

Davin J. Carr-Chellman, Michael Kroth

PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES OF PROFOUND LEARNING

ABSTRACT

Teachers play a fundamental role in the democratic process by forming an educated populace. Of our many different expectations of teachers, teacher-as-lifelong-learner is among the most neglected. Our basic research questions are: what are teachers' perceptions of profound learners and profound learning experiences. Through an in-depth focus group with public school teachers, the purpose of this study was to build our understanding of teachers-as-learners by exploring these two questions. Based on this research, the qualities of a profound learning experience include: growing, emotive, disruptive, real, irreversible, either positive or negative, social, opening, and surprising. Profound learners, according to themes which emerged: have depth of thought, are emotionally wise, take life seriously, are adventurous in thought and deed, are unbounded, and are humble. Through a constructivist lens, these qualities direct us to the following findings: profound learning is non-dualistic and holistic, is a cumulative process, and is integral to the complex role of structural identity.

Keywords: *profound learning, profound learner, qualitative research, profundity, teachers as lifelong learners*

IZKUŠNJE UČITELJEV V JAVNEM ŠOLSTVU S PRODORNIM UČENJEM - POVZETEK

Učitelji so bistvenega pomena za demokratični proces, saj oblikujejo izobraženo prebivalstvo. Od številnih pričakovanj, ki jih imamo do učiteljev, je učitelj-kot-vseživljenjski-učenec med najbolj zapostavljenimi. Osrednji raziskovalni vprašanji tega prispevka sta, kako učitelji dojemajo učence in kako izkušnjo prodornega¹ učenja. Namen študije je bil bolje razumeti učitelje-kot-učence, in sicer na podlagi podat-

Davin J. Carr-Chellman, PhD, Asst. Prof., Department of Leadership and Counseling, University of Idaho, dcarrchellman@uidaho.edu

Michael Kroth, PhD, Assoc. Prof., Department of Leadership and Counseling, University of Idaho, mkroth@uidaho.edu

1 Translator's note: The most suitable translation of the word 'profound' in this context, 'globoko učenje', is already well-established in Slovene terminology as 'deep learning'. I have used 'prodorno' to encapsulate both the depth and intensity of the term 'profound'. Prevaljalčeva opomba: Najprimernejši prevod besede »profound« v tem kontekstu, »globoko učenje«, je v slovenski terminologiji že dobro uveljavljen kot prevod za »deep learning«. Uporabil sem izraz »prodorno«, ker zajema oboje, tako globino kot intenzivnost, zajeti v izrazu »profound«.

kov ciljne skupine učiteljev v javnem šolstvu in osredotočenosti na zgornji dve vprašanji. Raziskava je pokazala, da izkušnje prodornega učenja zaznamujejo naslednje značilnosti: rastoče, čustveno, pretresljivo, pristno, nespremenljivo, ali pozitivno ali negativno, družabno, odpirajoče in presenetljivo. Znotraj procesa prodornega učenja in glede na teme, ki se pojavijo, učenci kažejo globino misli in čustveno inteligenco, življenje jemljejo resno, so pustolovski v mislih in dejanjih, so neomejeni in skromni. S konstruktivističnega vidika nas te lastnosti usmerjajo k naslednjim ugotovitvam: prodorno učenje je nedualistično in holistično, je kumulativen proces in je osrednjega pomena z vidika kompleksne vloge strukturalne identitete.

Ključne besede: *prodorno učenje, prodoren učenec, kvalitativna raziskava, globokost, učitelji kot vseživljenjski učenci*

This study explores the qualities of the profound learner and profound learning experiences from the perspectives of teachers. It is timely given the current environment in the United States concerning education, science, intellectualism, and its rival, anti-intellectualism (Hofstadter, 1963), as well as the global movement toward ‘the shallows’ (Carr, 2011). The shallows of the internet are “chipping away” (ibid., p. 5) at cognitive skills and changing the way people think.

These forces, which move society toward the superficial and away from deeper knowledge and thoughtful discourse, are reflected in education. Teachers in the United States face de-skilled, standardised environments, are constrained by governing boards with little understanding of education, and are required to justify value through testing. More globally, students are pushed to often sub-standard online course environments, to instant facts, and to social media. The global and interconnected world requires ever more complex thinking and decision making while their training and potential for leadership are flattened by these forces (Newport, 2016). Our research explores alternative visions for lifelong learning through the eyes of teachers.

