

TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING AND IDENTITY IN A
RE-ENTRY JOB SKILLS PROGRAM

by

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ABSTRACT

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This study investigated the nature of transformative learning experiences as qualitative shifts in identity by employing a basic interpretative qualitative methodology using data from semi-structured interviews with eight participants in a re-entry job skills program, that is, with participants in a program that was designed to aid them with their re-entry into society. This study explored the nature of these learning experiences through the transformative learning theoretical framework articulated by Illeris (2014). The findings supported Illeris' conceptualization of transformation and contributed to the explication of key concepts in his theory including regressive transformative learning, and identity as situated in three dimensions of learning. Further, this study showed that, for the study participants, transformative learning as a qualitative shift in identity entailed interconnected changes in participants' ways of being in, acting in, relating to, and knowing the world. The data also helped explain learning experiences that were both transformative and negative experiences, that is, a kind of experience not countenanced by the predominant Mezirowian view of transformative learning. This study thus found that transformative learning conceptualized as a qualitative shift in identity accounts for such transformative yet purportedly negative experiences.

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This work is dedicated to my parents, my family, and especially to my wife, Lisa.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Transformative Learning Theory and Unexpected Outcomes

Research in adult education highlights the fact that not all learning is of the same kind (Illeris, 2014). Indeed, there is a variety of distinctions that scholars draw between *kinds* of learning, but one distinction has been central to adult education, that is, the distinction between what is known as transformative learning and other types of learning. In general, transformative learning is set apart from other learning because, through it, there is a fundamental change of some kind that takes place in the learner, be it a profound change in, for example, how one views the world, or views oneself, or views one's relationship to the world. The work of Jack Mezirow has been influential in establishing transformative learning as an important theoretical and empirical area of study (Gunnlaugson, 2008; Merriam et al., 2007; Taylor, 1998). The contribution by Mezirow to transformative learning theory is far reaching, and any discussion of transformative learning must include a review of Mezirow's foundational work. Therefore, for this dissertation, Mezirow's work is its starting point.

One important feature of Mezirow's theory of transformative learning is that, after a profound change occurs in the learner through a transformative learning experience, there is for the learner a new way of acting in the world, a more positive, inclusive comportment toward the world, a new and enlightened praxis (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b, 1991, 1997, 2000). There is, however, recent scholarship that problematizes this feature of transformative learning. This recent research indicates that transformative learning experiences involve complex learning processes and may sometimes result in unexpected and widely varying outcomes, different than those anticipated by a Mezirowian understanding of transformative learning. Such complex transformative learning processes and unexpected results are highlighted in Morrice (2012),

Isopahkala-Bouret (2008), and McDonald et al. (1999). Whereas Mezirow's theory of transformative learning asserts that transformative learning experiences lead to salutary, humane, and enlightened praxes in the world, these studies demonstrate that transformative learning experiences involve complex emotional and environmental dynamics, and they can lead to ways of being and acting that are inconsistent or even anathematic to such optimistically humanistic outcomes. For example, Morrice shows that immigrant transformative experiences, informed by difficult emotional and social conditions, may lead to a diminished sense of self-worth; Isopahkala-Bouret demonstrates that some transformations can subordinate the learner to an hegemonic corporate ideology which would be quite inconsistent with the rationalistic humanism suggested in Mezirow's theory (e.g., Mezirow, 1997); and McDonald et al. show that environmental dynamics in transformative learning processes can mute the desire of the learner to engage in the expected and commensurate praxis of becoming vegan, despite the profound change that occurs in the learner. From a Mezirowian theoretical perspective, the learning processes involved in these outcomes are not fully explained and the outcomes are unexpected; they vary greatly from the positive, enlightening, and liberating outcomes predicted by the Mezirowian framework.

Illeris' Theoretical Framework and Research Question

A more holistic theory of transformative learning – one that attempts to account for the affective and environmental dimensions of learning as well as the cognitive – may be able to explain how these unexpected and wide-ranging outcomes of transformative learning may arise. As will be discussed, the unexpected outcomes that arise in the experiences described by Morrice (2012), Isopahkala-Bouret (2008), and McDonald et al. (1999), appear to be influenced by emotional and societal factors. For example, in McDonald et al., it is seen that the transformative

learning experience and the action that results from it are conditioned by social context and the negative affective experiences of the learner. The general learning model and the theory of transformative learning offered by Illeris (2007, 2014) may account for such unexpected outcomes in that they describe the processes of these dimensions of learning – the environmental and the affective – and so also can account for the effect of these dimensions on the outcomes of learning. Thus, Illeris' theory of transformative learning appears to explain a range of possible outcomes that may arise from transformative learning, and in some cases, learning that may have been simply dismissed as non-transformative when viewed from a Mezirowian perspective (Mezirow, 1978a).

Furthermore, Illeris's (2014) theory provides a typology to describe a range of transformative learning experiences that further explains the variety of expected or unexpected outcomes. First, the expected transformative learning outcome (that is, expected from a Mezirowian perspective) or the outcome intended by a transformative learning program arises in what Illeris calls a *progressive* transformative experience; according to Illeris, Mezirowian theory confines itself to this type of experience. Secondly, a transformative experience that may fail to result in an expected or intended outcome is what Illeris calls a *regressive* transformative experience; although there is indeed some degree of a transformative experience and there is some consequence of this transformation, the expected learning outcome does not come to fruition. Finally, a practical learning outcome, although unexpected from a Mezirowian perspective, but ultimately arising after a regressive experience, is what Illeris calls a *restorative* transformative experience. These types of transformative learning experiences begin to explain the possibility of unexpected outcomes in transformative learning.

Further, the theoretical approach of Illeris (2014) to understanding transformative learning clarifies the relationship between, on the one hand, the processes of learning that involve the three dimensions and, on the other hand, identity. For Illeris, identity is the locus of transformation. That is, transformative learning is that learning that results in some qualitative change in the learner's identity. Further, for Illeris, the identity is necessarily shaped by the processes of learning and the intersection of the dynamic processes involving the cognitive, the affective, and the environmental dimensions of learning (p. 69). So, for Illeris, transformative learning is defined by the processes and dimensions that reside within the learning experience and that shape identity. Therefore, the outcomes of such learning may be varied and are a function of the varied ways in which the learning processes occur and the varied ways the dimensions of learning interact. Thus, the theoretical framework provided by Illeris appears to be well-equipped to examine transformative learning experiences and their concomitant changes in identity and provide better explanation and description of the processes of learning and its outcomes, whether they be expected or unexpected.

There has been, however, little empirical study of transformative learning that employs Illeris' theoretical framework. Therefore, this dissertation argues that this dearth of empirical work, and the problematic nature of the predominant approach to transformative learning (i.e., Mezirow's), warrant further research into the transformative learning experiences that employs the theoretical framework offered by Illeris (2007, 2014). This present study thus engaged in empirical research that explored Illeris' identity-based theory of transformative learning and his general model of learning upon which his transformative theory relies. More specifically, this dissertation pursued the following research question and its sub-questions:

Question: What is the nature of the dimensions, processes, and the outcomes of transformative learning as a qualitative shift in identity for participants in a job skills employment program?

- a. Sub-question: What types of learning outcomes (progressive, regressive, restorative) are experienced by the learners?
- b. Sub-question: How does the process of identity transformation unfold for learners in a job skills training program?
- c. Sub-question: How do the learners experience the cognitive, the affective, and the environmental dimensions of transformative learning in a job skills training program?

This research question and its sub-questions invite an examination of learning experiences that are transformative using the conceptual framework provided by Illeris' (2007, 2014) general model of learning and his theory of transformative learning. Such an approach provided a more holistic account of transformative processes than a Mezirowian approach and accounted for unexpected outcomes that result from transformation. As the research question indicates, the research site was a job skills training program. The rationale for the selection of this site is provided in the following section and further developed in Chapter 3.

Rationale for Research Site and Qualitative Methodology

The phenomena that were investigated are those learning experiences that occurred in an environment in which transformative learning is likely to occur and in which the learning processes involving the dynamic interactions of the learning dimensions – the cognitive, the affective, and the social – were pronounced. The environment was a job skills training program designed for individuals who had experienced significant barriers to employment such as

homelessness, prior incarceration, other justice involvement, lack of education, and lack of work history. This program, in the upper Midwest United States, indicated that it not only provided training for basic job skills to its participants but also informally indicated that it provided life and character changing experiences for those individuals who faced significant intra-personal and social pressures as they tried to enter the workforce. A basic interpretative qualitative research method was used to explore the experiences of the learners in this 12-week intensive vocational and life-skills program. Through semi-structured interviews, I gained an understanding of the processes which the learners experienced, the roles and the relationships between the cognitive, the affective, and the environmental dimensions of learning, and the ways in which identity was shaped and changed through the learning program. Further, through semi-structured interviews, I gained an understanding of the practical activity that resulted from the participants' learning experiences.

Method and Data Analysis

The foundational problem that this current study addressed is very specific, that of the limitations in the predominant Mezirowian approach to understanding transformative learning which assumes a positive and progressive process and outcome, an approach that cannot adequately account for dynamic processes of learning and the unexpected outcomes of the learning. Therefore, the literature review focused on that literature which brings this problem explicitly to the fore. After situating the issue with a general account of transformative learning and of Mezirow's treatment of action that is purported to be the outcome of transformative experiences, the literature review focused on research already referenced, that of Morrice (2012), Isopahkala-Bouret (2008), and McDonald et al. (1999). This small but relevant body of work explicitly highlighted the limitations in Mezirow's approach and highlighted the need for a more

holistic theoretical approach that can account for, and highlight the significance of, the processes of learning, the dynamic interplay of the dimensions of learning, and the unexpected outcomes of transformation. The literature review then turned to an explication of the conceptual framework offered by Illeris (2007, 2014). In the current study, it is argued that this framework provides a more holistic approach to transformative learning, accounted for unexpected events in learning and the appearance of unexpected outcomes, and further, provided an account of how such seemingly anomalous outcomes have an important role in both transformative learning and in the educational development of the learner.

As indicated, a basic interpretative qualitative methodology elicited the data that supports such goals and addresses the research question. The argument for such a methodological approach is developed further in Chapter 3. Whereas the semi-structured interviews were the primary basis for collecting data, field observation complemented the interviews and helped inform the interview protocol by providing environmental context.

The analysis of the data required two cycles of coding. The first cycle coding provided basic analysis of the data in two ways, following Saldaña (2016). First, there were two inductive approaches to the coding of the data, *content coding* and *process coding*. The content coding provided a means of highlighting those concepts that were most pronounced in the data. Also, because the processes of learning have a central role in Illeris' theory as do the outcomes, and because the processes of learning may aid in understanding the significance of these unexpected outcomes of transformation, the coding approach referred to as process coding was used as well. These coding approaches are further described in Chapter 3. Further, a second and deductive coding cycle was employed to provide further analysis of the data vis-à-vis the conceptual

framework provided by Illeris. This second cycle of coding helped identify where the data spoke more directly to Illeris' model and aided in elaborating further Illeris' theory.

Significance

As argued, the predominant approach to research in transformative learning does not adequately account for the unexpected and broad range of practical outcomes of transformation. However, Illeris' (2007, 2014) model of general learning and his identity-based theory of transformative learning constitute a holistic approach to transformative learning that addresses this limitation. Further, the dearth of empirical work that adopts Illeris' theoretical framework of general learning and transformative learning warranted additional study and will help encourage further empirical work guided by Illeris' framework. Moreover, this present study articulates the meaningful role that complex learning processes, interactions between learning dimensions, and unexpected outcomes to transformation may have, and likewise highlights their significance for learning in general. Therefore, the significance of this study is that it informs scholarship of transformative learning toward sharper critique of the commonly received view of transformation, it addresses some limitations in Mezirowian theory specifically, and it highlights facets of purported transformative learning experiences whose value may have been overlooked in the past.

Limitations of this Study

This current study explored a more inclusive approach for the explanation and description of the processes and dimensions involved in transformative learning experiences, as well as the outcomes – expected or unexpected – that arise from this learning. There are limitations to this study, however, due in part to the selected research site and the method of data collection. The selected research site was the facility for a baking-based employment program designed for

individuals preparing to overcome societal obstacles such as recent incarceration, homelessness, and joblessness, and to re-enter society and the workforce fully. Therefore, the explanations and descriptions of transformative experiences for individuals with this general type of background may not be readily applicable to individuals of significantly different backgrounds. Further, the method of data collection was semi-structured interviews of participants requiring retrospective recall of their learning experiences. The retrospective nature of the participant accounts and descriptions provided meaningful data but did not as readily provide data on evolving experiences as might, instead, a method of data collection that would have taken place during participant enrollment in the program. A further limitation of this study was that the theoretical framing of the work begins with critique of Mezirow's work. Therefore, those characteristics of Illeris' theoretical work that are in contradistinction to Mezirow's will come to the fore of the discussion. Critique and response to other theoretical approaches to transformative learning would likely highlight a different set of characteristics and implications of Illeris' work; such dialogue between Illeris' approach and other theoretical approaches to transformation would complement well the work intended by this dissertation.

Definition of Terms

Affective Dimension. For this study, this term refers to that component of the learning experience that brings in a broad range of psychological elements associated with emotions, volitions, motivations, etc. Illeris (2014) refers to this dimension as *incentive* and as *emotions*. The term *affective* is used here, however, to capture Illeris' intended range of referents.

Cognitive Dimension: This term refers to that component of the learning experience that is comprised of cognitive content. Illeris (2014) also uses the terms *content*, *skills*, *knowledge*, *understanding* to describe the cognitive dimension.

Content Dimension: This is another term commonly used for the cognitive dimension of learning (Illeris, 2007, 2014).

Dimensions of Learning: According to Illeris (2007, 2014), all learning experiences have three primary factors, the cognitive, the affective, and the social. Illeris (2007) uses a collection of terms to express the meaning of each of these dimensions. The cognitive pertains to the following: content, knowledge, understanding, skills; the affective pertains to incentive, motivation, emotion, volition; the social pertains to interaction, action, communication, cooperation (p. 28). Note that the term *interaction* is used by Illeris as a technical term in two ways, first as described here referring to the environmental dimension, and second as the relationship between this dimension and the two other dimensions, the cognitive and the affective. For the purposes of this dissertation, then, the technical use of the term interaction is reserved for the latter meaning unless otherwise noted.

Environmental Dimension: For this dissertation, this term refers to that component of the learning experience that reflects social, environmental, political influences on learning. Illeris (2007, 2014) also employs the terms *interaction*, *action*, *communication*, and *cooperation* to capture the range of connotations related to this dimension. It should be noted that the term interaction is used in two possibly confusing ways by Illeris. At times, it refers to the environmental dimension of learning, and at other times to the relationship between the environmental dimension and the two other dimensions, the cognitive and the affective. Again, for the purposes of this dissertation, the technical use of the term interaction is reserved for the latter meaning unless otherwise noted.

Functionality: For Illeris (2003, 2004, 2007), This term refers to the abilities of the individual in relation to the understanding developed through the content, or cognitive,

dimension. Illeris (2007) describes it as “our capacity to function appropriately in the various contexts in which we are involved” (p. 26).

Identity: For Illeris (2014), transformative learning is defined by substantial change in one’s identity (p. 40). Identity, as the locus of transformation for the learner, is distinguished from the self, the personality, and one’s biography (p. 27). The identity is comprised of three layers, depicted as layers of concentric circles, the innermost and least malleable part of the identity called the *core layer*. The next layer is called the *personality layer* and, for Illeris, this layer is most involved with transformative learning experiences. Lastly, the *preference layer*, is the outermost and most changeable of the identity layers. For Illeris, identity is developed through learning, and identity change is a function of the processes of learning.

Incentive Dimension: This is the primary term that is used by Illeris (2007, 2014) to refer to the affective dimension (or, the emotional dimension) of learning.

Locus of Transformation: This term is used in this study to indicate that there is some *thing* that undergoes change in transformative learning experiences. For Illeris (2014), that locus is the identity. For Mezirow, for example, such a locus is not as clearly delineated, but the term *perspective transformation* suggests that the locus of change is primarily cognitive, and that which conditions one’s understanding of the world.

Part-Identity: For Illeris (2014), parts of one’s identity can be segregated from one’s *central* identity, and each one of these segregated parts has its own core, personality, and preference layer. For example, through one’s profession, one has a *work* part-identity; through one’s religious life, one has a *religion* part-identity. Other part-identities include those related to family, national heritage, political affiliation. For Illeris, one’s part-identity can undergo transformative change without necessarily affecting another part-identity.

Perspective Transformation: This term is most notably used by Mezirow (1978b) and refers to the kind of transformative learning described by his early empirical work (Mezirow, 1978a). In perspective transformation, the way the learner understands and makes meaning of the world through beliefs, opinions, prejudices, etc., is radically altered primarily through critical self-reflection, and through this experience the learner has a more rationally sound, inclusive, and open perspective of the world.

Processes of Learning: For Illeris (2014), the dynamic relationships between the dimensions of learning comprise the two main processes of learning. First, there is the process between the cognitive and the affective referred to as *acquisition*. Second, there is the process between the social and individual's acquisition process, referred to as *interaction* (pp. 33–35).

Progressive Transformation: For Illeris (2014), this type of transformative learning experience occasions qualitative identity change that leads to an expected or intended learning outcome. According to Illeris, most discussions of transformative learning refer to something like a progressive transformative experience and do not countenance alternate transformative experiences, namely the *regressive* and the *restorative* experiences conceptualized by Illeris (2014, see the definition for *Types of Transformation*).

Regressive Transformation: For Illeris (2014), this is a transformative learning experience in which there is qualitative identity change, but the experience does not lead to an expected or any learning outcome. Such an experience might sometimes be dismissed by others as non-transformative, but Illeris recognizes the important role that this kind of instance of identity change has in learning, and its relation to future transformative learning experiences (see the definition for *Types of Transformation*).

Restorative Transformation: For Illeris (2014), this is a transformative learning experience in which a learner, having experienced a regressive transformative experience, is able to experience further substantial identity change which leads to some desirable learning outcome (see the definition for *Types of Transformation*). This experience involves a regressive and then something like a progressive transformative experience. The concept of *restorative transformation* particularly highlights the value of learning experiences which may, at first, have unexpected or even undesirable outcomes, and it demonstrates how the processes and outcomes of transformation are open to a range of variations.

Sensitivity: This term for Illeris (2004, 2007) refers to the manifestation of the development of one's desires, emotions, "mobilisation of the mental energy required by learning" (Illeris, 2007, p. 26). Illeris (2003) uses the term *sensibility* for this function. Thus, to the extent that learning involves the emotional, affective, desiderative, there is a corresponding effect on the individual's ability to manifest emotions, affections, desires, that is, on one's sensitivity.

Sociality: This term for Illeris (2003, 2004, 2007) refers to the manifestation of the effect of the environmental dimension on the learner. Illeris (2004) describes sociality as being built up by the environmental dimension and its "external interaction, such as participation, communication, and cooperation . . . [as well as] the personal integration in communities and society" (p. 83).

Transformative Learning: This general term's definition is of course contested, but in general refers to some sort of substantial change in the learner that occurs through the learning process, as opposed to some sort of addition to one's existing understanding of the world. For

Illeris (2014), transformative learning is defined in this way: “The concept of transformative learning comprises all learning that implies change in the identity of the learner” (p. 40).

Types of Transformation: For Illeris (2014), there are three essential types of transformative learning experiences: progressive, regressive, and restorative (pp. 92–99). Progressive transformations are identity changes that lead to learning outcomes that are expected or intended. Regressive transformations are learning experiences in which there is substantial qualitative identity change, however, it does not result in the expected or any desired learning outcome. A restorative transformation is something of a combination of a regressive transformation and then a subsequent progressive transformation in that a learning experience, which at first does not appear to issue in some meaningful learning outcome (i.e., the regressive transformation), is followed by further learning and transformation that does produce a desirable, albeit originally unexpected, learning outcome.

Unexpected Outcome. For this dissertation, this term refers to the practical outcome of a transformative learning experience that is unexpected from a Mezirowian perspective. For example, in Isopahkala-Bouret (2008), the outcome of transformative learning is subordination of one’s activity to hegemonic corporate ideology, a result that is anathematic to the Mezirowian theoretical framework for transformative learning. It also refers to the outcome of a transformative learning program that does not result in the outcome intended by the program. Illeris (2014) provides an example of such an unexpected outcome in the discussion of regressive transformation wherein the learner in a job skills training program, although experiencing qualitative identity change in the training program, is not led to pursue this new career or any career.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

For adult education theorists and practitioners, the phenomenon of transformative learning has been an important focus since the study by Mezirow (1978a) (Gunnlaugson, 2008; Merriam et al., 2007; Taylor, 1998). During this time, Mezirow's theory of perspective transformation has been the dominant framework under which most research into transformative learning has taken place and to which most critiques of transformative learning theory have responded (Taylor, 1998, 2007; Taylor & Snyder, 2012). This focus on and exploration of Mezirow's theory—a body of scholarship often referred to as the *first wave* of transformative learning research (Gunnlaugson, 2006)—is motivated for good reason. Though there have been landmark contributions to adult education prior to Mezirow's theory, such as Knowles (1975), and these works have provided significant advances in how educators think and talk about adult education, Mezirow (1978a, 1978b, 1991) provided perhaps the most systematic and seminal theoretical contribution to adult education in recent decades (Cranton & Taylor, 2012; Hoggan, 2016). Therefore, any study of transformative learning experiences must acknowledge this contribution.

However, Mezirow's conceptualization has not been the only voice in the theoretical work related to the phenomenon of transformative learning experiences. Indeed, there have been many important and alternate theoretical contributions to the study of transformative learning. This body of work has been dubbed by Gunnlaugson (2006) the *second wave* of transformative learning theorizing. In fact, according to Hoggan (2016), the scholarship landscape pertaining to transformative learning has been an environment that has permitted a panoply of approaches to the study of learning phenomena that are variously construed to be transformative. Hoggan, citing Taylor (1998, 2007), identifies that in addition to Mezirow's *psychocritical* theory of

transformative learning, marked in general by the rationalistic critique of meaning perspectives and humanistic improvement of one's mode of being and activity in the world, there are at least seven other categories of theoretical approaches to understanding and explaining transformative learning phenomena with correspondingly different outcomes. Of the most prominent examples, there are the following: the psychodevelopmental approach (e.g., Kegan, 2000; Taylor & Elias, 2012) highlights the natural developmental tendency of the human learner to higher and discrete levels of consciousness marked by increasing epistemological complexity; the psychoanalytic approach (e.g., Boyd, 1991; Dirkx, 2012) which attributes transformative learning experiences to the Jungian phenomenon of individuation in which the learner's conscious ego becomes undivided and integrated with the unconscious dimensions of the self; and the social emancipatory approach (e.g., Freire, 1970; Brookfield, 2000) which recognizes that transformative learning is a social and political phenomenon whose purpose is to expose and overcome hegemonic ideology and effect change in the world. As Hoggan suggests, although Mezirow's has been the dominant perspective in transformative learning research, there are important alternate approaches to understanding and explaining those learning experiences which "result in significant and irreversible changes in the way a person experiences, conceptualizes, and interacts with the world" (p. 71).

Despite the varied approaches to transformative learning, the influence of Mezirow's has remained constant, so much so that some commentators on Mezirow, adult education, and transformative learning caution that such attention may stifle scholarship and research in adult education. For example, Cranton & Taylor (2012) remark that "most research today continues to be based on Mezirow's work rather than the newer perspectives. This is unfortunate, not only for the development of these perspectives but also for the general study of transformative learning

theory” (p. 16). Similarly, Taylor (2005), cited in Gunnlaugson (2008), comments on the problematic fact that much recent scholarship unquestioningly adopts the Mezirowian framework: “This ubiquitous focus on Mezirow’s theory, often leads to uncontested assumptions of a unitary conception of transformative learning, overshadowing a growing presence of other theoretical conceptions” (p. 459).

It is acknowledged that there has been much important theoretical work aside from that of Mezirow’s, and in fact this study will explore one alternate approach to transformative learning theory, that of Knud Illeris. However, the work of Mezirow nonetheless serves as the starting point of this study and not simply because Mezirow’s work had been groundbreaking four decades ago. Despite the important growth of alternate conceptions and theoretical approaches to the phenomena of transformative learning experiences, this recent theoretical work has mainly focused on competing conceptualizations of the purported outcomes of transformative experiences, as Hoggan’s (2016) work indicates. For example, the social emancipatory approach appears to offer political and social consciousness raising as the intended outcome of transformation (Freire, 1970). The psychoanalytic approach appears to seek the goal of individuation (Dirkx, 2012). The psychodevelopmental approach appears to seek the goal of achieving higher levels of epistemological consciousness (Taylor & Elias, 2012). Hoggan provides an important summary of these outcomes and provides a compelling case that Mezirow’s conceptualization of transformation is merely part of the story. However, what these conceptualizations—both Mezirow’s and the many alternatives—do not highlight as much as the outcome of transformation is the process of transformative learning. Indeed, there are clearly processes to each of the outcomes of these varied transformative experiences, whether it involves critical self-reflection (Mezirow, 1978a), artistic expression (Lawrence, 2012), or psychoanalytic

or soul work (Dirkx, 2012), for example. The focus, however, is nonetheless on the outcome and the distinguishing mark between the varied approaches is the outcome. This is an important distinction since there are learning experiences in which the intended or the expected learning outcome does not come to fruition but nonetheless there appears to be some kind of transformative experience; some change or transformation may occur, but it does not match what one or another theoretical approach would anticipate, and a theoretical approach that focuses on outcomes more so than processes may have a difficult time explaining this phenomenon.

Taylor & Cranton (2013) discuss this phenomenon of unexpected outcomes and argue that most literature on transformative learning takes an overly sanguine position on transformation by assuming that transformative outcomes will necessarily be positive, uplifting, or edifying experiences for the learner, as is anticipated by Mezirow's theory. They argue further that more critical scrutiny of transformative learning theory is needed to question the assumption that transformation always leads to some positive outcome. They cite Naughton & Schied (2012), and write that they (i.e., Naughton and Schied) "challenge the discourse on transformative learning theory—whether as a process or an outcome—that delimits transformation to a direction of positive growth" (p. 39). The overly optimistic view of transformative learning may be due, in part, to the lack of attention on transformative processes, and this is a question that is explored in this dissertation. A greater focus on processes may not only highlight the difficult and negative experiences that Taylor and Cranton discuss, but such a focus may also reveal the nature of transformative learning experiences in general and the various kinds of outcomes that may arise from transformative learning experiences. Therefore, this study begins with Mezirow as the paradigmatic theoretical approach to transformative learning—an approach that focuses on outcomes that are supposed to be positive in some

meaningful way—and also presents critique of Mezirow’s work that signals the need for greater attention and understanding of the processes of transformation.

Therefore, following Cooper (1988), this literature review is a selective and focused one, rather than a systematic and integrative one, intended to highlight this central issue in transformative learning theory, that is, the issue of transformative learning processes and unexpected outcomes. Thus, this review focuses on three key articles that respond to Mezirow’s theoretical approach and that bring to light one specific and under-addressed issue in transformative learning theory, that is, the connection between transformative learning processes, their outcomes, and the dimensions of learning involved in transformation. The significance of the connection between these three elements of transformative learning are highlighted and problematized in the selected studies through their discussions of unanticipated or unexpected outcomes of transformative learning and the actions resulting from that learning.

Rationalism, Transformation, and Action in the World

One prominent feature of the dominant theoretical approach (Taylor, 2007) to transformative learning—that of Mezirow (1978a, 1978b, 1991, 2000)—is that there is an important connection between, on the one hand, the profound change in one’s understanding of the world, one’s place in it, and how one should be in the world, and on the other hand, how one acts in the world. That is, simply put, one’s transformative learning experience entails a change in action in the world (Mezirow, 1978a). Further, according to Mezirow (1978a), transformative learning not only involves critical self-reflection and the examination of one’s understanding of the world, but also “the transformation process involves planning a course of action, acquiring the knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans, and finally a reintegration into society on one’s own terms with a new, inner-directed stance” (p. 8). That is, the transformed learner now

comports and conducts themselves in a fashion consistent with the reconstructed and elevated learning that was experienced. Mezirow (1978a) further explicates this connection between transformation and action:

Perspective transformation has been characterized as a process, but it is a process in which you make choices that are to shape your own destiny. It is more accurately thought of as a praxis, a dialectic in which understanding and action interact to produce an altered state of being. One must go beyond the exploration of options to formulate a plan for action. (p. 15)

Once one undergoes a transformative learning experience and transforms one's meaning perspective, one can act in ways commensurate to this new understanding. As Mezirow indicates, there is a "dialectic" between understanding and action. For Mezirow (1978a), for example, the commensurate action for the women who re-entered education as adults, and who came to make meaning of their roles in society in profoundly different ways, is to commit to their own education and pursue the development of their careers. Further, in a later account of transformative learning, Mezirow (2000) preserves his view of the centrality and natural progress toward a more enlightened way of being-in-the-world in transformative learning theory. He writes:

Transformative learning refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true [*sic*] or justified to guide action. Transformative learning involves participation in contractive discourse to

use the experience of others to assess reasons justifying these assumptions, and making an action decision based on the resulting insight. (pp. 7–8)

Mezirow (1996) reiterates the role of action in transformative learning: “A transformative learning experience requires that the learner makes an informed and reflective decision to act” (pp. 163–164). Mezirow (2000) further explains that the theory “assumes the perfectibility of human beings when this [i.e., transformation] refers to improving our understanding and the quality of our actions through meaningful learning” (p. 8). That is, there is the characteristically humanistic view that the rationally-guided transformative learning experience will lead to more rationally-guided actions—a praxis—that will benefit that actor, those around her, and the world.

Now, to be sure, Mezirow (1978a) does countenance the possibility that the path toward transformative learning might not result in action, but he explains this as a cognitive failure of some sort and thus a failure of the learning experience. That is, if the expected action does not come to fruition, then the transformative learning did not really take place. He suggests that in the cases where the learner does not come to act or begin to live in ways commensurate to one’s transformed perspective, the learner either finds a way to eschew critical analysis of one’s own life and one’s own beliefs and thus fails to critically reflect on oneself, or the learner deceives herself and rejects the notion that a critical analysis of a hegemonic ideology, for example, might also apply to her own worldview. In the first case, which would arise at the beginning of the transformative learning journey, the learner realizes the difficulty of critical self-reflection, and rather than engage in this phase of the learning, she might avoid it altogether, thus never having embarked fully on the learning experience and thus never committing to a new way of life or a new set of actions (Mezirow, 1978a, p. 16). Mezirow writes of this first kind of instance in which transformative learning does not result in action:

One is at the beginning [of engaging in a transformative learning experience], when exposing one's life roles and the feelings surrounding them to critical analysis threatens a long-established sense of order. As one [college] re-entry student explained: "I had all the old-fashioned ideas, and I found some of the new ideas difficult to follow through on. I took the program to pick a career and go to work. But I didn't. Instead, I found that I didn't know myself, didn't know the times—women's lib—and I just couldn't adjust to it. You can't just turn off a lifetime of doing things one way. The most important thing I got out of the course was to look at myself." (p. 16)

Here Mezirow indicates that the learner may find the learning process to be uncomfortable or too challenging to continue, and the learner abandons the task. Thus, new action does not result from the process since the process was abandoned at an early stage; that is, the transformation never occurred.

In the latter type of situation countenanced by Mezirow (1978a) in which transformative learning does not result in commensurate action, there can be a learner who is far along in her learning and who is at "the point when a commitment to action should logically follow awareness and insight but [the action] is so threatening or demanding as to be immobilizing" (p. 16). Mezirow goes on to explicate what is meant here. What stands in the way of action in this case is self-deception. In Mezirow's example, a 38-year-old woman who enrolled in a college re-entry program engaged in "self-deception that can impede progress" in learning, and therefore she "failed to personalize what she had learned about sex stereotypes and the common problems of women" (p. 16). That is, she understood the folly of *others* embracing a worldview that perpetuates their own subjugation, but her own self-deception had led her to deny that she herself is subject to this same folly. This self-deception leads her to have "misinterpreted what she

learned [in order] to rationalize her inability to take action” (p. 16). What is salient here, according to Mezirow, is that an important part of the learning—the critical self-reflection—does not occur and therefore a new way of being in the world does not come to fruition; again, action does not arise because the transformative learning process never fully occurred.

Challenging Rationalistic Action

With this theorized close tie between transformation, knowledge, and action, Mezirow underscores the role of rationality and humanistic ideals in his theory of transformative learning. However, recent work in transformative learning suggests that a sanguinely positive view of transformative learning’s relation, and that of knowledge, to action may not capture the full range of possible outcomes from learning that is transformative.

For example, Morrice (2012) provides an account of the experiences of refugees arriving to the United Kingdom who undergo transformative experiences, but this new learning does not lead to the positive results predicted by Mezirow’s theory. Morrice highlights the experiences of refugees coming to the United Kingdom and argues that the very experience of “[b]ecoming a refugee is . . . a source of deep learning as [refugees] confront unexpected changes in their life plans and the need to reshape their lives and construct their identities” (p. 253). Several of the subjects of Morrice’s study fled strife from their native countries where they had successful careers, well-established lives, and a degree of social prominence. Once in their new but strange British home, and having undergone this significant and transformative experience, the result is, however, far from a positive one. Here, Morrice challenges the optimistic and rationalistic notion that “positive outcomes invariably accompany learning.” She cites Mezirow (1990) and reiterates a key assumption of his position, specifically, the assumption that “the learning that occurs as immigrants make the transition to life in a new cultural context is that there will be positive

change as they become better adapted to the environment” (p. 254). However, she goes on to reject what is “[i]mplicit in all of these understandings [i.e.,] the sense that learning is about change for the better and that somehow it is always a good thing” (p. 254). Morrice argues that in the case of these refugees, their learning teaches them that they must abandon the esteem they once had for themselves. Morrice writes,

The learning outlined here does not lead to positive outcomes; rather, it is concerned with having to unlearn and let go of much of who and what they were. A significant part of their experience involved learning to accept that their cultural capital was not recognized and has little, if any, exchange value. It also involved learning to live with loss of professional identity and the social status and respect that accompanied their premigration identity. (p. 266)

Alluding to the optimism of Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning, Morrice further states, “These narratives indicate a ‘darker side’ to becoming a refugee that transformative learning cannot accommodate” (p. 266). So, here Morrice suggests that in these transformative learning experiences, the learners do indeed undergo a transformation, and they come to clearly understand the implications of this new worldview on their own lives. However, the learning does not result in a mode of living that is more *positive* for the learner, and it does not result in a better way of being in the world. So, contrary to Mezirow (1978a), there is no cognitive failure in the learning and still there is a failure in action.

McDonald et al. (1999) similarly provides empirical evidence of successful transformative learning but whose expected and ideal concomitant action and behavior, however, are not successful. This study of individuals who become ethical vegans also underscores that there are constraints on action that are not fully anticipated by Mezirow’s theory of

transformative learning. According to McDonald et al., and following Hart (1985), the consciousness raising community of ethical vegans, as a community whose goal is to foster a practical consciousness and to educate others to address moral-practical questions, is properly understood as adult education. Thus, per McDonald et al., “[i]f Mezirow’s theory is valid for a variety of transformational learning experiences, it should explain how people learn to become and *remain* ethical vegans” (p. 9, emphasis added). What this study concludes, however, is that Mezirow’s theory does not adequately explain the role of power relations, and particularly the normative power of dominant ideology, and its constraint on action in transformative learning. Although the ethical vegans in this study document the transformation of their worldview and the way they make meaning of human and non-human existence, the power of normative, dominant ideology curtails the way in which they would have rather had acted and lived in the world, a manner that would have been consistent with their transformation.

