and literature review were also evident in her story. Initially in the first interview series, her many accounts were related to the adjustments she was attempting to make to newer aspects of her home environment. At the time of our first interview, she had only just recognized this notion of new amongst old three months after being home. Tanya recognized that these "new" aspects that she would need to adapt to were causing her stress, such as her program at Graduate School and living alone again for the first time in a long time. As well, she would have to deal with prioritizing her time or lack thereof. Tanya's experiences also confirm my notion related to expectations, loss and separation, and self perceptions.

### **Expectations**

Tanya realized that the new way she had of looking at things was confronting her concept of her old life. She had assumed that she would be able to slip back into her old lifestyle after only a few weeks. As a result, she was affected profoundly by her own expectations of her

ability to adapt. "It might take a week or so, you'll have a little culture shock and then expect to be back at it again". Tanya mentioned, several times throughout the interviews, she didn't expect it would take her this long to adjust. Nine months after being home, by the time of the first interview in the series, in June, she had come to accept that "it does take this long". She also had expectations involving her relationship with her partner, Tom. As she had mentioned she "did fantasize that relationship", while she was in India. In reality, the continuation of their partnership required more work, soul searching and conciliation.

While in India, Tanya had no future plans for when she returned. Unexpectedly, she was offered an opportunity to go to Grad school. However, she had not expected to feel so dissatisfied with it. Her final years in her Undergraduate program had been very enlightening. Now, she had to deal with her conflicting conceptualizations of success and what part the awards and recognition played in that scenario. These aspects confronted her need for external validation, which she recognized compromised her values and quality of relationships with friends and family.

### **Loss and Separation**

Tanya expressed feelings of loss and separation from experiences in India, which had brought about a sense of belonging. She acknowledged that she missed particular aspects of that experience, such as, working with a team of women, and being engaged with people in meaningful and useful work. She also expressed a desire for that feeling of being at home. Her sense of loss was not only due to her India experiences. She also longed for that sense of belonging she had felt in her Undergrad program. Initially her Grad program was unable to offer

her the comfort she received from that sense of belonging. Her relationships with friends as well as her social and academic networks needed to be reconstructed. While she knew this would take time, the immediate need for them caused her sadness. She needed the support of people who knew her and could “just listen”. As a result of her India experiences, she had developed a deeper understanding of her philosophical outlook on the world. Back in Canada she was unable to share this with many people, as there was no one she knew who had fundamentally the same perspective.

### **Changing Self Perception**

While experiencing the combination of these aspects, she was at the same time not able to return to her old self in that place she had left. As a result, she had lost confidence in who she was and in those things that had once brought her comfort.

Through the duration of this study, we saw a progression in Tanya’s recognition of her own self-perception. At the time of the first interview in November, she did not recognize aspects of change in herself; rather she felt she was the same person, who had left Canada, only now she had a broader perspective of the world.

Early in the first interview Tanya indicated that her sense of confusion and feelings of being out of control were contributing to her Fuzzy Head. While she claimed her memory had always been bad, she was now having difficulty visualizing herself. She had lost confidence in her ability to know who she was. It was later in the final series of interviews, while reflecting back, that she was able to articulate more clearly, on how she had felt at that time. Where previously in her first interview she wasn’t able to identify herself as having changed. At that

time, she knew she was experiencing difficulties but didn't know what or how, exactly. Tanya freely discussed how she had been genuine, spontaneous, intimate, grounded, engaged, energized and useful, while living in India. She made comparisons to how she was here in Canada, but wasn't able to express how she could see herself in the way that she wanted to be. She could only identify her emotions, and except for her reaction to Graduate School, she didn't understand how they were manifested. In contrast, by the third interview in the first series, we see a realization beginning to dawn on Tanya, when she mentions that her friends had indicated they had felt a difference in her. At this time, Tanya began asking questions related to "What is Normal"?

