THE ROLE OF SAFETY IN LEARNING: INTERVIEWS WITH EIGHT ADULT EDUCATORS

by

PENI BROOK

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Dip. Ed., (Counselling Psychology), The University of British Columbia, 1994

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Department of Educational Studies
The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

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ABSTRACT

The assumption that safety has a crucial role in learning pervades the literature. Safety however is rarely defined, operationalized, or evaluated. A condition which is assumed to be a key factor in learning, but not clarified or demonstrated, is a significant and important area for study.

In this research project, eight adult educators discussed their assumptions about safety and learning, gave examples from their practice, and considered ways of improving learning by establishing safety within education programs. Interpretive findings drawn from these interviews were combined with data from the literature to suggest a tentative theoretical model. In the concluding discussions, implications for theory and practice are supported by data which suggest that safety is a fundamentally important element in strong and positive learning outcomes.
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1 not the culinary kind

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Learning is the essence of survival and fulfilment. We need to acquire the skills to learn so that we may function, develop, and grow. Learning activities take much organizational, educator, and program participant effort; but often the results seem a great deal less than was hoped. When learning programs are inadequate - for whatever reasons - the costs are high in many ways to individuals and to society. I wanted to identify a key element of learning which might contribute to limited results, and then try to understand the impact on education. I hoped to make a contribution to how we understand the experience of learning, and what it means to teach.

The role of safety in learning was the last thing I considered. My preliminary reviews of the literature, and discussions with educators, investigated several factors such as learning theory, program planning, teacher education, instructional design, social dynamic, and organizational development. During this early study I appreciated many explanations for limited learning results. But remedial changes in these various areas often failed to significantly increase the numbers of learners who succeeded, so it appeared that something fundamental still seemed to be lacking.

As the search for clues continued, I began to notice references to safety and learning. Phrases such as 'once the safe learning climate is developed...[then learning/teaching/education begins]' popped up in books, articles, and conversations without an explanation about what safety meant or by what criteria safety might be recognized. A concept seemed to exist unaccompanied by vocabulary or theory. I retraced the investigative journey and asked a new question within each educational area: what assumptions about safety and learning are present?

I discovered that, although references to the importance of safety seemed to pervade the

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1 Throughout the thesis, 'safety' is accepted as referring to the presumed relationships between safety and learning which form the basis for the study.
writings about education and learning, safety was rarely defined. A concept about safety prevailed even though meanings and criteria remained obscure. The assumption that safety somehow plays a key role in learning was ubiquitous yet unexplored (not operationalized, rarely applied, under-evaluated and seldom indexed). As a kind of generic assumption safety seemed overlooked by researchers and undeveloped by practitioners.

Cherryholmes (1988) called such assumptions 'primitives': hidden attitudes, embedded in normative approaches to education, which have remained implicit, crude, and unformed. They are "taken as given and not questioned. They are not defined. Often, they are not mentioned" (p.2). McIntyre (1993) described primitive assumptions as "presuppositions which are in the form of taken-for-granted deeply sedimented meanings...likely not to be philosophically explicit understandings at all" (p. 85). Recognizing safety as a primitive assumption created a dilemma. If safety is a crucial precondition for learning, as the assumptions seem to suggest, how might the effect of safety (or lack of safety) on learning be known? If safety is not explicated, demonstrated, or evaluated, how do we know if safety is an important issue, or if it is even present? Examining assumptions about safety seemed a worthwhile way to seek greater understanding about learning and teaching.

This chapter offers an overview of the research project. First, the research questions are introduced. An introduction to methodology is followed by a brief preliminary description of safety then by a discussion about limitations of and challenges to the study. Finally, an outline of the overall thesis structure provides the guiding framework.

Research Questions

The primary research questions investigated assumptions about safety by asking: (1) what assumptions about safety are common among a select group of educators, (2) what influence do
educators perceive safety to have in learning, and (3) by what criteria might safety be recognized?

Auxiliary questions sought to extend the substance and relevance of the project by asking: what related prior research has been done; what experiences have the research participants had and, finally, what is implicated when results from prior studies are combined with findings from the interpretation of interview data?

Choosing a Research Approach

I felt that my ability to understand and interpret data would be enhanced if my research framework was consistent with the interdisciplinary and speculative approach I used to arrive at questions about safety assumptions. I sought a methodology capable of transforming my informal interest into a formal research enquiry. I wanted to listen to educators discuss their perspectives, experiences, and concepts, to respond critically as significant data emerged, and to find different ways for interpreting data. I chose an interpretive approach for its ability to explore underlying assumptions by juxtaposing new and existing data in flexible and dynamic ways throughout the project. As I outlined the study, I also sought a basic definition of safety with which to guide the project.

Seeking a Basic Understanding of Safety

Safety may be an easily recognized concept which is not readily explained objectively but needs to be construed interpersonally. Brennan (1977) calls concepts like safety ‘open-textured’ because although there are specific ways of recognizing what is (or what is not) a safe experience, one cannot generalize to a given set of criteria capable of identifying cases in which safety is present or absent. Rationales for safety can be recognized, however, and can provide a broad standard for adequately judging what will or will not ‘count’ as safety. These rationales may always be incomplete because they need to be fundamentally sensitive to contextual changes.
Therefore criteria for defining, establishing, and evaluating safety may need to be negotiated within each context, according to broad rationales about purpose and effect.

The first challenge of the project was how to describe safety well enough to explain the meaning and purpose of the study while maintaining an open design capable of discovering authentic data which might not be obvious at first. When I started the project, I began to frame the assumptions I encountered in the literature as open-ended questions for colleagues, without attaching any definitions of safety. I thought I was offering an open process which would encourage others to talk through their concepts, uninfluenced by any assumptions I might have. However, many of those with whom I spoke at first needed more of a basis for discussion. Because I began the study looking for answers, I felt uncomfortable defining safety outside of my own contexts and relationships. I felt caught between two conflicting demands: to explicate safety conceptually in order to draw many people into the discussion and, at the same time, to create an open dialogic climate which allowed concepts about safety and learning to be revealed as a product of the study.

Another dilemma about giving an introductory definition for safety was my valuing uncertainty as the basis of an interpretive study. Griffin (1987) explains how conceptually open research might be of value because it can be "useful to others...who may want to: (1) broaden their ideas of what is possible to experience; (2) find words to express what they have experienced; or (3) find the courage to say ‘no, that is not what I have experienced. For me it has been different.’ " (p. 210). I decided to try bridging uncertainty and form by defining safety well enough and broadly enough to provide others with an introductory framework; I hoped that my views would do not get in the way of their thinking about safety from their own perspectives.
A Preliminary Definition of Safety

Standard meanings of safety were taken colloquially in terms of what is present in and what is absent from an event. Safety means protection, the absence of threat, and the freedom from the danger or anxiety of harm, loss, damage, or trauma. General meanings of safety might be understood inter-culturally, but safety may be a personal experience stimulated by situational factors and individual perceptions or feelings.

Attempting to find universal guidelines for effective teaching practice, Vella (1994) drew on forty years of teaching in North America, Africa, Asia, South America, and the Middle East to construct a framework of twelve principles for stimulating learning. Vella’s principles include organizational and relational approaches to subject matter instruction. Safety is the second principle and is, according to Vella,

linked to respect...it means that the design of learning tasks, the atmosphere in the room, and the very design of small groups and materials convey to the adult learners that this experience will work for them. Safety does not obviate the natural challenge of learning new concepts, skills, or attitudes. Safety does not take away any of the hard work involved in learning... Safety is a principle that guides the teacher’s hand throughout the planning, during the needs assessment, in the first moments of the course (p. 6).

Personal agency and capability imply a sense of personal control, empowerment, and usefulness.

Safety might be an umbrella concept if several elements of relationship and learning are interconnected in significant ways (Calkins, 1986; Svinicki, 1989; Short, 1990). The possibility that safety issues may underscore many aspects of learning increases the importance of clarifying what safety is. Perhaps identifying the effects of safety might provide useful information with which to clarify what safety means to learners as well as to develop criteria for creating, adjusting,
and evaluating safety within learning groups.

As a principle by which to foster a climate in which learners feel capable, safety may not be explicable in the normative sense. Individuals may recognize what safety means to them in a given situation, be able to share meanings with others, and find ways to negotiate the development of safe relations within a group, and still, consistent with Brennan's description of open-textured concepts, feel it inappropriate to define the meaning of safety in fixed or generalizable terms.

Norms for defining safety and for developing a safe learning climate can be explicitly negotiated once shared understandings are reached. Communicating differences and probing similarities can clarify perceptions and meanings so that agreements about relationship may be achieved within dialogue. Negotiating and developing criteria for safety become key aspects of the responsive, situational construction of meaning (Burbules, 1993; Chevalier, 1995).

In summary, safety' is a broadly used word, but common usage hides a general lack of understanding about what safety means. People recognize cross-culturally that they have similar personal meanings, feelings, and perspectives about safety, and are also able to realize that experiences of safety may differ from person to person. At the same time, social norms do not usually include protocols for establishing a safe climate among individuals. References to the importance of safety pervade the literature on learning and teaching, in the form of statements like: 'once a safe environment is established, then...’ but fails to identify, describe, establish, or evaluate what that 'safe environment' might look like.

Early in the study I looked at how safety concepts are used in other contexts. Terms such as workplace or occupational safety, traffic safety, health safety, water safety, and safe sex have become familiar expressions and have been operationalized within various social activities. As one way to appraise the study for face validity I considered how meanings associated with these
terms were compatible with or contradictory to the idea of safety in learning. No conflicting differences in meaning or usage were apparent, so I accepted that the underlying meanings which I was attributing to safety were compatible, or at least not contradictory.

As I considered how to accomplish the goals of my study, I rejected several good leads for research. Three examples illustrate potentially useful areas of future research different from what I chose to do: (1) a study which might inform our understanding about safety could investigate what it is about a trusting relationship which feels safe; (2) a search for what is safe in a situation where people are learning really well might yield more information about the role of safety in learning; and, (3) accountability-based research, although neither an element of the meaning of safety nor a criterion for determining safety, may contribute data about what sorts of resources contribute to making the learning context safe. These specific issues could not be fully explored in a preliminary research study such as mine because I needed to maintain a focus on identifying the broad basic issues underlying questions about safety. But the potential for safety to be recognized as an umbrella term added incentive to developing the project.

**Purpose of the Thesis**

The predominant purpose of the thesis project was to identify assumptions about the role of safety in learning, explicate related elements, and consider implications. Studying safety as an issue for the learning context seemed to be a new and important approach towards understanding teacher-learner relationships. A second purpose of the project was therefore to raise questions about the elements of safety which are crucial to learning, hoping to generate sufficient evidence with which to stimulate robust and provocative discussion among educators in practice and research. The overall purposes are recognition, explication, and understanding of the meaning of safety within learning contexts.
Contribution of the Study

The subliminal influences exerted by hidden assumptions are difficult to identify and analyze. Explicated assumptions can be evaluated and adapted. But if an implicit idea is established in practice, the lack of accessibility to the underlying rationales behind the idea becomes problematic because the idea has power without accountability. The relationship between power and accountability - and safety - resonated throughout the project. The first contribution of the study was to recognize and broadcast the fact that ‘primitive’ implicit assumptions about the role of safety in learning exist in education.

The project made a second contribution by gathering evidence, in the form of information about safety and learning, from several sources: first, relevant findings from a survey of previous interdisciplinary research were collated; second, interview data were gathered. Finally, when data from both endeavours generated new questions, additional material was drawn from the literature in response. This process created a strong combined data base with which to support a discussion of implications.

A third contribution was the project’s responsiveness to the invitation made by Sincoff and Sternberg (1989) on behalf of the ecology of learning. They asked educators to consider the effect of learning contexts on mental activities associated with significant learning. They called upon researchers to go beyond simply pointing out the necessity of considering contextual influences. They must pinpoint precisely the contextual factors affecting development and the way these factors alter mental activity (p. 50).

Davis & Sumara (1997) suggested further that “educational theories and practices that are inattentive to the particularities of context and, more specifically, that are inattentive to the
evolving *relations* among such particularities, are no longer adequate" (p. 120). Issues of safety *must* be at the heart of research into contextual factors and evolving relationships.

**How the Project was Developed**

My original goal was limited. In the early stages of the project I intended to do only a critical literature survey about assumptions which theorists and practitioners held about safety and learning. I thought that, once the meaning of safety was clarified through the literature search, I could identify useful safety-based implications aimed at improving learning results. I began by surveying issues of content delivery and acquisition and then, when too many questions remained, broadened the focus of my studies to consider the patterns of learning, stages of learning, and techniques which facilitate learning. I conceptualized learning as changes in attitudes, skills, abilities, or responses based on some kind of *experience*\(^3\). I framed education as learning which is achieved by organizing and managing experiences. Formal education adds an educator-learner relationship and an organizational context to the learning experience. I became interested in the ecology of education when I realized how much of a social experience the learning which occurs in formal education systems is.

Initially, when the early literature search focused on the social context of learning, I envisioned the project as a comparative theoretical analysis of the work of Vygotskii (1978), Maslow (1968), and Fischer (1980). The research of Vygotskii, Maslow, and Fischer linked the social or group dynamic with learning, and raised questions about communicative norms for dialogue, and issues of responsibility. I hoped that an analysis of the literature could identify, evaluate, and operationalize concepts associated with safety in learning in order to suggest a

\(^3\) "We learn what we do, and therefore all genuine education will keep doing and thinking together" (Lindeman, 1926, p. 9).
tentative working framework.

Within these selected theories of learning I explored the nature of learning as a dynamic interplay between elements of safety and risk, a relationship which might affect the development of learner agency. Tracing elements of risk, change, and challenge as being inherent in the learning experience, my attention returned to the importance of a safe social climate.

I discussed my preliminary literature findings with academic colleagues and realized that, given the complexity of the issues and the open-textured nature of the concepts, an analytical survey of interdisciplinary research might not provide them with enough evidence to accept the implications as credible. The importance of safety to the theory and practice of education needed to be established with a stronger combination of data than a literature review alone might provide. I decided to conduct an empirical study. While I drew some quantitative data from studies cited in the literature search, I chose an interpretive methodology because I wanted educators to speak for themselves so that other educators might hear.

Language of the Thesis

Early in the project I regarded language choices as key elements of the interpretive process. They would help me articulate the strategies with which to seek common ground among participants about the learning context, while keeping differences from blurring.

Terminology

Some terminology was used interchangeably throughout this thesis. For example, educators were called teachers, instructors, trainers, and facilitators⁴; learners were referred to as

⁴ Even while I appreciate Welton’s and Collin’s (Welton, 1995) skepticism about the term ‘facilitator’ “gutting as it does any ethical commitment from the practice of teacher” (p. 218). When I use ‘facilitator’, I prefer to emphasize the helping connotation of ‘making easy, or at least less difficult, with its inferred ethic of caring. Brookfield (1986) equates facilitation with coddling; Boud (1987) counters that “facilitation is multi-faceted and flexible, and its nature is
participants, students, and clients. Programs were also labeled courses, curricula, classes, and learning events. 'Education', as understood throughout the project, was taken to occur in educational settings, which in turn were referred to as school, corporate or workplace training, learning contexts, and centres.  

**Gender Neutrality**

The study is about assumptions and concepts educators have about their work and what experiences count as typical examples. The language of gender became problematic in this project. I found the practice of inter-chapter gender switching, or the current research use of the blended pronoun 'he/she', somewhat awkward. I felt that gender neutrality was a more suitable approach for this study because I strove to focus the presentation of findings on the conceptual and exemplar data as much as possible. When referring to participants I favoured two strategies for observing gender neutrality: first, by writing neutrally and, secondly, by using plural rather than singular pronouns whenever I could. My decision to remove gender from the descriptions of study participants elicited an occasional query from individual faculty who, from their perspective, were concerned that gender neutrality might weaken data integrity.

_Several_ considerations were important to me: first, data integrity; second, honouring confidentiality of participants; and third, encouraging critical thinking within readers. Even so, some readers seemed to impose an issue of gender on the study. For example, they wanted to know who among participants were male and female - as though such information would change the data. And, when they attached gender on the basis of how they read the data, the incorrect dependent on the context in which it occurs” (p. 223).

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5 The project was developed in the Educational Studies Department of the University of British Columbia (UBC). Unless otherwise clarified, all references to 'the university', colleagues, and faculty are based in connections at UBC.
gender was often assigned. When I questioned participants, none felt that gender should be identified and Sam was most clear about expressing that, while in the immediate culture there are many gender issues which are about the safety of individuals, safety is not fundamentally a gender issue.

As I worked through the interview data I felt not only that identifying the gender of participants might jeopardize confidentiality but also might interfere with data interpretation. Gender neutrality in this study sustained reader focus on issues of explicating the basic meanings and experiences associated with safety and learning. Confidentiality of participants was honoured. I am aware of the passionately felt debates among some qualitative researchers about the importance of gender in research. For another kind of study, I might have chosen to highlight gender differences, but for this study gender neutrality seemed the most appropriate way to respect the data and the participants.

**Culture**

I have used the term ‘culture’ throughout the project to represent the social dynamic as it has been developed or learned by group members. ‘Dynamic’ is the way participants react to each other - over time establishing the distinctive patterns or norms which characterize the group culture. The transformation of participants from a group of individuals dynamically interacting into a group culture is the site of the safety discussions which form the basis for this project. A group culture will develop, whether guided according to negotiated values, or arising spontaneously out of haphazard interpersonal connections.

Within the broad sense of group culture, ‘differences’ among participants will always be a

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There were several instances of readers encountering interview data and imposing an inaccurate gender identity on a participant - based on stereotypical ideas about occupation and points of view.
challenge to represent in research. Intracultural differences \textit{are} significant to the social dynamics and dialogic relationships. At the same time, cultural differences can be transparent, transformative, catalytic, insignificant, crucial, or distorting. I sense that insofar as the development of a safe climate is concerned, it may be the relational attributes of participants and the quality of dialogue (not the educational setting, personal preferences, or cultural biographies of participants) which most strongly influence the depth, complexity, and benefit of group development discourse. The study is concerned with the culture of learning and these communicative issues replay throughout the project. I focused on the cultivation of the social dynamic because I felt that that approach best respected and represented the data and the participants. The preliminary design stage of the project uncovered several secondary questions which could be anticipated in the process of refining the methodology, as well as some inherent limitations which could be acknowledged early in the study.

**Anticipated Questions**

The preliminary literature search identified several elements of context, and generated, in addition to the fundamental questions about safety and learning which structure the project, many questions which relate to group processes. Some of these questions were anticipated and embedded within the interview questions: what is the influence of the group dynamic, how is safety experienced in the group dynamic, does it matter whether or not the norms of group process are implicitly or explicitly known, how are risk and challenge related to learning, and if safety plays a role in learning, who is responsible for the safety within the group dynamic?

As the study progressed, other questions emerged such as about learner responses to risk and challenge. I wondered about the importance of participants being aware (attention) and feeling a confident commitment (agency) throughout learning process. Accepting that awareness
and confidence were significant aspects of learning, I asked about possible connections between a felt state of agency\(^7\) and feelings of challenge (as different from feelings of threat) about learning. The literature identified agency as a key factor in learning achievement, motivation, persistence, and participation so I expected issues of agency to emerge from the data. I was curious to discover how agency, safety, risk, and challenge might be (or not) related.

**Limitations of the Study**

Although the concluding chapter of the thesis discusses limitations of the study which became obvious during the research, some limitations were either inherent in the design or raised as concerns before the study began. Limitations embedded in the framework ranged from participant selection to data analysis - because the study focused on the broad perceptions and practices of adult educators about the role of safety in learning, not on the attitudes of their learners. Educator responses were expected to yield data about both learning and teaching because educators are also experienced learners themselves.

Giving issues related to safety a highlighted attention seemed to diminish the importance of other crucial issues. This natural effect of a research project needs to be kept in perspective. There is no suggestion that safety is the only crucial issue, only that it is the focus of the study.

Many important areas of research were omitted for practical reasons, and I would like to mention two - for their potential future importance. First, research concerning issues of safety and how children learn was excluded from the study because of developmental characteristics of that population and the time constraints of the researcher. And second, major psychological

\(^7\) Although Bandura (1986) labelled agency 'self-efficacy', and contributed strong research findings, I prefer the more generic, less jargonesque term. I understood *agency* as a proactive learning element which de Charms (1968, 1979) described as an enacted sense of personal causation; agency is "a belief that one can affect outcomes" (Cochran, 1990, p.66).
conditions which may also relate to safety and which affect learning were also not included. For example, I excluded the research on psychopaths, a group of learners known to be very low in their relational safety needs and high in their abilities to learn (Hare, 1993). I also omitted studies about people who suffer so much post traumatic stress that their safety needs have become inordinately high and their ability to learn become permanently compromised. Other studies which analyze these groups could yield rich data and generate new hypotheses.

The absence of a quantitative bank of findings may be seen as a project limitation. I felt that an interpretive study offered a particularly sensitive and reliable approach to exploring basic assumptions about safety and learning. Although quantitative experiments offer 'objectively' measured and valid data with which to generate useful theory, they may have particularly problematic aspects when applied to the culture of education, and be vulnerable to discreditation by contrary findings. Interpretive data, however, retain an enduring credibility, based as they are on experience and perception. One may disagree with the interpretation of a person's lived experience and one may reinterpret findings; but one cannot discredit the experience as it was felt. I hoped that, by the concluding chapter, the thesis might blend quantitative and interpretive data into evidence capable of supporting the concluding discussions about implications.

**Structure of the Thesis**

The research was conducted in layers ranging from the informal pursuit of ideas about learning, through a review of research literature, to a study of attitudes held by other educators. Thesis structure reflects that process, including the interpretation of the data, from which implications were drawn and is outlined in the following summary.
Outline of Chapters

Chapter Two summarizes literature research from three basic perspectives. First, an introduction to paradoxical concepts in education is followed by a discussion of confirming and contradictory evidence. Second, information about the nature of the learning context focuses on what education is understood to be, what are the social dimensions of the learning climate, and how issues of sustainability, power, and control affect the development of the social context. Third, learning relationships between educators and learners, and among learner participants, are explored in terms of processes for negotiating the group norms which characterize each learning culture. Fourth, the processes of learning are considered within a framework founded on a selected group of learning theories which include the work of Vygotskii, Maslow, and Fischer. An emphasis is maintained on learning as a social transaction which works purposively to optimize the abilities, resources, and personal characteristics of participants. A discussion about the ‘learning how to learn’ approach to education, and the dynamic factors of risk and safety, round out the literature survey. A tentative theoretical framework, taken from a collection of European research, is introduced.

Chapter Three describes the interpretive research design and methodology used to organize the project. Aspects of critical ethnographic theory which strengthen the capacity of the study to explore several dimensions of the research question are introduced. A pilot study is summarized in which the research question, choice of methodology, structure of the interview, various interview questions, and initial data analysis techniques were tested. An evaluation of the pilot study, supervised
by research faculty, contributed to the development of the current study design.

Precautionary notes about the role of the researcher preface a general description of selection criteria for study participants: the number, rationales for specific selection criteria, the mode for contacting participants, the anticipated time contribution participants make, and protocols for participant feedback. The methods used for gathering the data are detailed as guided by the design framework. The rationales behind the interview questions are included; and methods for transcribing, ordering, and storing the data are outlined. Ethical considerations are also discussed.

Chapter Four presents the data gathered in the interviews. A distilled review outlines data presentation methods, introduces participants, and describes interview settings. Interview data are offered in a narrative form, which strives to be as parsimonious as possible while retaining the key points and unique flavour of each interview.

Chapter Five organizes findings in three ways: those emerging directly from the research questions, unexpected findings, and a tangential discussion about the challenges to and misconceptions about safety which were dealt with during the project.

Findings are interpreted within the framework of the interview questions. The chapter is supported by an introductory chart of answers to the research questions and a summative glossary of terms drawn from the interviews.

Chapter Six begins with a tentative theoretical framework constructed of integrated research findings drawn from the thesis project. The derived model provides a

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8 in the Educational Studies department, Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia.
basis for the discussion of implications, presented according to the strength of the
data. First, the efficacy and application of the theoretical model is structured in
three sections which parallel the areas of investigation during the literature
searches: 1) learning relationships, 2) the learning context, and 3) research issues.
Second, findings specifically about safety issues are summarized. The concluding
discussion includes a critical look at the 'social image' of education, reviews
limitations and contributions of the study, and offers personal notes about what the
experience of doing the thesis has meant to me.

Illustrative figures were included throughout the thesis in response to
issues of style differences which were highlighted during the study. The project
hoped to offer different types of learners access to understanding the key points of
the research as they developed, so the figures were designed to be visual learning
aids only, not empirical presentations of data. The reader is encouraged to use the
thesis in whichever way works best. The text conveys all the information included
in the figures. If the text is confusing, hopefully the figures will help. If the figures
are confusing, pass over them.
CHAPTER TWO: SURVEYING THE LITERATURE

Defensible educational thought must take account of four commonplaces of equal rank: the learner, the teacher, the milieu, and the subject matter.  

Literature data about the role of safety in learning are paradoxically rich and abundant on one hand, and elusive on the other. The literature ubiquitously presumes safety to be a crucial precondition for learning, yet on closer scrutiny safety remains almost hidden from research and application, an example of the sort of 'primitive' assumption described in Chapter One. Educators who share the assumption about the importance of safety are given little direction about how to recognize what counts as safety or how to evaluate the effects of safety. The lack of awareness, understanding, or evaluation which results from such unexamined assumptions inhibits the development of a working framework, theory, or field of practice (Kuhn, 1970; Cherryholmes, 1988; McIntyre, 1993; McLaren, 1995).

The initial literature review revealed that many of the terms frequently used during discussions about safety and learning are vaguely defined and weakly understood. The task of Chapter Two was to identify and analyze concepts about teaching and learning until the parameters of the project were established, and then to investigate issues raised within the guidelines of the research questions. This entailed sorting through confusing details, identifying conceptual relationships, constructing temporary theoretical frameworks in order to test the strength of the relationships, and frequently abandoning one line of research for another.

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9 Schwab, 1973, p. 508

10 'Safety' is accepted as referring to the relationship between safety and learning, which forms the basis for the study.

11 such as safety, learning, teaching, risk, social dynamic etc
Most of the data found through the first literature search are absent. The novelty of the project demanded layers of clarification and often one set of issues was subsumed by other more comprehensive issues. Chapter Two is not intended to present a summary of the literature I explored, but is a focused reporting of key literature data intended to prepare readers for the presentation of interview findings and the discussion of implications.

Three areas of exploration were suggested by the research questions: (1) the culture and atmosphere of the learning context; (2) influences of teacher-learner relationships on teaching and learning; and (3) processes of learning for and among learners. Selected theories of learning were introduced as ways to understand how the elements related to safety may affect how people learn. The literature search sought to clarify which new questions were significant to the study by working from general information to particular effects in practice in the continually circular way typical of interpretive research.

The literature search was ongoing throughout the project. Data presented in this chapter are those which seemed most relevant to the interview questions. The focus of is such that information found at the beginning of the study is combined with findings emergent towards the end, so readers may know early in the thesis what data are brought forward to the concluding discussion of implications.

The first step in finding direction for the project was to recognize that ideas about learning programs seemed to be confused by paradox. The concept of paradox may partially explain why assumptions about safety and learning remain simultaneously ubiquitous and unexplored. The existence of paradoxical relationships among the concepts studied often confounded the study because issues related to safety seemed fragmented from the broad discussion about learning. Paradoxical and disparate aspects of safety identified by this project
were: the effect of power and control in relational communication, the development of the group
dynamic in a hierarchical social structure, differences between implicit and explicit process, and
the relationship between risk or challenge and a safe learning climate. Paradox is discussed in
conjunction with what sorts of evidence can support an understanding of assumptions.

Paradox

Paradoxes seem to be simultaneously confusing and informative; informative in the sense
that intuitively congruent patterns can be identified and accepted, but confusing because the
pieces which construct the patterns often do not seem to logically fit together. Paradoxes may be
reasonable and well-founded descriptions about seemingly incompatible facts which, when linked,
form cohesive ideas; they can alert us that paradigms may be reconfiguring by successfully
juxtaposing seemingly incongruous realities. Jarvis (1992) suggests that learning can be best
understood as a collective of paradoxes.

Our understandings of both learning and safety seem to be embedded in paradoxes which
might be expressed as follows: learning as a process is frequently discussed but rarely defined or
analysed; learning as a tangible outcome continues to be evaluated even though learning has never
been conclusively defined; and, learning occurs within individuals, but usually while individuals
are within a social dynamic. The broadest paradox associated with safety is that some educators
still suggest that threat, not safety, may be the effective catalyst for learning while the idea that an
unsafe climate might constrict learning potential intuitively makes sense.

Paradoxes alert us to the possibility that our understanding of the elements which form the
paradox may be limited, not that the data represented by paradox are problematic. The struggle
to find clarity in a study defined by paradox was served as much by a search for contradictory
evidence as for confirming.
Confirming and Contradictory Evidence

When paradox is found at the heart of a study, a search for disconfirming evidence may illuminate issues more usefully than may an investigation which focuses on consolidating or confirming particular clusters of data. The ongoing tensions between confirming and contradictory data helped me to distinguish cohesive and relevant themes with which to frame the project.

Confirming evidence satisfies many research demands. It establishes that the research question fits into what is normally understood about the topic - in this case safety as it relates to education - and then refines the study with techniques and approaches from related studies. As data are gathered, distilled, and interpreted, secondary literature searches clarify ideas. The presence of sufficient confirming evidence may justify strong claims.

The search for contradictory evidence adds important dimensions to a research project. Confirmation suggests; contradiction raises doubts. Confirming data may reinforce a tentative theoretical framework or discussion of implications with augmenting information. Contradictory evidence can challenge the validity of research by introducing new issues. Contradiction makes another useful contribution: if, in addition to good supportive evidence a researcher can justifiably claim that disconfirming evidence is unlikely to be found, the supporting evidence becomes more reliable. The absence of disconfirming evidence can strengthen claims made about the data.

It seemed unwise, in a study such as mine, to rely solely on obtaining adequate confirming evidence.

12 For example, twenty years ago the prestigious British scientific journal Nature published the radical theories of Dr. Rupert Sheldrake. Anticipating (and defusing) a negative outcry, the journal offered a reward (of approximately $30,000) to anyone who could disconfirm Sheldrake’s theories. Although many experiments have been run to dispute Sheldrake, the reward is still unclaimed.
evidence where many of the basic terms of reference are embedded in assumption. A thorough search which failed to produce contradictory evidence or which produced findings able to contradict null perspectives\(^{13}\), might improve the credibility of implications suggested at the end of the thesis. One example of how this worked might be helpful.

Data about risk, emotion, intensity, stimulation, power, ethics, motivation, relationship, roles, and social dynamics slowly started to gel midway through the study, but I couldn’t get a coherent idea from the mix of concepts. I revisited my path through the research, using the tools of confirming and disconfirming evidence to look for clues about anything I might have overlooked. I returned to an uncomfortable conversation early in my study when a senior researcher suggested that ‘threat’ should be taken more seriously than ‘safety’ as catalytic precondition for learning. I had dismissed the idea at the time. Using the tensions between kinds of evidence, I reversed the issues of safety into a different kind of question: could safety ever interfere with learning? Or: could the absence of safety ever be efficacious for learning? I found no defensible evidence to support a claim that either threat or an absence of safety could support learning which is uncontaminated by the negative effects of an unsafe process. I did not adjust my definitions of learning to include that which is damaging to the learner.

All of the issues identified through the literature search and then raised, investigated, and proposed throughout the project are open to challenge because the research questions seem to be inquiring into several implicit assumptions which have not been scrutinized in this way before. I am more confident about conclusions drawn from the study because the exploration of ideas continually included the consideration of alternative possibilities. While key confirming evidence is

\(^{13}\) Such as: safety limits learning, ‘unsafe’ fosters learning, some groups have no group dynamic, some teachers have no power or control with their learners and so on.
cited throughout the thesis, an increasing absence of contradiction is an invisible strength behind many of the findings.

Fundamental elements which were linked during preliminary searches into safety and learning were grouped into three sections: the learning context, learning relationships, and some processes of learning. First, data about the learning context introduce concepts about education, the social climate, and issues of power and control.

The Learning Context

The learning context provides a sense of location as well as of process. Education is defined through a summary of perspectives which emerged during the study. The social dimension of climate and the impact of power and control dynamics on climate and relationships are discussed.

Education

The goals of education form one of the underlying paradoxes of the study. The work of Shor & Friere (1987) and Illich (1971) notwithstanding, most education systems tend to share similar organizational features which define the relationships among/between teacher, learner, and content in hierarchical and political ways. This is an odd fact, considering the diversity of theories about the nature and aims of education. Scholars traditionally talk about aims of education and theories of learning. Perhaps an easier way to resolve some of the contradictory ideas about how education is typically understood might be if discourse was framed as theories of education and aims of learning.

The purpose of describing education was to set the framework for discussions about teaching and learning, not to begin a new debate. My own assumptions about education suggested that contextual and relational factors may be of crucial importance if the objective of
teaching is to assist learners to learn. But current popular images of education seemed to suggest that learning organization are founded on bases of content delivery. Vallance (1985) explained that "what may not be evident to educational planners is the extent to which an emphasis on content limits our conception of what education can be" (p. 202).

Speaking of education in terms of possibilities, Smith (1982) called education "the dynamic field of social practice" (p. 9), which Courtney (1986) reframed as "a species of moral and social interventions" (p. 162). Jarvis (1992) continued that the social intervention of education should be specifically directed towards learning, but that 'learning' is "either part of the formal educational structure or is lost in the process of everyday life in informal and incidental experiences" (p. 5). Crittenden (1994) added that it is "characteristic of education to regard [knowledge] as being valuable...as a significant part of the good for human beings" (p. 294). Typically, educators hold power and authority over the curriculum, process, and evaluation which create the learning context; "education seeks to control learning in some way" (Jarvis, 1992, p. 236). When educators hold such power over content and control the social climate, they must also hold a large share of the responsibility for the learning experiences of the student.

**Climate: the Social Dimension**

*Learning is constrained by the sociocultural milieu into which individuals are born, it is directed through pressures exerted by social structures, and it is subject to control by the power elites. Learning stems from the experiences of living in society, but paradoxically, there would be no society without people learning*.

Within education, within both the infrastructure and the curriculum, the social context is the medium for learning. "By social context we mean the entire spectrum of roles, responses,

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14 Jarvis, 1992, p. xii
expectations, and interaction between students and teachers, and among students. The educational process cannot be separated from its social context” (Rubenson, 1982, p.60). Vygotskii’s (1978) research shows that the individual learns through social interactions framed by context and focused through content. According to Tiberias and Billson (1991), “the social context is inherent in every teaching situation…” (p. 68).

The communicative social nature of learning “requires a climate of mutual trust and teamwork in which people feel accepted and free to disagree and take risks” (Smith, 1982, p. 49) because the climate can offer the emotional and physical support for learning (Kidd, 1975; Apps, 1981). But the atmosphere which characterizes a given social context is created by the dynamics among individual members. “The process of learning is located at the interface of people’s biography and the sociocultural milieu in which they live, for it is at this intersection that experiences occur (Jarvis, 1992, p. 17). The fundamental dynamic of a social group is the allocation of power, control, and responsibility. Interconnectivity between group dynamics, relationship, and learning is continually mediated by issues of power. McIntyre (1993) concludes: “it should be therefore a priority for...researchers to begin to specify context as a major determinant of adult learning” (p. 94).

Ideally¹⁵, dynamics begin as the responsibility of the organization and the educator and then shift to become the responsibility of the learners. Adams (1975) observed that “The group soon warmed to talking without a [teacher]; they had become frank with each other, more deeply involved” (p. 45). Cuban (1993) wrote about content as though it were the catalyst for relationship: “at the heart of [education] is the personal relationship between the teacher and

¹⁵ according to interview participants
students that develops over matters of content" (p. 184). Maclean (1987) is specific in saying that "learning is enhanced in a group setting which allows for the interplay of ideas and hence the potential for 'building' on the combined resources of the group...[and]...when the learning climate fosters self-esteem, interdependence, freedom of expression, acceptance of differences, and freedom to make mistakes" (P. 129). If the climate of education forms the foundation for teaching and learning, issues of power and control affect the development of relationships because power and control are unevenly distributed by the nature of education.

**Power and Control**

*Learning can never be dissociated from power relationships in the social context*\(^{16}\)

Issues of power and control affected every element of this thesis project. The features of social groupings were characterized by four questions: (1) who controls social process and cultural status, (2) who has how much power, (3) how is power distributed, and (4) how is responsibility shared?

In the conventional concept of organized education\(^{17}\) power is skewed by a relationship of deference between teacher and learner\(^{18}\). Program participants surrender degrees of personal power and aspects of relational control, supposedly in order to accomplish the greater purpose of maximizing learning outcomes. Ideally moral leadership, ethical conduct, content-expertise, and teaching skills combine in an educator to not only justify the learners' entering into such a

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\(^{16}\) Jarvis, 1992, p. 32

\(^{17}\) Carlson (1971) and Ohliger (1971) suggest that education perpetuates a learner’s sense of inadequacy through culturally sanctioned powers of certification which sustain both the status quo of the social elite while sustaining program viability. According to Carlson and Ohliger learners are not empowered to learn but disempowered through a social value of lifelong learning.

\(^{18}\) Taylor (1987) suggests that “an understanding of this role of authority in the learners’ processes would seem pivotal in effectively facilitating that learning” (p. 193).
submissive position but also to facilitate the extending of program leadership to the learner. A skilled educational leader recognizes the importance of each person developing power and control over their own knowledge (Gagne, 1974; Griffith, 1987; Gestrelius, 1995). Griffith (1987) defines a healthy and safe level of power and control as that which enhances “the ability to do”; it is not a matter of “power over or power with” (p. 59). Learners need to leave programs not only with content-specific advancement but also with the enhanced sense of agency which is stimulated through personal awareness and growth.

**Learning Relationships**

Context, climate, and social dynamics of power and control form the foundation for the learning relationships of education. These are not discreet features but are interactive conditions which develop according to the relational skills of each person.

**Teachers**  
*Teaching is about influence*.

In the cultures of learning and education, the word ‘teacher’ is charged with a complexity of meanings. Profiles of teachers convey status, power, and control over knowledge acquisition/production throughout society. Lindeman (1956) describes the stereotypical educator as “the oracle who speaks from the platform of authority” (p. 160). Learner experiences with this type of educator seem “to cause the individual to distrust [his/her] own experience and to stifle significant learning. Hence I have come to feel that the outcomes of teaching are either unimportant or hurtful” (Rogers, 1969, p. 277). From these perspectives, teaching is a problematic activity.

Schon (1987) interprets Rogers’ underlying intentions by centering the discussion on the ideal role for teaching, where learners strive to know how to learn and teachers are alongside to

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19 Gage, 1972
help them. Schon claims that Rogers has not lost interest in being a teacher, but that he has reframed teaching in a way that gives central importance to his own role as a learner. He elicits self-discovery in others, first by modelling for others, as a learner, the open expression of his own reflections (however absurd they may seem) and then, when others criticize him, by refusing to become defensive. He believes that the very expression of thoughts and feelings usually withheld, manifestly divergent from one another, has the potential to promote self-discovery (p. 92).

Lukmann (1997) extends this point of view by suggesting a shift from trying to know how to teach to one of understanding what makes learning possible.

Educators model for learners how learning should be approached (Bandura, 1986). “How we teach is what we teach” stresses Cuban (1993, p. 185). Boud (1987) acknowledges the influence of teachers on learners and on the learning climate, but cautions that a singular emphasis on ‘modelling’ overlooks the dilemma of modelling one’s teaching practice on the skills of a remembered teacher which may leave one unprepared for the demands of an educational culture very different from that in which one learned (p. 222).

Tom (1984) picks up the relational themes of the social context: “teaching...is a dynamic activity...a relationship between teacher and student” (p. 11) in which, writes Eisner (1991), teaching works as an artistic mediative function between content and learner (p. 11). According to Rogers (1969), in order to fulfill that function, the teacher “does not teach, but serves” (p. 92). Tom (1984) asserts that therefore no objectively effective and instrumentally based teaching skills are assignable because “the typical teaching problem may well have multiple appropriate solutions and because teacher-student influence is both bidirectional and mediated by a variety of factors...teaching is normative and situational”(p. 147); “teaching is not a form of practice under the firm control of the practitioner” (p. 73). Describing the act of teaching, Eisner (1979) writes
that “teaching is a form of human action in which many of the ends achieved are emergent - that is to say, found in the course of interaction with students rather than preconceived and efficiently attained” (p. 154).