Initially, ethical vegans, after experiencing their transformed view of non-human animals, were enthusiastic about sharing their views, encouraging others to act similarly, and critiquing oppression of non-human animals. As McDonald et al. (1999), phrase it, they were proselytizing (p. 19). However, this way of acting in the world, the ethical vegans found, was not sustainable. The authors continue:

The sustained power of the normative ideology, however, brought subtle changes in the vegans’ praxis over time. No longer shocked by animal cruelty, and worn by social-cultural and interpersonal challenges to veganism, their praxis became less outspoken. Many virtually stopped talking about their vegan ideology to nonvegetarians. This was explained by the vegans as the most effective way to educate others A critical reading of their narratives, however, reveals the unconscious power of the normative

ideology to regulate to conformity. The ability of this ideology to unprehensively [*sic*] modify a praxis of resistance presents evidence for the powerful and constraining effects of the dominant ideology on emancipatory education. (p. 19)

The oppressive normalizing effect of a dominant ideology is difficult to escape and is antagonistic to what appears to be a practical-moral therapy of transformative learning. The authors further write, “They [i.e., the ethical vegans] learned to avoid confrontations with the dominant culture, in spite of their continued discourse among themselves and their commitment to veganism. Sometimes, they even compromised their veganism” (p. 19). Here there is evidence that transformative learning experiences can indeed occur but, at the same time, the expected accompanying ethical action and way of being in the world is muted or blunted at best; McDonald et al., thus indicate that the optimistic rationalism of Mezirow’s theory cannot account for this. Highlighting this limitation to Mezirow’s theory, they further conclude that “to more fully understand emancipatory and transformational learning, such learning should be viewed from a more holistic perspective” (p. 20).

Another empirical study that problematizes the relationship between transformative learning and action is conducted by Isopahkala-Bouret (2008). Here, Isopahkala-Bouret similarly provides a critique of Mezirowian rationalistic optimism but from a different perspective in that she investigates the transformative experiences of those who are involved with work role transitions, specifically those transitions from a specialist, or technician, role in a corporate environment to a managerial role. The qualitative study relies on a transformative theory framework informed largely by Mezirow (1990, 1991, 2000). Isopahkala-Bouret states,

The intention of this study, in general, is to know more about the nature of learning involved in the transitions to [a] managerial role. Specifically, the study is looking at whether such learning involves self-reflection and self-transforming experiences. (p. 70)

The experiences of the six participants highlighted in the study indeed show that a transition to a managerial role does entail transformative experiences, however, what Isopahkala-Bouret highlights is an outcome that a rationalistic, Mezirowian view of transformation does not anticipate. In general, the shift from specialist to manager required a transformative learning experience (Isopahkala-Bouret, 2008, p. 72). However, Isopahkala-Bouret indicates that the dominant theoretical framework of transformative learning relies on the agency of the rational self and does not fully attend to the socio-cultural forces that shape the outcome of transformational learning experiences (Clark & Wilson, 1991; Collard & Law, 1989; Morrice, 2012). This criticism is similar to that lodged by McDonald et al. (1999), against Mezirow's theory, but in Isopahkala-Bouret's study as will be discussed, instead of seeing the anticipated praxis being thwarted by external normative forces, there is a way-of-being that Isopahkala-Bouret suggests should be repugnant to the traditional ideals of transformative learning theory, namely the ideals of rationalism, humanism, inclusion, and self-reflective criticism. That is, in the corporate environment in which the study took place, Isopahkala-Bouret reveals how the steps of transformative learning led to the adoption of a certain ideal of leadership (p. 80). That ideal, however, serves the values and goals of the corporate entity for which the subjects worked. The specialists had to shed their previous understandings of who they were and their function and purpose in relation to their work and take on a new self-understanding. So, instead of the learning experience leading to a new perspective that rejects uncritically accepted dominant ideologies, the learning lends support to the dominant corporate ideology of being a manager.

Further, rather than leading to a praxis that is more open, more understanding and more inclusive, the learning leads to a way of acting in the world that serves the corporate entity. Isopahkala-Bouret writes, “Hence, the transformative learning in work role transitions does not necessarily lead to a more inclusive and reflective perspective as Mezirow (1991) has suggested, but brings the adoption of a dominant perspective” (p. 81).

So, in all three empirical studies—Morrice (2012), McDonald et al. (1999), and Isopahkala-Bouret (2008)—the actions, the ways of being, the praxes that one would expect to issue from transformative learning experiences as anticipated by the predominant theory of transformative learning found in Mezirow (1978a, 1978b, 1991, 2000), do not arise and Mezirow’s theory does not adequately account for these phenomena. As discussed, Mezirow’s theory indicates that transformative learning experiences, triggered by a disorienting experience, followed by critical examination of one’s self and of the customary ways through which a person makes meaning of the world, would lead to a praxis that is commensurate with a more critically self-aware perspective of the world, that has a more critically aware perspective of dominant ideologies and their oppressive effects, and that is grounded in rational and humanistic principles. In these studies, though, there are experiences which are clearly transformative processes that nonetheless do not result in the expected change in behavior, that is, in the realization of such praxis. So, these studies identify a problem in Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning. To be more precise, these studies identify different problems related to the role of praxis in Mezirow’s account. Again, Morrice, indicates that transformative learning experiences may result in a way of being that is negative and an unwanted compromise by the learner; immigrants learn that their social status is diminished, and they must act accordingly. Isopahkala-Bouret demonstrates that transformative learning may lead to a result welcomed by

the learner, but that result is an embrace of principles and values that may be anathematic to the humanistic ideals expressed by Mezirowian transformative learning theory. Finally, McDonald et al., demonstrate that transformative learning may lead to a praxis that is welcomed by the learner, but there are structural, social and psychological forces at work that appear to thwart the praxis.

These findings call for, either explicitly or implicitly, a more comprehensive theoretical approach to understanding dimensions, processes, and outcomes of transformative learning. Illeris (2007, 2014) theorizes the possibility of a disjuncture between transformative learning and the action that should issue from it, that is, the possibility of the failure of praxis. Illeris' theoretical approach to transformative learning is based on his general theory of learning. Thus, to understand Illeris' theory of transformative learning, there must first be an understanding of his general learning model.

Illeris and the Model of Learning

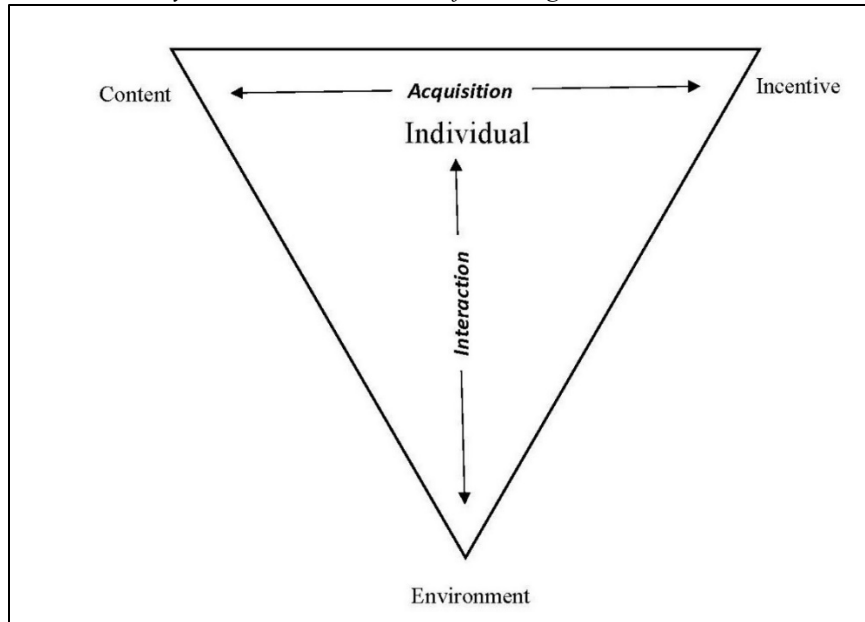
In the general account of learning offered by Illeris (2007), there is a broad definition of learning as “any process that in living organisms leads to permanent capacity change and which is not solely due to biological maturation or ageing” (p. 3). Further, according to Illeris, every learning experience has the same fundamental, multi-dimensional structure. In this structure, according to Illeris (2007, 2014), there are two basic dynamics at work, what Illeris refers to as *interaction*, and what he refers to as *acquisition*. The process of interaction is the dynamic between the individual on the one hand, and the environment and society around her on the other hand. The external forces interacting with the individual also continuously shape the second process which, according to Illeris (2007), is the “psychological processing and acquisition taking place in the individual of the impulses and influences that interaction implies” (p. 22).

That is, the continuous stream of stimulus, information, interaction from the environment acting on the individual informs the fundamental psychologic learning process in the individual, the process of acquisition. Figure 1, based on a diagram developed in Illeris (2014), represents the role of these two dynamics in the structure of learning. The two dynamics are represented by a vertical line (interaction) and a horizontal line (acquisition). So, with interaction, there is the relationship between the environment and the individual. However, there is also the individual in the learning experience and the dynamic of acquisition, which relies on two fundamental dimensions, what Illeris (2007, 2014) refers to as content and incentive. In sum, then, every learning experience consists of two dynamics (interaction and acquisition), and three dimensions represented by each point of the triangle in the figure, again, the dimension of content, incentive, and interaction, (which shares its name with the aforementioned socio-psychological learning dynamic, so one must be careful not to confuse or conflate the two). Thus, for Illeris, any analysis and investigation of learning must proceed with these fundamental elements of the learning experience.

The content dimension relates largely to the cognitive aspects of learning and reflects the knowledge, understanding and skills a person might acquire. Incentive relates to the affective, or emotional, aspects of learning, as well as the volitional and motive aspects. The dimension of interaction (again, not to be confused with the dynamic process of the same name, see Illeris, (2007, 2014)), pertains to the social, or environmental, aspect that occurs in learning, and relates to communication, cooperation, and activity with others that necessarily attends to learning.

Figure 1

Illeris and the dynamics and dimensions of learning



Note. Used with permission of Taylor & Francis Informa UK Ltd., from *Transformative Learning and Identity* (p. 35), K. Illeris, 2014, Routledge; permission conveyed through Copyright Clearance Center, Inc.

Thus, according to Illeris' (2007, 2014) model, learning and the acquisition of knowledge occur necessarily with all three dimensions. In all instances of learning, therefore, there is more than simply the cognitive dimension at work, contrary to the tendency of much learning theory in the past several decades that has focused on the content dimension as being of greatest importance (Illeris, 2007). Rather, there is necessarily affective, volitional, and motive components—that is, the aspects of the incentive dimension generally—as well as the social, communicative, cooperative dimensions, that is, the interaction dimension. This is an important difference between Illeris' view of learning and Mezirow's early view of learning, whereas Illeris insists on the necessary interaction of all three dimensions, Mezirow's earlier work has suggested that the cognitive is the primary constituent of the learning experience (Mezirow, 1978a; 1978b; 1981). In Mezirow's later work, he does acknowledge the important role of the

emotions in transformation (e.g., Mezirow, 1991; Dirkx et al., 2006). However, the role of the affective and the social, for Mezirow, may arise in some concomitant fashion but per accidens; emotions, for example, “appear as kind of an accompanying phenomenon,” as Illeris puts it (Illeris, 2007, p. 63; see also Hoggan et al., 2017).

Now, according to the model represented by Figure 1, there is the individual at the nexus of the two dynamics of interaction and acquisition, and at the center of the three dimensions, cognition, incentive, and interaction. However, Illeris (2007, 2014) further argues that at the center is, more precisely, *identity*. It is this component of Illeris’ general model of learning that provides an important foundation for Illeris’ theory of transformative learning.

Illeris, the Locus of Transformation, and Identity

A key feature of Illeris’ conceptualization of transformative learning is the importance he places on defining the locus of transformation in the learner. As Kegan (2000) argues, in order to understand transformative learning, one must identify what *form* it is that transforms; that is, one must identify the target of transformation. How one identifies this target will in large part determine one’s theoretical understanding of transformative learning. In Mezirow’s early writings, the locus of the transformative experience is essentially part of what Illeris would call the cognitive dimension of the learner. That is, for Mezirow (1978a, 1978b, 1981, 1989), the locus of transformation is the *meaning perspective*, which is later referred to as a *frame of reference* and as a *habit of mind* (1997, 2000). Illeris (2014), with Kegan, affirms that the conceptualization of the locus of transformation has a significant role in the development of a theory of transformative learning, and he, with others (e.g., McDonald et al., 1999), argues that what is needed is an alternative conceptualization to the cognitivist model provided by Mezirow that integrates more holistically the variety of dimensions of the psyche and of learning (see also,

e.g., Dirkx et al., 2018). Illeris thus provides an analysis of candidate loci, or *targets*, of transformation.

Following a common conceptual distinction in learning theory, Illeris first establishes that transformative learning pertains to an experience that involves learning by change as opposed to a learning by addition (see e.g., Piaget, 1952; Rogers, 1961; Kegan, 2000; Illeris, 2007). That is, in learning by change, something about the learner experiences some sort of qualitative change as opposed to the adding of some new datum, or new piece of information, or incrementally adding to an existing understanding, etc. Illeris (2014) refers to learning as change as an experience in which the “meaning, understanding or condition of something already acquired is changed, often at the same time as something new is added” (p. 16). Further, he writes, “Seen in this context the term ‘transformative learning’ directly implies a kind of learning as change” (p. 16). The question then is, what is it that changes? Illeris suggests that whatever it is that changes in the learner, it is captured within a portion of the “concepts of the totality of the human mind,” or rather, within some component of the human psyche or human character broadly speaking (p. 38).

Briefly, the *concepts of the human mind* that Illeris (2014) examines are the following: the self, the person, the biography, and identity; these are concepts that have been, according to Illeris, well-developed in twentieth century education and psychology literature (Illeris, 2014, pp. 16–20). Illeris presents a conceptual analysis guided largely by the way these terms are commonly used, and indeed, the common usage of these terms does point to different and distinct phenomena found within the *totality of the human mind*.

First, Illeris associates the *self* with the “mental center of the individual and its self-understanding, self-confidence, and self-realization,” highlighting human experiences as that of a

separate and independent individual (p. 37). Second, Illeris argues that the term *person*, on the other hand, pertains to “how one is and wants to be experienced by others” (p. 37). Illeris suggests that the concept person is associated with the term *personality* and, in common parlance, this is what a person presents to others and to one’s self in his or her social interactions. A third candidate concept, *biography* as one of the concepts of the totality of the human mind, represents the individual’s “orientation towards her or his own biography or life story” (p. 38). However, according to Illeris, none of these conceptualizations, that indeed are part of the totality of the human mind, captures the depth of the human character and its many facets that undergo and facilitate change, and that none seem to be subject to transformation in profound learning experiences.

It is the notion of *identity* that Illeris (2014) points to as a conceptually more robust aspect of the human psyche. According to Illeris, “identity comprises both how one experiences one’s self, one’s qualities and properties, and how one is experienced by others” (p. 39). In other words, the familiar notion of identity is a more comprehensive and, at the same time, more coherent notion that can help explain a range of experiences involved with learning in general, and transformative learning more specifically. Illeris writes,

[T]here is sufficient basis for selecting the *identity* as the adequate concept or term for what transformative learning is related to and transforms. . . . [T]he term for the target area of transformative learning must in a balanced way cover all the dimensions of the human mental capacity and learning—i.e. as already mentioned the cognitive, the emotional, the social, and the situatedness and societal and environmental embeddedness—it must give a short, precise and covering answer to Kegan’s questions, What Form Transforms? (pp. 38–39)

The notion of identity more fully encompasses those characteristics that are associated with the way a person may understand oneself, both in relation to oneself and in relation to others. But, more importantly, for Illeris, the identity is necessarily involved with the process of learning. In the passage, Illeris alludes to this as he cites the three dimensions of learning according to his model, dimensions which will be referred to as the cognitive, the affective, and the social, for the sake of greater clarity. It follows from Illeris' learning model, then, that the identity is the proper locus of transformative learning. Illeris writes further,

Like other mental conditions the identity is created, developed and changed through learning—which all takes place in an interplay with the innate dispositions that are integrated in the learning processes and thereby can influence the learning as well as the identity. So even though various kinds of characteristics of the identity can be said to be inherited, the transfer takes place as an integrated element of the learning processes.

Therefore, the identity also includes the three dimensions—content, incentive and interaction [i.e., the cognitive, the affective, and the social]—that are always in learning.

(p. 69)

Illeris further writes that the identity “therefore always also involves the three same dimensions, which are involved in all learning, i.e., the content, the incentive and the interaction—or,

formulated in more psychological terms, the cognitive, the emotional and the social” (p. 70).

What is being affirmed here is the necessary and essential connection between learning and identity, and that identity is necessarily constituted by these elements of learning. Identity lies at the center of all learning, is conditioned by learning, and supports learning. Thus, it is identity as a nexus of learning that plays a central role in Illeris' theory of learning in general and

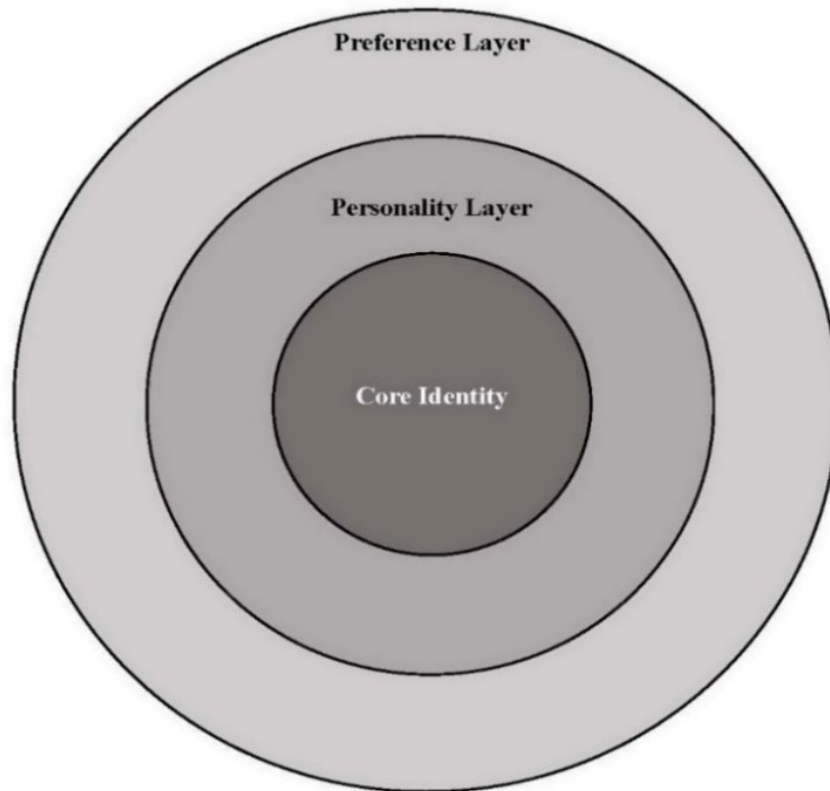
transformative learning in particular, and for Illeris, any analysis of learning must attend to all of these dimensions and elements.

The Structure of Identity

Illeris' (2014) model of the identity contributes to the descriptive and explanatory power of a theory of transformative learning. This further detail, illustrated in Figure 2, shows how psychological and social phenomena that are involved in identity are relevant to transformative learning. What this model represents is that identity consists of three layers. In the center of the identity is the core identity that Illeris describes as “a kind of centre, a rallying point, or a pivotal point, [that] can be identified, an instance that keeps the complexity and all the elements of the identity together” (p. 70). The core identity is developed at the earliest ages of the person and remains relatively stable throughout one's life. It is the part of the identity that “fundamentally contains the experience of being a distinct and particular individual, being the same in different situations and connections, and also through the entire course of life” (p. 70). In this core identity, one understands one's primary familial roles, one's gender, and other similarly closely held attributes.

Figure 2

Illeris general structure of Identity



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As the layers of the identity in this concentric circle model extend outward from the center, there is a difference in degree in the level to which the contents of each layer are subject to change. Again, the core identity is the most stable of the layers and provides the greatest unity and continuity of the identity and, typically, change to this layer is slow and imperceptible.

The next outermost layer is the personality layer. It is thus called, according to Illeris (2014), because it includes “who and how the individual wants to be and appear in relation to others and the surrounding world” (p. 72). The use of the term personality relies on the common

usage and connotations of the term that Illeris describes earlier in his conceptual analysis; he writes, “the personality is more about how one is and wants to be experienced by others” (p. 37). So, the closely held characteristics that reflect the cognitive, the affective, and the environmental dimensions to oneself and to others in the world are what may be referred to as the personality; so these components of the identity are found in the personality layer. Thus, this layer “typically includes conditions like values, attitudes, convictions, meanings, understandings, forms of behavior, patterns of experience, objectives, and social elements like manners, conventions, habits of communication, patterns of collaboration, empathy, obligingness, social distance and caution” (p. 72–73). It is in this personality layer that there are deep-seated traits in the individual, but they are not as entrenched as those features of the core identity. So, although change at this level can be difficult and can even encounter stubbornness, it is not atypical. In fact, this is where Illeris locates the transformational experiences that Mezirow explains in more cognitivist terms. Again, Illeris writes:

[W]hat Mezirow refers to as meaning perspectives and frames of reference predominantly are situated in the personality layer of the identity, and that, according to this, changes in this layer are the usual target of transformative learning. (p. 73)

Here, Illeris’ model provides the structure to account for features and dimensions of transformative learning that Mezirow’s theory does not originally accommodate, for example the extra-rational dimensions, the contextual dimensions of learning, and the differentiation of types of learning distinguishing transformative and non-transformative learning experiences (Clark & Wilson, 1991; Cranton & Kasl, 2012; Dirkx, 2001; Newman, 2012). There is now a richer description of a phenomenon of the human psyche—the personality layer—which is a

constituent part of the identity that is structured to account for the cognitive, the affective, and the social aspects of transformative learning.

The third layer is known as the preference layer. With this layer, there is that which can be construed to be a difference in degree rather than one in kind, particularly in the degree of the tenacity to which an individual adheres to—or is compelled by, or is swayed by, or is conditioned by—an element in this layer. Cranton & Kasl (2012) also highlight the distinction between the preference layer and the other layers, but do not phrase it in this way; rather, they draw the distinction in Jungian terms, noting the difference between the superficial identity and the consciousness, which is the “essence of our existence” (p. 394). So, for Illeris (2014), in this preference layer there are identity elements to which the individual’s commitment is weakest.

Illeris writes,

[The preference layer is] a more unstable and changeable layer of identity elements that do belong to the self-perception, but to which the individual is less devoted, [and is] more about what one usually does and how one usually behaves in various kinds of everyday situations, but in which one is not so engaged that it shall be in precisely the same or usual way. . . . [I]t is about what and how the individual more or less automatically prefers This layer includes all of the many different conditions we meet with in our daily lives that to some extent are important and relevant to us, but are not of any crucial importance. (p. 73)

Though this layer does not provide the greatest import for understanding transformative learning as does the personality layer, certainly one can imagine examples of such features of one’s identity. An example might be the following: person X drives to work every day taking the country road rather than the interstate because he enjoys the pastoral scenery, however, if his

passenger asked him to take a different route, X would easily comply. There is importance on the route that is to be taken, but its importance is not significant. The route is preferred, but it is preferred perhaps out of habit rather than some deliberation and conscious commitment. So, in the description of this layer, Illeris' identity model introduces the notion of the *importance* of some identity element for the learner, and there is the suggestion that a hallmark of a transformative learning experience is that it pertains to something that is *important* to the learner.

Part-Identities and Identity Change

Illeris further refines his model of identity with what are called part-identities (Illeris, 2014, p. 74–76). According to Illeris (2014), the identity is not only multi-layered, but it is also multi-faceted in that there are relatively distinct parts of our identity that constitute the whole, but which also may develop and change on their own. The primary identity that one has, Illeris refers to as “the central or personal identity, i.e. the part of the identity that relates to the person as a whole” (p. 74). Then there are sub-units to the identity that he describes thus:

In general these part-identities are related to one of two main areas that can be broadly termed our attitudes and our practice, respectively—which at the same time indicates that these part-identities may be of a more or less different kinds in different cultures with different traditions and norms and for different groups of people with different kinds of practice. (p. 74).

Illeris recognizes that the number and kinds of part-identities from one person to the next may vary and Figure 3, based on Illeris (2014, p. 76), provides a conceptualization of part-identities in relation to the central identity and offers an example of what a set of part-identities may look like in relation to the central identity. Like the central identity, the part-identities are also layered,

with a relatively stable core of beliefs and attitudes, a more malleable middle layer, and an even more fluid preference layer. Illeris writes,

[E]ach of these part-identities can in principle, like the central identity, be differentiated into a relatively stable core area, around this a more flexible layer in which changes typically can take place by transformative learning, and outside this a more unstable layer in which changes usually do not require great effort or determination. (p. 75)

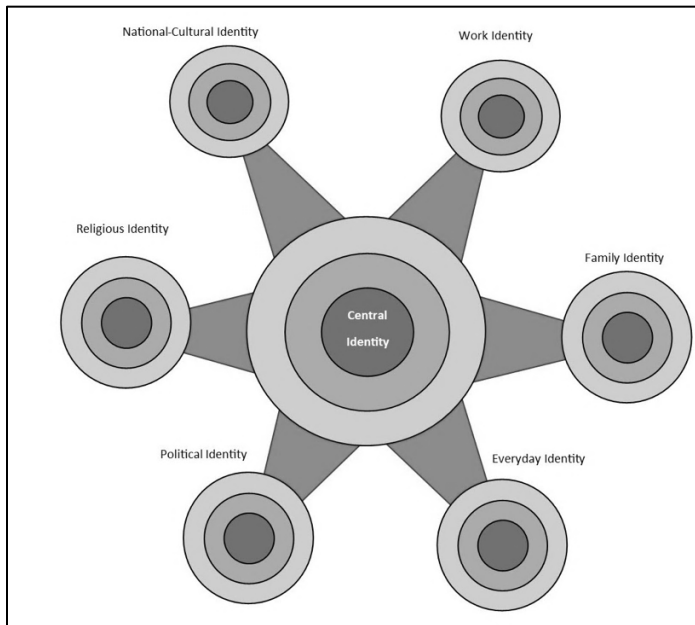
For example, one's central identity in general may rely on how one identifies himself through his work, and so there is the work identity, or more precisely, the work *part-identity*; according to Illeris, the work identity is one of the primary part-identities since large portions of one's adult life are occupied by work. This part-identity may develop and change quite independently from how one views himself in relation to another part-identity, religious identity for example. To illustrate, regarding the work identity, a person may have viewed himself all his life as a hard-working, industrious, technically skilled worker since his youth. This view of oneself may be at the core of his self-understanding as a worker. In early adulthood, this person may have trained to become an automobile manufacturing technician, and consequently spent decades in such a role. However, with changing technology and changing commercial and economic demands, this industry in his region may be shuttered and this worker may be forced to pursue a new kind of job. Perhaps it will be a somewhat related one but will require a change that is not easy to make such as, for example, a computer technician role. This worker may have never envisioned himself working on computers, a task that can be delicate, sometimes cerebral, and for him, intimidating. But such a job is consistent with his core work identity beliefs and attitudes about himself, that is, the beliefs that is a hardworking, industrious, and skilled technician. This change to a computer technician, however, would mark a change in the middle layer of this part-identity,

the “more flexible layer,” as Illeris has described it, but difficult to change, nonetheless. So, a change in identity may have to take place in the work identity in its middle layer when this worker takes on the difficult move into this new career. The move is difficult, and change occurs at the closely held elements of this middle layer because that which is changing in this worker’s identity is important to him. Thus, this type of substantive change to this layer of this part identity is a transformative change and would be associated with a transformative learning experience.

Now, change may also occur in the outermost layer of this part identity. Once in the new role of computer technician, this worker may initially be trained to work on one specific brand of computer or one type of operating system. Later in his new career he may then be asked to learn to work on a different brand of computer with a different operating system. For example, he may be asked to work on Apple computers in addition to Windows PCs for which he was originally trained. Though there may be some reluctance on his part to make such a change, he recognizes any such reluctance is slight and the expansion of his skills would not only be wise but it would also be relatively easy, certainly much easier than making the transition from automobile manufacturing to computer support work. This expansion of his computer skills would mark a change in the outer-most layer of the work identity, that is, the more unstable layer. It is important to note that during work identity changes, other part-identities may remain unchanged. So, as the work identity changes, the religious identity or the political identity, for example, can remain unaffected. Part-identities are conceptualized in Figure 3, adapted from Illeris (2014, p. 76).

Figure 3

Model of Part-Identities



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Illeris' Learning Model and Transformative Learning

From the explication of Illeris' general model of learning, and from the role and structure of identity, it can be seen how Illeris' conceptualization of learning can support a complex analysis of transformative learning experiences addressing process and outcome and implications for action. Learning, in general, is a function of identity development. For Illeris (2014), transformative learning is that learning which implies a qualitative change in the identity of the learner (p. 40), and one may see more precisely here that it is not any change in the identity, but rather that change to that part of the identity for which there is importance to the learner. Such transformative changes are associated with changes in the middle layer, or even possibly the core layer, of either the central identity or one of the part-identities. Further, because these instances of learning involve significant changes to the identity, and because the identity is necessarily

involved in and affected by the dynamics of *interaction* and *acquisition*, and these dynamics are in turn determined by the dimensions of content, incentive, and interaction, then in order to understand, analyze and describe transformative learning experiences, one must do so in terms of this complex interplay of elements involving the cognitive, the affective, and the social that occurs at a variety of levels (Illeris, 2014, p. 70).

With Illeris' identity-based transformative learning theory, then, there is a model that can provide criteria for defining transformative experiences and for identifying and differentiating different types of learning, whether they are, for example, incremental, instrumental, or assimilative (Hoggan et al., 2017), or whether they are actually transformative. Further, there is a model that starts to describe and explain more coherently and comprehensively those instances of transformative learning. In addition—and importantly—it is a theory that explicitly identifies a locus of transformation—namely, the identity—that is informed by Illeris general theory of learning. Thus, based on this learning model, the identity necessarily mediates and is informed by all learning experiences, and hence, necessarily mediates and is informed by the interplay of the cognitive, the affective, and the environmental dimensions.

Furthermore, with this theoretical framework offered by Illeris (2007, 2014), there are the analytic tools and concepts provided by Illeris that can begin to describe and explain not only phenomena of transformative learning, but also describe and explain those phenomena during a learning experience in which transformative learning goals do not come to fruition. Illeris' theoretical framework can accommodate non-cognitive factors that may affect the process of transformative learning experiences; further, because this framework highlights how the analysis of learning cannot simply focus on outcomes but rather must look at the entire process of learning, it can reveal how affective, volitional, societal, and other environmental influences may

shape a learning process and how such forces may thwart, slow, or impede such learning or their concomitant actions, and thus result in varying types of transformation of the identity.

Types of Transformative Learning Experiences

Illeris (2014) explicitly addresses the occasion in which an intended transformative learning process does not result in its intended outcome, what he calls *regressive* transformative learning. This notion of regressive transformative learning is part of Illeris' larger typology of transformative learning phenomena. Illeris argues that there are three primary types of transformative learning, the latter two which are not fully countenanced by the current literature on transformative learning. The types of transformative learning are the following: (1) *progressive*, that is, the commonly investigated phenomenon of transformation conceptualized by Mezirow, for example; (2) *regressive*, learning that in general fails to result in the anticipated action; and (3) *restorative*, learning that in general consists of a regressive learning experience followed by an alternate and remediating progressive experience (Illeris, 2014). Illeris' treatment of regressive transformative learning, however, is informative particularly in that it can address the failure of transformative learning, or the failure of action as described by McDonald et al., (1999), Morrice (2012), and Isopahkala-Bouret (2008). In so doing, Illeris' identity-based theory of transformative learning accommodates the multi-dimensionality of transformative learning experiences.

Regressive Transformative Learning

The phenomenon of regressive transformative learning generally occurs when, for some reason, an intended transformative learning experiences fails to come to fruition. Illeris (2014) does not dismiss this as simply a case of failed learning but recognizes this kind of phenomenon as an instructive occasion that highlights the different dynamics and dimensions at work in

learning and from which the educator can improve an instructional course. Further, this view of the learning experience highlights the notion that learning is a complex and rich process, not simply a means for attaining a specified outcome, however desirable that outcome may be. So, in a learning program, the learner may find the course too difficult, or may find the outcome unpalatable or impractical, or may resist the program because it is too burdensome or oppressive. Illeris writes that a “regressive transformation can quite often prove to be the first and often also the most difficult step to a positive solution [i.e., a successful instance of transformative learning]” (p. 95). For Illeris, the concept of regressive transformation serves as an important indication to the educator that it may not always be the case that transformative learning will be successful, and that the educator needs to be able to understand and respond to regressive transformative learning. One especially sees the value of regressive transformative experiences when they lead to restorative transformative experiences. In the regressive transformative learning experience, not only might there be some learning and change in the identity of the learner despite not achieving the expected outcome, but the transformation also that does take place may serve as a propaedeutic ultimately to a different outcome, vocation, or praxis, that is, an outcome of a restorative transformation.

Illeris (2014) argues that the received view of transformative learning experiences, such as that expressed by Mezirow, assumes that transformative learning is only of the progressive variety. That is, transformative learning is marked by its result which is some positive, salutary, rationally sound, and life-improving learning outcome. This is the assumption that is criticized by McDonald et al., (1999), Morrice (2012), and Isopahkala-Bouret (2008). Illeris writes,

It is as if it is taken for granted that this kind of learning [i.e., transformative learning] leads to progressive transformations, i.e., transformations towards something better,

something more advanced, a more profound and truer recognition or conduct of life, that one has got further into the understanding of oneself, a surmounting or correction of mistakes, weaknesses or something one wishes to put aside. (p. 93)

With an identity-based theory of transformative learning, and with transformative experiences understood as the process of significant identity work, involving the dynamic interplay of cognitive, affective, and social elements, one can see how it is possible that learning experiences—even identity changing ones—may still take place but not result in the intended learning outcome. In fact, such a transformative learning experience may have the learner shrink from the intended goal, or may have the learner give up on the pursuit of the intended goal, but according to Illeris the process still demonstrate identity work and has learning value. Illeris' example of a learner, Johnny, who experiences regressive transformative learning, is informative (Illeris, 2014, p. 96–97).

Johnny is described as a 29-year-old Danish citizen who did not formally finish his education in his youth, has since had an uneven employment record, and is now compelled to enter into an adult information technology skills training program so that he does not lose certain social welfare benefits from the government. In sum, Johnny pursued the information technology skills education, experienced certain significant changes in his identity, but in the end, did not finish the course and did not achieve the intended program outcome, that is, employment in information technology. Although the intended outcome did not come to fruition—that is, the learner, Johnny, did not engage in the intended praxis—Illeris does not dismiss this experience as one of *non-learning*. In fact, Illeris does acknowledge that some significant identity change did take place, and thus, transformative learning took place. For example, Illeris (2014) writes that

Johnny had “quit his circle [of friends] and distanced himself from their mode of life; there was too much drinking and too little perspective” (p. 96). Further, Illeris describes Johnny:

He dismantled his identity as a non-committed vagrant related to an environment that was just about letting the time pass. He also experienced that the day high school [i.e., the Danish adult education program] could give him something that was more promising. It was quite clear to him that his situation was untenable, and he most somehow continue in accordance with the influences he had received [from his skills education]. (p. 97)

Indeed, the learner recognizes that he could not continue to live the way he had been living, and he sees the value of the skills training and the promise of future employment. But for some reason, he cannot finish the course of the skills training. In a key passage, Illeris writes,

Seen from the point of view of learning, Johnny had unwillingly come into a situation that was actually transformative for him. He had all the challenges and all the support it takes to make a break; he was attracted by the possibilities, the environment and the teachers, but could not immediately manage to throw himself into the progressive changes that the situation actually opened to him. So, the first time around he withdrew to a new position that placed him in a vacuum between the old and well known, which he could no longer accept, and the new, which was too demanding to cope with. (p. 96)

So, Johnny found himself in a tentative position; he had undergone sufficient transformative experiences to lead him to view himself differently, to reject his old way of being, to understand the promise of new possibilities, but for some reason, he could not bring himself to complete the intended process of transformation. Illeris further writes about Johnny, “no new identity formation had taken place” (p. 97). Here Illeris appears to mean that for this learner, no new final work identity had taken shape. Clearly, significant qualitative identity change had occurred, and

Illeris is explicit in this; transformation as “change in the identity of the learner” had taken place in that he no longer desired to socialize with his old friends, recognized that this life of idleness could not continue, and came to appreciate the life possibilities that were open to him (Illeris, 2014, p. 40). But he did not pursue the expected learning outcome that was made open to him. In this, no final identity formation had taken place.