Tanya then began to explore the notion of memories and perceptions *trickling in*. "I've changed in ways that I haven't been aware of". With this recognition came the awareness that she was experiencing some discordance. "I'm not comfortable with things, who I am, what I think, and what I'm doing. At times I'm a loner and I have no vision of myself". During the month of December, January and part of February, Tanya later described herself as depressed. How much of this condition was also attributed to by her poor health is not certain. However, by the time of the second interview series, and increasingly more so in the third interview series, three to six months later, there appears to be evidence of her changing perspective. She was now able to clarify her earlier perceptions as part of her learning experience. She recognized that some of her perceptions were due to her Old Tapes. "The Tapes in your head, like your super ego, they tell you how you are supposed to be", Tanya explained. This conceptualization of tapes appeared to me to be a metaphor similar to self-talk, or verbalization of her perspectives, only she heard them in her head.

## Appropriate Timing

During the final interview, in June, Tanya expressed that her level of comfort had increased. While she now perceived herself as living “outside the box”, and it appeared that she was able to accept this concept, she also recognized that her interests had changed. Her perceptions were affected in that they were expanding. Tanya was now exhibiting an awareness and acceptance that her perceptions were leading to growthful perspectives. She attributed this to developing routines and a sense of belonging created through her ongoing activities and familiarity with her environment. She now saw herself as clarifying a “change that had begun in India”. Her experiences since returning home had been painful, but with these experiences came growth. As Tanya explained, “I needed to go through that painful process”. While reflecting on this concept, she also questioned the notion of people trying to control this pain, by controlling their experiences. She wondered if that might jeopardize the learning they gained while experiencing the pain. She felt that training programs and/or persons assisting returnees should be cognizant of this aspect in order not to veto it. Rather, it was important to try to understand the usefulness of painful experiences. By being able to give support, it might ensure a growthful learning experience for the returnee. We had not discussed this notion before and I found it exhilarating that we had come to the same conclusions that I had put forth in my previous research.

An essential question which I asked myself throughout this investigation was, and still is, *how much of reentry knowledge should we impart to returnees before they go through their own experiences?* At this point, during the first interview of the final series, it would have seemed natural to share with Tanya my model of reentry stages, as well as explore my past research with

her. Yet, I chose not to. I did however, acknowledge her conclusions as valuable and interesting and that we both had come to the same perception. One of the reasons I chose not to share my research was that there is this fine line between sharing and telling, as Tanya mentioned in her interviews. There were still two more interviews to do and it seemed to me, it would be more valuable for Tanya to discover her own perceptions rather than corroborate mine. As I had also mentioned, during this study it seemed that there was a natural evolution in Tanya's requests for information about reentry experiences and related research. Perhaps because we had developed a deep level of communication I felt her questions seemed to occur at the same time that I sensed she needed more information. Upon her self-discoveries, some aspects of my theories were able to naturally trickle in, at the appropriate time, in order for discussion or debate of an issue. I was, at the same time, mindful not to present them as pedagogy.

As we have seen, time and reflection will help to create a broader perspective. By the time of her third interview series in June, Tanya was better able to comprehend her experiences and delineate her thoughts. She was now looking back to explain her past perspectives. "I couldn't crystallize the different ways I was looking at things. I needed time to weigh them."

This question of time needed leads me to consider the reasons for the returnees' delay in recognition of their perspectives. As I had mentioned in the data, there seemed to be time needed for digestion of experiences, perhaps a gestation period in order to facilitate articulation. I wondered, since returnees are unable to foresee or predict their reactions to circumstances, is it then necessary for them to experience and confront these events head on. Is this necessary in order to put them into perspective, while at the same time possibly creating new perspective out of old ones?



We saw that in her earlier interviews, in the first series, Tanya explained that she avoided thinking about things. It was later in her final interview that she described this as a need to control herself emotionally. Taking this into consideration, I wonder if it is as a result of being confronted with a barrage of new perspectives in conflict with old perspectives that causes some returnees to experience confusion in a profound manner.