Schon (1987) describes the functions of a teacher to be: “(1) to ask what the student wants the project to be...conveying the message that personal preferences ought to be expressed and used to guide the project; (2) to encourage [the student] to try to produce what she likes...‘opening up the possibilities’; (3) to [be able to] judge the results of her work in terms of her effectiveness in ‘realizing those qualities she defined’ ” (p. 152). Caffarella (1988) rounds out general views about teaching by expressing a dichotomy consistent with many teaching organizations: “teachers...have two primary roles: to be content specialists and/or facilitators of the learning process” (p.108). Berkowitz (1997) focuses on the effect of teaching: “the best way to document how well you teach is to show how effectively students learn” (p. 16). It appears that there is one common dilemma: whose definition of learning?

**Learners/Learning**

Oddly, the definition and manner of use of the term learning has caused relatively little controversy among theorists...the tendency is to allow the socially accepted meaning to prevail. The difficulties that do emerge in usage show up when theoretical processes and mechanisms for explaining learning are proposed.

Over the years nearly every conceivable form of [learning] theory has been seriously proposed...theorizing about learning is an exercise in generalization and often can be as polemical as it seeks to be empirical.

I began to study learning through a lens of content delivery or knowledge acquisition

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21 op cit., p. 399
because that was the dominant model of education. As I confirmed that ‘learning’ is a labyrinth of processes and outcomes which cannot easily be defined, I shifted the study to consider which approaches facilitate learning by helping learners ‘learn how to learn’. In this approach to learning, people take what they know as the framework from which to work with what they don’t know in order to develop, to grow (Kidd, 1973; Smith, 1982; Brookfield, 1986).

I reframed learning in terms of experience, education as a way to achieve purposive learning by organizing and managing experiences, and formal education as adding an organizational context and the presumption of an educator-learner relationship. From a similar perspective, Osborne (1985) wrote that learning is

a change in our being-in-the-world, in our lived experience, which may include all aspects of our being but especially our perceptual, symbolic, and emotional processes. It is more than an intellectual change. It can disrupt the inertia of our prevailing state of consciousness. A change in world view can also be described as a change in attitude or disposition with accompanying feeling states. It is the way we perceive/feel/think about our world/s (p.196).

Rogers (1969) calls this “self-appropriated learning” (p. 277). Evidence that experience has become learning is found through a “demonstrable new capacity” in any aspect of living (Griffin, 1983, p. 13).

Education, then, is an intentional ordering of experiences to achieve specific kinds of learning. Learner experiences occur in relationship with an ‘educator’ (and the educator’s area-of-expertise content). This relationship is designed to maximize particular kinds of desired learning and usually includes more than one learner, adding the element of a group dynamic within the educational context. In both delivery and evaluation, education tends to focus on the planned curriculum. Consequently, a myriad of hidden learning outcomes are overlooked (Cuban, 1993).

22 “What is to be learned can be learned from what is done” (Hare, 1993b, p. 108).
Echoing the earlier comments about the gap between the curriculum offered, the teaching which is presented, and the learning which occurs, Dewey (1938) points out the "pedagogical fallacy" of presuming that a person's only learning is what's being studied (p. 48). Maling and Keepes (1985) agree that "students learn what they are exposed to rather than what curriculum developers necessarily intended that they should learn" (p. 267).

Purposive learning usually requires a milieu for learners to imagine change, to strengthen the ability to learn how to learn, to develop persistent effort and goodwill, to acquire information with which to work, and to experience the opportunity of evaluating their perspectives. According to Pine and Horne (1969), learners are not 'taught', but through their relationship with a teacher, become motivated to learn. Much of the value attached to learning is derived from the expectation that learning will effect some change in one's skills, attitudes, understanding, capacity, attributes etc. Definitions imply that learning endures. Enduring implies life changing.

I investigated what seemed to be happening for learners when learning seemed to be (or not to be) taking place. I wondered if it mattered whether or not the learning was about emotive issues like fear and anger or about more instrumental issues like mechanics and construction? I decided that the focus questions chosen for the study would need to accept differences among learners and ask what pre-conditional aspects of learning might influence learning experiences. I became increasingly interested in the ecology of education when I realized that learning is a social experience, and compared what elements of a 'learning' climate and a social dynamic might be. My interest became centred on the interplay between teaching and learning. I could see that issues of power, trust, communication, goodwill, risk, ethics, commitment, attention, motivation, and safety were significant factors of those relationships. As my study moved towards understanding the social dynamic, safety continued to emerge as a potential 'umbrella' concept.
Social Dynamic/Group Dynamic

How complex social dynamics are if course tutors take seriously what students are experiencing²³.

A diffused social group becomes defined as a group dynamic when program participants move through introductions to the work of learning. The group dynamic will develop with or without guidance from the educator but, because of the pivotal importance of relationships to successful learning outcomes, educators have a fundamental responsibility to lead group development (Griffin, 1987; Hodgson & Reynolds, 1987; Hare, 1992; Hyde, 1992). The educator has most of the power and the responsibility to influence what sort of dynamic emerges: "[as the teacher] the atmosphere you create during the first hour of a class often determines the tone for the rest of the class sessions" (Apps, 1991, p. 78; Knowles, 1980, p. 224). "The behaviour of the instructor is, without a doubt, the single most potent force in establishing a social climate" (Knowles, 1980, p. 225). Tom (1994) suggests that educators create a "frame of the deliberate relationship".

A learning community "emerges from mutual communication, meaningful work, and empowering methods" (Shor, 1992, p. 259). It is important that individual learners are capable of sharing group goals (Hayes, 1989). There needs to be a "sense of inviting a range of voices and styles of communication within it" (Burbules, 1993, p. 7).

"Through identifying the similarities and differences in our perceptions of each other, we can encounter the boundaries of our own perceptions and reach the point where learning may begin" (Robertson, 1987, p. 85). The explicitly differentiated, negotiated, and supportively constructed social dynamic creates a context in which judgement and moral reasoning can be

²³ Boud & Griffin, 1987, p. 11
developed (Burbules, 1993, p. 70). Such a dynamic can encourage a practice art of heteroglossia\(^{24}\), the ability to “honour difference while at the same time finding common ground” (Fenstermacher, 1994, p. 5). Eisner (1991) goes further by asserting that the “genuinely good schools do not diminish individual differences, [they] expand them” (p. 17). Underscoring a fundamental tension, Burbules (1993) writes “we need to be similar enough for communication to happen, but different enough to make it worthwhile” (p. 31).

Tiberias and Billson (1991) suggest that content expertise, while essential, is only one ability educators must bring to their class: “The most effective leaders pay as much attention to resolving conflict, ensuring even participation, and testing group sentiment as they do to planning, keeping the group on task, and evaluating productivity” (p. 77). A relationship which protects people from each other decreases the potential for learning (Schon, 1987, p. 299). Educators need to create a context in which conflict is engaged free of coercion (Mecke, 1990, p. 207). The optimal learning site depends on finding common ground and creating non-compromising relational processes which establish a safe context in which challenges and conflicts can be skillfully explored. As Burbules (1993) suggests “without differences to play against, learning is impossible (p. 26).

Because a positive social dynamic increases the complexity and stability of learning (Long, 1983, p. 239; Mezirow, 1996, p. 170), educators need to acknowledge that a “keener awareness of group processes can enhance teaching effectiveness through improving participation levels, increasing individual and group motivation, stimulating enthusiasm, and facilitating communication” (Billson & Tiberias, 1991, p. 88). Group processes develop either explicitly or

\(^{24}\) See Haig-Brown’s (1991) treatment of the role of heteroglossia in interpretive research.
implicitly according to how the ‘rules’ of conduct are conveyed.

**Implicit/explicit process.**

Group processes are created and are either explicitly or implicitly developed. Implicit and explicit processes must be recognized by their effects and for what they are. Implicit rules of conduct are the result of explicitly negotiated understandings which were once integrated into the social dynamic, automatic, and internally controlling. The implicit process blocks change when rules and information are hidden so that power and responsibility cannot be shared. People cannot grow\(^25\) if misunderstandings cannot be approached, if relationships cannot change.

Explicit and implicit processes serve different and complimentary functions. Explicit is important (Griffin, 1987, p. 209; Hyde, 1992, p. 179) because making criteria explicit “helps to map the paths” (Peters, 1973, p. 28). Mapping makes dimensions and contours\(^26\) available and provides choices of action. Not only are procedures more efficient if clearly stated (Gestrelius, 1995, p. 137), but guiding protocols are also more available for discussion. Echoing Minnich, Reinharz (1985) suggested that “since interest-free knowledge is logically impossible, we should feel free to substitute explicit interests for implicit ones” (p. 17). The authentically explicit is not experienced as ‘rules’ (Burbules, 1993, p. 82) but as guidelines. Sork & Welock (1992) suggest that making process explicit is an ethical action (p. 117).

Explicitly negotiating collective guidelines for interacting, offers each person an equal opportunity to be both socially safe and socially skillful. Although communication skills may need to be taught explicitly (Hayes, 1989, p. 60), bringing the group’s process, dialogue, and stories

\(^{25}\) “Indeed a repeated need to invoke [implicit rules] is itself a sign of a dialogical relationship gone bad” (Burbules, 1993, p. 82).

\(^{26}\) of ideas, organizations, cultures, relationships, rules, etc
forth explicitly contributes to strong collaborative dynamics. A robust sense of community develops in contexts where learners are more able to explore their implicit assumptions and reflections in subjective as well as collective ways.

The explicit process is established, maintained, and frequently recognized, through the responsible efforts of the educator (Davies, 1987, p. 46). Hare (1993a) “what we choose to teach more directly...will constitute an important part of the resources [learners] will have available to bring to the problems and issues they will face” (p. 11). If experience is open to exploration and negotiation, it has the potential to change.

One change important for the development of commitment in learners is a transformation of learners’ perceptions about the dynamics of learning from the ascribed needs of a program to their own felt needs. For learners to explicitly “name in their own way the processes they are experiencing, is an empowering skill” (Griffin, 1987). Making ideas, feelings, and cultural norms explicit is to share power, information, and process.

Burbules (1993) suggests that ‘modelling’ becomes a powerful way to educate when what is modelled is also made explicit. Educators create a true learning context by taking responsibility for making their practice explicit. What’s more, “in order to exert control over practice and not simply react to it, we must be explicit not only about what we do but also about what it is that structures what we do” (Cherryholmes, 1988, p. 6). Where a ‘clarifying or negotiating of process’ is explicit, then relational, communicative, and critical skills are developed.

27 If explicit process is conveyed with what Hyde (1993b) calls a “self-conscious false note” which lacks communicative or relational skill, then it comes across as “manipulative, calculating” (p. 127).
The negotiating of group norms is a key area for explicit approaches because the cultural rules by which a group functions determine how relationship develops, power is distributed, and safety procured.

**Group norms.**

- keep safety issues safe
- develop the group’s dialogic language
- seek common ground
- increase relational and communication skills

There are subtle but significant differences between the idea of negotiating guidelines for conduct in relationship among individuals, and the concept of rules or codes. The word negotiation implies reciprocity of input with equalized power and control enacted through joint responsibility. Rules and codes sound imposed by external power. The process of negotiation not only shares power but also builds power within the negotiating group. Negotiation is an intragroup activity, engaged anew with each new group or the arrival of a new participant.

The research project identifies many safety issues which need to be negotiated as group norms. The negotiation of group norms can be accomplished in a brief amount of time, presuming that participants have basic relational skills. A capacity for dialogue presumes relational and communication skills able to develop sufficient common ground to carry discussion. The thesis suggests that if those skills are not present, then the capacity of the group to engage in learning together is significantly constrained - whether the negotiation of group norms occurs or not.

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28 remembering that goodwill and commitment are preconditional qualities in the process

29 for example: dialogue, negotiation, relationship, power, control, agency, challenge, risk, change, planning, policy, administration, culture and so on
Schon (1987) summarizes: “building a relationship conducive to learning begins with the... establishment of a contract that sets expectations for the dialogue: what will [teacher] and student give to and get from each other? How will they hold each other accountable?” (p. 167). Hare (1993b) adds that explicit norms act as a “checklist to help cover important factors” (p. 97). Clear norms negotiated at the beginning are the foundation for the social dynamic (Carbines, 1989; Billion & Tiberias, 1991; Cervero & Wilson, 1995). The social dynamic happens. At issue here is the degree of educator leadership and the amount of support for learner input which is provided within each given program.

Another aspect of group norms is that learning occurs through the process of negotiation. Teachers model communication, relational skills are acquired or perfected, conflicts or problems are entered into in safe ways, and the best solutions are drawn from shared goals, values, and beliefs based on commitment and goodwill. Prior to content delivery, the experience of learning how to learn is begun, and learning relationships are developed through the processes of learning.

**Processes of Learning**

Because our understanding of the nature of learning is limited in many ways, a discussion of processes of learning may seem unsatisfactory. The questions I asked about learning related to how we learn how to learn - what learning requires of us in order to for us to be successful learners. Before I considered what ‘learning how to learn’ meant, I began with a survey of theories of learning and then concentrated on a selection of theories which most seemed to cover elements of social dynamics and individual challenges of learning.

**Selected Theories of Learning**

Broadly theorizing about learning is an art of speculation because learning theories tend to provide guidelines for thinking about learning programs and the work of educators without clearly
defining what learning is. Different theoretical approaches identify important issues but none have
gelled into a predominant and encompassing theory of learning. However, individual theoretical
themes contribute to overall understanding, and each perspective may offer unique and valuable
insights. Clustered thematically, compatible approaches may make useful contributions to the
different demands by various organizational and instructional aspects on educational cultures.\(^{30}\)

The theoretical approach I based my study on frames learning as occurring within social
experiences and also emphasize the importance of learners acquiring the skills of ‘learning how to
learn’. These approaches combine learning as a developmental process with issues of cultural
relationship, patterns of learning, and learning as an intersubjective skill\(^{31}\) by drawing connections
from one theory to another.

At one time I considered focusing my research on Fischer’s (1980) elegant theory of
learning. Figure 1, on the following page, introduces Fischer’s Skill Theory Metaphor for
Learning, which resembles the design of fractal geometry. Fischer begins his theory at the point
where learning begins, after all the preconditions have been met. Tracking only the processes of
ongoing learning as it happens within the individual, the model maps qualitative and quantitative
changes in a multi-dimensional concept. It can be applied to the process of learning anything.
When I applied the model to the process of learning about safety, I found that it helped me to
recognize the presence of unasked questions as well as reassure myself about the investigative
process. Fischer’s concepts about how experience is organized and engaged within the learner

\(^{30}\) Such as financial management, program planning, teacher education, instructional
techniques, social impact, evaluation, marketing, learning relationship, policy, research, goal
setting, certification, accountability, ethics, decision making, to name a few.

\(^{31}\) Such as ‘metacognition’, dialogue, reflection, learning to learn, reciprocal power
dynamics etc
continues to guide the way I approach this project - from the way I have organized the thesis to the encouragement I draw from the thesis project’s movement from a Tier One, Level Two pairing of ideas to a Level Four development of interconnected abstract concepts. Although the model accounted for most key elements of learning Fischer himself recognized that crucial relational issues such as safety lay outside of his model. His own critique (see the notes attached to Figure 1, p. 41) returned my attention to ecological issues of learning. My efforts to meld the theories of Fischer and Vygotskii’s led me to the models of Maslow, Lufts, and Engestrom.
Fischer's metaphor should be viewed as a multi-dimensional holographic image. Level I is a simple set, or one original idea. Level II is the application and mapping of the idea in several ways. Level III is the creation of a system about the mapped idea. Level IV creates a complex system of systems about the idea. Out of this process emerges one original idea, which becomes Level I of the next tier.

I offer an oversimplified example: if at Level I you might learn to tie a knot, at Level II you might experiment with knots; at Level III you might create different kinds of knots; and at Level IV you create macrame.

Fischer noted one limitation of his model - that, within a program, there is still the need to deal with processes by which skills are accrued. "No processes are designated to deal explicitly with the way skills are accessed. A person may have available the skill needed to perform a particular task or show a specific behavior and yet, in the appropriate context, may fail to use that skill. Skill theory does not deal directly with phenomena of this type, which are commonly classed under the rubric of motivation. What makes a person do one thing instead of another when she is capable of doing either?" (p. 524).
I continued to follow one stream of the research on learning by considering the effect of the social climate on the internal learning processes of an individual and began with Vygotskii's work (1978 [1932-1937]) on the social nature of learning. Vygotskii anchored learning in relationship and communicative process. The social learning approach identified the process by which understanding emerged as “inherently a social act” (Mezirow, 1996, p. 160). To Vygotskii, the medium for learning is the action of the interpersonal relationship on the developmental readiness of the learner. Learning potentials of individual are perceived as 'zones of proximal development' - intrasubjective states in which learning will be maximized when integral factors of ability and interaction are synchronized: (1) when the readiness of the learner is maximized, (2) when the learners edge of uncertainty lags slightly behind the competence level of a learning companion, (3) in an atmosphere which values learning, learning will be optimal. In this scenario, the ‘edge’ is the learner’s zone of proximal development. Educators have the skills with which to help learners recognize their individual zone (Vygotskii, 1978). Waldrop (1992) calls this zone by another name: “‘complexity’ - the edge between order and chaos”.

Appreciating the importance of contextual safety for the learner recognized that the tensions inherent in the risk-taking of learning must be balanced in a productive way. A focus in Vygotskii’s work was on the way learners who were one level more advanced in a particular domain provided a tension of stimulating and supportive challenge for learners in the ‘proximal’ level of understanding. Figure 2, as follows, provides a picture of how Vygotskii’s research suggested that the key to the accomplishment of strong positive learning outcomes is the social dynamic of learning in which participants could participate (with good faith) in dialogue with others.
Figure 2: Adaptation of Vygotskii’s (1978) Zone of Proximal Development.

Outside of Zone: Unsupported, uncomfortable, unsafe social dynamic. Not a learning opportunity.

Feelings of frustration, anxiety, distress, fear, not belonging, threat, isolation, preservation.

Teaching as a Helping Support to Agency and Independence.

Zone of Proximal Development
"LEARNING ZONE"
(Vygotskii, 1978)

Safe social dynamic

Present developmental level, prior knowledge & experience, skills, attributes, attitudes.

Feelings of uncertainty, questioning, disjuncture, challenge, risk, agency, growth.

Maslow describes necessary conditions which precede advanced learning. Theoretical continuities link Maslow's placement of 'safety' as the first psychological factor in his learning hierarchy (Maslow, 1968 & 1973; Boshier, 1977) with Vygotskii's zone of proximal development. At the lower levels of the learning hierarchy of conditions, Maslow understood himself to be outlining things as they are, not (at that point) attempting to create a new model. Learners prepare for significant learning by satisfying essential survival needs: first, the basic physiological survival needs must be met, then secondly, safety needs, and thirdly, the need to belong, to be in social relationships which sustain physiological well-being and the sense of safety.

Luft (1984) created a graphical representation of safety and learning in the social context with the "Johari Window", a diagnostic tool for identifying learning transactions as they occur. Figure 3, on the following page, was his illustration of how the 'Johari Window' demonstrated conditions of learning as outcomes of risk-taking in relationship, where confidence in what is known is suspended in order to consider new information. The 'Johari Window' adapted Vygotskii's model by moving from the idea of social transactions within an individual learner to one of many concurrent social learning transactions. While Luft's diagram includes the potential for a multiplicity of learning occurrences, the appraisal of learning is still centred on the individual learner, and how external influences affect the process.

Engestrom's (1994) model for workplace learning resembled a combination of Vygostkii and Luft; he used similar terminology and graphical representation to discuss the effects of workplace learning. Engestrom reversed the direction of the transaction to demonstrate how learning accomplished by an individual flows back to the community. He made the point that learning to learn as an individual achievement improved the learning culture within a social group.
Figure 3: Safety in Learning - an adaptation of Luft’s (1984) Johari window

Note: Lufts identifies different types of learning, from the conscious to the unconscious. He suggests that learning dynamics flow from community to individual. Information flows, through a mediating experience which combined safety and risk, to open quadrant, where learning will occur.

\[\text{Known to self} \quad \text{Known to others} \quad \text{Unknown to self} \quad \text{Unknown to others}\]

\[\text{I Open} \quad \text{II Hidden (self-disclosure)} \quad \text{III Blind (feedback)} \quad \text{IV Unknown (potential)}\]

\[\text{Risk} \quad \text{Safety}\]

32 taken from Gladding (1994) p.125
The purpose of introducing selected theories of learning was to establish a credible framework within which to discuss how learning occurs - in the sense that educators, if they presume to teach something, need to be aware what they are trying to achieve with their learners.

**Learning to Learn**

Knowing how to learn is the most basic knowledge there is - acquiring the tools with which to know oneself, one's community, and one's way in the world. These tools include a capacity for gathering information with unbiased inquisitiveness, critically thinking about conflicting ideas, evaluating competing ideas for linkages with which to structure a reasoned argument, and simultaneously acting on data while remaining open to the presence of other data.

If education is about learning, teaching is about helping. Helping offers caring and competence: caring to build learning relationships with and among others; competence about particular knowledge or skills which provide the framework to help mastery grow. Learning is about information, skill, and attitudes: (1) how to perceive and attend to details; (2) gaining vocabulary and means of expression; (3) recognizing what is useful among data; (4) noticing the significantly unexpected; and (5) applying new learning with (6) ongoing methods of evaluation. Knowing how to learn can help us choose a good teacher, and guide us in working collaboratively with others. A skillful learner can critique, express, adjust, and integrate.

The 'how to' aspect may be problematic if considered only from a procedural approach, which implies a technical approach to become a skillful learner. Certainly 'how' is about means,
but means may be fluid, adaptive, process-based agency rather than instrumentality. In the same way as expressions such as how to meditate, how to heal, how to transcend indicate guidance rather than instruction, so does 'how to learn'. I think we can acknowledge the semantic limitations embedded in the concept of 'how to' and still let elements of agency and responsiveness infuse our use of the term.

Learning to learn is acquiring the capacity to evaluate oneself and one's processes (Fuhrmann & Weissburg, 1978, p. 140; Seaman & Fellenz, 1989, p. 154), by having a broad range of cognitive and emotional abilities which are responsive to new situations (Bloom, 1956; Gestrelius, 1995; Mezirow, 1996). Individuals need to know how to learn in order to understand themselves, relate to others, and find a valued place in their culture (Kidd, 1959; Fenstermacher, 1986; Hare, 1993, Goleman, 1995). When Boud & Griffin (1987) remind educators of the obvious fact that 'only learners can learn' (p. 12) they are trying to highlight the fact that learning occurs after the attention of a program participant is focused on what is happening. No matter how important particular content areas might be to learners, the extent to which they are motivated and paying attention is the degree to which they may, within their natural abilities, succeed. At issue is the realization that within all education programs, educators are teaching their students how to learn - whether they understand that to be so or not.

Our learning defines our identity and our ability to meet our needs (Edwards, 1991, p. 89). Griffin writes "I equate naming one's learning process with naming one's gifts" (p. 218). Carl Rogers (1969) adds, "I find that another way of learning for me is to state my own uncertainties, to try to clarify my puzzlement, and thus get closer to the meaning that my experience actually seems to have" (p. 277). Bruner (1996) suggests criteria for assessing how well we know how to
learn by constructing four questions which asks (1) what we know, (2) how we came to know it, (3) what it means to us, and (4) what do we do when we get ‘stuck’.

The purpose of knowing how to learn is to understand the nature of the challenges we face and be able to imagine strategies for responding. A capacity for learning how to learn, and for acquiring an intrinsic motivation for learning, increases in safe groups (Griffith, 1987, p. 60). If educators are not teaching learners how to learn, the rhetorical question needs to be asked: what else are they teaching?

Educational organizations usually operate as though learning and teaching are synonymous (Burnaby, 1994, (p. 38). The learner is regarded as a discreet entity, reacting to content. The first task, then, is to clarify whether or not learning is an individual activity or if the social context is of fundamental significance. When Lindeman wrote “education proceeds by means of communication, and all forms of communication are social products” (1926, p. 148), he recognized basic elements of society -- communication in the social dynamic. These elements interact almost symbiotically and their effects are reciprocal: on the one hand, “learning is social” (Davies, 1987, p. 45) and on the other hand, “all social processes are learned” (Jarvis, 1992, p. 32). Once the social context was recognized as the catalyst and construct for learning, related factors of learning process - such as the risks of learning and the role of safety - could be discussed.

**Risk in Learning**

_In all systems that depend on authority, even duly constituted and representative authority, all of these factors seem to pose risks by opening discussion of currently institutionalized authority. And they are risky. Education is risky, for it fuels the sense of possibility._ (Bruner, 1996, p. 42)

34Consciousness, reflection, breadth of dialogue, and negotiation
Attention to the group dynamic - its norms of conduct and its climate - creates the atmosphere for learning which supports the processes of learning. Learning process includes elements of risk, safety, agency, and challenge. To learn is to risk a sense of security about one’s confidence in knowing something by choosing to be challenged.

Brookfield (1990) agrees that “the single greatest cause of resistance to learning is fear of the unknown” (p. 150). Hyde (1992) elaborates: “change contains several definite risks...it is risky to display shortcomings in front of other [learners] or to ask for help...risky to deviate from the relatively familiar”(p. 174). Taylor (1987) elaborates that the risks of change inherent in learning lead, at least temporarily, to...

...the loss of a frame of reference, a way of doing things, and, consequently, confidence in oneself. It includes the fear of uncertainty and mental chaos as well as the possibility that one will be discovered by others to be inadequate (p. 191).

Burbules (1993) specifies that the “communication and relationship on which learning depends is risky” (p. 69) because, as Griffith (1987) observes, even a ‘neutral’ environment feels tense because “risk is an essential component of interdependence...one risks not only making mistakes, but being mistaken” (p. 59). At best, “there is a dynamic interplay between two countervailing forces. On the one hand our conscious egos are striving for stability; on the other hand, our own growing or evolving principle is pushing us to expand our consciousness” (Weiser, 1987, p. 99).

Zemke (1995) knits this together by suggesting that increased safety in the learning environment allows increased risk-taking among program participants which yields learning.

Given the reasoned perspectives of theorists such as Brookfield, Burbules, Knowles, Taylor, and others, I wonder why contrary beliefs which promote the idea that fear yields growth and learning still prevail. An expression some people typically use to convey intense and complex
learning experiences is: 'on the other side of fear is growth'. Such statements may foster beliefs that fear and growth are symbiotic processes. If we explore these attitudes about fear and learning, we find that a crucial transition between fear and growth has been under-recognized. If one were to feel only fear, there would be only the pulling back without the growth, because "fear inhibits learning" (Heguet, 1996, p. 39).

If learning is the task, what might be the catalyst for a shift from anxiety to agency, from old ways to new possibilities. Qualities such as focus, commitment, openness to new information, effort, a sense of agency, and productive social dialogue often gel in ways which transform an experience from pulling back in fear to one of rising to meet a challenge. In a safe context taking a risk equates with meeting a challenge; successfully engaging in challenge enhances a learner’s personal agency and increases a disposition for learning.

Waldrop (1992) calls the edge between order and chaos "complexity" - a space of cooperation and challenge, where negotiation and risk-taking break down old barriers and discover new visions. Whitehead (1929) refers to the edge of the learning relationship, the point of strongest connection, where learning occurs like a ‘romance’ - the feelings of safety and relational contact where one can take risks with one’s sense of security about pre-existing knowledge or understanding and still feel confident that the learning relationship will remain trustworthy and engaged through the changes inherent in learning anything. Friere calls this a paradoxical experience in which he is ‘cultivating’ his fear (Shor & Friere, 1987, p. 56). I call this safety - where agency grows between fear and transformation.

If safety is the bridge between fear and the risk-taking which precedes transformation, we

35 Conversely, in an unsafe context the risk/challenge situation becomes one of fear, threat, and discomfort which leads to a loss of agency due to insufficient personal power and control.
need to understand the form and function of risk-taking. Svinicki suggests that:

if we accept the view of learning as risk-taking, we can begin to confront the factors that discourage students from taking risks, and build a class environment where learning becomes less of a risk, or where the risk-taking in learning becomes valued instead of dreaded. Both of these directions require that instructors develop a trusting relationship with students. If learning involves risk-taking, teaching involves trust building. (1989, p.1).

Risk-taking is a precursor to learning (Calkins, 1986; Short, 1990; Chevalier, 1994; Newman, 1994)

If safety is the bridge -- the necessary condition between the unknown of risk-taking and the agency of risk-taking -- how do we understand or construct safety?

**The Role of Safety in Learning**

Because this study explores a primitive assumption, I found no studies based on the role of safety in learning. I **did** find overwhelming evidence of the ubiquitous presence of the assumption throughout the literature. I found **no** substantive references to the positive importance of an unsafe climate or a threatening relationship.

Safety was discussed from several perspectives throughout the study and all of the data included lie under the umbrella concept of safety. Chapter One provides an introductory framework, while asserting that, as an open-textured concept, safety may never be ‘defined’ in the positivist sense. The concepts were further explored throughout all areas of the literature search. Descriptions of safety emerged from an awareness that to develop group relational processes might be a more effective approach to conditioning a learning event for optimum results than to just structure procedures and curriculum.

The physical or structural integrity of an environment, and the criminal control of its society, are usually the biggest safety issues people tend to think about at first. However, these concerns are usually determined by factors external to the learning process. This study accepts
that, as a general statement, where physical or social safety is in jeopardy, relational safety is impeded. For the sake of narrowing the discussion about safety to areas directly influenced by teacher and learner, physical safety is taken as a given for this project. I agree with Long's statement that "concern for the impact of the physical environmental conditions on the social environment and ultimately upon learning has not been adequately manifest in... education research" (1983, p. 259).

The initial literature search focused on two tasks: first, to determine what assumptions educators hold about a possibly crucial relationship between safety and learning; and second, to get a sense from the literature of criteria for determining what safety means, for identifying examples of safe practice, and for recognizing the effects of safety. The interviews were designed to investigate all aspects of safety, and discussion about related factors such as risk, relationship, power and control were considered part of the project's explication of safety.

The assumption that safety is a precondition for learning pervades the literature; references are endemic. Major texts on learning either overtly or implicitly presume a crucial role for safety in learning. I have not cited these literature references because I found no cases where the assumption was not at least tacitly implied. Explicit references such as "after a safe learning climate has been established." are easy to recognize. Slightly less directly, Malcolm Knowles comments:

people need to feel safe and unthreatened. They feel free to express themselves openly, to reveal their real feelings...they feel liked. Mutual trust and mutual responsibility...climate is collaborative. A place in which the emphasis is on the learning, not on the teaching" (Knowles, 1980).

Implicit comments may be less obvious, but identifiable nonetheless. The following are typical: Whitehead (1929) "the combination of imagination and learning requires...freedom from
restraint, freedom from harassing" (p. 146); Brookfield (1990) "underlying all significant
learning is the element of trust" (p. 163). While Brookfield (1986) does not explicitly frame his
guidelines for teaching as safety issues, his six principles for effective practice are based on
valuing safety in learning (p. 9). Pine and Horne’s (1969) twelve conditions of learning are based
on elements identifies in the study as safety issues. Typical of the literature, Brookfield touches
on the suggestion that an explicit commitment to safety issues within learning situations would
have innumerable implications (p. 11). Brookfield refined his concepts about safety and the social
learning context at the 1994 AERA conference when he suggested that learning be viewed as a
critical process, and that group dynamics were important support for learners because “they
provide a safe haven...through which they could make sense of the changes they were
experiencing” (Brookfield, 1994, p. 55)

According to a study by McDonald & Wood (1993), the three most frequently cited
ethical issues in adult education are safety issues: trust and confidentiality, treatment of the
reports that unequal power relationships within learning groups are sensed as threatening by
learners, preventing the development of agency among learners, and decreasing learner interaction
and participation (p. 182).

In a summary of what safety does, Jenkins suggests that “as students find it possible to

36 Conditions for learning: 1) active environment; 2) climate of respect; 3) climate of
acceptance; 4) atmosphere of trust; 5) climate of self-discovery; 6) non-threatening psychological
climate (i.e. ‘safe’); 7) climate of openness; 8) emphasis on uniquely personal nature of learning;
9) valuing diversity; 10) where errors and mistakes accepted as natural part of learning; 11) an
atmosphere in which ambiguity thrives; 12) emphasis on cooperative evaluation and
self-evaluation.

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accept each other and reaffirm each others’ value and worth...each of them will find greater personal security. And, as they are open to communication, they are then open to new stimulation and to learning” (1960, p. 57). For others, safety establishes survival and stability (Maslow, 1968): “motivated participants have largely satisfied lower order [safety] needs (Boshier, 1977, p. 93). Security becomes self-reinforcing (Svinicki, 1991, p. 106), and “no learning strategy can be truly beneficial unless students have constant practice in a non-threatening situation” (Brodie, 1988, p. 104). Weiten, Lloyd, and Lashley reinforce Maslow’s observations about safety and learning by stating that, [according to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs] accomplishment of one level of ‘need’, activates needs at the next level (1991, p. 50). For this and the other reasons, safety is necessary (Billion & Tiberias, 1991; Burbules, 1993; Brookfield, 1990; Knowles, 1980; Ormrod, 1995; Newman, 1995).

The preceding descriptions provide some detail with which to analyse and interpret participant responses to questions specifically asking about safety, and what counts as safety in practice. A graphical representation of an interdisciplinary analysis augments these comments by introducing additional material about what counts as safety, what is recognized as ‘not safe’, and how learning outcomes are affected.

**Graphical Representation of Safety in the Learning Context**

Summarizing the research, the learning climate was imagined on a continuum with ‘safe’ at the centre, with a passive condition of non-safety at one end and an active condition of non-safety at the other in order to focus on the role of safety in learning. On page 59, Figure 4 depicts safety, stress, and challenge associated as one set of variables tied to learning performance, and shows where safety is located within a range of educational climates. The
appendix includes detailed notes because the interdisciplinary nature of the figure may include concepts and associations unfamiliar to some educators. In Figure 4, a safe learning climate is located in the middle of the continuum, the central area of a Yerkes-Dodson (1908) inverted u-shaped curve, where learning performance peaks.

The 'extremities' are clustered at either end of a 'climate continuum'. At one end, clusters of abusive or rejecting behaviours are grouped and labeled as being 'not safe'; and on the other end of the continuum pampering and controlling climates are also clustered and labeled as being 'not safe'. The former cluster includes actively negative or threatening learning atmospheres in which learners are blocked with tension to the extent that learning is minimal. The latter cluster may not be as easily detected as 'unsafe' because of its more passive nature. However, a controlled or pampered climate robs one of agency thereby restricting learning through a lack of sufficient energy and motivation to stimulate the optimal risk taking which facilitates learning (Dinkmeyer & Sperry, 1987). The research on stress (Selye, 1985; Seligman, 1983) shows that very low levels of stress (comparable to conditions in the pampering or controlled climate) reduce performance capacities just as effectively as do highly stressful negative climate (Apps, 1987; Gestrelius, 1995). Research on stress supports the distinctions drawn on the climate continuum.

Representation of safety in learning offers an incomplete but useful framework. Because unsafe conditions were excluded from the study, neither the constraints on learning which exist within the extreme areas, nor the nature of the transition from 'unsafe' to 'safe', were explored.

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38 The moderate and balanced level of stress, called 'eustress', is the optimum condition for peak performance and is compared with the capacity to engage the risks of learning which is found within the safe learning climate.
Figure 4: Safety and Learning - three comparative models of stress and performance

(a) stress and performance

```
  high

  PERFORMANCE

  low

  low

  STRESS  high
```

Just the right amount of stress

'bustress'

(b) learning and challenge

```
  high

  LEARNING

  low

  low

  CHALLENGE  high

  Safe

  not safe

  not safe

  : boredom

  : over-protection

  : threat

  : anxiety/fear
```

(c) learning performance

```
  high

  LEARNING

  PERFORMANCE

  low

  low

  STRESS/CHALLENGE  high

  'bustress'

  safe

  not safe

  agency

  mastery

  not safe
```
A Tentative Theoretical Framework

Jerome Bruner’s (1996) summary of perspectives about education paralleled my conclusions from the literature review: “they emphasize the powers of consciousness, reflection, breadth of dialogue, and negotiation” (p. 42). Unwilling to hypothesize on the basis of preliminary evidence, I scanned the literature for a ready-made framework with which to anticipate a theoretical framework drawn from the data gathered during interviews. I found a useful model in a translated monograph on comparative European studies in learning. Voigt (1992) suggested that educators need to seek guidelines for constructing safety-based approaches to teaching, by using some of the practices developed for articulating scientific operations:

“science has to provide didactic guidelines for the design of such teaching-learning processes. The following ideas would provide guidelines for such a toolkit; it would be designed to:

1. Enhance awareness

2. Further insight into widely varying criteria of content selection and content structuring according to goals set

3. Enhance awareness of inseparably interlocked...teaching methods, the widest possible repertory is to be provided

4. Make aware the connection between socialization and learning. People of different socialization in families, schools, jobs will show different learning behaviour. This has to be interpreted correctly and considered in course designs.

5. The importance of interaction processes for learning is to be highlighted. Since interaction processes can help or hinder learning...more attention is required to intragroup and intergroup behaviour

6. Open curricula...must be developed; teaching and learning aids must be prepared permitting choice of content, methods, and media to the teaching staff.

These guidelines for a future direction for education can all be summed up in a demand for integration of general, political, and vocational education with a goal of helping a population learning how to learn as a social unit” (p. 42).
In this chapter I have identified and investigated key aspects of the issues associated with safety and learning which were uncovered by a preliminary literature search based on the research questions. The complexity and number of issues covered in this chapter underscore the process of discovery which moved from general questions to specific details. Issues which were brought forward in this chapter were used to develop the interview questions: what might safety mean, why is safety important, who is responsible for safety, what criteria identify safety, what implicit or explicit processes contribute to the learning dynamic, and how might a safe social dynamic be developed? Chapter Three outlines the research methodology designed to respond to these questions and the underlying purposes of the study.
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

I was interested in talking with educators who had, outside of any association with me, spontaneously linked safety and learning\textsuperscript{39}. I wanted to find out what safety meant to them, what they understood the safety elements in education to be, and how might ideas about safety fit in with teaching practice. I hoped to ask questions which drew forth examples and discussion capable of clarifying the issues and able to suggest a tentative safety-based model for thinking about teaching and learning. The research framework needed to support a dialogic study, not only with the gathering of interview data but also by allowing me to move back and forth between the literature and the transcripts as I worked to interpret findings. I needed access to good quantitative research already available as well as the opportunity to interpret data in possibly new ways. The research methodology was designed to fulfil these criteria.

Research Framework

In order to focus on the sense of education as a cultural site, I chose an interpretive methodology developed within a broad ethnographic framework, influenced by critical theory approaches to learning processes. McIntyre's (1993) description of critical theory as a blending of literature and interview data into an “alternative view of the dominant paradigms” (p. 87) fit with how I understood the work of clarifying assumptions. Critical ethnography, by focusing research on the “commonsense assumptions\textsuperscript{40}” behind processes of learning and issues of power and control, offered a useful design with which to guide the project.

The intent was to uncover what significant issues are suggested by the assumptions about

\textsuperscript{39} Again, throughout the chapter, ‘safety’ is accepted as referring to the presumed relationships between safety and learning which form the basis for the study.

\textsuperscript{40} Thomas, 1993, p. 3
safety, to discover why there are assumptions instead of well-developed theory, and to explicate the meaning of safety in terms of criteria with which to recognize and apply safety to teaching.

McIntyre (1993) suggests that critical ethnographic approaches are useful because they “interpret the missing contexts of...learning” (p. 89) such as safety. But, echoing Minnich, McIntyre also cautions that such a study may expose the irony that “critical theory, when pressed into the service of North American...learning theory...was stripped of its power to criticize the institutional context” (p. 89). This prepared me to consider that, while the techniques might successfully draw clear and useful data from the research questions, educational leaders may not be easily influenced by research findings.

Two factors supported the choice of methodology. First, I wanted to hear how educator practitioners understood safety, and by what criteria they recognized safety in their programs. Second, I wanted to follow a collaborative approach to considering the issues. Educators are experienced professionals, able to express their thoughts about their practice and to bring examples into discussion. I wanted to tap into that reservoir of understanding. Finally, there was a pragmatic reason for locating the research framework within what are called the qualitative model and ethnographic techniques: a substantial body of literature sufficient to engage the broad range of challenges I expected to encounter.