Again, the innovation of Illeris (2014) is the recognition that in transformative learning processes, meaningful identity work takes place, and although significant learning occurs, the intended outcome might not come to fruition. Illeris suggests that there may be some affective component of the learner that impedes the success of the learning process, or there may be some degree of identity defence at work (e.g., Illeris remarks, “perhaps some defence mechanisms are mobilized” [p. 94]). In the case of Johnny, he had the knowledge that he was a person who did not have to live as a “vagrant,” he knew that a more promising future was available to him, and he knew that he could not return to the mode of existence that he had. But despite the acquisition of this knowledge and despite the qualitative identity work, the intended outcome “was too demanding to cope with.” Though Illeris does not provide a more specific description of what is holding back Johnny, one does see traces of the dimensions of learning at work here. The cognitive content of his learning—the technical skills—are seen in relation to the social context in which Johnny inhabits, and it appears that the juxtaposition of the promise of a life of a skilled technician reveals the hollowness of the social world that he shares with old friends. Further, the broader social context of Danish social welfare and education programs imputes greater value on the skills training that is offered to Johnny; that is, the *interaction* between Johnny’s activity of acquiring these skills and this broader societal milieu signals to him that his learning is of great value not only to himself but also to all around him. Thus, this learning is transformative

according to Illeris. There is a qualitative change in Johnny's identity in that there are changes in how Johnny understands himself and his potential. But the qualitative identity change is not exactly the identity change intended by the instructional program. Rather, the dynamic interplay of the cognitive and the emotional dimensions signal that the learning takes a different direction. The *acquisition* that is taking place appears to be troubled. Although there is evidence that Johnny is capable of understanding the content of his course and acquiring these skills, there is some form of resistance to the course. It appears that some element of the incentive, i.e., affective, dimension—whether it be an emotion like fear, or an instance of identity defence protecting some remnant of his old identity, or perhaps weakness of motivation—precludes Johnny from realizing the intended aim—the intended identity change—of the instructional course. So, Johnny's experience is not one of non-learning nor is it even one in which transformation does not take place. Transformation does appear to occur. But despite the transformative learning that he experienced, the transformation into a skilled technician was not complete, and he failed to take on the intended praxis. He may be open to other alternative praxes, and ultimately, he may experience further qualitative change in his work identity. However, for now, the intended change does not come to fruition. Thus, the learning process is one of regressive transformation.

Applying Illeris' Framework

The description of Johnny's experience of regressive transformation is instructive for other purported cases of transformative learning. One can begin to see now how Illeris' identity-based theory can similarly aid in the description and explanation of the experiences of learners who undergo transformative learning experiences but for whom the corresponding praxis is not a positive, progressive outcome, or for whom the intended outcome does not come to fruition. For

this further elaboration of Illeris' theory, there are, for example, the demoralized immigrant professionals in the United Kingdom (Morrice, 2012); the technicians-turned-corporate managers (Isopahkala-Bouret, 2008); and the repressed ethical vegans (McDonald et al., 1999). As can be seen in these cases, the learning processes and outcomes that resulted could not be explained in terms of the rationalist and humanistic assumptions of Mezirow's transformative learning theory, and alternative analysis suggests that a more integrated framework that could better accommodate the cognitive, the affective and environmental dimensions that influenced these learning experiences. Illeris' transformative learning theory provides such conceptual tools. Further, the cases in these three studies can help further elaborate Illeris theory of transformative learning.

The Refugee Experience

In the case of the immigrants to the United Kingdom (Morrice, 2012), their transformative experiences were not simply a matter of perspective transformations; they were not one-dimensional cognitive changes. Indeed, the refugees did encounter a new way of understanding the world, they did critically examine their past perspectives, and through critical reflection, they did come to a more rational and comprehensive understanding of the work world presented to them in the United Kingdom. But this change did not consequently position them for a new and more fulfilling way of being in the world. Rather, the transformation, which was a complex and significant change in the identity of the learner, a change that involves the three dimensions of learning—the cognitive, the affective, and the social—reflects the dynamic interplay of these three dimensions. Morrice describes the experience thus:

Like previous studies that have considered immigration and learning there was significant learning in all of the participants' narratives, which resulted in perspective transformation,

positive change, and adaptation. However, this provides only a partial picture of the learning and identity processes at work. The learning did not end with the development of cultural competence and did not involve a “reintegration into one’s life” (Mezirow, 1994, p. 224). (p. 266)

For these immigrants, they had to learn the norms, the institutions, the culture of a new country, and they had to change the way they understood who they were in relation to these norms and cultures. Again, this is the cognitive content of their learning. But the context influenced greatly the overall nature of this learning. The environmental dimension of the learning and the interaction of the social with the individuals’ learning imputes a certain moral and social value on the acquisition of this content. For these immigrants, the social forces of the political asylum processes and related institutions, the pressures that come with social welfare and the stigma of such programs, and the racism that these immigrants experienced, convey to these learners that, not only have they learned the culture of a new country, but their worth in this new culture, especially as it pertains to their professional abilities, is diminished. This dynamic between content and social context in their learning has a significant effect on how the immigrants viewed themselves and thus had a profound qualitative effect on their identity.

The learning, moreover, appears to have a further effect on identity as revealed by the dynamic of the incentive, or affective, dimension of learning. Although Morrice (2012) does not focus on the initial experience of embracing the new culture, it appears that these learners were positively motivated to engage and understand the culture of their new country and so there was likely an initial enthusiastic curiosity for their new home. But, as the environmental dimension informed the context and value of this experience, and as the immigrant learners understood how their professional experiences and skills were undervalued and dismissed by this society, they

were significantly demoralized and discouraged. This profound emotional experience was integral to the learning and further contributed to the identity changes of the immigrants. The dynamic interplay here of the three dimensions of learning identified by Illeris (2007, 2014), appears to shape a fundamental component of the learners' personality layers—how they understand and define themselves—and more specifically, it appears to significantly change the learners' work identity. Further, as Morrice says of this transformation:

The case study of refugees has underlined how transformative learning not only involves epistemological processes of changing ways of thinking and changes how the world is perceived, but it can also involve a more profound ontological process where individuals have to adjust their sense of who they are and what they can be in the world. (p. 267)

This ontological change is part of the qualitative change in the identity and is accompanied by a change in the possibilities of what the learner can be and how the learner can act in the world, a change in their praxis. The epistemological change alone does not appear to affect the way one acts in the world; that is, how one acts in the world does not appear to be determined by a cognitive change alone. Rather, one's actions appear to be determined by the dynamic interplay of the three dimensions of the learning experience that constitute identity change and transformation. This analysis echoes the discussion by Illeris (2014) regarding regressive transformation. In that discussion, the *epistemological* changes of the learner (as Morrice would describe it), alone do not determine the actions of the learner, but rather behavior and action is the result of a more holistic dynamic within the identity (p. 96).

New Managers and Corporate Ideology

We also see that the study by Isopahkala-Bouret (2008) similarly lends itself to analysis within the framework provided by Illeris (2014). Here, Isopahkala-Bouret also argues that the

transformative experiences of the technicians-turned-managers cannot adequately be explained by Mezirow's theory. In the case of these new managers, their work identities also undergo a significant qualitative change, but that change cannot simply be understood as a cognitive change; rather, this identity change, too, is the result of complex interplay of the cognitive, the social, and the affective. These new managers did indeed acquire new cognitive content, that is, skills that are applied to the management of others and to leadership; these managers changed their perspective of the workplace and how they interact with co-workers, and they learned to be self-reflective and self-critical in the way they conduct themselves in the workplace. But, as Illeris' model suggests, this cognitive change was also informed by the social context of the learning. The interaction here between the social context and the acquisition of this content determines how this learning is manifested in the practical world; the cognitive change itself cannot fully determine one's actions and behaviors. In this case, the environmental dimension manifests the capitalist corporate environment along with its values and ethos. Thus, the value that is imputed to the acquisition of these new managerial skills has its origin in this corporate context. According to the ethos of this corporate milieu, there is value in these newly acquired managerial skills insofar as they serve the interests of the corporate entity. These corporate values thereby inform what this learning means to these new managers, and so who they are and who they perceive themselves to be is not simply newly skilled managers, but rather skilled managers who serve a certain set of corporate interests and values. This is here a significant qualitative change in their identities. More specifically, within Illeris' framework, the change is located in the work identity of these managers. Nonetheless, it is apparent that neither the cognitive dimension alone nor the cognitive dimension essentially is what defines this

transformative experience. Rather, there is the important role of the interaction between the social context and content in shaping the identity and thus the transformative learning.

This dynamic interplay of context and content also provides some explanation for the kind of *way of being* that these new managers assume. Again, Isopahkala-Bouret (2008) indicates how this new praxis may be anathematic to the ways of being that Mezirow's theory would anticipate, that is, ways of being that are "more inclusive, distinguished, open, integrative, and reflective" (Isopahkala-Bouret, 2008, p. 72, referencing Mezirow, 1991). The environmental dimension shapes the kind of practical value that these skills will have and in what kind of action they will be manifested. Isopahkala-Bouret writes,

The adoption of the dominant perspective means that the one who learns how to behave properly and transform one's habits of mind in accordance to the new role becomes subjected to a powerful organisational discourse that defines how one is supposed to behave, think and feel in a managerial role. (p. 81)

Here, the "dominant perspective" refers to the system of corporate values that provide the social context of the learning. So, although Isopahkala-Bouret does not fully explore the interplay of the three dimensions of learning cited by Illeris, the identity change framework offered by Illeris (2014) better explains these transformations and the actions that follow.

Ethical Vegans and Muted Activism

Finally, the study of ethical vegans in McDonald et al. (1999), similarly reveals the strength of Illeris' framework for understanding transformative experiences. McDonald et al. chronicle the learning of ethical vegans in what might be considered a paradigmatic transformative experience in which the learner initially possesses an overarching view of the world but, through critical self-reflection, changes the perspective one has. Such a worldview-

changing experience is not unlike that explored by Mezirow (1978a). In the experience of the ethical vegan, the learner indeed undergoes a qualitative identity change and is compelled to act in a new way that is consistent with one's change in perspective and identity; this is just as Mezirow's framework would anticipate. However, the learner eventually attenuates or even ceases altogether his or her ethical activity, contrary to what the Mezirowian model would predict. Yet, McDonald et al. do not deny that the experiences of the ethical vegans are nonetheless transformative.

For the subjects in McDonald et al. (1999), the transformative change consists not only of a cognitive perspectival change, but rather, the three dimensions of learning are at work here explaining this qualitative change in identity. For these learners, becoming vegan was a process that involved the desire to better understand their relationship to non-human animals, critically assess the received attitudes toward non-human animals, and to alter their worldview pertaining to the relationship between human and non-human animals. There is the dialectical relationship between cognitive content (the propositional knowledge regarding the status of non-human animals from a vegan perspective), and the affective and motivational components of this learning (Illeris, 2014). Undergirding this dialogic interplay was the complex influences of society (Illeris, 2014). Certainly, there was a community of vegans from whom the learners drew support, but although this social influence was essential to the learning of veganism and the imputation of value onto vegan ethical beliefs and action, this was still a small component of the environmental dimension that provided context for the learning. Illeris' dynamic of interaction was more complex in the case of these ethical vegans. The social context of the learning also contained a countervailing force informing the environmental dimension; the common ideology that rejects vegan principles also exerted its force on the learning experience and the shaping of

the identity of the learners. They understood their vegan principles as they existed in this social context, and so how they comported themselves and acted in the world—that is, how their identity was expressed—was reflected in a more muted vegan praxis.

Proposed Research Area

Although these studies help conceptually elaborate the way in which Illeris' (2014) framework for transformative learning accounts for transformative learning experiences, this elaboration is limited. Indeed, the preceding analysis was able to ferret out and identify the conceptual elements of Illeris' theory of transformative learning, however, these studies were not designed with this framework in mind. Further, although Illeris' theoretical framework is complex and well-crafted, a literature search revealed very little empirical work that applies Illeris' framework to the study of transformative learning experiences. So, there is little empirical work that applies this framework and elaborates on its tenability (see however Baldwin & Motter, 2020). Thus, there is a need in the literature on transformative learning and identity, and such work is required to further explore and elaborate on Illeris' theory and its explanation of transformation as a qualitative change in identity.

Summary

As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, this literature review was a selective review, focusing on three studies to highlight the fact that the predominant theoretical approach to transformative learning does not adequately address the relationship between the processes of transformation, the dimensions of learning, and the outcomes of transformative learning experiences. There may be this inadequate treatment particularly when researchers investigate transformative phenomena that do not result in the kind of action or being in the world that is expected by Mezirowian theory. Illeris (2014), however, does theorize that the processes of

transformative experiences will not necessarily result in the outcome that is intended. That is, transformative learning may not always be progressive. Rather, there are occasions when the experience may be regressive. Further still, there may be a compound phenomenon in which the transformation is restorative. Illeris' theory of identity-based transformative learning provides the theoretical framework to explore and describe the complex relationship between processes, outcomes, and the dimensions of learning, and provides an explanatory framework for the phenomena of unexpected transformative outcomes such as those described in the studies by McDonald et al., (1999), Morrice (2012), and Isopahkala-Bouret (2008). However, because of the paucity of empirical studies that are designed to elaborate on Illeris' theoretical framework, additional work was needed to explicate further how Illeris' work may explain how this range of transformative learning experiences is possible. To investigate the dynamic interplay of the cognitive, the affective, and the environmental dimensions of learning that may lead to this range of transformation types, an appropriate setting for an empirical study was necessary and is discussed in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Questions

As was borne out of the literature, the current predominant theoretical framework for understanding transformative learning—that of Mezirow (1978, 1991, 2000)—does not adequately describe or explain many kinds of transformative experiences, particularly those in which the practical effect of the learning transformation is not expected and not commensurate with the content or design of the intended instruction. Illeris' (2014) theory, however, appears to hold promise in helping explain and describe transformative experiences, particularly those cases whose outcomes would be unexpected when viewed from, for example, a Mezirowian framework. Though Illeris presents a compelling theory that provides a more holistic approach to transformative learning—the kind of theory which critics of Mezirow may be seeking—there nonetheless has been a need for empirical studies that assess this theoretical framework in a variety of transformative learning contexts. So, the purpose of this present study was to empirically analyze transformation as a qualitative shift in identity considering process types and variable outcomes. To this end, this study pursued the following research question and its sub-questions:

Question: What is the nature of the dimensions, processes, and the outcomes of transformative learning as a qualitative shift in identity for participants in a job skills employment program?

- a. Sub-question: What types of learning outcomes (progressive, regressive, restorative) are experienced by the learners?
- b. Sub-question: How does the process of identity transformation unfold for learners in a job skills training program?

- c. Sub-question: How do the learners experience the cognitive, the affective, and the environmental dimensions of transformative learning in a job skills training program?

Research Setting

As indicated by the research question, the research setting was a job skills employment program that served individuals for whom there were significant barriers into the workforce such as homelessness, justice involvement, lack of education, or lack of work history. This section provides further rationale for the selection of such a setting.

The data collection for this study took place in an environment that allowed the elements of learning, as Illeris (2014) explains them, to be pronounced and amenable to description. There are ample studies of transformative learning that take place in relatively common environments such as a college classroom or corporate training center (Taylor & Snyder, 2012). However, such environments often do not feature strong affective dynamics, or the fluidity of human psychological functions, or the illumination of the pervasive influence of dominant cultural norms, social pressures, or ideologies. Taylor and Snyder, however, do document the empirical research pertaining to transformative learning that has taken place outside the traditional classroom and environments in which the role of the dimensions of learning and their effect on the identity are brought out in sharper relief. In the three studies discussed in detail earlier, there is certainly the presence of societal pressures and their impact on learning, identity, and praxis, and there is the wide-ranging affective dynamics that are constituents of transformation. So, an appropriate subject of investigation was to explore and further elaborate Illeris' theory of transformative learning and that which exhibits dynamism and fluidity in the interplay between the cognitive, affective, and societal dimensions, such that it lent itself to the possibility of

learners' experiences of substantive change in identity, both in degree and in kind, and such that the features of Illeris' identity framework could be examined. Further, as noted by Taylor and Snyder, a common site for transformative learning research is a higher education environment. The selection of a site in which the study participants would likely be from traditionally underrepresented populations, that is, the populations of the recently incarcerated and the homeless, would provide an opportunity to amplify voices that are often missing from the transformative learning literature.

Overcoming Barriers to the Workforce and Re-Entry Transitions

Again, as indicated, a learning environment that was expected to offer such dynamism between the dimensions of learning was an environment that aided learners in overcoming significant barriers to the workforce, e.g., the re-entry of formerly incarcerated persons back into society or the preparation of homeless individuals for the workforce. In the case of many formerly incarcerated individuals, re-entry involves engaging in some form of education or training to help prepare oneself for employment and for navigating oneself in society, and such preparation may further involve the re-shaping of one's social attitudes, beliefs, and motivations (Duran et al., 2013). In addition, there is an emerging view in the re-entry literature that successful re-entry also involves challenging and then changing one's identity (Veysey et al., 2009). But not only do the processes of re-entry involve the development of one's skills and character, but also the processes often involve social and affective dynamics related to the learning experience, and these processes may bring into greater relief the elements of Illeris's (2014) framework. For example, having a criminal record alone creates a stigmatized criminal identity that makes employers reluctant to aid one in re-entry, and therefore there are already significant societal scrutiny and pressure present to the learning experience which may be further

compounded by racism (Hlavka et al., 2015; Tyler & Brockmann, 2017). Further, the formerly incarcerated face significant affective challenges. For example, it is common to experience “anxiety, panic attacks, paranoia, and cognitive dysfunction, which can hinder their re-entry” (Skinner-Osei & Stepteau-Watson, 2018, p. 242). So, like the transformative experiences of the refugees who arrive in the United Kingdom, the formerly incarcerated must similarly learn how to live and work in an unfamiliar and, at times, hostile environment, and they must re-shape who they are and do so likely in the face of negative affective and social influences. The environmental and affective experiences of the recently incarcerated are similar to the experiences of others with significant obstacles to entering the workforce. Individuals struggling with homelessness, for example, and who are seeking to enter the workforce similarly require special job skills training (Gray et al., 2016). Also, for example, for individuals overcoming homelessness and trying to enter the workforce, there are significant societal pressures and emotional dynamics that inform one’s path (Shaheen & Rio, 2007). Such a complex and dynamic learning environment and the transformative learning experiences therein could both be described well by Illeris’s general model of learning and identity framework, on the one hand, and also contribute to the elaboration of this theory on the other.

In one urban area in the upper Midwest United States, there was a training program for the development of job skills referred to here as the *baking-based employment program*. The program provided basic jobs skills training for those who faced significant obstacles to entering the workforce including justice involvement, homelessness, and scant work and education histories. The 12-week program was designed to provide participants with fundamental culinary and management skills so that graduates would be qualified to obtain entry-level positions in the food services industry. The program provided the equivalent of 12 credits of a technical college

education and students could be eligible for actual college credit if they chose to go on to a particular two-year college. Every 2 months, a cohort of 10 to 12 students entered the program. They met at the program facility for six hours a day, five days a week, for 12 weeks. The facility had both classroom and culinary lab space. At the same time, the program developed skills such as interview techniques, résumé writing, goal setting, mindfulness techniques, and teambuilding.

The program was one of several services provided by the parent organization, a medium-sized non-profit organization recognized by the IRS as a 501(c)3 organization. The parent organization was established in 1971 and in addition to the job skills program, it provided a shelter for homeless families, a peer support program for justice involved individuals, youth mentoring, a program to preserve relationships between incarcerated women and their children, a re-entry support group, a re-entry services agency, and a re-entry simulation experience to help educate community members about the challenges that newly released formerly incarcerated individuals face. The parent organization relied mainly on donations and sponsorships from local businesses, foundations, churches, and private individuals, and had annual revenue in 2022 of approximately \$2.9 million. There is no other higher-level organization from which it received programmatic direction. It did have a board of directors consisting of 14 citizens from the greater urban area. The executive director of the parent organization had been in her role for approximately 18 years and had a decades-long career in social services serving youth, the elderly, and incarcerated individuals. The job skills training program had nine staff members, and the parent organization had about 30 staff in total. The baking-based employment program was wholly voluntary for its participants. Some participants were either on parole or on probation.

Through discussions with the program coordinator, stories in the media, and informational sessions provided to prospective students, it became clear to me that the learning experience for participants was not simply job skills acquisition. Rather, this skills training was, first of all, accompanied by additional services to assist in the transition into the workforce including peer support and housing referral. Further, the program touted its work as not simply preparing one for a livelihood but also as work that changed lives. That is, these descriptions of the program suggested that the program could lead to a substantive shift in consciousness that is consistent with a qualitative change in the self or identity (Illeris, 2014).

Although the program did not appear to be intentionally designed to follow a specific theory of transformative learning, there appeared to be some of the so-called *core elements* of transformative learning identified in Taylor (2009), that typically are found in an educational program designed to foster transformative learning. Taylor reviewed the literature on fostering transformative learning experiences in intentional educational settings and identified common elements in the context of transformative experiences. These core elements are the following: individual experience; critical reflection; dialogue; holistic orientation; awareness of context; and authentic practice. As will be described in more detail, field observation at the location of the job skills program provided an understanding of the interactions between the program staff and its participants as well as the intentions and practices of the program. As suggested by an information session for the program, there appeared to be opportunity for participants to reflect on their identity; engage in dialogue; immerse themselves in a holistic experience that engages the mind, the body, and the emotions; and to have authentic relationships with the program staff and others in the program and the community. Therefore, although this job skills program did not explicitly follow a theoretical model for the learning it fosters, from the perspective of Taylor's

work, there was evidence that the fostering of transformative learning was at least a tacit goal of the program, if not an explicit one.

Further, because of the multi-dimensionality of the learning experience and the behavioral, learning, and identity challenges that the learner faced, there were conditions present that allowed for transformative learning experiences to result in the variety of kinds of transformations theorized by Illeris (2014). That is, the conditions in this program provided for the possibility of progressive transformation, regressive transformation, and restorative transformation. Therefore, this present study of the transformative learning adopted, and elaborates on, Illeris' (2014) theoretical framework.

Positionality Statement

In light of the possible differences in backgrounds between the research participants and me, and the possibility of bias resulting from the difference in positionality, following Holmes (2020), this positionality statement is intended to acknowledge and contribute to the mitigation of the possible biases that may arise due to these differences. As a higher education professional who has spent many years working in institutions whose missions include educational access and adult education, I have had an interest in developing programs to make education affordable and accessible for the adult learner. Further, I have believed that there are a variety of obstacles for the adult learner, both personal and societal, that may make it difficult to pursue higher education. Therefore, I recognize that I must be aware of possible professional interests that could create a bias in this research. Relatedly, I have held that there are a variety of systemic biases in our educational and judicial institutions that wrongly disadvantage many adult learners, and although this research project may indeed reveal such systemic problems, I needed also to be aware of the inclination to find such problems.

I was also aware that I have a very different social background from that of the research participants. For example, I have never been under the supervision of any judicial or correctional institution. Further, although I have been an adult learner and lifelong learner, I have, however, experienced what is typically referred to as a traditional K-16 education; I was continuously a student in both public and private schools from kindergarten through undergraduate education. Consistent with this conventional and privileged educational track, I completed my undergraduate education by age 22. Therefore, I must be aware of the biases and assumptions that are common for one who has experienced such a traditional education in a relatively privileged academic environment.

Further the participant pool was one whose members were from diverse socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds, and from demographic groups that have been customarily labeled as disadvantaged. That is, many of these participants are members of traditionally marginalized racial or ethnic groups, many have not completed a high school degree, and many have economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Although I identify as a member of a traditionally marginalized ethnic group and although I have been the target of overtly hostile, as well as implicit, racism, I typically do not experience nor am I typically conscious of such marginalization that may be directed toward me. Therefore, I was conscious of the implicit biases that may be typical of this middle-class privilege of being relatively unburdened by overt racist and classist societal pressures. So, in general, regarding my positionality, I recognized that I approached this research with a variety of interests and biases, both explicit and implicit, and this positionality statement is but one moment in the process of what will be frequent critical self-reflection and critical review of my research throughout this project.

Basic Qualitative Approach

The research questions sought to describe phenomena that, according to Illeris' (2007, 2014) theory of learning, were integral to learning experiences in general, and to transformative learning experiences more specifically. These phenomena included the cognitive, the affective, and the environmental dimensions of learning, the interplay of these dimensions in the learning process, the effect that these processes have on the identity of the learner, and the practical effect that transformative learning had on the learner. The collection of data of such phenomena, which are primarily subjective in nature—that is, subjective in the sense that the phenomena are experienced personally and are not readily externally observable—therefore lent itself to a qualitative approach. More specifically, the interview as the means of collecting data provided access to data on what the participant was experiencing in the learning process, how the participant understood these phenomena, and how the participant made sense and meaning of the learning experience.

Therefore, following Merriam & Tisdell (2016), the focus on transformative learning as a qualitative shift in identity, which was designed to provide skills training for those overcoming obstacles to entering the workforce, warranted a basic interpretive qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews of program participants as the primary means for gathering data. Again, the study was qualitative because the nature of the phenomena to be investigated and the need to describe in detail these phenomena. The study was interpretive in that the task of the study was to understand certain phenomena through the study participants' experiences and interpretations of these phenomena, and in turn, to provide an interpretation of these reports.

This view of the task of this research, then, implied certain philosophical assumptions. Underlying this interpretive approach was the ontological assumption that the world, or at least

the empirically accessible world, was necessarily constructed by the experiences and interpretations of those who are in it. That is, there was the underlying assumption that reality is a social construction (Glesne, 2016). With such an ontological perspective, there was then the concomitant epistemological assumption that to understand phenomena in this world, one cannot simply objectively observe phenomena, but rather one must necessarily interpret phenomena and, further, interpret the interpretation of phenomena offered by the subjects themselves (Schwandt, 1998). So, because the world is socially constructed, then knowledge of this world entailed a research approach that appreciated the role of participant experiences and their interpretation of such experiences. Further, the research approach accounted for the necessary role of the researcher and the development of his own interpretation of these phenomena which, in turn, necessarily contributed to the construction of knowledge of the world. Thus, with these ontological and epistemological assumptions, this study was an interpretive qualitative study.

Finally, this study was a *basic* interpretive qualitative study in that this study sought mainly to describe and interpret meaning and sought to examine and elaborate an existing theoretical framework (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). There was no higher order goal implied in this study such as, for example, the goal of discerning the essence of a lived experience, or inductively developing a new theory, or, say, fully exploring all facets of a single case.

Data Collection

Participant Interviews

Because of the subjective and personal nature of the learning phenomena that was investigated, and because of the nature of the research questions and the epistemological commitments underlying the study, this basic interpretive study relied on the interview as the primary means of data collection. Again, data were collected that pertained to the interactions

and interplay of certain dimensions of learning: the cognitive, the affective, and the social. These terms, however, are somewhat technical and are not part of the common vernacular and were unlikely to be part of the vernacular of the study participants. In fact, the phenomena connoted by these terms lay claim to a variety of monikers and the phenomena themselves tend to elude easy definition because of their intangible, intra-psychic, or abstract nature. Therefore, the interviews were semi-structured so as to invite the participant to use not only his or her own language, but also expand upon their remarks and allow them to describe as fully as possible their experiences.

Further, as will be discussed in the section on participant selection, the participants already completed their course in the program when they were interviewed, so access to data on these experiences relied on a retrospective semi-structured interview, rather than, say, a longitudinal set of interviews over the course of the learning experience or extended ethnographic field observation of participant behavior. The questions then elicited their recollections of the program, their program experiences, their learning, their affective experiences, and their description and understanding of the social context in which the learning occurred. Table 1 provides a list of interview questions associated with the research questions. See Appendix A for the full “Interview Guide and Questions.”

Table 1

Interview Questions

Preliminary Questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. First, can you tell me a little about yourself?<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Are you from this town? Where did you grow up? What town are you living in now?○ What kind of work are you doing now?2. Can you tell me how you found yourself in this program?<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ How did you get involved with this program? What attracted you to this program?○ What did you hope to get out of this program? When were you in the program?
Learning Process	<ol style="list-style-type: none">3. Can you tell me about how the learning experience was for you?<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Can you tell me about a typical day while you were in the program?○ Please tell me about a time when you felt the program was energizing, where you invested a lot of effort.○ Can you tell me about any time you felt the program was particularly challenging?○ Was there a time when you felt supported? Please tell me about it.○ How did you feel about the program when you were in it?4. Can you tell me about you had learned in the program?<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ What sort of skills did you learn? How did these skills build upon what you learned in the past? How does it compare to past training experiences?○ How did these skills differ from the kinds of jobs or skills you had done the past?○ What other job-related skills were you focusing on in the program.?5. How has what you learned in the program affected your everyday life?
Environmental dimension	<ol style="list-style-type: none">6. How did you feel about participating in a program that was in this town?7. During the program, how do you think others felt about your participation in the program?<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Family, friends? How did others influence your decision to be part of the program?○ Can you tell me about any outside encouragement or even pressure to participate in this program?8. During the program, how do you think the program was going to help you find your place in society?
Identity Change	<ol style="list-style-type: none">9. Thinking about who you were before the program and who you are now, what did you personally get out of the program?10. Can you tell me how you think that the program changed the way you view yourself?<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ During your learning, how did you feel about the changes you were making?○ During your learning, in what ways did you feel confident or have doubts about the changes you were making?○ In what ways did you begin to think differently about yourself, about what you can do, about your place in society? In what ways did your relationships with others change?11. Thinking about how you saw your job options before the program, what job options do you think resulted from your participation in the program?<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ In what ways do you think new possibilities have opened up to you? Can you tell me in what ways the possibilities for jobs has changed?12. Can you share in what other ways the program was changing you while you were in the program?
Practical Outcome	<ol style="list-style-type: none">13. What do you think was the program's goal for you once you were done?<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ How do you think you did in meeting this goal? Why do you think this was the outcome?14. How did you change through this program?<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ How has the program changed your life? How has it impacted your life?
End of the Interview	<ol style="list-style-type: none">15. Are there any questions you might have for me or anything you would like to add?16. If I have any questions, do you have any concerns if I reach out to you through email or phone for a follow-up conversation?

Vulnerable Populations and Trauma-Informed Research

Another consideration in the collection of data from study participants that added some heightened sensitivity to the interview process was that some participants were led to the program because of socially stigmatic and difficult experiences they had, such as involvement with the criminal justice system as a detainee, defendant, prisoner, parolee, etc., or because of one's experience with homelessness. In general, for example, justice-involved populations tend to be deemed vulnerable populations (Easterling & Johnson, 2015). Therefore, in such cases researchers need to be sensitive to vulnerabilities such as susceptibility to coercion; feelings of lack of autonomy, dignity, or rights; feelings of inferiority. Further, justice-involved populations may have suffered through traumatic experiences, thereby increasing the need for heightened sensitivity by the researcher when interviewing such participants. Rivlin et al. (2010), for example, show that justice-involved participant inclusion in research may exacerbate the ill-effects of prior trauma. Langballe & Schultz (2017) also offer evidence that interviews may amplify trauma depending on the manner and the temporal proximity of the interview to the traumatic event.

So, interviews with these participants were conducted in such a way that attempted to be sensitive to the possible vulnerabilities that they may have and sensitive to the possible trauma they may have experienced. Therefore, following qualitative research practices that were designed to be sensitive to vulnerable populations who may have experienced trauma (e.g., Easterling & Johnson, 2015; Paton et al., 2018), the following elements were part of the interview process:

- Questions were asked in way to invite the participant to control the pace and direction of the conversation while still attending to the goal of the question. For example, questions

asked “how” participants experienced their learning rather than having asked “why?” The latter question’s structure may put a participant in a defensive mode since the question suggests that some rationale or accounting is expected (Easterling & Johnson, 2015). Further, by shifting questions to this construction, the interview further developed the trauma-informed dimension of the interview (Paton et al., 2018).

- Questions were semi-structured. The semi-structured nature of questions not only allowed for freer dialogue, but it also empowered the participant to make choices about where to take the conversation. Paton et al. (2018) suggest that such choice and autonomy accorded to the participant helps establish trust and comfort.
- To further develop the trauma-informed nature of the process, the interview was conducted with the recognition that knowledge is constructed by the individual, but at the same time shaped by social interaction such as that involved in the interview. What was paramount were the experiences expressed by the participant and what was important to bear in mind was that knowledge is built upon this reality (Easterling & Johnson). Moreover, it was recognized that each participant was the “expert on their own life” and deference was required when the participant steered the conversation in unexpected directions, thereby having given the participants “epistemic privilege” (Paton et al., 2018). This recognition of the participant’s epistemic privilege was reflected in both the latitude provided in providing responses and in the analysis of data, both attending to the actual verbiage used by the participant and providing an opportunity for the participant to engage in a member checking process of the data.
- In a one-on-one interview, the participant may feel significant pressure from having the undivided attention of the interviewer focused on him or her. Paton et al. (2018)

implemented a *photovoice* methodology that allowed participants to bring photographs of places, things, etc., taken by the participants themselves. This allowed the immediate focus of the discussion to be the photographs rather than the participant, and the secondary focus to be the discussion of the participant's experiences. The objects thus provided an indirect way for the researcher to get to the immediately relevant data. Also, the use of some object in the room at the very least provided an alternative but relevant direction toward which either the participant's or interviewer's attention could be turned. Although in this present study, such artifacts were not used as a means to elicit responses, a photograph of the program building was used in facilitating the conversation. It helped enhance descriptive accounts of experiences and assisted in providing general content. The photograph was also intended to provide some relief from the social and interpersonal stresses that come with a one-on-one interview. This photograph was simply placed on the table at the interview.

Again, the goal of these enhancements to the interview process was to respond to the sensitive nature of the interview experience for vulnerable populations who may have experienced trauma. In general, the goal was to create a safe interview environment which enhanced the participant's comfort, feeling of autonomy and being in control, and sense of ownership of the process and the knowledge that was being shared. Also, to enhance the comfort of the environment, bottled water was available in the in-person interview settings.

As the interviews were conducted, I was attuned to moments at which the participant may have become uncomfortable with the conversation. Although only one such moment arose (the participant became tearful when speaking of the compassion of the program staff), I nonetheless had several options at hand. The participants were reminded that their participation was wholly

voluntary and that their participation could end at any time they desired, even during the interview. I was also able to divert the attention of both interlocutors toward the photograph, if needed, and the topic could have been changed at that point. I was also cognizant that, in general, data validity could be compromised if the participant felt as if the session was done under duress and respondent answers may end up being evasive or different had there been a less stressful environment. Therefore, if the diversion of attention and the changing of subject had not relieved the duress, pausing or stopping the session was an option. This course of action was never requested by any participants and was not taken.

Program Observation

In addition, to obtain greater context of the learning environment, there was non-participant observations of the interaction between the program staff and currently enrolled participants. The primary purpose of these observations was to obtain a greater understanding of the program and better context of the learning experience so that the data collected in the interviews could be analyzed and interpreted within this context. This context also helped inform the questions that were asked in the interviews, and helped guide follow-up questions. The program participants who were observed during this observation were not the same persons as the study participants. See Appendix B for the “Observation Protocol.”

Another purpose for the field observations was to aid in validating the findings from the interviews and assist in the interpretation of participant remarks in the interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The primary foci of the observations was the interaction between the instructor and participants; the behaviors, comments, and questions of the participants; and the processes and routine of the session.

The program observation took place at the facility in the downtown area of this upper Midwest United States city. There were four visits to the facility. The first one was introductory at which I met with the program director and was provided with a tour of the facility. The second visit allowed me to observe the production kitchen; it also provided an opportunity to interview two former program participants at that location during that visit so that the total visit time was about 2.5 hours. The third visit lasted about two hours and allowed me to sit in on the classroom experience. The fourth visit provided me with an opportunity to see the facility at a less busy time and also provided me with an opportunity to interview an additional former student. The total visit lasted about 1.5 hours.

Data Analysis

Prior to analysis of the data, the interview data were transcribed to Microsoft Word files. The original records of the interviews were digital audio recordings as well as backup digital audio recordings created by a second device. All digital files were stored on a password protected personal computer. Paper documentation was stored in a personal and secure location. Interview data were de-identified by using a code system whose key was known only to me. Pseudonyms were used when referring to specific data in this study.

