

ADULT LEARNING IN NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: A CONCEPTUAL INQUIRY
INTO THE VOLUNTARY SIMPLICITY MOVEMENT

by

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

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Adult Education)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

May, 2006

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Abstract

The purpose of this project is to explore adult learning in new social movements through the case of the voluntary simplicity movement. The goals of the project are: to add to the research on adult learning within new social movements, to contribute to the discussions of transformative learning and sociocultural learning, and to influence the practice of educators who are working within new social movements. I approach the research with both theoretical and practical questions and goals, identifying myself as a scholarly practitioner by reflecting on both theory and practice with the intent of influencing the practice of those involved in related work as well as contributing to knowledge construction. In this research, I draw on the literature of a particular movement and on various streams of theoretical literature in order to generate new knowledge about adult learning in new social movements. Using elements of the Precede-Proceed model (Green & Kreuter, 1999), I show the predisposing, enabling, and reinforcing factors of adult learning in the voluntary simplicity movement. These factors present a picture of what comprises the various aspects of adult learning in this movement. Further exploration of the factors in light of Kilgore's (1999) conception of collective learning leads to an understanding that identity, agency, and solidarity are the three main components of adult learning in the voluntary simplicity movement. Both transformative learning and sociocultural learning theories illuminate aspects of the data in ways that contribute to and reinforce my analysis that learning in the movement revolves around identity, agency, and solidarity. Implications for both theory and practice are explored with suggestions for further research

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Acknowledgements

I want to thank my advisor, Dan Pratt, for being a mentor and guide through the research process and in my teaching. Thanks as well to Daniel Vokey and Shauna Butterwick who added their considerable expertise and unique perspectives to the project.

My family has been supportive and encouraging throughout my work on this degree. Thanks to Mom and Dad for teaching their four daughters that we are strong, intelligent, and capable women who can achieve many things in life. Thanks to my sisters, Eowyn (for moral support and linguistic expertise), Melanie, and Varina.

Finally, many loving thanks to Ian who always believed I could do this, even when I had my doubts; who listened to my excitement and anxiety with equal interest; and who thinks that smart women are sexy.

For Maddie...

*...in the hope that transformations experienced and enacted
daily will create a better world for her to grow into...*

Chapter 1: Introduction

“It’s not fair” and “I want to change the world”. One statement often associated with young children and the other with young adults. Both are often assumed to be part of phases that we grow out of when we get into the real world and either our priorities shift or we become disillusioned. Part of the reality of the world, though, is that life is not fair and that changing injustice will require changing the world. My work as an adult educator keeps coming back to the idea of educating for creative, transformative change - of individual lives, of communities, and of the world with the goal of ecological, economic, and social sustainability.

Although there remains much denial and resistance, there is enough accepted information on global issues such as over-consumption, pollution, climate change, and resource depletion that it is safe to state that these are practical issues facing the world in the early twenty-first century. The rise of advocacy and protest movements has shown that these issues are on the minds of many around the world. The voluntary simplicity movement, with its concern for ecological, economic and social sustainability, is a movement of both personal and social transformation for a more just and equitable world.

Empowerment, personal growth, justice, change, activism...transformation. Adult education has long been concerned, in part, with individual and social change. In recent years, there have been calls in the literature and at conferences for adult education to return to its roots in social change education (Heaney, 1992; Ilsley, 1992; Mezirow, 1996), to address social transformation as well as personal transformation (Collard &

Law, 1989; O'Sullivan, 2001), and to attend to collective learning as well as individual learning (Kilgore, 1999).

In this research project, my personal and professional interests join with wider concerns facing society as well as trends within adult education to frame an inquiry that is both particular and general. It is particular in its relevance to my own work as an educator and to a specific stage in my studies and career development. It is general in what it may bring to discussions of the role of adult education and of the need for sweeping cultural changes to address global issues. The rationale for the project will unfold below as I present my own story as it relates to the exploration of adult learning in the voluntary simplicity movement and as I consider what is happening in the field of adult education and how the growing interest in adult learning in new social movements is informed by trends in the field and in society.

My Story

The research area that interests me, adult learning in new social movements, has its source partly in a field of practice and partly in theory. It also has its source in practical, contemporary issues and in my own life experience; as alluded to in the opening paragraphs. My interests in environmental issues, the equitable and sustainable use of global resources, and in various social justice concerns has been a lifelong evolution of concern and commitment. I was raised by a single mother who came to Canada as a draft resister and found creative and frugal ways to support two young children. Resistance to mainstream culture; simple, healthful living; self-determination and community were the themes of my childhood. In high school, I created a scrapbook

for an English project that combined poetry with images of the natural world as altered through human consumption, particularly pollution. In university, I began studying ecology and working with environmental groups, both raising my awareness of the natural world and of humanity's impact on the global and local ecology. Working in Christian summer camps during university and for several years afterwards connected me with other young adults with concerns for social justice from feminism to poverty. This environment also enabled me to make stronger connections between my spirituality, environmental issues, and social justice.

A few years after university, I had the opportunity to spend six months living and working in a small community in Ghana. The experience of being immersed in a culture so different from my own and of seeing first hand how western development projects can affect the environment, livelihood, and health of people in the majority world deepened my commitment to work in the area of education for sustainability. Upon returning home, the first time I entered a grocery store, with its vast quantity and diversity of products, was a profound experience after months of sharing in the simple basic foods of my Ghanaian community. While living in that community, the village elders and my hosts spoke of the economic, health, and cultural changes wrought by the presence of a hydroelectric dam many miles upriver from their community, which itself had no electricity. Links were made between the export economy, energy distribution, and the ability of communities to meet their own basic needs. Although I recognized the need for immediate aid and relief, I believed that the problems in these kinds of communities could be addressed by their own people, given the resources and the power. So, rather than taking on the role of "helping" those less fortunate in another part of the world, I

saw my role as educating those in my home country. Since the consumption patterns of the Western world drive many of the inequalities and cause many of the environmental problems locally and globally, I became more committed to providing educational experiences that would change those consumption patterns. This commitment was further enhanced by graduate studies in Christian education and ecotheology at a theological school known for its engagement in educating and working for social justice.

In my work as an adult educator over the past seventeen years, I returned again and again to practice of education for change. In camp leadership development, my focus was on changing the way we live together as community and changing how we use the earth's resources. While working with women's groups, my focus was on education for awareness of fair trade, sweatshops, working conditions of labourers and how our purchasing power and buying practices are linked to injustice and inequality. More recently, my interest has focused on the reasons and methods for shifting from a consumer lifestyle to a simpler, more sustainable lifestyle in opposition to western cultural norms and assumptions.

I am personally engaged in the voluntary simplicity movement in a number of ways. I am familiar with the literature and with the main thinkers and actors in the movement through my own search for ways to align my beliefs and values with my lifestyle. Through my study of this literature, I have found ways to live out my beliefs and to make practical choices that support my intentions in terms of contributing to an alternative way of life and way of viewing the world. My choices about work, consumption, money, and time have been influenced by engaging this literature. I have made a decision to leave a secure job in order to do work more in line with my beliefs

and values and in doing so, intentionally experienced a significant drop in my income that has impacted my consumption. I have made choices to continue my education and to spend time with family at the expense of being able to own a home. I continually try to make intentional choices about what and how much I consume. I also hosted and facilitated a simplicity study group for two years as a way of making space for dialogue with other women who are also concerned with simplifying their lives and living more sustainably. In choosing adult learning in new social movements as the area in which to do my research, I am thus beginning with my own life experience and with the issues that have held my attention over many years. One of my goals for this project is to link my personal and academic interests in order to develop what I hope will become the central focus of my teaching.

I have always tried to be reflective in my educational practice and have been drawn to books and articles that theorize about the practice of adult education. Research that tries to understand a phenomenon by linking ideas and experiences tends to be the kind of research that I most enjoy reading and that influences my own thinking and practice. I also enjoy reading widely and thinking about how ideas from one field or theory relate to other ideas; looking for patterns, connections, and insights. When I began developing this research project, I considered doing interviews of participants in the voluntary simplicity movement to explore what was important to their learning and transformation through the movement. As I worked on the project and engaged the literature, however, it became clear to me that I was deeply involved with the ideas and theories and needed to focus my work on exploring my research questions conceptually. I still think that my original idea of interviewing movement participants about their

learning would be an interesting and informative project, but it will be more so if it is grounded in a deeper conceptual understanding of the literature. This project takes a conceptual approach as a way of responding to my own interests and of using my skills in weaving together a variety of ideas and sources.

A New/Old Vision for Adult Education

In terms of understanding its own purposes and processes, adult education has undergone some shifts in its brief history. The work of reflecting on adult education's roots and history is well-documented. What is important for us here is to consider the central threads of this work and to look for patterns in the conclusions. The reason that we need to look back to adult education's roots is that contemporary calls for the field to engage more directly with issues of social justice often refer to those roots for support. There is general consensus about what adult education has looked like over its brief history, but differing explanations. In addition, there is a general sense in this discussion that adult education has lost its way and needs to rethink its current purpose or vision.

Beginnings and histories.

There are multiple voices drawing attention to adult education's historical involvement in social change and social justice. In a sharp call for renewal, Mezirow (1996) points to the field's beginnings in Scandinavia and England's populist movements. As evidence, he cites the work of Lindeman who saw an emerging field with two main goals: self-improvement in the immediate term and social change in the long term. He quotes Lindeman as saying that the purpose of adult education was "*social*

action on behalf of reasoned social change in the context of the quest for meaning..."

(Mezirow, 1996, The Evidence section, para. 2).

Ilsley's (1992) interpretation of the same history leads to a somewhat broader explanation of the beginnings of the field. He looks to the missions of adult education programmes and to the phenomenon of formal education to support his claim that there were two purposes behind early adult education activities. The first purpose was to uphold the status quo in society, or to control learners through subject matter and socialization. The second purpose was to change or improve society by liberating learners through critical reflection on self and society. In this interpretation, then, adult education has always had more than one agenda. Ilsley's view is upheld by the contribution of Finger (1995) who extends the analysis by positing three separate purposes in early adult education: lifelong learning, radical education, and andragogy. Finger contends that all three purposes focused on the adult learner as the central concern of adult education. He links lifelong learning to the project of secular humanism on a societal level and andragogy to the project of adult development on an individual level, with both being a part of a humanistic approach to education. The third purpose, political empowerment through radical education stands alongside as another way to "...individually and collectively humanize development and to become the masters of its process again" (Finger, 1995, p. 111). So, whether or not it was the single purpose of early adult education, it is agreed that education for social change was a part of the agenda of the field at its beginning.

Trends and critiques.

As the above exploration of history shows, adult education was certainly involved in social change education in the first phase of its existence. In the next phase of its existence, other purposes initially operating alongside social change education took the lead. This phase was characterized by a concern for professionalization, with humanistic approaches such as andragogy and lifelong learning becoming much more common than political or radical approaches (Collins, 1995; Finger, 1995; Ilsley, 1992). These authors argue that adult education in its current form focuses on the individual learner, the educator as a professional, and the purpose of education as supporting the status quo. Heaney's (1992) concern is that the field has become increasingly entrepreneurial and institutionalized. Mezirow's (1996) argument here is particularly pointed, accusing the field of being market-driven and focused on serving those who can pay. This period of rapid growth in the profession did not necessarily lead to an equivalent increase in self-reflective visioning. It is this reflection that is now happening; attending to criticisms, perceived failures, and evolving social conditions.

From the above discussion, it is clear that a central criticism of the current state of adult education is that it has lost its original concern for social action and change. There are three perceived failures that are of interest to us here: the failure to create enlightened and emancipated citizens (Finger, 1995); the failure to make education available to all (Mezirow, 1996); and the failure to retain diversity in those who identify as adult educators (Heaney, 1992). So, the vision of adult education is called into question as is the inclusion of some learners and educators with the exclusion of others. In trying to define a field, perhaps we have limited it instead.

Alongside all of the attention to where adult education has gone wrong is a growing understanding of the possibilities of the field. The combination of reaching the limits of industrial development and entering a period of sociocultural change provide adult education with incentive to re-invent itself for this unique and pivotal era (Finger, 1995). The project of humanizing development through lifelong learning and personal growth will not, on its own, address the causes of our current situation. The three purposes of adult education as posed by Finger (1995) are each found to be lacking. The project of secular humanism through lifelong learning is out of touch with reality because we have reached our biophysical limits for growth. The project of adult development through personal growth is out of touch with reality because it only reaches a privileged few and because it "...is no longer a collectively meaningful project" (Finger, 1995, p. 115). And the project of political empowerment is limited because our present challenges are as much biophysical and sociocultural as political. These assertions are echoed in Miles (2002) in her discussion of adult education's focus on "...enhancing individual and corporate competitive competence *and* containing the social costs of competition pursued at the cost of people and the planet" (Miles, 2002, p. 30).

Visioning and acting.

Given that the former/current visions of adult education are in question, where do we go from here? The key writers who I have explored in this section and who have given us relevant history and raised critical issues also provide the beginnings of a new direction. This new direction attends to the questions: "Who are we?" and "What do we do?" as adult educators and as a field. Answering the question, "Who are we?" is about vision and purpose. According to Ilsley (1992), adult education is in need of a direction.

Each of the thinkers explored in this section has a vision for adult education that encompasses its roots in social change education, addresses the criticisms of the modernist agenda of adult education, and engages with planetary and social challenges. This vision is enacted in various interconnected ways. Collins calls for attention to our commitments and activities and for a "...renewed emphasis on the agency of the adult educator..." (Collins, 1995, p. 95). Finger suggests a process of "...learning our way out..." (Finger, 1995, p. 116), with a shift from providing solutions through teaching to a process of collaborative learning. Mezirow (1996) names creating communities for discourse and working for participatory democracy as the two roles for adult educators today. All of these authors are optimistic about the viability and impact of the field of adult education.

A final important note in this conversation about a new era of adult education: Individual learning and collective learning must be linked. Neither on its own is sufficient to address the challenges that the world faces today. To set these types of learning up as a dualism is false, since both individual and social change are needed (Ilsley, 1992) and are mutually constitutive (Miles, 2002). Both individual and group components of learning have elements of identity, agency, and solidarity (Kilgore, 1999). As individuals, we are also part of the social world so that, when we change personally, we change part of that social world and education needs to address both aspects of this process (Welton, 1995). Adult education, as we have seen, can play an active role in social change, but it is not sufficient unto itself to create change (Heaney, 1992). In this discussion, it is important to understand what kind of social change is the aim and this understanding is articulated well by Cunningham (2000): "I argue that the role of critiquing structural alignments and

providing practical alternatives is the job of socially aware adult educators who by tradition have worked to strengthen the more vulnerable sectors through identification with these sectors" (p. 579). The phenomenon of social commitment provides the link between adult education and social change (Ilsley, 1992) and the site for both learning and learning to do (Mezirow, 1996).

Adult Learning in New Social Movements

Over the past few decades, transformative learning has become a recognized area of both study and practice within adult education. Scholarly articles, thought-provoking books, courses for practitioners, international conferences, and university-based centres for study draw attention to the profound interest of many educators in the process and purpose of educating for change. As well, there are many educational projects, both within and without the formal educational system, that seek to engage learners and enable change in a variety of ways and for a variety of purposes. There is also a growing interest in the learning that occurs within and around social movements, including Kilgore's (1999) work on collective learning and Welton's (1993) understanding of collective action as both a means to personal transformation and an engagement in social transformation.

Education for transformation has become an accepted part of the body of theory and practice in adult education. Work by Mezirow, Freire, and O'Sullivan represents different perspectives and practices undertaken with the aim of transformation at their core. Problem-posing education that develops critical awareness and leads to questioning rather than upholding the status quo grounds Freire's (1970) approach to transformative

education. He understands humanity as possessing a vocation to act on the world (1998) and looks to education to enable that action. Mezirow (2000) focuses on transformation of an individual's perspectives through critical reflection and dialogue. Whether through a "disorienting dilemma" or a gradual development of awareness, transformation, for Mezirow, begins with the personal before moving to the social. A third theorist in this area, O'Sullivan (2001), speaks directly to the need for global change with transformative education going beyond a critique of the culture to provide an alternative vision and specific ways to create a more just and sustainable culture.

The ideas of transformative learning have been my way into this project of exploring adult learning in new social movements. When I began my graduate studies, the concept of transformation, and the role of education in enabling and supporting transformation of personal philosophies and practices, was the focus of my study. As I progressed through the course work, I engaged with issues within adult education such as the role of spirituality and the impact of postmodernism. My studies also opened up the field of sociocultural learning and writings about learning in community. As I developed this thesis project, it became clear that what I was actually studying was adult learning in a new social movement, namely the voluntary simplicity movement. I use the term *new social movements* throughout this thesis following Melucci's (1995a) description of these movements as highly differentiated entities concerned with reflection, action, and knowledge production around sociocultural issues and conflicts. In a later chapter of this thesis, I explore this definition and distinction further and consider how it relates to the voluntary simplicity movement. As a relatively new area of study, there is only a limited amount of research and writing on adult learning in new social movements. My initial

interest in transformative learning, with its strengths and limitations, enabled me to see how elements of transformative learning and sociocultural learning theories could jointly illuminate aspects of adult learning in the voluntary simplicity movement as well as contribute to a deeper understanding of adult learning in new social movements.

The evolution of research and thinking on transformative learning has moved to blend the experiences of individual and group learning with personal and societal transformation. If a massive shift in attitudes and behaviour is required in order to meet the environmental, economic, and social challenges of our time, this is the kind of education with which adult educators should be concerned. Research in the area of education for transformation within social movements could add to both dialogue and action around many practical issues that have their root in the consumer culture of the western world.

The Research Project

The overall purpose of this project, then, is to explore adult learning in new social movements through the case of the voluntary simplicity movement. Focusing on the literature of a particular movement will enable some testing of what we think we know about adult learning in new social movements. It will also enable me to consider how ideas from transformative learning and sociocultural learning theories contribute to understanding the voluntary simplicity movement and its wider context. The goals of this project are: to add to the research on adult learning within new social movements, to contribute to the discussions of transformative learning and sociocultural learning, and to

influence the practice of educators who are working within new social movements to teach social justice, environmental awareness, and related subjects.

Research questions.

Based on the above purpose and the articulated goals of the study, the following are the research questions that I will attempt to explore, explain, answer, and further question in my thesis. They are the questions that I will take to the literature of the voluntary simplicity movement.

- What does adult learning look like in the literature of the voluntary simplicity movement?
 - a) What predisposing, enabling and reinforcing factors can be identified as contributing to learning, to action, and to persistence?
 - b) What is the dialectic between individual and group in learning?
 - c) What is it that changes through learning and in relation to movement interests?
 - d) What kinds of learning actually make a difference in adopting the philosophies and practices of the movement?
- How can ideas from transformative learning and sociocultural learning theories help us to understand learning in this movement?
 - a) What are the strengths, limitations, and critiques of transformative learning and sociocultural learning theories?
 - b) How do transformative learning and sociocultural learning theories inform and support one another?

- What can understanding learning in voluntary simplicity movement teach us about adult learning in new social movements and about practicing adult education within new social movements?

Assumptions and implications.

Any researcher brings with her assumptions about the research project. Some of these assumptions may be known and others may be identified during the project or even remain hidden. In this section, I will attempt to name some of my assumptions as I see them and as they have been pointed out to me in the process of completing this project.

The first assumption that I bring to this project is a belief in the “explanatory power of theory” (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 142). My initial interest in transformative learning theories and subsequent incorporation of sociocultural learning theories are indicative of my belief that theory can be useful in helping us to understand our world and ourselves. As can be seen from my research purpose, goals, and questions, it is my hope that this project will make a contribution to theory in the field of adult education. Alongside this assumption that theory is important is the assumption that theory alone is not enough of a contribution for my project. I want the knowledge created and extended in this project to also be of use to practitioners, including me. I subscribe to the notion that theory needs to have implications for practice and that practice needs theoretical reflection and development. It is my hope that the theoretical understandings that evolve through my work on this project will have practical implications for adult educators working within new social movements or engaging in social change education in other sites for learning.

Another assumption that I bring to this project is that no one theory, conception, or area of study will be sufficient for understanding adult learning in new social movements. I have named both transformative learning and sociocultural learning as theoretical sources that will be explored in relation to my research. New social movement theory, an area of study with its roots in sociology, will contribute in a number of ways. In addition, a conception of collective learning (Kilgore, 1999) and a model for identifying factors in adult learning (Green & Kreuter, 1999) will contribute to framing the discussion of adult learning in the voluntary simplicity movement. This is not simply a case study of adult learning in voluntary simplicity movement that will be explained using only literature on adult learning in new social movements; it draws more broadly in order to understand more deeply.

My final (known) assumption is that significant change is needed in the western world in order to create a more just global society and to safeguard the planet, and that this change will require struggle within individuals and communities, at local and global levels. It is my belief that education can and must make a difference. A related assumption is that there are educators, like me, who want to engage issues of ecological, economic, and social sustainability with adults and who are looking for theoretical grounding and for positive and effective ideas for how to do this kind of teaching.

This study is important for a number of reasons. Beginning from the perspective that change is necessary in order to address contemporary ecological, economic, and social challenges, this study is important in its attention to a movement that focuses on transitions to more sustainable lifestyles. From the perspective of educators who want to change the world, this study is important in its attention to exploring how adult learning

happens in new social movements. From the perspective of theory in adult education, this study is important in the possibility it holds for theorizing about adult learning in new social movements and for contributing to the further development of transformative learning and sociocultural learning theories. I believe that these contributions, in a small and partial way, answer the calls of the field of adult education as described earlier in this introduction.

In exploring both the field of adult education and my practice over the years, I have come to see personal and societal transformation as interdependent. Although my primary focus as an educator is on social transformation toward a more sustainable and equitable world, I have come to be strongly concerned as well for personal transformation as I believe it to be necessary for creating a wave of social transformation. In my teaching practice, I aim to enable learners to become more aware of social forces and of their assumptions about how the world works. I also aim to engage learners in making meaning and in constructing knowledge that is authentic and that deepens their understanding of themselves as well as the world around them. My educational philosophy views learners as individuals-in-community, as able to change and to create change, as beings and as doers. I see my role as that of a guide who can draw attention to the landscape and enable learners to explore new areas. In my teaching, it is important to know the terrain that is familiar to learners and to know how far and how fast they can explore without becoming lost or disoriented.

Transformation, both personal and social, is a process that can be dangerous and overwhelming. Although my beliefs and ideals mean that I want learners to see the world in a new way and to see how they can create change, this stance is tempered by the belief

that learners will more willingly and effectively engage transformation if they are neither pushed too much nor too little. This boundary and balance can be challenging to find and to maintain. It is my hope that the knowledge gained from this study will enable me, and other adult educators with similar aims, to plan and implement educational experiences and programmes which enable transformation in learners and that respond creatively and effectively to the most pressing challenges of our times, namely ecological, economic, and social sustainability. This study is significant because it is timely in terms of world issues, grounded in theory, and of practical interest to adult educators.

A map of the thesis.

This thesis is somewhat complex, involving as it does several distinct bodies of literature: voluntary simplicity, transformative learning theory, sociocultural learning theory, new social movement theory, and adult learning in new social movements. This complexity is a strength of the project as it draws on various sets of ideas in order to develop an understanding of adult learning in the voluntary simplicity movement and all of this literature has something important to contribute to that understanding. The complexity of the project is also a limitation, however, in that it means that boundaries need to be set on how much of the literature in each area can be drawn into the discussion. Each of these bodies of literature is extensive in itself and is also linked to related research that could add to the project. In order to manage the complexity and to stay within the bounds of a masters thesis project, decisions have been made about what literature to use. Key writers in each of the bodies of literature have been selected with the knowledge that they are not the final arbiters of their areas, but are either understood to be important contributors or to have something particular to add to this specific

project. It is my hope that the choices made about what to include will provide a well-rounded analysis, but I fully understand that there will be ideas, critiques, and insights that are left out. Any piece of research at this level and of this size will make only a small contribution to a field of study. In making the decision to create a complex, but limited, study it is my hope that the results will draw on my own strengths as a researcher and point to possibilities for future research.