Our findings suggest that the profound learner eschews intellectualism and anti-intellectualism in exchange for a more humble and open-minded approach to learning. This profound learning recognises that no one person or group can know everything. Also, our findings suggest that cultivated profound learning continues over a lifetime. As learners construct their knowledge through deep interaction between knowing subject and known object, it becomes clear that profound learning is non-dualistic and holistic, is a cumulative process, and is integral to the complex role of structural identity.

PROFOUND LEARNING

Kroth (2016) originally introduced the idea of the profound learner. He defined a *profound learner* as “someone who pursues deeper knowledge regularly over time” (ibid., p. 29). This, he said, was to distinguish longitudinal, persistent deepening over a lifetime from episodic learning *experiences*. This has been further conceptually and empirically

developed to include the relationship of profound learning to spiritual disciplines, preparing profound learners (Kroth & Carr-Chellman, 2018), qualities of profound learners and learning as identified by adult learning experts (*ibid.*), and the use of metaphor to conceptualise profundity (Carr-Chellman & Kroth, 2019).

Kroth and Carr-Chellman (2018) conceptualise profound learning as occurring over a lifetime, including both profound experiences and ongoing exploration that seeks insight, depth, and breadth; this can include practices or disciplines executed over time. Both the shifts and resultant deep change are indicative of transformative learning (TL); profound learning as conceptualised is not dependent upon a 'disorienting dilemma' but is more characteristically an ongoing exploration into unknown territory and the elaboration and adaptation of existing knowledge. Profound learning is primarily proactive and agentic while TL is reactive and dependent on a change in perspective.

Although TL is generally acknowledged to be the leading contemporary adult learning theory, significant theoretical progress may be slowing or even stagnant (Cranton & Taylor, 2012). As Cranton and Taylor (2012) observe, without continuing theoretical examination, "TL becomes a theory that may begin to lose its relevancy for the study of adult learning" (pp. 12–13). Developing profound learning theoretically and empirically may inform and breathe new life into TL theory, which will likely be found via further conceptual and empirical work to have some similar characteristics to profound learning.

Other theoretical constructs, such as intellectual humility, deep and surface learning, and *Bildung* have similar qualities to the emerging profound learning concept. These are being treated in detail elsewhere, but in summary, *intellectual humility* is a character trait "related to open-mindedness, a sense of one's own fallibility, and a healthy recognition of one's intellectual debts to others" ("Templeton Foundation"). The *deep-surface approach to learning* contrasts a surface approach to learning, which is characterised by the desire to meet course requirements with minimum efforts, with a deep approach, which is characterised by meaningful learning, application, appropriate methods, built upon a solid foundation of earlier knowledge (Biggs & Tang, 2011). *Bildung* is "a philosophical concept that refers to processes of cultivation of human capacities as well as to the end state of this process, the state of being educated, cultivated, or erudite" (Fuhr, 2017, p. 3).

There have been limited treatments of profundity in disparate fields over the years but no research agenda seems to exist. The qualities of a profound learner are unexplored. Little empirical research on profundity in general has been conducted and there is no evidence of ongoing comprehensive theory-building. The purpose of this section is to discuss existing literature related to profound learning.

Profundity in the humanities

Exploration of profundity in music is not grounded in empirical research as much as in anecdotal experience and reflection, but it is rich. Reimer's (1995) insightful article examines the experience of profundity in music. "It is," he says, "quite simply being

moved deeply in response to music” (ibid., p. 11). The complex term ‘deeply’, he says, is informed by beliefs that “human meanings exist not on a single plane but on a spectrum, ranging from the trivial to the quintessential” (ibid., p. 12). Profound experience in music is not limited to the listener, however. The composer and performer might also have deep, personal experiences while playing. Profound experiences can be solitary or with others, and they involve the listener, the context of the experience, and the musical experience. They must interrelate, he says, “if a deep musical experience is to occur” (ibid., p. 16). Levinson says that the listener’s experience is part of what makes music profound. The music may show or reveal something about how life is or might be. The music might strongly move the listener. He concludes by saying that some music gives the gift of vision, and “impression of knowledge—of having *seen*” (ibid., p. 60).

Music is not the only arena in the liberal arts where profundity has been considered. Andresen (1965), for example, developed a Profundity Scale to evaluate the profundity of literature. Profundity, he said, is “the degree towards universality at which the resolution of problems by characters in fiction reflects and interprets the struggle of all mankind” (ibid., p. 387). Literature can be viewed from ‘planes’ starting with the least profound, the Physical Plane, progressing through the Mental Plane, the Moral Plane, and the Psychological Plane, to the most profound level, the Philosophical Plane.

