

Cooperative Inquiry as a Strategy for Facilitating Perspective Transformation

by The European-American Collaborative Challenging Whiteness — January 28, 2002

This paper uses the lens of transformative learning theory to describe an empirical study of how people with the power and privilege conferred by White skin used cooperative inquiry as a self-directed learning strategy to change their consciousness and behavior. The research results are presented as a narrative analysis of one woman's transformation. Through Eleanor's own words, we trace her transformation from a "typical liberal" who evades consciousness about unequal power structures and examine how she adopts a broadened perspective in which she confronts her own "prejudiced thoughts" and becomes a leader in working for improved consciousness about diversity in the community college where she teaches.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Transforming consciousness in people who have long taken-for-granted that their own culture, values, and standards are superior and/or universally applicable, or that a universal culture is possible and desirable, is a daunting educational challenge. The purpose of this paper is to use the lens of transformative learning theory to describe an empirical study of how people with the power and privilege conferred by White skin used cooperative inquiry as a self-directed learning strategy to change their consciousness and behavior. The purpose requires that we explore two issues: our application of transformative learning theory's concept of meaning perspective to perspectives on Whiteness, and the strengths of cooperative inquiry as a learning strategy particularly suited to transformative learning.

WHITE SUPREMACIST CONSCIOUSNESS AS A MEANING PERSPECTIVE

Although the United States has often been described as a nation of immigrants, its cultural norms have been heavily influenced by the original colonizing powers of Great Britain and other western European countries. In the last century, the United States has increasingly become a multi-cultural and multi-racial society. Yet, Eurocentric norms and practices continue to be assumed by large segments of its population to be an appropriate universal standard for their own and others' behavior. These Eurocentric norms and practices, sometimes referred to as *White supremacist consciousness*, are associated with a history of White colonialism and racism (Hammel, et al., 1998).

The term White supremacist consciousness describes a way of thinking that takes for granted the legitimacy of an American society dominated by White norms and values. This statement about the legitimization of White norms does not mean that we assume either that all White people consciously or unconsciously subscribe to these norms or that White norms are subscribed to only by Whites. Through the process of cultural imperialism, some people of Color have also internalized these standards as both normative and preferable.

The process of privileging these values reinforces institutional racism. Many in our society fail to understand that racism is the institutionalization of privilege based on race, and think of it instead as attitudes and behavior manifested by individuals. "Many White people think of racism as a problem of individual prejudice and hatred," as Beverly Daniel Tatum put it in a recent *New York Times* op-ed piece, while many people of Color often understand racism as, "an intricate web of individual attitudes, cultural messages and institutional practices that systematically advantage Whites and disadvantage people of Color [capitalization added]" (2000, p. 11). That this consciousness is often invisible to those who hold it strengthens it as a force for hegemony.

In her analysis of how race is perceived by White dominant society in the United States, Ruth Frankenberg (1993) describes three common perspectives. One of these perspectives is *race cognizance*. Frankenberg explains that within the perspective of race cognizance, cultural practices are perceived as different but equal in value; there is no assumption that White cultural practices are either superior or normative. Frankenberg contrasts race cognizance with two other perspectives - *essentialist racism* and *power evasiveness*. Essentialist racism in the United States refers to the perspective that races are fundamentally different and unequal within systems of White superiority. The perspective of power evasiveness espouses a belief in equality among race and cultural groups. However, the dominant group fails to understand that its own norms and values are cultural constructions and instead takes for granted that these norms and values are universal. Because of the assumption of universality, when difference is perceived, it is judged as deviant or incorrect. Persons holding this worldview evade consciousness about how power is conferred on them through institutional hegemony.

In juxtaposing our use of the term White supremacist consciousness with Frankenberg's illumination of three perspectives on racism, we note that essentialist racism is a worldview in which Whites are perceived as superior to others. This worldview might be construed as implying special responsibilities (as in "White man's burden" to improve the lives of others) or as implying special rights and privileges (as in the White extremist movements in the United States that have adopted the label White Supremacist). Within the essentialist racism worldview, White supremacist consciousness is both espoused and acted upon consciously.

Because the term White supremacy has been so closely associated with essentialist racism, Whites often find it difficult to see that White supremacist consciousness is implicit in other worldviews. Power evasiveness is a worldview in which equality among all race and cultural groups is an espoused value. White supremacy is consciously rejected as a belief, but lack of consciousness about how White norms and values are culturally constructed leads to an assumption that what is White is universally descriptive of all humanity. Thus, as with the perspective of essentialist racism, dominance of White standards informs beliefs and actions. In contrast to essentialist racism, within the power evasiveness perspective the belief that White standards are superior is now unconscious instead of conscious. The word "superior"

would not be consciously embraced, but is implicit in the attribution of normalcy to White ways of being.