The thesis will unfold in five chapters following this introduction, beginning with methodology and concluding with implications. Chapter 2 discusses the methodology used in this research project: I identify my role as the researcher, explore conceptual inquiry as the culture of inquiry in which this research falls, and outline the forms of inquiry and tools that I will use throughout the thesis. Chapter 3 examines the definitions, characteristics, and features of the voluntary simplicity movement. The focus of Chapter 4 is on literature related to adult learning, with sections on transformative learning theory and sociocultural learning theory as well as a brief discussion of new social movement theory preceding a summary of the current literature on adult learning in new social movements. Both Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 summarize, analyze, and offer some critique of each of the bodies of literature chosen for this research project. Chapter 5 is the longest and most complex chapter of the thesis, drawing together the various threads of research to identify why I believe the voluntary simplicity movement is a new social movement and how adult learning can be characterized and understood in this movement. The final chapter outlines the implications of this project for contributing to theorizing and to practice and for further research.

Chapter 2: Methodology

Developing a clear and grounded methodology has been, for me, the most challenging aspect of the research process. What is it that we do when we consider theory in light of other theory, of a particular case and of professional and personal experience? How does one do reflective critique and integrate various strands of thinking in a way that is both logical and creative with both practical and theoretical results? What do I bring to this task and what tools do I need in order to accomplish it well?

There are many methodological ideas and approaches and writings that have influenced my process over the past months. One of my most recent discoveries, and one of the most influential in my work on discovering and realizing an appropriate methodology for this piece of research, has been Bentz and Shapiro's (1998) *Mindful Inquiry in Social Research*. Written as a guide for researchers, the text develops a research process named *mindful inquiry*. This process aims to provide a way for the researcher to link self and world; to do research that contributes to the development of the researcher as well as making a contribution to the world. There are two main ideas that I have taken from this text in order to shape my methodology: the idea of the researcher as a *scholarly practitioner* and the idea of triangulation. Taking the position of scholarly practitioner integrates both my own goals for this research as well as concerns from the literature around research in adult education. The idea of triangulation has evolved to include an understanding of crystallization and of *wide reflective equilibrium*. Following a discussion of both of these ideas in order to position myself further, I will explore the

culture of inquiry that frames my research and the various forms of inquiry and tools that I will draw on in order to complete the research project.

Scholarly Practitioner

The first central concept that I have used in developing an approach to my research tasks is the idea that the researcher is a scholarly practitioner at the centre of the research process (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998). This concept of the researcher as also a professional is not unique to these authors, but they are perhaps unusual in that they have made this kind of researcher the key audience for their approach. They define a scholarly practitioner as "...someone who mediates between her professional practice and the universe of scholarly, scientific, and academic knowledge and discourse. She sees her practice as part of a larger enterprise of knowledge generation and critical reflection" (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 66). In a chapter on the politics of knowledge construction, Deshler and Grudens-Schuck (2000) discuss the theory-practice dichotomy and summarize some of the critique of this dichotomy. They indicate that a growing number of researchers and practitioners are working together to develop theory informed by and applicable to practice. Their brief commentary is summarized with a statement that: "Knowledge construction that combines theory and practice should count because it speeds production of useful theories and efficacious technologies" (Deshler & Grudens-Schuck, 2000, p. 597). This position recognizes that practitioners are able to develop theory and are best positioned to theorize successful practice (Deshler & Hagan, 1989) and that scholars also have practical experience to draw on in their research. In a review of analytic philosophy of education in the 20th century, Portelli (1993) pointed to the shift

from the practice of pure analytic philosophy to a focus on the context of the issues under analysis. The author cites as evidence researchers who allow their analysis to be guided by their commitments as educators and who address normative as well as analytic concerns. Research, then, can be seen as the place where theory and practice are integrated (Deshler & Hagan, 1989).

In line with these explications of the importance of the theory-practice connection and also remaining true to my interests and roots in both areas, I am approaching the research with both theoretical and practical questions and goals. In this manner, I am identifying myself as a scholarly practitioner, reflecting on my own practice and the practice of others with the intent of influencing the practice of those involved in similar work as well as contributing to knowledge construction. Following Bentz & Shapiro (1998), I identify

...four primary functions of scholarly inquiry for the scholarly professional:

1. personal transformation;
2. the improvement of professional practice;
3. the generation of knowledge; and
4. appreciation of the complexity, intricacy, structure and – some would say – beauty of reality. (p. 68)

Wide Reflective Equilibrium

The second concept that has evolved as central for understanding my overall methodological approach to this research project is the idea of the search for a wide reflective equilibrium. In my initial reading of Bentz and Shapiro (1998) the idea of

triangulated research design struck me as being an important one for a project that draws on so many kinds of theoretical material. This concept is neatly integrated with the idea of the researcher as a scholarly practitioner in the following statement: "Triangulated design is well suited for mindful inquiry, because it requires that the researcher be the clear center of the process, weaving together and describing the results from each point of the triangle." (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 89). Although I believe Bentz and Shapiro take a broader interpretation of triangulation, it does have specific connotations in more empirical research. There are, however, similar conceptions that can be drawn on to articulate how this general idea applies to my research. Barrow (1990) posits a process of *holistic inquiry* which provides a layered approach that, when used carefully, can result in a fuller, richer curriculum design. Different types of questions are addressed using different methods and the whole that is created is greater than the individual pieces of research. In this view, all forms of inquiry are partial and have distinct kinds of questions, approaches to inquiry, and implications. In this sense, drawing on both transformative and sociocultural learning theories to consider how best to practice adult education within new social movements resonates with Barrow's conception of holistic inquiry.

A related understanding of the approach to research design that I want to use is described in Richardson's (1994) concept of crystallization, which is both more complex than the concept of triangulation and more refined than the concept of holistic inquiry. In her conception, the researcher can "...recognize that there are far more than 'three sides' from which to approach the world" and that "Crystals grow, change, alter, but are not amorphous" (Richardson, 1994, p. 522). Although I am approaching this research in order to contribute to understanding, I recognize that any understanding will remain

partial. Viewing my research, and adult learning within voluntary simplicity movement, through the lenses of transformative and sociocultural learning theories as well as new social movement theory, gives a multifaceted approach to addressing my research questions. In addition, as will be seen later in this chapter, various aspects of the research project will be addressed through different forms of inquiry as the questions asked and the materials considered are different in nature. With concern for both development of theory to understand adult education more deeply and for the development of useful techniques and processes for adult education practice, a single theoretical lens or form of inquiry would be unequal to the task. I will need to change how and where I look through the crystal (Richardson, 1994), in this case, the voluntary simplicity movement. A research design influenced by the concept of crystallization allows for the subject of the research to be considered from a number of points of view, through different theoretical lenses, and using a number of forms of inquiry.

Viewing the research problem and materials in this multifaceted way raises the question of how to deal with what I see: what will be the end result of the inquiry? The idea of a search for wide reflective equilibrium provides a way to assess what I see through the different theoretical lenses and forms of inquiry. The goal, in this view, is to come to a satisfactory set of agreements (Vokey, 2001) about what is happening in adult learning in the voluntary simplicity movement. Such a set of agreements would be “...*coherent, mutually-supporting, successful, and defensible* (Vokey, 2001, p. 92) both for theorizing and for practice. Included in this set of agreements would be contributions from different bodies of theory as well as from the voluntary simplicity movement itself. The set of agreements would deal with the strengths and limitations of transformative and

sociocultural learning theories in explaining adult learning in the voluntary simplicity movement. It would also speak to the internal coherence of the philosophies and practices of the voluntary simplicity movement and to the success of its methods for engaging adults in the movement in order to alter their lifestyles. Such a set of agreements, while contributing to knowledge of adult learning in new social movements, would not be seen as complete or inviolate since "...the process of seeking wide reflective equilibrium makes no claims to attain certainty. This is in part because the search for wide reflective equilibrium...is an ongoing process, its conclusions open to revision in the light of new developments or discoveries" (Vokey, 2001, p. 96). The process of seeking wide reflective equilibrium is to theoretical inquiry what triangulation is to empirical inquiry: both are central to a successful and thorough research design in their own culture of inquiries.

Conceptual Inquiry

Having identified how I view myself as a researcher and how I view my research process, the next step is to outline the culture of inquiry within which my research falls. A culture of inquiry is understood to be a general approach to research that, while incorporating various methods and focusing on different disciplines, holds specific assumptions and understandings about research, knowledge and reality (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998). A culture of inquiry generally has certain types of problems that it addresses, particular assumptions about knowledge, and a distinct researcher-subject relationship. The culture of inquiry framing my research is conceptual or theoretical inquiry. While Bentz and Shapiro (1998) use the term *theoretical inquiry*, Coombs and Daniels use the

term *conceptual inquiry*. I use the terms interchangeably in this thesis as I believe that, within this project at least, they do not need to be categorized separately.

While all research aims to add to the theorizing in a field or discipline, theoretical inquiry is distinct in that both its source material and end result is theoretical. This kind of inquiry can have a number of purposes and can take different shapes depending on the subject of the inquiry and on the methods used to pursue the inquiry. In terms of the work of this thesis, the concerns that I have raised in the introductory chapter clearly fall within the following articulation of theoretical inquiry which "...attempts to generate new knowledge through the analysis, critique, extension, and integration of existing theories and empirical research" (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 141). In this research, I will be drawing on the literature of a particular movement and on various streams of theoretical literature in order to generate new knowledge about adult learning in new social movements. The example of voluntary simplicity movement will provide a context out of which to analyze and critique current writings on adult learning in new social movements. The literature of transformative learning and sociocultural learning theories will be lenses through which to view the subject and each other in order to determine where each may address some of the critiques and shortcomings of the others. Thus, this research is theoretical inquiry that takes a hermeneutic approach as discussed in Bentz and Shapiro (1998):

In that it involves a reinterpretation of the meaning of, and intentions behind, prior theoretical work, theoretical inquiry is essentially hermeneutic. It always involves the interpretation and evaluation of existing theoretical or textual evidence for the generation of new theory. (p. 144)

This kind of theoretical inquiry requires a great deal of interpretation, in an iterative process that brings elements into dialogue, develops ideas further, adds another element, draws out new understandings, and strengthens various theories and practices along the way. Along with interpretation, this kind of inquiry also makes assessments about the practical relevance, comprehensiveness, and success (relative to its competitors) of the conception being considered (Vokey, 2001).

I rely heavily on one source, Coombs and Daniels, (1991) to identify and apply three distinct forms of inquiry within theoretical or conceptual inquiry: concept interpretation, conceptual structure assessment, and conception development. In their words, conceptual "...inquiry aims at understanding and improving the sets of concepts or conceptual structures in terms of which we interpret experience, express purposes, frame problems, and conduct inquiries" (Coombs & Daniels, 1991, p. 27). Conceptual inquiry, in this sense, is comprised of three forms of inquiry that the authors see as guidelines rather than as specific, step-by-step procedures. All three forms of inquiry can contribute to the tasks of this project and they are chosen in order to provide a structure for organizing the analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of the literature, theoretical materials, and conceptions undergoing study.

Concept interpretation.

The first form of inquiry is concept interpretation, a process which includes "...discovering the meanings persons attach to the concept..." (Coombs & Daniels, 1991, p. 34). The intent is to reach "...interpretations that are both accurate and sufficiently rich to capture the complexity of the concepts..." (Coombs & Daniels, 1991, p. 29). Several guidelines are suggested for this process of inquiry, with the clarification that they are not

intended as steps and not all may be needed for any given analytical task. Indeed, I use some, but not all of the guidelines suggested and will only outline those that are used. In order to develop an understanding of how a concept is ordinarily understood, its relationships to other concepts and to social practices can be explored (Coombs & Daniels, 1991). A variety of cases where the term is used should be compared and contrasted in order to test understanding of a meaning. Consideration of how the concept is used in less familiar settings prevents the researcher from falling back on intuitive understandings. And, finally, concepts may require more or less depth of analysis.

Exploration of the example of voluntary simplicity movement in order to examine adult learning in new social movements raises some important conceptual challenges. Understanding and interpreting the concept *voluntary simplicity* is critical to being able to use the movement to analyse and critique the theories under consideration. It is important to understand, from the literature, how participants view the movement and their reasons for participation. The process of concept interpretation outlined by Coombs and Daniels (1991) is engaged in order to explore a wide variety of literature related to the movement and to define and interpret the concept of *voluntary simplicity*. There are also two related terms that will be considered through this process since they are central to the movement literature as well as widely used and variously understood within and without that literature: *sustainability* and *social change*.

Conceptual structure assessment.

The second of Coombs and Daniels' (1991) three forms of conceptual inquiry is conceptual structure assessment:

The purpose of conceptual structure assessment (CSA) is not simply to understand the conceptual structure underlying a theory, model, argument, or research program, but to determine its adequacy for use in curriculum research and development. Basically, such assessments are comparative. (p. 35)

Again, the authors have suggested a number of guidelines for this form of inquiry. One way of determining the adequacy of a particular structure is to consider "...the morality of viewing the world as the structure would have us view it" (Coombs & Daniels, 1991, p. 35). It is also important that a particular structure allows us to develop questions about the purposes and challenges of our educational projects. If the structure proposes educational processes, part of the inquiry should be to determine how those processes are justified as well as to explore their educational implications.

This method will be used to interrogate a number of conceptual structures engaged throughout this project. The central conceptual structure under consideration is adult learning in new social movements, but related structures comprising transformative learning and sociocultural learning theories, and explaining new social movements will also be explored using this method. Questions that are asked include: How does this conceptual structure view the world? How does it contribute to our educational purposes? And how does it respond to the example of voluntary simplicity movement?

The implementation of conceptual structure assessment in this thesis takes a hermeneutical approach. Hermeneutics is especially important in this aspect of the project because of the complexity of the ideas, conceptions, and theories that are incorporated into the discussion of adult learning in new social movements. One main contribution is to "(a)llow the movements of understanding to happen on their own time" (Bentz &

Shapiro, p. 51). Hermeneutics recognizes that meaning is “webbed” (Smith, 1991) and it rejects both foundationalism and nihilism (Noddings, 1998). All of these characteristics point to the value of this approach for a theoretical inquiry that wants to analyze, synthesize and evaluate various threads of thought.

The idea that I most associate with hermeneutics is that of a hermeneutical circle which incorporates ideas from dialectic to form a distinct process. This process is best described by Vokey (2001) as follows:

This process involves two (at least) distinct dialectical movements. One is the movement back and forth in understanding a rival scheme of beliefs between using some understanding of the whole to illuminate the part, and using some understanding of the parts to illuminate the whole. The other dialectic is the movement back and forth between using one’s own point of view to understand the other, and then using the rival point of view (as best understood) to illuminate one’s own. (p. 41)

In order to use this process, it is important to understand the concept of horizons and the structure of dialectic and I turn to Lonergan (1973) to explore these ideas. A horizon, or a field of vision, is what we can see from our own position. My own horizon is, of course, the primary field of vision from which this project is developed. Other horizons are brought into the discussion through presentation and interpretation of other literature(s). There are differences between the horizons associated with transformative learning, sociocultural learning, new social movements, and the voluntary simplicity movement. Some of the differences in these horizons may be complementary in that they are not sufficient on their own and function to explain more of the world together. Other

differences may be genetic, meaning that they represent separate stages of development that build on and transform each other. Dialectically opposed horizons are not compatible and find each other unintelligible (Lonergan, 1973). Seeing the development of the discussion in this thesis as a hermeneutical circle will enable a deeper understanding of adult learning in voluntary simplicity movement to emerge. If only one horizon, that of transformative learning or the limited literature about adult learning in new social movements, was engaged in this thesis, the results would be poorer than I believe they will be for engaging in interpretation that brings in other horizons.

There are two places in which a hermeneutical circle process will be engaged in this research. In addition to the concept interpretation of the term voluntary simplicity, a hermeneutical approach to interpretation is engaged in order to understand the purposes, values, and characteristics of voluntary simplicity. In this sense, my use of the term hermeneutics follows Noddings (1998) who sees this as an ongoing process of uncovering and suggesting new meanings and Smith (1991) who indicates that meaning is always referential and relational rather than absolute. The second place where the hermeneutical circle can be entered, and more significant in terms of length and breadth, is in chapter five. Following an exploration of the voluntary simplicity movement and a review of the literature of transformative learning, sociocultural learning, new social movement theory, and adult learning in new social movements, the main task of the thesis will be to bring all of these elements into dialogue. The idea of a hermeneutical circle, where parts and whole illuminate each other and where different points of view are illuminate each other, lends itself well to the tasks of this thesis.

An additional tool is used to provide a structure for engaging in interpretive tasks: the Precede-Proceed Model (Green & Kreuter, 1999). This model assumes that behaviour is best understood and education is best planned, when the understanding and planning is multidimensional. The authors propose that, in order to understand what is happening in regards to a particular behavioural phenomenon, one must understand the predisposing, enabling, and reinforcing factors of the group and individuals being studied.

Understanding what is happening in the voluntary simplicity movement in terms of how adults are drawn into the movement, how they learn ideas, skills, and behaviours, and how they maintain changes in their lifestyles is directly related to these three factors. This model is used to explore adult learning in voluntary simplicity movement by identifying predisposing, enabling, and reinforcing factors for this group. Further interpretation is done by exploring how the literature on adult learning that has been discussed in the thesis can explain what is found in the movement, how elements of the literature can be used to better understand learning in this movement, and how educators can plan and facilitate learning based on this understanding.

It is important, then, to clarify what each of these factors comprises. The first set of factors, "predisposing factors include a person or population's knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, values, and perceptions that facilitate or hinder motivation for change" (Green & Kreuter, 1999, p. 40). Participants' motivations to become involved with the movement, to consider the issues, to think about possibly changing their lifestyles, all fall within this category. The second category is enabling factors which "...are those skills, resources, or barriers that can help or hinder the desired behavior changes as well as environmental changes" (Green & Kreuter, 1999, p. 40). In considering this factor, access to literature

and to study groups, understanding specific alternative actions, and how much control participants have over various aspects of their life may be factors. Finally, reinforcing factors includes rewards, feedback, support, and the positive or negative influences that they provide the person and/or population. Since the voluntary simplicity movement recommends various lifestyle changes that are at odds with mainstream culture, these factors are particularly important for sustaining change. Identifying predisposing, enabling, and reinforcing factors in the voluntary simplicity movement lays the groundwork for understanding elements of adult learning in this movement and makes possible the engagement of various theories and conceptions of adult learning to synthesize and evaluate what is found.

Conception development.

The third of Coombs and Daniels' (1991) forms of conceptual inquiry is conception development. This form of inquiry is "...designed to develop and defend a conception or conceptual structure" (Coombs & Daniels, 1991, p. 28). Guidelines for this method include taking care that I know what I want the conception to accomplish and how that is related to the problem(s) as articulated in the research. Care also needs to be taken so that the conception retains the meaning of the original ideas and shows clearly how it is better than the original group of concepts. The final task of this research project will be to build on the concepts and understandings of adult learning in new social movements and to add to the developing conception of this kind of learning. This task will obviously be partial and limited, but the method of conception development can help to ensure that it is done with respect and caution.

As this is a conceptual project, I identify my *data* as the literature of the voluntary simplicity movement. All other literature brought into the discussion is there to analyze the data and to develop an understanding of adult learning in this movement. I use the term *data* to distinguish how the different bodies of literature are used and to identify the voluntary simplicity movement literature as the focus of the study.

In conclusion, it is clear that this methodology is multifaceted. The research process began with identifying research goals and questions, positioning me, and naming assumptions and possible implications in the first two chapters of the thesis. The process now continues and can be described in three stages which are found in the following four chapters. The first stage, in Chapter 3, is the concept interpretation of voluntary simplicity in order to understand this movement. In the second stage, conceptual structure assessment will be engaged first by using the Precede-Proceed model to identify various aspects of learning in the voluntary simplicity movement. I will then take a hermeneutical approach to conceptual structure assessment in order to determine what can be understood about adult learning in the voluntary simplicity movement and about transformative and sociocultural learning theories as they relate to this movement. Chapter 4 and most of Chapter 5 attend to conceptual structure assessment. Finally, a brief application of conception development, in the conclusion of Chapter 5 and continuing into Chapter 6, will show what can be added to the theorizing about and practice of adult learning in new social movements, especially in the specific case of the voluntary simplicity movement. In each of these stages of the research process, choices are made regarding what to focus on and where to draw boundaries in order to keep the project manageable. My role as a scholarly practitioner is to attend to implications for

theory and practice throughout the dialogue and to attend to all elements of the dialogue without losing sight of the whole.

Chapter 3: Voluntary Simplicity

The term “voluntary simplicity” was coined in 1936 by Richard Gregg (Elgin, 1993). It became a recognized movement in the 1970s (Shama & Wisenblit, 1984) and has been gathering more mainstream attention in the last two decades (Zavestoski, 2002). The term is variously used and understood, with nuances of interpretation depending on the perspectives and purposes of those engaged with the concept. In order to develop and implement a thesis project that explores adult learning within voluntary simplicity movement, it is vitally important to understand how this concept is used, how it is interpreted through various perspectives, and the critiques that have been named. Some of the questions to be considered include: How is the term used and defined in the literature? What are the core values of voluntary simplicity? What kinds of practices are common among voluntary simplifiers and in what aspects of their lives? What kinds of critique are made regarding the concept and the practices? As the researcher, it is critical that I am intentional about how I will be using the term in shaping and discussing the research. It is also important that I be able to explain the meaning of the term to readers in a way that is supported and justified and that I remain open to alternative meanings.

In order to develop this exploration, a variety of literature was consulted ranging from articles in academic journals, to magazines and websites, to some of the key popular books in the field. These sources were chosen to demonstrate how the constituencies involved in explicating and practicing voluntary simplicity understand the concept. There are sources that were read but not included in this study and some sources that were not considered at all. I attempted to select representative and key resources while keeping the

amount of literature included manageable. The books include a classic in the field, one that focuses on education for voluntary simplicity, one that emphasizes spirituality from a Christian perspective, a book that takes a more philosophical and political approach, and a book that taps into the links between voluntary simplicity and ecological sustainability. Articles chosen from websites represent the main online communities related to voluntary simplicity while magazine articles show some of the response from general culture. Interestingly, most academic papers on voluntary simplicity are currently found in journals related to marketing, economics, and psychology and this provides a source outside of the movement so that understandings of the concept can be compared. Using concept interpretation and conceptual structure assessment, this chapter develops an understanding of the concept of voluntary simplicity, contributes an interpretation of the conceptual structure, and attends to critiques of the concept.

Understanding Voluntary Simplicity

By “understanding” voluntary simplicity, I mean getting at how the concept is commonly used, particularly how it is defined and described and what characteristics are linked to it. In their helpful outline of concept interpretation, Coombs and Daniels (1991) foreground the importance of investigating a range of meanings and indicating relationships between concepts. They suggest that the purpose of concept interpretation is to understand, but not change, our concepts. In order to develop an understanding of the concept of voluntary simplicity, definitions, descriptions, and characteristics named in the literature reviewed will be explored. The main questions here are: Where is this term used and how is it understood and used?