Moving from social science to religious studies, the mystical traditions offer rich resources for interpreting profound experiences. Mysticism, common to faith traditions such as Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, is considered to be experiencing the absolute, the divine, or God. The relationship of mysticism, religion, and spirituality to profundity is a narrower topic than this discussion and requires a more comprehensive treatment than we can undertake here, but it is worth noting. Stange and Taylor (2008) found that an artistically engaged person is more likely to label a profound emotional experience as an aesthetic experience and that there is a relationship between a person’s belief that a profound emotional experience is a religious-mystical experience and their religiosity. They found that profound religious-mystical and aesthetic experiences are “similar, if not identical, to experiences of a deeper level of consciousness, a deeper understanding an experience of the world, that we are inclined to label according to our worldview” (ibid., p. 43).

Perry’s (2002) “look at stories of pivotal, memorable, museum learning experiences in museum professional’s lives” (p. 21) found four types of learning: 1) sparking an interest, 2) delayed learning, 3) visceral learning, and 4) wrap-around learning which, she says, is “learning you feel with your whole body and via all your senses; learning that you can wrap your arms around” (ibid., p. 24). This suggests that profound learning experiences may involve the body as well as cognition and emotions in tandem or singularly, have lasting effects, and can be induced by surprise or novel situations.

Profundity in the natural world

Moving away from the humanities, the natural world has also been a site for discussion of profundity. Smith, Ham and Weiler (2011) looked at the effect of profound wildlife

experiences. The authors say that no accepted definition of profound experience exists but that related constructs such as mystical, peak, numinous, extraordinary experience, flow, and ecstasy have been described by various authors. The causes of profound experiences, they say, have common agreement. Factors include a range of triggers including religious experience, sexual activity, and experiences in nature. Profound experiences can have psychological and behavioural impacts on individuals. Smith et al. (2011) found three types of attitudinal impacts from interviewing 13 people who had profound experiences with wildlife: 1) reversing existing attitudes, 2) reinforcing existing attitudes, and 3) creating new attitudes. The range of behavioural outcomes also ranged from no impact to significant impact. Most interviewees had not experienced significant life changes and had minimally or not changed their behaviour as a result of their wildlife experience.

Workplace profundity

Deming, an early influence on the quality improvement movement, developed processes for improving organisations and his work has primarily been applied to quality management in organisations. Deming's (2005) system of profound knowledge is:

[a] four-part method that describes the relationship between the essential components of systems thinking. First defined by American statistician W. Edwards Deming, a system of profound knowledge includes familiarity with variations, such as common cause and special variation, as well as the interconnectivity of systems, psychology and other motivating factors, and theory related to the learning process. ("System of Profound Knowledge", 2018)

Jensen (2014), speaking of product design, says there are three dimensions which combine to form an entire experience: the instrumental dimension, the usage dimension, and the profound dimension. The profound dimension is found "when we become fully immersed in the experience" (ibid., p. 44). Here the design considers how products affect people's lives, and interconnect with what gives meaning and purpose.

Finally, Baruss, van Lier and Ali (2014) developed a Profundity Scale to evaluate the profundity participants experienced in a three-day self-development workshop. The scale consisted of 21 Likert-style items. The instrument was administered as part of a package of post-workshop measures. Participants were asked to provide a written description of their most memorable experience that day, and then to respond to the Profundity Scale instrument. The authors reported that at least some of the participants had "somewhat meaningful, profound, spiritual experiences in altered states of consciousness" (ibid., p. 1078).

In summary, profound learning may expose elegant truths, unseen complexity, or the relationship of one to the other; be an immersive and revelatory experience which engages mind, body, heart, and spirit; and may be not only a result but also an experience and an ongoing process involving both learner and environment.

IMPROVING TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE AND PROFOUND LEARNING

Teachers working with children in public school classrooms need to be lifelong learners. In spite of this important disposition, the literature of teacher education and professional development does not often discuss teachers as adult learners. In support of this work, the body of literature that has grown out of the academic and professional field of adult education is a valuable lens through which teacher learning, professional development, and identity formation may be viewed and interpreted (Gregson & Sturko, 2007). However, these areas of inquiry rarely intersect to form a coherent perspective. TL theory is one exception, having been used as a framework to interpret teacher learning (Freidus, 1994). The literature reviewed below indicates that authentic professional identity development transcends the traditional boundaries dividing the personal and the professional, that healthy teacher identity development is fundamental for effective practice, and that a teacher's identity is built over time through important relationships. Given what we know about profound learning, the implication of this research is that profound learning experiences are likely to help a teacher's professional practice and can help students develop as profound learners as well. Not only do teachers have important ideas about profound learning, as we explore through our focus group, but profound learning can make life better for teachers.