Race cognizance is a worldview in which White supremacy is consciously rejected. In contrast with power evasiveness, the person who holds a perspective of race cognizance is engaged actively in efforts to de-center Whiteness, that is, to recognize that institutional power structures have favored White standards and practices in a way that has reinforced belief-systems about their normalcy, and as a consequence, their supremacy.

Each of these positions - essentialist racism, power evasiveness, and race cognizance - can be thought of as what Jack Mezirow calls a *meaning perspective* or *habit of mind* (1991, 2000). For more than two decades, Mezirow has explored the transformative dimensions of adult learning in search of understanding how adult meaning perspectives become "more inclusive, differentiated, permeable, and integrated" (1991, p. 155). According to Mezirow, transformative learning is a process of making visible perspectives that have been invisible, engaging people in a process whereby they come to recognize the distortions and limitations in their current meaning perspectives and are thus able to create and integrate more appropriate ones. The initial impetus for change may result from a *disorienting dilemma*. Such dilemmas arise when unconscious assumptions about the world become at odds with experience. They may manifest when an individual becomes aware of dissonance between espoused and practiced values or when familiar coping strategies cease to be effective. Often disorienting dilemmas result in moments when previously held views must be discarded, and new perspectives emerge. Mezirow calls these moments *trigger events*. We use the lens of Jack Mezirow's theoretical perspective to describe how people with the power and privilege conferred by White skin transform their perspectives on Whiteness as they learn more inclusive, differentiated, permeable, and integrated habits of mind about race, culture, and their personal relationship to white hegemony.

COOPERATIVE INQUIRY AS A LEARNING STRATEGY

We now examine the strategy used by the people in our study to transform their meaning perspectives on White supremacy. Co-operative inquiry is a strategy for self-directed group inquiry that has been developed over the past thirty years as a research strategy (Heron, 1996; Heron & Reason, 1997). Recently, under the nomenclature of *collaborative inquiry*, it has been conceptualized and studied as a liberatory structure for adult learning (Bray, et al., 2000, thINQ, 1993).

Cooperative inquiry as a learning strategy has several important strengths for stimulating transformation in the pernicious habit of mind called White supremacy. First, it is self-directed. In our experience, efforts to educate people from the dominant culture often fall disproportionately on people of Color, who find themselves called on to teach White people about racism and White hegemony. As a matter of social justice, White people's distorted frames of reference ought not to

absorb so much time when they occupy public spaces with people of Color. It is our assumption that if White people accepted more responsibility for and could direct their own learning, greater equity would be realized. It should be noted that we do not mean to suggest that the fundamental challenge of confronting racism lies in this transformation process alone. On the contrary, such a transformation, at best, appears to allow White participants to see past the barrier of the belief that racism is solely a product of individual behavior.

Cooperative inquiry has several additional characteristics that are attractive as a strategy for transforming consciousness about White supremacy. The methodology is grounded in an experience-based epistemology that focuses on the lived experience of the participants. Through cycles of action and reflection, participants examine their own lived experiences of manifesting White supremacy. The topic for study is not "White supremacy in others" or "White supremacy in society," but is instead, "White supremacy in me." Particularly for persons whose habit of mind is characterized by the meaning perspective that Frankenberg calls power evasiveness - that is, persons who think of themselves as believing everyone is equal - recognition of the disjuncture between espoused values and actual practice creates a major disorienting dilemma. The cooperative inquiry group context that fosters trust, vulnerability and a sense of community is an ideal place in which to confront the dilemma.

In our study, groups made up only of White people formed inquiry groups in which, through self-directed cycles of action and reflection, they attempted to guide their own transformation of meaning perspective about race and cultural hegemony. As part of the original design, all participants in the cooperative inquiry identified as White. This unusual "Whites Only" strategy for membership in the inquiry groups is perceived as a way to complement, not replace, other multicultural learning experiences in the lives of the participants. Many participants previously or simultaneously pursued other educational activities in this area.