Before looking to the literature, a quick foray into a dictionary can show the basic definition of the two words that make up the term voluntary simplicity. According to the Canadian Dictionary of the English Language (1997), the two terms are defined as follows:

Voluntary – 1. Arising from or acting on one's own free will. 2. Acting, serving, or done willingly and without constraint or expectation of reward. 3. Normally controlled by or subject to individual volition. (p. 1520)

Simplicity – 1. The property, condition, or quality of being simple or uncombined. 2. Absence of luxury or showiness; plainness. 3. Absence of affectation or pretence. (p. 1275)

In his book *Voluntary Simplicity*, considered one of the main classics in the field, Duane Elgin (1993) also begins his exploration of the concept by looking separately at each of the words in the term. He says that “to live more *voluntarily* is to live more deliberately, intentionally, and purposefully – in short, it is to live more consciously” (Elgin, 1993, p. 24). In this understanding, *voluntary* involves paying attention, being aware and choosing how we will act in the world. Elgin's understanding includes an awareness of both our inner and outer worlds and emphasizes the need for acting as well as being. Turning to the word *simplicity* Elgin indicates that how simplicity is expressed varies according to each person. He mentions clutter, complication, consumption, work, and relationships, among other things, and then states that “simplicity of living means meeting life face-to-face” (Elgin, 1993, p. 25). Finally, he gives the following definition of voluntary simplicity: “...a manner of living that is outwardly more simple and

inwardly more rich, a way of being in which our most authentic and alive self is brought into direct and conscious contact with the living” (Elgin, 1993, p. 25).

Another central text in the area of voluntary simplicity is Cecile Andrews’ (1997) book entitled *The Circle of Simplicity: Return to the Good Life*, which initiated an educational movement of simplicity study circles. In this book, Andrews (1997) defines simplicity as a way of life, stating that:

The life of voluntary simplicity is a life lived consciously, a decision to live in harmony with life, to show reverence for life, to sustain life. It is a life of creativity and celebration, a life of community and participatory democracy, and a life in touch with nature and the universal life force. It is a life that has soul, it is a life that allows the individual’s soul to awaken. (p. 22)

Andrews’ definition, like Elgin’s, clearly attends to both the inner life and the outer world. Her understanding has a spiritual focus that is also found throughout another popular book, *Simpler Living, Compassionate Life: A Christian Perspective* edited by Michael Schut (1999). In his own article in the book, Schut gets at the concept of voluntary simplicity through the idea of abundance. He describes voluntary simplicity in terms of understanding what enough is, having time to reflect on our lives and our values, appreciating the sacredness of all life, and striving for the equitable distribution of resources. In short, voluntary simplicity is both a philosophy and a practice: it is a lifestyle (Johnston & Burton, 2002).

While the above definitions exhibit a breadth in terms of what is included in the concept of voluntary simplicity, other understandings are somewhat more focused or particular. Writing about voluntary simplicity from within the field of economic

psychology, Etzioni (1998) gives the following definition: “voluntary simplicity refers to the choice out of free will – rather than being coerced by poverty, government austerity programs, or being imprisoned – to limit expenditures on consumer goods and services, and to cultivate non-materialistic sources of satisfaction and meaning” (p. 620). In Etzioni’s view, voluntary simplicity is one alternative to capitalism’s goal of profit through consumerism. Of the range of possible concerns pertaining to voluntary simplicity, consumption is one that is commonly a particular focus. Shaw and Newholm (2002) foreground the choice to reduce and/or change consumption patterns, including those related to diet and transportation as well as choosing ethical, secondhand, or technologically efficient products. Another common characteristic ascribed to voluntary simplicity is the idea of self-sufficiency (Iwata, 2001; Shama & Wisenblit, 1984; Zavestoski, 2002) or self-determination (Dominguez & Robin, 1992; Johnston & Burton, 2002). Exchanging work for free time, reducing clutter, creating peaceful living spaces, streamlining financial and household tasks are some of the other characteristics of those practicing voluntary simplicity, often with a related reduction in income (Davis & Stover, 1996). One writer describes the pull of voluntary simplicity as “...yearning for a different kind of life –something slower and quieter; something more deliberate” (Keeva, 2003, p. 79). Drawing on statements from many people within the voluntary simplicity movement, Andrews (1997) identifies the elements of the “common person’s definition” of voluntary simplicity as time, freedom, purpose, identity, environment, clutter and consumption, money, moving to the country, health, mental health, and fulfillment.

It is clear from just this sampling of opinion, from literature within and outside the movement, that the concept *voluntary simplicity* has a range of meaning: it is used in

different ways by different people. However, it is also clear that this range is contained or bounded by the consistent appearance of several core characteristics. Concerns within the inner life for conscious and intentional ways of living, for attention to non-material aspects of self and world, and for sacredness and soulfulness are common, but not universal, characteristics of voluntary simplicity. In the outer world, limiting consumption and clutter, and spending less time on work and more with family and in community are also common, but not universal, characteristics. If these, then, are the main characteristics found in definitions and explanations of the term, they provide a focus for using a fairly abstract concept in concrete ways.

Interpreting Voluntary Simplicity

While concept interpretation begins with sifting through various uses of a term to discern a core meaning and to show specific ways to apply an abstract concept (Coombs & Daniels, 1991), a more hermeneutical approach is used to interpret elements of the voluntary simplicity movement. Smith (1991) indicates that hermeneutics is about making sense of our lives, not through rigid adherence to methodology, but by demonstrating understanding and by attending to tradition while being open to new ways of understanding. For the task of this literature review, a hermeneutical approach will address the questions: What are the commonly articulated values and purposes of voluntary simplicity and how are they important in interpreting the term? My intent is to assess the conceptual structure of voluntary simplicity to provide an interpretation for the ongoing conversation.

Different writers interpret the breadth of interests within voluntary simplicity in different ways. Etzioni (1998) addresses the variations by positing three distinct levels of voluntary simplicity practice while McCormick (1997) names three different messages within the movement. Taking a slightly different starting point, Johnston and Burton (2002) identify 12 dimensions of the movement that comprise four overall values. Looking first at the three levels of voluntary simplicity practice, it can be seen how the characteristics identified in the first section of this chapter can be layered in a logical way. Using the terms downshifters, strong simplifiers, and holistic simplifiers, Etzioni (1998) shows how lifestyles are impacted in moderate, strong, and radical ways depending on an individual intensity of practice. Downshifters reduce their consumption somewhat but generally maintain their lifestyles and practice voluntary simplicity in some areas but not in others. At this level of intensity, the main focus is on changing work patterns and on the requisite shifts in consumption. Strong simplifiers also focus on decreasing work or changing to more meaningful work but to a greater extent, creating the need to reduce consumption more significantly as income is decreased. The final level of intensity, the holistic simplifiers, is the most extreme: "this group differs from the downshifters and even strong simplifiers not only in scope of change in their conduct but also in that it is motivated by a coherently articulated philosophy" (Etzioni, 1998, p. 626). So, one way of interpreting the range of meaning for voluntary simplicity is to focus on the levels of intensity at which it is considered and practiced.

Alternatively, the purpose driving an understanding of voluntary simplicity can also provide a way of interpreting the concept. It is suggested that there are: "...three fundamentally different messages: simplicity is about frugality, simplicity is about stress

management, and (most rarely) simplicity is about social and ecological justice”

(McCormick, 1997, p. 47).

Again, considering the range of meaning and characteristics described above, it seems that this view can also be supported. Characteristics, or practices, can be grouped into categories concerned with reducing spending and consumption, living a more peaceful life, and making choices about work and consumption that are influenced by social and environmental issues. Most of the literature looking at voluntary simplicity from an economic or marketing point of view focuses on the first message of simplicity and is mainly concerned with the reduction in spending (Shaw & Newholm, 2002; Zavestoski, 2002). This focus is also found in the literature of voluntary simplicity itself with books like *Your Money or Your Life* (Dominguez & Robin, 1992) and newsletters such as *The Tightwad Gazette* being very popular (McCormick, 1997).

For many others drawn to voluntary simplicity, the purpose that they identify with is living a quieter, slower, more peaceful lifestyle. Responding to a culture of overwork, time binds, and high stress, many writers do speak from this perspective (Andrews 1997; Davis & Stover, 1996; Elgin, 1993). There is certainly evidence that the value of a different way of living is strongly related to this message of voluntary simplicity.

The third message suggested by McCormick (1997) is that of social and ecological justice. Simplifiers who are concerned about environmental issues tend to choose products that last longer, prefer natural products, choose ethical alternatives, and buy less in order to use fewer resources (Craig-Lees & Hill, 2002). Writers and practitioners also recognize that reducing consumption by simplifying lifestyles will

leave more resources for others whose basic needs are not met (Durning, 1999; Schut, 1999).

Related to purpose are values and another way of approaching the task of interpreting this concept is to start with the values named by various writers on the subject: self, relationship, society, and the earth (Johnston & Burton, 2002). In their review of the literature, Johnston and Burton (2002) identified 89 keywords that fell into twelve dimensions and associated those dimensions with the above four values. This approach to exploring the meaning of voluntary simplicity uses an empirical method to find the understanding of those writing in the movement. In their analysis, focus on self, with concern for the good life, purpose, growth, self-determination and choice, is the strongest value in the literature. Although this value, with its self-interested focus, forms the basis of voluntary simplicity, the other three values turn that focus outward. The outward shift begins with family, friends, community: those elements of life nearest to the self, with interest in both service and social justice leading to the third value of society. A close look at the literature finds a call to shift from focus on the self to focus on society, linking individual lifestyle choices to societal issues. Finally, the value that focuses on the earth comprises both an appreciation of nature and an awareness of the relationship between environmental issues and overconsumption. This literature review, then, shows again the various ways that voluntary simplicity is understood and engaged.

The idea that there are a few fundamental messages or sets of core values within voluntary simplicity is also named in different ways by other writers. Based on interviews with 53 participants in voluntary simplicity workshops in Australia, Craig-Lees and Hill (2002, p. 191) concluded that "individuals can adopt the philosophy for different reasons,

such as concern for the environment, their religion, or their physical well-being.” In his most recent work, (Elgin, 2003) suggests that, depending on the core values shaping practice, ten approaches to voluntary simplicity can now be identified. These are: choiceful, commercial, compassionate, ecological, elegant, frugal, natural, political, soulful, and uncluttered simplicity and his explanations of the values associated with each reflect those named in this literature review.

Just as there is no one specific definition that can be attached to voluntary simplicity, there is also no one specific purpose that can be seen to be driving the movement:

This way of life cannot be strictly defined. It means different things to different people. (Pierce, 2003, para. 2)

Thus, a wide range of individuals practice voluntary simplicity for multiple reasons (Shaw & Newholm, 2002, p. 169).

...the growing culture of simplicity contains a flourishing garden of expressions whose great diversity – and intertwined unity – are creating a resilient and hardy ecology of learning about how to live more sustainable and meaningful lives (Elgin, 2003, para. 17).

However, just as there are a set of characteristics associated with voluntary simplicity, there are also themes that reflect the values and intentions of those writing about and practicing this philosophy. When interpreting the conceptual structure of voluntary simplicity, then, it is important to attend to the values that influence different understandings and different explanations of the concept. The suggestions given for how to live a simple life and how to apply the philosophy of simplicity will depend on the

position of the writer. This movement is still quite young and is still in the process of drawing together various perspectives and concerns. Whether seen as a patchwork quilt (McCormick, 1997) or as a garden (Elgin, 2003), there are definitely a variety of interpretations that are commonly found. As the movement continues to grow and to be shaped by both theory and practice, one challenge will be to illuminate the links between the different purposes and sets of values that underpin the movement. Voluntary simplicity could be seen as a path, as a goal, or both, depending on what participants hope to accomplish through a simpler lifestyle and why they want to accomplish these things. Each of the streams of thought resonates for many people and has an impact on how people live in the world. Further work and conversation has the potential to draw these streams together and create greater change.

Critiquing Voluntary Simplicity

Questions of power and access, of worldview and positionality will be considered in this section. Critical tradition, with its scepticism regarding neutral and observable truth (Noddings, 1998), and its interest in questioning and challenging dominant discourse (Lather, 1991), provides good guidance for engaging a concept as complex and potentially subversive as voluntary simplicity. Consideration of power relationships and of practical realities is important to the conversation as well. Voluntary simplicity certainly has sceptics and detractors. This section will focus not so much on the specific arguments about why it will not work or why it is a bad idea. Rather, it aims to get to the root concerns of critics; the underlying philosophical disconnects and perspectives.

The main critique of voluntary simplicity is that it is a movement of the wealthy: that simplicity can only be a choice when basic needs are met and one has more than enough (Etzioni, 1998). This critique has layers related to who has access to the movement lifestyle and who benefits from the cumulative practices. The argument is made that those choosing a simpler lifestyle are abandoning their duty to the economic well-being of others (Vanderbilt, 1996). It can also be seen as a way of retreating from the world as Taylor-Gooby (1998) argues: "provided you have enough of it, money can buy you the choice of renouncing consumerism to attend to things that really make you happy" (p. 646).

A dominant discourse of our day is that of consumerism. This critique of voluntary simplicity as being a luxury, irresponsible or retreatist can be seen as a defensive reaction of that dominant discourse. Certainly, the movement is made up of wealthy or at least comfortable practitioners, but that, for many, is exactly the point. According to Noddings (1998, p. 67), "from the perspective of critical theorists, philosophy must be engaged with the great struggles and social movements of our times." As the gap between the rich and poor widens and the environmental consequences of overconsumption become clearer, movements such as anti-globalization and anti-war campaigns, The World Social Forum, vegetarianism, and sustainable agriculture are struggling for a better world. Voluntary simplicity, with its appeal to those who have economic and social power, has the potential to deconstruct the dominant discourse of consumerism and act as a corrective to unjust living. As one of the key thinkers in the field, it is important that this is a concern for Elgin (1993) who has considerable influence as one of the founders of the movement. He states that: "unless dramatic changes are

made in the manner of living and consuming in industrialized nations, we will soon produce a world of monumental destruction, suffering, conflict, and despair” (Elgin, 1993, p. 53). This view is also found in an article by someone looking into the growing phenomenon of voluntary simplicity: “...voluntary simplicity is not a form of self-improvement or –purification; it is an integral part of a personal and communal response to the social and ecological injustices that confront us at the end of the second millennium” (McCormick, 1997, pp. 48-49).

By beginning with a focus on a sense of dissatisfaction with consumerism or of overwork and stress, voluntary simplicity gets a foot in the doors of the wealthier parts of the world. As practices and lifestyles change and deepen, those participating in voluntary simplicity begin to reduce their impact on the environment, free up resources for others, and to find alternatives to destructive consumption patterns. According to Etzioni (1998, p. 641), voluntary simplicity “...provides a socially approved and supported lifestyle that is both psychologically sustainable and compatible with basic socio-economic equality.” With its focus on finding satisfaction in nonmaterial aspects of life, on spending more time with family, on civic participation and even social justice activism, voluntary simplicity speaks to some of the common concerns of those with more than enough. By engaging this constituency in change, there is potential to create widespread social change.

This position is echoed by Segal (2003) who opens the paperback edition of his book *Graceful Simplicity: The Philosophy and Politics of the Alternative American Dream* by recognizing a shift that has occurred in the movement in few years since his first publication. He indicates that his first edition was quite critical of other voluntary

simplicity literature for providing individualistic, “how to” prescriptions rather than a “politics of simplicity”. Recognizing the importance of naming practical actions related to social change, he indicates that the movement has begun “...to develop into a politics that goes beyond the bounds of a self-help movement” (Segal, 2003, p. xiii). His hope is that the movement will continue to become more socially aware and politically active, making the alternative of simple living into a real possibility for average families.

These criticisms come from both within and without the movement itself. In her research analyzing the voluntary simplicity movement, Grigsby (2004) raises a number of critiques of the movement from her position as both an academic researcher and a movement participant. Her critiques of the movement revolve around a general sense that the movement is not critically reflective of itself. One of Grigsby’s main critiques of the movement reflects those critiques discussed above. She sees the movement as too focused on voluntary individual change with not enough attention to legislated structural change. She attributes this limited vision to a lack of attention to ways in which inequalities are perpetuated structurally. For instance, although voluntary simplicity advocates freeing up resources through reducing consumption so that others can meet basic needs, this focus does not address structural inequalities in how resources are distributed and who has power over resources. This tendency to see and address only part of the problem is, in Grigsby’s (2004, p. 125) view, because “certain forms of inequality are apparent to them, and others are hidden in the shadows cast by their privilege.” Another critique that Grigsby (2004) raises is regarding a preference, of individual participants and the movement as a whole, for avoiding conflict. She indicates that in placing high value on being inclusive and nonjudgmental, the movement glosses over

conflict and does not problematize issues of power that do exist within various aspects of the movement. She makes this point particularly in relation to gendered power issues that she experienced and observed in simplicity study circles and that she believes pervade the movement as a whole. This tendency is perpetuated by desires for a peaceful life, for groups that are supportive, for a blame-free and guilt-free atmosphere, and for a sense of unity:

Simple lives are stuck in some ways between their desire to achieve an environmentally sustainable and more egalitarian world and the desire to feel good about themselves instead of guilty about the world's injustices and negotiate comfortable lives for themselves...Many also want to avoid conflict and contention in their daily lives and to feel comfortable in the relationships they have with others. This makes them reluctant to critique, deconstruct, or advocate dismantling of structures that provide them relative benefits even as they want to change outcomes of the processes of these structures. (Grigsby, 2004, p. 160)

Whether in their immediate relationships within the voluntary simplicity community or regarding relationships with the wider world, the desire to avoid conflict and the focus on personal change limits the potential of the movement. These critiques will be kept in mind and considered in terms of how they relate to adult learning in this movement.

Sustainability and Social Change

Most of this chapter has been concerned with understanding, interpreting, and critiquing the concept of voluntary simplicity. There are two other terms that are used throughout the thesis and in the literature that comprises the data and theoretical

framework of the thesis: sustainability and social change. In order to be clear and consistent about the meaning of these terms within this project, a brief concept interpretation of each follows.

Sustainability, in the literature of the voluntary simplicity movement, is comprised of ecological, economic, and social elements. Using resources more slowly than they are produced by the earth is a central element of how sustainability is understood (Elgin, 1993; Merkel, 2003). Sharing available resources equally with humanity, future generations, and other beings is also foregrounded (Dominguez & Robin, 1992; Durning, 1999; Elgin, 1993; Merkel, 2003). Social elements of sustainability include equality, democracy, and community (Merkel, 2003). The term sustainability will be used in this thesis with a meaning of ecological, economic, and social sustainability of the whole earth, locally and globally, in human communities and ecosystems. This understanding is reflected both in the literature of the movement being studied and in the wider culture as can be seen by the definition found on Wikipedia, an online, participatory encyclopedia:

Sustainability is a systemic concept, relating to the continuity of economic, social, institutional and environmental aspects of human society. It is intended to be a means of configuring civilization and human activity so that society, its members and its economies are able to meet their needs and express their greatest potential in the present, while preserving biodiversity and natural ecosystems, and planning and acting for the ability to maintain these ideals in a very long term. Sustainability affects every level of organization, from the local neighborhood to the entire planet. (2006, para. 1)

Social change is another term that is widely used in the literature of the voluntary simplicity movement and of adult education. It is also a term that can be understood in various ways. In both the voluntary simplicity movement and the adult education literature used throughout this thesis, a particular understanding of social change is present; an understanding that social change is directly linked to social justice. Changes that are advocated include both material and nonmaterial changes in areas such as economics, pollution, and community involvement (Elgin, 1993). Often the specific injustices to be changed are not named individually, but are categorized as social and ecological injustices (McCormick, 1997). Overall, they reflect the three elements of sustainability named above. This understanding that social change means reducing or eliminating injustices is also the underlying meaning of the term in much adult education literature. Reference to education and action, to a political agenda (Heaney, 1992), and to "...improvement of the social condition" (Ilsley, 1992, p. 26) give an idea of how this term is understood in adult education. In the introduction to this thesis, the call for a vision for adult education is linked to an understanding that social change is not just any structural or community change, but is change that is concerned with equality and equity. For this thesis, the concept of social change will be used with an implicit understanding that the term refers to progressive, emancipatory change that enables ecological, economic, and social sustainability.

This chapter uses concept interpretation and a brief conceptual structure assessment to explore the literature of the voluntary simplicity movement and to understand its' self-definition, its' goals and purposes, and its' philosophies and practices. This analysis is bounded by what literature was used and by how the inquiry was

undertaken, but it is sufficient to provide insight into the movement and its' literature. I will come back to this literature in Chapter 5 in order to look more closely at how adults learn in this movement. Before beginning that analysis, I want to explore some literature on adult learning so that it can be drawn into the analysis of the voluntary simplicity movement.

Chapter 4: Adult Learning

Adult learning in new social movements is the primary theoretical interest of this research. The case of voluntary simplicity movement was chosen to dialogue with what is known about new social movements and about adult learning within these movements. I am proposing in this thesis that adult learning in new social movements cannot be understood only through the extant research and writing on the subject. I aim to bring into dialogue with this literature the substantial contributions of transformative learning theory and sociocultural learning theory to the understanding of adult learning and adult education. Transformative learning theory is where my inquiry initially began, with an interest in the transformation of personal beliefs leading to actions that cumulatively could enable social change. Sociocultural learning theory enters the dialogue in order to better understand the context of learning and the role of both groups and cultures in enabling and sustaining learning. Finally, I review the existing literature on adult learning in new social movements. As a part of this discussion, new social movement theory is engaged in order identify characteristics and understandings of these movements. These three bodies of theory will be summarized, analyzed, and critiqued in this chapter and will join with the chapter on the voluntary simplicity movement to inform the discussion that follows. This chapter continues to implement the proposed methodology by engaging in conceptual structure assessment of various conceptions of adult learning in a hermeneutical manner. The literature chosen for study is representative of each body of literature and has contributions to make to understanding adult learning in the voluntary simplicity movement.

Transformative Learning Theory

Transformative learning theory has come to be an integral part of the field of adult education. As Taylor (2000) indicates:

No recent body of research in the field of adult education has been given more attention in the pursuit of understanding adult learning than the study of transformative learning theory. Transformative learning theory is uniquely adult, abstract, idealized, and grounded in the nature of human communication. (p. 2)

In exploring the thought of O'Sullivan, Freire, and Mezirow, three recognized writers in this field, I found that there are some common themes in transformative learning. Of course, not every theme is present in the work of each of the three writers and there are places where their stances diverge. This makes the project of understanding the dimensions of transformative learning an interesting and complex one. Over the next pages, some of these themes will be identified and investigated.

This historical moment.

Throughout his work toward building a theory of transformative learning, Mezirow (1981, 1989a, 1994, 2000) has focused on the importance of education enabling perspective transformation in adult learners. Many others have built upon and critiqued Mezirow's work - both applying and questioning his ideas (Clark & Wilson, 1991; Collard & Law, 1989; Cranton, 1994; Taylor, 1997). In light of his focus on personal transformation, Mezirow does not exhibit the direct links to contemporary issues that are considered by O'Sullivan and Freire.