Transcending the personal and the professional

Profound learning captures elements of broader life experience and translates them in terms of their impact on how one lives (Carr-Chellman & Kroth, 2019). There are strong connections between effective classroom practice – the purview of teacher professional development and learning – and a full rich life outside the classroom (Palmer, 2007), and profound learning offers a powerful added link. Our data show a complex picture of learning and ways of living that may improve a teacher's classroom practice and also build a fuller, richer life outside of the classroom. This fluidity and integrity between personal and professional contexts is a vital characteristic of profound learning, highlighting the limitations of narrower frameworks which depict teacher learning and identity formation as a discrete function occurring within the strictly professional walls of the school.

Identity development for effective practice

Palmer (2007) reflected on the requirements for effective classroom practice, claiming that “good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher” (p. 1). This identity and integrity, necessarily formed in the interplay and synergy between the personal and the professional, is fundamental to effective teaching practice. Levitan and Carr-Chellman (2018) posit that “Palmer sees this identity and integrity to be at once discovered and constructed, and involves vulnerability and a willingness to expose one's personal self to students” (p. 8). Navigating this boundary between the personal and the professional is a kind of constructed self-knowledge, the

pursuit of which is a primary disposition for becoming an effective teacher. It signals the integrity of identity that is necessary for a teacher to authentically engage in the learning and teaching process (Kroth & Carr-Chellman, 2018). Profound learning, characterised by deep self-reflection, is part and parcel of healthy identity development.

Identity as built over time and through relationships

The role of profound learning in teacher identity development can be significant and points to the necessity of lifelong learning for effective teaching. The picture of professional identity development that emerges is, as Franzak (2002) says, one in which “we continually construct and revise our visions of self” (p. 1). Levitan and Carr-Chellman (2018) suggest it is a kind of negotiation in which a teacher creates his or her identity as ‘teacher’ in relation to specific people, contexts, situations, and even him or herself. In this way, one’s constructed professional identity is not fixed or obdurate. Instead, it is built over time.

Developing a better understanding of teachers’ profound learning not only helps us better understand profound learning, it can also help us develop better ways for teachers to facilitate profound learning in their students (Freidus, 1994). For teachers working in public schools with children between the ages of 5 and 18, profound learning is relevant to the development of skill and technique but is not primarily oriented towards these things. Similarly, sustained effective teaching practice requires skill and technique, but also more global dispositions such as broad-mindedness, clear and open communication, and commitment to collegiality. As the teachers in our focus group indicate, their profound learning experiences and their perceptions of profound learners can impact these more global dispositions.

METHODS

The purpose of this exploratory study was to discern the qualities of the profound learner and profound learning experiences from the perspectives of teachers. The study design incorporated a combination of focus group, critical incident, and affinity diagramming methods. This section will describe the method and procedure used in this study.

Focus groups

This research design is well-suited to this study given the topic under investigation and the research questions. As discussed above, the phenomenon of profound learning currently has a shallow literature base, offering the opportunity for broad exploratory investigations such as focus groups. As Threlfall (1999) says:

Generally unexplored or new topic areas benefit from focus group inquiry, allowing the researcher a glimpse at the phenomenon to gain valuable information on language or behavior specifics [...]. This method provides useful perceptual information as a precursor for focus of expanded research (p. 103).

Another advantage of the focus group method for our study is the authenticity of the participant voices. As investigators into a sensitive topic, we were attending to the needs of our participants, observing closely whether public or private voices were being shared. An individual interview offers a private space where honesty can be more comfortable, while a focus group offers a public space, creating a different dynamic. At times, the focus group structure offers the best of both approaches, garnering individual responses to specific questions as well as the evolution and growth observed through group dynamics and social interaction.

An important value of the approach we used was providing a comfortable structure within which the group could warm up to authentic participation over the course of the meeting. Basch (1987) and Kitzinger (1994b) both emphasise the role of the moderator/researcher in offering a supportive environment that engenders openness and vulnerability. Given that the discussion of the group is the primary source of data, this ethos is essential for effective focus group practice. According to Kevern and Webb (2001), synergy within the group produces the richest data and opens doors to

[...] insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in the group (Morgan 1997, Kitzinger 1994a, b): ‘The idea behind the focus group method is that group processes can help people to explore and clarify their views in ways that would be less easily accessible in one to one interview’ (Kitzinger 1994a, as cited in Kevern and Webb, 2001, p. 324).