I considered the possibility that, as a result of these confrontations, the returnee may become numb to, or even postpone, their emotional and intellectual introspection in order to control their own reactions and behavior. Or until such a time that present day experiences may force the returnees to interact and deal with their emerging perceptions. In her later interviews in June, Tanya spoke of her common everyday experiences triggering a rush of reflections about experiences that, in the past, she had not been so clear about. "They came as bursts of reflection, moving in waves that would wash over me and lead to a flood of other revelations". This seems to confirm the notion that given time, one by one, returnees' perceptions eventually emerge as affirmations of their total experiences.

This notion of time may also explain why there seems to be a delay in recognition of past experiences relating to reentry difficulties. Numerous returnees I have spoken to claimed, that after some time, they believed there was something wrong within themselves. It was only much later that they came to understand that these experiences were also part of their adapting process.

### **Be Gentle with Yourself**

Perhaps it is this ability to blend the old with the new that enables people to readapt. It was not until nine months after she arrived home that Tanya explained her developing

perspective of this issue. “Things come do come together, it's part of the whole thing. I guess the newness has become less new.” By this time, she was coming to a realization that what she had needed to do for herself was to “be gentle with myself, give myself permission to be confused and to understand that it takes time”. In other words, not to expect too much from herself in her first year of returning home.

### **Tanya’s Proactive Concepts**

By the end of this study, Tanya was able to conceptualize her experiences in that she was now able to make sense of her adapting process. Although this is by no means the end of her reacculturation, it did however, demonstrate the significant headway she had made over this ten-month study. In retrospect, Tanya explained that if she were to do things differently she would not try to be so busy. She would remind herself that she needed a space where she can go and be with her experience “before getting right back into it completely”.

When I asked Tanya during the final interviews what advice she would give to others who were experiencing reentry difficulties, her answers reflected her deep understanding of her own experiences. She explained that you would need to:

- Let go of your expectations.
- Understand that it takes a long time and be prepared to accept that.
- Be able to say to yourself there’s no reason that you should be feeling normal.
- Remind yourself that it’s O.K. to experience discomfort for so long a time.
- Give yourself permission to take time.
- It’s important to have this experience validated by someone who has been through it.

We then explored the concept of going on a retreat with others, as a vehicle in order to meet these needs. Coincidentally Tanya's suggestion of a retreat matches my own perceptions. Although I had not mentioned my past experiences on my Crossroads retreat, Tanya had come to a similar conclusion as the result of a letter from a friend. Surprisingly this letter had recounted to Tanya how her friend had also benefited from her retreat experiences as part of her Canadian Crossroads involvement. Tanya felt the concept of retreat was a sound idea as it:

- allowed the returnee to reminisce
- developed a common bond through a common experience
- offered validation by a peer group experience – not by a professional
- allowed for the idea that reentry experience is normal.

Tanya's suggestions for her own adaption, and for the benefit of others, indicated that her perspective is developing in a proactive manner. How she will meet her needs for the future is yet to be explored.

In assessing this collaborative participatory experience, Tanya expounded on the many positive ways this experience had benefited her. She explained that these explorations together had allowed her:

- to talk with someone who had had similar experiences
- to feel she would receive immediate validation for her thoughts
- to realize that she was not the only one who had been through this
- to have a time and a space set aside where she could reflect in tandem.

While these aspects upon which Tanya has reflected appear to me to be proactive strategies for coping, I found it interesting that, when asked what would she identify as her coping skills, her reply was evasive. "Coping with what, with all of this?" She was unable to

offer any concrete suggestions. Yet, she had just alluded to them in the previous discussion. Sensing a reticence or possibly an inability to identify or recognize her own coping strategies, I chose not to pursue this question.

Recognizing that this may also require a long period of time for reflection to crystallize Tanya's perceptions, I wondered if this might be something Tanya would choose to explore more in depth in the future. Early in the data, I had expressed a concern that perhaps it might be too early to tell. On the other hand, it may have been a matter of semantics; perhaps my choice of wording was awkward resulting in Tanya's inability to identify this aspect. Unfortunately, this study will be finished before I have another opportunity to pursue this issue three to six months from now. Although as mentioned previously my intention is to continue in collaboration with Tanya, to investigate on a personal level, her ongoing experiences. With the passage of time and a revisitation, the answer to this question and many more, may reveal themselves.