Both O'Sullivan and Freire connect the task of transformation to the particular historical moment in which we find ourselves. Both also reflect that adult education has been used to maintain and perpetuate the status quo or the dominant cultural themes of our time (Freire, 1970; O'Sullivan, 2001). Freire (1970) attributes this tendency to a narrative approach to education that transfers accepted knowledge and results in students adapting to the world without a critical awareness. Clearly breaking with the modernist project, O'Sullivan (2001, p. 2) states that: "...the fundamental educational task of our times is to make the choice for a sustainable planetary habitat of interdependent life forms over and against the dysfunctional calling of the global competitive marketplace." He believes that we are living in a time of contested visions of reality and in a time where the attitudes and actions of the dominant culture are being called into question. The role of transformative education here is to go beyond a critique of the culture to provide an alternative vision and specific ways to create a more just and sustainable culture (O'Sullivan, 2001). Similarly, Freire (1970), writing some thirty years earlier, considers "...the fundamental theme of our epoch to be that of *domination* – which implies that it's opposite, the theme of *liberation*, as the objective to be achieved." Also questioning the modernist value of progress, Freire (1970) sees in humanity the creativity not only to produce material goods but to also develop "social institutions, ideas, and concepts." Viewing humanity as possessing a vocation to act on the world and as being always unfinished, Freire (1998) points to transformative learning as essential to the purpose of humanity. In the view of these two thinkers, this moment in the history of humanity is a moment on the cusp of a cultural shift.

Personal readiness.

Central to Mezirow's (1978) approach to transformative learning is the understanding that the learner, in order to experience transformation, must first become conscious of the cultural and psychological assumptions that shape her/his way of being. Whether through a "disorienting dilemma" leading to sudden insight or through a more gradual process of awareness, potential learners become ready for transformation (Mezirow, 1981). Alongside this is, of course, the possibility that potential learners may choose to remain within their comfort zone or to deny the need for transformation.

The process of denial is part of what O'Sullivan (2001) identifies as the survival stage of the transformation of consciousness. An individual faced with evidence that there are problems caused by the dominant culture may react with denial and may even move through a number of realizations, each followed by denial, before entering a state of despair and grief (O'Sullivan, 2001). Another way to view this stage is by considering the learner as a "naïve thinker" seeking, perhaps unconsciously, to accommodate themselves to the norms of the culture (Freire, 1970). This naiveté must be breached in order to recognize the unfinished nature of humans: it is this nature that makes us educable (Freire, 1998). Regardless of the language used or the details of the perspective, all three approaches studied indicate that transformative learning can be a challenging and even dangerous process, with the potential to engender fear and hopelessness in the learner. This makes the task of the educator more difficult and more important: we are not simply transferring knowledge but are engaged in an ethical endeavour.

Oppression.

The use of the concept of oppression here is not meant in any way to diminish the real and devastating oppression experienced by those in the majority world. However, I believe it is important to consider the oppressive nature of the consumer culture inherent in North American experience. The links between this reality and the economic and cultural oppression of peoples and nations around the world are widely recognized and are key to understanding the need for transformation in our own society. In his discussion of the relationship between oppressor and oppressed, Freire (1970), points to the reality of this link by indicating that "...oppressors do not see their monopoly on *having more* as a privilege which dehumanizes others and themselves" (p. 45) This places North American consumers squarely in the role of oppressor. However, much of Freire's discussion of the struggle for liberation can be interpreted with culturally-conditioned consumers in the role of the oppressed as well. Perceiving the reality of oppression, identifying alternatives, and believing in the possibility of change (Freire, 1970) are all aspects of this struggle which apply well to transformative learning in the context of privilege. This position is supported by O'Sullivan's (2001) argument that messages of consumption are pervasive in our culture and that the task of transformative education is to teach a critical hearing of these voices that can resist the overwhelming rhetoric as a first step toward visioning and creating an alternative. Taking a more psychological approach, Mezirow (1981) sees our culturally-bound assumptions as inducing dependency and constraining our development. He thus sees perspective transformation as an emancipatory process. Learners may be emancipated from the oppressive nature of

the dominant culture as well as from their roles as oppressors of others as their actions shift to cause less oppression themselves.

Dialogue and reflection.

Two of the approaches to transformative learning explored here speak explicitly of the role of the teacher and student in terms of dialogue and reflection. The process of perspective taking in Mezirow (1978, 1985) is seen as one of engaging in dialogue in order to test assumptions, try different points of view, and validate new assertions. This author also posits the need for a critical reflectivity that assists learners in discerning how the meanings they attach to reality are formed (Mezirow, 1978). Similarly, Freire (1998) argues that critical reflection is necessary to prevent theory from becoming simply words and practice from becoming simply activism. This critical reflection cannot happen in isolation, but rather is an “act of communication” and a “process of co-participation” that is “dialogical and not polemical” (Freire, 1998). In his earlier work, Freire (1970) differentiates between “banking education” where the educator deposits knowledge into the students and “problem-posing education” where “...students – no longer docile listeners – are now co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher.” The need for acknowledgement, shared understanding, emotional intimacy, and nourishment of the soul are the reasons given by O’Sullivan (2001) for learning in community.

Throughout his exploration of transformative learning, Mezirow argues that establishing ideal conditions for discourse in adult education environments is necessary for the promotion of perspective transformation in learners (1985, 1989a, 1991, 2000). He sees these conditions for discourse as fundamental to creating a quality learning environment and promoting high levels of learner participation. As well, they are relevant

in assessing systems, institutions, and practices as they pertain to learning (Mezirow, 1985).

In the domain of communicative learning, where inquiry is focused on understanding meaning, assumptions and beliefs are tested through consensus (Mezirow, 1989). Consensus-building requires much of its participants as it is informed, critical, emotional, and ongoing. Due to this complex nature, it can be more likely to occur under some circumstances and conditions and educators need to be intentional about creating environments for learning in this manner.

In several of his articles and books on Transformation Theory, Mezirow (1985, 1989, 1991, and 2000) lists and examines what he claims to be the ideal conditions for discourse. The handling of the subject found in his helpful review (1994) of the theory will inform our discussion here:

Ideally, a participant in a discourse will (a) have accurate and complete information, (b) be free from coercion and distorting self-deception, (c) be able to weigh evidence and assess arguments “objectively,” (d) be open to alternative points of view and to care about the way others think and feel, (e) be able to become critically reflective of assumptions and their consequences, (f) have equal opportunity to participate in the various roles of discourse, and (g) be willing to accept an informed, objective and rational consensus as legitimate test of validity until new perspectives, evidence, or arguments are encountered, and are subsequently established through discourse as yielding better judgments. (p. 225)

Regardless of the location of adult learning, educators need to be intentional about creating good conditions for discourse that includes dialogue and critical reflection. Questioning whether the conditions suggested above comprise ideal conditions for discourse is part of the critique of transformative learning theory.

Critiques.

There are two main areas of criticism of transformative learning theory that are important for the discussion in this thesis. It has been argued that transformative learning in particular and adult education in general has tended to focus on either personal or social transformation (Miles, 2002). Perspective transformation leading to behavioural change is the main focus of Mezirow's (1978, 1981) approach which is primarily concerned with personal transformation. He maintains that this personal transformation is a prerequisite to any social transformation and indicates that social responsibility is a broader goal of adult education (Mezirow, 2000). He also states that "personal problems can be seen as having their counterpart in public issues, and these call for both individual and collective action" (Mezirow, 1978, p. 103). The critique of this position began quite early in the development of Mezirow's theorizing about transformative learning and it has continued to be a concern. In one of a series of critiques published in a primary journal in adult education, Collard and Law (1989, p. 102) name "...the fundamental problem with Mezirow's work: the lack of a coherent, comprehensive theory of social change..." Writing several years later, St. Clair (1998) states that: "despite claiming that perspective transformation can bring about social change, even in his more recent work Mezirow (1995) has chosen not to explicate the link that takes change beyond the individual" (p. 7).

While Mezirow focuses on personal transformation and does not develop transformative learning theory in ways that explicitly attend to social transformation, others writing on this theory take different stances. In his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970) poses two aspects of the pedagogy, one enabling personal transformation with a shift in perception and another moving to social transformation that exposes myths. He reasons that since humanity has created objective reality, it is also humanity's historical task to transform that reality. Freire's focus on praxis, comprised of critical reflection and action in the world, gives a view in which transformation requires both. With the intent of creating a cultural alternative to the "global competitive marketplace" O'Sullivan (2001) places primary importance on social transformation. However, in the first stage (survival) of his transformative process, the consciousness of the learner is fore-grounded and in the final stage (creating) the need for a cosmology, or story of the universe, links the personal and social. This line of critique has led to an understanding that: "conceptualizing individual and social transformation as a causal process in which the former leads to the latter is not always helpful, either to understand change dynamics in the real world or to guide the work of adult educators" (Schugurensky, 2002, p. 63).

The second line of critique of transformative learning theory follows from the critique explored above and pertains to the lack of attention to context, particularly in Mezirow's take on transformative learning theory (Clark & Wilson, 1991; Schugurensky, 2002). This inattention to context, as seen for instance in Mezirow's ideal conditions for discourse, is seen as limiting the ability of learners to discover and transform the meaning of their experiences, which are informed and formed by their context (Clark & Wilson, 1991). Linking this critique to the previous one, Schugurensky (2002) claims that:

context is especially relevant in explaining the connections between individual and social transformation. For instance, a supportive social environment, a social reality that is susceptible of transformation (i.e. a viable collective project), and a sense of community are important elements in creating the conditions for social transformation. (p. 62)

Both of these lines of critique focus primarily on Mezirow's approach to transformative learning theory, with Freire and O'Sullivan's approaches making some progress in addressing aspects of the critiques. In a thorough study of the literature generated regarding the application of transformative learning theory, Taylor, (2000) found the following:

Six themes emerged from the literature about the nature of fostering transformative learning and its essential characteristics. They include: (a) fostering group ownership and individual agency, (b) providing intense shared experiential activities, (c) developing an awareness of personal and social contextual influences, (d) promoting value laden course content, (e) recognizing the interrelationship of critical reflection and affective learning, and (f) the need for time. (p. 10)

The above discussion of transformative learning points us to elements of a process and to factors enabling transformation, many of which reflect the research on learning in new social movements, but which on their own are not sufficient to explain and understand learning in new social movements.

Sociocultural Learning Theory

Sociocultural learning is another area of adult learning theory that relates to the study of adult learning in social movements. The idea of sociocultural learning is based in the belief that learning takes place through participation in social situations and practices (Hansman, 2001; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). This view sees learning as "...shaped by the context, culture, and tools in the learning situation" (Hansman, 2001, p. 45). Additionally, this view believes that "...there is no activity that is not situated..." and "...that agent, activity, and the world mutually constitute each other" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 33). Adult learning, from this perspective, takes place through participation in various communities of practice. In the words of one of the main writers in this area "...participation shapes not only what we do, but also who we are and how we interpret what we do" (Wenger, 1998, p. 4). I see this as an iterative process since once we interpret what we do, those actions or practices are further shaped by this reflection. Sociocultural learning theory, then, is grounded in three central concepts: practice, communities of practice, and participation.

Practice.

In the context of sociocultural learning theory, the idea of practice does not just connote doing. Practice is a process of experiencing the world that involves acting and knowing as a way of making meaning: it "...is about meaning as an experience of everyday life" (Wenger, 1998, p. 52). This understanding of practice assumes that it is embedded in a situation, a context, a community. It assumes that "...learning is inherently social in nature" (Hansman, 2001, p. 45). Learning is shaped by the "...nature of the interactions among learners, the tools they use within these interactions, the

activity itself, and the social context in which the activity takes place...” (Hansman, 2001, p. 45). There are both explicit and implicit aspects to practice. Explicit aspects include artefacts such as documents, procedures, and language and symbols. Implicit aspects include assumptions, relationships, and intuitions (Wenger, 1998).

Practices, then, are embedded and can be partially understood as authentic activity. This kind of activity is not structured, but rather, consists of the ordinary practices of a particular community (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). Learning in this sense involves participation in these ordinary practices as their “...meaning and purpose are socially constructed through negotiations among present and past members” (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989, p. 34). Concepts and practices evolve and take on meaning as they are used or engaged. Both are embedded in the sense that the product, a concept or practice, cannot be distinguished from the process of meaning-making (Nuthall, 1997). Learning is collective, it is both explicit and implicit, it is embedded, and it is social. Wenger articulates this understanding of practice as it relates to sociocultural learning as follows:

Over time this collective learning results in practices that reflect both the pursuit of our enterprises and the attendant social relations. These practices are thus the property of a kind of community created over time by the sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise. It makes sense, therefore, to call these kinds of communities’ *communities of practice*. (Wenger, 1998, p. 45)

Communities of practice.

A community of practice is one in which people are joined for some purpose that involves acting together and that generates shared meanings about the community and

about the world (Wenger, 1998). Viewed with a goal of learning, "communities of practice are self-organized and selected groups of people who share a common sense of purpose and a desire to learn and know what each other knows" (Hansman, 2001, p. 48). From this view, establishing a community of learners needs two sets of actions: "first the activities of learning have to be defined, modelled, and practised. Second, norms of practice have to be established that will structure effective participation in communities" (Nuthall, 1997, p. 26). These communities are not just haphazard groupings, nor are they simply gatherings of individuals: they are "...not just a convenient way to accumulate the individual knowledge of their members. They give rise synergistically to insights and solutions that would not come about without them" (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989).

The main elements of a community of practice are mutual engagement, a joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire (Wenger, 1998). These elements may be present in a very wide range of communities of practice (professional, recreational, cultural) and whether they are explicitly formed for purposes of learning or not, learning happens in these communities through the three elements. Mutual engagement implies active membership in the community, with each member having a unique role and contributing their competence to complement the contributions of others (Wenger, 1998). Connections are made between what is known and what can be learned from what others know, resulting in meaning-making and learning.

In communities of practice, joint enterprises are identified, negotiated, and pursued as part of the practice of that community. A joint enterprise is not necessarily based on complete belief and support on the part of all members, but it is negotiated communally and is a response to the conditions of the members (Wenger, 1998). These

joint enterprises, because they are real world situations with relationships and authentic activities, are effective learning environments (Hansman, 2001). Membership in a community of practice, then, involves some level of ownership of the goals and the perspectives of the community and its members (Nuthall, 1997).

The third element of a community of practice is a shared repertoire which "...includes the discourse by which members create meaningful statements about the world, as well as the styles by which they express their forms of membership and their identities as members" (Wenger, 1998, p. 83). This shared repertoire is developed over time, with meaning developing through the history of mutual engagement in joint enterprises. This history does limit meaning, but provides a place from which meaning continues to be negotiated. These webs of shared belief enable practitioners to understand what they do and to take on the norms of the community (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). In communities of practice, a shared repertoire evolves and is taken on when "...people learn as they participate and become intimately involved with a community or culture of learning, interacting with the community and learning to understand and participate in its history, assumptions, and cultural values and rules" (Hansman, 2001, p. 46).

Participation:

The concept of participation in communities of practice is layered and complex. In order to understand the whole, I will approach the discussion in two parts, first exploring Lave and Wenger's (1991) understanding of legitimate peripheral participation and how that understanding has been adopted and applied by others and then discussing Wenger's (1998) more recent writing on social participation.

Legitimate peripheral participation is a process wherein newcomers participate in the community and its practices only peripherally. Learners gradually take on aspects of the practice moving from novice to expert; from partial to full participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). It is made very clear in this conception that engagement in practice is valid; whether partial, peripheral engagement or full participation. There is no physical periphery in a community of practice and no centre either; simply changes in participation based on learning and taking on aspects on the practice. Legitimate peripheral participation, in the view of its authors, "...refers to the development of knowledgeably skilled identities in practice and to the reproduction and transformation of communities of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 55).

Others have taken these ideas and expressed them in ways that can contribute to our understanding. The most adopted concept is the idea of the progression from novice to expert which is seen as a transformation of roles through participation and membership (Nuthall, 1997). This transformation involves not only skills, but also understanding and knowledge so that both perceptions and behaviours evolve through engagement. Vygotsky's conception of a zone of proximal development is commonly used to explain this process: the idea that the space between what the learner can accomplish independently and their potential for development as evidenced by what they can accomplish with the assistance or guidance of an expert or a peer with greater skills or knowledge is where learning occurs (Bonk & Kim, 1998). The diversity of the community is thus critical to learning and "...all human activities take place in a cultural context with many levels of interactions, shared beliefs, values, knowledge, skills, structured relationships, and symbol systems" (Hansman, 2001, p. 45).

Wenger's (1998) own work has evolved and his articulation of social participation draws together and clarifies elements of a sociocultural theory of learning. In his view, social participation "...refers here not just to local events of engagement in certain activities with certain people, but to a more encompassing process of being active participants in the *practices* of social communities and constructing *identities* in relation to these communities" (Wenger, 1998, p. 4). He understands learning to have four components: learning as belonging – community, learning as becoming – identity, learning as experience – meaning, learning as doing – practice. These elements are seen throughout the above discussion of sociocultural learning and are inherent to communities of practice as articulated here. To bring the conversation back around to the depth and complexity of participation as understood in this conception of learning, Wenger's (1998) articulation is helpful:

... I will use the term participation to describe the social experience of living in the world in terms of membership in social communities and active involvement in social enterprises. Participation in this sense is both personal and social. It is a complex process that combines doing, talking, thinking, feeling, and belonging. It involves our whole person, including our bodies, minds, emotions, and social relations. (pp. 55-56)

Central to this articulation is a multi-faceted perception of identity, one that comprises membership, negotiated experience, imagination, and becoming through participation (Wenger, 1998).

Communities of practice are ubiquitous and exploring how learning occurs in these communities is important because they comprise such a large part of the lives of

adults (Bonk & Kim, 1998). As adults become members of communities of practice, the potential for learning and transformation exists for both the individual and the community (Wenger, 1998). Speaking of the centrality of learning in communities of practice, Wenger states that: “as a locus for engagement in action, interpersonal relations, shared knowledge, and negotiation of enterprises, such communities hold the key to real transformation – the kind that has real effects on people’s lives” (p. 85). In this sense,

...*learning* refers to a transformation – one that expands the learner’s potential range of action. The suggestion that learning is a transformation is a reference to the physical character of the learning system. Upon learning, a system’s patterns of activity and its associations with, and in, other systems undergo physical change (Davis & Sumara, 2001, p. 89).

Critiques.

In an article exploring five different understandings of experiential learning, (Fenwick, 2000) provides a succinct and informative critique of sociocultural learning theory. Her main criticism is that sociocultural learning theory tends to be apolitical in that it does not attend to aspects of relationships such as race, gender, and class. Any of these elements of relationships in a community of practice could limit participation or even keep potential members out of the community. Fenwick also indicates that questions of who holds power and who decides what knowledge is valued are not addressed in this theory. Communities of practice engage in joint enterprises that Wenger (1998) claims are negotiated by the community even if not everyone agrees. Who holds power in the community will, then, affect who will need to be in agreement for a joint enterprise to proceed. Another point that Fenwick makes is that participation is not problematized and

there is no attention to the role of resistance when the practices and processes of the community may be flawed or unjust. A community could be created around any number of sets of practices, joint enterprises, and shared repertoires. Those within or without the community may have valid objections to a community of practice, but the theory does not address questions of the value or legitimacy of particular communities of practice within a broader social context.

There are other concerns that I think could be raised regarding sociocultural learning theory. The idea of legitimate peripheral participation seems potentially idealistic to me. Some participants in some communities may not ever become full participants in a community of practice. In addition to the factors raised by Fenwick, I believe that motivation could also be a factor in limiting participation. If peripheral participation is an accepted norm, some participants may not be motivated to move toward full participation. Additionally, if length of membership in a particular community of practice gives status of an expert or full member, it may be that individuals with differing levels of understanding or differing abilities could be in a role of full participants and in a position to influence peripheral participants by passing on flawed knowledge and practices. Finally, in my understanding of sociocultural learning theory, despite the discussion of new members bringing new ideas and of the importance of diversity, I think it is possible that a community of practice could replicate its shared repertoire and practices uncritically. If the community itself or its senior members have status and authority in an organization or in society, new members may tend to, or be expected to, adapt and integrate rather than question and influence.

A sociocultural theory of learning, then, has potential to expand our understanding of how and where learning takes place and how transformation occurs in communities of practice. Both transformative learning and sociocultural learning theories can contribute to developing an understanding of adult learning in new social movements by enabling understanding of different aspects of what is found. Together, the two areas of theory may be able to illuminate more of what is happening in this context for adult learning. Attention to the critiques of both theories also provides ways to approach adult learning in new social movements both to understand this phenomenon more deeply and to bring that understanding into dialogue with existing theories.

Adult Learning in New Social Movements

This section explores literature in new social movement theory as well as related material from the field of adult education. For this research project, understanding how adults learn within new social movements is the central task. The voluntary simplicity movement is a new social movement and understanding the features of these movements (Melucci, 1995) will be important in establishing the framework for the study. Some of the characteristics of and developments in new social movement theory speak to concerns raised regarding the purpose and activities of adult education, particularly education for transformative change. They may also help us to understand how learning occurs in the voluntary simplicity movement according to the literature of the movement. The two main areas of interest here are the dialectic of personal and societal transformation and the nature of transformative adult learning within a social movement. Some of the literature that will be explored here includes Kilgore's (1999) work on collective

learning, Finger's (1989) discussion of the relationship between personal and societal transformation, and Holford's (1995) treatment of knowledge production in new social movements. This section continues the process of conceptual structure assessment, bringing into dialogue conceptions of new social movements and conceptions of adult learning.

In gathering the threads of thought within adult education and new social movement theory, I began to see this project as a weaving. Threads representing the evolution of adult education and contemporary discussions on its role in social change form the warp of the weaving and are laid down first on the frame. Woven into these visions and practices are ideas from new social movement theory forming the weft of the weaving. Together these two fields of study create a metaphorical tapestry representing adult education and learning in social movements. Adult education is a diverse field that engages many other fields of practice. For educators working for social transformation, understanding how adults learn within new social movements is critical and it is this viewpoint that draws me into the weaving process. My central concern as an educator is for personal and social transformation toward a more ecologically, economically and socially sustainable society. Understanding my own field and how it relates to a social phenomenon that is multiply connected to my teaching is critical both for my practice and for the development of my thesis research. In this section, I present the argument that some of the characteristics of and developments in new social movement theory speak to concerns raised regarding the purpose and activities of adult education. I propose that joining the two threads of thought can strengthen adult education in its social change

purpose, particularly regarding transformative learning in the voluntary simplicity movement.

In the introduction to this thesis, I discussed the roots of adult education and the field's concern for social change as well as the current calls for the field to once again take up responsibility for engaging social issues. The focus of this final section of my presentation and assessment of various conceptions and theoretical strands will shift to social movement theory and its concern for understanding how movements form and transform culture, develop collective identity and act in society. I will also explore the main patterns discerned in theorizing about adult education and learning in social movements. Rather than taking a very broad view of each of these areas, I will explore in depth a few key writings in each section. In my previous discussion drawing together the threads of dialogue within adult education regarding history, critique, and new vision, I set the beginnings of an emerging pattern of engagement between adult education and new social movements. I move, now, into a guided study of some threads of dialogue in new social movement theory.

A thoughtful consideration of new social movements must, of course, begin with presenting the features of this idea along with how the "new" movements differ from "old" social movements. The language here is inherent in the dialogue within sociology so I will continue to use it. However, the connotations associated with conceptions of "old" and "new" are unfortunate in that they imply a value judgment as well as two completely distinct categories. I see the shift in social movement characteristics and purposes as part of the overall shift of social, cultural, and political forces between modernism and postmodernism. This shift is not final or complete, but ebbs and flows as

characteristics of both modernism and postmodernism are extant in individual and cultural worldviews. If this is the case, then “new” is not necessarily better, just representative of the complexity of the times. It is likely also true that social movements may not always be easily classified as either old or new but may reflect the transitional moment of the wider world. This classification and debate is not dealt with extensively in this thesis and the brief treatment is one of the ways in which the thesis is partial and limited in scope. What I see as most important is understanding the characteristics of the kind of movement that voluntary simplicity represents in order to understand adult learning in that movement.

Old and new.