The coding process was multi-layered and iterative. In general, the multi-layered coding process was intended to analyze the data from the perspective of the research question and its sub-questions. Prior to the use of any codes, I gained familiarity with the data through the transcription process. The transcription of the audio files required three phases. First, the audio file was uploaded to transcription software embedded in Microsoft 365 Word. Then, that transcript was corrected manually by repeatedly and slowly listening to the audio recording and comparing to, and correcting, the transcript. Finally, the transcript was formatted and edited to

excise, or substitute with pseudonyms, any identifying personal, location, or organization names. The transcripts were uploaded to and coded in NVivo 2020, Release 1.7.1. This process provided repeated opportunities to become familiar with the data, and moreover, provided opportunities to anticipate, during the many months of recruitment, what the approaches to coding and data analysis may be. In addition, the gradual and growing familiarity with the richness of the data allowed me to increasingly gauge the growing saturation level of the data and the process helped inform the decision to conclude the study with eight participants. Further rationale for this participant group size is provided in next section pertaining to recruitment of participants.

Descriptive Coding. The first analysis was an initial descriptive coding, an inductive coding process conducted to highlight the prominent topics that were brought up in the interview and that had some relevance to the research question and its sub-questions (Saldaña, 2016). These codes were identified through the initial reading of the data and then through the re-reading of the data. This descriptive coding process provided an initial identification of passages that contained topics that were relevant to research questions and helped identify data relevant to the affective and social components of learning, the processes involved with learning and change, and the outcomes of this learning.

Process Coding. A second inductive analytic coding approach that was used and that built upon the descriptive coding was an approach referred to as process coding (Saldaña, 2016). This coding approach further identified those passages that were associated with processes involved in the learning experience and the changes in the learner associated with this experience. Similarly, this process coding was an iterative task in that the data was read and re-read to identify salient processes after other types of coding were done and highlighted those processes involved with learning and with any identity transformation.

Concept Coding. A third analytic strategy was the use of concept coding (Saldaña, 2016), a deductive coding process that relied on the conceptual framework provided by Illeris' general learning model (Illeris, 2007) and his theory of transformative learning (Illeris, 2014). This phase of coding was deductive in that it employed concepts from the framework provided by Illeris. In general, the salient concepts from Illeris' (2007) general learning model included the learning dimensions of the cognitive, the affective, and the social. This concept coding also included those concepts that pertain to the dynamic interplay of these dimensions, that is, the dynamics that Illeris refers to as acquisition and interaction as was described in Chapter 2. Further, these codes also reflected the primary concepts in Illeris' theory of transformative learning, that is, the concepts of identity change, part-identity change, and the transformative learning types of progressive, regressive, and restorative. In the application of these codes to the data, there were also distinctions drawn within a concept (Illeris, 2014). For example, a deductive code was used to identify passages that reflected the environmental dimension of the learning experience. However, a subcode was frequently used to help further specify the occurrence of the concept. As a further example, a comment from a participant that pertained to their own motivation for learning would be coded as "Affective Dimension," but also with the subcode "Motivation." That is, motivation is one of many components of the emotional dimension and thus there was this further specification. The deductive coding process differs, however, from the inductive coding process in that this process took a priori a particular conceptual framework and explicitly imposed that framework onto the data. In so doing, the process both provided a certain perspective of the data (that is, the perspective of the theory underlying the framework) and provided a means of testing the conceptual framework to determine if the framework is an adequate means of conceptualizing the data. The concept

coding thus clarified how the data related to the conceptual framework laid out by Illeris (2007, 2014).

Human Subjects Research and Recruitment of Participants

Because this current study relied on interview data from program participants, the study proposal and its recruitment methods were submitted to and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Appendix C contains a copy of the initial approval letter for this present study. The initial proposed study identified a recruitment and research site different from the baking-based employment skills program. After there was difficulty in recruiting participants at the original site, the study was moved to the baking program site. So Appendix D is a copy of the amendment approval letter for modifying the recruitment and research site as well as adding new recruitment materials.

In general, the recruitment communication pieces that were approved by the IRB indicated that the researcher was a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and was seeking participants in a study of adult learning experiences related to preparation for transition to new roles. The recruitment messages included language pertaining to the duration of the interview, the wholly voluntary nature of participation, and nominal compensation as token of appreciation. The compensation was \$35 for the initial interview session. This was approximately the equivalent to compensation of an entry level position with benefits for 1.5 hours of labor at the time of the interview. Study participants were provided with a copy of the consent form (see Appendix E) prior to the interview and a signed copy of the form was collected at the interview time. If there had been an indication that the potential participant had a low-literacy level and may not have been able to read or sign the consent form, then following IRB guidelines, verbal consent would have been obtained. There was not such indication or self-

identification of low literacy with any of the participants. However, one interview was conducted through videoconference and the participant's consent was obtained verbally in that case.

During the nine months of recruitment, I worked initially with the program director to communicate with potential participants and then I worked with the program coordinator who had greater daily contact with participants. These program staff members had agreed to contact program graduates and potential graduates on my behalf by a variety of means. First, they aided in recruitment by verbally communicating to program graduates and participants regarding this research opportunity. The text of this verbal communication can be found in Appendix F. Also, they agreed to distribute a flyer at their site. The text of this flyer can be find in Appendix G. Third, they were willing to distribute the recruitment announcement via other print communication that they might use. The text of this announcement is found in Appendix H. In addition to these efforts, there were communications prepared that I would use for direct outreach either by mail, email, or by phone. These scripts were used for both email and phone contact. The text of the mail communication is found in Appendix I. The text of the email message is found in Appendix J and the script for the phone communication is found in Appendix K.

Also, I was able to engage prospective participants when visiting the site, at which times I provided them with the printed version of the recruitment letter. Thus, I visited the facility four times for recruitment purposes. As indicated, these visits also allowed me to observe the program and the facility, and this observation helped put into context for me the responses that were provided by the participants. During some of these visits, I had the opportunity to introduce myself and directly invite students in the baking-based employment program to participate in the study after they graduated from the program. Through these varied recruitment approaches, one

participant was recruited through a staff member's email outreach; three study participants were recruited through a staff member's verbal contact with them; two study participants were recruited through their connections and friendships with other study participants who had already been interviewed; and two participants were introduced to me while at the program site.

The Number of Study Participants and Their Demographic Information

Following a common view of qualitative research, I recognized that there is no easy formula for determining the appropriate number of subjects for a qualitative study; rather, the number should be appropriate for the research questions that are being asked (Patton, 2014). The nature of the research questions was such that they attempted to describe a certain phenomenon—transformative learning—through a particular theoretical framework. The phenomenon is defined as an experience of the subject, the learner; that is, the phenomenon is not primarily a trans-personal social phenomenon, nor a trans-historical phenomenon, either of which would require relatively many more subjects to describe (Patton, 2014, pp. 311–312). That is, if the phenomenon were primarily a social phenomenon or were a phenomenon that endured through time, affecting many subjects, then to understand that phenomenon, a relatively larger number of subjects would have to be enlisted. However, the transformative learning experience, although situated in a social context and possibly involving others, is primarily an intrapersonal experience, eliciting changes in the learner the full description of which is accessible primarily by and through the subjects themselves. Therefore, descriptions of personal, subjective experiences, which do not warrant the solicitation of relatively many subjects, but rather relatively fewer data-rich subjects, will provide the data needed to answer the research questions.

However, a single case would not suffice for at least a few reasons. First, there is unlikely a way to select a subject without further vetting and research whose experiences will provide

fully answers to the research questions. Further, since there are a variety of kinds of transformative experiences, as suggested by Illeris' (2014) model, a single participant's experience will necessarily fail to provide the varied data needed to adequately elaborate on this theoretical framework.

Therefore, the proposal for this study had indicated that there would be a recruitment goal of enlisting and retaining twelve participants who had graduated from a baking-based employment program. As indicated in the previous chapter, the program was for individuals who were re-entering society from prison or who had experienced other similar obstacles to finding employment such as homelessness or other justice system involvement. This number of participants, twelve, was selected to help ensure that there would be a variety of kinds of learning experiences represented in the data so that the data would be relevant to the research question and its sub-questions. It was determined that this number of participants would therefore provide insight on the varied elements of Illeris' general model of learning (Illeris, 2007), and his theory of transformative learning (Illeris, 2014). After nine months of recruitment that started in March 2022, I was able to recruit eight participants. The quality of the data, however, obtained from these eight participant interviews and also the time required for additional recruitment led me to conclude that these eight participants were appropriate for this study. The quality of the data became apparent as I reviewed the data after each interview and noted the richness of their responses. Due to either the participant's recent completion of the program or the participant's recent post-graduation association with the program, the participants appeared to be readily able to recollect the learning experiences that they had in the program and articulate well their learning experiences. Also, because of the seemingly profound effect that these experiences had on the participants, the participants appeared to have had ongoing reflection and thoughtfulness

regarding their learning in the program. Therefore, the eight interviews provided thoughtful and thorough responses that addressed the research question and its sub-questions and appeared to provide saturation of data in relation to the research questions. It should also be noted, however, that the decision to stop collecting data after the eight interviews was also influenced by the relative difficulty of recruiting participants. The life circumstances of potential participants alone created obstacles to recruitment (e.g., irregular access to email or phones and ongoing searches for long-term housing arrangements created obstacles), but the difficulty in recruitment was also exacerbated by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on justice system work-release practices, work habits, and program participant lifestyle changes. The table below provides demographic information for the eight participants and the following section provides additional detail about them. They are listed in the chronological order in which they were interviewed.

Table 2

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Age at time of Interview	Gender	General Ethnicity Category	Employer at Time of Interview
Emmanuelle	25	Female	Latinx	Bakery in Grocery Store
Darwin	35	Male	African American	None
Freddie	51	Male	African American	Parent Org. of Baking Program
Homer	24	Male	European-American	Baking Program, Instructor
Carl	59	Male	African American	Baking Program, Baking Production Assistant
Blaise	29	Male	European-American	Baking Program, Baking Production Assistant
Galen	62	Male	European-American	None
Albert	21	Male	European-American	None

Participant Biographical Background

This section is intended to provide additional detail about each participant such as their age, when they attended the program, and some of the circumstances surrounding their entry into the program. Also, this section is intended to provide a preliminary indication of each participant's character in part by providing some self-description provided by the participant.

Albert. Albert was a 21-year-old Caucasian male who finished the program in 2022. He had gotten into legal trouble after he had graduated from high school in 2020 and during the first summer of the COVID-19 pandemic. Albert lived with his parents who ran a modest vehicle repair shop. He described himself as being highly personable. Albert said of himself,

I've always been pretty good with, like, communicating to people in a work environment. I've always had those kind of social skills, like when I was at the [family-run repair] business . . . [M]y mom said I had, like, some uncanny trait to make people, like, feel at home and they wouldn't get like they would get super upset at them when they called, but when I called it was just very relaxing I guess.

Albert had been recently incarcerated for a brief time and was under court supervision at the time of the interview. He was also seeking regular employment at that time and lived with his parents. Albert was a recent high school graduate who felt adrift during the pandemic and then, due to criminal activity, became involved with the justice system, spending only a brief time in jail, and then going through a drawn-out process of a trial, sentencing, and supervision. Albert was the youngest participant in the study. He also indicated that there had been only two participants in his cohort and the other participant had stopped coming to class midway through the program. So, Albert was the only participant to graduate in his cohort.

Blaise. Blaise was a 29-year-old Caucasian male who finished the program in 2019. He had described himself as being reclusive, anti-social, and misanthropic before his participation in the program. He would typically think to himself when he had to engage other people in conversation, "Yeah, no, I really would just rather not be talking right now . . . let's hurry up and get this over with 'cause I want to have you go away." Further, he described himself prior to the

program with disapproval: “I’m still a smart a--- but, like, back then I was more like an aggressor where like it would come off more of being an a--h---.”

Blaise grew up in a Midwest state in a suburban area of a large urban center. He became involved with drug trafficking when he was 15 years old and became estranged from his family, an estrangement that lasted many years. He then moved to the community in which the baking program was located to develop his drug business and this activity eventually led to his imprisonment. He entered the baking program immediately after his incarceration and eventually became employed in the program. At the time of his interview, he was preparing to leave employment in the program.

Carl. Carl was a 59-year-old African American male who finished the program in 2015. He had described himself as timid but he had noted that, whenever he dreaded engaging in some activity such as the interview he had with me, he knew that this fear was a signal that he had to overcome this fear and push himself to do things despite the discomfort he might feel. At the conclusion of our interview, he said,

It's hard for me to talk to people, and so that's how I know I had to do it, because if I, if I had passed this [interview] up, so I probably would've passed up the next one and the next one. So, knowing . . . I know if it's something that's hard for me, just to, just to get it over with. That's what I, that's what I gotta do.

He grew up in a very large urban center in a neighboring state where he became involved in drug use and drug trafficking. Although his guardians moved him out of state when he was young to keep him out of a social environment that involved drug trafficking, he eventually found his way back into that community and became heavily involved in that enterprise. Carl later moved to the state in which the baking program resides, and in that community, he continued his involvement

with illicit drugs, he was then arrested and imprisoned. He learned about the baking program while in prison and entered the program soon after his release. He had been an acquaintance of study participant Freddie while in prison, and they had remained friends after they both left prison. After graduating from the program, he worked in a variety of jobs and then returned to the baking program where he was employed at the time of his interview as a kitchen staff member.

Darwin. Darwin was a 35-year-old African American male who finished the program in 2021. Darwin described himself as highly gregarious and generous to others. He said of himself, I get along with everybody . . . and I'm the nicest f---ing person in the world. I'd give you my shirt off my back if I thought you needed it more than me. No s---. I've done it before. I come from nothing so I understand. I sympathize with people who are in the same boat, who had been there, because we normally don't get the proper support or proper help that we need to better ourselves.

He was also the romantic partner of study participant Emmanuelle with whom he resided in a subsidized housing facility for those transitioning into society from incarceration or homelessness. When I met with Darwin at the housing facility's common room, the many residents present in the room seemed to treat him with a large degree of familiarity and respect. He had been homeless prior to starting the program and became homeless again during his first enrollment in the program. The parent organization for the baking program helped Darwin and Emmanuelle find housing in the residential community where I met with Darwin for the interview. He had started the program early in 2021, then stopped attending, and then restarted the program later that year. He was unemployed at the time of his interview but devoted much of his time to developing his musical interests.

Emmanuelle. Emmanuelle was a 25-year-old female of Hispanic descent who finished the program in 2022. Although she described how she had long enjoyed cooking, she described herself as being timid. She said, “I’m not really a people person. So, I was out of my comfort zone [in the program], but I learn how to deal with things.” During the interview with Emmanuelle, which was conducted via videoconference, she seemed comfortable and at ease, but she was brief in her answers.

She had experienced homelessness prior to joining the program and had been a regular user of illicit drugs. At the time of the interview, she indicated that she no longer used drugs. She had started the program in 2021 but stopped attending midway through the program. She re-entered the program and then completed it in 2022. She had noted that, during her second enrollment in the program, she was one of only two participants who regularly attended the class. As noted earlier, Emmanuelle was the romantic partner of study participant Darwin. She had grown up in one of the plains states before moving to the upper Midwest state in which the program resides, but she expressed a desire to move to Texas.

Freddie. Freddie was a 51-year-old African American male who finished the program in 2018. He had moved to the state in which the baking program resides when he was a teenager. His mother desired to move him out of a large urban center at the time so that he would not get involved with drug trafficking and other criminal activity. The move out of his home state to the new location, however, did not prevent him from getting involved with illicit drug trade. Eventually he was incarcerated because of a drug-related conviction and, after his release, he entered the baking program. He learned about the program from his friend from prison, study participant Carl. At the time of his interview, he was employed by the program’s parent organization, a private non-profit social services provider, as a peer support specialist.

When he was in prison, he worked in the kitchen and acquired some cooking skills. After his release, he ran a food truck. After he became employed by the program's parent organization, two of his adult daughters also went through the program. Freddie indicated that, through his experiences in the kitchen in prison and in the program, he came to appreciate baking profoundly. He said, "Baking kind of soothes me. I love to mess with those [activities] like making bread. I love doing that."

Galen. Galen was a 62-year-old Caucasian male who finished the program in 2022. He had been incarcerated before entering the program, but he did not indicate why he was in prison. His probation officer encouraged him to enroll in the baking program. At the time of the interview, he was seeking employment.

He grew up in the south-central region of the United States. His father was an accomplished professor of physics at a prestigious private university. After his father's death, his family moved to an upper Midwest state in which the baking program resides. He prided himself in his interest in reading, doing puzzles, and his prior education; he had attended some college courses when he was younger, and regarding crossword puzzles, he said, "You know I can go through 10 or 20 New York Times Sunday crossword puzzles in a day. You know, in a matter of hours I just do so many of them." Galen noted that he was the only graduate of his cohort.

Homer. Homer was a 24-year-old Caucasian male who finished the program in 2018. At an early age, he had become involved with drugs and drug trafficking. Eventually he was imprisoned for drug-related offenses. He started the program in 2017 and then stopped attending midway in the program session, but re-enrolled in the next program cohort shortly afterwards. At the time of the interview, he was employed as an instructor in the baking program.

As a child, Homer had been exposed to drug abuse both inside and outside the home, and exposed to sexual abuse in his early educational environments. He eventually became a drug dealer and was tangentially involved with prostitution activities. Prior to his arrest and incarceration, his greatest aspiration was to be a successful drug dealer for famous musicians. He did not believe that he could aspire to be anything greater or anything else. At one point in the interview, he had remarked, “[I]f I had any goal it was to be a rapper’s drug dealer. Like my literal goal was, that if I were to keep drug dealing, I was going to end up, you know, moving to these states where these rappers are, and I was just going to be their drug dealer, you know?”

Interview Locations

Interviews took place as each participant was recruited and available. The interviews took place in the following locations and in the order listed below over a period of nine months:

- Emmanuelle’s interview was conducted via videoconference. She connected from her home.
- Darwin’s interview took place in a conference room in a common hall at a subsidized housing community.
- Freddie’s interview took place in his private office at his place of employment.
- The interviews with Homer, Carl, and Blaise were conducted in a conference room adjacent to the baking program facility that was owned by an unrelated non-profit organization.
- Galen’s interview took place in the program classroom.
- Albert’s interview took place in a conference room at a nearby university.

Pilot of the Interview Protocol

In order to assess the effectiveness of the proposed interview questions and the interview guide found in Appendix A, a pilot study of the interview protocol was conducted. The pilot study included one participant at a similar job skills training facility in a small Midwest city. This single interview provided the opportunity to test the questions and interview guide, and provided me with an opportunity to become accustomed to the questions. The results of this pilot study were not included in the present study. After the pilot, the interview questions were preserved however, I was able to alter the pace of the questions to improve the conversational tone.

Quality Control

Standard methods were employed to safeguard the quality of the research and the claims made by the research. First, there was follow-up communication with the participants that provided an opportunity for a respondent validation of the transcription of the interview data. This communication to participants occurred via email, mail, and verbal conversation. Of the eight participants, only two responded to this inquiry. Both of these participants agreed that the transcription was consistent with their recollection; both of these participants were contacted by email, but one provided verbal feedback during a subsequent in-person visit to the program facility. Five of the other participants were contacted by email. One participant was contacted by U.S. Mail.

Second, two additional researchers, both recent graduates from two different doctoral programs in education at public universities in the Midwest, audited the coding strategy of portions of the data to confirm the appropriateness of the strategy and approach. These additional researchers were asked to code a total of sixteen pages of excerpts from two of the interview

transcripts using the deductive concept approach, coding the text that pertained to the emotional and the social dimensions of learning. This audit task pertained to the identification of those dimensions of a learning experience that are not always overtly indicated, especially in interview data, that is, the emotional and the social dimensions of learning. Therefore, the presence of these dimensions in the learning experience must often be extrapolated from the data. Because there must be such extrapolation, and because such extrapolation might vary between coders, these additional researchers were asked to provide their coding for these dimensions. In general, the results from the work of these additional researchers were consistent with my results, and the exercise provided a confirmation of the strategy and approach to the coding. However, one researcher's work did highlight one aspect of the learning experience that was not underscored by the initial concept coding, and that was the emotional reaction of surprise that one participant had to the experience he had undergone through the program. This notation was added to my notes, assessed during later reviews of the coding, and it was noted how this reaction was present with the broader experience of relationship-building that occurred between program participants and program staff.

An additional means of improving quality was the explicit statement of positionality. This statement, indicated earlier in this chapter, provided a discussion of the relationship between my positionality and possible biases. The exercise in reflexivity provided an opportunity to uncover and mitigate researcher biases, and served as the basis of similar and ongoing reflection.

Summary

In sum, the current literature on transformative learning points to Illeris' (2014) theoretical framework as a rich and promising one for understanding transformative learning

experiences, however, there is very little empirical work in the literature that applies this framework with the intention of exploring the phenomenon of transformative and contributing to the elaboration of the framework. The selection of a baking-based employment skills program that serves individuals who were entering the workforce and overcoming obstacles such as recent incarceration, homelessness, and joblessness was motivated by the understanding that such a program would bring into greater view and sharper relief the dimensions of learning as theorized by Illeris. By bringing these elements into clearer view as they related to the study participants, one can more readily understand the tenability of Illeris' framework and transformative learning. Finally, the research questions and their accompanying interview questions were designed to elicit data that revealed the dynamic interplay of the dimensions of learning, to explore the complex process of identity work, and to highlight the varied ways of being to which transformative learning may lead the learner. To this end, a basic qualitative research methodology with semi-structured interviews complemented by field observation for context was used to provide ample data to describe and elaborate transformative learning and the theoretical framework offered by Illeris (2014).

Chapter 4: Research Findings

Introduction

This chapter summarizes the research findings from the interview data as they related to the research questions. For reference, here are those questions again:

Question: What is the nature of the dimensions, processes, and the outcomes of transformative learning as a qualitative shift in identity for participants in a job skills employment program?

- a. Sub-question: What types of learning outcomes (progressive, regressive, restorative) are experienced by the learners?
- b. Sub-question: How does the process of identity transformation unfold for learners in a job skills training program?
- c. Sub-question: How do the learners experience the cognitive, the affective, and the environmental dimensions of transformative learning in a job skills training program?

For the design of this study and analysis of the data, this study adopted the theoretical framework offered by Illeris' (2007, 2014) general model of learning and the framework offered by Illeris' (2014) theory of transformative learning. These research findings showed that, from the perspective of Illeris' theory, there were a variety of outcomes, that is, there were progressive, regressive, and restorative transformative learning outcomes. In addition, the research findings showed that, in the process of transformation for these study participants, there were four prominent social-affective processes that led to the transformative learning outcomes. Finally, the research findings demonstrated the efficacy of Illeris' tripartite model of learning dimensions in analyzing and highlighting the psychological and the social dynamics that operate in the

identity work that accompanies transformative learning. That is, the data showed that Illeris' general model of learning, relying on a conceptual framework consisting of the cognitive, the affective, and the environmental learning dimensions, describes and explains well how certain psychological and social processes contribute to transformative learning and how the various kinds of transformative learning outcomes are possible. First, however, is an account of the approach that was taken in the coding of the interview data.

Data Analysis and Coding

Descriptive Coding

The initial coding was a descriptive coding process to highlight the prominent topics in the data. This inductive round of coding elicited 72 such subcodes that were in turn grouped into 12 codes. For example, there were topics that had the subcodes "Care," "Accepting Help," "Tough Love," and "Unconditional Acceptance," which were subsumed under the code "Compassionate Action." The other codes under which the initial subcodes were grouped included the following: "Barriers to Learning and Change," "Career Outcomes," "Change in Oneself," "Compassionate Actions," "Disengaged," "Interpersonal Relations," "Learning and Content," "Motivation to Learn and Change," "Outside Forces," "Personal Outcomes," "Strong Emotions," and "Support." Table 3 provides just a few examples of passages that are illustrative text only of these 12 codes to provide an indication of the kinds of data captured by these codes. These examples of illustrative text also begin to provide a sense of the challenges participants faced and the identity work in which the study participants engaged.

Table 3*Descriptive Codes and Illustrative Example Text*

Descriptive coding
Descriptive Code 1: Barriers to Learning and Change
Description: Obstacles, barriers, challenges to learning and to change
Emmanuelle: “My feelings or my emotions can sometimes get in the way of the potential of the things that I know I can do.”
Homer: “Because none of it, no doubt . . . I could be wrong . . . but I feel like a lot of us in the jail system didn't get that opportunity growing up or didn't have the opportunities come our way because of our records.”
Carl: “And every time I got up, I'm like I ain't going no more and then I would get there and, uh, I mess up a product or burn something or mix something wrong or, every time I do something wrong, I'm expecting them to fire me. You know, 'cause that's what I'm used to.”
Descriptive Code 2: Career Outcomes
Pertaining to obtaining a job and the support in job seeking.
Galen: “So that's the main thing I'm getting out of this is, getting not only employment, but something like that. I want to do and think I would like to do.”
Carl: “I can go anywhere, and get a baking job. I can go anywhere and get hired, just on my credentials. I well, I, I choose to be here. I, I see the big picture.”
Albert: “I feel like because of this bakery, I'm pretty equipped to work in pretty much any kitchen now. I'd say 'cause like I have my ServSafe which is really big and then I have management supervision and I'm a culinary student too so I would say most kitchens would be pretty happy to have someone like me on board.”
Descriptive Code 3: Change in Oneself
Description: Pertaining to changes in the learner, growth, and modification of one's behavior.
Blaise: “I flip-flopped, you know, before it was like, I want the credentials and I want to make more money. Now, it's like I'm all about the understanding of support, and that's what I wanted out of the program. So the dynamic shifted while I was taking it and like within a month of taking it, a month and a half, like [Ms. J.] saw the shift in everyone else.”
Freddie: “So, if I'm out in the community, everybody know that I'm in this program because I let everybody know I am in this program and you see me out there whooping and hollering and fighting, and doing all the things that I used to do in my past, [people will say,] ‘That program ain't helping.’”
Carl: “Before the program I was that guy with the pocket full of crap, now I carry a pocket full of brochures. I understand what's going on out there, and these guys did, it's not what they want to do. They do it because it's the easiest thing they can do. You know. they sell that garbage. Just a monkey could do that and they want to know man, how, how did you get out of this, man? You know? I pass out brochures and tell them stuff . . .”
Descriptive Code 4: Compassionate Actions
Description: Pertaining to acts and expressions of care toward participants, and acceptance of this compassion.
Freddie: “I don't look for the bad in a person. I look for the good in the person. Because that's how they treated me. They looked for the good in me. And not that he was, he was ex-drug dealer. He was ex-drug user. You know, they didn't. Even that that never count. That never comes up.”
Carl: “He persuaded me to sign up for it and the thing that I liked about [Mr. J.], that made me trust him, is that the guy cared. He cared. He, he really made me think that he cared that I didn't fall back into the same traps that I went into.”
Blaise: “I saw how much like, yes, ‘We care about your credentials, but we care, we care more about yourself and your well-being and what you're going through and what's stopping you from the employment.’ That's what like, really got to me, like, you know? Just made me, you know, change.”

Descriptive Code 5: Disengaged
Description: Pertaining to the feeling of being disengaged, or alone, or hopeless.
Homer: "The first time I was first time I took it, I did not take it seriously. I just took it because I know you got out of jail."
Freddie: "You know, I told you I had been, I had been away [to prison] and when you coming back, 'cause I was freshly coming home, you know I came home and April of 2017, and I wandered the street."
Darwin: "[L]ike I said I was real, real depressed as far as the homeless s---. Back then, I'm living in a f---ing tent, it's cold, I got a female, I got to provide for her, this s--- is too much, it's stress. I'm just gonna to shut down. I wasn't gonna hurt myself but I just wanted to shut down to the world and just I wanted that s--- to leave me alone. That s--- was getting bad and it was weighing on me."
Descriptive Code 6: Interpersonal Relations
Description: Pertaining to development of relationships with others or working through adverse relationships.
Darwin: "[Y]ou come find out that, hey, these people, these teachers, were friends, they were like actually cool, like we may go actually play some pool someday. That's the vibe you get. It's not like you have to be on guard--like I don't wanna get a bad grade etc. We friends, we feel comfortable, we can be yourself, we can kick back, or we good; it's you know maybe I don't wanna do the work, maybe I wanna learn so it's a friendly environment, right?"
Freddie: "You know, and if you get into with a person in the class or you have a disagreement with a person in the class, you gotta learn to work through those differences for the common for the common good of yourself."
Carl: "I changed the people I used to hang out with and I started hanging out with [program staff members] and, and the parent program guys, you know? And all of a sudden, I'm not the AODA student or nothing. I'm one of their colleagues and man, that blew my mind, man."
Descriptive Code 7: Learning and Content
Description: Pertaining to the kind of content that was learned in the program.
Darwin: "Well, in the beginning it was kind of rough for me because, you were you were taking a person who hadn't been to school since 1989, so by me not being in school since 1989, it was a, a little rough getting into it until I got to the point to where I could do it."
Homer: "That was the biggest thing I could take away from the bakery, was the life skills."
Albert: "[T]heir goal is definitely more of like a getting you skills to succeed later in life and I think that's definitely more, they're more, like, individual focus, especially since it's a lot smaller workplace. So, I would definitely say it's a lot more individual than just graduate and get a job."
Descriptive Code 8: Motivation to Learn and Change
Description: Pertains to desires to learn and changing motivations.
Emmanuelle: "But the second time I took it I really am interested in baking and cooking."
Darwin: "It made it where you wanted to come to class. Over there I wanted to go to school."
Homer: "And I was, like--and this is this is so dumb--I didn't even hear any of that. I just heard they also have food. I heard they had food and I was like sign me up. I want to get out of jail. I don't care about this. I was still in that mindset of get me out of jail. So, I did take the [...] program."
Descriptive Code 9: Outside Forces
Description: Pertains to the effect that positive and negative external influences have on participants.
Darwin: "Doing it consistently and being around the people who are so high-strung energy and are focused on making sure that you do good, it just gave me a new form, a new found motivation."
Darwin: "Like the fact that they have experience because they did it themselves; it's not like somebody teaching you something they wasn't taught themselves and they learned on the go."

Homer: “The jail doesn't care. Yeah, I don't feel like the jail . . . The jail, that's why like, that's why I wish there was like . . . See, I had never heard . . . This is how bad it was—there was all these signup sheets and people talking about all these things, but I never heard of the bakery until someone who had been in the bakery was just talking about the food. And that's where I first was able to hear about it, so I . . . it wasn't even like he wasn't trying to encourage me per se.”
Descriptive Code 10: Personal Outcomes
Description: Pertaining to outcomes of the experience that relate to personal well-being, mental health, safety.
Carl: “And shoot, that was it. I just never thought that baking would be something that I'd like to do. It turns out I eat, sleep, think baking.”
Blaise: “Now, it's like I'm all about the understanding of support, and that's what I wanted out of the program.”
Albert: “But I think [the program] gave me more of a direction to take my life and like steps to make a progress towards a goal at least, and what I do after that goal. I don't know yet, but I think I know what I'm doing now and that's what I'd like to continue doing.”
Descriptive Code 11: Strong Emotions Accompanying Learning
Description: Pertains to both positive and negative expressions of emotion.
Homer: “[T]his is where actually every moment of my life kind of just like—when I had the choice—every other opportunity I had the choice to kind of go by the right path, but once boarding school happened, I held a lot of resentment for everybody. I hated my family. I hated Christian, like, religion. I hated [it]. . . Yeah, so I hated religion. I hated my family. I felt like, everything I had learned my whole life was just like a lie.”
Blaise: “I still feel that, like, I haven't gotten over, like, I feel guilty for what I've done, but so, like, part of it was on my family. And as much as they try to reach out, I don't reach back up because, like, I am ashamed of who I am.”
Albert: “I think I was definitely a lot more ashamed of it [i.e., my criminal past] before, but it seems to be like a common thing of, you know. I mean, I was 18 and I made a mistake. You know, whatever.”
Descriptive Code 12: Support
Description: Pertains to the kind of support received from outside the program.
Galen: “I don't really deal with anyone other than my family. And they're all supportive. My brother lives in Taiwan. But I talked to him every weekend and he was able to visit over the summer. So he was. Helping me out and he was excited about me getting into this program.”
Carl: “My kids thought I was . . . I was that dude, ‘Look at my dad. He's gonna be making cakes.’ And you know, they, they were happy for me, you know.”
Albert: “But now that I've like come to live with it more and get more used to it, it's like . . . Yeah, I would say I don't have like any kind of resentment. I'm starting to feel support from my probation officer.”

Process Coding

The second analytic strategy was another inductive coding layer, process coding, and this approach elicited 43 subcodes which were, in turn, grouped into seven codes. For example, the following subcodes were used for passages in this cycle of coding were subsequently grouped under the code, “Acting in the World with Greater Self Assurance;” “Beginning to Advocate for Worker Well-Being;” “Developing Sense of Autonomy and Responsibility;” “Elevating

Motivation to Higher Goals;” “Gaining More Self-Confidence;” “Changing Understanding of the World and Action in it.” The other six codes under which related subcodes were grouped are the following: “Attaining New Knowledge;” “Being Confronted by Challenges;” “Building Compassionate Relationships with Mutual Respect;” “Not Acting in Anticipated Ways;” “Receiving Wide-Ranging Support;” and “Reconciling with Past Self.” Again, Table 4 provides just a few examples as illustrative text only of these seven codes.

Table 4

Process Codes and Illustrative Example Text

<p>Process Code 1: Acting in the World with Greater Self Assurance</p> <p>Albert: “When I started, I wasn’t too sure like the first week or two, but as I kept going, I realized this was something that like I wanted to do for myself and, you know, I felt, it was pretty doable, especially once I got like through the first two books, and I realized I was still doing really well and I just had to keep it going. I definitely had confidence to finish then.”</p> <p>Carl: “[A]t first I didn’t have a job but [Mr. J.] got me a job from—right there in the old [parent program] building within is a daycare center and he got me a job of cleaning up the place and so that kind of gave me, it gave me my manhood back.”</p> <p>Emmanuelle: “After I took the class my eyes just opened up in my mind broadened to things that I know that I can do.”</p>
<p>Process Code 2: Attaining New Knowledge</p> <p>Freddie: “Well, this is what attracted me getting—being legal to get this certificate. To get, you know, at first, they usually give you a Baker’s Association ticket. I mean certificate and then you would get your ServSafe certificate. I had ulterior motives for my own, for my ServSafe, because I own food truck and with a food truck, so I want it to be legit in all aspects.”</p> <p>Freddie: “Well, it taught me communication skills. It taught me employability far as doing a mock interview, far as getting a resume done, and it taught me the people skills because everybody is not . . . It taught me people skills everybody is not gonna like you, you know, and if you get into with a person in the class or you have a disagreement with a person in the class, you gotta learn to work through those differences for the common, for the common good of yourself.”</p> <p>Homer: “But this is what gets to the why I really like this program right, why I am, all of this. While I was taking it, I really started to see the changes in my life taking effect. How like I really was mending relationships that for years I had been breaking. I was really getting like a lot of my, like, my life skills back. That was the biggest thing I could take away from the bakery, was the life skills.”</p>
<p>Process Code 3: Being Confronted by Challenges</p> <p>Albert: “I feel like sometimes the classwork was difficult in the fact that it was like. Just really time consuming ’cause like I would go there from 9 to 3 and then I’d go home and I’d have like 2 hours of work to do. At home, before the next day, OK? And that can definitely be challenging when I’m like I want to do other stuff. And if I’m there five days a week too. It’s so long.”</p> <p>Blaise: “There’s a lot of barriers besides, you know, aside from the background that, you know, affect me from getting a job.”</p>

Carl: "Yeah. It's hard for me to talk to people, and so that's how I know I had to do it, because if I, if I had passed this [interview] up, so I probably would've passed up the next one and the next one, so. Knowing . . . I know if it's something that's hard for me just to, just to get it over with. That's what I that's what I gotta do."

Process Code 4: Building Compassionate Relationships with Mutual Respect

Darwin: "The people are just cool, and they don't talk to you like worker-client, or caseworker to client, they talk to you as we're both two human beings."

Emmanuelle: "Because they started helping me in actually doing what they said they were going to do [that I started to trust the program staff].

Homer: "I could talk about the things I was going through, things I had done and not feel like I was being judged, or like being even not being judged or even like they gave, like they didn't care at all, like they cared in a positive manner that makes sense. Like, even if I was like, yeah, I did this. I can't believe I robbed this person. Maybe like, 'Why Did you?' Like, like, you know. It just feels like you could literally say all those things without being . . . feeling like uh, judged . . ."