RESEARCH METHODS

STUDY DESIGN

Four different cooperative inquiry groups, comprised of nineteen European-Americans, participated in a Cultural Consciousness Project for the duration of the 1998-99 academic year. The intention of these groups was to engage questions regarding the role that White supremacist consciousness played in the participants' lives. Our research collaborative came together initially as one of the four cooperative inquiry groups participating in the project. When our group decided to conduct research on the project, we invited the Cultural Consciousness Project coordinator to join us. Our newly-formed research collaborative interviewed all nineteen cooperative inquiry participants, including ourselves, to determine: 1) the impact of the inquiry process on participants' worldviews about race and White

supremacist consciousness, and 2) which elements of the inquiry process most directly contributed to learning and/or changes in consciousness.

We taped and transcribed the interviews, thus creating text for data analysis. All seven members of the research collaborative coded the full transcript data set independently for emergent themes. We then met as a team for several rounds of reflection to verify and refine our thematic inferences. Both the analysis and interpretation process include reflections on our own individual and collective experiences during the original inquiry.

We identified common themes relevant to our inquiry: the roles of vulnerability and trust amongst group members, the emergence of compassion for self and others, increased awareness of White norms and privileges, and shifts from personal passivity to an emergent interpersonal activism (Barlas, et al., 2000). We also examined the data to see how closely the participants had adhered to the principles of cooperative inquiry. Our analysis confirmed that each group created conditions and used processes largely consistent with cooperative inquiry. We found a shared commitment to democratic participation, shared responsibility for facilitation, shared intention to engage questions about White supremacist consciousness, and some procedure for testing the group's emergent learning by putting the group's ideas into practice.

PARTICIPANTS

There were nineteen participants in four cooperative inquiry groups, who met to inquire into the impact of White supremacist consciousness on members' lives. All agreed to participate in our subsequent study. Three of the groups were comprised of all women, while one group had two men. Sixteen of the participants were graduate students. Two were faculty members. All participants were mature adults with full-time adult responsibilities, most in their late 30s to mid 50s as an age group. Participation in both the co-operative inquiry process and the interviews was voluntary. Pseudonyms have been used for all reports.

ANALYSIS STRATEGY

In order to highlight the types of shifts in consciousness and behavior that resulted from the cooperative inquiry process, we have chosen to focus on one participant's story. The transcript of Eleanor's interview included her self-description of the nature and processes of change in her life as well as the role she attributed to cooperative inquiry in facilitating those changes. We referred back to the themes that we had identified in our original analysis of the full data set and used those themes to guide us in the shaping of Eleanor's narrative. Her interview transcript was then analyzed to identify *narrative segments*, or the elements that make up stories in William LaBov's descriptive analysis of narrative structures (LaBov, 1972). Using methods described by Elliot Mischler (1986), we used several incidents she had described in order to craft a core narrative of her transformation of consciousness. The story of Eleanor's transformation as a case narrative was constructed using direct quotations from her

interview. Eleanor was then invited to review and respond to our construction; these further refinements are reflected in the final text.

RESULTS: CASE NARRATIVE

Eleanor teaches at a community college in a fast-growing and formerly rural part of California. She describes her state of mind as a European-American woman prior to engaging in the Cultural Consciousness Project: "I used to think about these things and how nice it would be, sort of in an idealist way, like it would be wonderful if the world could be like that [free of racism], but I never really did do anything about it. I didn't speak out about it." When she was interviewed in January 2000, six months after the completion of her group's inquiry, she offered a very different description of herself. She is now acting as a leader on her institution's diversity committee and incorporating reflection on ethnic heritage into her teaching. Perhaps more fundamentally, she sees herself as having "so much more courage and boldness" not just to speak out, but also to examine her own attitudes and learn from them. She now perceives differently the times two years earlier in her doctoral program when issues of difference arose. "...I didn't appreciate my experience[s] of [difference]...because some of them were what I would have called negative. [Now] I am really appreciating diversity and complexity." She now looks back and asks, "Why did I get so upset over some of those things?" and seeks to learn from the answers.

In looking back at her self before participating in the co-operative inquiry on White supremacist consciousness, she describes herself as "a typical White liberal." She was aware of race as an issue because she often taught in classes that had "quite a minority of Caucasian students and a majority of Asian, Hispanic and Black [students]." Despite this opportunity to engage questions regarding race and White privilege, she had felt that asking her students to look at their own cultural awareness was rude, "almost me looking at them as if they were in a zoo or something." From her current perspective, she attributes this sense that she would be objectifying her students to the fact that she "was so aware that I had never done any work like that on myself."