The term “new social movements” was coined by Melucci in 1977 in articles that were translated into English in the early 1980’s (Melucci, 1995a). It is to his subsequent work that I turn for an explanation of what distinguishes old and new social movements and how these new movements are described and understood. Old social movements arose from two processes within industrialization: social conflict over production and class struggles with their fights for civil and political rights (Melucci, 1995a). They had a functional component that comprised individual events forming a collective reality. They also had a structural component comprised of behaviours that developed out of the class system. Hence, old social movements were highly political and system-oriented entities. In these movements, the “...source of analysis was economic or class-based, or had discrete interests in the social structure...” (Cunningham, 2000, p. 580).

New social movements, on the other hand, are characterized by their highly differentiated natures and sociocultural emphasis (Melucci, 1995a). Rather than focusing

on material production and political structures, new social movements are concerned with information resources, meaning making, and socially constructed realities. They are formed by groups occupying a specific social or cultural space (Cunningham, 2000). Whereas old social movements exhibited a high degree of unity and could be easily identified as entities, new social movements are composites; collective actors with diverse social processes and forms of actions.

Melucci (1995a) identifies five features of new social movements which can help us to understand their construction and action. First, conflict in these movements centred on information and knowledge production. Second, action in these movements is self-reflective with individuals and collectives living out the actions that they present to society. Third, action has a global dimension with a focus on interdependence. Fourth, these movements cycle between action on issues and reflection on new experiences formed by these actions. Finally, these movements have both measurable, visible effects such as institutional and cultural change as well as non-measurable effects linked to meaning and power.

Cultural shifts.

As in the discussion of adult education earlier, the dialogue around new social movements considers the ongoing shift away from Enlightenment culture with its emphasis on a metanarrative of objective scientific progress. In new social movements, the social and political merge so that a multiplicity of knowledges and politics are brought into the public arena. In the words of one theorist, “the alternative to Enlightenment universalism is not chaos and nihilism but living with uncertainty and a tolerance of ambiguity” (Seidman, 1998, p. 295). This shift, then, is characterized by

movement from the political to the sociocultural, evidenced in identity movements concerned with feminism, racism, environmentalism, and sexuality.

The way in which this shift happens is through social movements that find “cracks and fissures” in the dominant culture (Johnston & Klandermans, 1995). While the dominant culture is stable, social movements are change-agents that are the source of cultural shifts. The movements are, however, based in the dominant culture even as they critique that dominant culture. New social movements may transform the dominant culture or they may develop new cultural models. A key element of these movements, then, is that they are self-reflective so that they maintain their distinctiveness from the dominant culture and do not end up being institutionalized or marginalized.

This self-reflective and transformative nature of new social movements is exhibited in their meaning making activities. Three types of meaning making are identified within these movements: “...public discourse, persuasive communication, and consciousness raising during episodes of collective action” (Johnston & Klandermans, 1995, p. 10). Public discourse operates at the societal level where “...long-term processes of formation and transformation of collective beliefs take(s) place” (Johnston & Klandermans, 1995, p. 10). Persuasive communication operates at the group or community level with specific targets that are encouraged to come to agreement on beliefs. Individual participants form or transform their beliefs through actions which expose them to opposing points of view. For instance, all three kinds of meaning making can be seen in the environmental movement. Public discourse about various issues usually takes place when groups engage in actions around those issues and the discourse adds to the ongoing discussion of environmental issues. Persuasive communication may

happen through this discourse but mainly engages those nearer to the action with environmentalists interacting with other community members and stakeholders regarding the issue. Individuals exposed to new points of view may experience consciousness raising and a change in beliefs and actions.

Parallels between new social movements and adult education are beginning to emerge with possibilities for engagement of both learners and educators. The preceding discussion of the relationship between individual and collective learning is also echoed in new social movement theory's attention to the individual and the collective in meaning making. Actions of the group lead to the development of individual understanding which leads to internalization of new beliefs and changes in lifestyle which support the impact of the movement as a whole. The interweaving of individual and collective, learning and acting is promising for the exploration of voluntary simplicity in this project.

Collective identity.

Meaning making is also central to the development of collective identity in new social movements. Collective identity can be seen as having three inter-related processes (Melucci, 1995b) or three structural layers (Gamson, 1991). In Melucci's thinking, collective identity contains meaning making related to how the language and practices of the group are defined. Collective identity also involves the relationships among the participants, both formal and informal, that involve communication and negotiation. Emotional engagement in the movement also contributes to the building of collective identity. For collective identity to develop there must be an ability to differentiate between the group-self and its environment, including other groups (Melucci, 1995b).

Whereas Melucci's (1995b) discussion of collective identity focuses on three inter-connected elements, Gamson (1991) looks at the concept as a layering of identities. The organizational layer is composed of the identity of the types of people who are involved in the movement, known as "carriers". The movement layer contains group identities that may be linked to more than one specific effort. At the solidary layer, identity is formed based on social location, which may or may not be related to other aspects of identity. In Gamson's view, all layers are expressed publicly and are sociocultural in nature. Individuals are included through the growth of their personal identities to encompass group identities within the movement.

Solidarity, in Gamson's (1991) view is related to the individual's loyalty and commitment to the collective identity of the movement. If social commitment is important to the discussion of adult education and social change (Ilsley, 1992) then solidarity evidenced as commitment to a collective identity is also central to the discussion. Before participants can incorporate collective identity into their personal identities and exhibit solidarity with a movement's ideals and actions, they must first be recruited and initiated into the movement. A final thought from new social movement theory takes us to this issue. In a review of various studies on recruitment, Snow, Zurcher, and Ekland-Olson (1993) found four avenues for recruitment into new social movements. In exploring the success of each avenue, they reached three conclusions that are important for our discussion. First, individuals who know members of a movement are more likely to be successfully recruited. Second, people usually come into contact with a movement by participating in actions rather than by simply joining. Third, while individuals are more likely to be recruited if they have few connections to other social

networks, movements themselves are more likely to be successful in recruiting if they have multiple connections to multiple networks.

In considering the discussion of new social movement theory in light of the discussion of adult education and social change, what comes through most clearly to me is the dynamic between individual/personal and collective/social in learning through reflecting and acting. If we consider education to exist in public spaces, then this quote from Melucci (1995a) leads us nicely into the final section of the review which looks for patterns emerging from the weaving together of threads from these two areas of theory and practice: "the main function of public spaces, then, is to make the questions raised by the movements visible and collective" (Melucci, 1995a, p. 115).

Adult education and new social movements.

In the introduction to this thesis, I discussed the claim in the literature that adult education has always seen enabling social change as a part of its purpose in society. Two cases that support this claim are the Highlander and Antigonish movements. These two movements operated in very distinct ways, but both were involved in engaging adults in changing their personal and collective situations through education and action. Heaney (1992) understands Highlander to have been a critical actor in historical change. He describes the approach to education as one that engaged learners with their social environment as well as providing formal learning opportunities. He names Highlander's links to social movements and historical events as evidence that adult education did have connections to social transformation. In terms of process, Highlander acted from a responsive stance. Educators did not go out to initiate actions or movements, but, rather, became involved with emerging issues and movements in a supportive role. Highlander's

programmes grew out of the goals of movements around them and did not aim to create movements. Once involved, however, educators did not merely facilitate self-directed learners (Collins, 1995). Although the impetus for a programme was generated by movement goals, Highlander played a very active role in educating adults.

In contrast, the Antigonish movement did set out to directly initiate social action by groups in and among communities as it was "specifically created to promote social action through self-help and co-operative development..." (Crane, 1983, p. 151). The six principles of the movement combined the centrality of the individual with a focus on group action, addressed economic issues through institutional reforms, and saw education as a way to enable social reform for greater equity. Unlike Highlander, which worked with existing movements, Antigonish began their educational programming by gathering people in mass meetings to think about the problems in their lives and to learn new ways of looking at their lives. Small groups then studied local problems together with assistance from animators. Antigonish, then, initiated the process of change but saw the individual learner as the only one who could complete the process within themselves. The two movements had in common the belief that education must be grounded in people's real lives and that education must help people to move forward in new ways (Crane, 1983; Heaney, 1992).

The two main patterns that I see created in the drawing together of adult education and new social movement theory are: the dialectic of personal and social transformation and the nature of adult learning. Both discussions are inherent in the conversations from each field and they are also distinctly present in the adult education literature that deals explicitly with learning in social movements. It is to this literature that I move now in

order to extend and support my findings. The dialectic of personal and social transformation in this particular discussion reflects a more general dialogue in the field. This dialectic is seen in explanations of the early purposes of adult education (Ilsley, 1992), in the critiques of the present state of the field (Welton, 1995) and in specific conversations regarding transformative learning theory (Collard & Law, 1989). While reductionist tendencies remain on both sides (Miles, 2002) there is a growing trend in the literature to attend to both personal and social transformation in and through adult education (Kilgore, 1999; Welton, 1993).

In his article exploring the implications of new social movements for adult education, Finger (1989) argues that the main shift with new social movements is toward a focus on personal transformation. He indicates that structures and institutions can play only a supportive role in personal transformation that occurs from within. Social transformation, then, is the cumulative impact of personal transformations as individuals change their thinking and lifestyles. It is this cumulative effect on societies through the introduction of new values that gives social movements their importance in social and cultural transformation.

Welton (1993) criticizes Finger's position as being too polarized and indicates that "...one cannot separate personal fulfillment from collective action" (Welton, 1993, p. 153). If social transformation is seen as the democratization of public life, as in Welton, then collective action is not just a means to personal transformation but also an engagement in social transformation. Although Welton's argument here is not explicit, it echoes the earlier conversations from adult education and new social movement theory literature. For instance, Ilsley (1992) includes advocacy and social and political

enfranchisement in his own ethical considerations in planning adult education. Similarly, Johnston and Klandermans (1995) indicate that culture is internalized by individuals and made visible through their actions. In adult learning in new social movements, then, attention must be paid to the dialectic relationship between personal and social transformation.

In my view, this argument is made most clearly and strongly in Kilgore's (1999) work on collective learning. Discussing the ongoing conversation from transformative learning theory, alluded to above, Kilgore reverses a significant statement by Mezirow to clarify her own position. She articulates Mezirow's position as follows: "...while collective action is 'crucial', it is not necessary for critical reflection to result in immediate collective social action" (Kilgore, 1999, p. 194). She then adds the observation that "...collective social action is not necessarily the result of individual critical reflection" (Kilgore, 1999, p. 195). This statement is clearly supported by the Snow, Zurcher, and Ekland-Olson (1993) work on recruitment that shows that collective action can precede the integration of individual identity with collective identity and beliefs. Throughout her paper, Kilgore stands aside from the tendency to dichotomize individual and collective, seeing both as inherent in adult learning.

This brings us to the second main pattern in the tapestry of adult education and new social movements, the nature of adult learning. Staying with Kilgore for the moment, we can follow her theory building as she poses both group and individual components in a theory of collective learning. Here, Kilgore blends adult learning theory with sociocultural learning theory and social movement theory in a manner that highly influences my perspectives in this project. It is evident from her presentation that

individual and group characteristics and processes in learning are inherent in each other rather than separate:

In order to understand collective learning and development, we must consider the totality of the system. Individual development is partially determined by a group's development, a group's development is partially determined by any individual member's development, and all development is partially determined by the group's collective actions in relation to other groups' collective actions within a sociocultural context. (Kilgore, 1999, p. 197)

Once again, this position echoes and supports findings throughout this literature review.

Another approach to understanding the nature of adult learning in relation to social movements is found in Holford's (1995) work on cognitive praxis. Although tending to privilege the collective over the individual in his discussion, Holford contributes to the pattern of this review in his treatment of knowledge production within social movements. Holford sees social movements as sources of knowledge, both in the organization itself and in what he calls "movement intellectuals." Here, organizational knowledge is formed as a social movement communicates both internally and externally. It is through education and communication that ideas are articulated and shared and collective identity is built. Movement intellectuals are key participants in knowledge production as they articulate, interpret, and lead. For example, David Suzuki would be considered a movement intellectual in the environmental movement. Holford sees this as a natural role for adult educators to take within social movements and even links this role to the creation of an adult education identity. Adult educators as movement intellectuals contribute to the emergence of new knowledge and to active social change. This link

between education, action, change, and social movements that is so central for the work of this thesis is articulated nicely by Heaney (1992): “education for change is fueled by movements and by the within-reach possibilities for action which movements create” (p. 57).

The research and theorizing on adult learning in new social movements is limited in scope, but the general directions of the discussion reflect concerns in both transformative and sociocultural learning theories. The dialectics between personal and social elements of transformation and between individual and group components of learning are central in the discussion of adult learning in new social movements and they are also highlighted throughout the review of transformative and sociocultural learning theories. An intentional and critically reflective drawing together of these discussions, through an analysis of adult learning in the voluntary simplicity movement, holds the possibilities of furthering the overall theoretical and practical work outlined throughout this chapter. The conceptual structure assessment begun in this chapter will continue in the next chapter, adding a new tool to the hermeneutic circle.

Chapter 5: Toward a Conceptualization of Adult Learning in New Social Movements

The main task of the discussion portion of this thesis is to address the first two research questions as stated in the introduction:

- What does adult learning look like in the literature of the voluntary simplicity movement?
- How can ideas from transformative learning and sociocultural learning theories help us to understand learning in this movement?

Aspects of these questions have been considered in the concept interpretation and conceptual structure assessments in earlier chapters of this thesis. The task of this chapter is to explicitly explore and attempt to answer the two questions through bringing together all of the elements discussed earlier in the thesis, to continue with conceptual structure assessment and begin a conception development. I will begin to address the first question by identifying and exploring the predisposing, enabling, and reinforcing factors that are found in adult learners according to the literature of the movement. In other words, what draws learners to begin to engage with the movement, what enables learning, and what reinforces changes made by learners? This exploration will set up the analysis of adult learning in the voluntary simplicity movement.

Next, I will adapt Kilgore's (1999) ideas on collective learning to frame an examination of adult learning in voluntary simplicity movement through transformative learning and sociocultural learning theories. Given the elements of collective learning and what has been described about adult learning in voluntary simplicity movement, I will

demonstrate how transformative learning and sociocultural learning shed light on what is going on and combine to create a deeper understanding.

Before the two above tasks are engaged, I will present a brief argument to establish voluntary simplicity as a new social movement. To this point, it has been assumed that voluntary simplicity is in fact a new social movement. In order to use this movement as case through which to develop a deeper understanding of adult learning in new social movements, I feel that I need to more explicitly detail why voluntary simplicity can be used for this task. This will be done with reference to the characteristics and processes of new social movements as described in the literature review. What is known about the voluntary simplicity movement through its literature will be held up to new social movement theory for analysis.

Establishing Voluntary Simplicity as a New Social Movement

Characteristics.

There are a few ways to explore the fit of voluntary simplicity into the category of *new social movement*. The first is to see if the characteristics of new social movements, as distinguished from old social movements, apply to voluntary simplicity. I recognize that the distinction between these two types of movements is not black and white and is still under discussion in the literature. In my reading of the literature and understanding of how it relates to broader shifts in culture and worldview, I find the idea of new social movements with its associated characteristics and processes to be helpful and reasonable, if not unproblematic. As indicated in the previous chapter, new social movements are found to be highly differentiated and to have a sociocultural emphasis (Melucci, 1995a).

Throughout the description of the voluntary simplicity movement, it was clear that both philosophies and practices, while following definite themes, are diverse and differentiated in this movement (Andrews, 1997; Dominguez & Robin, 1992; Elgin, 1993; Schut, 1999). This differentiation can make it a challenge to determine what and who belongs in the movement and there are also overlaps with other movements and groups. This movement also clearly occupies a sociocultural space rather than a political space and this is mostly seen as a strength of the movement (Andrews, 1997; Cunningham, 2000; Segal, 1999).

Along with the above characteristics that differentiate new from old social movements, Melucci (1995a) also posits five features of new social movements which are outlined in the literature review. The first feature relates to the source of conflict in society that is addressed by the new social movement. While conflict addressed by old social movements was related to materials and goods, conflict addressed by new social movements is related to information and meaning. At the core of the voluntary simplicity movement is the understanding that the movement is offering an alternative way to understand the world and to make meaning in life (Andrews, 1997; Dominguez & Robin, 1992; Elgin, 1993; Etzioni, 1998; Merkel, 2003; Schut, 1999; Segal, 1999.). The second feature of new social movements has to do with the way that reflection and action are enacted. The voluntary simplicity movement is self-reflective in that the actions engaged become a message for those within and without the movement as do the processes of the movement itself. Action and reflection are integrated and mutually-supporting as well as in line with movement goals. The dialogue between action and reflection relates to another feature of new social movements in that action provides new experience for

members to reflect on and reflection gives impetus for new actions. Although the voluntary simplicity movement often begins with individual needs and individual change, the beliefs that local actions have global dimensions and that all aspects of life are interconnected are both central to the movement literature, echoing another feature of new social movements. Finally, there are, in the voluntary simplicity movement, both measurable and immeasurable changes. Many of the measurable changes are related to individual lifestyles, but these changes are understood to be cumulative in the wider social context and it is also proposed that individuals experiencing personal success will expand their action for change into social and political arenas. There are multiple immeasurable effects. Creating new meaning, empowering members, and making power structures visible are some of these effects in the voluntary simplicity movement.

Processes.

There are three processes of new social movements that pertain to this discussion of the voluntary simplicity movement. The first is the process of cultural shift, second is communication, and third is the formation of collective identity. In new social movements, cultural shifts arise from the dominant culture but occupy the “cracks and fissures” of that culture by acting to transform or replace aspects of the dominant culture (Johnston & Klandermans, 1995). In the voluntary simplicity movement, the dominant culture is often portrayed as the good life gone bad (Schut, 1999), as a flawed or corrupted American dream (Segal, 1999), or as an old road map that is out of date and dangerous (Dominguez & Robin 1992). The movement understands itself to be a way to transform the dominant culture by providing alternative perspectives and practices, by giving those who are disillusioned with the dominant culture tools to resist and change,

and by creating a groundswell of change that will rise up out of the cracks and flow in from the margins.

The movement's activities also reflect Johnston and Klandermans (1995) three levels of communication inherent in new social movements: consciousness-raising, persuasive communication, and public discourse. Often, publications related to the voluntary simplicity movement serve each function in some way (Andrews, 1997; Dominguez & Robin, 1992; Elgin, 1993; Merkel, 2003). At the individual level, resources and groups suggest actions and give practical ideas for individuals to use and reflect on, thus enabling individual meaning making and transformation. Links between common consumer practices and personal and global issues are made with alternatives being provided both in terms of action and of belief. Most resources in the movement encourage working with groups for support and dialogue while engaging with the literature and ideas of the movement. Beliefs and practices are presented as having arisen from groups and communities and the literature is meant to persuade the new members and groups using the material. Because the movement itself is quite diverse and differentiated, there are many points at which it interacts with the dominant culture. Public discourse related to the movement may be around consumption (Buy Nothing Day), time (Take Back Your Time Day), particular environmental issues locally and globally, and many other aspects of movement philosophies and practices. Public discourse is understood to be part of a long-term process of change that combines with individual, group, and community actions and changes over time.

The final process that I will explore in terms of how the voluntary simplicity movement reflects new social movement characteristics and processes is collective

identity. Collective identity is formed in new social movements through meaning making, relationships, and differentiation. The voluntary simplicity movement has a distinct language that is understood by members and is related to the practices of the movement (Andrews, 1997; Dominguez & Robin, 1992; Elgin, 1993). Identity is constructed through involvement with groups where relationships of support and shared meaning are developed. The movement, through its language and practices, is able to distinguish itself not only from the dominant culture, but from other movements and groups.

Collective identity in new social movements is also understood in terms of three layers of involvement (Gamson, 1991). Movement “carriers” at the organizational level shape collective identity by defining and representing a particular aspect of the movement, such as the frugal person concerned with reducing expenditures significantly (Dominguez & Robin, 1992) or the person who lives by the wiseacre challenge concerned with reducing their number of acres it takes to support his/her lifestyle (Merkel, 2003). The movement layer is broader than the organization layer, with multiple and overlapping commitments. This is found in the voluntary simplicity movement in terms of individuals’ involvement with various actions that all contribute to their identity. The solidary layer is based in the social location of participants. In the voluntary simplicity movement, it is understood that members are generally from a similar social location – white, upper middle class, educated – but the movement discourse indicates a concern for greater diversity. So, collective identity in voluntary simplicity movement is an amalgam of many factors that reflect the development of collective identity in new social movements more generally.

It seems clear to me that the literature of the voluntary simplicity movement contains sufficient evidence to classify the movement as a new social movement according to the theory that has been developed around this conception. I should mention here, though, that an analysis by another writer raises some questions about this classification (Grigsby, 2004). In her book, which aims to explore and analyze the movement from within, Grigsby identifies the voluntary simplicity movement as a cultural rather than a social movement. This determination rests mainly on the contention that the movement is not structured enough to be a social movement in that it "...does not formally recruit new members, imposes no strict guidelines for inclusion, has no officially sanctioned leaders, is not centralized or hierarchically organized, and is not aimed primarily at changing public policy" (Grigsby, 2004, p. 8). Rather, participants in the movement are seen as "cultural change agents" or carriers of an alternative culture. Grigsby sees the opposition of the movement to the dominant culture and the engagement in alternative cultural practices as evidence that the movement is cultural rather than social in nature. My reading of her analysis is that the basis of her criteria for classification as a social movement are more reflective of old social movements than new social movements. In addition, she does not clearly define the term *cultural movement* and she draws extensively on new social movement theory in her analysis. While her analysis likely has something to add to this discussion, it would necessitate doing additional research into conceptions of cultural movements which is beyond the scope of this project. I mention her analysis here so that the reader knows that there is another perspective, potentially different from or complementary to my own, in the literature.

Factors in Adult Learning in the Voluntary Simplicity Movement

Having established that the voluntary simplicity movement can be considered a new social movement, the next step in exploring adult learning in this and other new social movements is to establish how learning begins, develops, and is sustained in this movement. The Precede-Proceed model, designed for health promotion planning, is a useful tool for exploring learning in voluntary simplicity movement due to the resonance of its two fundamental propositions with this particular learning environment. These two propositions are that: "... (1) health and health risks have multiple determinants and (2) because health and health risks are determined by multiple causes, efforts to effect behavioral, environmental, and social change must be multidimensional or multisectoral." (Green & Kreuter, 1999, p. 43). The parallel here is that the voluntary simplicity movement and its concerns also have multiple determinants and that education and learning to enable individual and social change must also, therefore, be multidimensional. The evidence for the first proposition is clearly seen in the chapter describing and interpreting the voluntary simplicity movement in terms of how it defines itself and in terms of what philosophies and practices characterize the movement. As found in that chapter, there are particular understandings, meanings, and themes within the movement but also diversity in both philosophies and practices. In order to understand adult learning in this movement and to develop ways to improve education within the movement, the Precede-Proceed model can be used as a way to frame the dialogue. This next section of this discussion, then, will explore predisposing, enabling, and reinforcing factors found in descriptions of adult learning in the voluntary simplicity movement. The model will be used to organize what is known about learning in this movement in order to analyze it

further through the lenses of transformative learning, sociocultural learning, and learning in new social movements, extending the conceptual structure assessments begun in the previous chapter.

Predisposing factors.

These factors are the ones that combine to draw individuals into the voluntary simplicity movement. They are "...antecedents to behavior that provide the rationale or *motivation* for the behavior" (Green & Kreuter, 1999, p. 153). Predisposing factors may be intrinsic or extrinsic; related to the personality, knowledge, and experiences of the adult learner. They may also be cumulative, building up over time until the level of understanding and awareness combines with a need for action that stimulates engagement with the movement, through its literature or its people. Predisposing factors encompass beliefs, fears, values – in short, anything that prepares a person to form and act on an intention to participate in some way in the philosophies and practices of the voluntary simplicity movement (Green & Kreuter, 1999).