**Qualitative/Interpretive Approach**

Qualitative\(^1\) approaches such as the gathering and interpretation of interview data

\(^1\) The term ‘qualitative’ may be epistemologically problematic because it is a positivist term constructed to place interpretive methodology in counterpoint to quantitative research. However, the study is not a comparative analysis of research design, and the research literature includes a substantial background of writings described as qualitative methodologies which were helpful during the research design phase of the project.
provided a methodology with which to examine the 'primitive\(^{42}\) assumptions underlying the work educators do. Interpretative research is responsive to the demands of the data by creating a format for exploring complex relationships among developing ideas. "Qualitative researchers ask the primordial question 'What's going on here?'" (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 1993, p. 99). Revealing what's going on is a process of defamiliarization or of "making the familiar strange" (Van Maanen, 1995, p 20), which can make a hidden assumption available for discussion. Engaging 'what's going on' as it is happening may be done if the research design is flexible enough to adjust in response to emerging data.

The research project needed a design framework able to guide my listening skills so that the ideas and experiences most important to participants were recognized, explored, and understood. Methodology needed to accommodate new information in a changing project while retaining cohesion throughout the study. What is often called qualitative research includes diverse methodologies. I chose to use a combination of ethnographic and critical theory techniques because of their responsiveness to issues of relationship and learning.

**Ethnographic Model**

Many researchers suggest\(^{43}\) that qualitative and ethnographic research approaches are synonymous to the extent that they seek to reveal some aspect of culture, culture being broadly defined (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Smith, 1992; Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 1993; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Van Maanen, 1995). I defined education as a culturally laden practice and the

\(^{42}\) Cherryholmes, 1988

\(^{43}\) This is still a contestable view according to other researchers, who define culture more specifically, and suggest that not all qualitative research is influenced by culture. I feel that cultural norms pervade interpretive research, especially in the unavoidably politicized domains of education, and so have cited researchers who suggest similar views.
social contexts of adult education as being micro-cultures which develop within each learning program. My defining education and the social dynamics of learning programs this way led to my being asked to elaborate on my choices of methodology.

*Human experience* is cultural (Goodenough, 1976, p 5). Ethnographic techniques "...examine how a culture becomes a reality" (Van Maanen, 1995, p 13). Ethnography "shapes what will be seen" (Van Maanen, 1995, p 15) and has as much to do with creating concepts of culture as with describing culture. "Defamiliarization is...an emerging strategy for ethnographic representation" (op cit, p 20) where the "cultural portrait [which] exists within a context of already existing portraits" (op cit, p 30) may be revealed.

Wolcott (1995) was more specific in suggesting that culture is the "explicit conceptual orientation that provides the purpose and rationale for doing ethnography - gets there because the ethnographer puts it there" [his emphasis] (p 86). I was situating issues of safety within the developing relational dynamics of learning groups. 'Putting it there' requires a set of specifically designed techniques, so for this study, ethnography was both process and context.

Wolcott (1995) suggests that ethnographers can resist positivist challenges *and* enhance the quality of an ethnographic research project by identifying in detail the ethnographic techniques which have been applied specifically to a particular project. Individual techniques may not seem to create an ethnographic design, but, taken as a whole, they do.

**Ethnographic Techniques**

Wolcott (1995) further suggests that "culture is imposed" (p. 87) through implicit collective norms. Understanding learning, creating a social dynamic, negotiating norms of conduct or process, mitigating power relationships, and establishing forms of communication are cultural acts which, working together, create a ‘closed’ cultural group. Recognizing that this is so is at the
heart of the study; therefore another function of ethnographic approaches is to identify the often subliminal rules by which a social group functions.

Several ethnographic techniques identified by Van Maanen (1995) and Wolcott (1995) support the goals of this study. The methodology identifies education contexts as cultural activity, and includes interdisciplinary literature. Semi-structured interviewing which seeks context-specific examples in order to enhance the authenticity of the study (a way of learning the culture as it emerges) helps form the basis for an interpretive theory of the culture. Other techniques are particular to interpretive work: developing experimental dialogues between researcher and interviewee, focusing on the nature of the interpretation rather than on objective reporting, analyzing data in terms of praxis, remaining aware that "a way of seeing is also a way of not seeing" (Burke, 1935, p 70), and making the implicit explicit.

The inclusion of several critical theory techniques sharpened the interpretive lens. Critical theory contributed a focus on (1) the operational processes of learning, (2) making the implicit explicit, and (3) education's role in social and cultural reproduction (Wexler, 1987), and (4) the theoretical proximity between safety and control (Thomas, 1993; Creswell, 1994; Marshall & Rossman, 1995). The goal-driven quality of the research project is supported by "unpacking taken-for-granted views and detecting invisible but oppressive structures" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 9). The overall purpose may be 'making the obvious obvious' but the techniques for doing so emerge from the purposes of the study, the realities of the research participants, and the values of the researcher. Goetz & LeCompte (1984) purport that "educational ethnographers... have been most concerned with developing and applying theories of educational change... and instructional organization. Ethnographic design is especially suited to this level of theory construction" (p. 52).
Pilot Study (Winter 1995)

A pilot study was conducted during the winter of 1995, intended as both the second stage in developing a formal research design, and as an opportunity for confirming that the chosen methodology could provide trustworthy and relevant data. The pilot study was conducted in two phases. The first consisted of half-hour informal interviews with five participants in a pre-pilot study, intended to broadly evaluate and refine interview questions. When data received seemed related and relevant, the second phase, a formal pilot study was then conducted. Single one-hour audio-taped interviews with individual participants were transcribed, with written participant consent secured. A strong conceptual continuity seemed to be sustained from one transcript to the next. This enhanced confidence in the validity and reliability of the research design.

Pilot study supervision by faculty included evaluation at each stage: design, data gathering, and analysis. Phases of the pilot study were discussed in a graduate research seminar. In addition, study participants were invited to critique the methodology, interview questions, approaches of the interviewer, and the authenticity of the interpretation. Participants felt that the interpretation of data represented their views and perspectives. They also perceived the pilot study to be an initial phase of the thesis study and expressed their desire that pilot study interviews be included in the thesis data analysis.

The pilot study achieved three purposes: (1) confirming that the research design fit the goals of the project and the values of the researcher; (2) developing a series of semi-structured interview questions, which presented concepts in a clear and open way and elicited useful and comparable data; and (3) evaluating the primary research instrument: the approach and skills of the interviewer. The pilot study confirmed that several aspects of the study might be elusive in theory but that the research question was 'hot', 'thick', and a provocative a topic for practitioners.
Addressing a confusing and contentious assumption appeared to have the potential to make a substantive contribution to the field of adult education. And it seemed possible to frame questions in such a way as to begin with the general or conceptual and move to the instrumental. The pilot study refined the framework for the thesis project.

**Role of the Researcher**

In an interpretive study, the researcher is the instrument. "As a result, the biases, values, and judgements of the researcher become stated explicitly in the research report" (Creswell, 1994, p 147). I am pre-disposed to believe through my experience and study that safety is a crucial precondition for learning and that, furthermore, educators are implicitly aware that this is so. Situating myself is not only a task of identifying my biases. I remain open about my rationales behind methodological decisions, identify challenges and limitations, and claim that my work should be transparent to both participants and readers. I continue to invite disconfirming evidence and believe that the outcomes of any well designed study, conducted with integrity and with methodological skill, will produce useful results whether or not those results confirm the researcher's intuition.

My pursuit of the study has been encouraged by my combined discovery that the topic is as potent a one for educators as it is a marginalized one in the literature. I have established that the topic is an emotion and value laden issue among academics and practitioners. If confusing or

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44 For example, opening with "What does 'safety in learning' mean to you?" then asking "And what would that look like in practice?".

45 This may seem an incongruous statement, in view of the findings offered in Chapter Two. Those data however were drawn together from a broad search. Although taken as an underlying and given precondition for learning, and therefore named, safety is not engaged as a stand alone concept which might require definitions, operations, and evaluation.
controversial findings develop within the concluding discussions of this project in such a way as to stimulate interest in the nature of learning, the underlying purpose of the thesis will be fulfilled.

Participants

The project studied the assumptions of educators by interviewing them about their concepts and asking how those concepts were evidenced in their practice. Participants were chosen by the interviewer, who discussed selection criteria with them.

Criteria for Selection

Participants were selected according to a pre-determined participant profile: educators who worked in the area of adult education, who had spontaneously commented on the issue of safety and learning, and who were sufficiently known to the interviewer that there was an opportunity to assess congruence between what they articulated during their interviews and how they practised as educators in their programs. The selection criteria served the study in two ways. First, by focusing on essential roles and responsibilities within learning context and process, the study might clarify how relationships affect learning. Second, as both learners and instructors, educators could offer a complexity of experience with which to consider the issues. An example of the process for participant selection is included later in this chapter.

Number of participants

Eight adult educators were interviewed for the study. Two of the eight interviews were brought forward from the pilot study and included in the final analysis. The sampling of eight educators chosen from a wide range of educational contexts seemed to give a fair representation and was therefore considered to be a sufficient number. On the basis of the pilot study, I anticipated that differences among participants might be most clearly evident in the examples

46 Participants are introduced and described in Chapter Four.
offered from practice, rather than in basic conceptual understandings and assumptions held about safety and learning. I might have increased the number of participants had greater conceptual differences emerged from the interviews.

**Basis for recruitment**

The choice of whom to interview was a personal decision of mine. I had been listening for a long time to how educators described their practice, and I began to view a person as a potential participant for my study when I heard that person spontaneously make some link between safety or safe practice and learning agency. When, in the natural course of work, I heard another teacher make a reference to learning linked with safety (made independently of me or my research) I felt somewhat assured that the speaker had independently formed a strong point of view and could probably give supporting examples. For me, this reduced the possibility of participants adjusting the expression of their perspectives during the interview to fit into what they imagined I might want to hear.

When these two criteria were met I approached an educator with an invitation to participate in the study. Goetz and LeCompte (1984) support the idea of designing participant criteria based on the research focus of a project: “ethnographers commonly use criterion-based selection” (p. 73); “they create a recipe of the attributes essential” (p. 77) and then proceed to seek out participants who most closely resemble the profile. This approach was intended to increase the likelihood that the issues which are intended to be studied are those actually covered.

When I contacted prospective participants for the first time, I shared with them the basis for their being noticed. In a relaxed and casual conversation, participants had the opportunity to discuss the selection criteria and to consider how accurately I had understood their perspectives. They were given time to think about their participation before agreeing to become a part of the
thesis project. I discovered that this was a reciprocal process; these conversations generally included questions which evaluated my own level of understanding or my experience as an interviewer. Since this approach to participant selection may read 'flat' in text, I include the story of how Dean joined the project.

Anecdote: seeking participants.

The graduate program in adult education at the University of British Columbia included magisterial and doctoral candidates from the global community. Most were mature students who were both teachers and administrators. Dean was an assistant director of program planning for a large university extension program, who also taught term courses on campus and tutored distance education courses.

In a casual conversation among colleagues at a seminar, Dean mentioned the importance of personally telephoning each distance education student (at personal expense) before a program officially began. As this was not standard practice at that university, I asked why it was important. Dean explained that it was important in order for my learners to get to know me before they begin to do any work, so that they know that I really do want to get to know them as whole persons, and to help them feel comfortable with the course by knowing that I am on their side as they go through the work. Why is that important, I asked. "Well, it is important that they feel as comfortable as possible before they start a course so that they can concentrate on their work and know how to make the course work for them. It is also important that they know they can call me early on to talk about their questions, ideas, problems." I asked him what that had to do with learning. "Learning is risky - there are so many changes to accept and seek out. I want to help them feel as comfortable as possible so that they feel safe enough to take the risks they need to take in order to learn new information, skills, and values. It is my responsibility to provide that as best I can. Therefore I want to get to know them and have them get to know

47 pseudonym

48 Chapter Four describes how Dean first came to my attention.
me before there are any of the natural risks and challenges which will arise from the course.

When I approached Dean later about becoming a participant in my pilot study, we discussed the basis for my asking. We clarified that what I thought I had heard was what Dean intended to say. We discussed attitudes towards work with distance education, assumptions about learning, and the role of an instructor. I had worked with Dean in a similar setting, had observed how Dean worked with others. I therefore knew that the examples from practice which were given during the interview fit with what I knew of Dean’s approach to teaching. The focus of the interview was to discuss Dean’s history as both a learner and an educator, to clarify Dean’s assumptions, and to elicit examples. When we met to do the interview, our relationship was as collaborators.

My topic generated interest among classmates in graduate programs at the university. Some asked to participate in my study. This was an unexpected development, and I needed to think through the ramifications. Where I felt I had enough experience and background with those classmates (all of whom are educator administrators within formal institutions, social agencies with educational components, or corporations engaged in worker education) to establish a trustworthy and engaged relationship with them - at least sufficient for the study - then they were considered as participants. Because I was concerned about introducing an inconsistent element to the study by choosing from a pool of volunteers whose work I did not know, only one was chosen. A detailed description of basis for selection for each participant is provided in Chapter Four, prior to the presentation of interview data.

Who is not included?

Of three significant groups of participants not included in the study, one was a concern,

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but two were not. I was disappointed at failing to secure any participants to represent the views of academic educators who disparaged the notion of a relationship between safety in the learning context and 'learning'. I was bothered that they consistently declined to be included in the study.

In my search for disconfirming evidence, I wanted to understand their seemingly alternative assumptions about relationships between learning, safety, and examples from their instructional practice. These educators typically expressed some discomfort with notions of negotiation, reciprocity, formative evaluation, or power sharing in their relationship with their adult learners; the barrier for them seemed to be one of control. I wanted to include 'naysayers' because I felt that their views could contribute as much to the study as might an analysis of the assumptions of those who agreed that safety plays a crucial role in learning.

I was unconcerned about excluding educators whom I did not know. I felt it was important for me to know a participant well enough to compare participants' statements made during an interview with what I might know, from my own experience, about their practice. I was also not concerned that participants' learners views were excluded from this study. Although I recognized that such an expanded study could yield important data, the purpose of this study was to explore the role of safety in learning by finding out what educators might already implicitly presume to be true.

**Time Commitment of Participants**

The only time commitment participants made was to a one-hour audio taped interview, which focused on the research questions participants received several days prior to the interview. The maximum time participants chose to participate was determined by their own interest, and to a lesser degree, on the time constraints of the researcher. Participants had the opportunity for more involvement if they chose. They were offered a post-interview debriefing.
a complete draft transcript of the interview, and were invited to meet in follow-up discussions if they wanted to. They could add material to transcripts, and make interpretive changes. During the life of the study they could decide what, if any, of their material might be excluded from the study. They could contribute extra material. Chapter Four summarizes how participants responded to the study.

**Ethical Considerations**

The University of British Columbia’s standard ethical review process was conducted on the study proposal prior to the interviews. Guidelines which protect the university were determined to have been followed. My work as the researcher strove, throughout the study, to expand these ethical guidelines into a particularly 'safe' environment for participants. Unexpected ethical questions were recognized and responded to when they arose\(^{50}\). Other ethical and moral issues are discussed in Chapters Five and Six.

**Letters of Consent to Participants**

The letter of consent attached to the Ethical Review documentation provided research participants with important information about their relationship with the study. A covering letter accompanied the draft transcripts and further invited participants to clarify their views and retain control of their material. Chapter Four discusses participant responses.

**Guiding Ethic: Research Transparency and Supervision**

Guidelines for ethical research practice informed the study. No intimate or personal information was solicited or encountered beyond the experiences of participants as educators and learners. Participants remained focused on the issues and examples given related to practice.

\(^{50}\) For example, how to decide about including complete transcripts with the disk-copy of the thesis, whether or not to remove a participant’s anonymity (as requested), and so on.
The trustworthiness of interpretive research depends as much on the data gathering and interpretive skills of the researcher as it does on the selection and refinement of the research design. I sought supervision for my work in three ways: first by designing and conducting a pilot study - which an experienced researcher evaluated in terms of the basic design, my interview skills, and approaches to interpretation; secondly by requesting ongoing critical feedback from other colleagues experienced in ethnographic research; and finally, by offering participants several opportunities to review my work throughout the writing of the thesis.

**Participant Feedback**

Participants were assured of ongoing opportunities to debrief the interviews and to maintain control over transcript material. Participants received draft copies of interview transcripts three months prior to the research analysis. Participants had the opportunity to determine how their material would be used in the study in that they could veto material and offer additional notes about material used. They could adjust sentence structure and punctuation. Again, participant responses are discussed in Chapter Four.

Participants could debrief their involvement at three points. First, immediately after the interview they were able to discuss how they felt. Participants were also invited to meet by appointment for any reason related to the project. Third, covering letters which were sent out with the draft transcripts, invited written or oral feedback. Participants retained the option to review the final thesis. My phone and e-mail numbers were included in both the letter of consent and in the transcript covering letter, as were those of my research supervisor. Participants were encouraged to call me if they had any questions about this project from the time of first contact until the thesis was defended.

The framework for data gathering, which follows, includes specific details about the
interviews, from techniques for organizing discussions, through rationales behind the choice of questions to methods for data control and protection.

Framework for Data Gathering

Data gathering began informally when I first observed paradoxes about learning and tried to answer some difficult questions. The preliminary literature review began the formal inquiry by contributing a working vocabulary, and foundations of research from related interdisciplinary areas. The interview data, which form the core of the thesis project, were gathered through two approaches: semi-structured interviews with participants, and the keeping of a research journal. Continual review of the research literature responded to emerging questions.

Technique: Semi-structured Interviewing

Ethnographic research usually includes observation fieldwork, although excellent ethnographies have been conducted with only interview data (Van Maanen, 1995; Thomas, 1993). I decided against combining observation with interviewing for three reasons. First, the literature survey revealed that many of the issues were part of tacit scholarship, and the primary task of this study was to make those issues as explicit as possible. While observation might provide a very useful tool for follow-up research, the essential work of this project was to probe primitive assumptions with educators, to uncover as many underlying details as possible, and to interpret findings with reference to the broad literature on learning context. Second, the purpose of the study was to clarify assumptions about safety and to identify some of the key elements linking safety with learning - especially, if possible, with learning how to learn. That was felt to be as broad a goal as one study can hope to achieve. Future studies might focus on individual elements identified through this project. Third, the pilot study seemed to demonstrate that sufficient data were being generated by the interview format to fulfill the purposes of the project.
Interview questions accomplished the requirements of the project: they satisfied the goals of the research, and fit the practice of the participants and the researcher. Assumptions could be explored because semi-structured questions function as reminders about the core issues of the study while leaving "both you and your informant to follow new leads. It shows that you are prepared and competent but that you are not trying to exercise excessive control" (Bernard, 1994, p. 210). Burbules (1993) agrees that a semi-structured interview format is well suited for interpretive research, because it is

consciously tracing a line of inquiry, but without a definite outcome in mind. This...tends to preserve the dialogical form, since it requires active and creative responses by both parties, and since it more easily allows either partner to introduce new topics, to ask questions in return, or to change the direction of inquiry in unpredictable ways (p. 89).

I worked to be sensitive to and flexible about the direction participants took with their responses, while keeping in mind the essence of the question.

Bernard (1994) recommends a semi-structured interviewing technique when there will be only one interview with "elite members of a community...accustomed to efficient use of their time" (p. 209). Interviewing 'subculture representatives' such as educators is an acceptable ethnographic approach (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Wolcott, 1985); and the subjective focus of semi-structured interviews reaffirms "the belief that people contain knowledge" (Zavarzadeh & Morton, 1986, p. 16). Bernard suggests that these participants are typically capable of focusing on issues which relate to their work, beliefs or values, and their experiences. Participants were given interview questions days before the interview to provide time to think about the issues ahead of time. Interview questions were considered deeply by participants - and were engaged both critically and emotionally.
Augmentation: Research Journal

Throughout the project I kept a shoe box style research journal. Intermingled were my research journal notes from the preliminary discussion with participants, post-interview comments, notes about a participant's body language or voice tone which helped to support transcriptions, related clippings from various media sources, and my own personal reflections. These notes provided continual support during the interpretative phase of the project, and were sometimes used as catalysts for working through my thoughts and feelings about the data. For example, observations about non-verbal communication during interviews were woven into the full transcripts in the form of punctuation choices.

When, Where, & How

I was flexible about the timing and location of the interviews. A meeting room was available at the university, but we also used other locations more suitable to participants. Interviews were audio taped, then transcribed, and are presented in Chapter Four.

Interview Questions and Rationale

The interview questions were designed to evoke the themes reviewed in the literature without imposing concepts of safety. The questions fulfilled two requirements. First, to reveal, in as much appropriate complexity as possible, the understandings, concepts, and assumptions of these educators about the relationship between safety and learning. Second, to elicit examples from practice for triangulating the data by cross-checking the consistency of participants' 

I have taken some liberties with the term 'triangulate' because it expresses an important element in interpretive research, which I strove to include. Usually, 'triangulating' suggests that several methodologies were combined to interrogate the accuracy of data. In this case, I have assessed congruence between different kinds of data as a way to test for data integrity. For example, observing participants as adult educators, although sometimes not within their usual venue; checking for consistency between safety-based statements made prior to and outside of contact with me and statements made within the interviews; evaluating how examples seemed to
responses in order to support my interpretation of the data. The questions asked about the essential discreet concepts of safety and risk, the social context of learning (expressed as the group dynamic), differences between explicit or implicit processes, and issues of responsibility.

Questions were sent to participants a couple of weeks before the interviews, along with a draft of the letter of consent. Although the questions are discussed at the end of this chapter (and rationales given for the construction of each question), they are listed here so that readers might be prepared with an overview: (1) what, briefly, is your background as a learner and as an instructor; (2) what are the qualities you remember about a teacher of yours who made a special impact on your life; (3) what does the concept 'the role of safety in learning' mean to you; (4) what does the term 'group dynamic' mean to you and how does/does not the group dynamic influence learning; (5) who is responsible for the group dynamic/learning climate; (6) does it matter if group norms are implicit or explicit - please explain and illustrate; (7) how does/does not group dynamic relate to learning; (8) how might/might not risk be related to learning? Presented as "the most important questions" were: (9) do you have any questions; and (10) from your perspective, what has been left out of these questions or of our discussion?

When participants, in thinking about the social relationships of a learning group or the nature of group norms, began to talk spontaneously about learning in terms of safety, the data seem more trustworthy than if the questions were all framed as "safety' questions. I make this point in response to a criticism I received that I should have explicitly located all of my questions in a narrow safety framework. I differed by thinking that less directive questions let participants express their views more authentically.

The last two questions, broad attempts to encourage participants to introduce issues they conform to what interviewees said about their practice and so on.
might feel were left uncovered in the interview, were separated from the main body of questions by a heading box around the title: 'the most important questions'. I considered these to be the most important questions of the interview because they offered totally unstructured opportunities for participants to go anywhere they wanted to with their ideas. These questions were intended to purposefully mitigate the structure inherent in the semi-structured interview, and to emphasize the influential role that participants' responses have in the study. During the interview, I took care to leave a period of silence around these questions to allow for a moment of two of additional reflection - or at least an opportunity to shift gears.

At the end of the interviews, participants were genuinely encouraged to consider any issues, misgivings, or questions which might have been percolating deep in their thoughts but had not bubbled through in the format we used. While the basic questions of the study were ones I felt needed to be addressed, and there was a degree of leadership inherent in the interview format, it was equally important for me to know if the discussions felt complete to participants or if there were lingering feelings about something being left out.

The interview questions may seem, in text form, to be more formal and structuring in their function than they actually were. Participants had the same sheet of questions available to them throughout the interview. Questions usually arose in a random order because of how each participant approached the interview. The questions were adapted to fit the expression of the participant while retaining the essence of the question. The questions are presented here as on the question sheet.

During the interview a question was introduced first by seeking information about participants' conceptual understanding. A follow-through question asked for clarification through objectively framed examples from practice and experience. Various ways of acknowledging a
participant's responses and of asking open probing questions which encouraged participants to explore their responses more deeply were developed throughout the interview in ways which I hoped were sensitive to each participant.

**Interview Questions**

1. *What, briefly, is your background as a learner and as an instructor?*

   The opening question functioned as an icebreaker. It was hoped that participants would feel comfortable discussing some of their experiences. Responding to the question was an opportunity for interviewees to set and personalize a context for themselves within the interview. While participants were talking in their own natural way about themselves and their work, I was also provided with opportunities to acquire a sense of their communicative style. It offered me a relaxed occasion to demonstrate genuine interest, and listening skills, thereby setting a 'safe', trustworthy, and accepting climate. The question also began to draw from the interviewees some assumptions they had about learning and teaching.

2. *What are the qualities you remember about a teacher of yours who made a special impact on your life?*

   As either a follow-up to or a substitute for the opening question, this was simultaneously specific and broad. The interviewee could go anywhere in memory; there were no boundaries or standards attached to 'special impact'. As it happened, the answers were usually drawn from childhood rather than adult learning. This was particularly interesting given that each participant has spent several years as both an adult learner and
The 'impact' which participants chose to talk about was a generally positive one. The teacher remembered was consistently someone who was described as setting a safe climate, and for a whole learning group rather than being someone who had singled out the interviewee for privileged attention. Discussion about experience seemed to serve as an important vehicle for developing the language of the interview, and for beginning to provide tangible and objective examples of relationships between educators, learners, and learning.

3. What does "safety in learning" mean to you?

The broad question about the meanings which participants associate with concepts of safety and learning is a leap into conceptual understanding. When I began the pilot studies, this was the one question I expected might get deleted from the study, or might need adapting. In the surprising experience of qualitative research, this has proven to be the one question which has been most stable in its usefulness and which has elicited the clearest, most certain, and straightforwardly articulated responses. The question succeeded at not only gaining some preliminary understandings about 'safety' but also at providing a foundation for considering ways in which safety may or may not form one of the 'primitive' assumptions participating educators hold about their work. Responses served as a background to questions about the social context of learning, explicit process, and the risk/learning relationship.

What are some examples from your practice as an educator?

Questions seeking examples of the experiences which might represent or illustrate
concepts being expressed were repeated throughout the interview. This question, variously phrased, moved participants’ responses from being conceptually-based to being explicated through practice. The intent was to elicit concrete examples which might provide data capable of describing and corroborating points of view which participants had advanced. The question offered both participant and interviewee rich opportunities to clarify, problematize, and elaborate.

The remaining four interview questions sought to clarify significant aspects of relationships which develop in a closed social group such as a class of learners, and to relate those aspects to questions about safety, learning, and teaching. Responses were followed by the open probing questions asking for examples or illustrations from practice. This provided an opportunity for clarification and elaboration of each response and the building of an exemplar base with which to support interpretation.

Safety has been defined in the introduction to the thesis as an experience which is embedded in the communicative social aspect of the educational event. These four questions explore various aspects of the social context of learning.

4. *What does the term 'group dynamic' mean to you?*

During the pilot study, the term which most effectively got participants to think about relational experiences in the social context of learning was "group dynamic". From their professional background this was a term which evoked the most consistent responding about relationships in an educational group or class. Even so, as more interviews were held, I realized that the term ‘social dynamic’ was used as often as ‘group dynamic’. This shift is described further in Chapter Five.
5. Who is responsible for the group dynamic/learning climate?

This question grew from my preliminary literature review, the pre-pilot and pilot studies, the interviews, and conversations with academic colleagues. Issues of responsibility created a dichotomy of opinion among those with whom I spoke (both formally and informally) during the research project. Some researchers and most practitioners asserted that educators were responsible for the relational social climate within the learning group. However, many academics expressed a strong concern on campus about the notion that educators might be expected to be responsible for the climate learners create among themselves during a course or program. Responsibility is clearly a key ingredient in an organized social activity like learning. I was very interested to discover what range of viewpoints would be expressed by the study participants.

6. Does it matter if group norms are implicit or explicit?

Assumptions are inherently implicit. As the thesis project explored assumptions, questions needed to compare implicit and explicit processes and the effects of processes. If safety was found to be an implicit assumption and to be a necessary precondition for learning, it would be important to determine if educators recognize qualitative and functional differences between learning processes or approaches to relationships which are explicit/overt and those which are implicit/covert.

7. How does/does not group dynamic relate to learning?

A "how" question focuses on the effects of an action. The directness of this question was intended to stimulate a participant to react, on several levels, to consider: first, whether or not a dynamic group relationship is created among a group of learners;
second, whether or not the nature of intra-group relationships affect learning; and third, if learning is a social process.

8. How might/might not risk be related to learning?

Asking how risk might be related to learning was the most portable and applicable question in the sense that it seemed to fit in to nearly every part of the interviews, whenever participants began to think about learning, safety, and the group dynamic. It was placed last on the list more as a reminder to me to be aware of whether or not references to risk and learning had come naturally into the conversation rather than as an indication of its relationship with the other questions.

Several rationales supported this development of this question. First, establishing whether or not educator [and learners] perceived learning as a risky activity was fundamentally important to the study. Secondly, I had found that the most commonly expressed misconceptions about safety seemed to be related to risk and learning. I wanted to know what the participants thought. This was the broadest question I could imagine which might provide a gateway into issues of challenge, attention, agency and so on which have been closely associated with learning.

9. Do you have any questions?

The “most important question” provided some 'unstructured' time in the interview, where participants had an opportunity to talk freely and spontaneously about their points
of view. This opportunity occurred at the end of the interview so that participants felt connected to the research questions while able to move to their own open forum.

10. From your perspective, what has been left out of these questions or of our discussion?

As the concluding question, this intended to serve three purposes: to invite the participant to freely associate anomalous or disparate thoughts to the key questions, to amplify the openness of the study to alternative views and critique, and to signal closure to the interview while surrendering control of the process to the participant.

The Interviews

Interviews began with each participant reading over the letter of consent before signing it. There were no questions about the letters of consent, perhaps because participants had been given draft copies during our initial discussion about the research project. Participants were given control of the tape recorder and invited to turn the recorder on when they were ready.

As we settled in to the interview, I reviewed again with participants my reasons for asking each of them to participate - clarifying that the information I would be including about them in the thesis was accurate. An unanticipated benefit was the way this review seemed to bring some ease to participants. Each seemed pleased at the detail I had acquired about their work.

Although the semi-structured research questions were introduced at different moments within each interview, there did tend to be some consistency to the overall framework. Each interview, except the one with Dean, began with either the question about the participant’s experience or about a remembered teacher. Quite often the issues about learning, social dynamic,

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52 To a lesser extent was this true for Blaire whose generic nervousness about discussions which may involve ‘reporting back’ conflicted with an interest in participating in the research project. This is discussed during the review of Blaire’s interview.
safety, and risk emerged directly from the discussion rather than from being asked as questions. For example, Dean was not asked about whether or not negotiating norms was an important part of the 'learning event' because Dean spontaneously initiated a strong discussion about the importance of building relationship and norm setting. Each interview closed with participants being asked if they had other questions, or what they thought might have been left out.

At the end of each interview I took a few minutes to prepare participants for the experience of reading their transcripts. Even if one is prepared, it can still be a bit of a jolt to read the printed text of a spoken dialogue - so much of the nuance is gone, and an unfamiliar kind of inflection often seems to appear.

Method of Data Transcription, Control, and Storage

Interviews have been transcribed in their entirety, including any changes to the interview which were discussed during the debriefing. Pseudonyms have been exchanged for participants' names, and identity codes are secure. On all documentation, participants' names are blanked out. Tapes are labeled with a participant pseudonym and the date of the interview. The first draft copy of a complete transcript was given to each participant, with a covering letter and a stamped envelope addressed to me. Participants were able to remove parts of the transcript from the study.

Hard copies of the transcripts have been filed. Floppy disk and file folder storage of data (coded labels) is maintained in my own files. Data will be destroyed when no longer needed.

Interpretation

Interpretation was an ongoing process throughout the project and underlay the presentation of findings in Chapter Five. As interpretation was the source of data which created the theoretical framework and discussion of implications in Chapter Six, considerable attention
needed to be paid to what was problematic and what was effective about the interpretive process.

In preparation for the findings, data are first presented in Chapter Four.
CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF DATA

If our goal is teaching, then our goal is safety\(^{53}\).

The objective presentation of data is a difficult aspect of research because subjective decisions are made about which empirical data to include and in what form. Each decision molds the material in unseen ways. Readers may challenge the value of the research question, the thoroughness of the literature survey, the quality of the research design, and the strength of the concluding discussion, but are rarely able to evaluate how the data were treated. The reader depends on the researcher for a ‘true’ picture.

Preparing Data

Decisions which edit volumes of raw data into manageable briefs remain contestable. One’s capacity for sensitivity and wisdom is heavily taxed while striving to accurately describe each participant yet maintain confidentiality, distill the essence from each conversation while identifying significant anomalies, and organize data presentations so that overall impressions represent participants’ views parsimoniously. This slow and ongoing process was only paused for the thesis, not completed. Decisions about transcribing style, participant feedback, presentation format, and narrative summary of interviews create a seemingly complete document; readers need to remember that my interpretive approach is only one of many.

Data presentation is an art of compromises. The narrative may stir questions in the reader about what might be missing or in what context a comment was made. Each interview is as unique as each participant. I am trying to make sense of a whole project, but there is value in staying with the uncertainties inherent in each part. I strongly encourage readers to engage the thoughts, feelings, and ideas of the participants directly.

\(^{53}\) Sam 3:3
Transcribing Style

Some researchers strongly believe that integrity in interpretive research requires that every filler sound, mumble, repetitive bridging word, and fragmented sentence should be presented ‘intact’ when ‘textualizing’ interview conversations into instrumental transcripts. I feel that such superficial accuracy is potentially distracting and often fails to authentically represent either the content of the words, underlying meanings, or the rich data expressed in the unwritten intonation and kinesthetic communication. Most of our thoughts ramble around as we speak. I chose to cull some of the extraneous material. Punctuation and sentence styles were selected for their ability to most accurately convey the tone, content, and meaning of each participant. Transcript covering letters asked participants to carefully evaluate punctuation and sentence structure for effectiveness in portraying the intended message. Participants seemed satisfied; their feedback reassured me that the transcripts worked well.

Participant Feedback to Transcripts

Participants made no significant changes to the transcripts nor provided substantive additional information; this seemed to suggest that the interviews/transcripts conveyed what they wanted to say. Three participants responded with brief additional (and positive) comments. Blaire spoke about the experience of ‘reading’ a conversation - aware of both emotional discomfort with textualization as well as the way text provides opportunities for deeper levels of thinking. Jan returned the transcript with three pages of notes which continued the dialogue style of the interview by extending points made. Sam’s response was particularly enthusiastic, a strong request that the entire transcript be included in the thesis and that I name Sam and Sam’s organization.

54 With the exception of Jan, who sent down three pages of reflections on the transcript.
I did ask all participants about including complete transcripts as addenda to the thesis because I was initially supportive of Sam's suggestion that potential future research might benefit from including full texts of the interviews with at least the disk copy of my thesis. But none of the other participants was interested. After thinking long and hard about potential implications, I reluctantly decided against including only one transcript because one alone might skew the overall impression of the research.

Participants were invited to review the thesis draft and assess how well the abridged and narrative presentations of data portrayed their views. Whereas three of eight participants responded with additional notes about the transcripts - and asked for copies of the submitted thesis - none offered to read the thesis draft.

Introduction of Participants

The study focused on the perceptions and assumptions of eight adult educators who were chosen according to criteria previously discussed in Chapter Three. Participant characteristics ranged across a broad variety of educational contexts, client factors, types of learning events, learning objectives, cultural backgrounds, gender perspectives, levels of social status, and personality styles. While I had discovered that each participant fulfilled several roles as administrator, program planner, and facilitator for a diversity of educational programs, two other unexpected similarities surfaced during the interviews: each participant also continues to engage in extracurricular programs as a learner, and is involved in some form of educationally related volunteer activity. Eight was considered a sufficient number from which to draw empirical evidence not only because the participants represented such a broad range of educational situations and personal characteristics but also because of significant congruence among participant responses to interview questions.
Criteria for participant selection identified educators who had spontaneously demonstrated an assumption that safety has a role in learning. Participants were not screened for other dimensions of their practice such as to what extent they applied the assumptions, the complexity of their understanding, or the quality of their work. I preferred to have a mix of skills and abilities among the participants in order to see how issues of safety might be understood at different levels of praxis. Some interviews are longer or more complex than others and may contribute more examples, experience, and deeper level of understanding - but not be of more intrinsic value. The interviews are uneven to the degree that some educators seemed more sophisticated, articulate, or skilful than others - at least as was evident from one interview and limited observation. From my perspective, this diversity adds strength to the project by portraying safety from different perspectives.

The question of whether differences amount to saying the same thing in different ways or to saying different things (Coombs, 1997) will be discussed in the review of findings in Chapter Five. I think that responses about safety and learning are addressing essentially the same issues. Significant differences are found in auxiliary issues and are included as unexpected findings.

Although participants discussed all the issues covered by the interview questions, each interview seemed to have a deeper focus on one or two issues, representing a participant’s particular areas of interest or experience. I constructed a narrative summary of the transcripts, and used a highlighting technique to create a sense of each person’s individual emphasis. For example, Jean’s talked at greatest length about two issues: the impact of style differences and lack of screening on learning climate. Therefore, the abridged narrative presentation of the interview highlights those issues. Comments made by other participants about screening and style
differences were attached to the narrative presentation of Jean’s interview\textsuperscript{55}. Correspondingly, Jean’s responses to other questions are woven into summaries of other interviews. The one exception is the highlighting of ‘explicit process’ in the narrative summaries of both Jan’s and Terry’s interviews - not only because Jan and Terry focused on issues of process, but also because their approaches were from slightly different perspectives.

Participants are not described demographically by culture, gender, age, or social grouping in order to maintain a focus on their perspectives. None of the participant profiles resembles mine, so the congruence of their conceptual approaches to the issues of the research project seemed significant. Participants are introduced through how I know them and how we met.

**Blaire: Executive Director, Social Service Education Agency**

I met Blaire several years ago when I was gathering information about British Columbian organizations which offered educational support for a variety of social service agencies. At the time I volunteered a little of my small business consulting experience to Blaire’s agency. I was able to hear about Blaire’s work as an educator in social agency learning and to observe its consistent attention to group dynamics, relational development, communication skills, and social networking. Blaire’s responsibilities as the executive director of an umbrella agency include: maintaining a network among over three hundred similar purpose organizations; assessing their organizational and educational strength; developing educational modules for various workshops on topics ranging from management and marketing to group development and personal skills; securing funding grants on an ongoing basis; coordinating an annual professional development conference; managing a multi-purpose office; and training trainers.

Blaire enquired often about my research. But when given the opportunity to participate,
Blaire seemed torn between wanting to participate and feeling inadequate about making a worthwhile contribution to a scholarly project. Blaire was concerned that the thesis might be better supported by input from 'academic' instructors. Unfortunately there was too little time in the interview to explore how Blaire understands differences between academic educators and social agency educators. The reserved awkwardness and tension remained for Blaire even though we reviewed my perceptions of Blaire's work, the criteria for participant selection, and some perspective similarities among participants. Because "insight gained from involvement in the research might benefit the agency", Blaire was motivated to continue with the project despite the anxiety, and was the only participant to ask for a copy of the thesis as an agency resource. I wondered how much of Blaire's reactions were uniquely personal and how much might represent other educators who are identified as 'practitioners' by those who consider themselves 'professionals' through their association with some form of academia.

**Dale: Professor, Northern Regional College**

Dale teaches social work at an Arctic Regional College; facilitates social agency workshops on substance abuse, suicide prevention, cultural development, and life skills; teaches music; is a member of an international service organization; and serves on the Board of more than one social agency. Dale's formal education blends degrees in sociology and social work with graduate work in education. Dale and I worked together for several months in study groups for an issues in education graduate seminar. As the groups discussed a broad range of educational challenges for educators, my attention was drawn to Dale's focused concerns about the difficulties which cross-cultural values can cause multicultural learners in professional programs such as

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56 Following our interview, Blaire suggested that a meeting be set up for me to talk with K.A. Porter, the facilitator to whom the agency is currently contracting out workshop facilitation. I was fortunate to be given the opportunity to talk with Porter; comments from the meeting's fieldnotes are referenced in the thesis.
Social Work. As Dale struggled with questions about how learners can work with intercultural learning contexts I wondered what contributions Dale's perspectives might offer my research. When contacted, Dale seemed enthusiastic about participating.

Dale is a quiet personality who clearly expressed a basic underlying feeling of discomfort about the communicative style of someone as intense and extroverted as I. I went with a slow interview tempo, which was paced by frequent pauses of ten to twenty seconds in order to facilitate Dale's ease with the meeting. This was the only interview which I felt might have benefitted from being more than an hour, in order to let ideas rest for awhile throughout the conversation. Since the interview was actually less than an hour, it might be that, from Dale’s perspective, an hour seemed like a long time to be talking. As I wanted my views to remain in the background, most of my responses were in the form of paraphrasing, reframing, or probing Dale’s preceding comments. Dale often shifted mid-sentence between first person and second person reference when describing personal experiences.

Dale spoke at length about five decades of “lifelong learning”, beginning with a British system of schooling in the Central Americas, through Canadian university degrees in the social sciences, to personal skills courses in music and athletics throughout the years. Learning usually occurred in an “other” cultural context, adding extra tensions about ‘measuring up’ and finding levels of ‘confidence’.