We experienced other reasons for the richness of our focus group data. Compared with individual in-depth interviews, focus groups help mitigate the power differential between interviewer and interviewee, democratise the research process, provide a more naturalistic, social, and interactive context, and generate a sense of agency and self-determination among participants (Kevern & Webb, 2001; Kitzinger, 1994b; Wilkinson, 1998, 1999; Wilson, 1997). Given these characteristics and qualities, the focus group approach offered significant advantages for data collection with our public school teacher participants, all of whom knew each other well.

Critical incidents

The Critical Incident Technique (CIT) has been used since Flanagan (1954) introduced it as a way of collecting observations for “solving practical problems and developing broad psychological principles” (p. 327). It has been used extensively, being “more frequently cited by industrial and organizational psychologists over the past 40 years” (Butterfield, Borgen, Amundson, & Maglio, 2005), and in many disciplines, such as counselling, nursing, communications, education and teaching, marketing, and social work. CIT does not have a set of rules regarding data collection but rather a “proliferation of approaches and terminology” (ibid., p. 476). Flanagan supported four ways to collect critical incident data, including individual interviews, group interviews, questionnaires, and record forms, where the details of incidents are recorded in narrative form or by check marks on an existing list.

Affinity diagramming

The focus group process also utilised the affinity diagram method, also known as the K-J Method (Scupin, 1997), which involves four steps: 1) label making, 2) label grouping, 3) chart making, and 4) written or verbal explanation. Participants create descriptors and then sort them into groups, then label the groups, create a chart or configuration of the patterns found within the labels, followed by discussion. This approach is intended to build strong rapport within the group while also creating concrete representations of the knowledge objects generated through the focus group activity. Tools like post-its, flip charts, and 3X5 cards are used to facilitate discussion, categorise responses, and to keep a record for later analysis.

Data collection procedure

In our study, one focus group lasting 90 minutes was conducted. We used a combination of the critical incident technique and affinity diagramming, with the intent of developing a rich understanding of teachers' experiences and perspectives of profound learning. The steps used are described next.

- 1) Participant Orientation.
- 2) Affinity Diagram Process.
 - a) Participants were asked, without speaking, to write a word or two describing a quality of a person who lives life profoundly on index cards. All the cards were then spread out on the table and participants, still not speaking, organised the individual cards into piles of similar concepts.
 - b) Participants were then allowed to speak and labelled, as a group, each group of cards.
 - c) A facilitator then listed each of the categories on a flip chart.
- 3) Critical Incident Process. Participants were asked to write a detailed description of an experience they felt was one of personal profound learning. They were asked to describe the experience in as much detail as possible, and why it had a profound effect on them. After completing the critical incidents, the group discussed what they believed the qualities of their experiences were. The facilitators captured the main ideas on flip chart paper. After discussing the qualities of their critical incidents, the group was asked to think back on the first, affinity diagramming exercise about the profound learner, and if there was anything they wished to change or add to the discussion.

Research site

The focus group convened in a non-school institutional setting which also serves as a venue for regular meetings of teachers outside of school and away from students. This research site took advantage of a location offering familiarity and comfort for participants. It was easy to locate, convenient to park, and our meeting time complemented another important meeting occurring immediately prior to ours. We used a large, private room with freedom from interference and little fear of eavesdropping. The group was not

filtered for acquaintances and it was moderated by two researchers. Food and beverages were provided.

Participants

Fifteen elementary and secondary public school teachers participated in the focus group, with a range of experience, an even mix of men and women, and varying ages. All worked in the same large geographic region. This was a purposive, convenience sample intended to recruit a diverse population of elementary and secondary public school teachers. Recruitment occurred through the regional teachers' association and the focus group took place after a regular association meeting. Nearly all of the teachers attending the association meeting stayed to participate in our focus group.

Data analysis and analytical process

Our analytic process was thematic analysis of focus group data, taking advantage of the dual nature of the data offered by focus groups: in-depth individual responses combined with social interaction and dialogue. The analytical process was entirely inductive, extracting both articulated data and emergent data. Articulated data "is defined as that information that is expressed in response to, or specifically addresses, the questions posed. It includes responses to specific questions and probes by the moderator, as well as conversation that emerges among participants as they discuss these questions" (Massey, 2011, p. 23).

The emergent data are derived from and grounded in the attributional data and constitute the focus of this study. This data-driven, as opposed to theory-driven, approach was most appropriate for this study given the limited research base concerning profound learning and the objective of generating new knowledge. The research design was descriptive and exploratory, using the focus group method to facilitate participant elaboration of profound learning. Neither researcher approached the project with *a priori* codes or categories, eliminating the possibility of deductive analysis and hypothesis testing.