There are many factors that can predispose a person to involvement with voluntary simplicity, ranging from personal and familial to societal and environmental. These factors are in many ways parallel to the groupings of practices within the movement, along a continuum from personal to societal. This range is understood within the movement itself:

People are attracted to this movement for a lot of different reasons. Many are looking for more time. Some are looking for ways to save money, to find techniques for living on less. Almost all are concerned about the environment, for

they realize that our lifestyle is leading to the destruction of nature. (Andrews, 1997, pp. xiv-xv)

The more personal or individual predisposing factors include things such as time and work, clutter and consumption, authenticity and autonomy (Andrews, 1997; Craig-Lees & Hill, 2002; Dominguez & Robin, 1992; Pierce, 2000). Often these factors are interconnected such that one may be the central but rarely the only predisposing factor determining involvement. For many, time pressures related to work predispose them to engaging voluntary simplicity as a way to have more time for other things in life (Andrews, 1997; Pierce, 2000). Lack of time and energy for friends and family, feelings of constantly being rushed, and general unhappiness can result in individuals seeking ways to slow down, including working and spending less. One of the sacrifices related to overwork is, for many, their relationships with family and friends and this is a situation that can be an impetus for involvement with voluntary simplicity (Dominguez & Robin, 1992). An interest in spirituality and spiritual practice can also be a predisposing factor in terms of making time to attend to other aspects of life, both individually and communally.

Another set of predisposing factors centered in work are concerns for identity and integrity in work life (Dominguez & Robin, 1992; Pierce, 2000). In North American culture, identity is often connected to what we do in terms of working for a living. For some, including many who become involved with voluntary simplicity, aligning beliefs, and values with their work is desirable in order to maintain integrity. For others, the prospect of slowing down in order to work and spend less is a draw because of the time and space that it may open up for including other aspects of life as a more central part of

identity. Others limit the purpose of work to generating income and find their life purpose and identity in other activities.

Concerns about consumption also predispose adult learners to involvement with voluntary simplicity. Often this is a combination of a concern about clutter in their own lives and homes with a broader concern about a culture of consumption that understands consumption to be both a right and a responsibility (Andrews, 1997; Dominguez & Robin, 1992; Pierce, 2000). People who are predisposed to engagement with voluntary simplicity are usually aware at least of the clutter in their own lives and of the cycle of work and spend that adds to clutter while taking time away from other pursuits and interests.

The predisposing factors outlined so far are mainly individual or local, related directly to a person's day-to-day life. These factors are linked to others that can be seen as more communal or global concerns. For instance, the predisposing factor related to clutter and overconsumption also comes into play in terms of broader concerns for environmental and social justice as does an interest in spirituality. Concern about environmental degradation and resource depletion can predispose individuals to spend less consuming and to change their consumption patterns to used products, longer-lasting products, and natural products (Craig-Lees & Hill, 2002). Changing patterns of consumption may also be seen as a way to free up resources for others to meet their basic needs (Elgin, 1993). So there are links between the more personal predisposing factors, such as overconsumption leading to debt accumulation (Dominguez & Robin, 1992) and a developing spiritual connection to nature (Andrews, 1997), and more global factors, such as the role of overconsumption in continuing poverty (Dominguez & Robin, 1992;

Elgin, 1993), the health of the earth (Andrews, 1997) and continuing availability of resources (Dominguez & Robin, 1992). In a nutshell, people are predisposed to engagement with voluntary simplicity because the good life has gone bad: the good life promises that basic needs will be met for all, promises that there will be enough so that we can care for the whole community, and promises happiness (Schut, 1999). In reality, a few have more than enough at the expense of the many, not everyone in the community has equal opportunity (Schut, 1999), and after a certain point, more does not equal greater happiness (Dominguez & Robin, 1992).

Along with the factors, both personal and global, that positively predispose people to engagement with the voluntary simplicity movement are predisposing factors that may be barriers to engagement. According to Merkel (2003), barriers can be both internal and external. Internal barriers include fear of not having enough if attempts are made to reduce work and consumption; of loss of status and respect; not having support from family and friends, particularly if partners are not equally engaged. Responses to external barriers can range from feelings of resignation about global problems, to inability to see different ways of living in cities and towns that are built around unsustainable practices, to ongoing societal pressures to consume (Merkel, 2003). Another negatively predisposing factor is found in how voluntary simplicity is portrayed in the media. Stories often use examples of people who have made drastic lifestyle changes that, while inspiring, can also function to set the bar for involvement so high as to be a barrier (Andrews, 1997). According to theologian Thomas Berry, "the great obstacle is simply this: the conviction that we cannot change because we are dependent upon what is wrong. But that is the addict's excuse, and we know that it will not do" (1999, p. 102).

Overall, then, predisposing factors such as time, purpose, identity, environment, clutter and consumption, money, health, and fulfillment (Andrews, 1997) can open up possibilities to make dreams reality, whether raising a family on a farm or contributing to change through volunteer work (Dominguez & Robin, 1992). For those who become involved in the voluntary simplicity movement, the positively predisposing factors and the possibilities outweigh the fears or fears are reduced through involvement and a deeper understanding of the issues:

Yes, at the start, reinventing our own slice of life can look pretty much impossible. The more deeply we search for the causes of our world's drastic imbalances, the more we realize the full extent of the violence we have unknowingly supported. (Merkel, 2003, pp. 7-8)

Enabling factors.

In the Precede-Proceed model, enabling factors are those things that can help or hinder in terms of acquiring new skills and taking action (Green & Kreuter, 1999). As with predisposing factors, enabling factors can include barriers as well as factors that facilitate changes in understanding and action. They "...allow a motivation to be realized" (Green & Kreuter, 1999). Because these factors are linked to access to resources, learning new skills, and environmental conditions, they are the factors that organizations and groups often focus on in terms of adult learning. Awareness of enabling factors is key in terms of developing and implementing educational programs.

A key enabling factor found in virtually all of the voluntary simplicity literature is the emphasis on each learner deciding on her/his own level of involvement – what issues and practices are important to them, what changes they want to make to simplify and

what aspects of their lifestyles they wish to keep, and how they define 'enough' in their lives (Andrews, 1997, Dominguez & Robin, 1992; Elgin, 1993; Merkel, 2003; Pierce, 2000). It is possible that this enabling factor arose due to some of the barriers named as predisposing factors; certainly it provides more space for individuals to engage the movement in terms of their own needs, interests, and willingness to take risks. This central belief that "...there is no *one* way to simplify; rather, each person's unique way grows out of an analysis of his or her own life" (Andrews, 1997, p. xviii) is present in each of the simplicity resources commonly used in the movement.

Much of the literature used in the voluntary simplicity movement comes in the form of self-help style resources. These resources enable engagement in the movement by providing information, practical advice, skill development, and learning communities. Simplicity circles, as described in Cecile Andrews' (1997) book *The Circle of Simplicity: Return to the Good Life*, are one the most popular resources in the movement. In the opening to her book, Andrews describes the reasoning behind using simplicity circles to enable engagement with voluntary simplicity:

A lot of people are realizing that just reading a book or going to a workshop isn't enough. They get fired up for a few weeks and then they slip back into their old habits. To make lasting, profound changes, people are joining simplicity circles. Simplicity circles are small groups of people who gather together, without experts or authorities, to help each other simplify their lives – to support each other, to think together, to exchange ideas on ways to live differently. When you're working with like-minded people, talking with kindred spirits, exploring with

people who share your values, it's easier to make changes (Andrews, 1997, pp. xv-xvi).

Simplicity circles reinforce the idea that each person makes their own plan for simplifying their life (Andrews, 1997). They provide a place where learners can come to understand more deeply why they need to reduce consumption and to avoid simply reducing consumption by denying oneself things, which is seen as the equivalent of a diet which will not work. In simplicity circles, learners begin to find their own paths to simplicity by exploring their values, developing self-understanding, and finding purpose in life. Circles also explore ideas on everything from building community to specific ways to reduce consumption. Two central ideas of these groups are that: "...one of the constant themes is inspecting every aspect of your life" (Andrews, 1997, p. 138) and "...true community does not exist without the intimacy and support found within a small group" (Andrews, 1997, p. 203).

Another popular resource, an edited text of short readings on diverse topics related to simplicity from a Christian point of view, follows many of the patterns of Andrews' book on simplicity circles, even including excerpts from her book in the readings. This text also attends to mindfulness, overconsumption, fulfillment, and authenticity in terms of living according to one's values. Many of the same themes are found in both texts as well as a common purpose regarding an approach to engaging the practices:

While this study guide will be helpful to individuals, we encourage you to consider the benefits of going through it with a small group. Movement toward simplicity requires swimming upstream against dominant cultural messages; it

requires redefining success and the characteristics of 'the good life'; and it is certainly made easier with celebration –of friendships, community and all the beauty around us. Developing a community can both support such movement and make the process more enjoyable. (Schut, 1999, p. 17)

The enabling factors that can be seen in these resources are openness to individual choice and pace, emphasis on building a supportive community, provision of practical ideas, exposure to information and alternative viewpoints, encouragement of reflective and spiritual practices, shared leadership, and an ongoing process of change.

Along with simplicity circles, and using some of the same learning methods, another central program resource in the voluntary simplicity movement is the *Your Money or Your Life* program. This program provides an alternative perspective on money that focuses on financial intelligence, financial integrity, and financial independence. It aims to transform people's relationship with money and to approach the financial aspects of life as part of an integrated lifestyle (Dominguez & Robin, 1992). The development of this program began with the personal journeys of its two authors, grew into first an audio-cassette course and then a book with supporting materials, and emerged as an integral part of the growing voluntary simplicity movement. The book offers nine steps for the reader to follow, emphasizing that all steps are needed but that individuals may begin where they are most comfortable, may return to steps as needed, and may practice some steps indefinitely.

Although the book can be used by individuals, a culture of study groups, similar to simplicity circles but using this book and its steps as their content, has arisen. A variety of study guides are now available, designed to be led from within the group and

emphasizing reflection, discussion, support, idea sharing, and accountability (New Road Map Foundation, 1996). Online study groups are facilitated by followers of the program while face-to-face groups often have shared leadership. Online study groups are designed to create a space where participants can share their experiences and dialogue around the steps as they complete homework assignments linked to the first five steps. The objective here is not to finish the steps, but to begin them and to continue the work once the group process is complete. Both face-to-face and online groups provide a community of learners to support each individual in beginning a major life shift using exercises, personal reflection, and group discussion (New Road Map Foundation, 2003). The enabling factors associated with this resource are similar to those for simplicity circles, including individual decisions and choices, group support, reflection on personal and cultural values, practical ideas for frugality, and an integrated approach to lifestyle choices. It also incorporates rituals to increase awareness of spending practices, to determine whether spending is related to fulfillment, and to check if practices match values (Dominguez & Robin, 1992).

A newer resource, and one of the most radical and environmentally-oriented, combines a few different programs to give readers a number of ways to alter their lifestyles and practices as part of simplifying so that their lifestyles are more sustainable (Merkel, 2003). The author begins with what he calls the *sustainability sweatshop*; a three-step process of setting personal sustainability goals and considering how personal consumption impacts on other humans, other species, and future generations. This process is seen as a first step and the author then goes on to describe how other resources can be used to achieve these goals. The resources include *Your Money or Your Life*, as

discussed above, ecological footprinting, the wiseacre challenge, and learning from nature. The reason for presenting these other resources is given as follows: "if you are like most, your life is busy and you have unique considerations that will influence how you approach simplifying. That's where these tools come in; they'll help you focus on the specifics of your life" (Merkel, 2003, p. 72). Echoing a main tenet of the movement, the author indicates that

These tools will not tell you what to do or what is right or wrong. They simply help you to see what you are doing and encourage you to do your own evaluation. Month by month your unique pattern of interpenetration of the world around you is brought into focus. Then the fun begins as you reinforce beneficial patterns.

(Merkel, 2003, p. 73)

In the tools that he presents, the financial focus of *Your Money or Your Life*, with its emphasis on reducing consumption through frugality and leaving paid employment early, is balanced with ecological footprinting and the wiseacre challenge which focus more on reducing consumption for global environmental and social justice reasons. The diversity of the programs presented is one of the enabling factors associated with this resource as it gives a number of ways for readers to engage with the practices. Other enabling factors include providing positive stories of success, as the other resources described also do, as well as supporting personal choice and valuing the impact that those choices can make.

The enabling factors that help learners engage with voluntary simplicity have been described throughout this exploration of some of the programs commonly used in the movement. The programs themselves are a significant enabling factor as they all

provide clear patterns of engagement as well as the supportive stories of those who have been successful. Within the programs, positive enabling factors include:

- Individuals set their own level and pace of involvement
- Creating supportive communities is encouraged and tools are given to enable this
- Lots of practical ideas are included throughout the texts
- Stories and anecdotes emphasize the do-ability of the programs and practices
- Personal reflection on integrating values and practices is encouraged
- Community, spirituality, and connections with nature are all emphasized as important for personal change and fulfillment

These factors are not only seen within the resources that contain programs with steps or learning processes, they are also echoed in the first, and one of the most influential, text to be published on voluntary simplicity (Elgin, 1993).

Along with the many positive enabling factors, however, there are also negative factors, or barriers, that dis-able involvement. Significant shifts in worldview or cultural understandings and practices is one of the most difficult challenges in a movement whose philosophies and practices are outside the mainstream. Going against cultural norms is recognized as a challenge: "...messing about with a culture's sacred cows is tricky business. It's the kind of business where you meet the incredible blindspots of your own perception and come face-to-face with the strength or weakness of your own will" (Merkel, 2003, p. 13). Due to this particular challenge, lack of support from partners, family and close friends, can also be an important barrier. Another barrier is that "it is not uncommon for one person to want to simplify before his or her mate comes to the same

conclusion” (Pierce, 2000, p. 64). At least one of the programs discussed above considers strategies for dealing with this situation because of the number of people who raise it as an issue (Dominguez & Robin, 1992). Many of the barriers discussed regarding predisposing factors also function as barriers at the enabling stage of engagement.

A final consideration regarding enabling factors centres on the personal and social changes of concern in the voluntary simplicity movement. Throughout this investigation of the movement, there has been a clear pattern of concern for both personal and social changes, first seen in the characteristics and practices of the movement, and then in the predisposing factors. In terms of factors that enable engagement in the movement - the resources, skills, and conditions needed for action to be taken - the belief in the value and impact of personal action is central to enabling participants to expand their actions in ways that have broader impact. Involvement with voluntary simplicity is seen as a process that is long-term and that evolves and deepens over time. For Elgin (1993) it was “...an inarticulate but seemingly sensible response to emerging situations – and one response after another began to form a pattern...” (pp. 71-72). In this movement, individual actions are seen as essential and as a precursor to wider social change because “...before we can effectively deal with the ecological problem, we have to change our world image. This in turn means that we have to change our self image” (Sherrard, 1999, p. 201). In a study based on 211 responses to an online survey and 40 in-depth interviews, Pierce (2000) found that: “...the vast majority of people find meaning in a balance between the personal and the other-directed aspects of simple living” (p. 27).

Reinforcing factors.

The final set of factors for consideration are reinforcing factors,

...that is, the rewards received and the feedback the learner receives from others following adoption of a behavior – may encourage or discourage continuation of the behavior. Reinforcing behavior produces lifestyles (enduring patterns of behavior), which in turn influence the environment through political advocacy, consumer demand, or cumulative actions. (Green & Kreuter, 1999, p. 41)

These factors can also be positive or negative and encompass responses within the individual, feedback from people close to the individual and wider social support. Such factors may have an immediate or cumulative effect on the learner and some may be more or less important and influential.

One of the most significant reinforcing factors for participants in the voluntary simplicity movement is the gradual and cumulative nature of the practices. The experience of engaging voluntary simplicity as a process of creating a new way of life both enables learners to implement changes and reinforces those changes. Viewing voluntary simplicity as a process rather than as an end result to be achieved means that participants can set achievable goals and increase their experience of success (Elgin, 1993; Pierce, 2000). This gradual process also means that actions to free up time and energy for other meaningful activities and participation in those activities reinforce the changes that made them possible. This perception of voluntary simplicity as a process also leaves room for failures or times when the going is difficult (Merkel, 2003).

Changes made by participants are reinforced in many ways internally and personally. Taking control of one's lifestyle to create a way of living that is in line with one's values is empowering for participants (Elgin, 1993). They also experience success as one change may have multiple impacts; for instance a change made to save money

may also improve health and reduce pollution (Andrews, 1997, Merkel, 2003). Aligning values and actions also leads to a sense of a life lived with integrity which is fulfilling and satisfying (Dominguez & Robins, 1992; Merkel, 2003; Pierce, 2004). These reinforcing factors can deflect or reduce the barriers experienced by going against cultural norms and practices: "meaning brings completeness, the feeling that you know who you are, what you believe, how you want to live. It allows you to resist the manipulation and pressures of the desecrated life, the commercialized life" (Andrews, 1997, p. 69).

Another set of reinforcing factors relates to expressions of community and spirituality. Andrews (1997) sees both of these factors as central to a successful shift to a voluntary simplicity lifestyle. She indicates that, without the support of community, individuals can feel alone and insecure in their choices and changes. The inner authority developed by living with integrity still needs to be supported by others who understand, accept, and share values and practices. This assertion is echoed by Elgin (1993) who reports that having a small circle of supporters can offset the feeling of being tolerated by or alienated from the larger community or society. Spirituality can be an important reinforcing factor both in terms of connecting to nature on a deeper level and in terms of living each day as if it were sacred (Andrews, 1997). For those involved in particular spiritual or religious communities, aligning consumption with the teachings of their faith also reinforces changes in lifestyles (McDonald, 1999, p. 61).

A final group of reinforcing factors links back once again to the dialogue between personal and social action. The empowerment and integrity experienced by participants can have the effect of reinforcing their changes to the extent that they seek out ways to

deepen those changes and to connect them to larger issues (Elgin, 1993). Whether they begin to see how various personal issues are connected with larger environmental and societal problems or the experience of participating in the movement is radicalizing, many who are involved in the movement become more interested and involved in local and global issues. Part of this shift may be based on the personal experience that living more sustainably is possible (Merkel, 2003) and that reducing consumption means less impact on the earth and more resources for others (Dominguez & Robins, 1992). In summary,

...the ultimate question of whether or not voluntary simplicity can be sustained, and, moreover, greatly expand its reach among citizens of various societies depends, to a significant extent, on the question of whether voluntary simplicity constitutes a sacrifice that people must be constantly motivated to make, or whether it is in itself a major source of satisfaction, and hence is self-motivating. (Etzioni, 1998, pp. 627-628)

Components of Adult Learning in the Voluntary Simplicity Movement

The preceding two sections set the stage for the main task of this discussion, which is to develop a deep understanding of adult learning in the voluntary simplicity movement. This task, involving as it does several distinct bodies of literature and different approaches to theorizing about adult learning, is both complex and challenging. Identifying and classifying the elements of adult learning within the voluntary simplicity movement is a first step in that it foregrounds *learning* as the primary focus in using the case of voluntary simplicity in this thesis. It provides the data for exploring and

understanding adult learning in this particular context. These data now need to be analyzed in light of what is known about adult learning from transformative learning and sociocultural learning theories.

In searching for an organizing framework through which to explore and analyse themes in the data, and review existing conceptions, I discovered the work of Deborah Kilgore. Kilgore (1999) developed a conception of *collective learning* that draws on transformative learning, sociocultural learning, and new social movement theory, the same three theoretical streams engaged in this thesis. Adapting her conception of collective learning provides a way to frame my discussion of adult learning in voluntary simplicity movement. Kilgore (1999) claims that collective learning is "...a process that occurs among two or more diverse people in which taken-as-shared meanings (including a vision of social justice) are constructed or acted upon by the group" (p. 191). This conception makes visible "...the interplay between individuals and groups, between groups and other groups within a sociocultural context" (Kilgore, 1999, p. 200).

In the final pages of Chapter 4, I identified two main patterns at the intersection of transformative learning, sociocultural learning, and new social movement theories: personal and social aspects of transformation and the nature of adult learning. The dialectic and mutually constitutive nature of individual and group in adult learning and personal and social aspects of transformation is consistently present in the discussion of both voluntary simplicity and adult learning theories. Kilgore's (1999) conception of collective learning, developed with an underlying purpose of pursuing social change through adult education for transformation, is comprised of individual and group components of learning. The individual components of collective learning are:

- identity - who am I?,
- consciousness - experience as an autonomous actor,
- agency - imagination, can make things happen,
- worthiness - confidence in ability to contribute,
- and connectedness - social vision.

The group components are:

- identity - who are we?,
- consciousness - group as a social actor,
- solidarity - engagement in group process; unity and affinity,
- and organization - technical features of the group.

Kilgore's categories provide a starting point for considering the themes in the data presented earlier in this discussion. In my reading of her work, I find some overlap between consciousness and agency, between agency and worthiness, and between connectedness and solidarity. Given the emerging themes of the data on predisposing, enabling, and reinforcing factors, I have determined that identity, agency, and solidarity are the three components of learning that best frame my discussion of adult learning in the voluntary simplicity movement. Each of these three components holds elements of the data outlined above and each contributes to understanding the nature of adult learning and contains the inherent dialectic of the personal and social aspects of transformation. I will explore them in the order of identity, agency, and solidarity intentionally as the best way to organize the discussion, but with the recognition that there is ebb and flow between them and that they are not hierarchical steps in a learning process. I also recognize that each of these concepts has been researched extensively and that there is

considerable additional literature that could be drawn into the discussion of each. I have chosen to work with Kilgore's conception of the components because she locates them within a discussion of adult learning in new social movements specifically and that is how I am using them. Along with many other choices made in this thesis, this choice adds to the partial and limited nature of the thesis but is made intentionally to focus this particular piece of research.

Identity.

My use of the category *identity* retains Kilgore's (1999) original conception of this component of both individual and group learning processes. The question "who am I" is answered through individual identity while the question "who are we" is answered by group identity. These are not seen as completely distinct, however, since "...individual identity is not only one's perception of self as unique from other individuals and groups but also as interdependent with other individuals and groups" (Kilgore, 1999, p. 197). Relationships and memberships thus form part of individual identity. Collective identity, the "who are we", is comprised of shared meanings, shared actions, and shared aims.

The predisposing factors found in the voluntary simplicity movement are strongly related to identity, particularly individual identity. Factors such as time, work, purpose, consumption, and environmental-consciousness are all related to the emergence of an individual identity that sees itself at odds with the wider culture. Several predisposing factors become salient as the individual perceives herself to be at odds with the actions and aims of the dominant culture. In this sense, learning an individual identity in the voluntary simplicity movement means rejecting part of the collective identity of the

dominant culture. Fears or barriers identified as predisposing factors also bear upon this process as the individual faces the risk of her individual identity being at odds with the collective identity of friends, family, colleagues, and neighbours, that is, those who make up the various communities and the overall culture of which she is a member.

Enabling factors in the voluntary simplicity movement are very much concerned with formation of individual and collective identity. The programs described as contributing various enabling factors in the movement all emphasize identity of one kind or the other. Simplicity circles emphasize personal reflection and aligning actions with beliefs (Andrews, 1997). They also encourage formation of group identity by sharing stories of people in the movement and making visible the shared meanings and actions of those in the movement. This pattern holds in the *Your Money or Your Life* program as well, with both individual and collective identity being addressed through meaning making and a series of common actions (Dominguez & Robin, 1992). The programs and processes presented in Merkel's (2003) book on radical simplicity tend to begin with individual identity, as represented in the author's own story. Collective identity comes into play in the intent of the author whose goal of global living begins with individuals who, through experience, create alternative lifestyles that can serve as examples for others. The author most concerned with collective identity is the one who critiques the movement for being too focused on the individual, although he recognizes a shift in this tendency over the past several years (Segal, 1999). He sees the overall purpose of the movement as being a reimagining of collective identity on a large enough scale to have a significant impact on social and political processes and structures.