Her responses before her decision to participate in the co-operative inquiry were largely passive; she "didn't speak out." In the course of her interview, she characterized herself as "a real unconscious good White person." She described the associated habits of mind in this way: "As White women we have been taught if you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all. We have been really taught that if you can't *think* something nice, don't *think* anything at all." Eleanor suppressed racist responses she might have in her daily life or any events where she might have practiced racist behavior. "I would just close them down so fast that they wouldn't really have contained any reality for me because I wouldn't experience them. Then I couldn't remember them because I would never have experienced them, really fully experienced them."

In describing her transformation, Eleanor identifies two trigger events. The first came in the summer of 1998 while Eleanor attended a conference on earth-based traditions. At the conclusion of one of the conference panels, a White woman in the audience asked in earnest about how she could help fight racism. The two African American panelists said, as Eleanor recalls, "You need to learn for yourselves what it's like to be a White person in this culture and to be a part of White supremacy." Eleanor responded to this exchange "thrilled to have that as an invitation because [I] had wanted to do that, but that it almost seemed like a racist thing to do." This invitation freed her from her fear of violating what she considered the "good-girl" code about thinking bad thoughts. Her previous fear had been that "to study your White privilege was to be reinforcing it and making it more powerful and more oppressive to minority people." While she had already planned to participate in the Cultural Consciousness Project to meet a degree requirement, she "wasn't really committed" to participate until she felt this sense of "invitation" from the two African-American panelists.

Eleanor's participation in the project began in August 1998 when her group came together to begin its cooperative inquiry into the subject of White supremacist consciousness and continued until the following May. Initially her group was composed of two men and four women. Consistent with the procedures for this method, the group set out collectively to define the scope and nature of its question. There was apparent confusion at the beginning of the inquiry about the fact that a cooperative inquiry question should lead participants to study their own experience. Eleanor explains, "Some of us wanted to say, 'How did White Supremacy arise in our culture?' Some of us wanted to have the question, 'How does White Supremacy arise in my own daily experience?' So, pretty much we agreed on that second question. ... although some of our group, I think, still were thinking we had the first question, which is more about the past and learning information." At the first meeting, Eleanor remembered, "having a real strong feeling that nothing that I do will make any difference if I don't work on myself first." With some mixed feelings, Eleanor's small group decided to formulate the inquiry question as: "How does White supremacy arise in my own daily experience?" Eleanor reports that the group was having a difficult time until the two men, who wanted the "culture" question, dropped out. The four remaining women then conducted an active inquiry.

Near the beginning of their process, the four women discovered Paul Kivel's book, *Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice* (1996). They decided to try some of the exercises that Kivel describes for raising one's awareness. In the course of its ten months together, Eleanor's collaborative inquiry group chose a number of "actions" or activities to be conducted during the times between the group's reflections. The assignments gave Eleanor a sense of felt permission to ponder the racist thoughts that were going through her mind. She considered her conscientious completion of the assignments "part of [my] White conditioning" to be a good student, to be goodie two-shoes, to be the one who does her homework."

Eleanor felt that the group's reflections on each member's actions were central to their learning. She stated that, "the most important thing was the sharing [in our group]. We were able to share embarrassing things that we were ashamed of and embarrassed about in an open and honest way." While the process of having a White group reflect on Whiteness could have reinforced or normalized racist behavior, instead, in Eleanor's description, it heightened her and her group's awareness of the consequences of their previously unconscious assumptions. "[W]e looked at how much privilege we actually had [and] spoke about the [privileges] that were important to us that we hadn't noticed before." This particular action and reflection led the group to another action, precipitated by the question: "If there is a racist incident that takes place in front of you, what should you do about it?"

It was this action that resulted in what would become the second trigger event in Eleanor's transformation. The occasion arose while she was standing in a long line at a fast food restaurant. It was crowded. A White man behind her in line said to her, with apparent irritation, "Oh, there is nothing but Vietnamese people anymore anywhere you go." Eleanor was startled, especially by the assumption that she would automatically agree with his negative, racist comment. "It was like one of those [defining moments], I just froze." Because of her group's action, she was thinking, "okay now what should I say to him? I couldn't really think of a good thing to say. This was maybe a month into the first semester [of the Project]. What I actually did was I turned around and said, 'yes' and smiled." Eleanor had hoped the man would realize that she was pleased about the presence of Vietnamese people. "I think I would have previously just ignored him and thought to myself, 'What an ignorant man,' or something like that. I would have made some quick judgment about him and then that would have been probably the end of it." Eleanor felt that the cooperative inquiry process was directly responsible for her ability to remain in that expanded moment. Despite this shift from passivity to action, she was not entirely comfortable. She experienced herself as "more interested in trying to get something to eat ... I was trying not to antagonize him, but trying not to go along with him." Eleanor shared this experience and reflected on it with her inquiry group.