Process Code 5: Not Acting in Anticipated Ways

Darwin: "I'm actually not working. I don't want to do anything food-related, or actually work with the food."

Galen: "You know what kinds of things are expected of you as a, you know, a good employee. So I didn't feel like I learned anything that way, you know, as far as like, job skills and retaining a job and dealing with people. I didn't really need any experience with that 'cause I've already done that. I mean, it's just a kind of natural thing anyways, you know?"

Homer: "[P]eople always are like, 'Oh you work at a bakery? How's that?' I'm like, 'I have no idea.' I've never set foot in the bakery because I'm not good in the bakery. That's not my, that's not my skill set. If they put me in the bakery, they wouldn't be helping me because that's not where my skill set is, so I think that's what the bakery does a really good job at it. Since you find the skill set, you find the accountability, and you figure out where that can go well, instead of just being like, 'OK, well now you got the skills. Go ahead, go get a job. Oh, you live on the West side, cool, we'll get you a job on the east side but you gotta figure out daycare and the bus.'"

Process Code 6: Receiving Wide-Ranging Support

Blaise: "Well, that's a very big reason why I took it because I didn't have anyone when I got out, I didn't have any clothes, no housing, no nothing. So, they even helped me, well United Way, but the resources they know they were able to help me with getting \$1000 for my first apartment. So the support was very crucial to me."

Darwin: "They made where it was easily accessible for you to understand it. As far as them, the people who were giving you the lessons, have been through the program as well, so they from experience, 'Ok, I know that when I went through the program that I kind of didn't understand this way, so with that experience I can switch it where I know that this might help you because it helped me when I didn't understand it.'"

Freddie: "When people, when you messing with broken people anyway, you know, this is [the program]. Homeless people with mental health issues, substance abuse issues, people who have felonies on their record. People who just don't get it, don't fit in the world; [the program] caters to them."

Process Code 7: Reconciling with Past Self

Albert: "I think I was definitely a lot more ashamed of [my past] before, but it seems to be like a common thing of, you know. I mean, I was 18 and I made a mistake. You know whatever."

Carl: "I still got my street cred even though I'm old dude and I'm not there no more and so I'm, I'm kind of, I'm kind of glad that it's that way because I can show people that you just don't have to be there."

Homer: "I guess like that's where I think the [program] really helps. It helps you not put the blame on other stuff, but take accountability for yourself and take accountability for the blame, that like yes, you did all these things. But that's not who you are. Look at the life circumstances you were going through. Look at where you were at in that moment."

Concept Coding

The third coding process, concept coding, was a deductive process meaning that the codes were based on the conceptual framework provided by Illeris’ general learning model (Illeris, 2007) and his theory of transformative learning (Illeris, 2014). There were eleven codes based on this framework and they are listed in Table 5 with just a few excerpts from the interviews as illustrative sample text only for each code.

Table 5

Concept Codes and Illustrative Example Text

<p>Concept Code 1: Emotional Dimension</p> <p>Emmanuelle: “When I was in the bakery I loved to be in the bakery and make cookies and cheesecake I was really energized by that.”</p> <p>Freddie: “I was always curious about baking because I loved see how cookies–you know–transformed from a little ball dot and bloop bloop bloop – blew all up and stuff.”</p> <p>Homer: “Until I actually sat down and was like what have I done all my life? Oh, I've been in fight or flight since I was practically 13 years old.”</p>
<p>Concept Code 2: Cognitive Dimension</p> <p>Albert: “[They taught] works skills like the classics, like resume building and you know things like that. Those are definitely something they hit a lot. They also hit some more interesting things like how generational gaps affect the workplace and how to work with people with different generations and different personality types and things like that.”</p> <p>Emmanuelle: “Nutrition was one of the most hardest things to learn. Even for the teacher and it was challenging and it almost made me quit.”</p> <p>Freddie: “Well, it taught me communication skills. It taught me employability far as doing a mock interview far as getting a resume done and it taught me. The people skills because everybody is not. It taught me people skills everybody is not gonna like you.”</p>
<p>Concept Code 3: Environmental Dimension</p> <p>Carl: “[B]ut the people here are just amazing. They care about you. You know they really care, you know. And, and they came to my wedding, you know these, these people are my friends, you know. There's not just one or my coworkers, they, they actually my friends.”</p> <p>Blaise: “But it definitely changed me knowing that there is support out there. Where we have, you know, a government where everyone hates everything you do. So it just seems like a whole bunch of hate in the world. And that's how I grew up. To learn where now like it's, yes, it's out there, but the more it's talked about, the more it can change. If no one is talking about it, the more it's gonna be how it is.”</p> <p>Darwin: “lot of people working there became good friends. So when you seen him, it's like, "there’s my homey," not just a teacher. That made you want to come class to do the s--- because it’s a good environment, it’s good energy, it made it easy.”</p>
<p>Concept Code 4: Acquisition (Dynamic between Cognitive and Emotional)</p> <p>Albert: “I guess I had like some natural talent for baking, so everything kind of clicked pretty easily and just really enjoyed doing it.”</p>

Carl: "You know he would use me for, for the show and tell stuff so I'm not sure how he treated everybody else, but he taught me very well and I'm grateful for him for, for giving me to a place where I'm able to look at recipes and I can figure it out."

Emmanuelle: "My feelings or my emotions can sometimes get in the way of the potential of the things that I know I can do. And so, to be able to be told, and to be able to show it, and people see it, and tell me that I can do better, you know? That's cool."

Concept Code 5: Interaction Dynamic (Dynamic between Environment and the Individual Learner)

Darwin: "It differs from the fact that even though it wasn't like it's going to be different because you go to a job like I say they have a set paced plan—you gotta know this by this time. So, it puts that pressure on you it gives you that time to figure out how and what works for you it just get allowed some time if you didn't get in a lot of time then sucks for you. You gotta do better. they give you a time to acclimate. The way they did it they just took time out where other than like they don't care if you're acclimated enough, acclimated enough if you don't get this done then we're done with you we'll get somebody else. This wasn't like that that, you didn't feel that weight on your shoulder. They didn't make you feel that way they make you feel like just right don't worry about it it'll help you figure out to do it the proper way as long as you're helping everybody. Everybody is helping everybody."

Freddie: "Because that's how they treated me. They looked for the good in me. And not that he was, he was ex-drug dealer. He was ex-drug user. You know, they didn't. Even that that never count. That never comes up. Throughout the program, it never comes up, so it's like it's like it gives you a sense of cleansing when you go through, you know what I'm saying because you're coming out with this skill and you, you be eager. You be eager to hurry up and go get hired, hurry up and go show your skills and even for me, for a person who had been doing it for a long time I was, I was ready to get out there and show people."

Concept Code 6: Identity Change

Blaise: "Just made me, you know, change. And it was just the little things I did in the day, like opening up and talking to people. Asking people questions at a grocery store. I wouldn't ask an employee where something was and just get p---ed off and then eventually find it an hour later. But, it's just the little things that I started, like, suddenly noticing that, like, slowly changing, yeah. And that's where, like, the dynamic shift is like, yeah, I still want to get more money and everything, but like, I'm starting to learn how to talk to people, you know, especially being incarcerated too. You don't talk to people, so not only did I have like, the mental health issue of anxiety and being antisocial, institutionalized, too. That did it to me, but I've always been like that my whole life. That just didn't help. So getting out it helped me get reintroduced to society and, you know, yeah, it's scary not having anything but like, the more you talk, the more you know."

Carl: "Well I'm gonna put it like this. Before the program I was that guy with the pocket full of crap, now I carry a pocket full of brochures. I understand what's going on out there, and these guys did—it's not what they want to do. They do it because it's the easiest thing they can do. You know. they sell that garbage. Just a monkey could do that, and they want to know man, how, how did you get out of this, man? You know? I pass out brochures and tell them stuff – [Freddie] was one of them. I felt like I did enough damage to my community. I've damaged my kids, my wife. Everybody who cares about me, I was just full of s---. I don't need that life no more. I don't. I don't have to live like that."

Freddie: "My outlook on people have changed dramatically since you know, dealing with [the parent program] and [the program] program because, like if a bum was on the street, I would step over him, or step around, move around him. Now before I step over him, I'm going to engage in conversation: 'How you doing?' I was like, 'Man what? Where you live at?' And I'd engage in conversation. 'Do you know there's resources here, here and here? You know you can go take a shower here every day.' You know, I'm saying they even, I was like, 'Man, do you need socks, [inaudible], and things of that nature.' I would go in my pocket. I'd be like, 'I'll be back. What size you wear?' And things of that nature. I wouldn't have done that five years ago."

Concept Code 7: Part-Identity Change

Darwin: "I'm not that much different except that doing the program and doing it consistently and being around the people who are so high-strung energy and are focused on making sure that you do good, it just gave me a new form, a new found motivation. Like, 'You know what? I'm gonna do something with myself.'"

Homer: "I passed three of the five tests at the time, got out, and then six months later, I had found out that they were hiring for an assistant position, so I ran. I rushed over here and was, like, 'I would love to work for this organization—like you guys changed my life.'"
Concept Code 8: No Identity Change
Galen: "I think it's the opposite with me. Yeah, I think this is this is who I am. This fits me. This course and the skills and all that. This is something that actually matches me. I don't have to change myself to match it."
Galen: "I already knew I was good at academics. That's OK. Oh yeah. I already knew that, you know. I already knew I was good at academics. Yeah, I already knew that I knew how to you know, present myself in public. And act, you know, responsibly you know. Like an employee."
Concept Code 9: Regressive Transformation
Darwin: "They're trying to help you find work and what not, but I just have so much going on with child support so if I still do start working then I have to pay that and pay that, at this point, if I do get a job, I am working for everybody else and I'm not able to come out above. I'm just going to be at a stalemate."
Darwin: "I'm actually not working. I don't want to do anything food-related, or actually work with the food."
Concept Code 10: Restorative Transformation
Homer: "I called the coordinator, and I was like—before Ms. J. it was Ms. C—I'm like, 'Ms. C, like I really need to take this program. I really like what you guys are doing and I think this is something for me.' And she's like silent for a second and she just goes. 'I mean, you can take the program again, but you're going to have to start over.' And I was like, all right, I'm doing it. I'm doing it seriously. I'm taking it over and so I took it over a second time."
Homer: "But once I was given that chance, I took it full send and I think that's I think that's why I was willing to take it a second time. Because she gave me an opportunity. I didn't do anything for her and she was like, 'Yeah, you can take it. Just take it again.'"

The Program Context, Facility, and Environment

As was indicated previously, I had several opportunities to observe the operation of the program in order to gain a better understanding of the context of the participant experiences. The program was housed in a facility located in a part of town where a light industrial area bordered a general retail area. The facility was approximately two miles from the downtown section of the city. The program shared a building with another private non-profit organization that was also involved with production of food products whose sale helped fund social services for formerly incarcerated and homeless individuals. The program spaces included a small office, a classroom space, and bakery production areas. The location of the baking program was several miles away from the administrative offices of the program's parent organization.

At the time of the site observations, there were nine program staff members. The primary program coordinator, a Caucasian female, was in her early 30s and she had been in the role for

about one year when the interviews took place. She had recently been promoted after serving as a program assistant for three years. The kitchen program coordinator, a Caucasian male in his late 20s, was study participant Blaise. Four of the program staff were female, five were male. One female staff member was Latinx, the other were Caucasian. Three male program staff were African American, and the other two were Caucasian.

While attending an informational session for prospective participants for the baking-based employment program, four prospective students attended, three women and one man. One woman was African American and the other prospective students were Caucasian. One prospective student attended via videoconference and she was accompanied by a social worker.

While observing a classroom experience, there were 5 participants, all of whom were male. One participant was African American and the others were Caucasian. The classroom experience was a lecture and discussion on kitchen management principles. The participants worked in a textbook that was designed by program staff. The laboratory experience took place in the kitchen where program participants applied what they have learned in the baking of products many of which were to be sold in order to help fund the program. During the lecture period, most of the students appeared to be attentive and engaged, but only one student responded voluntarily to questions posed by the instructor. One student appeared to be uninterested in the class. I sat in the lecture session for about two hours and both the program staff and the students were friendly and welcoming.

The number of participants in the class during this observation was notably higher than the number in the cohorts that the study participants had experienced. Study participants who graduated after the COVID-19 pandemic—Albert, Darwin, Emmanuelle, and Galen—indicated that their cohort consisted of one, two, or only a few participants. The program coordinator had

noted that the pandemic had affected enrollment numbers because the nearby prison had curtailed their work release program which allowed inmates to go class. Also, other prospective students were simply reluctant to return to a classroom environment. Notably, although there were predominantly women who attended the informational session on the program, the majority of participants in the program during the observations were men.

Progressive, Regressive, and Restorative Learning Outcomes

With the eight study participants, there were a variety of transformative learning outcome types when viewed from the perspective of Illeris' (2014) framework. Again, Illeris argues that a transformative learning experience is that which "implies change in the identity of the learner" (p. 40). With seven of the eight study participant—Albert, Blaise, Carl, Darwin, Emmanuelle, Freddie, and Homer—there was evidence of some substantive identity change and, therefore, evidence of transformative learning of some sort. These changes in participant identity were especially highlighted when the participant experiences were also viewed from the perspective of Illeris' (2007, 2014) general model of learning. Again, according to this model of learning, all learning experiences involved three dimensions: content, also referred to as the cognitive; incentive, also referred to as the affective; and interaction, referred to also as the environment. Further, since according to Illeris (2007), "identity development can be understood as the individually specific essence of total learning" (p. 138), then it follows that, from this perspective, the constituent dimensions of identity are also the cognitive, the affective, and the social. So, from this model, the identity is, in large part, a complex congeries of (1) the cognitive, (2) dynamic affective constituents such as the emotions and the desires, and (3) the constant effect and interaction of the social environment on the cognitive and the affective. Therefore, the kind of learning outcome experienced by the study participants as identity change can, in part, be

understood, as Illeris (2014) explains, in terms of changes in functionality (i.e., that which reflects the content or cognitive dimension), in sensitivity (i.e., that which reflects the emotional or affective dimension), and sociality (i.e., that which reflects the environmental dimension).

The progressive transformative learning experience (Illeris, 2014) is one in which the learner undergoes substantial identity change vis-à-vis the cognitive, affective, and environmental dimensions, and, for example, one in which the learner takes on a new role, a new way of being. The complexity of Illeris' model of learning, however, is such that there is conceptual room in the model to allow for the possibility that a learner who undergoes some identity change may still reject additional identity transformation which may have been encouraged by the learning experience and its facilitators. A learner may also experience significant identity transformation through their learning up to a point, but still eschew further identity transformation, that is, eschew additional change that may lead to a new way of being. If the learner, for some reason, was unable to either endure—“cope with”—additional change or persist in the anticipated identity change and retreated to “a safe position” then the learner's experience would be one of regressive transformation (p. 94). When, however, a learner experienced such eschewing of additional identity change, but then found an alternate path for continuing the changes in one's identity—changes that led to a new way of being—then the learner experienced restorative transformation, according to Illeris.

Of the eight study participants, four participants—Albert, Blaise, Carl, Freddie—had learning experiences that could be characterized as progressive transformative learning in that they led to a qualitative shift in identity; Darwin had an experience that could be viewed as regressive transformation in that his experience entailed some identity work but then his learning was stymied and did not result in the intended qualitative shift in identity; and Emmanuelle and

Homer had experiences that could be characterized as restorative, that is, learning experiences that were stymied temporarily but then some alternate learning path ultimately led to a qualitative shift in identity. The eighth participant, Galen, had a learning experience that could be characterized as non-transformative in that his experience did not involve a qualitative shift in identity.

Progressive Transformative Learning: Albert, Freddie, Carl, Blaise

Albert. One study participant who appeared to have had a progressive transformative learning experience is Albert. As indicated previously, Albert was a 21-year-old Caucasian male who finished the program in 2022. He had recently been incarcerated and was under court supervision when he was interviewed. Because of his justice involvement, he found himself at a significant disadvantage when seeking employment; his criminal record disqualified him from many forms of employment, and if he was not formally disqualified, then the stigma of his record appeared to have led potential employers to reject his job applications. These experiences led him to feel increasingly ashamed of his past and he felt increasingly pessimistic that he had any meaningful job options. Further, his arrest, conviction, and subsequent incarceration, albeit brief, led him to believe that he was a pariah to society and likely unemployable in the view of most people. So, because of his criminal record, he became isolated; he stated, “[E]specially coming straight off the pandemic and, like, being arrested and all my friends were kind of not wanting to deal with that either, so I don’t really have anyone.”

Through the program, however, Albert discovered that he can indeed find direction in life, establish goals, and be comfortable with his place in the world. First, he was successful in finishing the program and acquiring baking skills. But through the program and its peer mentoring sessions, he came to change the way he understood himself. He learned that many

others, like him, made mistakes and made their employment prospects more challenging, and so he learned that he was not alone. He came to understand that he was not unique nor a pariah because of his criminal past. When Albert commented on how he had changed through his participation in the program, he alluded to the peer support component of the program and described how his interactions there helped him feel less shame and less incapacitated. He said,

I would say [that] hearing other people's experiences and comparing them to my own, and just, like, the general experience being able to, I guess, relate, and like be more comfortable with my own experience too, has given me, like, a different perception on, just, like, other people, I guess. 'Cause like—trying to think how to say this—I think I'm more, like, empathetic, 'cause like I've been through a lot, and I've seen a lot of other people who've been through a lot. And it just made, like I guess, a better understanding on people and myself.

When further asked if he has changed his perspective on his past, he said, "I think so. I think I was definitely a lot more ashamed of it before, but it seems to be like a common thing of, you know. I mean, I was 18 and I made a mistake." Again, referring to his peer support experience, he said, "So I think it made me realize it's more like normal than I thought I was, you know?"

Overcoming the profound shame that he felt about himself made him more open to the possibility that he could be employable and part of the workforce. He remarked, "[The program gave me] direction in my life now, gave me like different insights on myself and in people around me." Albert further remarked,

I think [the program] gave me more of a direction to take my life [in], and like steps to make a progress towards a goal at least, and what I do after that goal. I don't know yet, but I think I know what I'm doing now and that's what I'd like to continue doing.

Indeed, after completing the program, Albert continued his culinary training at the nearby two-year college. So, Albert not only acquired new baking skills, but he came to believe that he was capable of pursuing and succeeding in some sort of career path. Moreover, his shame was replaced by hopefulness, and rather than viewing himself as a pariah. He said that the program had “definitely given me more comfortable being who I am.” He further committed himself to additional learning outside of the baking-based employment program. So, the person he had become subsequent to the program was determined by the functionality, sensitivity, and sociality changes that he experienced. These changes were substantive changes in his identity that led to a new way of being and acting in the world, and so his experience was one of progressive transformative learning.

Freddie. Freddie was also a study participant who appeared to have had a progressive transformative learning experience. As indicated previously, Freddie was a 51-year-old African American male who finished the program in 2018. He had been under court supervision when he entered the program and had been incarcerated prior to that time. After the program he had been employed in various food industry locations and was eventually employed by the program’s parent organization, a private non-profit social services provider, as both a peer support specialist and as a kitchen production staff member.

Freddie grew up in a large urban center in a state neighboring the location of the baking-skills employment program. His family moved to the city in which the bakery program resides to get away from the criminal influences in his old community. However, in his new community, he still became involved with drug trafficking anyway and was soon afterwards imprisoned there. While in prison, he worked as a cook and developed basic culinary skills. Once he was out of prison, he pursued a business managing a food truck. However, that was not successful. He had

remarked that he lacked the kinds of social skills needed to engage in business or even the skills needed to work for and with others. He indicated that his impatience, quickness to anger, and his inability to appreciate the needs of those different from him got in the way of success in a work environment. He said that he “didn’t have those diplomatic skills at first,” that is, skills needed to get along with others.

Eventually, his friend from prison, referred to as Carl in this study, urged Freddie to enroll in the baking-based employment program. Freddie did finish the program successfully, but as was the case for Albert, the change that occurred in Freddie was not simply the acquisition of a new set of technical skills. Through the process of succeeding in the baking skills education, Freddie also changed how he understood his place in the world, he changed how he managed relationships with others, and he was able to change his emotional reactions to situations that he found challenging or contrary to what he desired. Freddie had indicated that, before his participation in the program, his emotions were volatile and he easily lost patience with those around him, especially those in the workplace. If a co-worker would appear slow to understand something, or if a supervisor would guide his work in ways with which he disagreed, then he would have lashed out at them to express his displeasure. Through the program, however, Freddie learned to present himself differently, to react in more constructive ways, and to be patient with others. In particular, he credits the coaching he received from one of the program coordinators for effecting much of this change in him. When asked if he believed that the bakery program made a difference in how he viewed himself, Freddie responded in a way that provided insight into the impact the program coordinator, who is referred to here as Ms. C., had on his learning:

Yeah, I do. I do, because had I not just basically had not been there, [in the program], I wouldn't have never became a recovery coach. I wouldn't never became a Certified Peer Specialist. [Ms. C.] kind of pushed me to do these things, you know, like, 'You know your story could help a lot of people, you know? So, I'm going to help you get to that next level because you have the voice, you know, how to talk and people listen to you. So, you got those type of skills and we gotta do is pump positivity into you and people going to follow you anywhere. They follow you; they follow you in the river, knowing that they might die, but they still might follow you.'

The efforts by Ms. C. and other staff members in the program taught Freddie to be the kind of voice Ms. C. envisioned, and he did acquire the "positivity" that was needed. Freddie further commented regarding this change in his character:

Everybody feels comfortable talking to me and I didn't have those diplomatic skills at first. [The program] taught me how to be diplomatic and how to deal with everything in this proper way. You know, I was already becoming the person who I was becoming. But the bakery, you know, kind of refined me, kind of gave me all the tools. Because of conflict resolution, I learned what triggers me and other people. You know what I'm saying? Because, you know, I know a lot of people in [the program] don't like a lot of questions. And we have a person there that asks a lot of questions, but then I had to tell him man, 'Everybody don't learn on your wavelength.' You know what I'm saying? Like, for me, you can show me one time and you gotta show me no more. But for other people, you might have to show them three and four times. And my supervisor that's at [the bakery] now, he learned that. He learned that through . . . with our conversation. I say . . . man, he know, he know I learned it from Ms. C. She taught me. Oh, she taught

me a lot. Well, because she was the one that really kind of dealt with me because . . . she would tell [Instructor Ms. J.], '[Something's wrong with Freddie].' Then she would like, go out to smoke. She would like, be like, 'Well, tell me what you mad about?' She's like, 'You ain't mad. Deal with the situation.' You know? She's like, 'You let it linger, letting it linger. It's not helping you. It hurts you.' You know I'm saying? 'He's like letting that s--- build up now. Get it out, get it in the open and deal with it.'

Here, Freddie described his experience with the program staff members, particularly Ms. C., during which he was coached and mentored by them to understand himself and his emotions better, to understand the perspectives of others better, and to react in more constructive ways to workplace challenges. Here he also described how program staff were able not only to coach Freddie in better ways to interact with those around him but also to serve as a role model for them and to share with others his newly honed skill at managing relationships. Indeed, Freddie not only became a leader in the kitchen for others, but he also assumed a second role with the baking-related employment program as a peer mentor. So, the learning experience created changes in how Freddie viewed himself and his role with others, as well as changes in how he managed his emotions, changes which led to a new leadership role for others. As Freddie expressed, the program "refined" him. Thus, his experience in the program led to an identity change, altering the way he understood himself, others, and his place in the world, leading him to feel and act in new and more flourishing ways.

Carl. Carl's experience, too, was one that could be construed to be progressive transformative learning. As indicated previously, Carl was a 59-year-old African American male who finished the program in 2015, and he was the person who had urged Freddie to participate in the program as well. Carl had learned about the program while in prison and, after being prodded

by his probation officer, entered the program soon after leaving prison. After graduating from the program, he worked in a variety of jobs, some of which were food services-related, and then he eventually returned to the program where he became employed as a kitchen production worker.

Carl grew up in a very large urban center in the state neighboring the baking-based employment program, and although he moved out of that state during his youth, he ended up back in his original community during his teen years. At that time, he became involved in drug use and drug trafficking. This involvement with illicit drugs continued after he relocated to the community in which the bakery program resides. Carl had a quiet and unassuming personality, and he seemed to have very much played the role of *follower* in groups of friends and associates. He appeared to have been susceptible to falling back into old habits, and he had expressed the concern that, after he got out of prison, he would easily resume his association with the same friends and acquaintances and get involved with similar criminal activity again. He further indicated that, when he was involved with illicit drug activity, he wrongly took pride in having that kind of role and he, therefore, further feared he would be drawn back to it. Underlying this activity, Carl appeared to have neither confidence in himself nor the belief that he could do something different and more meaningful with his life.

Once he entered the program, however, his understanding of the range of opportunities for him changed, and his understanding of how he can be and act in the world was altered. Carl came to understand that his old way of living, that is, a life of drugs and criminality, was foolish, and through the program, he came to realize that he had great potential, he had many career options, and that he could find pride in his new self. He successfully completed the program, forged new and close relationships with others who were associated with the program, and was

generally successful in finding employment. When Carl was asked how he had changed through the program, he responded,

No longer in the streets. I'm not a street dude. It was a time when you couldn't pay me to stay at home now. [Now], can't wait to be there. Home is my favorite place. I, I realize, I understand the things that could hurt me and keep me down and I know how to stay clear of. My family keep me grounded. I'm just, I'm just not my . . . I still got my street cred even though I'm an old dude and I'm not there no more and so I'm, I'm kind of, I'm kind of glad that it's that way because I can show people that you just don't have to be there. Yeah, I think, I think I've changed to a mentoring kind of, kind of way 'cause I just wanna, I just wanna help the next guy.

Rather than being fearful of slipping into his old criminal behaviors, after the program, Carl had a newfound confidence that he could live his life not only staying out of legal trouble, but also aiding others in doing the same. Further, in relation to his work and his ability to be employed, he remarked the following:

Before the program I was that guy with the pocket full of crap, now I carry a pocket full of brochures. I understand what's going on out there, and these guys did . . . It's not what they want to do. They do it because it's the easiest thing they can do. You know? They sell that garbage. Just a monkey could do that. And they want to know, 'Man, how, how did you get out of this, man?' You know? I pass out brochures and tell them stuff— [Freddie] was one of them. I felt like I did enough damage to my community. I've damaged my kids, my wife. Everybody who cares about me, I was just full of s---. I don't need that life no more. I don't. I don't have to live like that.

The “pocket full of brochures” that Carl refers to is the promotional literature for the baking-based employment program. Carl further commented on his employability as well: “I can go anywhere and get a baking job. I can go anywhere and get hired, just on my credentials.” Not only did Carl tout his baking skills and his self-confidence, but also the industry standard ServSafe credentials that he earned through the program. So, Carl’s identity had changed in a way consistent with Illeris’ (2014) understanding of progressive transformative learning. Again, the acquisition of baking skills for Carl was not merely an additive learning experience. Rather, the acquisition of baking skills in Carl’s case was also a process of changing his understanding regarding the possibilities there were for himself. It was also a process involving his emotional development, that is, a change from fearfulness and timidity to a courageousness that led him to become an advocate for the program and led him to engage others who may need the kind of help that was provided to him by the baking program. So, in many ways, Carl’s identity had undergone significant changes, affecting his understanding of himself and the world, changing his emotional reactions to the world, and altering how he acted in the world and with others.

Blaise. Finally, participant Blaise is also one whose learning experience in the program may be construed to be a progressive transformative learning experience. As indicated previously, Blaise was a 29-year-old Caucasian male who finished the program in 2019. He entered the program immediately after his multi-year incarceration, and then, after graduating, worked in the food industry. After a few years in the industry, he came back to the baking-based employment program where he was hired as an instructor. Blaise grew up in the outer metropolitan area of a large urban center, and at a young age, he became involved with drug trafficking. He originally had moved to the community in which the bakery program is established to grow his “drug empire,” as he had put it. This activity soon led to his

imprisonment. His experiences with both the justice system and with his family reinforced for him the negative view of himself that he was incapable of holding down a legitimate job. Further, he viewed himself as anti-social, hostile, and short tempered with all of those around him. At the same time, before his participation in the baking skills training program, he was unclear why he was so hostile to the world and unclear why he lacked confidence in his ability to pursue a meaningful and legitimate career. Amid this hopeless and confusing emotional and mental state, he viewed the world as primarily hate-filled and acted in the world in a commensurately distrustful manner when he started the program.

Blaise, however, indicated that through his participation in the program, he came to view the world in a vastly different way, and this change in worldview allowed him to reconceive his career options and to reconstruct his relationships with other people. Blaise reported that he acquired a range of new skills when he was asked what he had learned in the program. He replied,

[For] me, a lot entered like, not even just like the baking and everything, but like, personal skills, like, a lot of my core values have changed and what I care about. And how I would want to run a business, and I learned that while I was in class. And then, like, interpersonal skills like communication and socialization, 'cause I don't like talking to people and now, it's more, like, 'People' Like, 'Oh. It doesn't seem [bad].' I'm like, 'Yeah, no, I really would just rather not be talking right now.' So, but like I've learned how to be able to do that and not make it affect people compared to before. . . . So just learning stuff like that and how to handle situations, how to handle triggers, how to handle, you know, when you need to be reaching out for support or where to reach out for support, uh, in a positive manner. So, like it's not just about the program and again, it's

that support system, if they didn't have the support, part of it, if it was, 'Just take the program, pass these tests, do the kitchen and leave.' But having all of those community connections in one place is very solid for people growth and why I grew so much as a student.

In this complex response, Blaise revealed much about how his identity had changed through the program. First, Blaise had successfully finished the program and had gone on to be successfully employed as a baker. So, he acquired the technical baking skills. However, as he indicated, he learned more than this. Like the experience that Freddie had, Blaise learned to manage his anger and his frequent hostility toward others. In fact, as Blaise indicated, he learned to engage others in more familiar and intimate ways, even if only slightly more so. For example, he became more willing to engage others in conversation. Further, he was more willing to ask others for help which was a significant change from how his interactions were before when they were guided by distrust and anger. Perhaps most significantly, he developed a new compassion for other people, and this is indicated by his somewhat nebulous statement that he learned how he "would want to run a business." What Blaise had meant by this was revealed later in the interview, when, in subsequent remarks, Blaise commented on how the workplace experience should ideally be constructed for employees. He remarked that, at the baking facility, the staff members often praised the students for their work. He, himself, had received such encouragement. Blaise went on, however, to indicate that most employers are insensitive to the real emotional and mental health needs of employees. Blaise, who had eventually become an instructor in the baking program, remarked further about how workplaces are conducted and how he would react if a prospective employer called him for a reference check for one of his students:

And the more I hear, you know, like praises and things like that, [that is, the praise given at the baking program] the same in [other] workplaces, like, you don't hear that. 'You know, the manager said, Well, you're here to get paid, right?' You know, but they don't do the good job, you know? That looks nice. This, that and the other, anymore. So, like, even working here [in the baking program], like, I even grew even more to be . . . you know. . . . If someone puts me down to, for reference and everything, I'm asking the boss calling me, like, 'Well, what do you know about mental health and things like that?' Because, like, we're a training employment program and, like, 'I got some things to tell you [prospective employer],' like, you know, and some people aren't aware and some managers, you know, they're like, 'Oh no, we have a couple employees that, you know, such and such.' Yeah, just as a person, it's just, it's changed the way I view a lot of things, you know.

In Blaise's remarks, he was indicating that he had grown to be concerned with the emotional well-being of his students and that all other employers should have the same interest and compassion for their employees. Blaise was also indicating that his vision for a business would be one in which the employer is compassionate toward its employees and sensitive to their emotional and mental health needs.

Further, when he asked how the program may have changed him in general, Blaise took the question to mean, how has he changed in relation to his emotions and his understanding of mental health. He remarked,

I'm still a smart a--, but like back then, I was more like an aggressor, where like it would come off more of being an a-----. Like where now, like, I've turned it into, like, smart a-- comments. But, like, other than that, like, I've just become more civilized. . . . But it

definitely changed me knowing that there is support out there. Where we have, you know, a government where everyone hates everything you do. So, it just seems like a whole bunch of hate in the world. And that's how I grew up. To learn where, now, like it's, yes, it's out there, but the more it's talked about, the more it can change. If no one is talking about it, the more it's gonna be how it is.

These comments and the prior comments indicated that, for Blaise, the experience in the baking-based employment program was one that clearly changed who he was and thus made changes in his identity. In his progress toward acquiring baking skills, Blaise also came to view himself and the world in a very different way. He came to understand that there can be hope in what appears to be a hateful world. He came to understand that there are others in the world that are willing to care for him and others who may be in need. Further, his feelings toward the world and toward himself had changed. His comportment toward the world was no longer fundamentally hostile and untrusting, but rather, it became compassionate and concerned. Finally, he engaged the world and those around him in a sensitive and caring manner, and he had found a place in the world first as a baking professional, and then as an instructor. This identity change, then, is an example of a progressive transformative learning experience.

Regressive Transformative Learning: Darwin

One study participant, Darwin, however, who appeared to experience similar changes in facets of his identity found himself unwilling to make the kinds of changes that were made in the identities for the previously discussed participants. That is, although Darwin had changed the way he viewed the possibilities for his own life, and although he had experienced changes in his emotional response to the world and experienced a degree of identity transformation through his learning experience, he nonetheless did not continue in the kind of fuller identity change that

others had experienced. He did not change the way he engaged the world around him; he did not pursue a course that would lead to employment, and he eschewed work in baking. Further, he eschewed any employment whatsoever. So, viewed from the perspective of Illeris' (2014) theory of transformative learning, Darwin's experience is a regressive transformative learning experience.

As indicated previously, Darwin was a 35-year-old African American male who finished the program in 2021. He had some involvement with the justice system and had been homeless prior to starting the program. Darwin had originally started the program early in 2021 but dropped out because he had gotten into an altercation with a housemate and found himself homeless again. He then restarted the program later that year. He was unemployed at the time of the interview but had devoted his time to writing songs. Prior to the program, and when he was homeless, Darwin reported that he was in state of despair, depressed about his condition, and unable to find the motivation to pursue the interests he had when he was younger, such as music, and similarly hopeless regarding prospects of employment. He indicated that he was generally distrustful of those who worked in social services agencies, and he was skeptical of their motivations and of their ability to understand his needs and be effective in helping him. He described his experience with other social services workers in this way:

[T]hey don't actually look at you as a human. They look at you as. 'Hey, it's my job to tell you what you're supposed to be doing instead of listening to what you have to say.

It's what I say, so I can help you. I'm going to tell you what to do because I'm in charge.'

No. That s--- don't work with most people.

So, Darwin's view of those who wanted to help him had been jaded. Further, Darwin's motivation to improve his situation or to simply do better in tasks before him was lacking.

Describing his apathy, he said, “Whereas if I f--- off [then my response is], ‘Huh, I'm used to it,’ type s---.” He later added that his response to these social workers would be, “I don’t give a f--- about what you say.” So, Darwin was accustomed to failing and, further, not caring if those around him had advice for him, or wanted him to do better, or even wanted to help him to do better.

Through the program, however, as Darwin became engaged in the classroom experience, he began to change the way he understood himself and to change his feelings towards others. Further, his motivation seemed to change as well. So, that is, significant parts of his identity, as Illeris (2014) describes identity, had begun to transform. He began to view his world with optimism. He commented,

[T]hat one thing that the program did for me is that it helped me to keep myself motivated and pushing forth and doing something that I knew will be able to benefit me and keeping me focused on something good. That’s what was good for me. I can’t speak for anyone else, but for me that was good. Something put a fire under my a-- and keep me moving forward. When you’re homeless, it’s easy to get, ‘F--- everything. I’m done. Nothing’s f---ing working.’ ’Cause you’re already [inaudible]. But it’s easy if I know, f---ing, to have the motivation to get you up, keep up, and doing being better for yourself.

He further commented about the time when he first started the program:

At that time, I wasn’t writing music, I wasn’t doing nothing, and ever since then, I’ve been, ‘Ok. Let’s get this. I got this. I’m going to do this.’ All my creativity just started falling back into me, all this good energy. ‘Ok I needed this.’ I had this fire lit under my a--.