**Dana: Medical Practitioner, Administrator of Patient Education**

Dana works as an administrative medical practitioner. Dana has provided professional in-service training to hospital nurses, and continues to facilitate pain management workshops for patients in the provincial head office of a major national health care agency. The agency is associated with international organizations dedicated to one cluster of universal health issues.
Dana asked to participate in my research after attending a teleconference in which I asked a noted scholar in adult education program planning (the author of our course text) about how social and contextual safety considerations might be included in adult education program planning. Dana approached me afterwards to express discomfort with the response to my question and spoke with me about several aspects of the agency's work which related to safety and learning. We stayed in touch and Dana often initiated discussion about patient education and the responsibilities of facilitators.

Dana expressed an interest in joining the study. Because it was my intention to initiate participant selection myself, we talked at considerable length about Dana's work. I needed to acquire the confidence that there was a fit with the participant profile I had in mind and that I was well enough informed about Dana's views and practice to be able to interpret our interview. Dana felt uncertain about the strength and clarity of the points made in the first interview and wanted to revisit some of the topics. A follow-up meeting was intended to be less formal but as we began to chat we decided to record the conversation. From these interviews one two-part transcript was produced.

**Dean: Assistant Director, University Extension**

I had not met Dean before I overheard a conversation between Dean and a distance educator from another province about the influence of the educator/learner relationship on learning. The other person was a distance education instructor at a provincial university, and Dean was both instructor and program planner for one of the largest agricultural extension programs in Canada. Dean, surprised at the lack of personal relationship the other instructor developed with distance education learners, elaborated in detail on the when, how, and why of connecting with distance education learners, and said how important it was to contact distance education students.
before courses begin in order to establish a relaxed and supportive personal relationship. Dean described these introductory conversations as opportunities to encourage students to ask questions openly and take risks with their assignments; learning was defined in terms of risk and change. Dean suggested that learning would progress more satisfactorily if learners felt safe enough to discuss freely with their instructor any issues (whether content, process, or personally originating) and seemed convinced that the educator bore responsibility for creating such a dialogic atmosphere.

Without referring to my the earlier conversation, I got to know Dean as a colleague. I frequently asked questions which clarified Dean’s approach to program planning and instruction. Dean was enthusiastic when asked to be the first person to participate in the pre-pilot study with which I sought to test and evaluate my choice of research as well as figure out what were going to be the most representative, differentiating, coherent, relevant, and productive interview questions. I told Dean about how I had listened in on the initial conversation and checked out both Dean’s response to that and how accurately my interpretations represented Dean’s views. Dean seemed pleased at my understanding of the conversation and conveyed the hope that, although the research interview would occur in the early stages of my study, the substance of the interview would be included in my thesis. Dean was the only research participant who declined to read the transcript: "I think you handled the interview well, I am sure you will transcribe the conversation well, and I trust the way you will work with the material; there is no need for me to revisit the conversation." Although I felt that transcript review was important to me, I could not insist. Dean did not review the transcript although several offers, requests even, were made.
Jan: Administrator, Regional College

I had heard about Jan's program several years ago. Although currently an administrator for a Canadian regional college, Jan was previously responsible for developing a unique and sophisticated two-year mastercraft trades program. This specialty course is well known throughout North America for the high quality of subject expertise, its blending of trades and art, and a comfortable yet challenging learning climate. A friend endured a long waiting period to take the program several years ago and I met other program participants from a wide variety of cultural, gender, and social backgrounds and from across the continent. Despite the rigorous demands, each person was highly satisfied with the program. It was a surprise and a pleasure to meet Jan for the first time in 1995 at a professional development seminar. Jan was going through a career transition from educator to education administrator and was keen to participate in my research project, feeling that the topic had particular relevance to both roles. What stood out during the interview was a concern about details of learner issues and a commitment to the sort of professional development which combines research findings with practical application.

Jean: Senior Information Resource Faculty, University

Jean is a senior information resource administrator at one of Canada's major universities and has worked in small towns and large urban centres within the formal education system. I first met Jean in an academically related circumstance. Jean asked about my research. Although Jean is usually an introspective temperament, the response was very animated: of course learners' perceptions of feeling safe are necessary preconditions for learning. Jean outlined several key arguments and expressed an interest in continuing our conversation another time. Jean became a potential participant both because the perspective of an information resource technologist might be unique, and because I was familiar with the office in which Jean worked. Between the initial
conversation and Jean's agreement there was time for me to become acquainted with both Jean's work as a resource administrator and Jean's reputation as a well-regarded workshop facilitator. Jean brought a thoroughly annotated copy of the interview questions to our meeting; issues were discussed each question in turn.

Sam: Director, Community Education

Sam's work covers a wide range of educational contexts and responsibilities: director of a community education program throughout the lower mainland of Vancouver; professional skills trainer for facilitators who present workshops in social agency issues, life skills development, and peer counsellor training; facilitator of contracted stand-alone workshops for adults in conflict resolution, anger management, communication skills, suicide prevention, group development, and intercultural dialogue; as well as coordinator of design and production for support resource materials (purchased by other agencies in Europe, North America, and Australia). Sam and I began to discuss safety, group dynamics, and community education several years ago when Sam contributed an activity module for a train-the-trainers group I had joined. Sam is the only research participant with whom I have worked on a personal and long-term basis.

Terry: Corporate Manager - Workplace Training Facilitator

Terry gave a presentation on corporate workplace training which I attended. I asked about the rationale behind aspects of the presentation which focused on the development of a cooperative group dynamic among learners. Terry's response was "participants need to feel safe enough in the group to respond positively to the risk-taking challenges of learning". In a follow-up discussion, Terry broadened the response to include the importance of the group dynamic in corporate meetings. I was offered excerpts from the Corporation's training manuals. Over the following year, I participated in seminar programs with Terry.
Terry has senior responsibility for education and training within one of Canada's 'Globe One Hundred' companies; I have given this company the pseudonym of "The Porter Corporation of Canada". The 'Porter Corporation of Canada' is a resource, research, production, communications conglomerate. Although 'The Porter Corporation of Canada' is an independent corporate entity in Canada, linked by a multinational head office in a western country, it is also in association with other independents of the same name in other countries.

Terry has recently been asked by the multinational head office to report on possible reasons why statistics on the performance of 'The Porter Corporation of Canada' reveal high levels of employee satisfaction, commitment, and performance. Terry's sense, prior to seeking input from department heads and employee representatives, is that the 'The Porter Corporation of Canada' commitment to a positive corporate working and learning climate is a major factor. Terry was willing to participate in the research not only to make a contribution but also because the corporation would appreciate seeing itself as a contributor to a scholarly pursuit of professional development in domains of learning and training.

The preliminary discussion, clarifying my reasons for seeking Terry's participation, took longer than with any of the other participants in part because I was less familiar with Terry's work than with the other participants. Terry was attentive to my perception about the nature of the corporate approaches to workshop planning and facilitation, relational skills development within the corporation, and to my overall awareness of the corporate culture. The meeting confirmed that I had an accurate understanding of the way Terry worked out training within 'The Porter Corporation of Canada'.

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57 The Globe and Mail's annual review of Canada's top companies.
Summary of Interview Format

Each interview was uniquely challenging in terms of my adapting, listening, acknowledging, and probing skills: I responded to eight different communication styles and uniquely lived biographies. A narrative style has converted transcripts into descriptions so that the natural focus and rhythm of each interview has been preserved. I have tried, by introducing data in the order they appeared during the interview, to maintain the original flow of the conversation.

Most notations refer to page number, then paragraph number (eg. 12:6 situates the quote in the sixth paragraph on the twelfth page) of the unabridged transcript. Direct quotes are drawn from transcripts. If an important word is missing from a previous sentence, this is inserted in square brackets. Headings note where specific thesis topics are discussed. Because representative comments were chosen, coded data may seem inserted out of order: the quote which initially generated a heading may have been replaced by another which seemed to say the same thing better. For example, in Dale’s interview the introductory paragraph was used to group some of Dale’s general attitudes about learning, which were scattered throughout the opening comments. Then the first topic listed is ‘risk’, but the quote is from the end of the transcript. Since research is as work of interpretation, the reader might keep in mind that the headings devised and the statements included are the outcome of my efforts to capture the essence of the interview and to convey the perspectives of each participant as distinct from my own. The structure of this chapter is intended to provide the reader with as complex yet refined a review of the data as possible.
Abridged Narrative Summaries of the Interviews

Blaire: Executive Director, Social Service Education Agency

As the interview was being scheduled, Blaire expressed mixed feelings around wanting to be part of such a research project on the one hand, and dealing with a lifelong nervousness about any experience which might feel like an academic ‘test’ on the other. This struggle was acknowledged before we discussed how to develop the interview experience within Blaire’s comfort zone. Blaire was reminded of the option to withdraw from participation, but felt strongly interested in staying involved. Blaire seemed somewhat reassured that the conversation would be informal and that identity would remain confidential. We discussed how it is natural for a semi-structured audio taped interview to generate some nervousness. I asked what support Blaire might like to have during the interview, in addition to preview copies of the interview questions and letters of consent. Blaire asked to be the last interviewee.

The day before the interview Blaire called to change the date because of a heavy workload and short-handed office staffing. Feelings of nervousness were referred to again. We discussed the format, questions, and tone of the interview. I reiterated my interest in Blaire’s perspective while also reaffirming the option to withdraw from the study. Another date was set and we met in the board room of Blaire’s agency office on a weekday morning.

As the interview developed, Blaire referred to ‘support group’, ‘self-help’, or ‘mutual aid’ models of learning as one composite model which provided the best group dynamic for supporting learning. As time was limited, we did probe similarities to or differences from other models. There were strong similarities between the model Blaire described and that used by Terry to describe corporate training, even though the labels for each model were quite different.

Blaire reiterated an assumption mentioned by Dale, that some educators have a ‘natural
inclination’ to be skilful. Blaire gave as an example K.A. Porter to whom the agency contracts some of its professional development workshops. I was able to talk with Porter, who offered a somewhat different perspective: that skilful teaching does not flow from a basic inclination but is forged over years of work, effort, and uncertainty. Blaire and Dale’s perceptions about how skilful teaching practices are developed raise important questions about how to create teacher education programs. Most analyses of outstanding teaching have focussed on the relationships between content, process, and learning outcomes rather than on the quality of interpersonal learning dynamic created in the educational context. Another project might study how outstanding educators are perceived by their peers compared with how they perceive their own work. Such research might de-mythologize the skills of the really good teacher and help create some understanding of the evolutionary process of skill-building for teachers.

Learning how to learn.

For Blaire, learning is letting go of what you ‘do know’ in order to let what you ‘do know’ change [12:1]. ‘Learning how to learn’ is the key factor for successfully learning anything. ‘Getting it’ from the typical lecture style of schooling had been mostly a matter of hit and miss ‘luck’, and the focus of Blaire’s work became to understand what it meant to know how to learn - on acquiring information, abilities, values, and attitudes by developing learning skills.

An important aspect of learning how to learn is feeling safe enough to make mistakes, especially because “I think [risk] is related to learning”; “you would have to feel safe in order to take the risks of making mistakes and to still belong”[12:3]. Blaire touched on learner characteristics such as being interested in learning and having the social abilities to relate to others. In order to tie these in with other participants’ ideas about important learner attributes, I have called these ‘commitment’ and ‘goodwill’. They suggest the capacity to acquire a sense of
agency, “learning that you can do things for yourself...being able to take risks with control” [6:6].

Contextual factors such as whether or not program expectations are clear to the learner through open or explicit norms provide the climate for developing learner confidence. “The group needs to be very very aware of what their goals, objectives, and norms are. If that starts to change, that’s ok but they need to be aware of the change and state, as a group, that this is what the change is and that it is ok” [5:6]. The educator’s responsibility is to develop and change the learning climate into a culture which supports learner agency. Content expertise, communication processes, and development of the social dynamic into an encouraging relational climate are initiated, fostered, modeled, and evaluated by educators “I don’t think [learning] happens otherwise” [16:1]. Blaire regards ideal educators as quintessential learners, and gives the example of how an educator’s learning skills transferred into teaching skills.

Blaire’s spouse of thirty years (pseudonym Sandy) is a well-esteemed senior instructor for a medical school whose curriculum is run on a lecture model. Sandy and Blaire were going to co-facilitate a workshop at an annual social agency conference held in Vancouver. When they didn’t find matches in their schedules to develop the workshop together, Sandy presented it alone. Participant evaluations of the workshop were negative and were so objectively detailed that Sandy had an ‘epiphany’ about the role of the facilitator and the social nature of learning. Sandy adapted some courses at medical school to the teaching/learning model Blaire uses. The feedback from medical students about these courses has been positive: satisfaction with the course, higher exam scores, and a heightened interest in Sandy’s specialty field. Sandy has continued to hone these facilitation skills and no longer uses the lecture format as the primary means of delivery.

‘Learning how to learn’ was considered the fundamental work of formal education by all the research participants. For Dale, the emphasis was on the
importance of understanding learning in the sense of "breaking [content] down and seeing what are the different parts, how I could teach it to someone else." Getting a program into manageable and well-organized pieces was a key "part of developing the comfort" which precedes meeting the risks and challenges inherent in the learning relationship. Dean's approach was a metacognitive interest in learners acquiring critical skills with which "they learn how to be re-thinking the issues" [Dean, 8:2].

For Jan, ‘learning how to learn’ is the pragmatic mind set which makes learning anything possible. As the educator “you can focus on content and [be an instructor] harder, or you can do it [be an instructor] differently. And I think working differently makes the most sense. Because it is the learner who is doing the learning. And you have to assist them to get into a position or a frame of mind - or whatever we want to call it - so that learning is going to occur” [Jan, 14:5]. The frame of mind is not only ‘learning how to learn’, it is also the agency to follow-through and the sense of safety to risk the security of the familiar for the experience of the possible, “because it aids the process of learning. That person is not going to learn unless they are receptive” [Jan, 13:4]. “The other part [of learning how to learn] reflects back on the content. One of the real appeals of it is that there is always more to learn about [the subject]. You can go on and on. So there was the recognition that we were not going to learn everything there was to learn about [the subject] in nine months and you [the learner] need to be prepared to continue to learn when you walk out the door. I think that that was probably the part that I made most explicit” [Jan, 15:5].

Group norms.

Blaire suggested that the social climate, and the rules or norms with which it develops, are the core of ‘learning how to learn’. Dean suggested “it is very important to negotiate and agree on the norms for the class at the beginning of the term so the idea is to set up expectations around participation. Throughout the year you are constantly reinforcing those norms” [Dean, 10:5]. Blaire broadened the function of norm negotiation to a process which provides the learning event with both its fundamental safety and its fundamental purpose:

We need to know what we are there for, we need to know what the expectations are going to be, we need some sort of outline of what the [learning event] is going to be, and we need to know what expectations there
are for *our* interaction" [10:6]. Oh yes, group norms should be VERY explicit because if they are you can work in any direction with them. They give safety, boundaries, cohesion, knowledge, trust. Trust comes from knowing what is going on. If they have that trust, even if they don’t like the norm that the group has decided (for example ‘you can’t smoke in the group’) they know they can trust the process, they can learn to trust the group, they know what the boundaries are, and they know what to expect or what this group does" [12:6].

Blaire holds a broad view of the function of norms in group development - from establishing safety, sharing power and responsibility, fostering social relationships which support ‘significant’ learning, developing communication skills, strengthening individual leadership abilities, and increasing the capacity of participants to learn how to learn. Norm setting has multidimensional benefits. For norms to authentically reflect the dynamics and culture of particular groups, negotiations need to be safe; safe group negotiation process enhances safety for the individual; enhanced individual safety contributes to overall safety within the group.

Blaire blends the idea of shared power and responsibility with the idea of the group norms by suggesting “everyone in the group having a job or task within the group”[6:2]. Wolfensberger (1980) agrees that having culturally valued roles within a group is crucial to each individual’s development, especially important for learners, whom he includes as ‘people at risk’. Jean said the same thing: “I do think the instructor has the responsibility... for being very much aware of what is happening for the whole group and to make sure everybody contributes” [11:7]. Bruner (1996) considers the act of “promoting a sense of division of labor” as a key element in “sustaining [the sort of] group solidarity” which develops the “interactive pedagogy” crucial to “communities of mutual learners”. These “shared” and “negotiable ways of thinking in a group” are the foundations for the metacognition which fosters a capacity for complex learning (p. 22).

**Closing the interview.**

At the end of the interview Blaire expressed some relief about the way the conversation
had 'made sense' and that there had been an opportunity to consider practice from new perspectives: "I think that asking myself these questions [during the interview] and getting inside myself a little more about it took [the idea of safety] down into a different level for me, a level that is not as intellectual about it. So...thank you, Peni." Given Blaire's anxiety about doing a 'research interview', I asked what the experience had felt like. Blaire "Well, I felt safe enough with our discussion, and that was a surprise. I'm not sure how well I talked to the topic: I tend to wander." I said that conversation 'tends to wander'.

Blaire kept in touch more than the other participants, has asked how my work was going, then contributed useful observations. For example, when I felt that I was floundering with my interpretations, wondering if I could ever 'pull apart' and 'evaluate' and 'interpret' all the data while conveying the full authentic voice of the participants, and wondering how Blaire might feel about my work on reading both the personal description and the transcript summary of our interview, Blaire's response was: "you cannot expect of yourself nor be expected by others to present the 'whole voice'. You are striving to offer a significant voice. You and others may need to accept that that is the best you can ever do. Anyway, whatever you do, it will not speak to everyone the same way."

Blaire's only note to the sixteen single-spaced pages of the interview was pencilled onto page ten: "I'm realizing from the way I feel about this [reading the transcript], my garbled responses, etc. that safety for me means not being asked direct questions. I go a bit blank, panic, and lose trains of thought. Is that true for others?" It was a difficult question because among all participants, including Blaire, there was little overt evidence of panic, blankness, and confusion during the interview or in the reading of the transcripts. The transcript of Blaire's interview demonstrates strong clear answers, a high degree of internal consistency, stable emotion
throughout, and evidence of working with the material in ways which led to insights during the interview. However, Blaire’s feelings were clearly intense and in our debriefing we discussed them together.

If I were meeting with Blaire several times, I would manage follow-up interviews differently - beginning with reflection, acknowledgement, and paraphrasing of what Blaire was saying, and then easing into “what do you think might be...” sorts of questions rather than the focussed open questions I tended to ask. On the other hand, Blaire may feel anxious in interpersonal encounters and have exceptionally strong safety needs. Perhaps knowing the extent of the anxiety and of the safety needs would provide Blaire with the tools for engaging group relationships more comfortably. Although this is simple speculation on my part, a question is opened of how responsible Blaire (or any of us) might be for recognizing such strong needs for a particular form of communication and then for conveying this information to the partner/s in dialogue. The importance of reciprocity, in communication and power sharing, was a major sub-theme in the project.

Dale: Professor, Northern Regional College

Dale’s self-image is as a quiet personality, which, to Dale, implies a nurturing approach to other people. Much of the interview was focused on perceptions of learning from the ‘introspective’ experience. I would have liked more opportunity to explore Dale’s perceptions of differences between quiet/introspective versus robust/extroverted temperaments and what a ‘nurturing approach might look like with each personality type. We did, however, discuss Dale’s assumptions that ‘quiet’, nurturing, and ‘calm’ equated with ‘skilful’.

Issues about style differences came up twice during our interview. First, in a social agency course Dale taught, an extroverted student was judged to be “dominating” and “disruptive”.
Dale confronted the student in a private office meeting. The student quit the course. During our interview Dale realized, with some expressed regret, that the student might not have actually been disruptive and might not have felt nurtured or safe.

The second discussion about style differences occurred during Dale's description of the 'ideal teacher' as one who is quietly implicit in approach and has a nurturing style. These are the qualities with which Dale most identifies. Dale reviewed the pattern of responses which the ideal teacher might follow and realized that implicit process worked as a *maintenance* of norms which needed to be explicated early in group development.

Although Dale and Blaire both work with social agency education in mixed cultural contexts, there were significant differences in their points of view. Dale focused attention on how content might be reconstructed - how teaching certain models of social behaviour from one culture to learners from another culture is problematic. Blaire disagreed about particular content being a predominant issue and suggested [3:2ff] that an emphasis on developing participants' critical thinking and abilities to *communicate* with each other about their different models and approaches to social or cultural behaviour would offer the optimal approach to all types of social agency training.

**Agency: an outcome of safety.**

An early theme established in the interview was the importance of relationship between learner and teacher in which the teacher conveys confidence in the learner's ability to master the required work. Positive expectations reassure the learner that the learning would "not be a risk because I had the capability to do it" (my emphasis). Bandura (1986) and de Charms & Shea (1976) have coined the term 'agency' to describe that awareness of one's efficacy. Agency is linked with safety throughout all eight interviews, but it was Dale's focal issue:
If [instructors] don’t make you feel that you can do it, you won’t take the risks’[3:2]. “Comfort and safety are the same thing, come together. If you feel comfortable - or safe - in that environment then you can actually do things, you can look foolish, you can make mistakes, but you are not going to get shot down. So you need to feel safe [3:8]. People who feel safe and comfortable...can start sharing, reflecting on their experience...all those things are good for learning [5:2].

All interview participants share the concept of agency as feeling able to knowingly risk one’s sense of mastery and control within a group of peers in order to explore possibilities for learning. Being willing to fail or make mistakes is one hallmark of feeling comfortable, safe, and positioned for learning.

Mistakes were always referred to as ‘learning experiences’; ‘you haven’t made a mistake, you have had a learning experience. Seize the opportunity’. I was always saying that ‘if everything goes smoothly you are probably not learning very much. It is when you make a mistake that you have the opportunity to learn the most’ (Jan’s notes, returned with the transcript).

Blaire associated voluntary mistake-making with a deeper agency about values. “We need to feel safe enough to make mistakes and to feel it is ok to carry on with something we feel is important” [12:3]. Jean’s perspective is consistent with resource-based learning: “if their anxiety level goes down they will be willing to make a mistake, willing to ask a question even if they think the question might be rather dim, because they know they are not going to be put down” [8:1]. “A willingness to take chances and make mistakes I think is fostered by feeling quite safe in that atmosphere” [Jean, 9:5]. Terry’s point is that the ‘freedom to fail’ marks a safe climate in which the possibilities for learning are present and enhanced. Dale speaks to the core of the learning relationship: the power of the educator needs to charge the learner with the self-confidence, the agency, that this learning in this environment is possible for this learner.

**Learning**

Dale, and all of the participants, distinguished easily between spontaneous or incidental learning - which might be less internalized, accessible, or meaningful - and the ‘significant learning’ which is seen as the purpose of the teacher-learner relationship. Learning, including
Dale’s perspectives, is discussed in detail within the summary of Dana’s interview. As an overview of each learning group, Dale agreed with Terry that there needs to be a flow of power and responsibility from the educator to the learner: “I see the facilitator as being responsible for establishing some kind of democratic environment and that means they’re also sharing the process” [5:5]. Agency is developed through the experience of ‘doing’ and the sense of being relationally safe enough to take the emotional risks which contribute to ‘deeper learning’: “the learner becomes just as instrumental as the instructor at creating and supporting that environment” [10:6]. The underlying element which contributes to developing this confidence is a safe environment.

**Challenge, safety, and learning.**

Dale linked agency and challenge. Challenge can be a positive aspect of a learning atmosphere if introduced *after* the teacher conveyed confidence in [the learners’ ability to do well:

the challenge and frustration that goes with tackling something this complex [as learning] and I am still willing to go through that stress and frustration and whatever, if the teacher makes you feel comfortable. This is important because you won’t otherwise take that step [3:2].

A perception shift occurred when Dale realized that safety and challenge are mutually compatible, not conflicting concepts: “Yeah, not that ‘challenge’ is unsafe. I think that at one time I felt [safety meant] it was more important that everyone felt comfortable and unchallenged... I think for awhile I was perceiving challenging as ‘unsafe’ ” [12:1], but not any more.

**Does it matter if process is explicit or implicit?**

Dale began to discuss process by suggesting that there are differences between explicit or implicit processes in education and went on to propose hesitantly that an *explicitly* negotiated relationship, learning environment, and group norms *might* be a good idea; but that for really
highly skilled educators, the implicit process was the ideal and it reflected higher level skill. I was intrigued. "So how would these particularly skilled educators behave?" I asked. Dale began to describe the implicit process as the one which "seems so natural", and gave some examples. I summarized the examples and then asked: "in these situations, exactly how are educators responding [to interactions in the classroom]?" At first Dale responded: "they are very observant...it seems so natural...you know...and implicit. I think other people in the class pick it up also unconsciously without saying this is what they are trying to do. But I think that this is a very high skill that everybody does not have...every instructor does not have naturally" [8:3].

As the interview developed, Dale began to realize that an explicit process might be necessary as a developmental first step. An educator needed to use explicit norming in order to attain what was to Dale the highest level of teaching skill: the ability to implicitly nurture the learning climate. Dale realized that "sometimes one might have to practice it very explicitly at first and you might not even do it well" [8:3]. Developing ideas throughout the interview, Dale suggested that a facilitator needs to make it very clear to learners that responsibility has to be a shared element in the learning, just as power is. "I guess that would have to be said explicitly. I don’t know how else you could convey directly to the other person that they have that responsibility. I think it would have to be done explicitly" [10:1]. Dale became more certain about how facilitators need to use a very explicit process: "...right...when you think about it... you do have to do it explicitly" [12:7].

At the end of the interview Dale expressed a desire to hear about my perspectives, so we remained for another quarter hour with the tape recorder off, discussing my work to date. Part of the interest for Dale seemed to be that my personality is a contrast to Dale's. I am spirited and direct, my teaching style is dynamic; both Dale and I were aware that I might be the sort of
exuberant character that Dale describes being a challenge in the classroom.

Our meeting ended with a discussion about the range of complex social issues in educational settings, about how unaware educators may be about what sorts of learning may be really happening, and about the difficulties created by the lack of pre-screening of learners or matching between learners, learning events, and facilitators. As we were leaving the interview room, other significant issues were brought into the parting conversation: learner characteristics such as mental health, psychological wholeness, moral development; different social issues of power and control; institutional factors such as how difficult it can be for an instructor and/or learner to agree early enough in a program that a particular learning event is not right or appropriate at that time, screening, and so on. Many of these issues resonated throughout the interviews with all the participants.

Dana: Medical Practitioner, Administrator of Patient Education

Dana was doubly motivated to participate: first, to respond to challenges to the value of the research question which had been made in the teleconference and, second, to benefit from the opportunity to discuss issues of practice with which Dana had been working through for years. Dana and I met in a small meeting room at the university.

From the beginning of the interview to the end, Dana strongly asserted the fundamental importance and responsibility of the teacher or facilitator to the learning event by repeating four aspects of facilitator responsibility: 1) educators need to be 'situated'; their political, cultural, philosophical, moral, and emotional beliefs and values needed to be well known at least to the educator and, ideally transparent to or approachable by the learner; 2) the power and control synonymous with the role of educator need to be understood and shared; 3) educators have the responsibility for the contextual and interpersonal safety within the learning group; and 4) learners
must become their own change agents; they do this best in the social context of learning groups, learning from each other, with the educator as the catalyst. Throughout the interview Dana referred to the importance of educators realizing what the broad social, cultural, and organizational contexts are which influence relationships and experiences within learning events.

Dana’s spoke about what learning is - both desired (positive) and undesired (negative), and the importance of understanding how learners should be helped.

**Learners and learning.**

According to Dana, significant and useful learning must be tangibly recognizable: “they... take back something to their own family, their own community, their own life and wherever they live and use it and have it have some meaning for them” [3:7](also Brookfield, 1990, p. 199). Acting on new learning as the way to deepen it, to integrate it into one's life, is promoted by Dean also: “And I tell them ‘Don’t take my word for it, talk with your other friends, go home and talk with your family and see what they are thinking about’” [Dean, 8:7].

Dana suggested that the key processes and relationships facilitating learning were above all fundamentally safe. A safe learning climate is recognized in the dialogic quality of relationships [3:6], collaborative social dynamic [20:1], explicit norms [20:4], comfort [5:2], acknowledgment of the personhood of the learner [3:5], and a guided positive focus [19:3]. Dana understood significant learning to be a risk-taking experience where a learner is temporarily surrendering a degree of self-confidence in order to expose themselves to changing some aspect of themselves, their thoughts, their previously trusted ways of being.

Dana remains focused on the recognition of the paradox that although the educator facilitates learning, it is the learners who are learning and that it “happens within themselves; they need to get there by themselves” [23:1]. In successful learning dynamic, “it is ok to take risks in this group” [22:3], there is enough safety to support the inner and contextual challenging which
can draw learning to deeper levels of meaning. *Dale agrees:*

> maybe I did learn something on my own, just listening; but the deeper learning began to occur once I felt [safe] [5:5]. If I feel safe then I feel I can learn, I can go about the business of learning more [10:6]. Ideally it should be that people are able to take more risks so that they are able to learn more, to develop more meaningful types of learning [11:4].

Learning, described in terms of capacity, meaningfulness, significance, and usefulness, is the intended product of the teacher-learner relationship. "Well, because it is only through authentic relationship that you are going to really get down and learn the attitudes that are going to move you as a person to learn....learning in the sense of changing you in life" [12:5]. Jan builds on Dana's understanding of the learning relationship by evaluating not whether or not the curriculum content was mastered but rather whether the teacher/learner relationship might have fulfilled greater potential than it did: "you didn't learn as much as you could have learned when you were here". [Peni: the learner?] "Yes, me as the instructor saying [to the student] that we could have gone further than what we did this year (pause). [talking with the student] "you are going to finish the basic curriculum. The question of how far we can go beyond that curriculum is what is important" [Jan, 15:3]. Jean expands: "I know that there is a lot of learning you can do on your own -- reading and thinking and so on -- but there are other aspects important to learning too: discussing ideas, throwing out something new into the discussion and seeing what happens - if you are always learning on your own you are losing out on that interaction" [Jean, 9:4]**..."having [your] ideas expanded, or changed, or turned" [Jean, 12:3]. Jean has a fine ability to move back and forth between the micro and macro issues. Moving from the broad potentials of the learning relationship, Jean returns to Dale's earlier point about breaking the desired outcome down into small and manageable pieces. Talking to a group of learners at an introduction to technology course, Jean tells learners: " 'you don't need to know all of this to get started, you can get started with just a little bit of it. You can learn more later; you don't have to know it all to get going.' This seems to set people's minds at rest considerably"[Jean, 14:6].
Dana’s view of the role of safety in learning includes not only the positive effects and crucial preconditions created by the presence of safety but also what is lost, or what undesirable learning happens, when safety is absent or when the conditions are unsafe.

Lack of safety: negative learning.

Dana elaborated on the effects of an unsafe climate by pointing out the overt effects of emotional distress and the real possibilities of a learner dropping out of a program. The hidden aspects of negative learning were also covered: learning undesirable or even harmful lessons as well as internalizing barriers to further participation in learning events. First, learners will react by shutting the educator out; “they may become angry, fearful, frustrated, put down, disempowered, depressed” [9:3]. “I personally didn’t learn anything...I just quit going. My learning was really compromised. I remember going away from a lot of those seminars feeling really angry, pissed off - angry because I had gone, because I had just sat there” [17:4]. Second, “if the group dynamic is chaotic and a person feels unsafe, uncomfortable, anxious, or too tense, then that person is not going to learn because there are things happening that are interfering, distracting. To me that is how the group dynamic [and safety] relate to learning” [21:5].

The unseen, passive, negative learning was identified by all participants as being as relevant to discussions about learning as are generally evaluated positive or content focused learning outcomes. “In the unsafe learning situation that person won’t expose himself to those situations [of learning] again. They have learned. They have learned that ‘boy, if I open my mouth and say anything, I am really going to get shot down’ ”[10:]. “One thing I think you learn is fear of attempting a difficult subject” [Jean 13:4].

The image of ‘getting shot down’ was brought into the discussion by several of the participants, and is discussed in the presentation of findings (Chapter Six). Dale agreed with

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[^58]: The impact of a neutral, safety-absent learning climate is covered at length in Sam’s interview.
Dana: “the potential negative side of a teacher-learner relationship is anxiety about being ‘ridiculed’, ‘made a fool of’, and ‘getting shot down’”. Sam said “this immediately makes students feel that they don’t want to be there, makes the other students feel very unsafe because they might be the next person to be targeted in front of the rest of the group. When I say students I mean whoever the learners are” [5:4]. According to Jean, “if people are too caught up in being anxious or afraid of looking stupid, they don’t listen. They have to feel comfortable in order to really listen. They have to be listening in order to learn” [15:1]. The concluding observation is made by Sam, who bridges the effects of safety present and absent in a learning context:

I think [safety] is required in every classroom. When somebody feels uncomfortable, their stress increases, and their learning decreases”[3:3]. By creating a good relationship with you as the facilitator and the student with whom you are speaking, you generally have many people there are in your group listening and developing a sense of safety with you at the same time. In the same way, if you convey the idea that their answer was ‘stupid’, you lose not one person, you lose all the learners in the classroom [Sam 6:1].

Shor and Friere (1987) observe: “these students are silent because they no longer expect education to include the joy of learning” (p. 122). Collins, (in Welton, 1995) concludes “these tendencies remain integral to the fragmentation of social learning processes which prevent us... from acting collectively in our own best interests” (p. 201).

All of the participants indicated that there was little real neutral ground between educators and learners. The learning dynamic is either fundamentally safe or fundamentally not-safe, with significant consequences. If the safe connection isn’t there “they may miss what it is that they really want to do” [Dean, 7:4]. “You might lose something important for yourself [for your learning]. If you only do where you know you can succeed, you are not taking much risk and you might lose something that would be important”[Jean, 13:4].

Blaire, Dale, and Sam brought out an insidious kind of passive learning which may occur in an unsafe climate. Blaire said that “if process of learning is not very comfortable, and if we get stressed, we just automatically regress back to whatever we
did before, even if that does not make us comfortable. It is comfortable enough by being familiar" [12:4]. Brookfield (1990) and Hare (1993b) agree that in an inhospitable learning climate, the learner retreats to 'the familiar'. Jan notes that the regression is often proactively instigated by the educator, that instructors tend to respond to stress or feelings of intellectual risk by going “back to what is comfortable. In other words, taking them away from a teachable moment” [Jan, 13:1]. Learners might learn not only to avoid learning-based relationships, but also strengthen a conviction that change was not achievable, reinforcing the experience of being closed down to change. The implications of such a possibility beg future research\(^59\).

**Explicit or implicit?**

Dana’s response to questions about whether implicit or explicit process made a difference in the degree to which safety could be established were similar to Dale’s: that maybe it didn’t matter if the norms were explicit or implicit; that perhaps learners could be sufficiently guided by an implicitly safe environment. But, as with Dale, when Dana’s examples were elaborated, the ‘implicit norms’ turned out again to be those which had been introduced explicitly earlier in a course or program.

An important point needs to be made about the nature of the interview discussions which led to dramatic turn-arounds of perception: my approach was only to probe the process and the examples to check for clarity and consistency. It would have been as interesting to me to encounter examples of a completely implicit process proving to be more effective in establishing a safe learning environment.

\(^59\) Cuban (1993) discusses levels of curriculum - from the ‘taught’ curriculum to the ‘learned’ curriculum. His article supports many of the points made by participants about degrees of covert learning, the importance of including the learned curriculum in our evaluation of the learning event, and the need for educators to broaden their understanding of teaching to include multiple layers of learner experience.
Descriptions of former teachers.

Four of the former teachers Dana mentioned are included in the summary of our interview; two helped learners learn and two impeded learning.

1. The ‘remembered teacher’ taught an American history course in a Canadian high school [pages 14-16]. This teacher made the students feel very safe, the class came alive. What was particularly intriguing was that Dana had this same teacher for ‘home room’ - which was not safe; this teacher’s response to the students was very different from his responses to students in American History. This was a case of a teacher being safe in one class, and the class coming alive in a wonderful way with this teacher AND the same teacher being very unsafe as a home room teacher, with students too anxious to contribute.

2. Training in a medical school program - mature students with years of medical experience were streamed into a program with new high school graduates. Mature students were labeled ‘post basics’; young students were labeled ‘generics’. [p. 12] “So in trying to meet the learning needs of both groups [the program planners/ instructors] didn’t meet anybody’s.” Dana went to the professor [p. 13] who agreed that there was this problem with the program but since it was the university’s policy to combine the groups, “nothing could be done. It seemed like a hopeless way of dealing with it.”

3. The next story was about an on-site archaeology course where there were strong social dynamic differences created with exactly the same group of learners from one part of the day to the other part of the day, depending on which instructor was in charge of the group. Under the leadership of one teacher, the students were respectful and considerate with each other and effortful about the work. With the other teacher, the same group of students formed different social groups, behaved rudely and aggressively towards each other, and did little work [p. 17].
At the end of the interview, Dana talked about how the experience of participating in the thesis project had strengthened practice: “I have had the chance to think through why I do things, to question the benefits of certain approaches and, most importantly, to find out that others share my perspectives and that there are good theoretical reasons for continuing. Because of our discussion, I listened to the seminar with Libby Tisdell with a keener attention than I might have otherwise. So many times I would be saying to myself “yes! That is my experience also!” or “now I know the theory behind the practice!”. It has been such a help.

**Dean: Assistant Director, University Extension**

The interview was in a small classroom in my department at the university. Dean began the interview with a ‘learner’ biographical sketch, telling a story of what ‘learning’ had meant over a lifetime. Providing a background for our discussion, Dean described a vocational transformation from the role of microbiologist to university educator. Dean did not plan to become an educator, it ‘just sort of developed’.

When farmers expressed a desire to find out ‘what was going on’ at a new agricultural facility in which Dean was a researcher, Dean began to develop onsite ‘learning event’ tours for civilians. Coincidentally, provincial and international agricultural extension summer courses began to include the research facility in their field trips. Because Dean is “always in a learning mode”, learning how to be a better agricultural educator began to be a focus. Dean discovered that farmers “have this real appetite for learning...and that in many ways for them to be successful they have to be able to take all this information and make it work for them”. Over a fifteen year period Dean’s work and interest shifted from being an agricultural researcher to becoming a program planner for agricultural extension courses to, recently, teaching courses in adult education at a large provincial university.
Dean relied on a keen sense of organizational analysis and course evaluation as a program planning. As an educator, Dean was sensitive to how the risks of learning affect program participation. What Dean consistently described as a quantitative approach to planning and sustainability provided a unique lens for this research project. Qualitative issues about ethics, educator responsiveness to learner needs, safe climate, and institutional flexibility were paired with quantitative issues of marketing, program delivery, revenue generation, and sustainability: it was "just good business". While themes of sustainability replayed throughout the interview, Dean also reiterated that personal satisfaction is derived from learner satisfaction, because that reflects well on program planning ability. Dean's model for program planning included details about delivery, interrelationships, and what sort of lasting impression a program makes on the learner.

Dean stated several times that safety was crucial. Dean agreed with other research participants that learning situations are inherently stressful [8:6], and may be perceived as threatening [11:5]. "What [safety] does is take the pressure off, and when you're not under a lot of pressure, you can focus on the learning rather than on the worrying" [8:4]. A safe atmosphere stimulates learning [9:1].

When it seemed to me that Dean's following a 'proactive' approach to program planning was a preventative strategy, Dean disagreed by asserting that an explicit process is just a reaction to "the way things are" or "maybe it's just what I would like to have happen for me if I were the learner". I probed an apparent inconsistency between Dean's strongly stated desire to be perceived as an 'implicit' and 'reactive' educator, and the overt care with which relationships were established, norms negotiated, reciprocity developed. However, there was no straightforward resolution. Perhaps some ambivalence remained because of my pilot-study tentativeness about my role in the conversation. I was trying to stay in the background and just
explore how the basic questions worked without direction from me. I was not yet confident about which questions would be most useful. Time limitation was also a factor. Dean’s interview was a stimulating, personal insight for me into areas of education which are unfamiliar to me: agriculture, biology research, extension service program planning, distance education, and university administration. Much of the discussion is not included because, although it was rich and informative it was on loosely related issues of marketing, program management, sustainability, ethics, and funding. Dean suggested that issues of safety are fundamental to each of these topics. But there was insufficient time during the interview for greater exploration and there is not enough opportunity in the thesis project to consider all these issues. I feel confident about highlighting Dean’s safety-related statements because they were direct and strong. The summary presents Dean’s most revisited issues: the responsibilities of an educator and the qualities which define skillful educators.

**Educator responsibilities**

To Dean, the educator has primary responsibility for the learning climate because at the beginning of a learning program, the educator has most of the relational and contextual power. These are “tough” responsibilities because social dynamics are hard work [10:3]. If the educator is “trying to do your best to help them learn, then they will put their trust in you. They will almost give you that ability to really help them learn, to take some risks. And those are the things we do as educators” [11:6]. “If the group is going to be successful, [the facilitator] is responsible” [15:3].