Our data included observational data retrieved at the time of the focus group and triangulated between the researchers after the fact, transcripts based on audio recordings of the focus group, and document analysis using the artefacts generated throughout the focus group. Extensive field notes were recorded by each researcher and used to help guide initial coding and subsequent iterations of coding to develop themes from the articulated and emergent data.

FINDINGS

Our findings are captured in two broad categories, corresponding to our research questions: qualities of profound learning experiences and characteristics and traits of profound learners. In the first category, qualities of profound learning experiences, the following themes emerged from the data. Profound learning experiences are: growing, emotive, disruptive, real, irreversible, either positive or negative, social, opening, and surprising qualities.

In the second category, characteristics and traits of profound learners, the following themes emerged: depth of thought, emotionally wise, taking life seriously, adventurous in thought and deed, unbounded, and humble.

Qualities of profound learning experiences

Following are elaborations of the qualities of profound learning experiences. Here we draw from the categorised information to develop a description of the quality. Obviously, different experiences will have more or less of any one or combination of these qualities.

Given the themes, profound learning experiences are:

Growing. Profound learning experiences result in growth. Participants said that they came out tougher; that they see things, including people, around them differently; that they have new understandings, that they didn't know what they didn't know; and that it wasn't possible to return to where they were before the experience.

Emotive. Our participants identified strongly with the idea that a profound learning experience carries a heavy emotional load. These emotions might be traumatic, painful, stressful, or exciting. The experience might culminate in a sense of relief. These are sensory, visceral emotions.

Disruptive. Profound learning is disruptive in several dimensions. The experience is profound because it has strong cognitive impact in ways that generate awareness, paradigm shifts, and deep realisations. Participants described a profound learning experience as one in which they were forced to question assumptions, to see the environment differently, to experience the reality of a situation instead of their own interpretation. One described it as moving "just outside my bubble, there's a whole world out there". Those cognitive disruptions ripple through other beliefs and people become aware of that which they hadn't been aware of before. This is a systemic disruption extending beyond the experience itself.

Real. Participants encountering a profound learning experience feel they have been through something authentic. They have moments of clarity where they feel they are experiencing a reality that was not available to them before.

Irreversible. Once the learner has experienced something profound they cannot go back to not-experiencing it. The person is changed. They have now stepped into a new journey, much as Campbell has described the Hero's Journey. The path has been irrevocably altered.

Either positive or negative. Participants identified profound learning experiences as either positive or negative. There was very little grey area or nuance. Profound experiences for these teachers were not simply good, beneficial, or positive, as colloquial common sense might suggest. Participants also emphasised that painful and negative experiences can be profound as well.

Social. Although the scope of a profound learning experience seems limited to the individual, participants said that it also involves others around them, both in origin and in affect. These experiences, as suggested in the “disruptive” category above, ripple through social relationships, interactions, and mutual understandings.

Opening. Profound learning experiences tend to have an opening effect on people. They are more curious, adventurous, open-minded. Their perspectives are more likely to be multifaceted once they have experienced something profound.

Surprising. A profound learning experience can be surprising. It can be unexpected but more than that, it might surprise the learner over time, as they experience the relief of dropping built up or transmitted beliefs, understandings, or expectations they had been carrying, often unbeknownst to themselves.

Qualities of profound learning experiences – discussed. Consistent with a constructivist theoretical perspective, the qualities which emerged suggest that participants experienced profound learning as something expansive. Qualities of opening, surprising, disruptive, and growing lead to a conclusion that experiences which instigate deep learning must also be part of an expanding, unfolding, or blooming process. That is, this experience portends human flourishing. Given our results – qualities of surprising, emotive, irreversible, real, and positive or negative, another overall conclusion suggests that these experiences penetrate deeply and progressively into one’s feelings and perceptions about oneself and the world. These penetrative experiences become part of the person’s life identity. Finally, the social quality that was identified demonstrates that profound learning experiences exist within a milieu in which the learner is immersed. The milieu is one of social connection and, to carry this idea further, one of beliefs, culture, history, and perceived futures. The themes of flourishing and identity evolution occurring within a milieu suggest the depth of profound learning is part of an ongoing process rather than just the simple cause-and-effect of an event.

Qualities of profound learners

Profound learners have, like everyone, profound learning experiences but those are just a part of a more intentional, cumulative learning process which occurs over a year or a lifetime. Following are elaborations of the qualities which emerged from the affinity diagram experience combined with analysis of the meeting transcripts. Here we draw from the categorised information to develop a description of the quality. Obviously, different individuals will have more or less of any one or combination of these qualities.