As for Tanya, through self-reflection and self-assessment, she was able to identify her own needs for readaption and develop proactive coping strategies, thus enabling her to enhance her readjustment. She was able to achieve a comfort level while at the same time, recognize that her reaccluturation was still on going. Tanya concluded that reentry does take a long time and the returnees must constantly remind themselves to be gentle with themselves.

## CHAPTER 6

### **REFLECTION: NEW AWAKENINGS AND AWARENESS**

As a result of this longitudinal study, I was able to develop a broader perspective of reacculturation. Based on our findings I offer these recommendations, for future consideration:

- Changing perceptions of a returnee's reacculturation necessitates ongoing reassessment. Preparation workshops or reorientation sessions which are offered only once, either before returning home or within a couple of months after arriving back, are beneficial but somewhat limited in dealing with the unpredictable future experiences and perceptions of returnees. Returnees need to continuously reassess their experiences, before returning home, during reacculturation, and after they have been home. This will enable them to blend their Old Selves with their New Selves. And for some, this may take considerable time. There is also a need for on-going support, which can enhance the returnees to successfully reacculturate. If this support takes the form of workshops or reorientation sessions, they need to be offered at different times perhaps in three month intervals throughout the first year of reacculturation; possible longer if needed. Support Networks may also assist in this area.
- It is important to remember that each returnee will experience reentry in their own way. While they may have some common experiences with others what affects one returnee may or may not affect another, based on the sum total of their own experiences.

- Returnees must remember to take time for themselves to reflect and to be patient with their own reacculturation. Frustration and confusion are often part of a learning experience and that returnees can come to see these experiences as growthful.

In assessing this study from my own point of view, I have come to acknowledge a number of aspects that I had not previously perceived. I discussed many of them as they emerged throughout the data. Since that time, I have come to formulate more thoughts and questions pertaining to those particular issues.

### **Validationgram**

The Validationgram was, in a sense, a useful tool for me. It served a purpose of being able to open our co-investigation to deeper levels of expression of emotions and communication. It allowed Tanya an opportunity to discuss issues which she may not have been able to articulate. On the other hand, as mentioned previously, it is important for those who may choose to replicate this study that the researcher, trainer or counselor be aware of the returnee's sensitivity to the "type of tools" to be used. The device should be compatible with the person being investigated. Flexibility on the part of the co-researcher is essential. In our case, Tanya's Mind Map served as a valuable substitute, although its emphasis was more a chronological historical exploration. In future, I would not discount the Validationgram but I may try to explain its purpose as a tool for communication, not as a tool for categorizing.

## **Seeking Professional Help**

As Tanya's story unfolded and her perspective evolved, the issue of seeking help from a professional, such as a counselor or therapist, came more and more into question. It occurred to me there may be difficulty for some people to seek help when experiencing discordance. For a number of reasons: at first they may not perceive that some of their difficulties are connected to their reentry experiences as we witnessed with Tanya, or they may perceive it as a weakness in themselves to not to be able to handle things.

I also question the adequate knowledge of professionals to be equipped to deal with the complexities of reentry experiences. While there are counselors dealing with the aspects of migration trauma, as mentioned previously, the notion of returning to one's own home is not the same. It is important for persons counseling or treating returnees to understand the depth and multitude of variables affecting returnees.

Tanya's experiences demonstrated that although it was initially helpful to be seeing a counselor, as time progressed, she became dissatisfied with what she perceived as a lack of understanding of the nature of her experiences. From Tanya's accounts, the usefulness of her sessions became less effective when the counselor began to offer some thoughts on strategies and coping mechanisms. As in Tanya's case, she may have needed to be at a different point in her reentry experiences in order to fully grasp the concept of coping strategies.