Darwin clearly credits his learning experience in the program for the change in his comportment toward the world, toward his projects, and toward his opportunities. He remarked further,

I've always been creative. It's just, when it gets to the situation I was in, being homeless and having to think about and deal with other stuff, I had no time to focus on that. So, it was like I was losing touch with the one thing that made me calm, happy, expressive. So, this program put the fire under my a-- and all these new thoughts start running in and like, 'Look, I got this s---.' That's how a feel. And I applaud them for that. I applaud them all the time.

These changes in his perspective and his feelings about himself and the world around him, however, were not accompanied by the expected changes in how he interacted with the world. Even though the program provided him with new employment skills, and he had a newfound enthusiasm for exploring his creative side, Darwin nonetheless rejected the idea of obtaining gainful employment. First, although he successfully completed the program, he did not view himself as a baker nor did he want to do food service work. When he was asked about his current employment, he said,

I'm actually not working. I don't want to do anything food-related, or actually work with the food. I want to do something managerial, because I worked food for so long, where I don't wanna be the person in back there flipping burgers and making fries. Put me in charge or something.

He further explained that his motivation to finish the program was not to get employment but rather to simply have that accomplishment. He said,

With me completing the class, I wanted to complete it because I did it before [without finishing] and that happened and I made a promise to myself hey, 'I like this program, I

like what they're doing,' and I, and I get more out of this, so I came back and completed it. That was the main reason I did, too, because it was more of self-motivation of myself.

Stick to what you say and you're gonna do.

Further, however, he indicated that he did not want to pursue any employment at all. To justify his eschewing any employment, he offered a seemingly specious argument that claimed it was not in his best interest to earn money since much of his earnings would have to go toward debts that he owed, debts such as child support. He said,

But, they [the program staff] are trying to help you find work and what not, but I just have so much going on with child support, so if I still do start working then I have to pay that and pay that, at this point, if I do get a job, I am working for everybody else and I'm not able to come out above. I'm just going to be at a stalemate. Something has to change in order for me to move forward. That's kind of my dilemma right now.

Darwin appeared to be arguing that gainful employment would not be in his best interest since at least some of his earnings would have to be used to meet his financial obligations to others.

Therefore, Darwin appeared to have concluded that it is best for him not to work at all. Viewed from the perspective of Illeris' (2014) framework, Darwin appeared to have experienced significant change in who he was and how he understood the world—that is, he experienced change in his identity vis-à-vis its cognitive and affective components—however, Darwin appeared to be unable or unwilling to continue in identity transformation, especially regarding how he interacted with the environment around him and how he acted in the world. The thoughts, beliefs, and feelings he had about himself and the world had changed, however, there was not an accompanying change in how he acted in the world. More specifically, there was no movement by Darwin toward obtaining employment. Illeris (2014) describes this kind of

aversion to progressing in identity change as resistance, an overt and conscious rejection of either identity change or what may be a next stage in identity change (p. 109). For Illeris, there are two primary mechanisms that may be employed by a learner when a learning experience involving identity change becomes unwanted by the learner. They are *identity defence* and *resistance*. Identity defence manifests itself in a way that is not overt, but rather subconsciously and appears to be the result of the inertia of one having become accustomed to and comfortable with one's identity. Illeris likens the use of this inertia to the concept Mälkki (2010) refers to when using the phrase "comfort zone." For Illeris, though, the learner may not be aware of this aversion nor readily able to articulate their rejection of the potential change in identity. Resistance, however, manifests itself when change is readily apparent to the learner and the learner overtly challenges the change. Illeris writes that "resistance to transformative learning is rooted in conditions that are conscious . . . [and] the possible transformation goes in a direction that is different from what the person wants, means, thinks, and finds right and important" (p. 109). Such resistance, when arising in a learning experience as advanced as that experienced by Darwin, results in a regressive transformative learning experience, just as Illeris cautions; he writes that "the results of intended transformative processes will not in all cases be a change for the better or an advancement. Regressive transformations will in principle always be a possibility" (p. 95). Thus it was for Darwin. Indeed, his learning experience in the program resulted in changes in how he viewed the world and others and he did change how he understood the prospects for his future. But he resisted further identity change. He eschewed further identity work that would have changed in a way that would have been commensurate with the other changes in his identity and in a way that would have been commensurate with the goals of the learning program.

Restorative Transformative Learning: Emmanuelle and Homer

The learning experiences of two study participants, Emmanuelle and Homer, resulted in what Illeris (2014) refers to as a restorative transformative experience in that their learning, involving identity work, progressed, but then was stopped for some reason, and then ultimately continued and resulted in a qualitative shift in identity. That is, their stymied transformative learning experience was restored and resulted in an outcome involving a significant change in identity. So, their experiences did not follow a path like many of the other study participants, that is, they did not follow the path of progressive transformative learning. Nor, however, did they follow the path of a regressive transformative learning experience. Indeed, for both Emmanuelle and Homer, there was the experience of at least some identity change through their time in the baking-based employment program, just as there was for the previously discussed five participants. But, like Darwin, both Emmanuelle and Homer, during at least one moment in their participation in the program, rejected a path that would have led to further learning and identity work. However, unlike Darwin, both Emmanuelle and Homer eventually continued in their learning, experienced further identity change, and therefore experienced what Illeris (2014) would refer to as restorative transformative learning.

Emmanuelle. Emmanuelle was a 25-year-old female of Hispanic descent who had been involved with the justice system and had experienced homelessness prior to joining the program. When she first learned about the baking-based employment program, she had viewed herself as someone incapable of finding meaningful employment, and much less, able to establish a career. Further, she indicated that she did not trust other people and that she would typically not share with others her thoughts, feelings, concerns, and needs. As the experiences of other participants had indicated, the program was likely an opportunity well-suited to Emmanuelle's needs.

However, at that time, she also learned that participants would be awarded a monetary stipend, and this financial opportunity alone is what motivated her to enroll in the program. At that time, she had very little interest in succeeding in the program. She was only interested in the financial support. She said,

[T]hey were going to give me \$600 to take [the course] so that's . . . why I took it the first time. . . When I first started the class, I really just wanted the money. I wasn't really doing anything else with my life. I just got housing. So, I really just needed the money. So that's why I took it the first time.

However, her motivation, driven by the desire for the financial support, was not sufficient to keep her committed to the program. So, she eventually dropped out of the program. She had taken the initial steps of enrolling in the program and participating in it, but then did not have the motivation to engage in the learning offered by the program.

She did, however, have sufficient time in the program to be able to reflect back on the experience and come to the realization that she actually did want the learning that the program offered. She then enrolled in the program a second time. She said, “[T]he second time I took it, I really am interested in baking and cooking and things like that, and going to school and so I felt like [the program] can give me a nudge in the right direction to where I need to go.” So, after the pause in the learning, there is a realization that the content of the program was actually what she desired, and there was a resumption of the learning. This realization was part of the process of her identity change through learning. She then went on to fully embrace the program and had further transformative experiences.

Emmanuelle successfully acquired the baking skills that were part of the program's curriculum, and the acquisition of this knowledge was also accompanied by other changes. For

example, because of her learning experience, she no longer believed that she was incapable of succeeding in the labor market; rather, Emmanuelle came to believe that she was capable of any job and believed that she had a wide range of opportunities available to her. When she was asked how her self-esteem and self-confidence may have changed, she replied, “I really just didn’t have any [self-esteem], you know? But then, when I started passing the tests and the quizzes, and then I felt more confident and better about myself, ‘Oh,’ I thought, ‘I can do this.’” Also, as her vision for the future expanded, her desires changed. She originally started the program to obtain the small stipend that was offered to participants; she had the extrinsic motivation for a short-term and immediate gain provided by a small sum of money. As the program progressed, however, her motivation changed to a more intrinsic one, motivated by the possibility of pursuing career-related long-term goals. This change was evident when she commented on her view of her new possibilities:

My motivation [changed]. I used to be homeless and I’m now two years clean. So, the things that I wanted to do . . . back then are gone. After I took the class, my eyes just opened up in my mind, broadened to things that I know that I can do. Like, I can go to [the local two-year college]. Eventually I do want to go to school for culinary arts.

When she was asked if, before participating in the program, she thought that someday she might have gone to college, she said, “No. I didn’t even think I’d be housed two or three years ago. So, a lot has changed.” Finally, she clearly articulated her newfound self-understanding:

I can really do anything that I put my mind to it. Sometimes I’m my biggest problem. . . My feelings or my emotions can sometimes get in the way of the potential of the things that I know I can do. And so, to be able to be told, and to be able to show it, and people see it, and tell me that I can do better, you know? That’s cool.

Further, not only did Emmanuelle's view of herself change, but so did her relationships with others. Her distrust of other people faded, and she became comfortable with sharing with others her feelings and her needs. She said, "I went from not really trusting anybody to venting and expressing emotions, you know, seeking guidance and help." Emmanuelle also reported that she obtained employment in the bakery of a local grocery store and was starting a second job in a nearby trendy boutique bakery.

Following Illeris (2014), Emmanuelle's learning experience should be characterized as a restorative transformation. At first, for her, the opportunity for learning in the baking program was not what she desired, and although she engaged in the program for a little while, she was not motivated to complete the program. But, after this pause in her learning, and after further reflection, she re-enrolled in the program and fully engaged the learning offered by it. Indeed, she acquired technical baking skills, but the experience also resulted in a qualitative change in her identity. After the program, she viewed herself as a baker and she understood herself to be a person capable of achieving anything to which she puts her mind. She had a new self-confidence and was motivated to build her career; she was no longer depressed or feeling hopeless. Further, Emmanuelle started engaging the world in a new way. She was able to build trusting relationships with others and become a productive and trusted employee at two local bakeries. So, the perspective through which she understood herself and understood the world had been altered. The ways in which she felt about herself and her abilities, the goals that she desired, and what had motivated her had changed. The learning experience, then, was identity changing, affecting the functionality, sensitivity, and sociality of who she was. The faltering learning experience she first embarked on was restored to one that suited her well and allowed for significant change in identity.

Homer. Homer, who was a 24-year-old Caucasian male, similarly enrolled in the program initially motivated by goods that were extrinsic to the program, and he then similarly faced a hiatus in this participation in the program having to quit midway through the program. But also, like Emmanuelle, he eventually came to realize that he actually wanted more than the immediate, extrinsic benefits of being in the program, and rather, he desired the learning opportunity that the program offered. He therefore enrolled in the program a second time.

When Homer first enrolled in the program, he knew that the program would allow him to be temporarily released from prison for the day, and he knew that he could get free food in the baking skills program; he had strongly desired to eat something other than prison food. These were his sole motivations. Homer recounted his original decision to pursue the program after a fellow prisoner told him about the opportunity:

[My cellmate] was like, ‘Man, why don’t you just take the bakery program? They’re not going to give you time off [from your prison sentence], but they don’t care about what you do or what you didn’t do. They’re just trying to help you change your life.’ And I was, like—and this is, this is so dumb—I didn’t even hear any of that. I just heard they also have food. I heard they had food, and I was, like, ‘Sign me up.’ I wanted to get out of jail. I don’t care about this. I was still in that mindset of, ‘Get me out of jail.’ So, I did take the [baking skills] program. . . The first time I took it, I did not take it seriously. I just took it because I know you got out of jail.

But there was an incident in prison which caused a general lockdown. This prevented Homer from attending class and he was faced with having to drop out of the program. At this point, he realized that he actually desired all that the program was offering to him. He believed that the program was not simply trying to teach him technical skills and to get him into a job, but that the

program offered him care, support, and an opportunity to change his life. This shift in his motivation led Homer to re-enroll in the program, and through his participation in the program, he learned in ways that would lead to a significant qualitative shift in his identity.

As indicated previously, Homer had a difficult childhood in that he was surrounded by drug use both inside and outside the home, and he and his family had moved abruptly many times when he was a child, and thus he attended many different schools in a short period of time. Eventually, as a teenager, he was sent away to a boarding school in a southern state where he experienced physical and sexual abuse. He finally returned to his hometown, that town in which the baking program resides, and became a drug dealer. Prior to his arrest and incarceration, his greatest aspiration was to be a successful drug dealer. He did not believe that he could aspire to be anything else despite knowing that his lifestyle was indeed shameful. Once he was incarcerated, he was hostile and angry at the judicial system, his family, and his circumstances.

Who Homer was prior to the program—his identity—could be understood from a phrase that he had used often in the interview. He had described that he was in a “fight or flight mode” for most of his life. He acknowledged that since he was very young, his life had been chaotic and insecure. He said,

I’ve been in fight or flight since I was practically 13 years old. I had not had a second to, like, stop. Soon as I was 15, I was shipped off to a boarding school. Soon as I come back, I’m on my own until I get arrested and it’s, like, I was just going through the motions you know.

His identity was shaped by the constant frenetic and threatening world that surrounded him, and he came to understand the world as chaotic with his predominating emotions appearing to be fear and shame. He was constantly acting defensively and consistently ashamed of the kind of life he

had been leading. Accordingly, he acted in the world always as if he was looking for the quickest and easiest relief to the challenges that confronted him. Further, his self-worth was consistently diminished by his interactions with his family. Homer recounted what he was told by them:

“‘You’re never gonna amount to s---. You’re never going to be s---. You’re not going to college this, this, this, this.’ So I sold drugs, and I didn’t amount to s---.”

For Homer, though, the resumption of his participation in the program had become a transformative learning experience. Through his second enrollment in the program, he succeeded in learning how to bake and how to be a culinary professional. Further, he learned how to take responsibility for himself and his past actions, and he began to understand his place in the world differently. He emphasized how he became “accountable” indicating that he was able to take responsibility for what he had done with this life. In this way, he overcame the shame he felt for the kind of life he had led and was able to find pride now in what he was currently doing, and he was able to become comfortable with leading a new life. When he was asked how he might have changed through the baking program, he commented,

I got my life back. I got accountability back. I got my friends, my family. Well, my real friends, back. My family back. I feel like I learned more . . . but, truthfully, what I learned more was some really good accountability, like, I can go to anybody and tell them that yes, I was a drug dealer and, like, yes, I did this. I dated an escort. Like I can say all those with passion in my voice and mean it because I know that what I did was terrible. But I came back from it. When it first happened, I didn’t want to tell anybody, I didn’t want to acknowledge it.

Who he became, however, was a person who had reconciled with his past and who had overcome his shame. He also came to recognize that he was not alone in the world to face life's challenges.

He expressed this sentiment by saying that he is not "special." He commented,

I thought I was special, but I'm not special. I'm just getting these tools and resources [from the baking program]. That I deserve almost whatever else is kinda like how much you feel like you're special. But it's like, 'No, we're not anymore special.' It's that we haven't . . . we haven't been given the opportunity and now we need that opportunity. We need to be giving our stuff back. We're not any different than anybody else, I'm no different than, you know, like I mean—I am, but like I'm no different than you.

Homer here expressed a recognition that there is a kind of commonality and community among all people. In his prior life, one in which he lived in a "fight or flight" mode, he felt as if he was by himself, alone, and therefore unique from all others. This alienation that Homer felt had needed only to be assuaged by the kind of support and opportunities that were provided to him by the baking program.

Non-Transformative, Acquisitional Learning: Galen

The eighth study participant, Galen, reported his learning experience in the baking-based employment program in terms such that his experience could be construed to be non-transformative from the perspective of Illeris (2104). The learning experience did not involve a fundamental or important change in Galen's identity. Rather, the learning experience was simply and mainly characterized by the acquisition of new knowledge that was commensurate with who Galen already was.

Galen was a 62-year-old Caucasian male who finished the program in 2022. Shortly before entering the program, he had been incarcerated and was then encouraged by his probation

officer to enter this program to help secure employment. Galen indicated that he was seeking any kind of job that would keep him employed until the age of 65, at which time he would have access to a certain level of retirement benefits. He was the son of a prominent professor of physics at a prestigious private American research university and he had held long-term positions in a grocery store chain. He was an avid reader, a crossword puzzle aficionado, and he indicated that he enjoyed learning new things. After his incarceration, he had wished to pursue a position in information technology, but the nature of his criminal record precluded him from such a position. So, after learning about the baking program from his probation officer, he pursued the program and completed it. Prior and during the program, Galen was confident in his ability to learn baking skills and master the written material. He was confident in his ability to succeed in the program, and he was confident that his learning in the program would be much like the learning he experienced in other work environments.

Indeed, Galen did successfully complete the program as did the other study participants. Galen, however, did not describe the kinds of obstacles to success that other study participants described. For example, Galen did not describe how he had to overcome poor self-confidence or sense of self-worth. He did not describe how a sense of shame, or an emotional volatility, or a persistent resentment or anger toward the world was changed, and therefore, there was a change in who he was, in his identity. Rather, Galen viewed the program as an opportunity to pick up easily and quickly a set of new skills that might be useful for three years. In many ways, the skills and knowledge he acquired in the program were consistent with what he had done in the past. He indicated that he already knew how to be a good employee and how to be hardworking. When Galen was asked if he had learned skills other than baking skills, such as basic employability skills, he responded,

No, no, 'cause I had, I worked 15 years for a grocery store as a checker, so I'm, you know, I'd show up on time for work. I don't just, you know, come in late when I feel like it or, you know. I didn't need to learn job retention skills, in other words, you know.

He commented further regarding how challenging the program was for him: "I mean, it's basically like a junior college level . . . So, and I'm good enough for it. You know? Just keeping up with their reading, you know, was enough." When Galen was asked whether the program changed his view of himself, he responded that it had not and that he was already predisposed to learning new skills and pursuing new interests and jobs. He said:

I already knew I was good at academics. . . . Yeah, I already knew that. I knew how to, you know, present myself in public. And act, you know, responsibly, you know. Like an employee . . .

Later Galen reiterated that this experience was consistent with the person that he was already:

[T]his place has provided me with something that I appreciate. It's the kind of thing that I already would appreciate. Not from some kind of change in me that I would suddenly learn something new and be able to appreciate what they have here. You know, I was already built that way.

So, Galen's experience appeared to have provided a contrast to the transformative learning experience, whether it is progressive, regressive, or restorative. Like much learning that takes place in other environments such as classrooms, training centers, etc., there was not a fundamental or important change in the learner's identity. For Galen, the addition of baking skill knowledge to his existing knowledge did not require a change in identity.

The Processes of Identity Transformation

As the data have shown, the transformative learning experiences for the study participants had varied outcomes from the perspective of the conceptual framework offered by Illeris (2014): progressive, regressive, and restorative. Each of these outcomes involved a change in some way in the learner's identity through the learning experience. What were the processes, however, that led to these changes in the learners' identities? The foregoing descriptions of the outcomes provided some indication of some of the processes that led to identity change, but what follows is an account of the processes that were most pronounced in the data associated with transformative outcomes. These processes were characterized by four prominent themes:

- The engaging in caring and trusting relationships with others in the learning experiences.
- The reconciliation with one's past identity and coming to terms with one's past.
- The development of a greater sense of self-confidence.
- The development of motivations intrinsically tied to the transformative effects of the program.

Engaging in Caring and Trusting Relationships

Relationships with Staff Members. Nearly all the study participants—seven of the eight, i.e., Albert, Blaise, Carl, Darwin, Emmanuelle, Freddie, and Homer—indicated that the process of engaging in caring and trusting relationships with others, namely the staff of the baking-based employment program, had an important role in the learning and the change they experienced in the program. Generally, the study participants were emerging from difficult life circumstances. They were either recently incarcerated or homeless. For most of the participants, entering a formal learning environment was daunting and uncomfortable, but also, for most of the participants, their learning experiences were characterized by the process of developing

trusting and compassionate relationships with the program staff. For these participants, this process was an unexpected but welcome feature of their learning experience and they indicated that these relationships contributed much to their growth, learning, and transformation.

Carl, for example, indicated that the compassionate relationships he had with the program staff led to a change in his self-understanding and a change in how could envision his future. An anecdote provided by Carl pertained to a time, prior to his enrollment, when he was just starting to learn about the program. One of the program staff members who had been trying to recruit Carl into the program learned that Carl was being evicted from his home. When the staff person encountered Carl, he offered him a gift card from a shoe store as a bit of assistance during this difficult time. Carl reflected on that occasion:

I was wearing some really beat up shoes and out of the clear blue sky, [the staff member] just walked up to me and he slid a card in my hand, and it was a, a, a [shoe store] gift card and so that's kind of it. It kind of, it kind of got me and so the next time he brought up that bakery class, I, I'm, I'm all in, I'm all in. And I, I thought, 'Hell, that just might work, you know? Can't do no, I, I can't do no worse than I've been doing.' I just thought it just might work.

This act of kindness by a staff member was an emotionally moving experience for Carl and it gave Carl hope that the program might be able to help him improve his life circumstances. This budding relationship of trust between Carl and the program staff also started to change the way he viewed himself. Carl further remarked,

And so, I went to [the program] and I joined the support group there and this guy named [Mr. J.], he was running the bakery program—and it didn't have a name. It, we just called it the bakery program. And he persuaded me to sign up for it. And the thing that I liked

about [Mr. J.], that made me trust him, is that the guy cared. He cared. He, he really made me think that he cared.

In addition, Carl commented on the effect that this relationship had on his self-perception. He realized that, in the eyes of the program staff, he was not simply a subordinate or another student among many, but rather he was a friend and colleague to them. Carl said,

I changed the people I used to hang out with, and I started hanging out with [Mr. J., Mr. J.M., and Mr. J.G.] and the [other program] guys, you know. And all of a sudden, I'm not the AODA student or nothing. I'm one of their colleagues, and man, that blew my mind, man. I start acting different and so things, things were looking up, you know, things just start happening.

Here, Carl commented that he isn't the "AODA student," that is, Carl recognized that he is not simply someone who has been judged to be delinquent or criminal, having been involved with drugs. In fact, he is not that person at all from the perspective of program staff. Rather, he was embraced by program staff as a colleague and friend, and Carl began to understand himself as someone worthy of dignity and respect, and worthy of the friendship and the compassion from those people whom he respected. Thus, as the learning environment consistently provided him with caring relationships with program staff, Carl began to reconsider who he was and the wider range of life possibilities there might actually be for him.

The effect of such caring relationships was typical among study participants. Darwin's experience, for example, further underscores the important role that the caring relationships with program staff had in identity formation. Darwin noted the effect this compassion had on his own motivation to learn and to succeed. He described it as an "energy" that was created by the program staff's deep interest in his success. This interest further invigorated his desire to be in

the program. He described the interest that program staff had in his well-being and his success in the program thus:

They not just doing their job. They care. They really, genuinely care. [Program staff convey to participants,] ‘I don’t care what the f---’s going on with you, if you just need to talk, all ears.’ If I need to get something off my chest, they’re just, ‘Mmm hmm.’ I f---s with that. Like, to me, that’s legit.

So strong and ardent was this compassion from program staff that Darwin further characterized the relationship as having a family-like nature. He compared his relationship with one staff member, referred to here as Ms. S., as one between siblings and as a source of “tough love.”

Darwin said:

The lady, [Ms. S.], she’s part of the program. I consider her a big sis. That’s my case worker for [the program]. I literally consider her like my big sister because she don’t sugar coat s--- with me. She’s like, ‘Look, you know you’re f---ing up, right? I going to need your a-- to do better. If not, you’re going to get this lecture.’ I don’t want to be talked to, but I can’t say nothing to her. She’s like my big sister. I’m like, ‘S--- you know what, you’re [inaudible] I’m going to do better.’ That type of energy and the fact that they genuinely give a f--- about the people they working with goes a long way.

These relationships energized him and motivated him to learn. Further, undergirding these relationships was the caring and compassionate interest that program staff had in the learner’s success and well-being and this kind of relationship contributed significantly to the identity transformation that Darwin experienced.

Again, the experience of engaging in caring and trusting relationships was highlighted by seven of the eight participants, namely, Albert, Blaise, Carl, Darwin, Emmanuelle, Freddie, and

Homer, however, Carl’s and Darwin’s experiences are described in detail here since they exemplified more fully this experience. Carl’s account was highlighted in this section because of the rich description of his personal relationships with program staff that he provided and his description of himself coming to view himself as a peer and friend of others whom he had never imagined befriending prior to the program. Similarly, Darwin’s experience is highlighted here because of the rich description he provided of the nuances that were related to the nature of the relationships between program staff and program participants.

The other five participants—Albert, Blaise, Emmanuelle, Freddie, and Homer—expressed similar accounts regarding their relationships with program staff. Albert, for example, when asked about whether or not he had considered dropping out of the program, he remarked, “I think it's definitely pretty important [to finish] 'cause once you start forming those relationships [with program staff], it's like I wouldn't just be letting myself down too, you know . . . [T]hey've done so much for me, like, if I don't . . . continue on and, you know, make good out of it.” Blaise, too, appreciated the message that the program had conveyed to him which he summarized thus: “We care about your credentials, but we care, we care more about yourself and your well-being and what you're going through and what's stopping you from the employment.” For Emmanuelle, who appeared to have rarely trusted others, said she was able to trust the program staff “because they started helping [her] in actually doing what they aid they were going to do.” Freddie commented regarding the program coordinator, “I can talk to her about anything . . . [s]he was just that down. And she supported you.” Finally, Homer also conveyed the kind of relationship that he had with the program staff and how open he could be with them. He said, “I come here and they're like, ‘Yeah,’ and I can talk about my life. I could talk about the things I was going through, things I had done and not feel like I was being judged, or like being even not

being judged or even like they gave, like they didn't care at all, like they cared in a positive manner that makes sense.”

Relationships with Peers and Peer Mentors. Other participants, such as Homer, similarly expressed the effect of the caring relationships with peers and peer mentors. He said of the program, “[I]t felt like home. Like, it feels like a family here.” It was this accepting environment that affected his attitude toward the program, and he began to view the program as an opportunity for personal growth, understanding, and learning. Much of this care was experienced in a portion of the program referred to as “peer support,” the part of the program that previous comments by Albert had lauded. In peer support, participants were provided a space to share with others their life experiences, the challenges they face, and the goals that they have. The discussion was led by a program staff member who had similar life experiences. These staff members had also been incarcerated, homeless, involved with illicit drugs, and chronically unemployed. Homer commented on the program and on the peer support:

[T]he peer support was actually another seller for me. I had people come in from peer support who have done 50 . . . 30 plus years in prison, and they’ve got their lives together now and they have good paying jobs. And they actually are helping the community. I was, like, ‘I could turn my life around,’ like, ‘I don't need to be this anymore.’ And I was, like, I just was never given that opportunity, you know. And so, towards the end of the first class I started taking it seriously, started putting in the work, taking all the program, like, for real.

These initial changes in Homer reflected the effect of the compassionate and unjudging relationships he had with staff members and peers. Homer felt he could reveal anything about himself without feeling either shamed, judged, or inferior. So, the development of caring

relationships with program participants was standard for program staff and for peer mentors, and the experiences of Carl, Darwin, and Homer reflected well the effect that these relationships had on identity change. Freddie, Albert, Emmanuelle, and Blaise also expressed how the caring relationships they had with staff influenced the changes that they experienced in the program. Homer's experience is highlighted in this section to illustrate the importance of the peer relationships because his description of the interaction with peers was the more expansive and detailed of the accounts provided by the other participants. Albert similarly expressed gratitude for his relationship with peers; he said, "[S]eeing the other people with the similar experiences, it makes me feel less alone." Emmanuelle also expressed the value of her relationship with her peers and in her case, she felt valued because others in the class looked to her for guidance. She said, "The other people in the class look to me as an older peer . . . someone they can ask for help."

Reconciling with One's Past

Another prominent theme in the learning experience that accompanied identity transformation is the process of reconciling oneself with one's past. Five of the eight study participants—Albert, Blaise, Carl, Freddie, and Homer—talked about their reflections on their past and on the role this reflection had in their learning. Many of the participants remarked that their past behavior—including the involvement that they had with criminal activity and the justice system, and the troubled relationships they had with family and friends—created for them barriers to pursuing a new way of living and to changing their circumstances. There was also the fear that they would not be able to escape being the person that they had been, that is, they feared that they could not transform their identity. Reconciling oneself to one's past—that is, for example, coming to take responsibility for what they had done, coming to understand how they

became who they were, understanding what one was, and coming to understand that they were not unique in befalling such difficult circumstances—was an important process for study participants in their pursuit of acquiring a new vocation and in transforming who they were.

Homer, for example, came to understand that his identity was not simply defined by his problematic past. As indicated previously, Homer felt that, prior to his incarceration, he was always in a mode of living which never allowed him to reflect on his own life and that he was always in a “fight or flight” mode. It was not until he enrolled in the baking skills program that he was able to reflect on his prior life marked by criminality. He said of his past:

I knew I was dating an escort, selling drugs. Those are two of the worst, like grimiest things to be doing. But when I was doing it, not once did it ever occur to me like, ‘Hmm. I’m being [something that I don’t want to be] . . .’ I was just surviving, you know. It’s not till later, when I’m not in, like, fight or flight anymore, that I’m like, ‘Dang, I was really doing that? Like, that’s crazy.’ So, I think that’s really what it is, it’s like, once I got out of fight or flight, I was able to really like [reflect on my life].

For Homer, the opportunity to look back on his life also provided him with the opportunity to accept the fact that he had lived a lifestyle that was anti-social and unhealthy and was, as he had suggested, “grimiest.” He recognized, too, that he had to be held accountable for it and he could not let the past prevent him from flourishing in the future. Homer further elaborated on how he reconciled with his past:

I know I was a drug dealer. I know what I was doing was wrong, but I couldn’t figure out why because no one would give me the opportunity to even think about why. It was just, ‘You’re wrong. You’re wrong or terrible. This, that, other.’ Until I actually sat down and was, like, ‘What have I done all my life? Oh, I’ve been in fight or flight since I was

practically 13 years old.' I had, not had a second to, like, stop. Soon as I was 15, I was shipped off to a boarding school. Soon I come back, I'm on my own until I get arrested and it's like . . . I was just going through the motions, you know, so . . . And some of these people . . . I'm lucky I was twenty when I finally like was able to snap out of it.

For Homer, the learning experience included the “snapping out of it,” the recognition that one’s former way of living, one’s former identity, was an unhealthy mode of living.

As was the case with Homer, Carl also further indicated that his identity transformed insofar as he was able to reconcile with his past and disassociate himself from it. As indicated previously, Carl recognized that he was peddling “crap,” as he put it, and he recognized his failure in the past. Again, he said, “I felt like I did enough damage to my community. I’ve damaged my kids, my wife. Everybody who cares about me, I was just full of s---.” Thus, Carl was able to reflect on this past and the damaging effect he had on those around him. Regarding his past life, he said, “I still got my street cred even though I’m old dude and I’m not there no more and so I’m, I’m kind of, I’m kind of glad that it’s that way because I can show people that you just don’t have to be there.”

Homer’s experience of coming to terms with his past is highlighted here because of the well-articulated and self-reflective nature of his description. Again, his account provided a high level of self-reflection that was not common in the other interviews. Carl’s experience is also used as an illustration here because of the vignette he offered that described how his past was still represented by the people whom he continued to encounter in his community. He had been able to both accept how he had been and continue to reject his former lifestyle despite it being still present in his community. Blaise, Albert, and Freddie similarly shared accounts of how their learning experience in the program involved times during which they were able to reflect on their

past, accept who had they had, and overcome shame that may have been holding them back from making positive changes in their lives. Albert commented on that part of the program that led him to be more accepting of himself and his past:

I would say hearing other people's experiences and comparing them to my own, and just like the general experience being able to, I guess relate, and like be more comfortable with my own experience . . . I think I was definitely a lot more ashamed of it before, but it seems to be like a common thing of, you know. I mean, I was 18 and I made a mistake.

Blaise, too, acknowledged the poor choices he had made in his past, and he also began to view his relationship with his family differently. His relationship with his family had been hateful and estranged, but through his experience in the program, and the development of his new understanding of himself and the world, his view of his family relationship changed. He reflected:

I haven't seen, like, physically talked to my, like, actually sat down at a table with my father in ten years. My mother, she struggles with active addiction and I haven't seen her in 20 some years. So yeah, I'm the same as my family that like, once I'm done, I'm done. But like now it's more of a guilty thing and I just don't know how to handle that yet.

So, Blaise has accepted that the way he had viewed and treated his family in the past was wrong and his resentment had changed to guilt. But, nonetheless, there is a reconciliation with and improved understanding of his past emotions. Finally, Freddie also reflected on how he had changed his perspective on his past through the program. He said, recognizing the waywardness of his prior self, "I was a hard person. [The program] brought me down, just softened me up. You know what I'm saying? I was the big bad 'grrr,' walking around, chest poked out type of guy."

The Development of a Greater Sense of Self-Confidence

The identity formation of the program participants also included the process by which there was a development of one's self-confidence. Based on the data presented thus far, it is perhaps unsurprising that one's confidence in oneself would be bolstered by the program, since the participants had been immersed in a caring and compassionate environment dedicated to the learning and development of the participant. Thus, the development of self-confidence was a prominent feature in the experiences of several of the study participants, namely Albert, Blaise, Carl, Darwin, Emmanuelle, and Homer. As was indicated previously, the development of a stronger sense of self and greater self-confidence appeared to have been an outcome of the identity work that study participants had gone through. That is, a feature of one's new identity was their greater self-confidence. However, as the study participants also indicated, their increased self-confidence was a catalyst for further identity work. Thus, for many study participants, identity transformation unfolded, in part, because of the development of greater self-confidence.

Three of the participants—Emmanuelle, Carl, and Homer—were most explicit in how the program had fostered this increased confidence in their abilities. Emmanuelle, for example, said, “I really just didn't have any [self-confidence], you know, but then when I started passing the tests and the quizzes and then I felt more confident and better about myself. ‘Oh’, I thought, ‘I can do this’.” After her successful completion of the program, Emmanuelle was able to say, “I can really do anything that I put my mind to.” But she continued and revealed that this self-confidence is due to the supportive environment that she has around her. Again, Emmanuelle said, “[T]o be able to be told [that I am good at something], and to be able to show it, and people see it, and tell me that I can do better, you know? That's cool.” Further, Emmanuelle's success at

learning itself started to shape the environment around her as she helped create a better learning environment for others. She said that after she started doing well in the program, “other people in the class look to me as an older peer, someone they can ask for help.” So, as she helped shape a better learning environment for others, she also engaged in activities that boosted her self-confidence and thereby increased her ability to learn further.

Similarly, Carl experienced the development of his self-confidence and his hopefulness for a better future for himself. He was a soft-spoken, relatively shy individual. In him, though, the program developed a greater sense of self-confidence by showing him that he can excel at some vocation. Carl spoke about one instructor who helped bolster his self-confidence by assigning him special tasks in the bakery:

[The instructor] having confidence in me like that . . . I just . . . yeah . . . I, I was, I’m just tickled to death because, I know I can do this. I can do this this. It’s dough. I can do it.

And so, it really . . . by them giving me a chance it kind of charged me up there and I felt it made me feel good about myself.

So noteworthy for Carl was this bolstering of his self-confidence that he identified this aspect as one of the primary intentions of the program. When asked what he thought was the overall goal of the program, he commented, “I think the, the program goal for me was just to get my self-confidence back. Give me some tools. To be independent. Then stay off the streets. Give me credentials to be able to have a choice.” Related to his improved self-confidence, the program helped Carl find pride in his work. Carl indicated that the staff also helped him find employment while he was in the program. Regarding the job, Carl remarked,

It gave me my manhood back. I can, I, you know, I, I was living with my sister at the time and, you know, me and my family, we are, we are really close knit and while she

thinks nothing if it, I think that a man supposed to take care of himself and take care of his family.

Underscoring his newfound confidence, when he was asked if the range of his opportunities had expanded, he said, “[Y]es, absolutely. I can go anywhere and get a baking job. I can go anywhere and get hired, just on my credentials.” Homer also commented on how the opportunities that the program created for participants to reconcile with their past were also moments during which participants gained greater self-confidence. Homer explicitly recognized the effect that this development in his self-confidence had on the transformation of his identity as he noted that for him, it was “a monumental moment” in his life. Again, the development of a greater sense of self-confidence was described in the interviews with Albert, Blaise, Carl, Darwin, Emmanuelle, and Homer. The experiences of Emmanuelle, Carl, and Homer are highlighted here since their accounts illustrate well this feature that was in the experiences of these six participants.