Profound learners:

Have depth of thought. Profound learners pursue depth of thought through analysis, valuing knowledge and wisdom, and finding meaning. Depth here additionally comes from looking at situations from a multi-faceted, multi-connected perspective. Thinking for the profound learner is valued, and recognised as an intellectual, cerebral, but not entirely cognitive, process. These learners are not static, they are goal oriented, always moving deeper.

Are emotionally wise. A profound learner is open to emotion and self-confidently and securely authentic. They are self-aware. These qualities allow these learners to take the risks of being authentic with others, to listen deeply, and therefore be able to develop deep relationships and to learn from them the more important aspects of what they know and feel. Empathy, care, and passion are balanced with serenity, humility, and reflection.

Take life seriously. Profound learners are likely to be meaningfully engaged with others and the community. They make connections with people and with ideas. They may be activists interested in a cause. Regardless, profound learners are deliberate, dedicated, respectful, and conscientious people who act with integrity.

Are adventurous in thought and deed. Profound learning doesn't occur over time without taking risks and profound learners are on a lifelong journey, a quest, to learn. On that journey they maintain open, flexible, and non-judgmental minds. They are curious and are motivated to seek knowledge. This search to learn more is multifaceted and adventurous.

Are unbounded. These learners are not constrained by their age, ideological perspectives, or level of education. They transcend structural identity and are able to look holistically at what they are considering.

Are humble. Profound learners, while confident risk-takers who have increasing depth, remain humble in the larger sense. They are reflective, sensitive, and respectful, knowing they are on a learning journey which does not have an end. They are ethical. If the object is learning and not other extrinsic rewards then there is no purpose in acting in ways that do not 'respect the data' and insights they and others are gathering.

Qualities of profound learners – discussed. Qualities of unboundedness and being adventurous in thought and deed suggest profound learners have a spirit of exploration. This spirit builds upon the idea of human flourishing through blooming, extending, and unfolding which, over time, manifests in profound learners through deep experience. The identified qualities of humbleness, depth of thought, taking life seriously, and emotional wisdom exemplify virtues which profound learners also develop over time. Profound learners, we conclude, exhibit a gravitas developed over long periods of a lifetime.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

From the data, nine qualities of a profound learning experience and six qualities of the profound learner emerged. This was an exploratory study, meant to begin a theory-building process which, we hope, will initiate further studies and discussion. Here we will consider the most pertinent implications of this research. Through a constructivist lens, our data lead us to the following conclusions:

Non-dualistic and holistic

Learning is often characterised as a narrowly cognitive activity, something that happens between one's ears. While our scientific understanding of how learning happens pushes

against this characterisation, the colloquial perception of learning is still often trapped in this cognitive paradigm. Our participants, on the other hand, moved easily beyond colloquial characterisations of learning into much more holistic territory. Learning in the context of profound learning experiences and profound learners is somatic, socio-cultural, as well as cognitive. It is ontological, existential, and relational.

A cumulative process

The words ‘deep’ and ‘depth’ are prominent throughout the findings. Profound learning seems to be a process of continually going deeper. In particular, the relationship of profound learning experiences to the long arc of personal growth undertaken by profound learners seems essential. The profound learner is continually going forward. This deepening process has twists and turns along the way which become profound learning experiences. Profound learning does not have a predetermined path; instead, it is a process of deepening and centring through certain experiences. A profound learner intentionally engages in this process over time through practices and routines founded in curiosity and openness. Along the way the learner encounters profound learning experiences which reorient, reopen, and rearrange assumptions, a process which continues inexorably as long as the profound learner continues to move.

Everyone has profound learning experiences. They are transformative (Cranton, 2006; Dirkx, 2011; Mezirow, 2000). Those episodic experiences can have a long term, deep impact on one’s life and identity. For profound learners engaged in lifelong profound learning, these profound learning experiences are turning points along an intentionally and continually deepening and centring path.

The complex role of structural identity

Structural identity is a powerful force as each participant is embedded in social networks, represents specific role identities by virtue of their participation in particular social structures, and has internalised certain characteristics of the self as it has been represented to them by others. The kind and quality of agency an individual possesses in light of his or her structural identity is a matter of debate (Carr-Chellman, 2005; Dolet, 2018; Giddens, 1984; Robinson & Robertson, 2014; Unger, 2004). As our participants discussed their profound learning experiences, the traditional dichotomy of structure and agency offered a limited toolset for interpreting their stories. Significantly, a profound learning experience was often described as a catalyst for moving beyond one’s structural identity. On the other hand, structural identity was also described as an inhibiting force, delaying growth and exploration that might contribute to profound learning experiences. The complexity of the role of structural identity highlights Cervero and Wilson’s (1994) call for “a theory of human action that integrates agency and structure” (p. 186), moving beyond a more simplistic emphasis on either structural determination or self-determination.