### **Readiness to Tackle Issues**

In reviewing this issue of identifying coping strategies, it occurred to me that this too could be an aspect classified under need for appropriate timing as mentioned previously. I am led to questioning aspects of the returnees' readiness to tackle specific issues or perceptions at particular times and how this relates to their length of time being home.

### **Support Networks**

Recognizing that having someone who can listen to the returnee and share in their experiences is a very valuable aspect. Tanya highlighted this as one of the reasons she would favour a peer rather than a counselor. My sense is that if support structures were set up to help returnees, they might be able to deal with their circumstances before they reach a point where they need a counselor. This leads me to believe that the aspect of peer pairing or the development of support networks would be beneficial for returnees throughout their reacculturation. While Tanya and I briefly examined this notion we were unable to explore it in any depth. I feel it is a valuable concept, which merits further study.

### **Health Issues**

Another aspect, which was discussed, was Tanya's prolonged health issues. Returnee programs often only touch briefly on this aspect. The chronic nature of some illnesses must have an impact on how returnees are able to deal with their readaptation. This has led me to wonder



about the effects of overseas experiences on our hormonal systems and how we adjust and adapt to the drastic changes we experience. In my literature search, I found no mention of health concerns or how they influence our readaption process. Perhaps this is due, in part, to the lack of longitudinal studies in this field. Such studies would enable us to observe the persistent nature of health concerns that affect some returnees. This could be an extremely vital study if examined by medical professionals who also possess a background and knowledge of reentry difficulties. After all, the adapting process does include mind, body and spirit, as noted in theses by and Crystal (1997), Greenwood (1991), and Mathews (1994).

### **Returnee's Ability to "Talk About It"**

Another emerging aspect of this study, which we were unable to explore in depth, was the concept of returnees not wanting to discuss their reentry or overseas experiences. Tanya raised this question when she noted that at times, she didn't want to talk about her experiences and at other times, she couldn't stop talking about it. She wondered if this was a common experience for returnees. From my own experience I don't remember not wanting to talk about my experiences, but I do remember choosing who I would talk to based on what I perceived was their exposure to reentry experiences. On the other hand, over the years, I have come in contact with returnees who have recounted their inability to discuss their overseas placements based on experiences which manifested guilty feelings, insecurities or misconceptions they had had at the time. In the data I addressed this notion of inability to articulate, wondering whether it was more important to respect the returnee's desire not to speak about their experiences or whether it was

more important to offer support and encouragement to enable the returnee to come to some awareness of their experiences. Much more research is needed to understand this aspect.

### **Question of Semantics**

Throughout our discussions, I observed an interesting development of semantics. Tanya's descriptions for explaining her experience created useful mechanisms for me to explore my own past experiences. Her choice of words such as, *trickling in of ideas*, *crystallization of thoughts*, *giving herself permission*, *being gentle with herself*, *living outside the box*, *reflecting in tandem*, and *expanding your space of thinking*, gave me new insights to my own perspectives. As the interviews progressed, the meaning of these words created a language of communication which enabled Tanya and I to collaboratively dig deeper into her concepts and mine.

### **Future Research**

As such, this longitudinal study allowed me to develop a broader perspective of the reacculturation process. Observing the changes in Tanya's perspectives from the first interview to the last, challenged my own original notions of reacculturation. While I did not discuss the theory of stages with Tanya due to her conception of categorizations, my original theory still exists but in a very different form. The W curve explains levels of comfort and integration in a linear mode. Yet, how these reentry perceptions are shaped has not been explained. It became clear to me that the phases of reentry, throughout predeparture, arrival home, and honeymoon period, adjustment and the final integration are not so easily definable. The recursive cyclical

pattern is much more complex than I had anticipated. Reflections of experiences will emerge to be reflected upon again, weaving threads of those experiences through the lives of the returnee, and thus resulting in the uniqueness of the individual experience. Those who have experienced reentry and have successfully returned home, will see these threads, however painful, as growthful life changing experiences. Future research may be capable of developing a more comprehensive model than I have been able to describe.