Unsatisfied by the lack of clarity in her response and consistent with cooperative inquiry's emphasis on exploring experience through different representational modes, Eleanor wrote "a big essay" on the event, which she entitled "Speechless in Sonora." In it she described herself and the events, writing about her inability "to know what to do and about my own inner awareness and desire to say something," to help this man "see how racist his remark was." As it turns out, the essay took on a life of its own.

Eleanor took this essay to her class of diverse students. She had given an assignment for each of them to write about their own experience of racism. As noted earlier, it was an assignment that she would have been uncomfortable giving before her participation in her cooperative inquiry. "I read [my essay] first and you could just feel the whole room shift. It was really powerful because I think of how honest I was and it was hard for me to be this way. And you know the [students] knew that [it was hard for me]."

It was difficult for Eleanor to admit that she was "speechless in Sonora," but the momentum from sharing such stories with her inquiry group propelled her into sharing stories and speaking out in her school. She began by telling her students about the course on White consciousness in which she was participating. Then she sent her essay to a faculty magazine to be included in an issue focused on diversity. Additionally, the essay became the foundation Eleanor used to organize an in-service program on cultural consciousness with her colleagues. Eleanor goes on to explain how her experience has been catalyzing for her entire school. "To affirm what other people have already tried to do for a long time, we have regrouped ... it is full of energy now." They have established new committees, taken on new projects and gained substantial institutional support. One impact of Eleanor's enthusiasm is that others who had been silent have begun to speak out about making changes at the school.

While these turns in Eleanor's professional life are impressive, the more fundamental and apparently irreversible changes emerge in her basic mental frameworks and the minutiae of everyday interaction. She describes her new habits of mind in this way: "I just have so much more courage and boldness than I did [a year ago]. I think because I can have my inner thoughts heard by myself," even when they are "not nice ... I feel like I am a little bit accomplished at it now." She recalls an incident, early in her work with the inquiry, where she had called one of her students Pancho instead of his correct name, Pablo, an incident she describes as "horrifying." What was striking to Eleanor was that she was no longer suppressing her responses and avoiding self-reflection. "I was able to experience myself in my own race, racist kind of set of mental reactions." She had compassion for herself at the same time that she was traumatized by what she felt was an insensitive slip on her part. This movement from denial and suppression of experience to a more open and compassionate response was consistent with the experience of many of the project's participants (Barlas, et al., 2000). In her continued attention to these responses, Eleanor feels capable of continuing to learn about her own attitudes and the attitudes of those around her.

DISCUSSION

This study, which examines how a group of White people can facilitate their own perspective transformation using cooperative inquiry, has significant limitations. The participants in our research represent a special, relatively homogeneous group. Nearly all are women; all are well-educated professionals; all expressed a motivation to examine issues of White supremacy in themselves by volunteering for the cooperative inquiry project. Knowing that this self-selected group is intrinsically motivated toward change, we realize that many other activities in their lives were also contributing to their perspective transformation regarding White hegemony. We did not collect information about other activities systematically. Still, in our interviews, participants consistently affirmed that cooperative inquiry had been an important contributor to changes in their beliefs and behavior.

In our discussion, we continue to use the narrative device of examining Eleanor's story to comment on findings that emerged from our analysis of the entire data set.

Whether or not Eleanor's transformation in beliefs and behaviors would have taken place eventually without cooperative inquiry, it seems relatively safe to say that her participation in the inquiry group accelerated, facilitated and supported changes in her meaning perspective.

Eleanor's meaning perspective when she began the cooperative inquiry process was typical of the power evasiveness position described by Frankenberg. In Eleanor's own words, she was a "typical liberal" who thought it would be "rude" to call attention to race and culture in her highly multi-cultural community college classroom when she "had never done any work like that on [her]self." Yet, she had another belief that prevented her from doing "work like that" on herself. She feared that "to study your White privilege was to be reinforcing it and making it more powerful and more oppressive to minority people."

Two trigger events mark Eleanor's trajectory of change. First, when Eleanor felt that two African-American women invited her to examine her own attitudes of White supremacy, they disrupted her belief that examining her own whiteness was oppressive. Second, when she read to her students her own essay about her silence in the fast food restaurant, she tested a new behavior that challenged her previous frames about rudeness. This experience was a bold step that served as a catalyst for continued new habits of action in her workplace. She began speaking out in meetings; she organized a development day for faculty. These two trigger events led to revised patterns of understanding and behavior. Eleanor perceived them as pivotal to her development. Finally, her descriptions of qualitative changes, such as growing pervasiveness of race consciousness and her capacity to speak with others about White hegemony appear to reflect changed habits of mind. Of equal importance, Eleanor also perceived cooperative inquiry as a critical factor in her growth and change.