Dean seems passionate about and committed to the work and responsibilities of an adult educator. Sam and Dean share the belief that “the facilitator is constantly the model - in fact that is probably the number one task of any facilitator...to model what an effective facilitator looks
like” [Sam 14:1]; they both share a self-concept which combines the effective models of managing a business with the caring models of teaching. It is easy to accept that Dean is an educator who can ‘turn the learner on to learning’ [8:6] when the learning facilitator melds with the organization executive, within a framework of trust, integrity, and ethics [11:5], concern [11:6], leadership [8:2], and respect [10:3].

**Teacher - learner**

Dean’s model of teaching as a sustainable business is combined with a committed awareness of the importance of being a teacher who (in addition to fiscal accountability) is “always in the learning mode”. Dean feels that a strong educator is one who engages the learner from three perspectives: (1) as another learner yet simultaneously as the educator, keenly aware of the power and responsibilities of the relationship; (2) as a key player in policy decisions and fiscal accountability; and (3) as the primary model for educational values of integrity, concern, ethics, respect, trust, safety, challenge, and relationship. Dean suggested that educators who hold the dual roles of learner and educator in mind when engaging students would offer the strongest service to the program and the clients.

**Jan: Administrator, Regional College**

The interview was synchronized with Jan’s annual professional development trip to Vancouver, and took place on the university campus. Jan often responded to questions about concepts or process with anecdotes from experience and, like Dale, also tended to switch mid-sentence between first person and second person when describing personal experiences. Jan was the only participant to dialogue with the transcript, mailing back three pages of follow-up notes.

The interview was grounded in biography rich with experiential detail and reflections on...
conceptual meanings of practice. The two themes Jan seemed to develop with most detail were developing the social dynamic of learning and the importance of an explicit process. Jan’s comments about learner characteristics and the qualities of skillful teachers are included throughout this chapter.

**The social dynamic.**

Discussion began with Jan’s eclectic post-secondary learning, both formal and experiential; travel, interdisciplinary courses, and work experience combined in an attitude Jan developed about grounded, applicable learning. Over time Jan became dimly aware of and then committed to the social nature of learning. A predominant theme throughout the interview was the impact of relationship on learning “my perspective changed when I recognized that the job is not teaching [the content], the job is teaching the people [12:2]. The learning environment started to evolve [11:1]. I started ‘helping learners’ rather than ‘teaching [the subject]’. It was quite a different focus. Community started to develop naturally.” [11:2].

Jan started to begin new programs by telling students that “they are the beginning learners, that there is support from the group, not only about the importance of safety in learning but also the comfort of relationships within the group. So: even if there are things going on outside of the program, how can we help you?” [18:1]. “And I would reinforce that throughout the year...that this is a safe environment, we are friendly people, we are going to help each other through the emotional experiences that you are going to experience as you undertake to do this learning that you have undertaken for the next few months”[ 11:6]. Building the learning community takes not only commitments, goodwill, and guidance, but also time and positive experiences together [8:1], “where everybody’s skills are valued...you are aware of the huge basis of experience” [4:7].

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60 Sam, Terry, Dean, and Jan are professionally mature educators. Narratives of their interviews captures the essence of the conversations but denies the reader the opportunity of gaining from the details of their experience. I (again!) strongly encourage everyone interested in the issues raised in this thesis to read at least the abridged transcripts in the Appendix.
Dana concurred “they need to develop that closeness with each other and trust of each other before they can start to incorporate skill building” [20:1]. Eisner (1991) suggests that “developing an ethic of caring, and creating a community that cares” ought to be a priority in education programs (p. 16).

Sam agreed with Jan, and focused on the tensions and risks which are inherent in the learning dynamic, extending Jan’s attention to introductory group-building into recognizing the learner’s initial experiences: “classroom [cultures] are very tense [7:2]. [introductory moments] with a group of learners the first thing they are doing is establishing their own safety. That is the first thing we do when we come into a new situation, is make sure ‘am I ok here?’ [15:3] If you have a group of people all having those needs, there is immediately tension. There is rivalry simply by everyone wanting to be accepted at the same time” [7:3].

Jan often repeated that modeling relational skills is a fundamental teacher responsibility. Jean contributed an anecdote about a trainer (teaching teachers) who modelled skillful teaching by starting out a session with a focus question and then moulding a cohesive, collaborative, communicative group dynamic by monitoring for conflict or mental wandering and then guiding the group (explicitly) back to normative relationship [11:2]. Jan says “so it becomes their community...and I think it works through all principles of recognizing your role as an instructor [12:5]. At the same time, Jan suggests, developing the social learning dynamic means sharing power and responsibility in reciprocal ways “I mean there were many many times when I didn't have the answer and we would find them together” [12:5].

Reality-checking is important to Jan, who spoke with colleagues and students about the research project, and sent the following as a note with the returned transcript: “I spoke about your research project with a student who had been in the class for two years. The first few days of the first year were recalled as setting the tone for the entire experience. When difficult situations arose, or became extremely frustrating, or the purpose for being there got confusing, the group talked together about these times being part of the process. Instead of becoming overwhelmed
with self-doubt, this student said it became easier to recognize what was happening."61

The social dynamic: failure of the learning group.

Building on Dana’s observations about negative learning in a non-safe climate, Jan discussed why some groups might not work “I think when a group doesn’t work smoothly, there are power conflicts...so you don’t have mutual respect going throughout the group - it doesn’t turn into a group. It remains a bunch of individuals” [7:1]. When the learning group fails to gel, learning is restricted “because otherwise we go backwards, what have you learned?” [Peni: ‘go back’ to where?] To what is comfortable...to what you already know” [3:1].

Providing significant direction is often the most effective manner in helping the learner gain ‘access’ to the field or discipline. In providing this direction the educator should not concentrate only on the fundamentals but also on how those fundamentals relate to the whole. In doing so the educator is asking the learner for their trust, and the educator must recognize what is being offered or given up. Again, the necessity for an authentic relationship is paramount.62

Explicit process is an essential feature of building the learning relationship

Explicit process.

Jan expressed a commitment in creating an explicit relational process within the social dynamic. This attitude about explicit process differs from the concerns Bruner (1996) raises about explicit information stunting inquisitiveness. Jan was speaking to process, not content, in the conviction that an open process provides degrees of safety which stimulate inquisitiveness and permit educators to use their expertise as guiding rather than dominating forces. All research participants came to support the concept of explicit group development, but Jan had integrated

61 From notes which Jan returned with the reviewed transcript.

62 As above.
the ideas more deeply (and for a longer time) into teaching practice.

“As I evolved [as the facilitator] within the program, process got more and more explicit. Right from day one I would talk about what's going to happen for you this year, what are some of the experiences you might run into, how you might feel about them. What the immediate response might be in terms of everyone coming over when you've screwed up...and we are all going to be there to help you...it's only a mistake and its got nothing to do with you as a learner. So there was a lot of support in that way” [11:6]. “…and make it explicit. I found that it strengthened not only relationship on a one-to-one basis, but also all the relationships that would happen as a consequence in the [learning] community” [12:2]. The purpose of an explicit process is to bring the learner to the point of realizing ‘now I am ready to learn’. “I think that is done by making that very, very explicit: "the way you are feeling is setting you up for risk, and that is a chance to learn something, so let's work through it” [3:1].

Again, Sam considered the introductory moments of group formation to be crucial for the future of the group “by making 'the covert' overt, the facilitator is taking the potentially uncontrolled group dynamics at the beginning of any group and saying, 'let's start by setting some safety guidelines'. And that will have a profound impact on the short term development of group style” [16:1]. “With an explicit process, this group will feel less stress from interpersonal conflicts... and therefore the only anxiety they will feel will be based on their desire to learn, their desire to know - what they are there for” [16:5]. Jean added “in making this explicit, your intention is to provide a learning environment where everybody will be able to contribute and wherein contributions can be shared by everybody in the group” [12:5]. And Terry summarized: “what is important about explicit? I think that ground rules become part of the cultural norm... one, for each learner who now has an enhanced opportunity to meet [the expectations and their ground rules]; two, for other people who have the opportunity to think “oh, wouldn't that be a good thing”; and, three, for the trainers, who have some obligation and
responsibility to do what they can to help [learners] to achieve those. So the explicitness is really important” [8:2].

Jan’s summary of the teacher/learner relationship blends all elements of the research questions:

I believe that every educator hopes to develop in every learner with whom they interact the traits of taking personal responsibility for your own learning, becoming an active learner. The role of the educator, especially when the learner is facing a new area of information, is an extremely important one. If we accept any degree of accountability for how or what a learner learns, then the educator must accept a far greater role than Knowles appears to describe. Being ‘a guide on the side’ provides the direction to enable the learner to get going down the road. Being supportive while the learner does circles in the ditch doesn’t provide benefit to anybody. Of course, the direction of the road and as many of the intersections as are known to the educator must be made explicit. Once learners are on the road and able to recognize ‘ditches’ for themselves, the learning contracts can become valuable tools by which learners may recognize the intersections and select the options as they proceed on their own.

Jean: Senior Information Resource Faculty, University

Jean’s preference was to meet in my family home on the university campus. Although I could provide meeting rooms on campus or in the business sector, Jean accepted the offer of a homey location. Jean anticipated a high level of intensity about an audio-taped interview and was conscientious about feeling comfortable enough to think through the important points. Jean arrived with an annotated ‘question sheet’ in hand and responded to each of questions in turn.

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63 From notes which Jan returned with the reviewed transcript.

64 All participants were given choices of meeting locales: the university, business settings, my sitting room, their offices, or any other appropriate sites which might feel most comfortable for them.
The remembered teacher.

Jean continues to learn from an experience over thirty years ago with a grade twelve English teacher. The teacher was "very much in control of the mood of the class" and was able to create a "very encouraging" atmosphere. "His class was quite a cheerful place. I remember that he tried very hard to get everybody to contribute...discussions in his class were considerably livelier and people were more willing to try something...whereas in other classes that wasn't always the case." There was "a sense of exploration" where "any ideas were worth talking about; it was ok to try something on". "There was a sense that it was ok to explore something. If it didn't turn out to be the greatest, that was ok." For Jean this one teacher seemed to be a standout in twenty years of formal schooling. "I don't know if I can think of anyone in university." "I didn't feel that way in a lot of other classes. There were lots of classes where you would think twice about opening your mouth." So, as Jean points out, relationships with teachers can have "a lifelong impact" [16:5].

Anxiety in teaching.

A new piece Jean brought to the discussions was an emphasis on teacher-safety. In order for teachers to enact their responsibilities to create safe learning climates within their programs, they also need to feel safe in the organizational context and social dynamic of the learning site. Jean mentioned several levels of teacher safety: being familiar with the technical, instrumental, and multi-media resources to be used; having a physically comfortable environment in which to teach; working within an egalitarian relationship structure among colleagues; and fair access to scholastic materials and research funding.

[A discussion about why instructor's anxiety level may be increased through contextual factors has not been transcribed. It almost felt like 'forbidden terrain'; it was extremely
interesting, and an important aspect of the question to return to in another research project. As Jean said: “this may be way off your topic, but it sure alleviates my anxiety to talk about it”. I did not resist Jean’s returning the discussion back to issues pertaining to learners. I did not pursue the questions about teacher safety, sensing that it is a big question - deserving of its own study. I do feel that safety must be reciprocal and equally available to all participants in a learning event. Of course educators must feel safe (10:5).

In my research journal I noted that Jean and Dale were the least workplace independent among the participants and were the two who expressed most frustration about style differences, contextual factors, loss of power and control, and limited flexibility regarding curriculum and instructional approaches. On so little information, it is hard to evaluate the direction of cause and effect. Even so, these educators indicated that they may not feel safe enough. They seem to feel constrained in their opportunities to establish environments which are safe enough for them to feel empowered in their work and for their learners to gain maximum benefit from their programs. Although Chapter Seven will suggest implications and options, this is another issue which would benefit from future research and deeper consideration than that which this project can offer.

Jean highlights pragmatic issues because they seem easiest to remedy: “we have a certain level of anxiety ourselves because half the time we are teaching in some lab we have never seen before and may not quite know how everything is connected. It is not like we have our own lab where we know how everything works” [10:4].

**Style differences and learner characteristics.**

Style differences and the influence of learner characteristics might be the most significant of the ‘unexpected findings’. Participants mentioned several factors, which will be discussed in
more detail. Because most of the points Jean made during the interview were connected in some way to personal qualities of educator and learner, an introduction of the issues weaves Jean's comments together in preparation for a more thorough consideration of overall findings.

Jean brought out several ways style differences affect the learning culture, from instructional considerations, through negotiating procedural norms, to issues of communication and atmosphere.

Learner characteristics refer back to the comments other participants made about qualities of commitment and goodwill. Jean felt that because “I always care about whether or not the people I am teaching are comfortable, and that I check for feedback about how they are understanding, [it is important that] that the people I am teaching are there because they want to learn” [6:ff]. As Blaire said: “teach people who are interested in being taught” [5:3].

A dilemma which arises when style differences such as extroversion or shyness become confused with learner characteristics such as goodwill or commitment, is discussed in Chapter Five. Although research answers how style differences are met through instructional techniques, participants’ comments suggest that the projection of qualities and characteristics onto style may be another important issue to study.

Style differences are not only a question of attribution but also one of taking responsibility. Whereas Jean (and to some extent Dale) felt that certain types or styles of learners have a generalizable negative impact on the social dynamic, others (Terry, Jan, Dean, Dana, and Sam) take on the responsibility for accepting all style differences as potentially positive assets in a learning culture. The educator is presumed responsible

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65 at the end of the presentation of findings in Chapter Five

66 For example, when Dale uncritically attaches the quality of ‘nurturing’ to the temperament of ‘quiet’ or when Jean associates ‘domination and controlling’ with extroverted, they may be revealing a major challenge for educators’ efforts at creating a safe learning climate.
for working 'style' into norming strategies and group development. For example, Terry responds with respect to resistant learners who demonstrate an independent and uncollaborative style in a group by giving them a reason to join in the negotiations for group development. Terry continues:

that kind of a style typically responds to logic. [For example:] 'we are now going to spend the next five minutes developing a quick list of ground rules. The reason we are going to do that is because we are going to work together in the next three days. It has been my experience over all the classes that I have done that if we spend five minutes up front identifying precisely what our ground rules are about how we are going to work together it will be well worth the effort. We will get our result more quickly'. It's the explaining why which draws them in [14:2].

Data findings suggest that expression of style differences can be negotiated; learner characteristics of goodwill, commitment, and adequate prior knowledge cannot be negotiated. Differences which develop between commitment and goodwill are present as either 'ascribed' or 'felt' needs are discussed in Chapters Five and Six. Several significant implications become evident, especially in areas of group development, instructional techniques, evaluation, and policy.

Screening.

If characteristics may not be negotiated, can they be screened for? Courses routinely screen for adequate preparation by attaching prerequisite learning to course registration. Jean observes that such screening is less common in skill-based training programs. “There should be some sort of screening to make sure that a beginning course is made up of beginners, and that people who are not beginners form another group” [15:5]. “I felt quite unsafe myself because a lot of people were more advanced than I was”[16:1].

Jan agreed that the arbitrary assignment typical of education programs impacts the formation of the group dynamic and should be studied further. Alternatively, Jan suggests, there might be significant benefits accrue to learning outcomes if participants were screened for issues which might need to be considered during a program - early
enough that instructional approaches might be adapted to support a particular group rather than struggled with once the group [program] is brought together. All participants mentioned the potential benefits of screening in some way. What’s more, Blaire and Dana’s programs are tailored to highly specific groups of learners; Sam screens program participants for suitability; both Terry and Dean are proactive about preliminary contact with program participants and the importance of instructors preparing courses with a particular group in mind.

**Safety.**

According to Jean, safety is the essence of a positive social climate which is capable of offering a supportive platform to learners because “[the group dynamic] governs the degree of communication that can occur in that group. I think the ‘dynamic’ also defines the degree of trust or lack of, and the degree of respect, which I think are very, very important: feeling comfortable enough to speak” [10:6]. Although Jean’s comments about norming and relationships are included throughout other interview summaries, Jean’s overarching belief is that the group climate must feel safe enough for learners to engage each other about the issues, and that responsibility for group development lies with the educator.

The interview ended within an hour, as Jean had another meeting. Our untaped closing discussion probed some of the issues around style differences. Jean recognized that assigning socially desirable qualities to particular learning styles might be problematic, but that expecting educators to take full responsibility for the effect of both personal characteristics and diversity of learning styles is also problematic for Jean.

**Sam: Director, Community Education**

Sam and I arranged to meet in Sam's office first thing in the morning but we met by happenstance outside the centre, then chatted as we checked mail, warmed up muffins, and made tea. We had a trying time fixing my tape machine - which was not recording. I was anxious
about the recorder because it had been difficult to find a block of time in Sam's schedule for the interview. Sam warded off nervousness by reciting goofy short poems every time I needed to do a test. Finally, functioning recorder in hand, we moved into Sam's office, sat down, and almost immediately began the interview.

The interview was only fifty minutes, which is surprising, given the density and length of the transcript. Sam spoke quickly and animatedly. Throughout the interview we were drinking tea. Sam said afterwards that, for most of the interview, I maintained such a [n untypical] neutral affect that Sam was concerned about whether or not the interview was "giving you what you wanted". When I asked what influence that might have had on what was said, Sam replied that, by receiving no cues from me, the discussion focused on just Sam's own perspective. I had hoped that would happen. I had been concerned that our working relationship might have influenced Sam's responses, and hoped for unmediated reactions to the issues we were exploring. However, in hindsight, I wish I had anticipated that my neutral expression would be so unlike me that Sam might feel uncomfortable. I think that my including Sam ahead of time in my thoughts and intentions might have provided the condition for Sam's spontaneity minus the discomfort. Sam and I know each other's approach to teaching so well, and have had to negotiate that approach within school board settings, that I was nervous about responding in any way that might impose any of my perspectives onto Sam's responses. Having had the experience of sharing an interview with Sam, I can see how I could set the beginning up differently to maintain both objectives of comfort and authenticity.

I have seen Sam consistently accept conflict when it occurs, and hold it steady until the opposites have been clarified and communication developed. When, in the interview, Sam speaks of securing learners, that is an accurate description of practice.
Debrief.

Two days after the interview I took the transcript to Sam to read. We discussed the way I had just thrown the interview open, and my concerns that I may have left Sam without a solid foundation upon which to be interviewed. Perhaps if I had moved through the steps of introduction and opening Sam might have felt more relaxed, 'safer', at the beginning of the interview. Sam responded with, "If you are going to do that, you might balance your reflections with some input from me. [well, yes, of course] Maybe I am just a nervous person and needed a few minutes of chatting around to get settled in. It may be that if you had introduced into our familiar working relationship a new 'professional interviewer' approach of explaining it all to me, or of following interview protocols of opening the discussion and question formation, I might have become discombobulated altogether. Perhaps I felt most comfortable with your just being yourself."

In the debriefing, Sam and I discussed how the issue of 'safety' has been an important link between us. To Sam it has also been important that my evaluations as a teacher are high; this suggests some congruence between theoretical perspective and practical application. And Sam is the only person I have worked with who is consistently successful at developing a safe learning environment.

Sam agreed to review the transcript and to forward any afterthoughts to me, but had already considered one aspect of the interview. Sam had not thought about 'implicit / explicit' as relevant aspects of the learning process and was surprised to hear responses to my question,

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Because my workshops are highly sensitive and because each takes class time from another teacher's regular program, hosting teachers are asked to formally evaluate my work (in approximately twenty-five dimensions). I am therefore evaluated by several different teachers, and hundreds of students, each year.
describing what were the differences were and what were the outcomes. After the interview, responses became both more complex and anchored as years of facilitating, teaching, and educational administration were factored in. "I think this is a very important factor for you to focus on in your thesis." "It is the underlying focus of my thesis", I replied; "I hope to explore not only the relationship between safety, risk, and learning but also how educators can recognize that they hold implicit assumptions about those relationships and that their assumptions become closer to being integrated into practice to the extent that they are explicitly known."

Sam began the interview by talking about experiences as a learner and teacher which developed perceptions about and practices supporting safety and learning. Sam’s first self-awareness about the role of safety in learning occurred over ten years ago in the education program of a provincial youth corrections centre. Youth were not safe in this facility, and Sam noticed that they were unable to absorb even basic learning about personal hygiene or proper use of equipment “until they felt they were listened to, respected, and accepted. For them that was the basis of safety” [2:2]. As Sam developed safety-based approaches in order to gain the attention and involvement of the youth, it became apparent that “when you offer safety to someone, offer them the experience of being accepted and not being forced to change... led to a tremendous increase to their gaining the educational side of these services that we offered. I realized that safety was absolutely essential” [2:2] because “the safer the learners, the quicker they are to learn” [6:3].

The roles of safety and risk in learning.

When Sam moved into mainstream community education with adults, the ideas which backed institutional practice were tested against the needs of a ‘normal’ adult population. Sam realized that “safety on a very basic level reduces stress, which increases learning effectiveness”
“A group which feels safe with each other will take more risks. The more risks you take, the more you are trying out new behaviours, exploring new ideas, therefore the more you are learning. That is the overall goal of education. When a group feels safe together, you see learners being a lot more creative. They will say ‘I want to try something here; let me know if it works’. And the ideas are sometimes quite brilliant, where they wouldn't have had the courage to try if they were afraid of being judged or of being responded negatively to by their peers” [17:2]. Sam explored the effects of safety-based teaching strategies and found that “safety increases the risks [which can be taken]. More risks mean more learning taking place. And especially more creativity. Creativity plays a very important role. We are beyond memorizing in adult learning. We are trying to find ways to respond to tasks, to respond to problems, to seize opportunities. And being willing to risk in the face of a challenge will always create a far more creative, and in the long run, a far more effective solution to any problem” [17:2]. “What we want to do is prime the learners so they want to learn, which will put them at the right level of anxiety for learning but not increase the anxiety beyond the appropriate level by creating an unsafe environment” [8:1].

**Safety: content and process.**

Sam began to study the elements of learning events and realized that “the content has almost nothing to do with safety [4:1]. The content the learners are discussing or asking for, is far less important than their need to be recognized by the facilitator, to have their opinions or ideas validated [7:3]. No matter how valuable the information is, if it is presented in a way that doesn't create safety and a sense of being respected, that person [the teacher] is going to be ignored. If our goal is teaching, then our goal is safety [3:3]. The primary way to do it is to be present and to be accepting in your presence. The 'person' of the teacher is the absolute foundation of safety in the classroom [4:3]. *Cuban (1993) agrees that “any content...is
worthless...unless there are strong relationships between teacher and students” (p. 185).

**Techniques for developing safety.**

Accepting that safety is a crucial element of learning, and that the educator has the primary responsibility for creating a learning climate, Sam developed educational techniques with which to create a ‘safe’ learning group. The first step is to “treat every member of the group as if they were in acute crisis. By doing that I ensure that the students who are feeling unsafe will feel safe and that the students who are already feeling safe just feel very impressed with the amount of acceptance they are experiencing from the facilitator [3:1]. [4:3] There are some specific techniques [of validation and acknowledgment]. *Validation* meets the needs of allowing a person to feel that they are being accepted [6:1]. Learners respond to validation with: I want to be validated; I want that experience, and this is a safe place to respond, I won't be put down for my own ideas. That will encourage participation [8:5]. By validating, the facilitator is modeling ways of responding to one another, ways of responding to differences of content and opinion. That will have a dramatic impact on the formation of group dynamics and will create safety [16:3].

“'The other technique is *acknowledgment*. will take us from a neutral to a safer environment. To do that quickly, we have to make the covert overt [8:5]. Peni: And why do you call it 'acknowledgment'? Sam: Because we are acknowledging the situation. In a teaching context, when somebody is reacting to the material they might be reacting in ways that are seen as problematic [9:4]. Acknowledgment is a three step process. First you want to acknowledge the context [9:1]. Step two - within the context you refer to any *challenge* which the context may create [9:3]. The third step is the request to create safety. ‘So please ask any questions; no question is a stupid question’ [10:6].
“Additional techniques that we use are norm-setting” [12:1] and conscious development of a strong group culture. “You can create an environment where certain aspects of people’s personal characteristics will come out, aspects that are cooperative, aspects that encourage each other, rather than compete with each other. And so in that way, without trying to create any therapy to change people's group responses, we take advantage of the positive sides of everybody's group responses by creating a safe environment right at the outset” [11:4].

Sam refocused the discussion of safety to issues of content, challenge, and conflict. In order to be authentic and effective, safety practices in education must include processes for dealing with right and wrong information, conflict, and the sort of positive, energizing challenge which stimulates deeper levels of learning. Returning to the question of inaccurate or inappropriate learner responding, Sam suggested: “what you might actually end up saying is that you disagree with the actual content, but first you make them feel comfortable... ‘I am really glad you raised that because...’ And then you can go on and correct the content. But your first response was to make them feel really pleased that they offered something in front of the group” [6:1]. “When you get locked up in an argument, the argument degenerates into content quite quickly, and then you could spend an hour discussing the content when there is a lot of really important process stuff to deal with” [14:1].

**Differentiating between content and process.**

“Content and process go together and cannot be separated. The care with which I treat the content is a form of process itself. Hopefully I am modeling sufficient concern that the students will read the manual and to take the information that is useful from the manual into the classroom” [15:1]. “The curriculum is the process. Most of that time is spent on how to make that content come to life to turn it into process” [14:1]. Porter (1996) put the point another way:
"content is the vessel for the process."

"What we remember about any significant event in our lives is the process of the experience. Most of us won't remember the words of a marriage proposal, or the time we got together with someone we are close to. Most of us don't remember the words that were spoken to us at graduation, or at another important event. We will remember the *feel* of it, we will remember the process, how somebody presented themselves. We will remember when somebody was sarcastic, but we may not remember what they said. That is what we remember: the process. We are learning the process all the time [15:1].

**Safety as a process issue.**

"So the actual facilitation takes the information that is required and creates a process by which it is integrated and doesn't just become information; it actually becomes part of what people experience when they think about giving the workshops themselves. It is a very important part of our training to realize that the curriculum, although it looks like it's about content, is actually about process" [Sam, 14:1].

*Jan agreed with Sam that safety is a process issue, not a content issue. While we may be able to describe differences between the functions of process and the role of content, the boundaries may be meaningless in practice. As Sam says: it doesn't matter what the content is. Jan: "there is no way the learner will attempt to take further risks until they feel safe again in the learning environment. That comes back into that element of safety that you are looking at in your research. If they are not safe, they are not receptive enough. If they do not feel receptive, they are going to back away. It doesn't matter how hard you push content or how well you have arranged it in the cognitive sense, appealing to their prior knowledge or whatever, there is something else that could interfere. And you have to deal with it. (pause) It was an evolution in my understanding. It is not something that I started with or something that I understood suddenly" [Jan, 14:5].
Sam reviewed the draft of the transcript. One concern was about a section where thoughts seemed to jumble into each other. Sam was reassured to hear that such a ‘breakdown’ in the middle of an intense discussion showed the authenticity of the transcription. However, the section in question did not contain uniquely relevant material and so is not included in the abridged transcript in the Appendix. Sam met briefly with me for a follow-through debrief, as discussed in the introduction to the interview.

**Terry: Corporate Manager - Workplace Training Facilitator**

Terry and I became acquainted at a professional development seminar, where we were equals in our work as participants. In a later event, when I had the opportunity to join one of Terry’s small workshop presentations, the atmosphere was task-focused, yet comfortable and congenial. The research interview was scheduled for a weekday morning in Terry’s office. Terry had been prepared through our pre-interview discussion and Terry’s access to the outline and letter of consent which preceded our meeting. I had done a little bit of background reading about ‘the Porter Corporation of Canada’ and had once worked in the financial district of the downtown core. I felt prepared for our meeting. However, I still found the ‘high-end corporate setting’, with its formal reception area and Terry’s closed executive office, momentarily intimidating. As I sat on the other side of Terry’s expansive desk, it was a relief that the process of the interview had been established between us and the interview could begin with the first of the semi-structured questions.

After reviewing a professional and personal history of life-long learning, Terry spoke about a ‘remembered teacher’ within the context of shared teacher-learner responsibilities. Terry’s main theme throughout the discussion was that the educator has all the responsibilities for the learning event - including the crucial task of creating a safe and explicit enough culture that
learners will take the shift of learning responsibilities to themselves. The narrative of Terry’s interview follows the theme of shifting responsibilities, in the context of the role of safety in learning, throughout all of the related issues raised.

**Shared responsibility: educator responsibility and learner responsibility.**

“The best trainer I have personally experienced had an ability to make a personal connection with each of the people in the class and was able to demonstrate his interest in them as an individual. To watch him do that was phenomenal. In a four day course he made an individual connection with each of twenty people he had not met before. He learned something about each of them, something of their style, what was working for them and what wasn't. He chatted with each individual at a level they understood. Whether he would have been the same in a normal social environment or even have liked them, who knows” [2:5].

“He said: ‘I want to help you get the most out of today that you can. M-O-S-T (on a flip chart page) How do you get the most? First of all M *manage* your learning; do what you need to do. If you need to go have a break, you go have a break; if you have some important calls that need to be done and you can't concentrate on your learning until you do them, you go do your calls. We are all adults here. If we look around the room, we have twenty-one trainers in this room. We don't have one. Everybody here has life experience they bring to the table. I have some that may be particular to this subject, you probably do to. *You* manage your learning. O for *observe*. Observe the process that we are going through, observe others, you can learn from all of that. S *search for application*. Unless you can find ways to apply this when you get back to your work 'use it or lose it' is the message. So search for application. And T *talk*. Talk with each other because you can learn from all of us’. And then he essentially closes that by saying ‘You are responsible for your own learning. I am here to set an environment in which you can
learn. I am here to provide you some content which you can learn. But only you can decide to learn it. If there's anything I can do to help you with that, please let me know. But if you don't let me know, I can't help you. But it is your job to do the learning’ ”[3:5].

“He has responsibilities and the learners have responsibilities. He is just making sure up front [explicitly] that people know what those responsibilities are by giving them some tips about how they get the 'most' out of the workshop. And by setting that up front it sets up for better success, really” [4:3].

There was some discontinuity between what Terry might occasionally say about learning theory and what Terry would actually do in practice. For example, there was one reference to learners who might not feel they could benefit by a ‘safe-practice’ approach to education, followed by a statement that educators were not responsible for changing such perspectives in their learners. Then Terry offered an anecdote about a group of corporate managers who strongly resisted participation in a ‘safety-based’ learning program and the total responsibility Terry took, as the educator, to create a process vehicle with which to bring this group into the learning mode Terry felt would be most beneficial for them!

**Safety.**

Terry defines safety from two areas of physical safety [4:5] and psychological safety; psychological safety [5:] includes five dimensions of power, relationships, social dynamics, the ‘freedom to fail’, and the valuing of diversity. Terry also suggested that physical safety needs to be taken as a given, where physical safety is not secured in some way, other areas of safety are at risk. Psychological safety is fundamentally about social relationships and the feeling of belonging. Power in relationship needs to be neutralized, shared, or transformed somehow into a useful tool for group development [5:2; 10:5]. Social dynamics are fundamentally the responsibility of the
educator (who has the balance of power in the group), but the responsibility of the educator is to shift power and responsibilities to the learner - through the development of explicit and negotiated norms and expectations - until learners are ‘empowered’ (motivated through personal agency) to make the learning their own. The process of learning includes the safety of being able to take risks, the ‘freedom to fail’, to make mistakes while being able to maintain one’s sense of agency, and belonging within the group. Finally, if diversity is a factor but is not valued, it is another sort of safety issue: “you may not feel as psychologically safe to let your opinions out [6:1].

Normative standards for safety within a learning group - negotiated group norms of conduct and process - need to be “set safety right at the beginning [and] if you make them explicit then that could just help things go more smoothly. What kinds of ground rules do we want to set, what are the kinds of things we want to abide by as a group?”[7:3] Within regularly scheduled company meetings, norm setting no longer needs to be done explicitly because, having been negotiated by the same groups in the past, the norms have become part of the corporate culture. Even so, when a group feels ‘rusty’, someone will remember the process of norm negotiation and suggest that the group revisit the process and the rationale for following the process. And because even the process has been explicitly negotiated, it is comfortable for group members to suggest a temporary return to the explicit review of rules and procedures of group communication. For some areas of the corporation, explicitly negotiating norms or even developing employee training programs has been slower to establish than that in other areas. As Terry demonstrates a sensitivity to creating safety around the speed with which certain areas of the company are brought in to the corporate ethos of collaborative team building: [speaking slowly] “I think that the ground rules have been used more in various parts of the organization than in others - not a surprise. Where they have been used a lot, they are ingrained, they are a
part of the culture. ...I don't think you can develop the group norms... if they are contrary to the working culture, they are not going to work”[10:2].

Terry also mentioned contextual safety factors associated with learning. It was a telling comment that, because many adult learners are scarred by schooling experiences, in order to create a safe and effective learning environment, “I try and make my training rooms not look like classrooms, to not feel like classrooms...that is another safety issue for some people” [6:4].

One low-key company approach towards mitigating the resistance of the more technically oriented areas of the organization to incorporating collaborative communication and team-building procedures is to move into management positions people who have become skilled in the process: we don't hire at the management level. The vast majority of our managers are promoted from within. That means that they are already part of the culture” [18:2].

Explicit process.

I returned the interview to Terry's statements about the importance of explicit processes by asking: [Peni] “we are talking about risk and making norms explicit...what's it got to do with learning? [Terry]: “...creates the opportunity for people to learn, and the enthusiasm for the learning. If people can't voice what they are thinking ...... we all tend to talk with half-baked ideas but the process of talking about it, getting input, bakes those ideas for us...or we throw them out”[12:6].

A second important function of explicitly setting the norms for a learning group is that it can “identify [for the learners] what their expectation are. It is time really well spent. Because it is input to the trainer as to what needs to be covered - but perhaps even more importantly, by stating their expectations, it is explicit to them”[8:1].

Thirdly, Terry suggested that conflict resolution within groups might best be achieved
through 'perception sharing' [9:3], a form of making explicit all points of view in a social dynamic of respect and acceptance. Terry call this “planting the seed of ‘It's ok to disagree’ as opposed to ‘We are expecting a huge problem’[9:6].

**Educator responsibility.**

Having suggested that a shifting of significant responsibility and power from educator to learner is one effective method for helping people learn how to learn, Terry reasserted that educator responsibility for monitoring and maintaining the integrity of a program was paramount. Terry emphasized the importance of monitoring responsibilities by describing one learning format where power sharing can be done only at the expense of content exposure.

Opportunities to develop the group dynamic ‘naturally’ may be limited due to the brevity or intensity of a workshop, or to learner characteristics; then the educator is responsible for establishing a safe atmosphere, monitoring learner dilemmas and relationships, and designing an instructional approach which is going to work for that group of learners. “In a one or two day workshop there isn't really the opportunity.......you [as a facilitator] have had the luxury, the opportunity and the responsibility and the obligation [tapping the table] to pre-think alternative processes which will help get that content across as effectively and as quickly as you can. So for people doing course design, you don't just design one course, you design about six or seven each with branches in terms of ......ok here is the point or activity I want to get across... what are the two three four ways of doing that depending on the environment in the class with those particular individuals. At the next learning point...or if this goes this way maybe there is a choice of two things I need to do. And so it branches. I think that when you are trying to jam content as quickly and as effectively as you can you don't in a short one or two day workshop have the opportunity to hand over too much of the process to the group. I mean if you *did* hand it over,
they are working much harder and less effectively on the content” [17:1].

**Shifting responsibility for safety and learning.**

Less intensive or longer running courses offer a standard platform for the shift in responsibility from an educator led to a learner led culture. Other participants suggested likewise. For Dale, the simplest level of educator responsibility is “that they are always monitoring”. Blaire expands: “the facilitator monitors. One of the jobs of the facilitator is to monitor the group and make sure that the norms and goals get looked at every now and then to confirm that they are being followed - or to renegotiate a change” [Blaire, 6:1]. Dale elaborates:

> for the learner to feel safe around the facilitator, the facilitator needs to be willing to share with the learner and to be on the same level with the learners so that the learners don’t feel threatened by this person’s power. So it would be a matter of people getting to know each other in a democratic way. I see the facilitator as being responsible for establishing some kind of democratic environment and that means they’re also sharing the process [5:5]. As the learner begins to come into that, the learner becomes just as instrumental as the instructor at creating and supporting that environment. [The instructor] cannot do it by themselves [10:6]. The responsibility shifts from the instructor to the learners...more responsibility shifts from the instructor, and the group becomes more and more cooperative [11:2].

‘Shifting’ is a concept which emerged from the study as a real unexpected finding which will be discussed at greater length in Chapter Five. Each of the participants spontaneously introduced this dimension of the learning relationship - a unique kind of reciprocity.

**Educator autonomy and accountability**

Terry has complete freedom and accountability for program planning, implementation, and evaluation within the Corporation. Fiscal decisions about educational support spending are made by Terry. “I am accountable to the organization for the decisions I make...So I get to do whatever I want, which sounds absolutely luxurious. But 'whatever I want' only means that I have to be out there in the organization, understanding whatever the needs are and putting priorities on them. I
I am the one who determines if it makes sense both from the time the organization has for training, the needs for training” [18:4).

As Terry walked me through corporate offices to the expansive foyer, we arranged to debrief the interview after Terry read the transcript. Terry felt that the interview itself had concluded without the need for debriefing. Terry returned the reviewed transcript to me with pencilled changes to protect the anonymity of the corporation and a note that there was otherwise no need to further debrief the transcript.

Discussion

The research project established that educators assume safety has a crucial role in the sort of purposive learning expected from the educator/learner relationship. Participants were able to describe safety, provide examples of safety from practice, discuss methods for establishing and evaluating safety in the social dynamic, and evaluate safety in process.

While I felt confident that each of the participants could speak succinctly to the key issues targeted by the interview questions, I did not expect the degree of congruence among participant responses in terms of frequently identical terms of reference, convincing example from practice, and lines of logical thinking. I began gathering data satisfied that each participant would have something coherent to say about safety and learning; I anticipated that some participants might hold very different descriptive perspectives and value judgements from mine, but none did. Differences of nuance and example which surfaced during analysis were equally surprising. Recognizing and expressing unexpected findings was as difficult a task as was identifying, describing, and interpreting commonalities. The generalized discussion about findings across interviews is presented in three sections as Chapter Five: findings which specifically related to the
research questions\textsuperscript{68}, unexpected findings, and a glossary of terms. The concluding discussion about research findings is supplemented by a descriptive figure of the learning relationship as suggested by participants.

\textsuperscript{68} Illustrated as Figure 5.
CHAPTER FIVE: REVIEW OF INTERVIEW FINDINGS

You cannot expect of yourself nor be expected by others to present the ‘whole voice’. You are striving to offer a significant voice. You and others may need to accept that that is the best you can ever do. Anyway, whatever you do, it will not speak to everyone the same way\textsuperscript{69}.

Interview findings are presented through an interpretive discussion, a chart of participant responses to the interview questions, and, at the end of the chapter, a glossary of terms drawn from the interviews. Responses are organized according to the interview questions, arranged into clusters of ideas which prepare the reader for the concluding discussion of implications suggested in Chapter Six. The interviews raised several questions and offered unexpected points of view which I wanted to highlight, so alternative approaches were considered. This format was chosen after deliberation about how to maintain continuity among the literature findings, the interviews, and the concluding discussion of implications.

A chart of participant responses appears on the following page in order to give the reader a quick reference to data at the broadest level. Prior to a glossary, attention is given to misconceptions about and challenges to issues of safety which evolved from several discussions I had with other educators whom I met at seminars, colloquia, and conferences. The glossary of terms, created with a collage of participant quotations, is available at the end of the chapter.

Findings Relating to the Interview Questions

The interview data reflected that, for the research participants at least, safety is an assumed precondition for learning, that learning - although experienced by individuals - is a relationally dynamic social activity, and that there are several correlated factors\textsuperscript{70} to consider.