The Development of Motivations Intrinsic to the Transformative Effect of the Program

Another theme that was prominent in the data is related to the development of participant motivation. For many of the participants—Albert, Blaise, Emmanuelle, Freddie, and Homer—the process of identity change was accompanied by the development of their motivation, having been first motivated by more proximate and basic desires and then, as the learning progressed, being motivated by the desire for benefits that were intrinsic to the learning and to the transformative effects of the program. As had been indicated, a significant and important change in some facet of the affective dimension of one’s identity such as a change in one’s motivation could itself be considered an outcome of transformative learning; that is, how one is motivated is a feature of one’s identity and so, a significant change in how one is motivated could be viewed as a change in one’s identity. However, as was the case with the process of developing greater

self-confidence, the process of changing one's motivation in the case of these participants was both an intermediate outcome of, and a process leading toward further, identity change. Three study participants were explicit regarding how their motivation was changed: Emmanuelle, Blaise, and Homer.

As indicated in the section pertaining to restorative transformation, Emmanuelle reported that she experienced a shift in what motivated her to pursue the program. She had enrolled in the program twice having not completed it with her first attempt. Again, the first time she took the program, she was motivated to be in the program by a desire for something wholly extrinsic to the program; that is, she knew that there was a financial subsidy available to her if she took the program. However, she indicated that by the second time she tried, her motivation had changed. She had begun to see that success was possible for her and she knew that the program would support her in all ways. She now desired to be in the program because of the changes that would occur because of the program and long-term benefits she might receive. Emmanuelle was highly cognizant of the significance of this change of motivation. When asked how she has changed because of the program, she quickly said that it was her motivation that had changed. She answered more fully:

My motivation. I used to be homeless and I'm now two years clean. So, the things that I wanted to do . . . back then are gone. After I took the class, my eyes just opened up in my mind, broadened to things that I know that I can do. Like I can go to [the nearby two-year college]. Eventually I do want to go to school for culinary arts.

Her success in learning thus changed her motivation and further fueled her desire to learn and make her more open to further identity change.

Blaise had commented that initially for him, his primary desire was to obtain the baking credentials that were available through the program and gain easier access to employment. So unlike Homer and Emmanuelle, Blaise was motivated by a primary benefit of the program, the technical education. As he progressed in the program, however, his desires shifted for some further benefit beyond simply the means to employment. He became motivated by benefits that were also intrinsic to the kind of learning that took place in the program. He started to desire the relations and friendships that could be forged through the program. He also became motivated by what appears to be the emotionally therapeutic effect of the program. He said,

Of course, the credentials are nice and everything, and it's funny that, you know, I flip-flopped, you know? Before it was, like, 'I want the credentials and I want to make more money.' Now, it's, like, I'm all about the understanding, of support, and that's what I wanted out of the program. So, the dynamic shifted while I was taking it and like within a month of taking it, a month and a half, like, [instructor Ms. J.] saw the shift in everyone else. Like, when the students graduate, we tell them how much we've seen him grow and [now] me being a teacher and instructor, that didn't finally click seeing the other side of it until I started doing it and then me getting upset at the end of class. Like, 'I don't want to see you go. You grew a lot, like, you were combative when you first came into the kitchen and now you know what you're doing. You're excelling.'

This complex comment revealed that, for Blaise, there was a significant change in what motivated him when he was a student in the program and, here, he indicated that it was not until he was an instructor in the program that he more fully understood what he had been desiring. Blaise had seen in his graduating students the significant and beneficial transformation that they

had undergone, and appeared to be indicating that, the value of transformative learning he observed in others was what he had desired for himself when he was a student.

As indicated in the discussion pertaining to restorative transformations, Homer was first motivated to enroll in the program because he desired to get out from behind prison walls for a little time every day and he wanted to eat food other than prison food. However, as he progressed in the program and recognized how it began to change how he was, his motivation for remaining in the program changed. He said, “I started taking it seriously, started putting in the work, taking all the program, like, for real.” He further described the process of his motivation changing in this way:

[T]here’s definitely a motivation factor to be here. . . . There’s too much work that needs to be put in for you just to kind of skate by and so I think that’s where it was, it was like it was a little bit of both. It was, like I know I need to do this in order for me to keep getting out of jail each day. But also, it was like, you’re getting a lot of information out of this and you’re like, like, learning. I’m always kind of, like, learning.

This passage captured the shift of what motivated Homer from some base desire to a desire to learn and to grow, and for him, this learning in turn was transformative. So, with Homer, the development of his motivation not only marked a change in his identity, but also was a condition for further identity work.

Transformation and its Prominent Processes. Thus, for the study participants, there were these four prominent processes that characterized the unfolding of their transformative learning experience: the engaging in caring and trusting relationships; the reconciling with one’s past; the development of a greater sense of self confidence; and the development of higher order motivations. These processes provided the conditions that allowed for transformative learning

and the reshaping of one's identity and provided an answer to the research question pertaining to how the process of identity transformation unfolded for the student participants. A further research question probes more deeply into the nature of transformative learning and asks how the dimensions of learning, as identified by Illeris (2007, 2014), are experienced by the study participants. In the foregoing discussions pertaining to transformative learning outcomes and to the processes involved with transformative learning, there was already indication of how the learning experience for the study participants involved not only the cognitive, but also the affective and the social. The following, then, is further description and explication of how the three dimensions of learning—the cognitive, the affective, and the social—as defined by Illeris are experienced by the learners.

Experiencing the Three Dimensions of Learning

As noted, Illeris (2007, 2014) claims that there are three primary dimensions to the learning experience, that is, the cognitive, the affective, and the social. The data from the participant interviews indicated that not only does such a tripartite framework of learning aid in the analysis of the learning experience, but further, for these study participants, the framework reveals how pronounced and integral these three dimensions are in the learning experience. Thus, the data aid in answering the research question regarding how learners experience the cognitive, the affective, and the environmental dimensions of transformative learning in a job skills training program.

The Environmental and the Affective Dimensions of Learning

We have already seen that, for Emmanuelle, the acquisition of technical baking skills also required the interplay of the affective components of her character as well as the social forces around her to inform and ensure that the learning occurred. Skill acquisition did not simply rely

on a cognitive process such as technical instruction. Rather, her success in skill acquisition also relied on her emotions, her motivations and desires, and her varying levels of self-confidence. Skill acquisition also relied on the social environment surrounding the learning such as the support and compassion she received from others. Moreover, the dynamic of the affective dimension and the environmental dimension on skills acquisition was not simply unidirectional; it was not simply the case that, for example, her desire to learn was directed to the goal of learning, and therefore she succeeded in learning. Rather, there appeared to be at times a dialectical relationship between the experience of content acquisition and the emotional. Similarly, there appeared to be such a relationship between the experience of knowledge acquisition and the environmental dimension. For example, the positive effect of a newfound motivation on her skill acquisition had a positive effect, in turn, on her self-confidence (which is another facet of the affective dimension). This effect consequently also facilitated successful skill acquisition even further.

Similarly, the acquisition of skill contributed to her self-confidence and, in turn, this increased self-confidence compelled her to learn more as well. Further, the changed emotional and desiderative state that accompanied her skill acquisition was also influenced positively by the social environment. The supportive environment that was created in the baking skills program was also a necessary component to Emmanuelle's success as a learner. It was this kind of safe, unconditionally supportive and nurturing environment that allowed Emmanuelle's emotions and desires to change so that they were amenable to the acquisition of skills. Again, that nurturing environment allowed for her desires and emotions to change so that they would allow for the acquisition of knowledge.

With Darwin, there was a similar experience with the program and the dimensions of learning. Of the support he received from the program during this transition into homelessness, Darwin said, “[T]he school was just trying to make sure I was somewhere that I could do it. And for the most part it was cool till just little stuff turned into bigger stuff and that’s it.” So, during his first enrollment with the program, he had neither the social environment to support his learning nor the emotional state to support it either. When Darwin enrolled again, he was successful in the program, and his learning experience reflected the salutary effects of positive affective and social influences on his skill acquisition. First, a stable living situation was necessary for Darwin to succeed in the program; after his eviction and homelessness, he was able to obtain housing through a private agency that was closely affiliated with the baking skills program.

Darwin elaborated at length regarding the supportive environment that was created in the program, as we saw, and he described it as a collegial, jovial environment, and at other times, as a family-like environment. Darwin also noted the effect that this care and compassion had on his own motivation to learn and to succeed. Again, regarding the atmosphere in the program, he said, “That made you want to come to class to do the s--- because it’s a good environment, it’s good energy, it made it easy.” Conversely, when a supportive, stable, and secure environment was not in place for this learner, Darwin, then successful learning did not take place; when he experienced homeless again after enrolling in the program the first time, he had to drop out of the program. Relatedly, when one’s emotions and attitudes were characterized by depression, fear, and lack of confidence, as they were for Darwin, or when one’s motivations were guided by some incidental or base desires, such as the desire to obtain the financial assistance from the

program rather than a desire to learn the content in the program, as they were for Emmanuelle, then the learning was not successful.

With most of the other study participants, there were similar comments that highlighted how the learning experience and the acquisition of content were conditioned by the compassionate environment that enveloped the learners. In general, participant interviews revealed that the emotional and desiderative comportment of the learner was a necessary component of the learning experience.

The Cognitive Dimension

The learning experience in the baking skills training program illustrates the necessary interrelation of the environmental dimension and of the affective dimension with the acquisition of content. Successful acquisition of baking skills, in part reflected by the successful completion of the program, was accompanied by a social environment that was experienced as unconditionally supportive and was accompanied by the comportment of the emotional and desiderative elements of the learner's identity, a comportment that was oriented toward learning. Regarding the cognitive dimension of the learning—that is, the content of the learning—however, the study participants reported that their learning consisted of more than simply the acquisition of baking skills. Rather, for the study participants, there were two other broad categories of content that the program participants had acquired in addition to technical baking skills—general employability skills and life skills that are necessary to interact with others and live in society. That the content of the learning experience went beyond simply technical baking skills appeared to reflect the caring environment in which the learning occurred. From the perspective of the learning experience, the staff of the baking skills training program wanted to make sure that the program participants not only mastered job skills, but also that they learned

how to develop a career for themselves and learned how to thrive in society and to flourish in their relationships with others.

For example, Freddie, who had a profound and longstanding interest in mastering food services skills, touted how he was able to demonstrate his technical baking skills in and out of the classroom. But he also highlighted his learning of general work skills, such as getting along with others in the workplace, and also his personal character development, like learning to moderate one's temper and learning to appreciate differing opinions of others. Freddie was explicit in his recounting of these varied skills. When asked what the program had taught him, Freddie replied in the following way:

[The program] taught me communication skills. It taught me employability far as doing a mock interview, far as getting a résumé done and it taught me the people skills because everybody is not . . . it taught me people skills . . . everybody is not gonna be like you, you know? And if you get into it with a person in the class or you have a disagreement with a person in the class, you gotta learn to work through those differences for the common, for the common good of yourself. So, when I, when I say for the common good for me, I wasn't going to let no confrontation that I ever got into with anybody in the classroom because, let's just face it, we all don't, don't believe . . . I might have thought it was wrong. They might thought it was right, but who's to say who's right or wrong? Because in your eyes, you say it's right, but in my eyes, I'm seeing as well. So, you know, I had learned and taught me how to differentiate that everybody not going to disagree. So, you got, you know, 'OK, I see your point. I'm gonna move on.' You know, and [Ms. J.] was very adamant on learning that skill . . .

This excerpt from the interview with Freddie reveals the complex nature of the content of the

learning experience. Elsewhere in the interview, Freddie provided an indication that in past work environments, he had been confrontational with those who may have disagreed with him on how to bake, or he may have lost his temper with others if they conducted their work in ways different from the way he would have conducted his work. Here, Freddie is indicating that his instructor, Ms. J., was attuned to his lack of self-regulatory skills and she was integrating the learning of interpersonal skills and the development of a more tempered character with the learning of baking. So, for Freddie, the social environment and his attitude toward learning were not only essential to acquiring the content of the program, but the content itself—the congeries of baking skills, workplace skills, and character virtues—was commensurate to the emotional and environmental dimensions involved in the learning. The teaching of baking skills along with communication skills in a compassionate environment resulted in the learner wanting to be kinder, more considerate, and more understanding with his co-workers.

Freddie's experience with acquiring this complex mixture of content was emblematic of the experiences of the other learners. The other participants, in general, similarly acquired not only technical baking skills, but life skills and personal development through the curriculum of the program, but Blaise raised an interesting perspective regarding the interplay of the three dimensions. He spoke to the social developmental learning that took place in the program but described it in terms that may be characterized as psychotherapeutic. He learned to accept himself, which appeared to be a significant accomplishment for one who described his earlier self as depressed and self-loathing. Blaise said,

So, like, I've just learned myself, in a sense. And it's a struggle sometimes to be myself. But like with that, like, you know, this program, with me being a student, like teaches you, like, 'That's okay to feel like that. How are we going to fix it? [How are we going

to] make you not feel like that?’ And that’s where, like, I never thought of those things. I just knew that I felt like s---, and everyone was degrading me before. Compared to [now], like, cool, ‘You can think that now, but I know it’s not true.’

Blaise credited the baking skills training program with teaching him about himself, teaching him to accept himself, and teaching him to accept others. Again, there was a learning environment that was ostensibly designed to teach technical culinary skills, but that was also built within an environment of care and compassion, of collegial and familial relations, and an environment that conditioned the emotions and desires of the learner. So, for the learners in this program, the experience of the three dimensions of learning—the environmental, the emotional, and the cognitive—was a rich, dynamic, and complex experience in which there appeared to be a necessary relationship between all three dimensions. If it had not been for this special environmental dimension—the environment created by the program staff—the learner’s emotional and desiderative attitudes may not have been oriented toward acquiring this kind of content, not only the more emotionally complex life skills content, but also the less complex skills of baking. For some of these learners, even the acquisition of basic job skills involved in a bakery may have been difficult if not for the environment created by the program staff. Here, Freddie’s experience is highlighted since the acquisition of a variety of skill types, from baking skills to anger management, to general supervisory skills, figured most largely in his description of this experience in the program.

Further, Freddie’s acquisition of these skills was informed by significant self-pride arising from his ability to learn these skills well and quickly. This pride was further reflected in his role as a baker. Freddie recounted the occasion in class when he impressed the instructor with his knowledge related to weighing ingredients on a scale. Freddie described the instructor’s

reaction when he, Freddie, demonstrated keen insight into a problem: “And when he looked at me and he looked at the rest of the class, he said, ‘See? He know how. To make anybody who catches that, they know what they're doing on the scale.’” This pride extended into his career as a baker. Freddie further recounted an occasion, after he had established himself as a baker, when he visited his cousin in the southern United States. After demonstrating to family his skills, Freddie relayed what his cousin had said about him after he had returned home: “As he was telling, telling people that lived down there, all my other cousins that was like, ‘That boy really do know how to bake.’ It was like, ‘Yeah!’” Thus, the affective component—specifically, that pertaining to pride—that was involved in the learning process manifested itself in the kind of baker Freddie had become.

A Note on Participant Data used as Illustrative Experiences

It should be noted that, in this chapter’s discussions of the salient processes of transformative learning experiences and the dynamic interaction of the dimensions of learning, only a few of the participant accounts of these phenomena were recounted as illustrative of the nature of the phenomena. The prominence of these accounts, however, does not diminish the relevance and importance of the experiences of the other participants’ who experienced these phenomena as well. There was, however, one participant whose experience is missing from the discussions on the processes of transformation and the dynamics of the learning dimensions, that is, those experiences of Galen. His experiences are missing from these discussions because, the experiences involved with the phenomena in question were missing from his description of his experience in the program. For Galen, the learning experience in the program was instrumental only. He sought to attain a new set of job skills without having undergone a qualitative shift in identity. Because he was already amenable to this new skill acquisition, the transformative

processes experienced by others were not part of his experience, and the caring and trusting environment created by program staff, for example, did not have a significant effect on him and his learning. Therefore, his experiences are missing from the description of the learning phenomena that accompanied the transformative experiences in the program.

Summary

The focus on the three dimensions of learning in the experiences of the study participants showed that, for these learners, the interplay of the cognitive, the affective, and the social, was not only dynamic, but also dialectical. That is, the influence of one dimension on another was not always unidirectional. Rather, at times, the dimensions mutually informed one another in order to constitute a learning experience.

Further, the data show that the processes at work as the transformative learning experience unfolded were reflections of this dynamic interplay of the three dimensions of learning. The forging of trusting and compassionate relationships between program staff and participants reflected the emotionally therapeutic activity that transformed the emotions and desires of the learners. The reconciliation with one's past was the transformation of one's view of oneself and one's relation to the social world—that is, one's world view—and the changing of one's emotional reaction to one's own history. The development of one's self-confidence occurred because of the conditions of the learning environment and because of the successes one had in acquiring new knowledge, not just about baking, but also about oneself and others. Finally, the process of developing one's motivations, from being driven by base desires to being driven by intrinsically motivated desires, arises partly from the compassionate environment created by the program staff and partly from the initial successes the learner had at acquiring new

knowledge, again, not simply regarding baking, but also regarding oneself and how one should understand and interact with others.

The data also showed that these processes undergirded the experience of transformative learning. However, these processes were not simply the conditions and activities that led to identity change. These processes may also be viewed as part of the outcome of transformative learning itself insofar as transformative learning is understood to be some significant and important change in one's identity. That is, these processes themselves signal significant and important changes in the learner's identity. Further, the findings reveal the complex nature of the outcome of transformative learning insofar as the learning experiences themselves are complex. That is, insofar as learning is the result of the dynamic interplay of the cognitive, the affective, and the social, then too are the identity and identity change determined by the dynamic, but complex, interplay of these three dimensions. This complexity begins to reveal how progressive, regressive, and restorative transformative learning experiences, and the varieties therein, are even possible.

In the chapter that follows, what will be discussed are the implications that these findings have for the explication of Illeris' general learning model and his theory of transformative learning. This elaboration of Illeris' framework will also provide the opportunity to revisit two of the central problems posed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, that is, the question of how transformative learning experiences may not always result in positive and salutary outcomes, and correlatively, the question of how the varieties of progressive, regressive, and restorative transformations are possible. In addition, the next chapter will explore how transformative learning understood as identity change can help inform some contemporary problems related to transformative learning theory and practice.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The primary task of the present study was to explore the nature of transformative learning as a qualitative shift in identity for participants in a baking-based re-entry employment program. More specifically, this study was designed to answer the primary research question: what is the nature of the dimensions, processes, and the outcomes of transformative learning as a qualitative shift in identity for participants in a job skills employment program? This primary question had three sub-questions:

- a. What types of learning outcomes are experienced by the learners?
- b. How does the process of identity transformation unfold for learners in the baking program?
- c. How do the learners experience the dimensions of learning in the program?

This study was conducted from the perspective of Illeris' (2007, 2014) general model of learning and his theory of transformative learning. This study also had the goal of examining and refining Illeris' theory to better describe and explain transformative learning phenomena. This chapter provides a discussion on how the findings from this study have implications for Illeris' theory of transformation. In addition, this chapter will return to the challenges to Mezirow's theory of transformative learning that were raised in Chapter 2. More specifically, this chapter will revisit the key issues that arise in the work of those authors who challenge the Mezirowian view that transformation is necessarily a positive, salutary, and progressive experience. Again, these views are exemplified in the work of Morrice (2012), Isopahkala-Bouret (2008), and MacDonald et al. (1999). Further, the findings in this chapter have implications for the general theoretical work pertaining to transformative learning phenomena. These findings also contribute to recent discussions on the practice of transformative learning and highlight ways in which

transformative learning outcomes may be propaedeutic to other educational goals. Furthermore, there are several questions that this study raises but cannot fully address, and these questions merit further research. These areas of further study are also discussed in this chapter.

Implications for Understanding Transformative Learning as Change in Identity

Character of Learning Experience Reflected in Character of Identity

This study's primary research question asks what the nature of transformative learning as a qualitative shift in identity is. One significant implication of the findings is that, in the context of the baking-based employment skills program, the character of dimensions of learning that are involved with the transformative learning experience provide an insight into the character of identity work that takes place for the learner. Indeed, Illeris (2014) does argue that the dimensions of learning contribute to the development of the learner's identity, and he places identity at the intersection of the three dimensions. The findings of this present study do align with Illeris' argument; however, they provide further insight on *how* those dimensions more specifically shape the identity in this skills development program.

The data shows, for example, that for the majority of the study participants, the learning environment, which was characterized by unconditional support and compassion, and the emotional dynamics, which were characterized by greater self-confidence, self-reconciliation, and self-love, correspondingly shaped the character of their identity work and their identity outcome. This concept is illustrated well with study participant Blaise. Blaise successfully completed the program and found work as a baker, acquiring baking skills and industry-recognized credentials. Blaise received the unconditional support, care and compassion of program staff. He welcomed that care and compassion and it contributed to his desire to succeed in the program and to become a gainfully employed member of society. In other words, one

important component of the environmental dimension of the learning experience consisted of both program staff's compassionate and caring outreach to Blaise and Blaise's grateful acceptance of that outreach. The environmental dimension of his learning experience, defined largely by this relationship, informed Blaise's subsequent identity work and the identity outcome which was a change in the way he understood himself and others, and how he interacted with the world. The character of the environmental dimension also helped inform the kind of baker he was to become. As Blaise had indicated, he became a worker who cared deeply for those he worked with, a worker who was willing to be open and caring with others around him, and a worker who understood that caring for the mental well-being of employees was incumbent upon any employer.

Participant Freddie's experience also demonstrates how the specific nature of the dimensions can inform the character of the identity work of a learner. Freddie also successfully completed the baking program and became a baker. While in the program, he prided himself in doing well in the class, understanding baking better than others, and being chosen by one instructor to aid in special tasks in class. That is, the emotional dimension of the learning experience was characterized by pride and the desire to do well and to show others that he can do well. This character of the emotional dimension was similarly manifested in the kind of baker that he became, that is, in his identity as a baker. He took pride in his role as a baker just as he was proud to have been singled out by his instructor in his learning experiences. He also had undergone significant changes in the way he managed his anger and emotional reactions to others, and his learning was also marked by a change in his emotional reactions to the world around him. Thus, the implication here for understanding the nature of transformative learning as a qualitative shift in identity is that the character of the emotional dimension that accompanies

the learning experience may inform the character of the identity work and the resulting identity that arises from the learning. Again, Illeris' (2014) conceptualization of the relationship between identity and the three dimensions of learning indicates that identity is informed by the dynamic interplay of the dimensions. He writes, "the identity also includes the three dimensions—content, incentive and interaction—that are always involved in learning—and . . . has its pivotal point where the interaction process meets with the acquisition process" (p. 69). Illeris, however, does not indicate how the dimensions might shape identity work and identity in this way. The data from this study thus provides some empirical evidence of how the character of identity may be directly informed by the character of the dimensions involved in the learning experience, specifically in a re-entry program that helps develop employment skills.

Identity Model Trisected by Dimensions of Learning

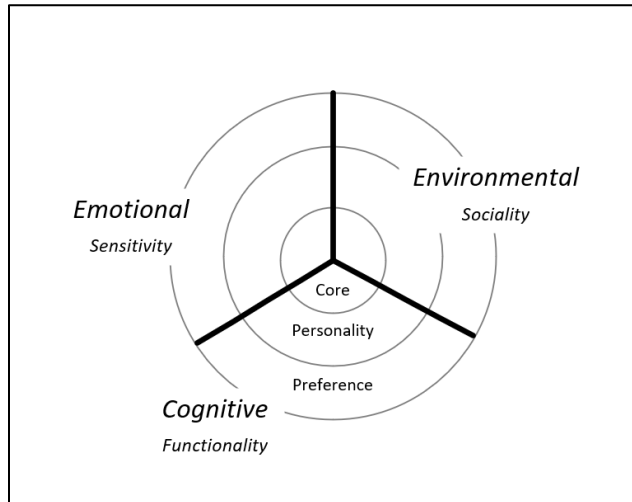
A consequence of the foregoing discussion may, therefore, be a refinement to the interpretation of Illeris' (2014) theory of transformative learning. In light of the correlation of the character of emotional and environmental dimensions to the character of the resulting identity for the participants in the baking-based employment program, a model of identity for these learners may also accommodate this relative effect on the learner's identity. Several study participants, such as Emmanuelle, Freddie, and Blaise, had learning experiences characterized, for example, by a significant bolstering of self-confidence; for them that self-confidence was reflected in who they later became. Also, several study participants such as Blaise, Homer, and Carl, had learning experiences that were characterized by a profoundly compassionate relationship with others, and a degree of compassion was reflected in the person they became. Further, as just described for Blaise and Freddie, the character of learning environment that they experienced and the kinds of

emotions that they experienced in their learning shaped the character of the person and the baker they each had become.

This correlation of the character of the dimensions to the character of the resulting identity for these participants may be better depicted in an amended model of identity. That is, in Illeris' (2014) graphic depiction of identity, the personality layers depicted in Figure 2 may also be trisected by lines indicating the segments of the effect of the three dimensions relative to identity, as depicted by Figure 4. What this model conveys is that each layer of identity can be segmented by the three dimensions of learning. Segmented in this way for these participants, the model conveys that the analysis of identity work and identity change could be understood in terms of the relative character of these dimensions. This implication aligns with Illeris' conceptualization of an identity that is influenced by the dimensions, but what the model further highlights is the relationship of identity to the dimensions of learning. So Figure 4 is offered here as a friendly amendment to the model originally depicted by Illeris. Further, what this model also conveys for the present study is that identity is, at least in part, informed by the character of the dimensions that are experienced in learning. Illeris (2003, 2004, 2007, 2014) uses the terms functionality, sensitivity, and sociality to refer to the general cognitive, emotional, and social abilities that result from learning processes. This revised model of identity indicates more explicitly that the functionality, sensitivity, and sociality of these learners in the baking-based employment skills program are a manifestation of the specific character of the corresponding dimensions that were experienced in learning and effect the qualitative change in identity.

Figure 4

Model of Tri-Dimensional Identity



Note. Adapted with permission of Taylor & Francis Informa UK Ltd., from *Transformative Learning and Identity* (p. 71), K. Illeris, 2014, Routledge; permission conveyed through Copyright Clearance Center, Inc.

Regressive Transformation, Resistance, and Negative Identity Change

The present study's findings may also provide a further elaboration on the interpretation of Illeris' (2014) conception of regressive transformation and the concept of *resistance* in such experiences. Chapter 2 described a regressive transformation as a learning experience that had the potential to lead to positive qualitative identity change, but the process becomes stymied for some reason. That interference in the progress of a qualitative identity change, according to Illeris, may be due to a variety of forces such as *identity defense*, which is a subconscious emotional reaction that strives to preserve one's current identity, or *resistance*, which is a more conscious rejection of intended identity work (pp. 108–109). The data indicated that resistance appears to have occurred in the regressive experience of Darwin, and that this resistance itself also involved an additional identity-changing learning experience for him. Because Darwin's

experience was the only one among the study participants to clearly exemplify a regressive transformation, the focus here is on his experience.

First, as Illeris' (2014) model explains, Darwin did experience a degree of positive identity change through his experience with the program. There were positive outcomes in that he did come to trust others, he had a rejuvenation of his creative activity, he gained self-confidence and motivation, and he learned to understand the world differently as a place that could provide comfort and hope to those, like he, who experienced destitution. But ultimately, the learning experience was a regressive transformative experience. Darwin stopped further identity work that might have led him to become a gainfully employed baker or other food service worker. In fact, he rejected the notion of having any employment altogether.

Darwin consciously resisted the path that would have led him to gainful employment having argued that it was not in his financial interest. What appears to have led Darwin to eschew this further identity work and reject any employment was the social pressure upon him to meet his financial obligations and pay his debts, and his realization that if he were to make good on these obligations, then others would take all of the money he had earned. He said that, if he were to obtain employment, then he would be “working for everybody else.”

For Darwin, the world presented a threat to his financial well-being, and so he came to believe that the best role for him was one in which he had no gainful employment whatsoever. This role—of being unemployed—however, seemed to be inconsistent with other parts of Darwin's identity: he had been motivated to be productive in other ways, he became hopeful for his future, he claimed to have recaptured his musical creativity. But he resisted the further identity work of becoming gainfully employed. The resistance here, however, did not appear to be simply the rejection of one path over some alternately preferred path, as Illeris (2014)

describes resistance (p. 109). Rather, the resistance appeared to be an outcome of a process of Darwin having learned that these social pressures on him to relinquish his wealth were a threat to him. So, he learned to act in a way that seemed to protect his interests. However, this way of acting appeared to be inconsistent with other facets of his identity. In this resistance, then, there was a part of his identity, shaped largely by what he learned about the perceived environmental threats to his wealth and the emotions that arose when he felt threatened, that took him in a direction opposite to that which the learning program had intended. For Darwin, the regressive transformative learning that he experienced was due to an instance of resistance, but in Darwin's case, resistance resulted from an additional experience of learning, informed by the environmental pressures on his financial well-being and the emotional dimension of the threat he felt from them. So, the data suggests that resistance, which can stymie positive identity change—that is, identity change that has some salutary effect on his work identity and ability to support himself—also involved a negative learning experience for Darwin, and therefore, a negative identity change. That is, the identity change was negative in that it detracted from the program's goal of having the participant become more self-sufficient and more capable of thriving in society.

Illeris and, Refugee, Corporate, and Ethical Vegan Experiences

Dimensions of Learning and Transformation as Positive or Negative

The findings of this present study may also assist in elaborating on the transformative learning phenomena described by Morrice (2012), Isopahkala-Bouret (2008), and McDonald et al. (1999), as summarized in Chapter 2. In these studies, there were examples of transformative learning that did not lead to the kinds of positive outcomes that would be predicted by Mezirow's theory of perspective transformation. Rather, they highlight the experiences of refugees in Great

Britain (Morrice), corporate management trainees (Isopahkala-Bouret), and ethical vegans (McDonald et al.), that show that transformations can have a “dark side,” or they can serve unpalatable and illiberal values, or they can lead one to acquiescence to dominant ideologies, all of which are outcomes that are not anticipated by Mezirow’s theory. What the data from this current study show is, first, that transformative learning experiences, understood as qualitative shifts in identity, are situated in the dimensions of learning. Further, because they are situated in the environmental and the emotional dimensions in this way, identity changes may be positive or negative changes. For most of the study participants, the social and emotional dimensions of learning, which may be viewed as positive, likewise led to identity changes that were also viewed as positive. As described earlier, for one participant, Darwin, there were social and emotional dimensions that could be described as negative, and these contributed to a negative change in his identity. These experiences of this study’s participants, especially that of Darwin, indicated more clearly how Illeris’ (2014) theory of transformation as a qualitative shift in identity may account for the negative learning outcomes described by Morrice, Isopahkala-Bouret, and McDonald et al. For the study participants, identity shifts may be either positive or negative, depending on the character of the dimensions of the learning that are informing the learning experience. But, in either case, such qualitative shifts in identity are nonetheless transformative learning experiences. Similarly, for the study participants described in the works of Morrice, Isopahkala-Bouret, and McDonald et al., the apparent negative character of the dimensions of learning experienced by the participants could likewise account for the apparent negative outcomes of their transformative learning experiences.

Dimensions of Learning and Identity-Based Action

The findings of the current study also assist in explaining the cessation of the activism of the ethical vegans that are described by McDonald et al. (1999). Recall that in this case, study participants, who ascribed to a vegan lifestyle as a result of transformative learning experiences, eventually ceased or curtailed their public advocacy of an ethical vegan lifestyle. In the face of pushback and rejection by others, they started to shrink from their open advocacy. The possibility of this kind of a curtailment of an activity, originally spurred by a transformative learning experience, was not countenanced by Mezirow's theory of perspective transformation, as McDonald et al., argue. The data from this current study help explain how this cessation or curtailment of activism might be possible.

The transformative learning experiences of the current study's participants have been shown to be complex in at least two ways. First, they are complex in that qualitative shifts in identity are situated in the dimensions of learning, and these dimensions themselves are complex. These dimensions inform the kind of identity that may result from the learning experience. Second, they are complex in that qualitative shifts in identity are not single events. Rather, as we have seen with the study participants, there may be more than one shift in identity. For example, with Emmanuelle, there was an initial shift in her identity in that she became self-confident and hopeful in her future. This change led her to eventually view herself as a competent baking professional which, arguably, is a further but related change in identity; one positive identity change contributed to a second and related positive identity change. In the case of Darwin, however, one positive shift in identity was followed by a negative shift in identity. As discussed earlier, he experienced a new found optimism, hopefulness, and burst of creativity. But there were other dynamics at work—namely, financial pressures and the threat he felt from them—that

led him to become someone that rejected any gainful employment whatsoever; Darwin refused to seek employment. What is salient in these two examples is that transformative learning experiences are complexly informed by social and emotional dimensions, and they can lead to qualitative shifts in identity that may not only be viewed as negative but may also shape and possibly thwart one's activity in the world, as was the case with Darwin. For the ethical vegans, therefore, one possible explanation for their cessation of vegan advocacy is that, for them, the countervailing social pressures and the emotional responses that come with those pressures may have further effected another qualitative shift in their identity, but this time informing an identity for which advocacy and activism were excluded.

The Unity of Transformative Outcomes in Identity

The findings of this study also contribute to current discussions regarding the metatheoretical work of transformative learning. Hoggan (2016) argues that in order for transformative learning theorizing to progress, there needs to be a metatheoretical framework that, at the very least, defines a common vocabulary for describing transformative learning and provides better definition of the possible outcomes of transformative learning experiences. In recent years, much literature has been critical of the seemingly haphazard theoretical approach to transformative learning in part because of a poorly delineated conceptual framework for understanding this kind of learning (e.g., Brookfield, 2003; Chapman, 2005; Cranton & Taylor, 2012; Howie & Bagnall, 2013; Newman, 2012). There have been many important responses to these critiques that have contributed to a refinement of the conceptual work (Cranton & Kasl, 2012; Dirkx, 2012b; Hoggan, 2016; Hoggan & Hoggan-Kloubert, 2022; Hoggan & Kloubert, 2020). Perhaps most significantly, Hoggan (2016), following Aldridge (1992), offers a metatheoretical framework that provides greater precision in the use of terms and in the

understanding of phenomena that are typically associated with transformative learning. One central feature of this metatheoretical framework is the six general kinds of outcome phenomena of transformative learning that have been identified by various researchers. Briefly, these six outcomes cited by Hoggan (2016), and the kinds of changes associated with them in transformative learning, are the following:

1. **Worldview:** changes in assumptions, beliefs, attitudes, and expectations, and how one interprets the world and one's past experiences.
2. **Self:** changes in one's understanding of oneself, knowledge of one's strengths and motivations, in one's personal narrative, and explanation of their lives.
3. **Epistemology:** changes in how one comes to know the world, in how discriminating they may, how open-minded they may be.
4. **Ontology:** changes in how one *is* in the world; how one exists in, emotionally reacts to, and experiences the world; changes in "attributes" of the learner, such as one's "generosity, compassion, empathy, hopefulness, determination, vulnerability, and trust" (Hoggan, 2016, p. 68).
5. **Behavior:** changes in professional practices, workplace behaviors, and one's skills that are employed to effect changes in the world.
6. **Capacity:** changes in one's ability to grow cognitively and in their awareness of the world, and their sense of "connection" with the world and with others (Hoggan, 2016, p. 69).

According to Hoggan, research on transformative learning must first define which one or more of these outcome types are the subject of one's inquiry. Some inquiries into transformative learning may focus on phenomena that pertain to only one of these outcome types. Other

inquiries may focus on phenomena that involve a few of these outcome types. Hoggan, for example, cites Mezirow's work as focusing on the following outcome types: worldview, epistemology, ontology, and behavior.

The findings from this present study contribute to Hoggan's (2016) metatheoretical work in that they suggest there may be transformative learning phenomena—namely, qualitative shifts in identity—that entail all of these outcome types and, further, this coincidence of all these outcomes may indicate an interconnected unity of these outcomes. Such a phenomena may then have implications for future work on a metatheoretical framework. For many study participants who experienced progressive transformative learning, a qualitative shift in identity meant primarily a change in how they were to *be* in the world, that is, a change in their ontology. They engaged the world differently, more openly, and with greater hope, optimism, and confidence. But they also opened themselves to knowing the world in a different way, that is, their epistemology changed as well. Further, they changed how they viewed the world and viewed themselves; that is, there was a change in worldview and in their understanding of self. This was seen most clearly when many of them reconciled themselves with their pasts; stopped seeing the world as hostile, cold and uncaring; and viewed relationships with others as opportunities to express care. These changed ways of being in the world and ways of knowing the world were accompanied by changes in how they acted in the world. They became caring and productive colleagues and they confidently sought job opportunities, and in this changed behavior, they connected with the world in a more intimate way. For them, an identity change meant that there were changes throughout various facets of their being, and these changes appeared to be interconnected such that one change entailed one or more other changes.