In thinking about this, it appeared to me that the function of this collaborative study has allowed me to experience the processes of reacculturation in a more organic manner. As mentioned in the data, if we had stopped the research in December, after only the first series of interviews, I would have had a simple monochromatic and somewhat static version of her experiences. My present perception of reacculturation is now more like that of a multidimensional kaleidoscope of perspectives, moving and changing in increments, yet at the same time in unison with the whole. The myriad of variables, aspects and circumstances are depicted by the colours and textures of the shapes which metamorphisize and emerge as new visions, concepts and perspectives. The final integration of experiences creates a different picture still connected to the past and continuously evolving into the future.

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## APPENDIX

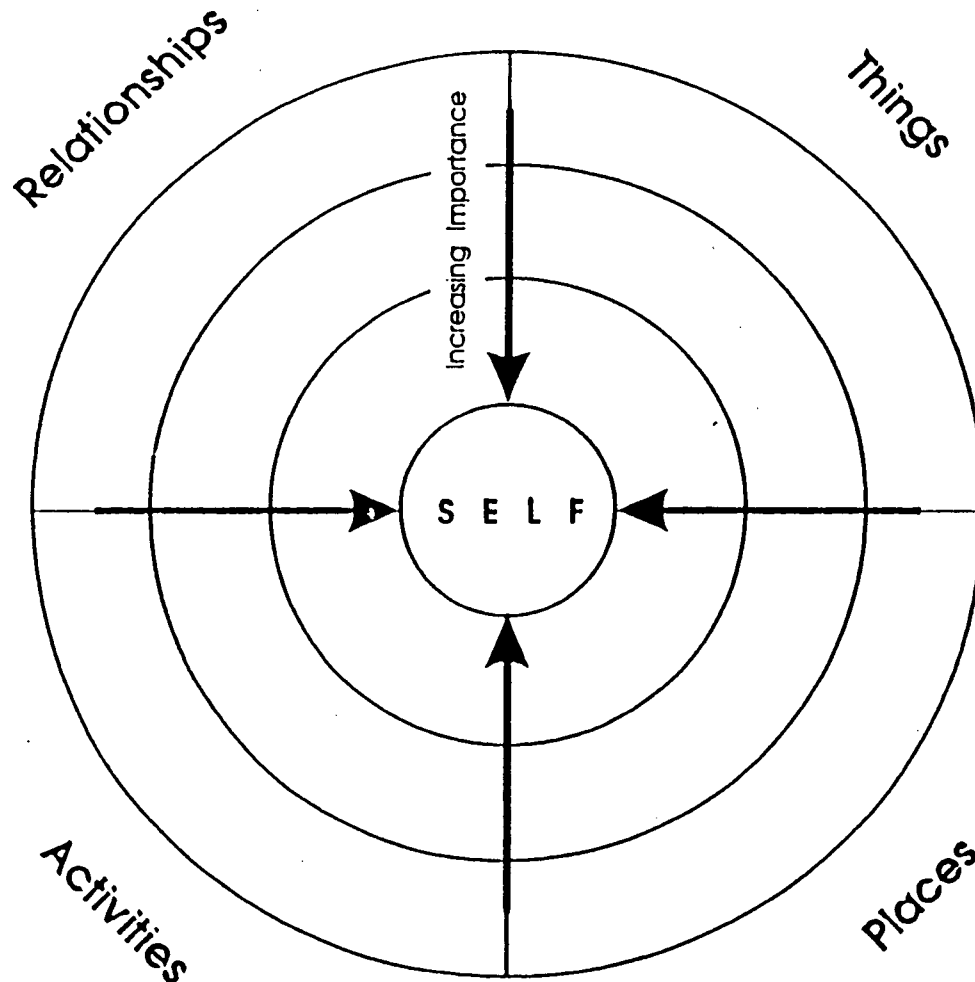
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