Nonetheless, the voluntary simplicity movement significantly foregrounds individual identity formation as a precursor to collective identity formation. All the major writers in the field contend that individual identity must first be changed, with corresponding changes in lifestyle, before collective identity on a large scale is addressed. However, collective identity of the groups comprising the overall movement is also clearly valued. This can be seen both in the definitions and characteristics outlined in the chapter engaging a conceptual inquiry of voluntary simplicity and in the enabling factors described earlier in this discussion. Like other new social movements, there is diversity and differentiation in the voluntary simplicity movement, but there is also an identifiable movement identity. What is important to highlight about the learning process is the interconnected nature of individual and collective identity formation. The fact that learners are encouraged to set their own level and pace of involvement, and to decide for themselves what is enough and what lifestyle changes to make, goes hand in hand with the strong encouragement to work with the programs in groups of like-minded and supportive peers. Also, while there are no strict rules about what can and cannot be called voluntary simplicity, and there is no one person or group considered to be the official voice of the movement, there are a handful of books that are very widely used and a small number of writer/speakers who are known by most members of the movement.

Reinforcing factors linked to identity are mainly concerned with being able to maintain identity in the context of the dominant culture and when the significant people and communities in the individual's life are not fully supportive. Being a member of a group or community with shared meanings and practices, with a collective identity, is the central reinforcing factor related to identity. So, both individual and collective identities

are found in each of the categories (predisposing, enabling, and reinforcing factors) of learning in the voluntary simplicity movement.

How identity acts in adult learning in this movement can be further understood by looking at how transformative learning and sociocultural learning theories address identity in ways that explain what we see in the voluntary simplicity movement. One of the challenges of transformative learning is the risk that individuals take in engaging in learning that could change them (Freire, 1998; Mezirow, 1981; O'Sullivan, 2001).

Transforming identity requires a sense of readiness to be challenged and to accept the possibility of change. For individuals to be willing to enter into this process, they need to develop awareness that their current understanding of the world is no longer sufficient or appropriate. They are then open to seeing or finding alternative visions. As they consider the movement or begin to engage with its philosophies and practices, learners look for ways to make changes in their life that meet their own needs and that provide different ways of understanding and interpreting the world around them. In transformative learning, the focus is on moving the learner from the expression of felt needs to the identification of the causes of those needs that can then be addressed through the educational process (Mezirow, 1978).

Individuals self-select into the movement because of common interests and purposes and a desire to learn from each other (Hansman, 2001). At the early stages of involvement with the movement, individual and collective identities are already engaging each other. Individuals find something in the collective identity that connects with their sense of self and cultivates "...some directions of how it can be part of a process of change that will create a new cultural form..." (O'Sullivan, 1999, p. 5). This self-

selection into the movement, then, takes courage on the part of the individual and the community provides the space, the tools, and the support needed by the individual in transforming their identity. In the words of Freire: “for us, to learn is to construct, to reconstruct, to observe with a view to changing – none of which can be done without being open to risk, to the adventure of the spirit” (1998, p. 67).

This process of learning involves critical reflection and dialogue where individual learners hear other points of view, explore new meanings, and take on new perspectives (Mezirow, 1978, 1985). In this way, transformative learning engages both individual and collective identity formation through communication and participation in community (Freire, 1998; O’Sullivan, 2001). Collective identity is important in supporting individual transformation through shared experiences and by providing an alternative vision for learners. A shared repertoire that is reflective of the goals of the group and that is continually evolving (Wenger, 1998) gives learners a way to understand and contribute to the collective identity.

The voluntary simplicity movement tends to reject the grand narrative of consumerism. This rejection is part of the movement’s collective identity; the movement must also, then, provide new narratives as an alternative vision of the world and as part of an ever-evolving collective identity:

We need stories of sufficient power and complexity to orient people for effective action to overcome environmental problems, to address multiple problems presented by environmental destruction, to reveal what the possibilities are for transforming these and to reveal to people the role that they can play in this project.” (O’Sullivan, 1999, p. 182)

These stories comprise part of a shared repertoire; a collection of activities, symbols, and meanings related to the joint enterprise of the community (Wenger, 1998). This shared repertoire is what individuals engage as they form or transform their identity and it is itself formed and transformed by the interpretations and contributions of many individuals.

It is around the shared repertoire that critical reflection and dialogue, negotiation of meaning through discourse, occurs:

I call a community's set of shared resources a *repertoire* to emphasize both its rehearsed character and its availability for further engagement in practice. The repertoire of a practice combines two characteristics that allow it to become a resource for the negotiation of meaning:

- 1) it reflects a history of mutual engagement
- 2) it remains inherently ambiguous. (Wenger, 1998, p. 83)

In the voluntary simplicity movement, much of the shared repertoire of the movement is recorded in the books, articles, and websites of the movement. These documents represent the history of engagement with the goals of the movement and they reflect the evolving nature of the movement as they offer somewhat varied pictures of the movement or critiques of aspects of the movement.

Engagement with the movement's shared repertoire is a way in which meaning is negotiated. It provides a place to begin, but is never finished as new members join and bring new interpretations and as actions and the world continually need to be interpreted. Individuals can try on different perspectives, adapt their own perspectives in ways that make better sense of their experience, and contribute their understandings to the dialogue. This negotiation of meaning has the feeling of "give-and-take" (Wenger, 1998) and is not

meant to be confrontational, but, rather, a collective effort (Schugurensky, 2002, p. 64).

In the words of Mezirow:

Discourse is not based on winning arguments: it centrally involves finding agreement, welcoming difference, "trying on" other points of view, identifying the common in the contradictory, tolerating the anxiety implicit in paradox, searching for synthesis, and reframing. (2000, p. 13)

Authors in both transformative learning and sociocultural learning theories strongly emphasize that this meaning-making, development of a shared repertoire, and ongoing transformation of identities is inherently a task that combines individual and social processes. Freire says that any breakthrough in how we see the world will be the result of a collective, rather than an individual, experience:

It's important to stress that the breakthrough of a new form of awareness in understanding the world is not the privilege of one person. The experience that makes possible the 'breakthrough' is a 'collective' experience. (Freire, 1998, p. 77)

Wenger focuses on identity, pointing out that identity is the pivotal and reciprocal link between the collective and the person:

Building an identity consists of negotiating the meanings of our experience of membership in social communities. The concept of identity serves as a pivot between the social and the individual, so that each can be talked about in terms of the other. It avoids a simplistic individual-social dichotomy without doing away with the distinction. (Wenger, 1998, p. 145)

Schugurensky is even more strident in suggesting that individual transformations cannot be achieved except through a negotiated relational process with others.

If transformative learning implies a critical awareness of the tacit assumptions and expectations that we and other people hold and an assessment of their relevance for making choices, this process cannot occur in isolation. Such a process involves participation in a constructive discourse in which participants deliberate about the reasons for their actions and get insights from the meaning, experiences, and opinions expressed by others. Thus one of the main goals of transformative learning is the development of more autonomous thinkers who can justify their choices or reasons, but this development can take place only in relation to others, which makes it a collective, relational process. (Schugurensky, 2002, p. 64)

The dynamic reciprocity of individual and collective identity formation and transformation is certainly evident in the elements of learning found in the literature of the voluntary simplicity movement. Also evident in the voluntary simplicity literature is the sense that identity formation is an ongoing process. Much of what the movement holds as central around identity transformation aims to make the process as safe and supported as possible. The practice of allowing individuals to set their own pace supports a more gradual approach to transformation. Taking on the collective identity in voluntary simplicity movement is a process of legitimate peripheral participation where individuals move from marginal to full participation in the movement, learning the beliefs and practices of the movement and adopting the norms as part of their own identity (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Learning in this new social movement, then, is a process of becoming something or someone (Freire, 1970; Wenger, 1998), a gradual transformation of identity as elements of the collective identity are taken on by the individual and as the collective identity is transformed by the engagement of individuals. This process of learning reflects Freire's (1970, 1998) assertion that humanity is always unfinished and awareness of our unfinished state is what makes us educable. Voluntary simplicity's way of encouraging individuals to engage with the philosophies and practices of the movement at their own pace recognizes this unfinished nature of humanity and the dialectic nature of reflection and action. Identity in voluntary simplicity movement "...manifests as a tendency to come up with certain interpretations, to engage in certain actions, to make certain choices, to value certain experiences – all by virtue of participating in certain enterprises" (Wenger, 1998, p. 153).

Agency.

The component of adult learning that I name as agency comprises a few elements of Kilgore's (1999) various components of individual and collective learning. It incorporates a distinct component that she calls *consciousness*. As a component of individual learning, consciousness is the enacting of identity; "...the awareness of oneself as an autonomous actor" (Kilgore, 1999, p. 197). In this sense, action is conscious or purposeful and is an expression of self and of experience. As a component of group learning, consciousness is "...the awareness of the group as a social actor" (Kilgore, 1999, p. 197). Through group actions and constructing a collective identity, the group becomes conscious of itself as having a combined ability to act on the world. In my view, consciousness, understood this way, is part of agency; the beginning stage of taking

action based on identity. Agency, in terms of individual learning, is a deeper awareness that the learner is able to impact the future and create change (Kilgore, 1999). The experience of acting from a sense of identity and of being purposeful in those actions enables the learner to feel a sense of agency. Drawing on their sense of agency, individuals join in group processes "...and the group becomes more confident of itself as a collective change agent" (Kilgore, 1999, p. 197). Kilgore names this *solidarity* in terms of group learning, but I understand it as part of agency as the individual is empowered by and empowers group actions. Another aspect of agency is a sense of worthiness (Kilgore, 1999). For individuals, worthiness "...is the belief that we can contribute positively to the group process or product; that we have something to offer" (Kilgore, 1999, p. 197). As can be seen from this brief discussion, the three components of learning that I have separated out to apply to the voluntary simplicity literature are deeply intertwined. They are also complex ideas that are part of numerous discussions in the literature of adult education and other fields. In this discussion of agency, and the surrounding discussions of identity and solidarity, I have tried to be clear about how I am using and understanding these conceptions for the purposes of the project.

Agency as a component of adult learning is found in enabling and reinforcing factors in the voluntary simplicity movement. Predisposing factors are located before identity begins to be enacted according to the practices of voluntary simplicity, so that they precede agency in learners. Enabling factors in the voluntary simplicity movement are strongly focused on agency. All of the central programs and resources contain practical advice on specific actions that can be taken to make changes in one's lifestyle. This advice ranges from how-to lists to personal stories of actions taken by the writers

and other movement participants. In most of the programs described earlier, the how-to lists and stories are housed within educational processes that encourage participants to consider each practice or set of practices one at a time. The processes involve steps or a series of group discussions, both with associated personal actions that can be taken at each point. As with the development of identity, development of agency in the voluntary simplicity movement can be a gradual process that individuals control in terms of level and pace of implementing practices or taking actions.

One of the most important enabling factors as they relate to agency is that resources set out practices that are part of what the group does as a social actor so that individuals can learn from the actions of others in the movement and adopt the practices as their own. Collective agency, then, provides support and inspiration for individual agency and builds a sense of being part of a larger whole that makes a significant contribution to society. Also, no individual action is seen as too small in this movement. Individual agency is encouraged partly because the individuals can set achievable goals for themselves, developing a sense of worthiness that reinforces agency. Experiencing the impact of one's own agency on one's own life reinforces involvement in the movement and its practices. This experience also reinforces the overall group agency as actions begin to accumulate and their impact becomes visible.

In the view of transformative learning, consciousness of oneself as an autonomous actor or of one's group as a collective change agent requires first a consciousness of the dominant worldview and the assumptions that go with that worldview (Mezirow, 1978). Before individual and collective consciousness can develop, the learner must leave the state of naivete that may be unconscious (Freire, 1970, 1998). Part of transformative

learning, then, is consciousness raising; increasing awareness of self, group, and world as distinct but interrelated. This is related to the earlier discussion of identity as well, but in terms of agency, consciousness has to do with experience and with practice. In voluntary simplicity movement, consciousness is raised through actions that provide alternatives to cultural norms and through reflection on action which highlights assumptions and consequences. Experiencing another way of living provides the impetus for questioning present lifestyles as well as giving learners concrete ideas for making changes. In agency, action and reflection are combined as praxis. In Freire's (1970) view, reflection without action is only verbalism and action without reflection is only activism; true praxis needs both elements.

Enacting identity, both as individuals and as groups, is also related to the idea of practice in sociocultural learning. Practice, in this understanding, is authentic activities or actions that are inherently connected to collective identity (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). They encompass knowing and doing in the sense that practices reflect both the goals of the group and meanings shared by the group (Wenger, 1998). Engaging with the practices of the voluntary simplicity movement provides learners with experiences upon which to reflect as part of their meaning-making and identity formation which in turn can lead to engaging more deeply in movement practice. Agency, then, is a central aspect of learning in voluntary simplicity movement as "...understanding and experience are in constant interaction – indeed, are mutually constitutive" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, pp. 51-52). These practices are embedded in the community that produces them so that their meaning and purpose are constructed by the community (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). The process of engaging in practice, reflecting on experience, and becoming a full

member of the community of practice combines the reflection and action aspects of learning. Both practices and meaning are taken on in this process, which can be an "...extended period of legitimate peripherality (that) provides learners with opportunities to make the culture of practice theirs" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 95).

Practice both provides experience upon which to reflect as well as opportunity to act, to experience agency. A sense of both individual and group agency, a belief in and experience of being able to enact change, connects with Freire's (1998) understanding of transformative learning as involved with acting on the world rather than just observing the world. O'Sullivan's (1999) take on transformative learning also indicates that both attitudes and actions are transformed. For both of these thinkers, a main purpose of transformative learning is to prepare individuals, as members of communities, to engage in action for social change.

The joint enterprises of the voluntary simplicity movement are a way in which individuals participate in the movement and enact change in their own lives. Mutual engagement in these enterprises "...draws on what we do and what we know, as well as on our ability to connect meaningfully to what we don't do and what we don't know – that is, to the contributions and knowledge of others" (Wenger, 1998, p. 76). For instance, engagement in the joint enterprise of ecological footprinting provides a place for building knowledge and taking significant action beyond what an individual already knows and can do (Merkel, 2003). The community of practice is a place "...to become agents in our own history" (Hall, 2002, p. 44). Rather than replicating beliefs and practices of the dominant culture uncritically, the voluntary simplicity community encourages members to take control of their own lives through reflective engagement in the community's

alternative practices. The expectation that individuals will form their own understandings and practices gives room for diversity and for the community to be transformed by that diversity. Just as "...participation in social communities shapes our experience, and it also shapes those communities; the transformative potential goes both ways" (Wenger, 1998, p. 56-57). This individual and collective agency through the joint enterprises and practices of a community is centrally important because it gives focus, impetus, and direction to change: "Just as objective social reality exists not by chance, but as the product of human action, so it is not transformed by chance" (Freire, 1970, p. 36).

These understandings of agency from both transformational and sociocultural learning perspectives reflect what we see happening in voluntary simplicity movement. The practices of voluntary simplicity are embedded in the collective identity and joint enterprises of the community. Learning as doing and learning as experience (Wenger, 1998) in this movement are central to the focus on making changes in one's lifestyle and following steps to create a new way of living. Agency in this movement, both individual and collective, supports identity and builds solidarity.

Solidarity.

Solidarity, in Kilgore's analysis, is a group component of adult learning. In my view, this component has power both for individuals and for groups. Solidarity is "...the general feeling of unity or affinity among members of the group" (Kilgore, 1999, p. 197). It is also, in my view, an awareness of affinity with and interest in others outside of the group, what Kilgore (1999) names *connectedness*. The aspect of solidarity presents as a social vision and as a reason behind involvement with group process.

In the predisposing factors found in the voluntary simplicity movement, solidarity is related to the individual's initial engagement with the movement as they find people and ideas with which that have an affinity. As individuals identify ways in which they feel at odds with the dominant culture, they may see involvement with voluntary simplicity as a way to connect with others who hold similar values. Concern about how their lifestyle impacts others and the earth is a common predisposing factor for many participants in voluntary simplicity. For these adults, solidarity as connectedness with all of humanity and with nature is linked to their predisposition to engage the movement as a way to connect their individual interests with a social vision that makes a different way of life possible for many.

These feelings of connection with others and with a wider social vision are also central enabling factors in the movement. The emphasis on group study and support is directly linked to the development of solidarity as affinity. Connection to community that shares meanings and actions is seen as key to individual success in engaging voluntary simplicity. The value placed on solidarity in this movement is so high that desire for unity and affinity may actually mask difference (Grigsby, 2004). This heightened emphasis on solidarity within the movement may be related to the position of the movement as it stands against dominant culture. Affinity with others in the movement enables individuals to take on meanings and practices that may set them more at odds with others in their lives and with the dominant culture which in turn increases their need for affinity within the movement or small group. This affinity also serves to reinforce their involvement with the movement and its practices.

Solidarity in the voluntary simplicity movement is also understood to be a condition enabling the link between individual change and social change. Involvement with a community gives learners a place to learn about, reflect on, and act on local and global issues related to the personal lifestyle issues that are central factors in initial movement involvement. The emphasis on interconnection with other humans and with nature widens the understanding of solidarity as a basis for engagement in social justice and environmental issues related to simplicity practices. Although some participants bring this sense of connectedness and social vision with them, many enter the movement for more personal reasons. Developing or enhancing solidarity as connectedness is key to how the movement understands its ability to move beyond personal change and enact significant social change. A deep feeling of solidarity as connectedness also reinforces involvement in the movement as members understand their continuing action to be beneficial for others and for nature.

Both aspects of solidarity, unity and affinity within the community and connectedness with and concern for the wider world, are reflected in some way in both transformative and sociocultural learning theories. Solidarity within the community of practice nourishes and supports individuals and enables them to be fully human (O'Sullivan, 1999; Freire, 1970). This aspect of solidarity within the community gives rise to learning as belonging (Wenger, 1998) which in turn creates a sense of safety and trust for individuals. In this way, solidarity creates conditions in which new insights and solutions can arise (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989) and the diversity within the community adds to the possibilities for learning (Hansman, 2001). Affinity with the

group enables mutual engagement, with each individual contributing to the group (Wenger, 1998) and feeling a sense of worthiness.

All of these aspects of solidarity within the movement are reflected in the literature of the voluntary simplicity movement. The movement provides a place where members can find others who are like them in some ways, who share similar understandings of the world, have similar concerns, and are engaged in a similar way of life. This sense of unity and affinity with others in the movement is nourishing to participants and helps to create a sense of belonging so that learning and participation are enabled and changes are reinforced. When these conditions exist, the make-up of the group, from newcomers to oldtimers, including those with particular interests and varied experiences, can result in dialogue that gives rise to new meanings and practices for individuals or collectively as the movement evolves. In this way, community is "...a way of talking about the social configurations in which our enterprises are defined as worth pursuing and our participation is recognizable as competence" (Wenger, 1998, p. 5). Just as important as worthiness and competence is "...a deeper sense of the value of participation to the community and the learner lies in *becoming* part of the community" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 111).

There are two dangers inherent in unity and affinity within a group. The first is that the sense of unity will disempower those who hold views that are somewhat different from the group. Since the meanings and practices of the movement are always evolving and always somewhat ambiguous, there needs to be room for other points of view and for learning from difference. An over-emphasis on unity, then, can reduce the effectiveness of the community for learning and action. Preventing or reducing this limitation

“...requires the presence of different viewpoints (especially those that challenge prevailing norms) and must allow (even encourage) the expression of dissent” (Schugurensky, 2002, p. 64). This is important in the voluntary simplicity movement, both within the small groups and within the larger community. Within the small groups, room for dissent and for differing views and practices provides space for learners to change at their own pace and to contribute to group meanings and norms. Within the movement as a whole, dissent and differing views and practices enables learning and knowledge production that “...emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry (we) pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (Freire, 1970, p. 58).

The second danger of an overemphasis on unity within the group is the possibility that the reification of meanings and practices will limit participation (Wenger, 1998). Reification is an important part of the evolution of a community of practice as “any community of practice produces abstractions, tools, symbols, stories, terms, and concepts that reify something of that practice in a congealed form” (Wenger, 1998, p. 59). Reification, in this sense, helps communities to give form to experience, to have ways of talking about experience that are understandable. If unity and affinity with the group is so strong that these forms are no longer questioned, meaningfulness can be lost and potential for growth can also be lost. In Wenger’s clever words: “the politician’s slogan can become a substitute for a deep understanding of and commitment to what it stands for” (Wenger, 1998, p. 61). Within the voluntary simplicity movement, this possibility is present as the movement becomes more public. Ways to communicate the essence of the movement to the public may contribute to reification of symbols and concepts to the

point that meaning becomes lost. This may have an effect of making the movement and its practices seem either inaccessible or flawed.

The other aspect of solidarity is connectedness to others, to nature, to the whole world and its beings. From the perspective of transformative learning, empathy and social vision are essential because a sense of connectedness to others and to the wider world generates awareness of responsibility and possibility which enables change in terms of attitudes and actions (Freire, 1970). Development of shared understandings through critical reflection and coparticipation contributes to the possibility of creating a cultural shift, which is both a goal of the voluntary simplicity movement and the purpose of transformative learning in the view of Freire (1998) and O'Sullivan (2001).

Schugurensky ties together both aspects of solidarity:

First, people learn faster and happier when they are not alone, when they are a part of a social movement, and especially if the movement has an ethical stand, a utopia to chase, and some successes to celebrate. Second, learning in this context is dynamic, unpredictable, and often inexplicable, jumping like sparks from person to person. (Schugurensky, 2002, p. 72)

The passage of ideas and actions from person to person within a community of practice can be magnified through our connections to multiple communities and by the overlap of various communities of practice. This view is upheld by Lave and Wenger (1991) who state that: "a community of practice is a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice" (p. 98). Alignment with other groups and communities "...amplifies the

ramifications of our actions by coordinating multiple localities, competencies, and viewpoints. It expands the scope of our effects on the world” (Wenger, 1998, p. 180).

Solidarity with the world outside the community of practice, outside the voluntary simplicity movement, is what enables social change through cultural shifts and an emergence of an alternative collective identity on a larger scale. This sense of solidarity as connectedness is found in other social movements and groups as well and according to Miles (2002):

These groups are affirming their own value and identity as well as their connection to others; seeking their own good as well as the good of all; selectively building on and honoring traditional culture and contributions while welcoming change; articulating new senses of self and others and of possible futures grounded in the value of all life. (p. 30)

The voluntary simplicity movement has many natural connections with other movements and communities from environmental movements to groups advocating for a shorter work week. Interconnections with those groups hold the possibility for magnifying impacts and creating widespread change. In order to do this, members of the voluntary simplicity movement need to feel and experience solidarity with the world.

Adult Learning in the Voluntary Simplicity Movement

I stated at the beginning of this chapter that the purpose of the chapter is to answer my first two research questions. I engaged these questions through conceptual structure assessment using a hermeneutical approach and the Precede-Proceed model to frame the discussion. In this final section of the chapter, I want to summarize the detailed and

complex answers to those two questions as they have unfolded throughout the discussion, assessing and extending the conception of adult learning in new social movements. The first question at the core of this research project is: What does adult learning look like in the literature of the voluntary simplicity movement? Using elements of the Precede-Proceed model, I have shown the predisposing, enabling, and reinforcing factors of adult learning in the voluntary simplicity movement. These factors present a picture of what comprises the various aspects of adult learning in this movement. They show why learners enter the movement, how they learn and change, and how their new attitudes and actions are maintained over time.