\textsuperscript{69} Blaire

\textsuperscript{70} such as risk, responsibility, establishing social norms etc.
Figure 5: Chart of participant responses to interview questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Blair</th>
<th>Dale</th>
<th>Dana</th>
<th>Dean</th>
<th>Jan</th>
<th>Jean</th>
<th>Sam</th>
<th>Terry</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning, in an educational context, is a social activity.</td>
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<td>Learning involves risking what the known for the unknown.</td>
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<td>Learning is enhanced by minimizing unnecessary risks - to maximize risks inherent in the challenges of considering the unknown.</td>
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<td>‘Safe’ is having just the right amount of challenge.</td>
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<td>A safe process is a necessary precondition for learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Safety is:</td>
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<tr>
<td>- the absence of risk; non-threatening</td>
<td>Blair</td>
<td>Dale</td>
<td>Dana</td>
<td>Dean</td>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>Jean</td>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Terry</td>
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<tr>
<td>- comfortable</td>
<td>Blair</td>
<td>Dale</td>
<td>Dana</td>
<td>Dean</td>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>Jean</td>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Terry</td>
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<tr>
<td>- having explicit norms</td>
<td>Blair</td>
<td>Dale</td>
<td>Dana</td>
<td>Dean</td>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>Jean</td>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Terry</td>
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<tr>
<td>- reciprocal</td>
<td>Blair</td>
<td>Dale</td>
<td>Dana</td>
<td>Dean</td>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>Jean</td>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Terry</td>
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<tr>
<td>- respect</td>
<td>Dana</td>
<td>Dean</td>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>Jean</td>
<td></td>
<td>Jean</td>
<td>Sam</td>
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<tr>
<td>- trust</td>
<td>Dana</td>
<td>Dean</td>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>Jean</td>
<td></td>
<td>Jean</td>
<td>Sam</td>
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<tr>
<td>Norms need to be negotiated, applied, and upheld.</td>
<td>Blair</td>
<td>Dale</td>
<td>Dana</td>
<td>Dean</td>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>Jean</td>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Terry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Style differences should be considered as factors when setting norms.</td>
<td>Blair</td>
<td>Dale</td>
<td>Dana</td>
<td>Dean</td>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>Jean</td>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Terry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Educators are responsible for the safe climate for learning</td>
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<td>Dale</td>
<td>Dana</td>
<td>Dean</td>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>Jean</td>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Terry</td>
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<tr>
<td>There are differences in safety needs among people</td>
<td>Blair</td>
<td>Dale</td>
<td>Dana</td>
<td>Farn</td>
<td>Jean</td>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Terry</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Differing safety needs should be explicitly ‘normed’</td>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>Terry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Differing safety needs should be met by educators</td>
<td>Blair</td>
<td>Dale</td>
<td>Dana</td>
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<tr>
<td>Power (control) is shared in a safe learning context</td>
<td>Blair</td>
<td>Dale</td>
<td>Dana</td>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>Terry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learners and educators should be pre-screened for a ‘fit’ with a course</td>
<td>Dana</td>
<td>Dean</td>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>Jean</td>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Terry</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The interview data offered several surprising results. First, while I expected that participants would describe what safety in learning personally meant to them, I did not expect safety to be discussed primarily as a feeling or as the outcome of a process. Identifying what safety feels like and the conditions under which those feelings tend to occur became important.

I expected variance in the types of examples illustrating safety and in the meanings participants drew from their experiences with safety. But I found an unexpected degree of both similarity of exemplar and of ways interviewees constructed concepts about safety. I wondered if some participants might view learning as an experience of the self-directed learner while others might focus on the social dynamic but all participants regarded learning as a predominantly social activity. I thought there might be a continuum of responses about the importance of explicit process, a wide variety of safe (and unsafe) practices, and some potential disputes about responsibility for learning climate. I was unprepared for the degree of congruence in participants' responses about the primary issues targeted by the interview questions and the intensity with which these issues were felt. I was also surprised by what was left out of the discussions.

Participants from a diversity of educational contexts, demographic backgrounds, political attitudes, and life experiences expressed a strongly congruent recognition that safety is a precondition for learning, that education is a social enterprise, and that learning is a risk-taking experience which effects a change in what we know. In order to learn, we challenge our familiar level of understanding by considering the importance of what we don’t know, and we allow ourselves to become temporarily vulnerable by experiencing insecurity or confusion so that we can acquire greater abilities or attributes than we had.

71 For example, participants placed relatively little emphasis on ‘trust’ and ‘respect’ as being key elements of safety. This raises the question of whether qualities of trust and respect were superseded by comfortable and explicated norms - and, if so, this may offer insights into understanding trust and respect.
All of the participants suggested that normally our inner resources are dedicated to and concentrated on keeping us functioning well in the external environment, especially in social relationships. We have only so much attentional and energizing resources to draw on. So if we are to focus ourselves on learning, we must feel safe enough in the social context to redeploy our resources away from personal security and towards our efforts to acquire new skills of one kind or another. Participants unanimously agreed that safety must be established in the social relationships of the learning event and that educators have a primary responsibility for the development of safety within the group dynamic of their programs.

Two other surprising similarities emerged: first, that none of the participants was troubled by what the terms used in the study meant, and second, that participants seem to share a common sense of meaning. I would need more information from the participants before I tried to analyse the significance of their shared concepts. Important differences were evident in the ways participants reached the same conclusions and the significance of these experiential differences is discussed as the thesis presents participant responses to the interview questions.

**Participants Backgrounds as a Learners and Educators**

The first two interview questions gave participants the opportunity to take different perspectives of the learner/teacher relationship and to talk casually about their own professional development. Participants responded to the opening question in an unexpected way: as they spoke of their development as educators, they continued to frame themselves within the learner role. Sam was the only participant to discuss professional development from the perspective of an educator. This, and similar references throughout the interviews, raised several questions for me. For example, how do educators acquire their professional identity? If educators know themselves

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72 Such as safety, comfortable, explicit, norms, responsibility, social dynamic etc.
primarily as learners and secondarily as educators, by what process do they develop their sense of professional conduct, personal responsibility, academic theory, and moral leadership? How do educators learn to differentiate between their roles as learners and their responsibilities as educators and to maintain appropriate boundaries between themselves and their clients? The work of Sam, Dean, Jan, Terry, and Dana raised another question: what is happening when educators who seem to think of themselves *simultaneously* as learners *and* educators are able to develop these preceding attributes *and* are recognized as master teachers?

These questions indicate to me that these data may be a very significant outcome of the study. Participants seemed to be suggesting that there is a unique professional quality about educators who see themselves as learners who may know more about a certain area of study [and who regard their ‘students’ as ‘teachers’ who may know different things about an area of study]. Participants seemed to be suggesting that a heightened level of empathy and responsibility is assumed by educators who see themselves in this kind of a relationship with their program participants, and that such an attitude within the relational learning dynamic may be crucial to creating the dialogical/reciprocal climate which interviewees indicated was at the heart of a safe learning culture. Those who thought most strongly of themselves as learners while identifying themselves most closely as educators (Dean, Jan, Sam, Dana, and Terry) were also those who (1) assumed greatest responsibility for the safety of their learners and (2) were most acknowledged by their peers as master teachers. These data influence the discussion of implications in the next chapter because the consistency of their appearance in the interviews and their linkage with discussions of safety, then combine with other data from the interviews and from the literature, 73 safer teachers
supported implications about teaching and learning.

Another interesting issue, also unexplored, seemed to stem from how closely involved with fiscal decisions an educator was: those who were accountable for cost-benefit programming were those who most clearly identified themselves professionally as educators and were those who took greatest responsibility for the learning climate. These issues may merit future study.

**Teachers Remembered from the Past**

The purpose of the ‘remembered teacher’ question was threefold: participants could relax around an easy open question, experience ways in which they would be heard during the interview, and orient themselves to their own ideas about ‘learning’ and what influences the teaching/learner relationship had had on their learning. None of the participants chose unpleasant experiences as their focus although all of the interviews did include some discussion about distressing learning relationships. The directive wording of the question may have been partly influential. Had I asked participants to describe an ‘important schooling incident’, I might have heard anecdotes about negative or traumatic events (Ferguson, 1980, p. 283; Smith, 1982, p. 46). As participants began to remember past learning experiences associated with a particular teacher, they were framing their concepts for answering the questions about their assumptions about learning, learning relationships, and examples from practice.

Only one participant did not describe particular former teachers. Sam, who completed an honours post-secondary degree and is known internationally for work in community education, hinted that negative relationships with secondary school teachers who had caricaturized Sam’s abilities as ‘marginal’, had impeded high school accomplishment. Those painful years of struggle and isolation had fuelled a passion for professional development as an educator - wanting, as a

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74 The full study of this issue might provide a basis for an important future study.
teacher, to never hurt others. So Sam's focus was on key experiences which had stimulated professional development and this was the only interview which remained primarily in the perspective of educator.

Although Terry and Jan emphasized their developmental growth as educators, they also frequently referred to how their professional training had been strongly influenced by mentored or observational learning through association with more advanced teachers who not only modelled skills mastery, but also created an explicitly learner-centred skill-building social dynamic. Dale spoke about certain types of former teachers in terms of clustered positive qualities they exuded and the agency and achievement thereby developed within their learners. There were direct parallels between these teachers' personal qualities, Dale's learning style, and the qualities Dale strove to express as a teacher. Dale conveyed the sense that the educative qualities might be temperamentally based. While talking anecdotally about personal teaching experiences, Dale recognized that qualities of educator skill might be separate from temperament (for example, "nurturing" and "encouraging" were not synonymous with [or restricted to] "quiet" and "introspective").

Blaire, Dana, Dean, Terry, and Jean each recalled one particular teacher. The positive strength of the learning, the relationships, the social dynamic in the learning context, and strongly expressed feelings of safety not only accompanied each story but the stories seemed to have been frequently revisited over the years. Long after the events and relationships have ended, the learning has continued both in terms of process and subject area. In each case the subject area developed into a lifelong interest. Dean, who was majoring in combined humanities and general science, made a career of plant biology. Although Dana's career is in the health sciences (a goal set before meeting the 'remembered teacher') a continuing interest in history and archaeology is
nurtured in 'study' holidays. Jean moved directly into the subject area of the 'remembered teacher' and then into a career of teaching. While Blaire sustains an enduring interest in Shakespeare and works as a short course facilitator, it is the modelling provided by the 'remembered teacher' which seems to still guide Blaire's work: "she just wanted us to learn for learning's sake and for the love of learning. I never remember having a test or any sort of [achievement based] feedback". During the workshop Terry cited, the skill modelling of the instructor was particularly catalytic in drawing together ideas about teacher-learner responsibilities, social dynamics, the importance of safety, and flexible instructional approaches so that Terry's own work was strengthened at many levels.

Because inter-participant congruence covered many factors I think there is not much validity to a suggestion that these pivotal learning relationships were just a matter of timing and predisposition rather than educator skill. All of the former teachers were remembered for similar qualities of safety, relationship, challenge, a passion for their subject area, a capacity to connect with learners, and a sense of moral responsibility; they created learning climates which seemed to bring out the best in all their learners, not just a few.

Participants seemed to indicate that there may be a significant difference of a collaborative style versus an authoritarian style between teachers who create a 'safe' learning atmosphere and those who do not. Participants suggested two additional factors, one associated with how teachers perceive themselves in their role and another about how teachers perceive the potential influence of a learning event on learners. First, that there may be significant differences between teachers who identify themselves as learners who have acquired some extra information or skills they would like others to have access to, and those who identify themselves as teachers who have learned something that is important for others to know. The other distinction seemed to be made
between teachers who perceive their teaching in terms of 'discreet events' in learners' experiences, and those who understood their teaching as contributing to the flow of learner's overall lives?

The ways participants discussed the ongoing influence 'remembered' teachers on their lives was not expected, and seemed to support Hare's (1993a) comment that "teaching fosters long-term dispositions" (p.22) as well as Bandura's (1986) claim that modelling can be a potent teacher. Other undeveloped issues about safety are implied by these responses: (1) if safety is recognized as a primitive assumption which needs to be explicitly embedded in teaching practice, from whom might student teachers learn how to be safe educators; (2) what might become evident as modelled teaching in both safe and in unsafe learning climates; (3) how might criteria for safe practice be developed and by whom?

Across participants, excellence in teaching was described in terms of relationships and climate, not as content or context. The importance of 'fit' between educators and learners (as mentioned during a couple of interviews) might be an exciting piece of basic research for a future project; many questions would need to be asked about the politics, policies, program planning, and funding behind education which usually preclude a free-market selection process between educators and learners.

The act of remembering former teachers connected participants with prior experiences in which they were learning (or constrained from learning). Memories provided an attunement to answers and examples with which participants responded to the questions.

**Participants' Concepts of Safety**

> The more risks you take, the more you are trying out new behaviours, exploring new ideas, therefore the more you are learning. That is the

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75 Relationships and climate are fluid interactive aspects of a program - which profoundly affect the more tangible elements of program content and organizational context.
overall goal of education. When a group feels safe together, you see learners being a lot more creative. They will say "I want to try something here; let me know if it works." And the ideas are sometimes quite brilliant, where they wouldn't have had the courage to try if they were afraid of being judged or of being responded negatively to by their peers [Sam, 17:2].

Although the interview question asked “what does the concept ‘the role of safety in learning’ mean to you?”, participants began the interview with descriptions of what ‘safety’ meant to them rather than whether or not ‘safety’ has a role in learning. The relationship between safety and learning was introduced when participants spoke about learning. Participants used similar language to describe safety. Participants did not know each other, and interviews were held over four months in different locations.

The high degree of agreement among participants was greater than I had anticipated. I was unprepared not only for the similarity of the language used to describe safety (comfortable), but also for the infrequent use of certain common descriptors (trust, respect). These findings will be elaborated under ‘unexpected findings’.

Participant agreement extended to what was left out of what they said about safety and learning. It is paradoxical that participants consistently referred to safety as comfortable while suggesting that safety was comfortable enough to be willing to be in a state of discomfort. As we probed these perspectives, it seemed to me that participants were talking about ‘comfort’ at the ontological level associated with agency, motivation, psychic well-being, and nurturing. Therefore, the discomforts of effort, risk, and challenge do not, of their own attributes, violate an essential feeling of either safety or an overall feeling of comfortableness.

Participants agreed that safety is a personal feeling of sufficient comfortableness that a person is able to take the risks of creativity, is open with responses, feels acceptance within the social dynamic, is able to make behavioural choices such as saying ‘no’ to an option, has a sense
that they can be successful, reciprocates in relationship, and is able to make mistakes without feeling embarrassed or put down. The effect of safety is to create the climate for learning by reducing needless stressors and creating supportive and positively reinforcing social dynamics.

While discussion centred on safety issues related to the social dynamic and the learner/instructor relationship, dimensions of physical safety were mentioned as essential preconditions.

Participants suggested that safety could be recognized by the comfortableness of the context in which learning is taking place and that a key process for creating a comfortable climate was through an explicit setting of social dynamic norms. If learners know that their group values reciprocal and unthreatening social relationships, that members can work together with mutual commitment and goodwill, and that guidelines for supporting a positive social dynamic have been negotiated together, then they are free to engage an optimum level of challenge as they strive to learn. Participants felt confident that they could distinguish productive stress from destructive anxiety on a personal level. Not being able to define safety universally was not important: safety needs are individually felt and have to be contextually negotiated in some way.

None of the participants associated safety with familiarity; in fact, *familiarity* was associated with blockages to learning. I tried to understand the significance of this finding when I responded later in this chapter to challenges that safety could be “too much” and could thereby limit learning.

Safety was described as a feeling. I had expected some emphasis on the idea that safety might be mostly perception, but this did not emerge as an issue for interviewees. It seemed to me that participants were consistently clear about presuming a differentiation between ‘real’ safety
and a mistaken impression of safety, or 'false' safety.

Participants, possibly because their responses were framed experientially through the interview questions, spoke of feelings and how feelings could be shared in normative and reciprocal ways; so the discussions led naturally to group dynamics and norm setting.

Social Dynamic/Learning Relationship

**Group dynamic:** where people feel comfortable with each other, where people feel that it is safe to say things, where whatever you say is not going to be laughed at or [negatively] challenged, you are going to learn.

The group dynamic was identified by participants as the relational, often non-verbal, ways the social climate is enacted among individuals and how group culture is created. The process of learning, with its inherent risk, seems to intensify interpersonal dynamics. Leadership is required of the educator so that the group dynamic develops in positive and supportive ways. Dale’s comment about the relationship between risk and learning seems representative of the research: “ideally it should be that people are able to take more risks so that they are able to learn more, to develop more meaningful types of learning [Dale, 11:4].

Learner characteristics and style differences emerged as key issues in discussions about the group dynamic. As these were not embedded within the research question, they are discussed in the section on unexpected results. Suffice to mention that learner characteristics of commitment and goodwill, relational abilities among group members, and individual style differences were

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76 I was asked if, on the basis of my thesis project, I thought it mattered whether or not people were really be safe or if it is sufficient for them to just 'feel' safe (when the situation might not be safe at all). While the project did not research such a phenomenon - it seems to me that the data about non-threatening experiences, comfortableness, explicitness, trustworthiness and so on presume authenticity. A retrospective discovery that one was not safe in a situation which felt safe at the time might become a very unsafe feeling experience, overlaying not only past memories of the event, but also impacting on current and future experiences.

77 Dana (21:5)
consistently mentioned as affecting group development, a safe climate, and positive learning outcomes.

Participants identified group dynamic formation as a crucial factor in creating a safe and effective learning environment. The teacher or educator was held fully responsible for the learning group dynamic, including dealing with challenging learners because, in a formal learning context, the educator has the power or authority in the group - at least at the beginning of the group. Figure 6, below, illustrates the group dynamic as participants described it. Beginning with full instructor responsibility and power, the process was described as developmental, shifting power and responsibility to learners by the end of a program. The transition phase is the most interactive exchange of emotions and ideas in relationship, where most new creative learning occurs.

Figure 6: Optimal learning relationship between educator and learner - shifting power, control, and responsibility from educator to learner.
Participants seemed to suggest that the dynamic elements of learning - experiences in which 'disjuncture' (Jarvis, 1992) occurs and is engaged - became assimilated within individuals during the process of integrating new learning into prior experience. Taylor (1987) elaborates:

institutionally recognized people -- the instructor, teaching assistants, senior students -- are in a strategic position to promote or inhibit learners' responsibility-taking in their education. The learner is in relationship to the instructor, and it is through this and similar relationships that the locus of responsibility and authority is transformed and re-interpreted from being external to the learner to being shared in and by the learner (p. 193).

Participants described the first step to shared power as going through the setting of norms and moving to a whole-group responsibility for the group learning dynamic in a collaborative atmosphere, and, finally, shifting to learners internalizing the norms and the learning, separate from the group experience, by the end of the learning event. How norms were negotiated was an important factor for participants in how safe individuals in a group might feel.

**Negotiating Group Norms**

*Group norms... give safety, boundaries, cohesion, knowledge, trust. Trust comes from knowing what is going on. Now if they have that trust, even if they don't like the norm that the group has decided (for example: 'you can't smoke in the group') they know they can trust the process, they can learn to trust the group, they know what the boundaries are, and they know what to expect or what this group does.* [Blaire, 12:6]

Negt (1975)\(^78\), commenting on 'intentional education processes, wrote: “it is much more important to unfold (in the medium of formal language and empirical scientific knowledge) the experiential contents not yet explicit and the experiences bound up in solitary communications” (p. 173). Participants agreed that when a process is explicit, when norms are explicitly negotiated, safety and group efficacy are enhanced.

\(^78\) Translated in Madar (1992).
Comparing Implicit and Explicit Processes

The question about using either explicit or implicit process was largely derived from the literature search where it was common to find injunctions to ‘make something explicit’. The benefits of ‘being explicit’ seem to be as ‘primitive’ in established beliefs as is safety. One is frequently enjoined to ‘be explicit’ without it made clear what being explicit means or contributes.

A causal association of explicit process with shared power, strong relationships, accessible ideas, and enhanced learning seemed to be implied when the term ‘explicit’ was referred to in both the literature and by the interview participants. Explicitly negotiating procedural and value norms within a group appeared to be a key aspect of developing safety. Participants also noted that an implicit or automatic process becomes the most efficient way for a group to function. The underlying message seemed to be that there needs to be an initial explicit setting up of group process and norms. The norms become embedded into group dynamics as an automatic way of interaction but the explicit process remains available so that arising issues can be initially engaged with an explicit response before becoming again accommodated into an automatic implicit function.

Responses to the question about implicit or explicit process were the most vital and unpredictable of the study. Although all participants concluded, through considering examples of practice, that safe learning climates develop in crucial part through explicitly negotiated norms\(^79\), not all participants approached the issues in the same way. Some began talking about the implicit process as representing high standards of teaching. For example, Dale, Dana, and Jean’s initial replies suggested that an implicit teaching practice demonstrated superior professional skill.

\(^79\) Which may become implicitly embedded in group process as the social dynamic develops.
As we probed for examples, each of these participants realized that the skilfulness they were perceiving was an 'automatic' stage reached in the middle of a learning relationship. And as they thought about their examples, they discovered that masterful educators are those who are able to adapt their programs to the characteristics of their learners and the nature of the particular group dynamics. Once norms are established, educators are able to focus on exploring content-based learning - as modified by explicit group norms. In discussing how an implicit process might be recognized or how implicit norms might be developed, all participants decided that the most skilled and effective creation of group norms, learning atmosphere, and a safe social climate needed to be done explicitly and then become the automatic process for the group.

Who is Responsible for the Learning Climate?

Participants state unequivocally that educators are responsible for the learning climate. I wonder if that the strength of their perspective came from the research focus on learning. The educator is the interface between an organization and a learner’s participation in a program. Interviewees suggested that, from within the learning unit, the educator is endowed (or burdened) with the power and control assigned to or by the institution.

Participants identified several educator responsibilities. First, to create genuine safety in the group. Second, to explicate, model, and maintain safe relational communication. Third, to share power and responsibilities by shifting control to learners. Fourth, to have subject matter...
expertise and, fifth, to offer appropriate encouragement, feedback, and critique. Participants also assigned responsibility to educators for a level of professional development which included relational skills, moral leadership, and up-to-date content mastery.

The idea that shared power and responsibility are linked to the development of a safe learning climate was the most recurrent theme among participant responses. Figure 6, previously introduced, illustrates this point. The sense of 'shifting' seems similar to the shift participants described from an explicit relational process to implicitly embedded social norms which reinforced the notion that reciprocity, exchange, and dialogic skill may be fundamental elements in good learning environments.

"Do you have any questions? What has been left out?"

These questions were the most important to me because they offered participants an unstructured time to bring any issues they wanted to into the discussion. The questions were designed to encourage participants to offer thoughts, feelings, information, concerns, or unique personal experiences which they felt belonged to the discussion, but which had not been given sufficient opportunity to come out earlier in the interviews. I felt that the questions might also be an opportunity for me to check if participants had felt free to be themselves, to say exactly what they really believe - without constraints, because they had had time to think about the questions for days before the interviews. I anticipated perhaps a couple of surprising questions and points of view.

Participants did not, however, seem to have anything more left to say by the end of the interview. I speculated that (1) everything that needed to be said had found a place to be said; (2) perhaps they have had little practice with thinking in terms of what they might observe being left out; (3) the question may have been too direct for some (Blaire, Dale) and another time I
would prefer to have different ways of asking this question so that I would feel more confident I had responded to the style of participants who were introspective or anxious by nature; however, (4) they seemed relaxed - perhaps the timing was problematic and they were just somewhat weary by the end of the interview. In any case, many participants seemed to rather enjoy this as an opportunity to ask questions about the research project from my point of view. I was surprised.

Insofar as defining safety, both the literature and the participants were clear: safety is a necessary precondition for the sort of learning we typically think about when we think about education, and defining safety is a context specific task which can be guided by general guidelines related to power balancing, communication, goodwill, commitment, trust, comfortableness, and responsibility. Unexpected data are treated separately from the main findings because of their more tenuous nature. This does not imply a judgement of lesser value. Unexpected findings can frequently be the most significant in a study.

**Unexpected Findings**

The discussion about unexpected finding groups several kinds of uncommon data: data which seemed incongruous or just baffling, points of view which perhaps fell outside of the specific issues being discussed, and surprising associations made among concepts. Some unexpected findings were easier to identify because they stood out from the anticipated pattern. Others appeared almost 'in passing' or were oddities which seemed perhaps out of place in the discussion. They might have been an absence of the expected or have been overlooked as being too insignificant, or out of place to be included.

**Similarity of Participant Responses to Interview Questions**

Participant agreement about the fundamental issues was the first of several unexpected findings. I *did* expect a common interest since participants had been chosen according to a
selection profile which included their each making a spontaneous public reference to some relationship between safety and learning prior to any discussions with me. I also expected that the interviews would focus on what assumptions, perspectives, and experiences participants had about safety and learning. But the similarity with which participants described safety, common patterns of experiences or perspectives about safety and learning, the collective strength of their convictions about the importance of safety to learning, and the similar approaches they presented surprised me. While the data offer a strong platform from which to discuss implications suggested by the study, it also raises more questions about why such a seemingly pervasive and strongly held primitive assumption has remained largely invisible to education policy and research.

As I speculated on why some participant responses were so similar, I felt confident about setting aside some possible explanations. Because participants were cross-gender and culture, their ages ranged from late twenties to late fifties, and their educational backgrounds or professional domains were quite different, it seemed reasonable to consider that the similarities in their response were not due to gender, age, cultural influences, work-related factors, or educational background. It may be possible to suggest that the meaning and feeling of safety (like the meaning of happiness, anger, aversion, and sadness) can be interculturally understood and that there are several shared ways of describing safety. Some approaches to program development, and process may be broadly generalizable while requiring ‘customizing’ to fit the needs of specific situations and social/cultural aspects.

Forcefulness and intensity of feeling about the importance of the role of safety in learning was another common feature. Participants expressed a strong agreement that safety was a crucial precondition for learning, that safety could be established, that educators hold the fundamental responsibility for creating a safe learning climate, and that safety is a feeling of sufficient
comfortableness by which learners may be prepared to take the risks inherent in learning.

Two other unexpected findings concerned learner characteristics and personality style differences. Neither issue was included in the research questions yet both issues were mentioned by all participants. I think this is particularly significant when one considers that participants inferred but did not directly raise educational issues which are otherwise typically highlighted such as organizational matters, policy, class management, program evaluation, ethics, teacher education, motivation, participation, or learner experience. Chapter Six draws implications about these basic issues, as well as about the more process-based issues focused on in the interviews, by blending data from the thesis project into an interpretive discussion.

**Learner Characteristics**

Participants, and research findings in the literature, recognize that learners bring a set of attitudes and values with them. Learner characteristics may be confused with learning styles, but they are quite different phenomena. All of the participants suggested that learner characteristics such as commitment, goodwill, and at least basic relational skills, may be essential for setting positive group dynamics. Some study participants felt so strongly about the necessity of these attributes being present that they suggested learners and educators should be screened for these qualities before a program begins.

Commitment and goodwill were identified across the study as necessarily present in a safe relationship. Burbules (1993) highlights goodwill and commitment in a different way by suggesting that “dialogue without challenges of disagreements is impoverished, but challenges or disagreements without an underlying relation of personal commitment will break down the communicative process very quickly” (p. 46). Burbules described goodwill as the “sincerity and rightness” which underscores commitment (p. 75). And Collins & Steven (1982) combined
goodwill and commitment into a quality of "underlying positive spirit" (p. 273).

Findings which connected style differences to safety were unexpected in their strength of congruence and in their degree of significance. Discussions about style differences within a learning group elicited strong emotional reactions from participants, who suggested that style differences were major challenges in the social dynamic, communicative processes, and relational struggles inherent in any group. Participants did not view style differences in the same way, so my first task was to determine if there were differences of substance or differences of perspective. While participants seemed to share substantially the same understanding about what style differences are, they differed profoundly about what style differences mean, both to themselves individually and to their teaching practice.

**Style Differences**

Research into style differences is extensive - offering information about and resources to facilitate interventions which support alternative learning or teaching styles. Yet there seems to be little research in the field of education into the impact of style differences on teaching/learning relationships or on the development of social dynamics. The literature on style differences generally seems to presume that, given techniques for providing a variety of instructional methods by which to encourage various learning styles, educators would be comfortable responding to difference. The comments of participants in this study suggest this may not be so; that in fact style differences may be the greatest challenge in the development of relationship.

First, for some participants, style differences were disruptive factors at best and, at worst, destructive to the learning group dynamic. Brewer and Hunter (1989) suggest that style

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83 Commitment and goodwill as essential learner characteristics may have been overlooked rather than dismissed.
differences are "socially embedded in intellectual communities" and that while "the selective socialization...within these communities gives mutual support" it also simultaneously "perpetuates structural cleavages and conflicts" among participants with different personality and learning styles or just, "at best, differentiated indifference" (p. 26) - which is not conducive to interacting, communicating, and learning together.

On the other hand, Maclean (1987) notes that "learning is enhanced when learners develop their preferred learning styles. As people become more aware of how they learn, and become exposed to other ways of learning, they can redefine and modify their own styles as they seek ways of becoming more competent and responsible learners" (p. 130).

Among participants there was the broad range of perception about and reaction to encountering style differences in a learning context than around any other issue. Issues about style differences generated the most amount of reaction from various readers. This is clearly a 'hot' topic.

**Responses to style differences.**

Some educator participants reacted to style differences as negative intrusions into their teaching efforts whereas others considered style differences as positive opportunities to introduce a more varied repertoire of instructional techniques, thereby enhancing the quality of the event. Of all the significant differences I had anticipated, this had not even been a passing consideration because all participants demonstrated learner-centred teaching approaches. A review of interviewee comments begins a discussion, but problematic issues of communication, responsibility, and impact on learning cannot be resolved on the basis of the limited data.

**Dialogue between two basic style types.**

Issues around style differences stemmed from temperamental differences between
outgoing people and reserved people. In order to describe these particular findings, I used the
terms "introverted" (to represent quiet, introspective, and shy temperaments) and "extroverted"
(to represent outgoing, sociable, expressive temperaments). Some of the participants used these
generic terms while others used more specific descriptors.

Some readers may wonder about my use of the terms on the basis of my 'labeling'
participants or potentially making a judgement about participants. I searched dictionaries and
found that decades ago the terms might have implied judgement or deficiency but that current
usage tends to be as an objective descriptor of temperament, without inference of lack or labeling.
I am not sure that this is always effective but, for the purpose of reporting an issue raised during
the interviews, I am intending these terms to describe a style rather than label a person. I think
that the underlying information is very important while at the same time I am concerned about
how little empirical basis I have for discussion.

The two participants who described themselves as "quiet", expressed a resentment of
"extroverted" students, seemed to find extroverted students too difficult to "deal with", and used
strong language in describing extroverted students ("blabbermouths", "controllers", disruptive,
etc). The extroverted participants in the study, while referring to extra challenges in creating a
safe environment for introverted or quiet students, responded as though they took responsibility
for all their students, without blaming some students for requiring extra effort. Two other
participants, quiet and introverted, took responsibility for the climate in their programs and
responded to extroverted students positively; so clearly, this is only one open question about
perception educators may have about their learners.

There may be a special issue here if educators who can express that safety has an essential
preconditional role in learning are inhibited in their ability to apply safety-enhancing strategies to
their relationships with learners whose style or culture is somehow very different from their own. Such inhibition might limit relationship and dialogue among people with style differences, diminish learner potential, and in the long run contribute to instructor burn-out. An important contribution could be made by a research project which examined how educators perceive and understand style differences in learning events, what sort of responses are generated in situations of obvious differences, and strategies educators actually use in practice (as opposed to those they might refer to in theory) when they react to style differences. Our differences may create both opportunities for creative dialogue and complex learning as well as constrain the goodwill and commitment with which we are able to reciprocate. ‘Learning how to learn’ includes enhancing communicative skills and is just as important a pursuit for educators as for their program participants.

Discussions about style differences introduced questions about how important it is that safety is reciprocally, mutually experienced: instructors need to acquire an awareness about their own reactions to learners, social dynamics, and learning contexts in order to become sufficiently equipped with relational skills and strategies to enact their leadership in a positive way.

**Screening**

Four of the eight participants suggested that a screening process might prepare both learners and educators to participate in particular programs. These participants try to ‘screen’ within their own programs, at least to the extent of trying to prepare their learners for a particular program, by making contact before programs begin. There was some discussion about improved administrative processes for a better matching of participants with programs.

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84 possibly for both educator and learner, possibly involving matching of goals with particular courses or programs as well
Language: “Not get shot down”

Participants described safety from both positive and negative perspectives - in terms of what safety was and was not. They spoke about safety not being threatening, socially isolating, embarrassing and so on. However the appearance of the expression ‘not get shot down’ in a majority of the interviews may be a classic example of anomalous or outlying data - of something not being said yet still conveyed. One could argue that, although there were age, experience, and cultural differences among participants, the English language based education of each had been guided by anglo-Europeans, so a similarity of idiosyncratic phrasing is not remarkable. But what seemed significant to me was: (1) ‘getting shot down’ was a common (and negative) experience associated with education and learning-based relationships; (2) the language is very strong, threatening, and has a violent connotation; (3) the associated anxious or fearful emotion was intense; (4) and, while I don’t use that expression, it was familiarly evocative for me: I had experienced what they were talking about. To pursue the significance of this expression in my study stretches interpretation beyond a point at which I am comfortable going in this thesis. However, this seemed to be an example of what Agar and Hobbs (1982) call a “contextualization cue” which “signals relevant frameworks for interpretation” (p. 4) and therefore worth noting as an important pursuit for another project: how common is it for learners in educational contexts to feel ‘shot down’, and what impact does the feeling have on their sense of immediate safety, on their learning, and on their future participation?

A discussion about challenges to and misconceptions about the research project is loosely attached to Chapter Five. On one hand I feel that these data are important to include in the study because they seem to represent the most frequently expressed resistance to both the purpose of the study and the concluding discussion of implications. On the other hand, these data do not fall
directly within either the literature search or the literature search. They do, however, provide
different lenses with which to interpret the basic data of the study and for this reason are deemed
significant to the project.

**Challenges and Misconceptions**

Uncertainty and misunderstanding were the stimulus for exploring most of the issues
during the project. Rather than weaken the case for understanding the role of safety in learning,
the presence of challenges highlights the importance of examining that role. The basic framework
of the thesis project is formed by contentious issues which gelled into questions about the role of
safety in learning. Although some of these issues were determined to be outside of the study, they
contributed to the strength of the essential work of the thesis by raising the most common
challenges that: threat is a more effective stimulant for learning than is safety, too much safety
stifles learning, classrooms and learning events are basically safe climates, and safety cannot be
usefully defined.

Occasionally academics made closed challenges about the basic integrity of the project. A
closed challenge is made in a way which blocked my having an opportunity to respond. When
some educators challenge the relevance of safety to learning while rejecting opportunities to
consider the issues, their responses raise questions about what may be threatening to them about
the importance of safety for their learners. This section includes a discussion about some
misconceptions and challenges expressed by educators, as well as about some possible safety
needs they may have. The thesis project is limited in being able to interpret the challenges because
these educators who challenged the importance of safety in learning declined to discuss their
concerns or underlying positions. If I can not dialogue in person about some of these issues with
those who raised them, I can include the issues as being important to the ongoing discussion. My
intention is to demonstrate the project’s responsiveness by reviewing the challenges and misconceptions which were most frequently voiced.

This section intends to extend the breadth of the project. The process of engagement is meant to offer educators who truly challenge the crucial role of safety in learning a review of the issues from which they might consider developing parallel studies. While I did not find evidence to support the points of view which were expressed in these challenges, I think it important to maintain the discussion. A healthy debate will do more to keep the issues of safety than will a project which offers only a convincing argument about one perspective. Safety is a dynamic element, not easily reconciled within the relationship between learner and educator. I believe that issues of safety are more likely to generate a robust interest among administrators, researchers, educators (those in power) if opposing views or conflicting attitudes can be held in explicit and dialogic tension with each other.

First, a challenge is presented in the way I typically heard it. An example or anecdote is given. Finally, questions are clarified according to the literature review. I called points of view ‘misconceptions’ only after open discussions into meaning, criteria, and example. I tried to make a distinction between what might be a misconception (easily clarified) and what might be a different point of view or significant alternative data; it was a delicate and sometimes difficult task for me to be sure I was maintaining the distinction between probing for clarification and directing a line of thinking. Misconceptions appeared to be strongly held ideas which, when elaborated, explored, and clarified by participants themselves changed easily into other ideas with which participants seemed to feel more comfortable. Misconceptions such as this are ubiquitous to the study and I frequently explored my own confusion, misconception and uncertainty. Further research and sensitive methodology is needed to understand all the key issues and nuances raised.
First Challenge: Classrooms are Inherently Safe

The most pervasive and problematic of the challenges to the project seemed to be also the least informed: that education programs are, by definition, basically safe for all concerned. This was also stated as: learning is an intrinsically safe experience. The implication is that, since learning is already safe, the question about a role of safety in learning is a non sequitur. For me, these statements beg other questions: what does mean that learning is intrinsically safe, by what criteria is this safe essence recognized, what is the value of safety, and how is everyone safe at the same time? Perhaps anecdotal examples of how this assumption was expressed as a challenge make it easier to understand.

Anecdotal examples from discussions about program safety.

A conversation with a senior administrator and teaching faculty member of a university language school typical: “you are raising an insignificant issue. Safety is a minor consideration, easily and consistently established by most teachers, including myself. Classrooms are safe places. Why don’t you find something really worthwhile to work on?” We discussed how this educator provides a sense of safety in the classroom: “I give students maps and guides to the area, a list of emergency resource numbers, and a pamphlet on counselling services.” The emotional tone towards me was abrupt, almost angry. I felt confused by the intensity, the feeling of attack, and the resistance to any discussion. I spoke quietly, encouragingly, as I asked this person to participate in the study. “Would you be willing to participate in an interview if you were in control of the tape recorder, the data, and your anonymity? Your views could make a valuable contribution to this research project.” The initial reply was “maybe”, followed by “perhaps in eight or ten months”, followed immediately by a very brusque “Actually, no.”

In a second example, another educator, an instructor of teaching/learning courses at a
major Canadian university, stated that ‘classroom’ and ‘safety’ are synonymous. “Classrooms are, by definition, safe learning environments; you are clearly ignorant about what really goes on. Maybe you are just not a very skilful teacher to be so concerned about safety issues.” The offer to participate in my study was rejected.

The literature details myriads of damaging experiences learners may encounter in educational settings. According to prior scholarship or to my research participants, classrooms are not safe at either the broad level nor the interpersonal. I wonder if promoting classrooms as inherently safety-based climates without attending to explicate what safety might mean to the individual could be an example of what Noam Chomsky calls the subliminal ‘manufacturing of consent’ (Herman & Chomsky, 1988).

Issues about how learning contexts are perceived by the various stakeholders deserve an independent analysis on their own. But they are beyond the project’s direct frame of reference. The question of whether or not classrooms are basically safe is, however, answered indirectly as the thesis covers social context, group dynamic, safety, and challenge. Classrooms are not safe if educators, administrators, and learners lack sufficient relational skills to facilitate the development of a safe learning climate.

**Second Challenge: Threat is More Efficacious than Safety**

As mentioned earlier, I initially avoided the suggestion that threat might be an effective approach to teaching. When I realized that I was avoiding my own dismay about the issue, I began to explore the source of my discomfort. While I could rebut the position, I wanted to understand the roots of the perspective.

I realized, when I retraced my steps, that I had failed to consider adequately the fact that beliefs about a positive relationship between threat and learning have a long history in education.
‘Threat’ is a multi-dimensional concept which is deceptive in the sense that misnomers such as ‘Well-intentioned threat’, or ‘inspirational threat’ are oxymorons which form part of the common vocabulary. I took a new perspective by looking at the ways ‘threat’ could be associated (positively or negatively) with agency, dialogue, negotiation, responsibility, moral maturity, safety, and ‘learning how to learn’. When I analysed the ways ‘threat’ was being used to convey a positive potential in learning relationships, I realized that when people were describing what threat was meant to do, they may have been talking about something else.

In order to let readers decide for themselves if my interpretation is defensible, I offer some anecdotal examples which describe how some of the conversations about threat occurred.

**Anecdotal example about threat.**

A doctoral student who was close to submitting a thesis on the “importance of educators’ stripping away learners’ resources in order to hurl the learners into the abyss of fear and uncertainty as a way to force them to really learn”, challenged my study. I was really keen to talk together about the underlying values and data in our studies. I was really keen to talk together about the underlying values and data in our studies.

I responded by saying: *your views could make a valuable contribution to my research. Would you be willing to participate in an interview? You would be in control of the tape recorder, the data, and your anonymity?*” Reply: “No.” Because I wondered if time constraints were a factor, I was prepared to be flexible and accommodating. They were not the problem. The other student was adamant that the underlying hypothesis supporting my thesis are so weakly contrived theoretically as to be not worth discussing.

I was confused by both the strength of the challenge and the resistance to further discussion about my work. The other student described her/his project with fervour and conviction. I suggested that, since our views appeared to be polarized, we might collaborate on a
presentation at an upcoming conference by creating a hermeneutic dialogue. Reply: "No. Your project won't stand up to analysis". Would the student let me read the draft thesis or let me know when the thesis would be defended so I could attend? Reply: "No." I was a bit caught up with my own feelings. I realized only later how defensive the other student seemed. I had failed to make a contact.