With study participant Blaise, for example, the data showed that he experienced a profound change in his worldview in that he originally viewed the world as hate-filled and hostile. Because, his *worldview* changed in this way, his comportment toward others changed as well. He himself became a caring and compassionate person; that is, he experienced an *ontological* change. Further, he viewed himself differently. He no longer harbored self-loathing nor held himself in low esteem. Thus, he experienced a *change in self*. In addition, Blaise started to investigate the world in a new, critical manner. He developed a new set of critical questions to ask when observing human interaction, for example, when asking prospective employers how they treat their workers. In other words, Blaise had experienced an *epistemological* change. These changes in Blaise also indicate that he *had a new capacity*, a capacity for greater human understanding, greater compassion, and greater positive life experiences whether they be the development of a career or the forging of new relationships with others. Finally, Blaise *behaved in the world* differently. He engaged others in interested and caring relationships, took steps to develop his career and to challenge himself professionally, and acted as a guide and mentor to other participants in the baking program. So, all six types of outcome phenomena described by Hoggan were manifested in the experience that Blaise had.

The coincidence of these outcome types suggests that the qualitative shifts in identity experienced by Blaise and others were holistic experiences indicating an interconnectedness of these attributes of the learner. Again, Blaise came to understand the world and himself through his experiences in the baking program, through the relationships he developed, and through the opportunity he had to reflect on his past. So how he came to know the world was the same experience that led him to change the manner in which he came to *be* in the world. Thus, in the transformative learning experience, the change in knowing and the change in being are two

facets of the same experience. Baldwin (2023) makes a similar observation regarding transformative learning experiences and cites Karpen (2022) who suggests that certain substantive changes in identity arise through concomitant changes in one's epistemology and ontology, both of which determine a change in one's behavior. Other study participants similarly manifested many, if not all, of the six types of changes in personal traits in ways that seemed to be interconnected. Homer, for example, changed his understanding of the world and at the same time came to view himself differently, engaged the world differently, and investigated the world differently. Study participants Emmanuelle, Albert, Carl, and Freddie manifested multi-faceted experiences exhibiting various outcome phenomena, manifesting changed sense of self, changed ways of knowing the world, changed ways of engaging with and acting in the world. So, for these study participants, there is a broad range of personal attributes that may be seen as being interconnected and concomitantly changed by transformative learning when such learning is understood as a qualitative shift in identity. Although this feature of identity in transformative learning is not countenanced by Illeris (2014), it complements the elements that he articulates in his theoretical framework, particularly the conceptualization of identity as holistically encompassing the cognitive, the emotional, and the environmental dimensions of learning.

Implications for the Practice of Transformative Learning

Transformative Learning as Supportive of Further Learning Goals

An additional implication of the findings from the present study is that for some learners, the process of experiencing a shift in identity through transformative learning can be understood as a preconditional step toward further learning. In the case of several of the learners in the baking program, before they could have learned to become a baker, there also had to be accompanying or preliminary changes in their identity. So, for them, a progressive

transformative learning experience was preparatory for the attainment of a new set of employability skills. In this way, transformative learning served in a supportive role for the goal of employment skills acquisition. This implication is important because transformative learning is often viewed as the ultimate goal of a learning program (Taylor & Laros, 2014). Here, however, we see how it may in some cases have a secondary role.

This kind of experience was evident for many of the study participants. For example, both Emmanuelle and Carl had to first develop a newfound confidence in themselves before they believed that they could become a skilled baker. Freddie, who already viewed himself as a baker and food service worker, had to become a better-tempered leader before his employment in the industry would become more stable. Moreover, as indicated in the previous chapter, both Homer and Blaise overcame self-loathing and misanthropy before they were able to progress in their careers; Homer and Blaise had to first become open to the acquisition of new relationships before they could transform into the leaders that they had become. Thus, for most of the study participants, an identity-changing transformative learning experience was a precondition for the acquisition of further skills. The primary stated goal of the program was to provide a set of skills to its students that led to employment. A supportive goal in the case of these learners was to ensure that some sort of identity transformation, if needed, took place to allow for the attainment of the primary goal. Therefore, a broader implication for understanding transformative learning as a qualitative shift in identity is that, when investigating transformative learning, one must also understand that such a shift in identity may either be the ultimate goal of the learning experience or, as in the case of these study participants, it is an essential precondition underlying content knowledge acquisition.

This insight into the possible priority of learning goals may further speak to questions raised in the literature regarding the articulation of goals in transformative learning practice. Taylor & Laros (2014) highlight the failure in some transformative learning practice in articulating the transformative experience as a learning goal. They write, “From educators’ perspective, the goal of transformation is embedded in the curriculum and, to some degree, defines their primary role,” but that such goals are “rarely explicitly made transparent by the educator” (p. 138–139). Taylor and Laros then summarize, “Looking at the present literature, [transformative learning] seems to be a by-product, instead of the primary aim of educators, although not stated as such” (p. 139). They argue that “[w]ithout clarity and consistency, it becomes more and more difficult to determine the goal and the practice of fostering [transformative learning] as an approach to teaching adults unique in itself” (p. 140). What Taylor and Laros suggest, however, is that programs that contain transformative learning as a goal, whether tacitly or explicitly, have it as a primary goal. The present study may offer a partial remedy for this difficulty of non-enunciated goals in transformative learning practice in that, before a practitioner can articulate what are the transformative learning goals of a program, one must first determine if those goals of transformation are ends in themselves or if they may serve as means in supporting other learning goals. This analytic step may assist in providing the practitioner and their stakeholders greater clarity in the task of the learning program and aid in better enunciating those tasks and their goals.

Safe Environments in the Practice of Transformative Learning

Although this present study was not intended as an assessment of the design and efficacy of the baking-skills employment program as a program for fostering transformative learning, the data nonetheless reveals interesting practices that indeed fostered the transformative experiences

for program participants, and such practices may help inform the practice of transformative learning in other environments. One practice in the baking-based employment program that merits attention is the creation of a safe space that would be amenable to transformative learning (Taylor, 2009). The findings of this study revealed that, not only was the learning space a safe space for the participants, but it was also a compassionate and caring space. This was important in order to meet the needs of the learners in that program, many of whom had developed a deep-seated distrust of others, of social services bureaucracies, and even of their own abilities. Certainly a prominent admonition in transformative learning literature is the recommendation that safe spaces be created in order to foster transformative learning to create trust and authentic understanding (e.g., Taylor, 2007; Yorks & Kasl, 2006). However, the creation of a safe environment, often relying on dialogue and other forms of conversation, is not easy to create in practice (Hathaway, 2017; King & Heuer, 2009; Kivalvi & Oliver, 2015). The success of the baking-based employment program in creating an environment that felt safe was due in large part to the peer mentoring portion of the program. In that program, students established relationships with others who not only went through the program but who also experienced the same kind of life circumstances that they had. In the case of the baking program, these peers experienced prosecution, incarceration, substance abuse, and homelessness. They also experienced the difficulties of re-entering society and navigating unfriendly bureaucratic systems. These common experiences allowed the program participants to “identify” with the program staff and thereby come to trust them. In the literature, there are several techniques that are discussed that foster a safe environment, but creating an environment in which students identify with instructors, teachers, manager, etc., does not appear to be prevalent in the literature. So, regarding the practice of fostering transformative learning experiences, the creation of environments in which

the identifying with program staff may be a technique for other programs to explore and put into practice.

Conclusion, Limitations, and Further Research

The goal of this study was to explore the nature of the dimensions, the processes, and the outcomes of transformative learning as a qualitative shift in identity. That is, the goal has been to understand learning experiences from the perspective of an identity-based theory of transformative learning, and more specifically, from the perspective of the theory articulated by Illeris (2014). What this study found was that the qualitative data from interviews with eight participants of a baking-based employment program designed for formerly incarcerated individuals supported the tenability of Illeris' theory of transformative learning as a qualitative shift in identity. The findings supported Illeris' conceptualization of transformation in that the types of transformative learning that the study participants experienced were consistent with the model articulated by Illeris. Identity change for the participants exemplified Illeris' conception of progressive, regressive, and restorative transformative learning types. The data also revealed that transformation for study participants was accompanied by four prominent processes: (1) the development of caring and trusting relationships, (2) the development of intrinsic motivation to learn, (3) the development of greater self-confidence, and (4) the reconciliation with one's past and former identity. Lastly, the data underscored the importance of the three dimensions and learning and their interrelationships in understanding learning generally, and transformative learning as identity change more specifically.

Moreover, however, this study brought to light some challenges in interpreting Illeris and transformative learning as a shift in identity, and a claim in this present study is that, based on the data, identity change must be further understood, in part, as a function of the character of the

emotional and environmental dimensions that inform the learning experience. Therefore, too, a graphic depiction of the model of identity had to be further trisected to convey the role of the dimensions in identity change. The study also offered further explication of Illeris' conception of transformation, particularly transformation as a regressive transformation, and argued that any transformation, but regressive ones in particular, must be understood to be complicated phenomena involving possibly positive and negative identity change, again, influenced by the character and the complex interaction of the dimensions of learning.

The present study also helped articulate how transformative learning was possible when the received view of transformative learning—the theory of perspective transformation articulated by Mezirow—has been unable to account for the problematic cases highlighted by criticisms found in Morrice (2012), Isopahkala-Bouret (2008), and McDonald et al. (1999). Illeris' theory appeared to be a promising framework for describing and explaining these problematic cases, but his theory required additional elaboration and interpretation. The learning experiences of students in a baking-based employment program provided the opportunity to study transformative learning, its dimensions, and its outcomes through the lens of Illeris' (2014) framework, and aid in understanding better Illeris' theoretical framework and how it might overcome some of the challenges that the predominant view of transformative learning faces. Also in relation to addressing the critique of the received view, the findings indicate that Illeris' theory implies that qualitative shifts in identity, whether positive or negative, may have an effect on action, as was indicated in the experiences of some of the study participants.

Further, the findings showed that for the study participants, a shift in identity included interconnected changes in an array of personal traits of the learner, including one's behavior in and comportment toward the world, one's worldview, ontology, and epistemology. When

transformative learning is understood as a qualitative shift in identity, there appears to be a unity of these types of outcomes. Finally, the findings also indicate that transformative learning can play a supportive role for other learning outcomes, and the possibility of such a role might help clarify for practitioners of transformative learning the relationship and the explication of the goals of one's learning program.

There are, however, limitations to this study that should be noted. First, the research site for this study was a program largely designed for the re-entry into society of formerly incarcerated individuals and provides only a single context for the examination of transformative learning as conceptualized by Illeris. Also, the study is based on one-time interviews with the program participants that occurred after their participation in the program. So, the data reflect the learner's understanding of their experiences at a point of time and there is no longitudinal data to show how their perceptions may have changed. Another limitation of this study is that identity was broadly conceptualized, relying on the general model provided by Illeris (2014). Finally, a further limitation on this study was the limited number of member checking responses that were received. Again, only two participants provided a response to the request for their review of the interview transcripts to ensure that the interview was captured appropriately. As noted earlier, some study participants had limited or no access to email, and some were in times of transition so were in the process of changing residences. Therefore, the response rate was low.

There are further limitations to this study in that the study raises new questions that the present data cannot answer. Therefore, additional data collection, research, and analysis are needed to explore these additional questions. The following discussion highlights some of these prominent areas for further research.

Interplay of Dimensions as Ongoing Dialectical Phenomena

The findings of the present study highlight the multi-directional relationships between the dimensions of learning. For example, the environment informs the emotional, and the thus-conditioned emotional dimension reflects back on the environmental, and all these dynamics further affect the acquisition of content, and that acquisition itself has an effect on the emotional, etc. (Illeris, 2014). The present study indicates that such dynamics occur, but it does not indicate how, nor does it describe the phenomena with great precision. Further research should explore the mechanisms of such dynamic interplay and describe them with greater detail. Such additional research would contribute to the understanding of transformative learning as identity change since, as the findings show, these dynamics are the constituent elements of identity change and transformation. So, to explore these dynamics further, a future study should ask questions that are more precise and that are guided by these findings. Such questions, for example, should capture the chronology of the interplay of the dimensions of learning and should identify causal connections between the phenomena related to the dimensions of learning. Such a collection of data may also warrant research methods other than those used in this study such as an ethnographic approach to capture the array of social and environmental factors in learning and a longitudinal study to capture the succession and causal connections of different phenomena in the learning experience. An example of such a study might ask the following set of research questions in a similar setting: what is the nature of the interpersonal interactions between learners and program staff and how do those interactions change during the course of the learning program; what are the emotional reactions of the learner to the content of the learning, to the program staff interaction with them, and to their co-learners; if the learning process involves a qualitative shift in identity, how do the specific social interactions and the specific emotional

responses involved in the learning program inform specific features of the resulting identity. The method of data collection would likely involve ethnographic observation as well as semi-structured interviews of program participants and program staff during and after the program in order to provide a longitudinal perspective of the learning experience. Although this is but a preliminary sketch of what a further research program may contain, the important challenge is observing and analyzing the changing nature of social and psychological phenomena in a learning environment.

Building a Metatheoretical Environment

The present study suggests that there may be transformative learning phenomena that indicate that there is a unity and interconnectedness between commonly observed outcomes of transformative learning. If there is a necessary interconnectedness between outcomes such as learner ontology, epistemology, worldview, self-view, capacity, and behavior, then such a unity may raise questions regarding how there may be, if at all, a unity among the varying theories of transformative learning that may focus on one or another of these outcomes. Future metatheoretical work might explore, for example, the question that, if there is such a unity of these outcomes, would any one of these outcomes play a more prominent role in establishing this unity. That is, for example, the question may be raised whether an ontological shift in the person signals a multi-faceted change in the learner more so than would, say, a behavioral shift would signal such a multi-faceted change. Another question may ask, what is the relationship between changes in one's comportment toward the world with changes in one's understanding of the world, and to what extent these two kinds of changes are necessarily related. Further, questions may be raised regarding the relationship between identity change and change in human action; again, if there might be an interconnectedness between those features of the learner that are

observed to change in transformative learning, one of the more practical questions would then be how action is affected by changes in being and understanding.

Gender, Race, and Age

This study highlighted the nature of the identity work that occurred in the transformative learning experiences for those individuals who experienced a transition from incarceration or homelessness into society. That is, this study highlighted the learning experiences of individuals who are not typically represented in transformative learning research. The participants' status as individuals re-entering society and as individuals of lower socioeconomic backgrounds underscored the character of the environmental and the emotional dimensions of the learning experiences of those who faced joblessness, homelessness, and societal stigma. However, this study did not explore the identity dynamics that focus on gender, race, or age, even though the data began to suggest that such dynamics may be significant in this learning environment. For example, the recruitment of study participants that resulted in only one female participant and the apparent paucity of female participants in the program raised the question of the role of gender in the learning experience in general, and the transformative learning that took place in the program more specifically. Although the sample here is small, studying intersectional identity work may merit further examination in order to explore what role race, gender, and age might have in the identity transformations catalyzed by the baking program.

Finally, the data showed that some sort of transformative learning experience as a qualitative shift in identity took place for all study participants except one, that is, Galen. Galen stood apart from the other participants in that he was over 60 years old when he enrolled in the program, and his immediate goal was to obtain any employment until he could obtain Social Security retirement benefits. Carl, the next oldest participant when he went through the program,

was around 52 years old when he finished the program. Freddie was in his 40s, Darwin in his 30s, and the rest of the participants were in their 20s. So, Galen was unique both because of his age and his view of the length of his future employment. This distinction suggests that there may be some significance in the relationship between one's age in the program and one's experience of the learning and to the extent to which the learning experience is transformative. These questions regarding gender, race, and age were not explored in this study nor was the data collection designed to gather data for such an exploration. So, this limitation of the current study may be overcome by further research that increases the number of study participants, ensures a greater diversity of participants vis-à-vis gender, race, and age, and that asks questions and designs an observation protocol that is attuned to these identity elements and their relation to the learning experience.

Scholarship and the Work of Knud Illeris

Finally, a further area of research prompted by this current study is further scholarship on, interpretation of, and development of the work of Knud Illeris. The present study provided an indication of how an appeal to the work of Illeris (2007, 2014) is helpful in understanding problematic cases of transformation and helpful in understanding transformative learning in general. The present study also provided evidence of the viability of Illeris' theoretical framework in explaining transformative learning and provided an elaboration and further interpretation of his work. So, although Illeris' work is grounded in his practical experiences as an educator in Denmark, his work has applicability across geo-political boundaries as well as disciplinary boundaries. His work reflects the sociological and the psychological implications of learning, provides commentary on the intellectually and culturally historic import of late 20th and early 21st century modernity and its implications for education, and contributes significantly to

the discussion of identity and learning. As this study has shown, there are areas of Illeris' work that need further elaboration and interpretation, and this present study has attempted to provide some contribution to that work. However, many more interpretative questions remain. His treatment of the concept of part-identities, for example, does not appear to provide adequate conceptualization. The three dimensions of learning consist of categories that may require greater refinement and identification of subparts of these dimensions. Further, another area of Illeris' work that merits further research is the concept of *importance*. Illeris relies on the notion of importance when it comes to the learner's identity; for a learner, something is a greater part of one's identity if it is important to that learner. Although this concept seems to have a large role in Illeris' theory of transformative learning, it is not a well-developed concept. Future study can explore both empirically and theoretically the nature of importance in Illeris' theoretical framework. Further, Illeris' commentary on current cultural conditions highlights the need for an understanding of identity change as transformation, but questions arise regarding the status of transformative learning as identity change if cultural conditions were different. So, further research on Illeris' work can better explore the culturally relative nature of the transformative learning phenomenon that he describes.

Another important reason to pursue the study of Illeris' work is that his theory of transformative learning can provide an important alternative to the theoretical work of Mezirow. This dissertation highlighted the theoretical problems in Mezirow's work raised by the arguments in three critical articles. However, as additional critiques referenced above indicate, the limitations of Mezirow's theoretical work are well-documented in the literature. Nonetheless, much current scholarship and empirical research continues to rely on Mezirow's work (Cranton & Taylor, 2012; Hoggan, 2023). Such reliance may preclude the improved understanding of the

richness of transformative learning experiences, a richness that is brought to the fore by Illeris' framework. Indeed, there are already other approaches and theories that provide alternate explanatory frameworks for transformative learning contra Mezirow (see e.g., Baldwin, 2023; Butterwick & Lawrence, 2023; Dirkx, 20121a; Tisdell, 2023). Nonetheless, as argued and substantiated in this study, Illeris presents a compelling and interestingly holistic approach to understanding and explaining transformative learning experiences especially when compared to the approach represented in Mezirow's work.

Indeed, Illeris' (2007, 2014) general model of learning has been part of the adult education research landscape for the past three decades, however, his work has not yet been as influential in discussions of transformative learning in the United States as it perhaps should be. Therefore, further scholarship on his work will not only assist in answering some questions raised by this present study, but will also contribute to current debate surrounding transformative learning theory. As the findings for the present study and as current literature suggest, transformative learning theorizing is only beginning to find the conceptual structure and discipline that is needed in order for there to be progress in this work. Illeris' work may be able to complement and resonate with the structure and discipline being established by recent metatheoretical work and, indeed, further bring into broader consideration qualitative change in identity as a hallmark of transformative learning.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide and Questions

General Study Purpose: Study adult learning and how adults change in their preparation for new roles.

Study Name: Transformative Learning and Job Skills Training

Agenda

1. Introduce self and reiterate the purpose of the study.
2. Indicate length of interview (approximately 60 minutes), and nominal compensation for their time as a token of appreciation.
3. Reiterate that participation is completely voluntary and they are free to end participation at any moment during our meeting or any time afterwards.
4. Introduce the consent form and obtain signature if form is not yet completed.
5. Explain how the recording and data will be managed:
 - a. Interview will be audio-recorded without any identifying information on the recording.
 - b. Recording will be shared only with a transcriber. Afterwards, no one will have access to the recording. It will be secured and destroyed when the study is complete.
 - c. Pseudonyms will be used in the transcriptions and in the study.
 - d. Data will be de-identified.
6. Ask if there are any questions before we begin.
7. Ask permission to begin recording and to start the interview. Use backup recording device as well.
8. Conduct Interview. See questions below.
9. After interview, turn off recorder.
10. Ask again if there are any questions or concerns.
11. Provide participant with business card with contact information and invite participant to contact me if any additional questions, concerns, etc.

Interview Questions

Preliminary Questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. First, can you tell me a little about yourself? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Are you from this town? ○ Where did you grow up? ○ What town are you living in now? ○ What kind of work are you doing now? 2. Can you tell me how you found yourself in this program? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How did you get involved with this program? ○ What attracted you to this program? ○ What did you hope to get out of this program? ○ When were you in the program?
Learning Process	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Can you tell me about how the learning experience was for you? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Can you tell me about a typical day while you were in the program? ○ Please tell me about a time when you felt the program was energizing, where you invested a lot of effort. ○ Can you tell me about any time you felt the program was particularly challenging? ○ Was there a time when you felt supported? Please tell me about it. ○ How did you feel about the program when you were in it? 4. Can you tell me about you had learned in the program? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What sort of skills did you learn? How did these skills build upon what you learned in the past? How does it compare to past training experiences? How did these skills differ from the kinds of jobs or skills you had done the past? What other job-related skills were you focusing on in the program.? 5. How has what you learned in the program affected your everyday life?
Environmental dimension	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. How did you feel about participating in a program that was in this town? 7. During the program, how do you think others felt about your participation in the program? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Family, friends? ○ How did others influence your decision to be part of the program? ○ Can you tell me about any outside encouragement or even pressure to participate in this program? 8. During the program, how do you think the program was going to help you find your place in society?
Identity Change	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Thinking about who you were before the program and who you are now, what did you personally get out of the program? 10. Can you tell me how you think that the program changed the way you view yourself? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ During your learning, how did you feel about the changes you were making? ○ During your learning, in what ways did you feel confident or have doubts about the changes you were making? ○ In what ways did you begin to think differently about yourself, about what you can do, about your place in society? ○ In what ways did your relationships with others change? 11. Thinking about how you saw your job options before the program, what job options do you think resulted from your participation in the program? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In what ways do you think new possibilities have opened up to you? ○ Can you tell me in what ways the possibilities for jobs has changed?

	<p>12. Can you share in what other ways the program was changing you while you were in the program?</p>
<p>Practical Outcome</p>	<p>13. What do you think was the program’s goal for you once you were done?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How do you think you did in meeting this goal? ○ Why do you think this was the outcome? <p>14. How did you change through this program?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How has the program changed your life? How has it impacted your life?
<p>End of the Interview</p>	<p>15. Are there any questions you might have for me or anything you would like to add?</p> <p>16. If I have any questions, do you have any concerns if I reach out to you through email or phone for a follow-up conversation?</p>

Appendix B: Observation Protocol

Data Collection Method: Non-participant Program Observation

Purpose: The purpose of the non-participant program observation is to provide the researcher with fuller context of the learning and processes that take place in the job skills program. The observation will be of the program staff and the current participants. This context will help inform the interview of the participants and will help the researcher better understand participant responses when interviewing former program participants. For example, if a participant refers to a tool or a process that is used in the training, then the researcher will understand better the context in which this term is used. Further, the observation will provide the researcher with an understanding of how learning takes place in this environment and when the dimensions of learning are affected by the learning processes. If events or processes need further explanation for the researcher, then questions for clarification will be asked of the program director after the observation.

Data Recording: Observations will be recorded through hand-written notes taken during the observation and after the observation. If a follow-up discussion takes place with the program director in order to obtain clarification, then notes from this discussion will also be recorded through hand-written notes both during and immediately after the discussion. No personally identifying information of persons observed will be recorded in these notes.

Appendix C: Institutional Review Board Approval Letter



Institutional Review Board

uwm.edu/irb irbinfo@uwm.edu 414-662-3544

Date: October 15, 2021

To: Cheryl Baldwin

Dept: Administration Leadership

CC: Edward Janairo–Co-Inv (Full Access w/Notify)

IRB #: 22.080

Title: Transformative Learning, Identity and Action in a Job Skills Mentoring Program

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Institutional Review Board has granted your protocol Exempt Status under Category 2 as governed by 45 CFR 46.104(d).

This exemption determination is valid for three years and will expire on **October 14, 2024**. Before the expiration date, you will receive an email explaining how to either keep the study open or close it. If the study is completed before the expiration date, you may notify the IRB by sending an email to irbinfo@uwm.edu.

Any proposed changes to the protocol must be reviewed by the IRB before implementation, unless the change is specifically necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.

It is your responsibility to:

- promptly report unanticipated problems to the IRB
- maintain proper documentation of study records
- ensure that all study staff receive appropriate training as outlined in the protocol
- adhere to the policies and guidelines set forth by the IRB, UWM, and the UW System, and to all applicable state and federal laws

Contact the IRB office if you have any further questions. Thank you for your cooperation and best wishes for a successful project.

Appendix D: Institutional Review Board Amendment Approval Letter



Institutional Review Board

uwm.edu/irb irbinfo@uwm.edu 414-662-3544

Date: April 25, 2022

To: Cheryl Baldwin

Dept: Administration Leadership

CC: Edward Janairo—Co-Inv (Full Access w/Notify)

IRB #: 22.080

Title: Transformative Learning, Identity and Action in a Job Skills Training Program

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Institutional Review Board has approved the following changes to your protocol:

- Changing recruitment site
- Adding recruitment materials
- Minor updates to consent, population, and study title

Review level: Exempt

As a reminder, this study's IRB approval will expire on **October 14, 2024**. Before the expiration date, you will receive an email explaining how to either keep the study open or close it.

Any proposed changes to the protocol must be reviewed by the IRB before implementation, unless the change is specifically necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.

It is your responsibility to:

- promptly report unanticipated problems to the IRB
- maintain proper documentation of study records
- ensure that all study staff receive appropriate training as outlined in the protocol
- adhere to the policies and guidelines set forth by the IRB, UWM, and the UW System, and to all applicable state and federal laws

Contact the IRB office if you have any further questions. Thank you for your cooperation and best wishes for a successful project.

Appendix E: Consent Form



Informed Consent for Research Participation

IRB #: [Click here to type](#)

IRB Approval Date: [Click here to type](#)

Study title	Transformative Learning and Job Skills Training
Researchers	Ed Janairo, Ph.D. Candidate. Associate Professor Cheryl Baldwin, Ph.D.; also, Dissertation Director and Principal Investigator. Department of Administrative Leadership, School of Education

We're inviting you to participate in a research study. Participation is completely voluntary. If you agree to participate now, you can always change your mind later. There are no negative consequences, whatever you decide.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study is to better understand adult learning, especially that learning referred to as transformative learning.

What will I do?

You will be in an interview with the researcher to discuss your learning experiences with the work readiness program that you participated in. You'll be asked questions about what you learned, how you felt about the learning, and how your learning may have prepared you for work and changed how you understand yourself. The interview will take about one hour. There may be follow-up questions at a later date if needed.

Risks

Possible risks	How we're minimizing these risks
Breach of confidentiality (your data being seen by someone who shouldn't have access to it)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We'll remove all identifiers after the study has been completed and dissertation has been defended. • We'll store all electronic data on a password-protected, encrypted computer. • We'll store all paper data in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office. • We'll keep your identifying information separate from your research data, but we'll be able to link it to you by using a study ID. We will destroy this link after we finish collecting and analyzing the data.

There may be risks we don't know about yet. Throughout the study, we'll tell you if we learn anything that might affect your decision to participate.

Other Study Information

Possible benefits	This study will help mentors, trainers and educators better understand adult education and will in turn help adult learners through more effective education.
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Estimated number of participants	Approximately 14 participants
How long will it take?	Approximately 1 hour for the interview. There might be follow-up questions on the phone or through email which could require approximately 30 minutes.
Costs	None
Compensation	\$35 Gift Card from a grocery store, Amazon.com or Walmart
Future research	De-identified (all identifying information removed) may be shared with other researchers. You won't be told specific details about these future research studies.
Recordings / Photographs	We will audio record you only. The recordings will be of the interview used as the data for the study. The recordings will be transcribed, and once that is done, the recordings will be deleted. The recording is necessary to this research in order to capture the contents of the interview. If you do not want to be, you should not be in this study.

Confidentiality and Data Security

We'll collect the following identifying information for the research:

- Name
- Phone Number
- Email Address

This information is needed so that we can contact you to arrange an interview and if there are any follow-up questions.

Where will data be stored?	Data will be stored on a password protected computer and back-up USB drive.
How long will it be kept?	The recordings will be stored until they have been transcribed, which will be approximately 6 weeks after the interview. The data in the transcriptions will have all identifying information removed once the study and dissertation is complete which will be approximately 12 – 18 months after the interview. The transcriptions will have no identifying information and will be retained for possible future research.

Who can see my data?	Why?	Type of data
The researchers	To conduct the study and analyze the data	Coded (names removed and labeled with a study ID) transcripts of interviews.
The IRB (Institutional Review Board) at UWM The Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) or other federal agencies	To ensure we're following laws and ethical guidelines	Coded (names removed and labeled with a study ID) transcripts of interviews.
Anyone (public)	If we share our findings in publications or presentations	Data will be de-identified (no names, birthdate, address, etc.)

		and if we quote you, we'll use a pseudonym (fake name).
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Mandated Reporting

We are mandated reporters. This means that if we learn or suspect that a child is being abused or neglected, we're required to report this to the authorities.

Contact information:

For questions about the research	Ed Janairo	ejanairo@uwm.edu (920) 889-1640
For questions about your rights as a research participant	IRB (Institutional Review Board; provides ethics oversight)	414-662-3544 / irbinfo@uwm.edu
For complaints or problems	Ed Janairo	ejanairo@uwm.edu (920) 889-1640
	IRB	414-662-3544 / irbinfo@uwm.edu

Signatures

If you have had all your questions answered and would like to participate in this study, sign on the lines below. Remember, your participation is completely voluntary, and you're free to withdraw from the study at any time.

Name of Participant (print)

Signature of Participant

Date

Name of Researcher obtaining consent (print)

Signature of Researcher obtaining consent

Date

Appendix F: Graduation Event Verbal Announcement

Dear Graduates,

Doctoral student, Ed Janairo, from the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, invites you to participate in a research study that focuses on adult learning and how adults learn and prepare for new jobs and roles in the community. Participation will involve an interview about your learning experiences in the program and there may be follow-up questions at a later time. Participants will receive a gift card as compensation for their time. To learn more, pick up a flyer from Ed who is present, or from me, the program coordinator.

Appendix G: Text of Recruitment Flyer

Hello,

My name is Ed Janairo and I am a student in the Urban Education Doctoral Program at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. I am conducting research on adult learning and how adults learn and prepare for new jobs and roles in the community. As you know, the [Job Skills Training Program] prepares adults to enter into the workforce by providing them with job skills. I would like to talk to former participants in the [Job Skills Program] and I am asking if you would like to participate in this study. Participation is completely voluntary and any information that you share with me would be kept confidential.

Your participation would include the following:

- Signing a consent form.
- One interview that will last approximately 60 minutes, either in person or on the phone.
- Possibly one follow-up communication, either via email, or in person or on the phone.
- There will be compensation of a \$35 gift card for a local store such as a grocery store or WalMart, or online retailer (such as Amazon) for completion of the first meeting. In some cases, it might be necessary to have a second meeting. In that case, an additional \$35 gift card will be provided for the completion of the second meeting.

If you would be interested in participating in this study or if you have any questions, please call me at the number below or email me.

Thank you for your consideration,

Ed Janairo

Doctoral Student
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
ejanairo@uwm.edu
(920) 889-1640

Appendix H: Text of Study Announcement to be Inserted in Program Communications

Dear Graduates,

Doctoral student, Ed Janairo, from the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, invites you to participate in a research study that focuses on adult learning and how adults learn and prepare for new jobs and roles in the community. Participation will involve an interview about your learning experiences in the program and there may be follow-up questions at a later time. Participants will receive a gift card as compensation for their time. To learn more, pick up a flyer from Ed who is present or from me, the program coordinator. Participation is completely voluntary and any information that you share with Ed would be kept confidential. Your participation would include the following: signing a consent form; one interview that will last approximately 60 minutes, either in person or on the phone; possibly one follow-up communication, either via email, or in person or on the phone; there will be compensation of a \$35 gift card for a local store such as a grocery store or WalMart, or online retailer (such as Amazon) for completion of the first meeting. In some cases, it might be necessary to have a second meeting. In that case, an additional \$35 gift card will be provided for the completion of the second meeting.

If you would be interested in participating in this study or if you have any questions, please call Ed at the number below or email him. Thank you for your consideration! Here is his contact information:

Ed Janairo

Doctoral Student

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

ejanairo@uwm.edu

(920) 889-1640

Appendix I: Recruitment Letter

Hello,

My name is Ed Janairo and I am a student in the Urban Education Doctoral Program at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. I am conducting research on adult learning and how adults learn and prepare for new jobs and roles in the community. As you know, the [Job Skills Training Program] prepares adults to enter into the workforce by providing them with job skills. I would like to talk to former participants in the [Job Skills Program] and I am asking if you would like to participate in this study. Participation is completely voluntary and any information that you share with me would be kept confidential.

Your participation would include the following:

- Signing a consent form.
- One interview that will last approximately 60 minutes, either in person or on the phone.
- Possibly one follow-up communication, either via email, or in person or on the phone.
- There will be compensation of a \$35 gift card for a local store such as a grocery store or WalMart, or online retailer (such as Amazon) for completion of the first meeting. In some cases, it might be necessary to have a second meeting. In that case, an additional \$35 gift card will be provided for the completion of the second meeting.

If you would be interested in participating in this study or if you have any questions, please call me at the number below or email me.

Thank you for your consideration,

Ed Janairo

Doctoral Student
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
ejanairo@uwm.edu
(920) 889-1640

Appendix J: Recruitment Email

Hello,

My name is Ed Janairo and I am a student in the Urban Education Doctoral Program at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. I am conducting research on adult learning and how adults learn and prepare for new jobs and roles in the community. As you know, the [Job Skills Program] prepares adults to transition back to the community by providing them with job skills. I would like to talk to former participants in the [Job Skills Training Program]. The program coordinator, [Ms. XX.] provided me with your email address and I am asking if you would like to participate in this study.

Participation is completely voluntary and any information that you share with me would be kept confidential.

Your participation would include the following:

- Signing a consent form.
- One interview that will last approximately 60 minutes, either in person or on the phone.
- Possibly one follow-up communication, either via email, or in person or on the phone.
- There will be compensation of a \$35 gift card for a local store such as a grocery store or WalMart, or online retailer (such as Amazon) for completion of the first meeting. In some cases, it might be necessary to have a second meeting. In that case, an additional \$35 gift card will be provided for the completion of the second meeting.

If you would be interested in participating in this study or if you have any questions, please call me at the number below or email me.

Thank you for your consideration,

Ed Janairo

Doctoral Student
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
ejanairo@uwm.edu
(920) 889-1640

Appendix K: Recruitment Phone Script

Hello, may I speak to [potential participant]?

My name is Ed Janairo and I am a student in the Urban Education Doctoral Program at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. I am conducting research on adult learning and how adults learn and prepare for new jobs and roles in the community. As you know, the [Job Skills Training Program] prepares adults to enter the workforce by providing them with job skills. I would like to talk to former participants in the [Job Skills Training Program]. The program coordinator, [Ms. XX.] provided me with your phone number and I am asking if you would like to participate in this study. Participation is completely voluntary and any information that you share with me would be kept confidential.

Your participation would include the following:

- Signing a consent form.
- One interview that will last approximately 60 minutes, either in person or on the phone.
- Possibly one follow-up communication, either via email, or in person or on the phone.
- There will be compensation of a \$35 gift card for a local grocery store (such as Festival Foods) or online retailer (such as Amazon) for completion of the first meeting. In some cases, it might be necessary to have a second meeting. In that case, an additional \$35 gift card will be provided for the completion of the second meeting.

Would you be interested in participating in this study? If you would like some time to consider this and contact me later with questions, please call me at this number, (920) 889-1640.

Thank you for your consideration.