Although the predisposing, enabling, and reinforcing factors found are many and diverse, there are distinct patterns in the underlying concerns of the factors. Exploration of the factors has led to an understanding that identity, agency, and solidarity are the three main components of adult learning in voluntary simplicity movement. Predisposing factors in learners are mainly concerned with identity and solidarity. The dynamic dialectic between individual and collective identity contributes to both the initial engagement of learners in the movement and to their ongoing solidarity with the movement. Enabling factors relate to identity, agency, and solidarity in various ways. In each of these components, individual and collective identity and action are mutually constituted. Finally, reinforcing factors, often extensions of enabling factors, also pertain to identity, agency, and solidarity. Establishing the predisposing, enabling, and reinforcing factors of adult learning in this movement provided the data from which to identify the three components of adult learning in this movement. The three sets of factors and three components that they comprise show us what adult learning looks like

in the voluntary simplicity movement. It is a setting in which adult learning happens through attention to identity, agency and solidarity at all stages of the learning process. It is a setting in which adult learning is a process of individual and group learning resulting in personal and social change.

The second question that I have posed in this research follows from and expands on the first: How can ideas from transformative learning and sociocultural learning theories help us to understand learning in this movement? It is not enough to describe, collate, and synthesize the data about adult learning in the voluntary simplicity movement. Part of the task of this thesis is to attempt to explain what is found in light of what is known or theorized about adult learning. In this discussion, it is found that both transformative learning and sociocultural learning theories illuminate aspects of the data in ways that contribute to and reinforce my analysis that learning in the movement revolves around identity, agency, and solidarity. Transformative and sociocultural conceptions of adult learning are complementary rather than genetic or dialectically opposed (Lonergan, 1973).

Both transformative learning and sociocultural learning theories contribute to understanding how identity functions as a locus for learning in the voluntary simplicity movement. Transformative learning theory contributes an understanding of how readiness, critical reflection, dialogue, and perspective transformation are involved in formation and transformation of individual and collective identity in the movement. This theoretical lens also illuminates the role of collective identity in providing an alternative vision for learners whose individual identities are at odds with the dominant worldview. Sociocultural learning theory also contributes to understanding identity in this movement

in its attention to shared repertoire, negotiation of meaning, and legitimate peripheral participation. Transformative learning theory tends to put the learner's individual identity at the start of the learning process. Sociocultural learning theory tends to look at learning beginning with collective identity in a community of practice. Considering what was discovered about adult learning in the voluntary simplicity movement in light of both of these theories not only gives a fuller, deeper understanding, it also shows that individual and collective identity are mutually constituted through processes reflected in both theories.

Both sociocultural and transformative learning theories also contribute to understanding agency in adult learning in the voluntary simplicity movement. Sociocultural learning views agency as participation in the practices of a community of practice. In this view, practices are embedded in the community and in the collective identity and meaning-making of the community: identity and agency are co-constituted in communities of practice. Practices provide the learner with experience upon which to reflect and give the learner authentic ways to contribute to the joint enterprises of the community. Experience is also an essential element of agency as understood by transformative learning theory. Learning through praxis involves both action and reflection; experience provides something to reflect on and reflection results in actions which provide more experience. In the voluntary simplicity movement, learning is centred on the practices of the movement. Learners engage in authentic practices as a way of participating in the movement and of aligning their beliefs with their actions. Participation raises awareness of an alternative way of life and of various issues

underlying lifestyle choices. It furthers movement goals while contributing to the development of individual agency and change.

Finally, both sociocultural and transformative learning theories contribute to understanding how solidarity functions as a key component in learning and transformation in the voluntary simplicity movement. Both show how belonging and support contribute to enabling and reinforcing learning. They also illuminate the shift from personal to social change. Transformative learning theory illuminates this shift in its attention to how solidarity develops a sense of interconnectedness that enables social change actions in individuals and groups. Sociocultural learning theory illuminates this shift in its explanation of how practices are distributed, multiplied, and aligned through overlaps in communities of practices and their members. Both of these theories also point to the dangers of uncritical solidarity and to the need for diversity, differing viewpoints, and evolving meanings and practices.

If this project had focused only on answering the first question regarding what adult learning looks like in voluntary simplicity movement, some partial and beginning understandings relevant to this movement would have been visible. Attention to the second question by adding two theories of adult learning to the discussion creates stronger explanations of what is happening in this movement in terms of learning. Using two theories that are seen as having fundamentally different understandings of how adult learning happens illuminates more of the case and also shows that the underlying concerns of both theories, although distinct, are not mutually exclusive.

Drawing two separate theories into this dialogue also gives the possibility of responding to critiques of each theory. In the literature review, critiques of transformative

learning theory were presented. In summary, these critiques claim that transformative learning theory privileges personal transformation and does not attend to the processes of social transformation or to how context is involved in transformation of attitudes and actions. There are also critiques of sociocultural learning theory, namely that it does not give enough attention to issues of power, conflict, resistance, and motivation. Through the process of exploring identity, agency, and solidarity in the voluntary simplicity movement, these two theories functioned to support one another by each attending to areas that are seen as limitations in the other. For instance, transformative learning theory's attention to readiness balances sociocultural learning theory's inattention to motivation. In addition, sociocultural learning theory's embeddedness in the context of learning addresses transformative learning theory's lesser attention to this facet of learning. Finally, the dialectic of individual and group in learning and of personal and social change is made visible by what each of these theories brings to the discussion.

The work of studying and beginning to answer these first two questions results mainly in a better understanding of adult learning in one specific new social movement and I have begun to develop a conception of adult learning in this movement. The final task of this thesis is to see what conclusions can be drawn about implications for theory and practice of adult learning in the voluntary simplicity movement and how those implications may be extrapolated to adult learning in new social movements more generally.

Chapter 6: Implications

This final chapter aims to address the third and last question of my research project: What can understanding learning in voluntary simplicity movement teach us about adult learning in new social movements and about practicing adult education within new social movements? In my introduction to this thesis, I indicated that my interest in this topic is both theoretical and practical; it is related to global issues, to concerns within the field of adult education, and to my professional practice and personal lifestyle. In this final chapter, I will explore the implications of this research for theory and for practice while attending to underlying societal, professional, and personal interests. In doing this, I will attempt to further develop a conception of adult learning in new social movements. I will also name some of the limitations of the study as well as some possibilities for further research. As I see these as being intertwined with the implications for theory and for practice, I will raise limitations and possibilities within both of those discussions. The chapter, and the thesis as a whole, concludes with a personal reflection on the project.

Implications for Theory

A primary finding of this research is the identification of identity, agency, and solidarity as central components of adult learning in new social movements. These components, either singly or together, provide a potential focus for ongoing research. This thesis adds to knowledge of adult learning in new social movements by contributing to existing ideas and by drawing together aspects of the research to deepen current understanding. Current research looking explicitly at adult learning in new social

movements is limited and it was summarized in the literature review. My research reflects some of the themes in this research.

One area of existing research to which this thesis contributes is to the discussion of transformation in new social movements. In a paper exploring new social movements as sites for adult education, Finger (1995) proposes that new social movements primarily focus on personal transformation and that social transformation in these movements is cumulative and cannot be engaged directly. His position is questioned by Welton (1993) who claims that personal fulfillment is gained through collective action in new social movements. Both of these positions are reflected in the literature of the voluntary simplicity movement and in the dialogue of that literature with theory in this thesis. Through engaging transformative and sociocultural learning theories with data from the voluntary simplicity movement, personal and social transformation came to be seen as a dialectic rather than a stepwise process or a choice between one and the other. Attending to both individual and collective agency, in particular, strengthens the possibility of transformation of the individual and, through collective action, of groups and of the movement as a whole. The findings in this thesis support Finger's view in that the voluntary simplicity movement tends to articulate a similar view of transformation. However, the discussion of agency in the voluntary simplicity movement shows how individual and collective action function together in transformation. Participation in the practices of the movement and reflection on those practices as they relate to identity and meaning-making combine to enable transformation. What this thesis contributes to the discussion, then, is information about the dialectic nature of individual and collective in the learning component of agency in the voluntary simplicity movement. Further research

into the functioning of agency in other social movements could build on, clarify, or contest this understanding, especially since this thesis is limited by the boundaries set on the literature included in the discussion. Additional research that brings in other literature could extend or rework what was discovered in this small project.

Another piece of existing research that can be further illuminated by the findings of this thesis is Holford's (1995) study of how knowledge develops in and through new social movements. He argues that movement knowledge develops through internal and external communication. This reflects Johnston and Klandermans (1995) work on communication in new social movements. Consciousness-raising, persuasive communication, and public discourse are named in their paper as three kinds of meaning-making that operate internally and externally during collective action. In my task of establishing voluntary simplicity as a new social movement, I have shown how the literature and practices of the movement function in meaning-making and knowledge production in ways that conform to Johnston and Klanderman's findings. Holford further claims that the knowledge produced in new social movements becomes part of the knowledge of the society that they impact. Certainly the voluntary simplicity movement aims to impact knowledge in society through providing an alternative view of consumerism; an alternative collective identity. Further research on the interaction of movement identity, in its individual and collective forms, with dominant cultural identities could elaborate this partial understanding.

This thesis also contributes to the further development of Kilgore's conception of collective learning. Overall, her conception, with its focus on the dialectic of individual and group in adult learning and of personal and social transformation, is upheld by the

findings of this thesis. Where I contribute to clarifying her conception is in the application of her components of collective learning to the literature of the voluntary simplicity movement. I found that the components, as she initially articulated them, were in some ways too discrete and overlapped in some areas according to her definitions. As I synthesized the data to find themes about adult learning in the movement, what emerged was three components that were distinct from each other, although related, and that each contained elements of individual and group learning. Application of her components of collective learning to a specific new social movement resulted in a modification of her work as it was found that her components were not a good fit with the data from an actual learning situation. My identification of identity, agency, and solidarity as three components of collective learning in the voluntary simplicity movement reflects Kilgore's original conception and intent but clarifies and consolidates her work. My use of her components, however, does not draw on all of the available discourse on the conceptions of identity, agency, and solidarity. Instead, it relies on Kilgore's discussion of these conceptions as well as related material from transformative learning and sociocultural learning theories. The lack of attention to other discourse on these conceptions, particularly where they may disagree with or critique that theories that I do use, is a limitation of the thesis.

I see three ways in which this research could be extended, Kilgore's conception further developed, and my re-working of her components tested. First, the conception of collective learning, with the three components of identity, agency, and solidarity, could be tested against the literature from a variety of other new social movements. This could be done by testing the results of this conceptual inquiry empirically, looking for whether

the three components are present and central in adult learning in other new social movements. Second, participants in new social movements could be interviewed about their learning experiences in order to test the findings of this thesis in a qualitative research project using the conceptions developed in this thesis. And third, each of the components could be studied more deeply through additional conceptual work drawing on other literature.

A final implication of this research, in terms of its relationship to research on adult learning in new social movements, is the contribution of other theories of adult learning to the dialogue. Transformative learning and sociocultural learning theories are both well-established and widely accepted as contributing to the field of adult education. They have also both been subject to critiques and neither has emerged as a way of understanding all adult learning. Using these two bodies of theory in this thesis has shown that, when brought to bear on data on adult learning in a new social movement, they each illuminate aspects of adult learning. My work shows that both transformative learning and sociocultural learning theories contribute to understanding how adult learning occurs in the context of new social movements. Neither is sufficient in itself to understand adult learning in this situation but both make significant contributions. A side effect of incorporating these two theories into my research has been seeing how they each respond to perceived limitations in the other. Adult learning in general can be understood more fully through considering the knowledge inherent in both of these theories. As research into adult learning in new social movements continues to develop, it will be important not to limit its scope by focusing on one perspective of adult learning or another. The dialectic of individual and group as seen in all three components of learning

points to a need for attention to internal and contextual learning processes in understanding adult learning in new social movements.

I began this thesis by briefly exploring the state of the field of adult education, ending with a summary of the calls for adult education to once again take up the task of educating for social change. The early research on adult learning in new social movements is in many ways a response to this call as the researchers see new "...social movements as socially important sources of knowledge as well as profound sites of learning" (Holford, 1995, p. 104). I believe that this thesis gives evidence for this view as it presents an example of a new social movement in which adult learning is significant and directly related to social change pertaining to a variety of locally and globally important issues. Participants in the movement gain knowledge of an alternative worldview and lifestyle as well as integrate that knowledge with their own beliefs and actions. They transform their individual identities in light of an alternative collective identity, develop agency by engaging in personal and collective action, and find solidarity within the movement and with the rest of humanity and nature. These three learning components combine to develop adults who are committed to a way of life that has potential to create social change toward ecological, economic, and social sustainability. Understanding learning in this movement and beginning to explore its potential for educating for social change supports the contention that new social movements can be sites for adult learning that engage a central purpose of the field of adult education. The value of the conceptual analysis done in this thesis is that it has added some clarity to the variety of conceptions studied and suggested further avenues to developing and testing the conceptions.

Implications for Practice

Use of part of the Precede-Proceed model as a framework for synthesizing and analyzing the data from the literature of the voluntary simplicity movement has implications beyond simply framing the discussion of the data. Understanding what factors predispose, enable, and reinforce involvement in the voluntary simplicity movement points to ways to educate within this movement. It is my hope that understanding these factors in one movement will also provide guidance for adult educators working with other new social movements. Since the voluntary simplicity movement fits the profile of new social movements, I think that the possibility of extrapolating educational practice to new social movements in general can be tentatively claimed.

Identification of the predisposing, enabling, and reinforcing factors in adult learning in new social movement provides a way to frame educational practice. Predisposing factors are those that bring learners to the movement and provide the impetus for initial engagement. For many, predisposing factors are related to personal lifestyle issues and for some, they are related to broader community and global concerns. Educational programs and practices aimed at drawing adults into new social movements as sites for learning will, therefore, need to attend to the kinds of factors that predispose involvement. Educational materials aimed at consciousness-raising and persuasion will need to address individual needs and concerns at least as much as global issues. An over-emphasis initially on negative facts regarding global issues may have the effect of creating barriers to involvement as potential participants may already feel personally

overwhelmed and lacking in energy and hope for dealing with larger issues. Connection of the movement goals to the interests and needs of adult learners may potentially build cumulative predisposing factors to the point of engagement with the movement.

Another area of concern regarding predisposing factors is the use of media for persuasive communication and public discourse. Stories about voluntary simplicity have tended to emphasize radical changes in lifestyle, making the movement seem unrealistic for many potential participants. Along with speaking to the immediate lives of individuals, communication about the movement should also share more accessible and achievable stories and examples. A balance needs to be struck between sharing stories that are inspiring and achievable but that represent a clear alternative to the mainstream.

Enabling factors, with their focus on resources, skills, and knowledge for transformation of beliefs and actions, tend to be the natural focus of educational initiatives. This is true both in health education, from which the Precede-Proceed model originates, and in the voluntary simplicity movement. The programs associated with the voluntary simplicity movement are the main ways of enabling active involvement in the movement identity and practices. There are two things that I think my research shows should be of central concern in developing programs and resources within the voluntary simplicity movement and, perhaps, other new social movements.

One aspect of adult learning in new social movements that should influence program and resource development is the differentiated nature of the movement. My chapter exploring voluntary simplicity shows that there are different levels of involvement and different purposes for involvement that can be clearly identified and named. Enabling materials designed to address each of the levels and purposes will

provide more ways for learners to engage the movement in line with their own interests and abilities. It will be important for educators in other social movements to identify enabling factors, including levels of and reasons for engagement, in order to design programs and resources that resonate with learners.

The second aspect of adult learning in new social movements that should be considered when developing educational programs and resources is the importance of being able to set one's own pace and develop one's own set of practices. This gradual and self-directed focus in the voluntary simplicity movement is a strong enabling factor for involvement. Participants are able to set achievable goals for themselves and to decide on the practices that will make the most difference in their own lives. This makes participation easier and more likely to be successful and ongoing. Creating programs and resources that enable personal critical reflection on movement goals and practices can support this central enabling factor and reduce barriers. Again, identifying enabling factors in other new social movements will provide a focus for educators in making their movement programs and resources accessible and achievable.

The flip side of this enabling factor is its potential for limiting more significant change. It is my opinion that over-emphasis on any involvement, action, or change being acceptable may give the impression that all levels and amounts of change are equally valuable in terms of movement goals. This valuing of small steps is centrally important as an enabling factor, but if the movement wants to engage significant social change, a way needs to be found to encourage deeper engagement. This will require of the educator intimate knowledge of the movement, its goals, and the struggles of individual learners, as well as the ability to create educational materials and opportunities that value

individual successes while showing potential for more significant changes in practices. Enabling learners to link personal issues with wider social, ecological, and economic issues is one way to consider this educational task. Another way is to work with learners in making links between their beliefs about the world and their personal actions. For instance, many participants in the voluntary simplicity movement are concerned about environmental issues and poverty. They may have beliefs about what is right and wrong in relation to these issues and how they think the world should be, but their actions may be only partly aligned with their beliefs. Making these elements visible to learners along with links to voluntary simplicity philosophies and practices is an important role for the adult educator.

Reinforcing factors in adult learning in the voluntary simplicity movement are primarily concerned with ways of finding and feeling support for changes that participants implement in their lives. The role of community is central in reinforcing learning and practice and it is well addressed in many of the movement programs and resources. An area that I believe educators should attend to more intentionally in reinforcing movement involvement and personal beliefs and actions concerns the emphasis on spirituality and nature in much of the voluntary simplicity literature. Spiritual practices and spending time in nature are considered to be vitally important to voluntary simplicity and are often named as factors reinforcing learning. They are seen as both reinforcing learning and as developing a sense of connectedness with the world. However, there is very little in the way of guidance on how to engage spirituality and nature in participants' personal lives and communities. I believe that programs and resources need to intentionally develop ways to teach learners about spirituality and about

the natural world. Currently, the treatment of both of these topics is quite superficial, holding them up as ideals but not addressing understanding or practice of either in any significant way. Both of these topics and areas of practice are complex, deeply personal, and potentially transformative so they should be given thoughtful and explicit attention by educators.

Predisposing, enabling, and reinforcing factors, thus, provide a way for organizing education in the voluntary simplicity movement and, potentially, in new social movements. A limitation of this study is that only a small part of the Precede-Proceed model was incorporated, with the wider context of the model into which the factors fit left unconsidered. While identification of the factors is a tool for focusing research and educational practice that I recommend for educators, an additional avenue of research would be to extend the inquiry into how other aspects of the model could also be of use in planning and implementing educational practice in new social movements. One way of engaging this research would be to study how educators plan and implement their educational practice before and after exposure to the Precede-Proceed model and to test the model's efficacy and applicability in this context.

It is my belief that the centrality of identity, agency, and solidarity also provide a focus for the content and activities of educational practice. Foremost, in my mind, is the evidence that individual and group are mutually constitutive in each of these components of adult learning. Awareness of this will influence how educators plan and implement programs and develop resources. This is already evident in the literature of the voluntary simplicity movement where a standard educational practice of learning in small groups has evolved. Of equal importance is the understanding that identity, agency, and

solidarity are also mutually constitutive. Beliefs, actions, and connectedness form together through reflection and action in this site of adult learning. Links between identity formation, and personal and collective action, and solidarity with all of humanity and nature provides a circle or cycle in which learning happens and all elements need to be attended to by educators. As I mentioned regarding enabling factors, I believe that a role for educators is to make explicit the connections between worldview, beliefs, and actions. This role reflects the underlying components of identity, agency, and solidarity in adult learning in the voluntary simplicity movement. An additional role for educators throughout all aspects of learning is to empower critical reflection, healthy conflict, dissenting voices, and alignment of philosophies and practices as they evolve in the movement. As indicated in the implications for theory, a limitation of this study is in its lack of attention to other discourse regarding identity, agency, and solidarity. In addition to further conceptual work on each of these components, additional research studying how educators articulate the components and use them in their practice would be an interesting and informative study.

Conclusion

To sum up this final chapter, I want to return to the four primary functions that Bentz and Shapiro (1998) claim for scholarly practitioners:

1. personal transformation;
2. the improvement of professional practice;
3. the generation of knowledge; and

4. appreciation of the complexity, intricacy, structure and – some would say – beauty of reality. (p. 68)

This research project was, for me, personally transformative in that it stretched and challenged my knowledge, skills, and commitments beyond what I expected at the start of the project. My narrowly focused theoretical base expanded to include areas previously unexplored and my knowledge of the field of adult education was significantly expanded as well as influenced by other areas of study. My skills as a writer, until now sufficient for any project I encountered, were unexpectedly tested and I hope have improved as a result. My commitments as an adult educator have been confirmed and clarified, and I feel like I see ways forward in building my own educational practice.

From pursuing a study of one particular new social movement that I am personally involved with and that speaks to many of my goals as an adult educator, I have developed ideas for practice within this movement. These ideas for my own practice are, I believe, relevant for other adult educators working within new social movements and/or concerned with educating for social change. Identification of identity, agency, and solidarity as central components of adult learning in the voluntary simplicity movement provides a way to focus my professional engagement with the movement as does knowledge of predisposing, enabling, and reinforcing factors. Consideration of how these components and factors function in other new social movements gives other educators a way to focus, reflect on, and theorize about their own practice and contexts. In some ways, this project has confirmed my practices as an educator within the voluntary simplicity movement. I will continue to use many of the same processes and approaches that are central to this movement, such as small group studies, a focus on personal goal-

setting, and attention to both philosophies and practices in teaching and learning. The project has also opened up ways in which my practice can change and deepen through understanding the factors and components of learning in this movement. The main change that I want to make in my practice is in teaching for an integration of beliefs, intentions, and actions related to voluntary simplicity. In my experience, adult learners often have beliefs about how the world should be, or ideas about how they would like to live in the world, or are making some small changes in their actions, but their beliefs, intentions, and actions are often poorly articulated and not well integrated. I would like to begin developing educational programs that enable learners to articulate their beliefs, decide how they would like to live in the world, and plan changes that are integrated with their beliefs and intentions. Developing a personal working philosophy and practice of voluntary simplicity is a personal goal that I hope will become an educational program that I can teach. This brings me back to my stated position of scholarly practitioner, bridging theory and practice in my own work.

The knowledge generated in this thesis is partial and tentative but does add to the knowledge base of adult education in a few ways. As I have shown in the pages above, this research contributes to an understanding of adult learning in new social movements, adds to the development of a conception of collective learning, and attends to a primary purpose of adult education. I think that the main contribution that this thesis makes to the generation of knowledge is in posing identity, agency, and solidarity as a focus for research into adult learning in new social movements. For the voluntary simplicity movement, this project contributes to a deeper and more integrated understanding of the potentials and limitations of the movement. In my own engagement with the movement

as an educator, I am clear that I want the movement to be more intentional about making links between personal actions and social justice. This thesis has made visible the ways in which the movement literature makes these links and the ways in which it holds back from fully engaging a more radically active stance. As a study that is supportive of the movement, this thesis has the potential to add to the movement's self-understanding and critical reflection, particularly for movement leaders.

When I first read Bentz and Shapiro's four primary functions of a scholarly practitioner, I responded to the final function in a somewhat dismissive way. It just did not seem as important, as serious, as the other three. I think I understand it better now. Looking at one very small part of contemporary reality has been like looking through a kaleidoscope. I would think I was beginning to see a pattern when a new piece would fall into place and shift the whole in unexpected ways. Adult learning in the voluntary simplicity movement is indeed complex, intricate, and beautiful (at least for an adult educator!)

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