Another memorable experience with threat-related challenges involved an internationally renowned scholar. My work was challenged with a powerful statement about the superior efficacy of threat in learning. At the peak of our three-hour discussion, this educator gave as an example teaching her/his children the multiplication tables, using threats. "They knew they had to learn their tables in order to earn Mummy/Daddy's love. They became highly skilled with their arithmetic, and threat was the effective motivator". I responded by acknowledging that they may have learned their multiplication tables, but I wonder how they felt about their relationship with their parent. It was an emotional moment. I was told that the children had left home as teenagers, and were estranged as adults. Each of them works in personal development or human resource fields.

**Discussion about threat.**

'The efficacy of threat' was one of the most forceful challenges made by those educators who dismissed the role of safety in learning. There seemed to be two issues at the core of these points of view. The first might be described as confusion about the meaning of words: that threat might be being used where 'challenge' was really what was meant - but I wasn't sure about that. Threat might actually be used in practice in the misunderstanding that threat was just another way of *being* challenging. The second misconception might be that concepts of safety, risk, and

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85 And I think most disturbing in its power dominance and its lack of caring or empathy.
challenge are mutually exclusive - that conditions of safety neutralize a learner’s ability to engage
the risks essential to learning. According to this perspective, it might be inconceivable to think
that safety might enhance risk-taking abilities. And, conversely, taking risks could not be done in
a safe way let alone be done in a superior way through a safe process. This is an interesting
conception, given that professional performing risk-takers take great care to maximize their safety
in order to maximize their ability to take greater risks.

As I explored the meanings and examples of ‘threat’ I realized that there seemed to be a
semantic confusion about what ‘threat’ is and about what ‘threat’ does. So their perception may
be confused because in some cases what they identified as threat seemed to be something else. In
order to study the phenomenon of threat being promoted as a motivational strategy for teaching, I
asked myself four questions about a threatening climate. First, when threat is being used to make
someone else learn, and that person does seem to be learning some content, is there anything else
that might be problematic being learned at the same time? Is that learning relatively
inconsequential, or might the problems it creates overshadow positive content-based outcomes?
Second, what emotions are being associated with the learning relationship when threat is used as a
motivator? And, third, how might we evaluate the degree to which learning was actually limited
from its full potential, even if learning has been seen to occur?

Glasser (1969) wrote that a learning climate needs to liberate built-in motivation, and that
threat is a poor motivator (p. 18). Brookfield wrote that threat creates feelings of being
‘overwhelmed, inhibited, and blocked’ (1990, p. 147-8). The damaging effect of threat on
learning is further implied in the research on the debilitating impact of anxiety (Selye, 1985),
mood-dependentness of learning (Eich, 1989), and learned helplessness (Seligman, 1983). Even
so, there did seem to be a dynamic factor implied in motivation which was not covered by the
concept of safety.

Lazarus and Folkman, discussing the concept of agency as the active element in motivation, made a distinction between “threatened” and “challenged”. Contrasting ‘challenged’ persons with ‘threatened’ persons, they suggested that:

challenged persons are more likely to have better morale, because to be challenged means feeling positive about demanding encounters, as reflected in the pleasurable emotions accompanying challenge. The quality of functioning is apt to be better in challenge because the person feels more confident, less emotionally overwhelmed, and more capable of drawing on available resources (1984, p. 34).

Ormrod (1995) summarizes the contrasts between threat and challenge

a threat is a situation in which individuals believe they have little chance of success - they see failure as an almost inevitable outcome. In contrast, a challenge is a situation in which individuals believe there is some probability of success with effort” (p. 491).

Jenkins (1960) posits ‘challenge’ as “a new stimulation for learning” (p. 57) and Burbules (1993) writes: “dialogue without challenges or disagreements is impoverished. But challenges without an underlying relation of personal commitment will break down the communication process very quickly” (p. ). Challenge, not threat, stimulates learning, and a safe social dynamic is the optimum climate for the striving between challenge and knowing. In a safely challenging relationship, we can engage the insecurity of new ideas or ways of doing as we to change fragmented or unfamiliar data into cohesive and useful knowledge.

Third Challenge: Too Much Safety Stifles Learning

Misconceptions about what really counts as ‘safe’ can be only partially covered in this research project. One important issue to consider is the perception some people seem to have that there is such a thing as too much safety. While I regard this as similar to arguing that there can be such a condition as too much health, I recognize a legitimate difficulty of understanding.
The problem seems to be one of semantic confusion. Climate issues are shown (Figure 1) on a continuum within a Yerkes-Dodson (1908) curve used to illustrate Selye’s (1985) research into the relationship between performance and different degrees of stress. The safe climate offers most positive potential and greatest response options between the limited ‘not-safe’ extremities of passive, stifling, pampering or overly-protective at one end or overt threat and fear at the other end. Personal control, trust, comfortableness, negotiation of relational norms, and dialogue are the standards - as suggested by the literature and by the interview participants - for safety. These are as absent in the pampering, overprotective environment as in the abusive one. One loses agency in an overprotective or pampering climate, by lacking opportunity for action and experience. ‘Too much safety’ is shown to be a contradiction in terms. If ‘safety’ is perceived as overprotection, too much ‘safety’ is not safety.

**Fourth Challenge: Safety Cannot be Defined**

For some educators, the fact that safety cannot be fully defined eliminates it from serious consideration as a crucial precondition for learning. Chapter One discussed my dilemma about defining safety too early in the study and strong challenges were expressed to both my desire for an emergent understanding about safety and to the ‘open-textured’ nature of the concept of safety. However, I feel that the intensity of discomfort about leaving definitions to emerge from the study bears greater consideration than the fact that some readers want to have, early on in an introduction, a quite clear idea of exactly what is going to happen during the thesis. Strong words were sometimes used when the validity, usefulness, and contribution of the study was challenged on the ground of inadequate definition. A good example of these challenges occurred as I was considering ways to let definitions and distinctions about safety emerge from the literature search and interviews with research participants.
**Anecdote about Defining Safety.**

I had a first meeting with a senior faculty member to ask for guidance as I worked on my research proposal. I was surprised by a strong and emotional reaction against my outline: “you cannot do a research project about safety unless you start out by defining exactly what safety means to you and applying that definition to your study. Leaving the definition of safety up to the literature and your research participants is unethical”.

When I asked for clarification, the comment was repeated. I think that “unethical” is the most powerful criticism one can level against a research project. I was especially concerned because I thought that a keen sense of ethical practice was at the root of my study. Since I was open to discussing ways to introduce safety, I felt confused that ethics were being tied to the presence or absence of a definition rather than to the design, methodology, sensitivity, accountability, reciprocity, confidentiality, openness, commitment, or goodwill of the project.

I felt concerned about the sense that these sorts of exchanges seemed intended to impose a position rather than offer an opportunity for dialogue; this was a closed discussion. There seemed to be a demand for that positivistic definition be imposed on a qualitative exploration of the assumptions and meanings which inform the work of many whose approaches to teaching might be different from mine.

There is no greater ‘truth’ or predictability in quantitative conclusions than interpretive. Quantitatively-derived definitions may be written in precise analytical scientific language and offer valuable insights. But they are vulnerable to disconfirmation. Interpretive understanding may be negotiable and therefore less scientifically precise. However, because I surveyed the data for disconfirming information throughout this project, I may suggest that the interpretations and implications offered are as reliable and valid as those derived from quantitative research might
have been. However I think they are more durable, and at least as useful\textsuperscript{86}

The lack of interest in dialogue about what might be the benefit and the challenges of an open study troubled me. I include this conversation because I feel that such comments about defining safety\textsuperscript{87} are bound somehow to issues of power and control. An irony of these kinds of conversations was that a lack of safety in a conversation about safety was a strong reminder about the importance of safe dialogue.

Although the meaning of safety may be broadly agreed upon, safety can not be defined objectively. However, many of the natural concepts our functional lives depend on remain undefined. We have combined an ability to describe a thing really well and with a capacity to develop global technologies around our trust in the stable effect it creates. We accomplish powerful achievements with phenomena such as gravity, crystals, light, or electromagnetism which we are unable to accurately define. Safety is a useful concept to understand because the effects of safety facilitate learning. Safety is a tangible concept to the extent that it can be described, negotiated, applied, and evaluated.

**A Story about Misconception**

I use the term misconception to describe points of view which were first brought to me as challenges but which seemed to become resolved through discussion about meaning, criteria, and examples. More uncertain than challenges, openly voiced misconceptions enter dialogue without

\textsuperscript{86} Let me add that I think research should include both approaches. That is why I sought quantitative data in Chapter Two and throughout the project by returning to prior scholarship for data. Early in the project, I asked if any of my quantitatively included colleagues would be interested in our doing parallel theses: that I would do a study on safety and learning using interpretive interviews; someone else could do another thesis on safety and learning using experimental approaches. But it did not happen.

\textsuperscript{87} Which were very different from discussions with other educators about criteria, effect, meaning, and negotiation of safety.
a pre-determined outcome agenda. Confusion, insecurity, and misconception sometimes offer a healthy stimulus for learning. The following provides one example of the misconceptions I met, and from which I learned, throughout the study.

An international doctoral student asked to meet with me out of a strongly felt surety that my thesis topic might be culturally misguided and based on false premises. This student wanted to save me the loss of a year's work and spare me embarrassment at my thesis defence when I discovered I was wrong in my position that safety has a crucial role in learning. Our conversation began with my open interest in finding out how my approach might be improved.

The student's home country is in social disarray and political upheaval; violence is the norm. Universities are unsafe in every way. Completing an undergraduate degree and being accepted at a Western, European, or North American university is the best way out of the country. Youth endure, learn, and move away.

We discussed the fears, political intrigues, and physical dangers of the university campus. Then we probed specifically how students learned the material they needed to know...what exactly were they doing to enable learning? The response was that, in order to study subject areas, students formed discreet small study groups which met in safe places - sometimes the homes or offices of dissidents.

I left a long pause - several minutes. The student looked confused, then shaken. "Yes, we were safe in those groups. That is how we did it". And to leave? "We left the safest way we could - and a foreign university is a safer place to learn. While we want to be home with our friends, families, and our own culture - we are afraid to return".

Discussion about Challenges and Misconceptions

Learning is a process full of paradox, so uncertainty and confusion are normal elements of
trying to understand what’s going on when learning does or does not occur. Misconceptions, perhaps more than real challenges, may be clouding understanding about risk, safety, and learning. Challenges to the strength of safety issues offered many opportunities for me to explore and clarify my own perspectives by hearing others’ points of view. If misconceptions about safety issues are confusing our understanding about learning relationship, then research and reflection need to work through the questions which arise. I tried to accommodate the underlying point behind challenges and misconceptions which arose early in the study. By responding to challenges and misconceptions I hope to show that listening to different points of view may be a safe, fascinating, and enriching experience, and that safely engaging uncertainty, conflict, and confusion may foster relationship and understanding.

The research questions targeted issues which were first identified in the literature, and the interviews provided data which fit with the literature while raising provocative new questions. Participant responses coalesced into a suggestion that safety is crucial for the kind of learning organized education is designed to accomplish, and provided examples from educational programs which helped to explain why this is the case. This chapter has revealed some unexpected findings by asking questions about seemingly minor data, or about what was left unsaid when something might have been expected to be included. The following glossary augments the narrative data with excerpted textual data from the interviews, and provides a detailed survey of findings.

These findings may generate as many questions as they answer but they do fulfill the purposes of the thesis. An assumption that safety is a prerequisite for learning pervades the literature and was a commonly held belief among interviewees. Participants were also able to describe what assumptions they held, to identify some key elements in establishing safe learning
climates, to provide the sort of examples from their experience from which a profile of safe
practice might be drawn and proposed as sound, to introduce ideas from outside of the interview
questions, and to suggest implications for the concluding discussion. Data from the interviews are
supported by findings from the literature search and provide good grounds for the discussion of
implications in Chapter Six.
### Glossary of Terms Drawn from Interviews

**Acknowledgment**
The content the learners are discussing or asking for is far less important than their need to be acknowledged by the facilitator and to have their ideas validated [Sam, 7:3]. Acknowledging them for *who they are* and not the person that the educator is [Dana, 3:3]

**Agency**
Learning that you can do things for yourself, that you can make a contribution, and that you can be part of a group [Blaire, 6:6]

**Application**
I can challenge ideas with learners. And I tell them ‘don’t take my word for it, talk with your friends, go home and talk with your family and see what they are thinking about’ [Dean, 8:7]. They must be able to take the learning back to the family, community, their own life and have it have some meaning for them [Dana, 3:7].

**Attention**
That person is not going to learn unless they are receptive [Jan, 13:4]

**Challenge**
Challenge is necessary for learning and must come *after* a safe relationship has been established [Dale, 3:8]
Challenge facilitates learning [Dana, 22:3]

**Challenge**
NOT synonymous with threat [Blaire, 11:2]
NOT synonymous with *unsafe* [Dale, 12:1]

**Climate/atmosphere**
You stimulate learning by creating a friendly atmosphere, a safe atmosphere. If you challenge [students’ ideas] at the beginning [of a course], you’d alienate yourself, and they’d turn you off [Dean, 10:3].

**Content**
The process of the safety of the teacher is what has the impact on the learners, not the content [Sam, 4:1]. Content is the vessel for the process [Porter, 1996]. The care with which I treat the content is a form of process itself [Sam, 15:1]. Content has almost nothing to do with safety [Sam, 4:1]. One of the real appeals is that there is always more to learn [Jan, 15:5].

**Context**
Every context is going to be difficult for some people and not for others [Sam, 10:5]

**Control**
[see ‘power and control’]
Educating
(facilitating, mentoring, modeling, teaching, training)

The actual facilitation takes the information that is required and creates a process by which it is integrated [Sam, 14:1]. To help create the conditions were significant learning can occur [Jan, notes]. If you are an adult educator and don’t put the learners first and show concern about their welfare, you are not doing your job [Dean, 11:3]. When I started ‘helping learners’ rather than ‘teaching the subject’, it was quite a different focus [Jan, 11:2]. Make a personal connection with each of the people in the class [Terry, 1:f]. Can the instructor turn you on the learning? [Dean, 8:6]. Turning them from participants into learners [Jan, 22:f]. The educator is the catalyst [Dana]. The facilitator is the constantly the model; that is the number one task [Sam, 14:1]. Model what you are teaching, or you are teaching something else [Porter, 1996].

Educator Responsibilities
Sets the tone [Sam, 4:2] [Terry, 16:2]. To create an environment conducive to learning for everyone in the group [Jan 13:3]. The instructor has responsibility for the group dynamic [Jean, 11:2]. For being aware of what is happening for the whole group [Jean, 11:7]. Observant, constantly monitoring what is happening with the group [Dale, 8:3]. To create safety in the group, not just a nice relationship between you as the educator and the other person who is the learner [Sam, 6:1]. To recognize and respect the feelings that the learner has, to clarify and validate them and to make them as explicit as possible [Jan, 13:3]. Creating a safe environment [Dale, 10:6]. For the contextual and interpersonal safety within the learning group [Dana]. For establishing some kind of democratic environment [Dale, 5:5]. To monitor the group, make sure that norms and goals get looked at now and then, to confirm that they are being followed, or to renegotiate a change [Blaire, 6:1]. To keep the communication between participants in a learning event open and explicit [Blaire, 2:2]. To always try to focus the discussion in a positive way [Dana, 19:3]. To manage style differences amongst learners [Jean, 10:6]. Throughout the year you are constantly reinforcing the norms [Dean, 10:5]. Needs to be willing to share with the learner, to be on the same level with learners [Dale, 5:5]. Responsibility and power need to be shared elements in learning and facilitators need to make that explicit to learners, I don’t know how else you could convey that [Dale, 10:1]. Give learners the responsibility for their own learning [Terry, 3:5]. I always check for feedback about how they are learning [Jean, 6f]. To convey their subject expertise as a means to stimulate discussion and learning [Dale, 10:6]. To be situated: their political, cultural, philosophical, moral, emotional beliefs and values need to be well known at least to the educator and ideally transparent to or approachable by the learner [Dana]. Paint the ‘big picture’ [Jan, notes]. Warm, friendly, and approachable [Jean, 8:6].
 Explicit

Making the ‘covert’ overt [Sam, 16:1]. To create a safe environment, we have to make the covert overt [Sam, 8:5]. Make it explicit [Jan, 12:2]. Developing learners to the point where they can feel ‘I am now ready to learn’ is done by making the learning process very very explicit. [Jan, 13:1]. A kind of checking out with each other just exactly what was going on before people began leaping to assumptions [Dana, 8:2]. Upfront [Dana, 20:4]. Knowing what is going on [Blaire, 12:6]. As I evolved as the facilitator within the program, process got more and more explicit [Jan, 11:6]. If we identify our ground rules explicitly we are going to work together better and we will get our result more quickly [Terry, 14:2]. Group norms should be VERY explicit because if they are you can work in any direction with them [Blaire, 12:6]. There need to be explicit norms for the group; I don’t think a deep kind of learning happens otherwise. [Blaire, 16:1]. With an explicit process...the only anxiety learners will feel will be based on their desire to learn [Sam, 16:5]. When learner state their course expectations explicitly then the learners can go about fulfilling their expectations [Terry, 8:1]. (see also ‘Norms’)

 Group Dynamic is

The learners and the instructor are the group [Terry, 3:3]. We are all always exploring whether we are accepted in a group or not [Sam, 3:3].

 Group Dynamic does

Group dynamics are really important and can really affect learning [Dana, 18:3]. In a positive safe group dynamic, you are going to learn [Dana, 21:5]. A group which feels safe with each other will take more risks. The more risks you take, the more you are trying out new behaviours, exploring new ideas, being creative, therefore the more you are learning [Sam, 17:2]. Governs the degree of communication that can occur in that group. I think the ‘dynamic’ also defines the degree of trust or lack of, and the degree of respect, which are very very important: feeling comfortable enough to speak [Jean, 10:6]. Once the person feels that they’ve got the acceptance of the group, that the group is able to see their skills and their commitment, we then gradually begin to offer the opportunity for constructive criticism that encourages strengthening of areas which are areas of challenge, which may have otherwise been potential weakness. So we start with a baseline of acceptance and then move towards focused objective criticism. [Sam, 12:1]. It’s ok to take risks in this group [Dana, 22:3].
**Group Dynamic**

Gives emotional support, some social support, and some practical support [Blaire, 4:4]. Being able to support each other emotionally [Sam, 13:3]. There need to be equal relationships for learning to occur [Dana, 3:6]. People feel comfortable with each other [Dana, 21:5]. Where people feel that it's safe to say things, where whatever you say is not going to be laughed at [Dana, 21:5]. Have a special interaction between 'elder' members and newer members because they learn from each other [Blaire, 4:4]. Be democratic [Dale].

(See also “Power and Control”)

**developing**

It takes time and experiences together for mutual respect to develop [Jan, 8:1]. So it becomes their community [Jan, 12:5]. In all these years, I can’t recall any instances where conflict built. If people started to feel tense, it was said, it was recognized within the group, and it was dealt with immediately [Jan, 18:3]. Helping them have an opportunity to find some respect for the other person’s position, even if it is very different from their own [Sam, 13:1].

**negative**

If a person feels unsafe, uncomfortable, anxious, or too tense because the group dynamic is chaotic then that person is not going to learn because there are things happening that are interfering. To me that is how the group dynamic and safety relate to learning [Dana, 21:5]. When there is a group that doesn’t work smoothly...you don’t have a mutual respect...it doesn’t turn into a group; it remains a bunch of individuals [Jan, 7:1]. The meeting was ABSOLUTELY NOT a positive learning experience and it was because of the group dynamic [Jean, 13:2].

**prepare for**

Learn the basic vocabulary, fundamental skills, knowledge, and approaches that are used in the field [Jan, notes]. You don’t need to know it all to get started, you can get started with just a little bit of it and learn more later [Jean, 14:6]. Learning is far more effective if safety is first constructed [Sam, 12:1].

**Learning is**

Letting go of what you ‘do know’ in order to let what you ‘do know’ change [Blaire, 12:1]. The ‘disjuncture gap’ [Jan, 13:1]. To learn more, to develop more meaningful types of learning means being able to take more risks [Dale, 11:4]. Ways to respond to problems, to seize the opportunities [Sam, 17:2].
Learning Process
I moved right away from the content and spoke more about the emotions attached to learning [Jan, 11:3]. They have it all...they just need to be motivated and empowered to use what they have. And they get it from each other [Dana, 19:3]. ‘Mistakes’ are referred to as learning experiences; you haven’t made a mistake, you have had a learning experience; seize the opportunity [Jan, notes].

Learning
‘Learning’ may still happen (without safety) but it might not have any meaning to them...they might take away everything they need to know about the subject and do nothing about it [Dana, 3:6]. If we go back to what you already know, what have you learned? [Jan, 13:1]. Without [the safe learning interaction] ideas are not expanded, changed, turned or whatever [Jean, 12:3].

negative Learning
We carry the negative learning experiences with us [Sam, 10:6]. You learn the fear of attempting a difficult subject [Jean, 13:4]. Angry, fearful, frustrated, put down, disempowered, depressed [Dana, 9:3]. I personally didn’t learn anything (because) I just quit [Dana, 17:4]. If you have an intimidating, sarcastic teacher, that will stay with you when you think about teachers and learning. This is a lifelong impact. [Jean, 16:5].

setting Norms
It is very important to negotiate and agree on the norms for the class at the beginning of the term so the idea is to set up expectations around participation. [Dean, 10:5]. Group norms need to be discussed at the beginning [Terry, 7:3]. Group members decide on their norms [Blaire, 5:5]. Norms setting is an aspect of developing psychological safety within a group [Terry, 4:5]. They give safety, boundaries, cohesion, knowledge, and trust [Blaire, 12:6]. Even if they don’t like the norm that the group has decided (for example: ‘you can’t smoke in the group’), they know they can trust the process, they can learn to trust this group, they know what the boundaries are, they know what to expect or what this group does [Blaire, 12:6]. The ground rules become part of the cultural norm [Terry, 8:2].

types of Norms
There are certain rules about people’s points of view mattering and being respected even if not agreed upon [Dana, 5:4]. Everyone in the group having a job or task [within the group][Blaire, 6:2]. Really basic things like ‘you need to be on time’ [Dana, 5:4]. No power relationships, be able to ‘fail’, to make mistakes [Terry, 7:3]. Bring up all ideas, don’t agree if you don’t agree [Terry, 8:4].
Power and Control

Power and relationships in a group are issues of safety in a group [Terry, 5:5]. The power and control synonymous with the role of educator need to be understood and shared [Dale, ]. When learners come in they expect to have to give up their power and control [Jan, 21:f]. While a certain amount of expert power is given to me as an instructor...bring that down to a level where I can make sure they are on the right track [Dean, 8:2]. An educator needs to take the opportunity to see that the same power relationships that happen in society are not getting played out in the classroom [Dana, 3:5]. When people encourage learning with each other they are also giving up some of their own control, taking risks with control [Blare, 6:6]

Process

What we remember about any significant event in our lives is the process of the experience, not the content. We are learning process all the time. [Sam, 15:1]. When you get locked up in an argument, the argument degenerates into content quite quickly, indicating that there are important process issues to deal with [Sam, 14:1]

Risk

Points of risk are where real learning does happen [Blare, 12:3] Risk is the key to learning; they can take a chance or two and not get shot down [Dean, 8:6]. Ideally... people are able to take more risks so that they are able to learn more, to develop more meaningful types of learning [Dale, 11:4]. More risks mean more learning [Sam, 17:2]. Risk creates opportunities for people to learn [Terry, 12:6]

Safety is an issue for everyone [Sam, 2:2]. The first thing learners do is to establish their own safety; when we come into a new situation, we check out: ‘am I ok here?’ [Sam, 15:3]. Comfort [Dale, 3:8]. Feeling comfortable enough to say ‘no’ [Dale, 5:2]. Comfort, respect, trust [Dean, 10:4]. Comfortable [Jean, 15:1]. Physical safety [Dana, 23:4]. Equal power relationships [Dale, 5:5]. Feeling that it’s ok to make mistakes [Blare, 12:3]. Freedom to fail, to ask imperfect questions [Terry, 5:6]. Can look foolish, can make mistakes [Dale, 3:8]. Takes the pressure off [Dean, 8:4]. Friendly people who help each other [Jan, 11:6]. Friendly [Dean, 9:1]. Openness [Dale, 8:2]. Honest relationships [Jan, 16:4]. Listened to, respected, and accepted [Sam, 2:2]. Affirming, engaged [Dana, 16:2]. Different kinds of safety are important for different kinds of people [Terry, 21:3].
Safety does Stimulate learning by having a safe atmosphere [Dean, 9:1]. Safety is essential for learning [Sam, 2:2]. Safety is what makes it possible for a learner to take the challenge of risk in order to learn [Blaire, 12:3]. Necessary for learning to occur [Dale, 4:5]. If I feel safe, then I can learn [Dale, 4:5]. Safety reduces stress [Sam, 16:5]. When you’re not under a lot of pressure you can focus on the learning rather than on the worrying [Dean, 8:4]. You get to the heavy issues [in learning] after you’ve built up a level of comfort, or respect, of trust [Dean, 10:4]. They have to feel comfortable in order to really listen. They have to be listening in order to learn. [Jean, 15:1]. A willingness to take chances and make mistakes is fostered by feeling quite safe in that atmosphere [Jean, 9:5]. A tremendous increase to their gaining the educational side of these services which we offered [Sam, 2:2]. Crucial for learning; it is something that allows them to enjoy their work experience, their learning experience more...once you make that connection, they feel comfortable, they call on you, the instructor. [Dean, 7:4]. The safer the learners, the quicker they are to learn [Sam, 6:3]. Safety increases the risks which can be taken; the more risks the more learning [Sam, 17:2]. If we are talking about learning positive behavioural change or useful skills, then ‘safe’ is the first important element [Blaire, 11:6].


lack of Safety does If they are not safe, they are not receptive enough. If they do not feel receptive, they are going to back away. It doesn’t matter [what other approach you have], there is something that could interfere. And you have to deal with it. [Jan, 14:5]. They may miss what they really want to do [Dean, 7:4]. They are unable to get the information, no matter how basic the information [Sam, 2:2]. Makes learners feel they don’t want to be there [Sam, 5:4]. If you create a lack of safety for one learner, if you convey that their answer was ‘stupid’, you lose not one person, you lose all the learners [Sam, 6:1].

inherent Stress There is a certain anxiety in learning because you are taking on new information and you feel responsible to learn it [Sam, ]. There is a certain amount of rivalry simply by everyone wanting to be accepted at the same time [Sam, 7:3].
positive Stress

The right amount of stress puts you at a reasonable peak in your learning ability [Sam, ]. If their anxiety level goes down, they may be willing to make a mistake, willing to ask a question [Jean, 8:1]. If I create a respectful situation in the classroom, if the learner can interact with the instructor, then that learner is on an even keel, is less stressed out, can then devote most energy into the learning than into worrying about the process [Dean, 8:6].

too much Stress

If people are worrying, they aren’t going to learn anything [Dean, 11:4]. If people are too caught up in being anxious they don’t listen [Jean, 8:1].

Trust

Trust comes from knowing what is going on [Blaire, 12:6]. As an educator I have tried to have trust, integrity, and ethics because I think if I don’t have those values then I don’t do my job. Your clientele has to be able to look at you as a person who has these values, so they don’t feel threatened [Dean, 11:5]. Learners will put their trust in you...they will almost give you that ability to really help them learn, to take some risks. And those are the things we do as educators [Dean, 11:6]. Trust in the relationship is important in acquiring that body of knowledge [Jan, 16:4]. Without that trust the words of critique could be interpreted very differently [Sam, 12:1].

(see 'Explicit')
CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION OF IMPLICATIONS

Although these ideas are commonplace in our felt experience, very little has been written about them in the context of learning, and researchers have perhaps resisted grappling with what may seem to be very subjective phenomena. Yet despite their subjectivity, these ideas are sufficiently tangible and part of our vocabulary of learning for them to be explored and considered as meaningful ways of describing experience.

The purpose of the thesis project was to explore an assumption in the literature that safety has a crucial role in learning, to investigate what assumptions educators hold about safety, and to draw implications into a tentative theoretical framework. It was a broad territory to try to chart in one project because issues of safety had not been explored this way before in a research context. On one hand, the lack of prior research might be seen to limit the degree of certainty about conclusions drawn. On the other hand, the data are sufficiently well supported that credible implications may be accepted as sound. The study has also succeeded in determining that safety is a fundamentally important, provocative, intense, and complex issue for educators, learners, and learning organizations. This chapter does not aspire to resolve the paradoxes and uncertainties raised by the study, but rather to make paradox accessible through discussion. The thesis is meant to be a dialogue paused in time.

The investigation combined data drawn from interviews with eight adult educators about their wide range of learning and teaching experience, with findings from a survey of interdisciplinary literature. Examples provided by the participants helped to explicate what the role of safety in learning might look like in practice. During the final interpretive phase of the

88 Boud & Griffin, 1987, p. 11

89 Consistent with the rest of the thesis, the use of the word ‘safety’ is accepted as referring to the presumed relationship between safety and learning which formed the basis for the study.
project, between the presentation of findings and the introduction of a theoretical framework, both the transcripts and the literature were frequently revisited when interpretation seemed to raise new questions or where data seemed unclear. The following discussion offers a new way of thinking about the results of the project and includes new data from the literature where further clarification seems useful.

Overview

The concluding discussions are extensions of the earlier chapters and are presented in sections to accommodate uneven degrees of certainty and evidence. First, the strongest research findings form the basis of a tentative theoretical framework about the role of safety; the project data are taken as good grounds for accepting the model⁹⁰. Next, some theoretical and practical implications are suggested across the relational, organizational, and political levels of education which were introduced in the study. The third section of the chapter consolidates and expands the findings about safety by considering the effects of safety, whether present or absent. Finally, the project is brought to a close through a series of brief discussions ranging from a ‘critical look at the existing social image of education’ to a review of my experiences with the project. Philosophical and moral issues are recognized as important, because the nature of the model suggests underlying philosophical and moral factors; these are not elaborated as I felt that to do so might unjustifiably overreach the boundaries of the study. After the study is closed with an acknowledgment of limitations and a summary about what has been accomplished, I discuss how my own point of view has evolved.

⁹⁰ The tentative theoretical framework which generates the discussion of implications is interchangeably referred to as a framework, model, or construct.
Tentative Theoretical Framework

*Understanding is not the same thing as prediction.*

This project clarified, through a combination of prior research and interview data, that most education occurs through catalytic relationships, usually between learners and educators. The study focused on these relationships as the social dynamic which must be felt as safe for optimal positive learning to occur. Criteria for understanding learning and for recognizing safety were identified. Details about how to establish a safe climate were drawn from the data, and formed the basis of implications for practice.

The project recognized that paradox and ambiguity often characterize discourse about teaching, learning, and education. At the same time, a broad awareness of the underlying issues emerged from interdisciplinary research uncovered during the study. The tentative theoretical framework was designed through an interpretation of the data in terms of implications, and was intended to offer guidelines for practice and research. The construction of this model within the organizational, instructional, and philosophical frameworks referred to in the study adhered to Glasser’s (1969) suggestion that “any recommendations for change must fall within the existing framework... applicable to the existing conditions in the schools” (p. 7).

The model is summarized through an abbreviated narrative which describes what a crucial role for safety might look like in an ideal practice:

**Learning** is a demonstrable change in capability, not just temporary acquisition of subject

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91 Waldrop, 1992, p. 306

92 and among learners

93 Preliminary work early in the project established that ecological safety, criminal control, and psychic safety must be taken as given preconditions for the purposes of this study.
matter. And, to rephrase from Chapter Two, you cannot make people learn facts, you can create a climate where they want to learn. Educators can help learners improve their learning skills and discover how to experience changes in their abilities, whether knowledge-based or skill related.

Safety may be the catalyst of the productive learning climate - the quality of relationship and context which allows learners to focus on their work and engage personal challenges. Safety is not a fixed concept, but a feeling which may be negotiated, explicated, and experienced. The safe learning climate balances challenge with comfortableness, power with responsibility, and holds as trustworthy qualities of encouragement, dialogue, commitment, and goodwill.

According to the study, safety is an important quality in learner, educator, organizational and societal profiles.

Learners need to bring characteristics of goodwill and commitment to their participation, and be capable of relational skills, agency, attention, explication, enquiry, change, and evaluation.

Skilled educators, in their abilities to create a safe learning climate, are above all models. They should be committed to helping people take risks with security in order to make changes. Educators are the competent relational leaders, have skills and content expertise with which to inform learners’ process, and share power and responsibility with others.

Educational organizations should create the broad environment which establish the conditions supportive of safe learning relationships. Safety-related organizational qualities include: the development of relevant operational policy, an openness about their goals and mission, explicit procedural norms, safety-based program planning, processes for evaluating and maintaining organizational standards, shared responsibilities and power among organizational elements, and the encouragement of feedback and accountability.

A Society which values learning for learning’s sake (without oppressive cultural agenda)
supports a safe learning culture by respecting diversity and dialogue, valuing relational skills, and recognizing strength in power sharing. **Learning** is creative, unlimited, integrated, applied, and subjectively recognized.

Although not investigated by the study, **Sustainability** was recognized as a quality inherent in the organizational structure. Sustainability is the driving force behind the capacity to continue (to maintain, endure, and perpetuate). Data suggest that in a safety-based climate sustainability is explicitly acknowledged as important, and is based upon the social values of the culture.

Learning may be limited to the extent that any of the elements of this model is constrained. Like the notion of safety itself, the model acts like a foundation for social interaction, and is therefore complex. It may be the awareness of the values of safety, rather than being able to eliminate all constraints on safe practice, which is fundamentally most important because “in the end” writes Tom (1984) “a theoretical idea, even a potent one, may be inundated by a swirl of interactions” (p.148). The role of safety, consistently important, changes expression and appearance from one context or relationship to the next. The model offers a general framework from which to understand, articulate, operationalize, and negotiate safe practice. As a guideline the theoretical construct is flexible, adaptive, and dependable insofar as it reflects those it serves. A guideline is not a blueprint for action. Criteria for evaluating this model’s validity, efficacy, and future usefulness lie in practice, dialogue, and interpretation. While criteria may seem limited, Merriam (1987) reminds scholars that “no theory fares well when all ‘criteria’ are applied” (197).

Application and evaluation are situated in practice and the theoretical framework intended to represent the principles for skilled practice which interview participants seemed to repeatedly express. As Taylor (1987) notes: “one indication of the applicability of the model is its
'recognizability' to learners" (p. 194). Implications for efficacy and application address practical matters such as what is recognized as potentially safe practice, what are some anticipated problems, what may be alternative approaches. The following discussion elaborates by considering the model as applied to learning relationships and elements of the learning context.

**Learning Relationships**

Notions about education imply that experiences are organized within relationships between educators and learners. Learning is a fluid and unpredictable experience; people are always learning. Sometimes they are unlearning, maintaining learning, learning negative or damaging things, reinforcing what they already know, changing, adapting, accommodating, resolving. In seeking change, they may choose to learn on their own. But, the learning relationships offer a potential medium for complex learning. Educators become catalysts for learning by serving as leaders for the learning community which forms among program participants.

**Learners**

An intention to acquire knowledge or skills does not make one a learner. People become learners when they develop learning abilities (Knowles & Knowles, 1972; Novak & Gowin, 1984; Daniels & Case, 1996). Data from this project suggest that, within educational settings, basic learning abilities include goodwill, commitment, relational and communicative skills, and a capacity to risk change. Learners need a cooperative intelligence so that the relational leadership skills of the educator may develop the social dynamic into a safe learning community for all. Learners must have the capacity to negotiate a safe enough climate with which to acquire the basic vocabulary and rules of the subject area while developing a critical and enquiring attitude. The data suggest that while learners need these skills in order to learn well, educators or
organizations have a responsibility to either screen for these qualities or to develop them within the learning group dynamic.

Since learning is a social activity, diversity within a group can be deeply divisive and inhibiting, and/or stimulating and shared (Brewer & Hunter, 1989, p. 26). The characteristics of commitment and goodwill can go a long way to mitigate the impact of individual differences on group development while maximizing participants' learning curves. The research participants who most clearly emphasized these issues seemed to be those most able to also recognize and foster their own learning style, while acknowledging and appreciating the contribution and experiences of others. When the learning skills and social dynamic roles of program participants are congruent with their preferred learning styles, learning is enhanced (Maclean, 1987, p. 130). The majority of formal learning events neglects to 'screen' for these abilities or prepare learners to develop these skills.

Learners may not be able to teach content, but they are able - in optimal learning environments - to help others learn (Vygotskii, 1978; Joyce & Showers, 1983; Hyde, 1992). If educators oversee the development of a safe learning climate and teach learners how to learn, the 'struggle' to engage content will become a safely dynamic learning adventure for all.

Educators.

Educators need to be aware of what effect they are having on the world and recognize that knowledge is a negotiated political currency of social power and that they perpetuate the knowledge industry. Educators should know how knowledge gets constructed, organized, and dispersed (and for whose benefit), what products are educators really creating,

94 This responsibility is further explored in the following discussion about educators.

95 and their own style for enacting their role as educators.
what developments are blocked, and what may be lost or gained by learners.

If their primary work is to be helpful, educators need many skills to help people transform themselves into learners, to help individual participants coalesce into groups, and to help organizations develop into safe learning cultures rather than just mechanisms for political control. In addition to a mastery of useful knowledge, they need the skills to be able to perceive what is happening with their learners, the moral maturity to care that learning is positive, personal, and complex, and a repertoire of instructional and relational skills (Knowles, 1972; Griffin, 1987). Educators are responsible for creating safe conditions where learners believe that success is possible and where learners are safe enough to engage important challenges.

An educator must be prepared to use their skills in moderating the normal perturbances in the learning process when a safe challenging climate among learners might momentarily shift to threatening because “understanding and misunderstanding always occur together (Burbules, 1993, p. 115). Therefore educators must not only be able to recognize these shifts as they start to occur but also have the skills to continue stimulating learning while maintaining a safe social dynamic. If the learning potentials of program participants are to be fulfilled, an awareness of the conditions which support learning, combined with an ongoing evaluation of the relational climate and the will to enact leadership responsibility, are essential educator qualities.

As Jan mentioned, there is a major difference in educator approach between a desire to teach content and a commitment to teaching people. Hare (1993b) adds that another way educators demonstrate their desire to help the learner learn is by showing that we “value the knowledge the student has which we have not taught” (p. 109). Taylor (1987) continued:

I have come to appreciate the authority I have as a teacher as a precious ingredient in people’s learning rather than as inhibitive. I have a better sense of how to relate to people who are in a conflicting relationship with me and
of when my attention and support are critical to learners. I understand better who I am to people in my classes and, while I think I have become much more effective as a teacher I am also acquiring an appropriate humility about the limits of my influence (p. 195).

The following is a sample of educators who take different perspectives about how to construct education, reflects the findings of the project. In a collection of essays by adult educators in Germany (Mader, 1992), Holzapfel introduces views of European scholars who call for a "sensitization of pedagogues for the structure and complexity of learning conditions on behalf of participants' learning processes" (p. 177). Belanger & Blaise (1995) "redefine education, not as a transfer of knowledge and skills, but as a communicative process or dialogue between people, as a sharing of genuine competencies and expertise" (p. 127). Whitehead (1929) suggests that "the justification for a university is that it preserves the connection between knowledge and the zest for life by uniting young and old in the imaginative consideration of learning... A university which fails in this respect has no reason for existence" (p. 139). The task of a university is to "weld together imagination and experience" (p. 140). Education, therefore, 'disciplines' (Whitehead, 1929, p. 147) and "energizes the adventure of life" (de Tocqueville, 1975, p. 15).

Educators become teachers after first being learners and many educators reenact the teaching styles under which they learned. This study suggests that educators need to keep learning; to learn how to create a safe learning climate they may need their own 'teachers', mentors, and supervisors. Educators may first need to experience such an atmosphere while they themselves are learners. They also need safe professional development opportunities to examine their attitudes and to acquire expanded relational skills. Educators must have the group skills with which to be responsible for themselves and their learners and they need an organizational context which provides support and opportunity for them to enact their responsibilities to
learners\textsuperscript{96}.

**Social dynamic.**

At the beginning of the thesis project, concepts about the social dynamic predominated discussions about context and were central to the interview questions. Data gathered provide a basis for moving the discussion from understanding what happens to suggesting the implications of what happens. Therefore data relating to the social dynamic have been projected into discussions about the learning context.