The process offered Eleanor permission to be attendant to her habits of mind, habits that included suppressing attention to this issue. The mechanism by which previously suppressed thoughts come to conscious awareness so they can be examined is related to cooperative inquiry's reflection/action epistemology. Actions in inquiry are heuristic in that they are questions one carries, frequently without being able to anticipate when they may become salient as they suddenly did for Eleanor at the fast-food restaurant. She noted that simply attending to that event - in action - had allowed her to unpack more of what was going on for her. "There is so much there in that little moment ... it feels almost like [an] infinitely large little moment and then it collapses and then you have to like go on with chronological time." This is fully consistent with John Heron's (1996, p. 16) description of the action phase of cooperative inquiry as "a transactional manifold of meaning, relating a person intentionally to their world Action consummates and fulfills thought, completes it through manifestation. Action in the form of reshaping our worlds - economically, technologically, ecologically, aesthetically, politically, socially - is the end of thought, thought is not the end of action; this is the basic asymmetry." Schön (1987) names this kind of experience as "reflection-in-action," which is distinguished from

other types of reflection by its immediate relevance to action in the moment. This link between reflection-in-action and changes in behavior is most encouraging for adult educators interested in doing more than simply raising intellectual awareness of issues.

Participation in her inquiry group provided Eleanor with the context and support to examine her experiences further, especially those she previously suppressed. She reflects on how groups can create a context of trust such that participants are able to become vulnerable enough to recognize and examine felt experiences of racist thoughts and behaviors. This is consistent with John Heron's model of how people learn from their experience. Using Heron's model as an interpretive frame, we saw the role played by feelings and emotions (Heron, 1996). Cooperative inquiry's emphasis on exploring emotions and experience through the process of different representational forms dovetailed effectively with her new confidence to explore cultural heritage in her class, which led to the creation of her "big essay."

Eleanor developed several capacities that contributed to her shift in meaning perspective. As discussed in our previous report (Barlas, et al., 2000), many participants shared Eleanor's sense of growing compassion towards her own racist attitudes and those of others. In her encounter with the man at the restaurant, she was able to face, rather than suppress, her response to his offensive comment. Along with our other participants, Eleanor credited this new openness to her ability to integrate her own and others complex responses to racist behavior and, ultimately, take action for change. This kind of reflection in action helped fuel her rather remarkable impact upon her work system. Eleanor's enhanced ability to be vulnerable with the "embarrassing" sides of herself - with her cooperative inquiry group, her students and her workplace - demonstrates another critical quality for Mezirow's "developmentally progressive meaning perspective" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 156). Since Eleanor was able to allow new information and experiences into her life that she would not previously have encountered or reflected upon, she was able to turn one disorienting dilemma into a stream of new awareness and changes in behavior. This permeability on her part, as demonstrated by her experience of the "expanded moment" or her engagement with her students on race and culture is, as Mezirow suggests, important for the future and her ability to continue her transformative learning. Such openness means that she can continue to move in the world in a way that is "more inclusive, discriminating and integrated" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 156).

CONCLUSIONS

The research has several implications. First, this liberatory structure for self-directed adult learning proved a powerful facilitator of significant shifts in meaning perspectives. As exemplified in Eleanor's story, participants were able to challenge hegemonic points of view. Second, learning about the process of cooperative inquiry as a facilitative strategy can help adult educators who seek to develop "learning-to-learn" skills in adults. These skills are relevant for many contexts where participatory-based learning strategies - including action learning, action science, or participatory

action research - are used. Third, the role played by feeling and emotion was clearly of great significance and may have implications for other investigations of the process of learning from experience. Finally, insights about White supremacist consciousness may inform adult educators who are members of groups near the hegemonic center (most particularly, educators who are White and/or male) about needed transformations of their own consciousness if they are to be humane participants in a diverse society. The research team concludes that cooperative inquiry is a viable strategy for helping people with power and privilege expand personal consciousness of their privilege and its impact on their lives.

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Cite This Article as: *Teachers College Record*, Date Published: January 28, 2002
<http://www.tcrecord.org> ID Number: 10879, Date Accessed: 5/26/2006 1:26:55 PM