**Learning Context**

The data are viewed from broad education elements of social culture and organizational infrastructure of a program as they are reflected in the planning, policy, and politics which influence the specific relationships among educators and learners. Although these elements are discussed sequentially, they need to be recognized as interconnected aspects of the organized contexts in which education programs tend to occur.

**Social culture.**

Interview participants mentioned the influence of societal values on the learning culture. If society values learning and relational skills, community development, and collaborative power, then the likelihood of educational organizations modeling those values is increased. Safe practice depends on a combined awareness within the broad social culture of the factors and issues of safety and learning. Societal values become translated into organizational administration.

\textsuperscript{96} "We need to prepare and encourage our teachers to be as concerned with their moral manner as they are with their subject-matter methods. And we must make provision for conflict and controversy in our classrooms" (Fenstermacher, 1994, p. 7).
Organizational administration

The imagination of organized education does not yet encompass the idea of the truly difficult and thoroughly vital adventure of the willingness to open oneself to the possibility of being transformed by learning.\(^7\)

Education-associated organizations\(^8\) define the contexts in which learners and educators engage each other. Organizations function simultaneously as cultural entities and as units fragmented from each other within society. The thesis project did not attempt an organizational analysis of education, not even to highlight the dependence of educators on institutional and instructional models of learning; however, several organizational elements were identified throughout Chapters Two and Four and are included in this discussion.

Educational organizations manage fiscal resources and provide administrative infrastructure. Organizational mission statements which define both goals and structure are developed through policy, philosophy, and political perception\(^9\). Programs are planned according to organizational resources, educational policy, and sociopolitical influences. Safety is established to the degree with which safety values pervade organizational elements.

Although it is outside the boundaries of this study to pursue organizational influences in greater detail, four aspects of organizational function which did appear in the data are summarized. While these issues may seem somewhat peripheral to the original focus of the study and to the rationales behind the interview questions, they were issues recognized by participants as being inherent in the organization of education and to the formal study of education. Issues of

\(^7\) Walker, 1996, p. 5

\(^8\) including government policy, political/economic agendas, community associations etc

\(^9\) Because epistemological concepts are often used to justify organizational decision-making, future research findings may contribute a rich resource for design and critique of educational approaches
planning, policy, and politics are therefore included in the discussion of implications for the theoretical framework.

**Program planning**

Program planning (or curriculum) structures learning events. Models of program planning tend to articulate political, procedural, and instructional factors of content management rather than relational factors of learning (Sork & Caffarella, 1989). But Houle (1976) suggests that “of all design components...social reinforcement tends to be most important, being at once a beginning point, a major detriment of continuity, and a basis of appraisal” (p. 104). Details of program planning were not directly explored in the research project, so a well-informed discussion about specific safety considerations is not possible. Insofar as safety issues are concerned, Cervero and Wilson (1994) note that “nearly all models for planning [learning] programs for adults have treated power, politics, and ethics as noise that gets in the way of good planning” (p. xii). The frustration and limitations expressed by research participants in this study suggest that the degree of consideration given to safety factors by program planners facilitates or inhibits positive learning experiences.

Program planning defines the approaches which support stages of group development. Limited data notwithstanding, two planning elements of evaluation and technological approaches to communication are mentioned because of the distinctive influence each exerts on programming.

**Program planning - evaluation.**

Evaluation provides the information on which program analysis, interpretation, reflection, and decision-making can be based. Evaluation can also be used in highly manipulative and damaging ways. Participants interviewed referred to both positive and negative effects of evaluation and made two suggestions: the first in favour of increased use of formative evaluation;
and second, that data from formative and summative evaluation be combined to identify learning outcomes.

Formative evaluation offers crucially valuable information about the experiences of participants during a program but is a less frequently employed resource. Evaluation is typically summative, used to end a program by scoring both educator and program appeal. Although problems are easier to resolve the sooner they become evident, many educators are unskilled at seeking formative evaluation. The only way to monitor and maintain group norms and the quality of the learning dynamics is through formative evaluation. Educators who lack relational and leadership skills may feel intimidated by such ongoing feedback. This opens up a whole new set of issues ranging from the importance of educators acquiring relational skills capable of maintaining their own sense of safety while serving the safety needs of others, to questions about why formative evaluations are so rarely used.

Second, educators and administrators need to combine data from both formative and summative evaluation to seek information about relational, emotional, and creative experiences, as well as content-associated data. There is sufficient evidence available in the literature that data about such participant aspects as the degree of participation, sense of agency, group social support, and relationship with the instructor might be used to assess the application and durability of learning, and to make moderate predictions about learning accomplishment. If the planned curriculum is not altogether what is learned (Dewey, 1938; Maling and Keepes, 1985; Cuban, 1993) and yet evaluation is based on the declared curriculum, how might program evaluation be designed to recognize what is actually learned? A diversity of issues could be evaluated to provide learners, educators, and administrators with data for policy making, program planning, accountability protocols, group development, and teacher education.
Program planning - technological approaches to communication.

Educators, learners, and organizations seem to be by-passing communicative and relational demands through an increasing reliance of the ultimate control of learning on the technological delivery of programs. Technology provides a wide range of organizational and instructional tools. Technology can deliver content in degrees of complexity, volume, and creativity beyond the ability of individual teachers. Information for training, entertainment, and self-development is available globally at any time of the day in discreetly packaged units. Communication via technology can link individuals across formidable distances while minimizing the stresses of interpersonal social dynamics. Impressive gains lie in the availability of information, reminiscent of Illich's 'deschooling' of education. Technology may contribute new methodology for assisting both educators and learners in acquiring relational skills. However, important losses devolving from an over reliance on the technological delivery of information and a potentially consequent reduction in learning relationships need to be recognized in order to be remedied.

Many people have speculated that teachers and classrooms as we know them are becoming obsolete. Educators as a profession have been slow to respond to the changing technological market - both in terms of providing technology-driven information and by enhancing their own interpersonal and teaching skills. Systemic technological changes are inevitable in education. Technological innovations may reposition content to a secondary role in the learning relationship and highlight the importance of relational skills.

Policy.

If safety is a crucial precondition for learning, questions need to be asked about how policy decision-making is central to the development of a 'safe ethos' within organizations, social
cultures, program planning, and the expression of political goals. Policy articulates beliefs and defines practice. Policy converts an organization's mission statement into organizational goals, structure, protocols, curriculum, and processes for accountability. Changing practice requires changing the beliefs or philosophical attitudes which drive policy decisions\textsuperscript{100}. Policy reflects the mind-set underlying organization. Proposed organizational courses of action are often known to only an elite administrative few, or are implicitly embedded in planning and procedures, often beyond the scrutiny or influence of either educators or learners.

Explicit policy-making systems, responsive to the safety needs of program participants, may improve both education and society. Again, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to define policy or to suggest how safety might be articulated as policy for any given organization. But two policy issues were thematic to the project and bear comment: the sustainability of an organization and the political ecology.

**Policy - sustainability.**

Sustainability is introduced because the concept is at the core or organizational viability. Sustainability is an essential consideration for policy and program planning. It is also a problematic concept. Cultural reproduction sounds somehow natural, benign, and understandable. But power, social privilege, and personal opportunity are at stake when concepts of sustainability are based on the status quo. Perhaps formal education, and many teachers, are not working for the growth of the individual learner but for the advancement and perpetuation of the mainstream culture. From this perspective, the 'failure' of some learners weeds out those who don't fit in, and strengthens the positions of those learners who do fin in and who thereby serve the continuation of the system. Sustainability is a contested site.

\textsuperscript{100} Eisner, 1991, p. 17
de Tocqueville (1975) observed that when “the mind became an element in success, knowledge became a tool of government and intellect a social force” (p. 10). Educators are social elites, mandarins of knowledge, gatekeepers of information who need to make individual choices about how they use their position. Ohliger (1974) and Carlson (1971) raise concerns about the tendency for educators to focus on content acquisition and organizational durability and suggested that learners are destined to self-perceptions of lifelong inadequacy by policies based on sustainability. Chomsky goes further, stating that current attitudes determine that “education is a system of imposed ignorance\textsuperscript{101}”. And Griffin (1987) warns of the dangers of sustainability policies based on compensation or continuance (p. 200). The issue is how to creatively use that force to embed values of safe social dynamics into the policies and politics of sustainability.

Waldrop (1992) regards sustainability as a potent driving force behind organizational development and growth. In order for sustainability to be a power-neutral concept, Waldrop suggests that sustainability requires explicit policy-making procedures need to create “an informational transition to a world in which scientific research, education, and global monitoring allow large numbers of people to understand the nature of the challenges they face” (p. 350). Hare (1993b) takes a different but compatible perspective: “conceptual, normative, and empirical awareness is necessary but it needs to be transformed by critical judgement into something meaningful and relevant” (p. 113).

Smith (1982) takes a pragmatic approach to sustainability and issues of learner-centred education policies. His comments about the importance of ‘learning to learn’ should capture the attention of policy makers: “the costs in money and energy are dear for individuals who learn inadequately throughout their lives - and most of us do, whatever level of education we may

\textsuperscript{101} From a National Film Board of Canada documentary called “Manufacturing Consent”.
The social costs are surely astronomical...” (p. 10). Safety-based changes to our education systems may make low-cost, high return, sustainable improvements. The costs of continuing to ignore issues of safety in learning may prove to be too steep in the long run, anyway. Safety as a precondition for learning needs to become a political issue, because policy and politics are kindred elements in the key organizational dimensions of ‘relevant’ and sustained.

Politics

Education is value-laden and political, generally reproducing the status quo and guiding ethic of a society, culture, or program. Rather than exceed the findings of the thesis project, a discussion of political implications is bound within two issues: power (and control), and the importance of a radically democratic approach in education. Politics effect what knowledge is valued and sought, what counts as learning; who decides what skills, attributes, abilities, values, beliefs contribute to society and how certification is bestowed; as well as whose vision of society is empowered through policy, funding, and curriculum. Learning has always been a political act (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991; Edwards, 1991). Safety is a political issue, given its relationship with power and control and its role in dialogue and relationship.

Politics - power and control

Knowledge is recognized in the education context as the currency of power and control. The power and control inherent in organizations of learning can be mitigated by “a process of continuing negotiations through which we gain an open access to knowledge resources in society” (Jones, 1974, p. 46; see also Stenhouse, 1975, p. 6). To restate Bourdieu’s position: cultural protocols which construct and limit choices, assign status, and define social routines alert us to the presence of underlying power and control. While minimum cultural rules are needed for social interactions to develop, the extent to which explicit and negotiable guidelines are present signal
how healthy and reciprocal are the degrees of power. When social organizations have entrenched preferred “right ways of thinking about meaning or action and when alternative ways are suppressed, hidden power and assumptions are doing violence to the healthy development of a culture” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979, p. 4). Plumb (in Welton, 1995) adds that “communicative distortions can be traced to inequitable relations of power in society” (P. 209).

At the micro level, power and control are key elements in the development of personal agency and positive social dynamics. Griffith (1987) describes personal ‘power’ as “the ability to do” (P. 59). In the social context, she distinguishes exploitive power, “power over”, from collaborative community building “power with”.

Taylor (1987) agrees that “an understanding of this role of authority in the learners’ processes would seem pivotal in effectively facilitating that learning” (p. 193). Cervero & Wilson (1994) situated issues of power and control in the actions of program planning and suggest safe practice may “...require the planner to hold clearly defined beliefs about how to act responsibly in the face of power” (p. xii).

**Politics - democratic process.**

At this point in the discussion, safety issues may seem to be expanding beyond confines of the project. However, my sense is that one service this project may offer is to provide some fundamental mapping of issues and options. Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) respond to the social issues of learning as education by calling for a renewal of the ‘radically democratic’ vision of relationship. They discuss the importance of learning, in terms of emancipatory citizenship where “the notions of difference, power, and specificity can be understood as part of a public philosophy that broadens and deepens individual liberties and rights through rather than against\(^ {102} \) a radical

\(^{102}\) their italics
notion of democracy” (p. 81). For me, a discussion about democratic values offers a framework for considering the micro level safety issues of relationship in the macro level domain of social policy. What is needed is more applied research into communicative, relational, and political aspects of education.

Research

Formal education institutions may fail to recognize what practice and theory claim to be true: in data from interdisciplinary studies and in the perceptions of research participants, safety is identified as a crucial precondition for learning. This raises a problem with how to stimulate sufficient interest in the ‘academy’ to generate the kinds of research, evaluation criteria, and skill building which would bring questions about safety and learning into mainstream education policy and planning.

Research provides ways of responding to questions from theory and practice - using study to seek understanding. I tend to emphasize application and evaluation because usually data are not new - most often they are available but under-applied. The two solitudes of theory and practice identified by Thompson & Wagner (1994) do not exist in other professions to the extent that they do in education. Technical, medical, legal, and scientific fields have to be sensitive to new information, quick to apply and evaluate findings. Educators, it seems, are able to coast along for decades, recognizing scholarship but not being held accountable for application, learning outcomes, or responsive changes in practice.

Four traditional and problematic aspects of educational research typically constrain the applicability of research findings: (1) the lack of a cooperative dynamic tension between theory and practice, (2) issues of power and control which limit topics for study or application, (3) a

103 because of competition and professional demands
failed distribution of research findings (Belanger & Blais, 1995), and (4) seemingly little impetus for research findings to be applied, tested, and evaluated.

Questions about how theoretical findings are integrated into practice emerge from the types of resistance to participate I received from some academics who challenged the underlying value of the thesis project. The reluctance of these educators to discuss the issues of learning and safety may reveal a tendency by some leaders in the field of education to avoid, diminish, or fail to apply, interdisciplinary research - especially research from the areas of psychology and sociology. Research may be cited, but it is rarely engaged and worked on until it becomes applied education research. Such a response may deny academics and practitioners opportunities to discover what may be useful for education research among such interdisciplinary phenomena as learned helplessness, eustress, social learning theory, group dynamics, and so on.

Rubenson (1982) identifies another weakness by suggesting that much of education research has been atheoretical and, consequently, marginalized in terms of policy and practice. Using the metaphor of mapping territory, he cautions that if the data used in charting the field of education are “theoretical constructs that are borrowed from other disciplines” then they need to be worked with in such a way that they are used “to reconstruct the total social and (when proper) institutional setting of the problem under study”, rather than introduced as only “mosaic pieces” (p. 73). One directive emerging from the thesis project is for academics and practitioners to account for their views and approaches by developing a dynamic research culture which embeds application and evaluation as follow-ups to research.

A second problem widespread in education research is that a particularly cohesive

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104 I reviewed adult education literature on 'group dynamics' and found little association with learning or with application, program delivery, policy, and evaluation.
institutionalized ‘elite’ administrative power base maintains control over what is valued as research: formal education is a tightly controlled enterprise. For example, the lack of cooperative research between ‘formal' education organizations, ‘training’ institutions, and community education demonstrates the peculiar resistance on the part of academics to the professional development, accountability, and research-driven innovation which mark other professions.

The weak distribution of adult education research findings is mentioned because surveys reported by Long (1983b), Belanger and Blaise (1995), and Rubenson, (1982) show that the majority of new research is done by graduate students, and is rarely published. Participants referred to their difficulties in accessing practical information about theory. And I noticed that, unlike professionals in other research-likened fields, educators seldom referred to the theories, theorists, or research which informs their practice.

Finally, research into the role of safety in learning needs to map the relationship between learner, educator, and organization. McIntyre (1993) suggests that [educational] research understandings are “specific understandings of context which can be brought to the surface and critiqued” (p. 87) in order to “reconnect paradigm theory to research practice” (p. 85). Research which refines understanding about safety may expand the applicability and evaluation of theory.

Safety

Safety is a familiar concept, so the project strove to ‘make the familiar strange’ (Van Maanen, 1995) in order to understand why the importance of safety in learning is a primitive assumption, what assumptions exist, and to try to find ways to articulate safety in teaching practice. Some distinguishing features of safety may be universal: unthreatening, communicative, power sharing, responsible, and comfortable. What safety means to each of us is unique: we each

\footnote{105 therefore certifiable}
recognize that there is a feeling of safety and have a sense of what that might mean to ourselves.

**Understanding Safety**

If learning is about challenge and risk-taking, then the learning relationship needs to be felt as safe enough to take risks. Safety enables learners to go beyond curricular acquisition (Cuban, 1993) to create the new and more complex problems and questions which indicate deeper levels of learning accomplishment. Tom (1994) suggests that participants need to be able to “move out of the prescribed roles, and risk genuine connection” (p. 10). Safety at one level allows risks at another level. Defining safety within the learning relationship becomes the fundamental preliminary work between teacher and learner.

Safety is an essential precondition for optimal learning. ‘Pre-condition’ may suggest that, once achieved, safety remains static. But safety is achieved through a relational dynamic - and requires ongoing monitoring, effort, and skill to maintain. The word 'optimal' is used in recognition that there is much learning which is truncated, fragmented, incomplete, or confused. An assumption is made in this thesis that if we are planning to participate in a learning event, either as facilitator or learner - and given a free choice - we would choose to learn at our potential rather than under conditions which limit us.

While a sense of personal power is a necessary element of the agency and effort which enable learning, power and control require skillful management in a social context where everyone needs a certain amount of power in order to perform to their optimal ability. In a continuum of effect, power energizes and facilitates at one end, but dominates and destroys at another. The natural human need to feel ‘empowered’ needs to be fulfilled and expressed with skill and maturity. By developing reciprocal social dynamics which evidence relational [communicative

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106 interpreted here as having a sense of personal agency, ability, belonging, and social role
and interactive] skills, a climate of safety may mitigate the inappropriate craving for power and control while opening up possibilities for relationship.

**Commonly Held False Ideas About Safety**

The project includes an acknowledgment that false ideas about safety may be commonly held\(^{107}\), especially the odd and almost mythic ideas which seems to linger in the academy that threat, competition, and arousal create a most efficacious learning climate. It may be that the preservation of a societal status quo through creating social members who are able to compete is a value which has dominated educational organizations. But if the goal is to create skillful learners, safety and collaboration in relationship are crucial \(^{108}\).

Safety is a set of conditions experienced as a feeling. A question was asked during the project: if learners could be lulled into feeling safe, when they weren’t really, would it count as safety? No. Although safety is a feeling, not a fact\(^{109}\), the contextual and relational circumstances which explicitly establish safety within a social dynamic need to be authentically safe. Deception and delusion might be felt as betrayal.

Maclean (1987) presents a proactive view that, for learners, “the [safe] learning experience...jolts them into thinking about assumptions that had been previously unexamined” (p. 136). Changing questionable attitudes and beliefs with new habits and practice is often a long, slow process; misconceptions or fallacies about safety may persist in the attitudes of some educators for a long time. However, at the end of the project I feel confident that the data support

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\(^{107}\) These are distinguished from challenges and misconceptions presented in Chapter Five.

\(^{108}\) Greatest evolutionary advances in robotics/artificial intelligence have occurred when intelligent robots have collaborated with each other, in order to learn from each other.

\(^{109}\) See Chapter Five.
the implications derived from the theoretical framework offered at the beginning of the chapter.

Having engaged several challenges to and misconceptions or false concepts about safety, I do not anticipate the emergence of disconfirming data. But if another researcher feels they have a counter-argument, I’d like to hear about it\textsuperscript{110}.

**Operationalizing Safety**

Safety needs to be operationalized, for inclusion in policy, programming, and teacher education as an assumed value in education. According to interview participants, safety may not be defined as a static intellectual construct because safety is a feeling. In a social setting safety is developed primarily through interpersonal relationships. These relationships need to be supported so that they develop in positive and appropriate ways. Guidelines for recognizing and establishing states of safety within learning relationships can be planned and monitored by educators and negotiated among participants.

**How to Establish Safety**

Safety is a feeling which arises within the dynamics of relationship and is established through negotiation, founded on mutual goodwill and commitment. Program participants must be sufficiently prepared so that goodwill and commitment are authentically felt qualities brought to the learning event.

Where goodwill or commitment are absent, developing these qualities becomes the primary task of the program (Hyde, 1992, p. 186). Pre-screening, introductory evaluations, and explicit norm setting designed to establish that the essential participant characteristics are present. There are many ways to weave the process of creating a felt need for commitment, goodwill, relationship, and safety into the content-based curricula, but the creation of the basic relational

\textsuperscript{110} Come and talk with me!
qualities remains paramount for the group.

Safety can be established by making the 'rules' by which the group dynamic or culture will be developed explicit. Safety in relational dynamics is developed during norm setting and is based on having an explicit process. Negotiations for norm setting are guided by the group leader - the educator - and are supported by the commitment, goodwill, relational skills, and personal responsibility of each group member.

The effects of safety are a trustworthy communicative process, a comfortable level of relational engagement, reciprocal exchanges of social value in terms of power and responsibility, and a sense within each participant of personal agency. If one person feels unsafe, the group feels unsafe\textsuperscript{111}.

Explicitly negotiated rules, reinforced by the educator/leader, may become implicitly absorbed into the group dynamic as the rules shift from being directive to becoming normative. As the group dynamic develops, the potential exists for power and control of leadership to pass from educator to learners (see Figure 7, Chapter Five). Safety in the group stimulates greater risk-taking within and among members and enhances the abilities of all participants to resourcefully and creatively engage learning challenges. As participants learn how to learn, through developing the learning community within their program, new learning becomes both reinforced and increasingly integrated so that other or more complex new degrees of learning may occur.

**Effects from Lack of Safety**

Impediments to safety are impediments to learning. It might be difficult to establish objective criteria for measuring what is lacking, or degrees of lost opportunity because the degree

\textsuperscript{111} Data from the study suggests that where one member of a group feels unsafe, the sense of that experience pervades the group.
of limitation might not be obvious or testable in a course-end summative evaluation. According to the data, one may still suggest that the extent to which safety is not present is one major limitation on learning. If objective confirmation were an important criteria for accepting the usefulness of safety as a precondition for learning, pre-tests combined with formative and longitudinal evaluations could better assess changes in understanding, ongoing interest, sustained knowledge, and application of learning.

The study established that negative emotions such as anxiety, threat, fear, inadequacy, anger, helplessness, and isolation are created by unsafe climates. Negative emotions are not passive; they have several effects. For example, Eich's (1989) research into mood-dependent learning shows that learning tends to be cued and retrieved with the same emotion; skills or attitudes learned in anger may be retrieved in anger, and so on. Stress research, as illustrated in Figure 4, in Chapter Two, shows that performance is diminished when participants feel the duress of negative emotions and is enhanced in a state of positive arousal such as that which program participants experience when they are able to take on challenges as they are learning\textsuperscript{112}.

Other effects of an unsafe climate are the loss of experience or opportunity and the loss of passion, persistence, agency, confidence, joy, vision. There may be a reduced information base for the development of future knowledge and skill. Learning may be less applied, therefore less enduring. There may also be a reduction or loss of the commitment and goodwill upon which future participation is predicated.

Burbules (1993) points out that a teacher or learner who is personally skilled in relational abilities may be unable to function skillfully in an unsafe learning context. “Even more serious are

\textsuperscript{112} What conditions give rise to negative or positive emotions may vary from culture or social role, but the good feelings feel good in similar ways, just as anger is anger in any culture - even if the ‘causes’ of anger vary.
those aspects of the school situation that make it unsafe and threatening for those who do possess and practice the communicative virtues to manifest them in that setting” (p. 152).

Whose needs are served by not having a safe learning environment? Carlson (1971) and Ohliger (1974) suggest that program sustainability may depend on a certain lack of safety in order to exploit learner’s sense of inadequacy as a way of keeping program enrollment up. This concern can be raised, but not resolved in a project this limited. I respond by suggesting that safe teaching practices might, as a secondary consequence, create fail-safe measures which help to protect against the development of unsafe implicit ways of doing things.

I move on from these considerations by asking educators to imagine answering three rhetorical questions: What might knowing about safety do to people? What if everyone engaged in safe practice? Might there be any cases where safe practice might not be beneficial?

Concluding Discussion

Having explicated the tentative theoretical frame, and reviewed the data about safety, I move to pull the project to a close with discussions about some unresolved broad issues, limitations of the study, who the project serves, and my own experiences.

A Critical Look at the ‘existing social image’ of Education

Throughout the project I encountered misconception, uncertainty, and confusion within myself. Even so, I was unprepared for a realization which occurred late in the study. I discovered in the data I found and in the absence of data which I expected that my approach to the basic assumptions upon which the study is based might be flawed.

The introduction to the thesis presumed that education is about helping people to learn, and that teaching, therefore, is about helping. At the end of the project, data from the literature

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113 Thomas, 1993, p. 6
and the interviews drew on me to question that assumption. It appears that much of education may be about controlling the development of culture and population into a form which will sustain the status quo of the dominant social grouping, and of those educational leaders who hold power\textsuperscript{114}. Much of teaching seems to be less about helping learners to learn, to develop a group culture, and to acquire relational skills and more about controlling their thinking.

Much of teaching seems to be treated as a matter of information transfer, and learning as an accumulation of facts. Failures in learning are often regarded as deficiencies in an individual’s rational capacity, not as failures in the education system. Anomalous information about learning and teaching tends to be overlooked, and concerns about the sustainability of an organization usually dominate over concerns about the quality of learning which occurs.

When I began to wonder why learning was often elusive for so many, I was unaware of prevailing assumptions about relationships between content and teaching which imply that the more clear or rational the information, the more easily it could be absorbed by any truly willing learner. This broad assumption may have served mainstream politics of education because it also implied that organizations and educators were not responsible for learners. Learners were expected to learn how to learn because they fit in to their social roles and were capable of picking up the learning skills befitting the role of student. Educators were expected to be content experts who channel knowledge in the most productive way; teaching was about management, instruction, and leadership, not about helping and relationship. Educators acquired the perception of being a profession without requiring the demonstrations of mastery expected of those in other professions.

Although I can reconstruct my approach to focus on ideals of education, teaching, and

\textsuperscript{114} See Bruner (1996) on the anthropology of schooling (p. 33ff).
learning - rather than on existing conditions - these remain problematic issues for me. The following adjunct commentary attempts to convey how these changes in my thinking about learning affected my perceptions about education. If strong challenges develop to the concept that safety plays a crucial role in learning, I would expect them to derive from the political context of education, not from well-done research. The discussions which follow link the politics of learning to issues of philosophical orientation and the moral development of educational leadership.

Philosophy Considerations and Moral Leadership

Philosophy, in the broad sense of understanding belief and attitudes which comprise conceptual meaning, offers a special venue for asking questions about safety and learning because philosophical frameworks help define approaches to educational policy. The values which contribute to a philosophical ideology underscore organizational purpose, policy, and planning. Interactions among stakeholders in educational organizations become more productive if underlying philosophical concepts are understood.

Although the extent to which findings can be framed in philosophical discourse is limited, future research may recognize several points of reference from which to explore the role of safety in learning; discussions about goodwill, explicit process, dialogue, relational skills, and social development may be enhanced with a philosophical perspective. Safety issues may be inherently moral and philosophical as well as pragmatic. What's more, I suggest that when an educator becomes aware that primitive assumptions about safety and learning exist, fundamental moral questions about the goals of teaching and stakeholder intentions about learning must be responded to for practice to continue being considered ethical.

Study participants suggested that relational safety presumed moral maturity, and that
educator skills need to be based in moral attributes in order that the safe climate necessary for successful learning can be created. Communication and relationship skills are infused with a quality of really caring that others are doing at least as well as oneself is and, ideally, better. “Learning to communicate and live together is a moral act, the essential feature of a just society” (Plumb, in Welton, 1995, p. 210). I agree with Cunningham (1992) and Carlson (1988) that moral development and leadership does not proceed from codes of ethics but from moral education. We need teachers who are committed to teaching. Taking a critical perspective of education “deepens and sharpens ethical commitment by forcing us to develop and act upon value commitments in the context of political agendas” such as education (Thomas, 1993, p. 2).

**Limitations of this Thesis Project**

Research can be understood by its limitations as well as by its contributions. Limitations of this project were found in two areas - those which have developed within the structure of the thesis, and those revealed through the concluding discussion. Project limitations inherent in the research design were covered in Chapter One.

Certain limitations arise within the underlying assumptions on which the project was designed. Safety is a precondition for learning where certain attitudes about learning exist. Concepts about learning need to include the ability of a program participant to acquire useful knowledge, skills, and attributes. Learners need to be able to experience social relationships within which their personal sense of agency is fostered. In order to facilitate learning in others, educators need to be safe within the policies, infrastructure, procedures, and planning practices of the organization. If educational organizations need to be safe, society must value learning for its own sake - and such a societal value might threaten the status quo of social power structures. If relational skills are the keys to safety in learning, programs which develop communicative virtues
(Burbules, 1993) and moral development (Likona, 1976) must be readily available. While all of these issues may be inferred from the data, none was explored on its own.

What is Served by this Project?

The sense I have about what has been served by this project is one of beginnings, from seemingly minor changes in the way individuals may be thinking about education to the hope for the beginnings of a paradigm shift in the social enactment of education: a key assumption about education has been explored and found to be both contentious and crucial. When I started to wonder five years ago about the role of safety in learning, some people would look puzzled, disconcerted, confused, or bored. Many educators have heard about safety since then, and increasing numbers are responding with interest. Thoughtful and relevant questions are being asked; sometimes dialogue continues. Interview participants felt strengthened by their contribution. I believe, along with many of the researchers cited in the thesis, that one small change in one’s way of thinking may ripple out to the thinking of others.

A colleague in another university department works full time for a high-profile financial institution. I started talking with him about safety five years ago. Two years ago that organization established a foundation for street youth - with the banner: “a safe place to go is a good place to start”. I called my friend. He laughed. Yes, he had conveyed my ideas into the workplace, but not directly into this foundation. Wouldn’t it be wonderful, he said, if those ideas had somehow made the rounds into the fund-raising slogan. It doesn’t matter the route, I replied, it’s the fact that counts. But: as a slogan and as a cause it did not stimulate a great public outpouring of financial contribution. The financial institution stayed true to its commitment anyway, and funded a ‘safe house’ for street youth - which is currently under construction in Vancouver’s downtown eastside community.
The process of developing new paradigms begins with a shift of perception from an automatic set of assumptions about how things are to an attention on what is anomalous between expected conditions and what actually happens. A heightened sensitivity to anomaly or inconsistency begin to notice confusion, to anticipate points of vulnerability and points of conflict and to look for disconfirming evidence. I would hope that some day this project becomes part of the groundwork which shifts our current paradigms of education to focus more on the processes of learning than on the content.

My Experience

At the end of the project, I find myself looking back as I tried to think about how the doing of this project moves me towards the future. What I started looking for were techniques to facilitate learning. I have ended up with more questions than I started out with, questions which remain to be explored in the future. Nothing about education seems as certain as it did when I began - except perhaps the importance of relationship in learning and a strengthened realization that education as it is currently practiced seems to be less about learning and more about politics, culture, and morality.

Doing the project

Originally I thought the project would focus on ethics, evaluation, accountability, and instructional design as the means organizations implicitly use to make learning ‘safe’. I thought the thesis would work to explicate rationales behind these actions and to uncover practical details. I expected to devote extensive thesis sections to ‘learning’. It may not be obvious that I explored these issues to clarify ideas about safety in my own mind. As interview participants were saying other things in other ways, however, the thesis took different directions from those at first anticipated. With each change in direction, I needed to reorient myself by checking out intuitive
responses, emotional nuances, and how a new direction fit with the interdisciplinary literature. Little of this floundering around is covered in the thesis.

A litany of questions became my research companion: what is happening, what is this a case of, what am I overlooking, what is hidden or silent, what does it mean, to whom, to whom else, what could it mean to anyone, how does it fit, what counts as an example of this, are there other examples like this, do they mean the same things...?

**Dialogues with strangers.**

As academia 'saboteurs' of my work started attacking my personhood115 - I began asking everyone I met what they thought: people on the bus, in movie line-ups, at sports events, in the middle of parties; people of all ages (young children, the very old); people of every culture, economic circumstance, educational background. I started out worrying about how to say it right so the other person would be comfortable. But I realized two things: first, if I didn’t say very much and was just attentive, encouraging, and listening, other people quickly put the idea into their own experience and language, and started talking. My task was to hear the experiences and be able to talk in that language. These almost daily conversations contributed to my work on the thesis project immeasurably. I gained confidence, clarity, insight, and persistence for myself and a strong conviction that the issues associated with the role of safety in learning are fundamentally important to the practice of education and that this importance is under-represented. Although each conversation was quite different from another, I want to include a sample to illustrate the experiences I was having.

Sometimes I floundered with finding appropriate language. When I gave up the lead, people spoke in their own terms and I learned. A medical educator (a non-interviewed family

115 as ‘not being safe enough to talk about safety, and besides safety is not important’
member) seemed completely confused by the ‘jargon’ of my thesis topic. I turned the conversation back by asking what, if any, relevance the idea of safety and learning might have. The answer: “every bit of what I teach must be safe. Patients die if my students fail to learn something. It may be my student’s error, but it is my responsibility.” So how do you teach? “Well, first I have to create a close and trustworthy relationship with each of them and they with each other. I am always encouraging, monitoring, listening. Because I have to be demanding - no error is tolerable - I have to teach them how to make mistakes early on in group formation...how to recognize mistakes while the mistakes are small...how to monitor for mistakes with an open, effortful mind. I have to know for sure that they care, are committed, and bring goodwill to their learning; they have to know that for sure about me, also. Ideally, by the end of the course, they have taken full control and responsibility for their learning. How does this fit in to your thesis?”

Often a conversation which started out in tension or bafflement has yielded poignant details. For example, although I don’t like riding public transit - I have seen too much blood, vomit, mucous, and urine on buses - conversations about safety have been moving. One very punky-looking late teen male in some kind of altered state of reality imposed a conversation on me, so I responded by talking about the role of safety in learning. “What a bunch of fucking bullshit that is!” he retorted loudly. “If you’re talkin’ school, man, there’s no safety there...only crap. Safety? Safety is being blasted out of my mind on the street with my friends. Well, shit...what do I know about school....I’m stupid!” As he then got up to get off, all I had time to say was “maybe it wasn’t you who was stupid”. He stopped, looked startled. You should have seen the look of soft gratitude and pain in his eyes when he looked back at me. I wasn’t the only person on the bus who was choked.

I moved awkwardly between academia and these experiences about learning and teaching. Safety seems to touch deep emotions and provoke intense discussion. I agree with Thomas (1993) that in moments of confusion we must “turn away from the belief that we have spoken truly and turn instead to the question, how have we spoken?” (P. 67). I was often overwhelmed with the peculiar demands of academic rigor, yet I wanted to achieve academic excellence with my work.
I wanted the issues to be heard by those whom I feel have the most power and influence over education and seem to be listening the least: education academics and administrators.

My point of view.

When I have tried to write open, clear, sensitive summaries about learning, teaching, safety, and culture, the result was often fragmented and rambling uncertainty. Finally, in exasperation, I challenged myself to express in a few words what have I learned:

- Education prepares individuals to participate in society.
- Society is defined by the kind of learning people do.
- Safe relationships potentiate high achievement.
- Commitment and goodwill are necessary preconditions for safe relationships.
- In safe relationships, conflicts can be engaged.
- The essence of education is resolving conflicts, dilemmas, and problems.
- Learning to learn is the primary human task.
- The safer the culture, where learning is valued, the better the learning.

I believe that safety is essential for the kind of learning, and learning how to learn, that educational organizations claim to promote. I believe that there are facile ways to implement and evaluate safety, based on explicit practices, relational skills, and accountability.

Throughout the project, I experimented with the one hour workshops I was doing at the time. I found that safety could not be usefully defined to satisfy every learner’s safety needs, and that a lot of confusing time might be spent trying. When I shifted my emphasis from criteria to process and, right at the beginning of a workshop offered some of my leadership power to learners, the group became more cohesive and interactive at a level of risk and challenge to participating individuals. A framework of norms could be quickly negotiated. Learning

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116 I was facilitating several stand-alone skills development workshops in formal education organizations a month. Time and content were important.
outcomes\textsuperscript{117} improved. I made the change by simply explicating safety as a collective and negotiable value; I would say something like:

"We are here in order to learn well together. Learning often entails risk and challenge. In order to learn well, we need to feel safe as a group among ourselves; then we can each take risks with our ideas. We don't have time in such a brief class to create safety guidelines specific to our group, but each of us has a sense of what safety feels like. We can bring that sense to this class. We need to be willing to be safe with each other. We can stop at any time if anyone is not feeling safe enough to learn in the group - we can work it out together. For now, are there any questions?"

There were rarely "what if" questions from anticipatory anxiety. When there were, I invited learners to stay alert to their feelings as we did the workshops and to raise concerns if they experienced discomfort. I did a lot of acknowledging and validating during the workshops. Sometimes safety issues were raised; I never found these to be either frivolous or time-wasting, and clarifying safety with the group was always doable. I am not wanting to imply that would always be the case - for me or for another educator - only that over dozens of workshops this is what happened.

I do have a concern, not raised by participants nor found in the main body of literature\textsuperscript{118}. Safety must be authentically introduced...all of the elements of the tentative model must be present\textsuperscript{119}. If safety is introduced by an educator without all of the elements, some learners may be made more vulnerable that they otherwise might be. Inappropriate conduct within a more vulnerable group could damage the sense of agency of learners. Educator skills and an open, committed, goodwill, relational skills, explicit process, negotiated norms, shared power and responsibility.

\textsuperscript{117} measured according to information recall, ability to imagine application, participant satisfaction, and increased interest in the subject

\textsuperscript{118} but identified in Hare's (1993) work on psychopaths and Olweus' work on bullying.

\textsuperscript{119} commitment, goodwill, relational skills, explicit process, negotiated norms, shared power and responsibility.
inclusive, democratic\textsuperscript{120}, communicative process are key. Criteria for recognizing and establishing safety may be revealed through the process of enacting safety while implementing formative evaluation.

\textbf{This is not the end, this is only where I stop\textsuperscript{121}.}

As this project is an early study about safety, it is bound to be incomplete. I know from the data that the issues are even more important than they seemed at the beginning. Learning is the edge of becoming for each of us, and the experience should be facilitated by skilled educators so that the adventure of learning is safe enough for us to feel successful, to want to take the journey another time.

The thesis project was a special opportunity to explore key issues about learning. If at some places in the thesis I sound discouraged about some of the findings, there were many times during data gathering when I was deeply moved by the work and insights of participants and interdisciplinary scholars. As the interpreter, I often felt humbled by my limitations.

I find it difficult to let go because often conclusions silence discussion\textsuperscript{122}. I hope that the ending of this project is just part of ongoing discussion; if other educators take up the issues for serious investigation, I will feel that the study has served a useful purpose.

\textbf{Postscript}

While I was working on the final revisions of my thesis, I read the following passage in a Globe and Mail newspaper article on workplace training:

\begin{quote}
Researcher Guy Claxton suggested that the desire to be consistent, \end{quote}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{120} shared power and responsibility
\item \textsuperscript{121} Ndunda, 1995
\item \textsuperscript{122} Thomas, 1993, p. 71
\end{itemize}
competent, comfortable, and confident are key barriers to learning. Control should be added to his list. Improvisation challenges these tendencies. Responding creatively and intuitively in the moment by building on others' ideas requires that individuals think and act in ways with which they are uncomfortable. For most people, this is a tremendous psychological challenge (Crossan, 1997, p. 1).

The article captures both the essence and the dilemma of the thesis research. In essence, learners and educators want the prime experience - the moment when intensive learning risk and challenge peak with learner ability - the place where stress and performance are optimally matched. The dilemma is how to match a complexity of factors so as to create that optimal learning climate.

The article embeds all of the key points from the thesis project but two: it affirms that learners must have strong relational skills, goodwill (be supportive), and commitment. It lists the importance of people having their own 'safety nets' [however, there is no suggestion that safety in learning is part of the program]. What seems to be left out are the educator responsibilities such as the negotiation of group norms of behaviour, and a monitored shift in power123 to learners.

Like the T-group and Gestalt therapy movements in the 1960s, innovative corporate training of the 1990s is working learners intensively in a climate of strong personal challenge and high psychic risk. Consistent with findings in the thesis, this place of learning can be extremely effective. It can also be extremely dangerous and damaging to learners if the level of activity exceeds what they are prepared to do.

I think educators have a moral responsibility to know what their learners are prepared to do. And, if that is not as much as the educator had planned, then the educator needs to spend more time in preparing the learner for the experience. To coerce or compel an unprepared learner into experiences which strip away the sense of personal control and power (in the name of

123 The article does include a mention of exercises which develop intra-group power sharing among learner participants, but the role of the team leader seems to remain static.
learning) is an misuse of educator power and a threat to the learner. It is not safe, it is not helping, it is not teaching, and it hurts. Clearly the trainers mentioned in the article intend to do good work, and they rightly identify the group dynamic which stimulates optimal learning. But they appear to have left out the role of safety from their practice, leaving an open question about the overall or long term benefits of their work.
REFERENCES