LIMITATIONS

There are two notable limitations to this study. First, this small sample and single focus group, located in one geographic region, is not representative and cannot be interpreted as enabling generalisable conclusions which can be extended to the more general population of teachers or others. Second, although this is an exploratory study, meant to initiate and build theory, we recognise that we, as researchers, bring a considerable number of preconceptions to this work. As researchers, we have reflected for years about existing adult learning theory and frameworks. As individuals, we have also considered our own relationship to spirituality, our personal journeys, and contemporary issues. We recognise that others might easily analyse and interpret results differently than we have.

CONCLUSIONS

Profound learning, that is, seeking more depth of knowledge over time, seems an especially important issue. This study argues that the qualities of profound learning experiences and profound learners can be cultivated and developed to improve teachers' personal practice and pedagogy. The cultivation of profound learning can infuse degrees of depth into practices and purposes which have been flattened by cultural superficiality and shallowness. Profound learning, as experienced by the teachers in our study, is non-dualistic and holistic, is a cumulative process, and is integral to the complex role of structural identity. This study is intended to initiate a comprehensive theory building and theory testing process (Lynham, 2002), which will hopefully help scholars to extend, reconceptualise, and 'deepen', as it were, existing theory. By exploring profound learning from the ground up rather than attaching it to existing theory we hope to loosen preconceptions that might otherwise limit generativity.

REFERENCES

- Andresen, O. (1965). Evaluating profundity in literature. *Journal of Reading*, 8(6), 387–390.
- Barrett, J. L. (2017). Intellectual humility. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 12(1), 1–2. doi:10.1080/17439760.2016.1167945.
- Basch, C. E. (1987). Focus group interview: An underutilized research technique for improving theory and practice in health education. *Health Education Quarterly*, 14(4), 411–448.
- Baruss, I., van Lier, C., & Ali, D. (2014). Alterations of consciousness at a self-development seminar: A Matrix Energetics seminar survey. *Journal of Consciousness Exploration & Research*, 5(11), 1064–1086.
- Biggs, J., & Tang, C. (2011). *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Butterfield, L. D., Borgen, W. A., Amundson, N. E., & Maglio, A.-S. T. (2005). Fifty years of the critical incident technique: 1954–2004 and beyond. *Qualitative Research*, 5(4), 475–497. doi:10.1177/1468794105056924.
- Carr, N. G. (2011). *The shallows: What the Internet is doing to our brains*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Carr-Chellman, D. J., & Kroth, M. (2017). The Spiritual Disciplines as Practices of Transformation. *International Journal of Adult Vocational Education and Technology*, 8(1), 23–35.

- Carr-Chellman, D. J., & Kroth, M. (2019). *Conceptualizing profundity through lexicon and metaphor*. Toronto: American Educational Research Association.
- Carr-Chellman, D. J. (2005). *Pragmatism, Postmodernism, and adult education: structure and agency in the 21st century*. *Proceedings of the Annual Adult Education Research Conference*. Retrieved from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/a594/3ad81bd8f6c679a62a5f914358739c46751c.pdf>.
- Cervero, R. M., & Wilson, A. L. (1994). *Planning responsibly for adult education: A guide to negotiating power and interests*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Cranton, P. (2006). *Understanding and promoting transformative learning: A guide for educators of adults*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Cranton, P., & Taylor, E. W. (2012). Transformative learning theory: Seeking a more unified theory. In E. W. Taylor & P. Cranton (Eds.), *Handbook of transformative learning theory: Research, theory, and practice* (pp. 3–20). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Davies, S. (2002). Profundity in instrumental music. *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 42(4), 343–356.
- Deming, W. E. (2005). Systems of Profound Knowledge. In W. Edwards Deming: *Critical - Evaluations in Business and Management* (pp. 89–96). Abingdon: Routledge.
- Dirkx, J. M. (2011). An Enduring and Expanding Legacy. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 9(3), 139–142. doi:10.1177/1541344612444774.
- Dolet, N. (2018). *A phenomenological study of adult learner's information seeking behaviors during the college admissions process* (Dissertation). Penn State University, Pennsylvania.
- Flanagan, J. C. (1954). The critical incident technique. *Psychological Bulletin*, 51(4), 327–358. doi:10.1037/h0061470.
- Franzak, J. K. (2002). Developing a teacher identity: The impact of critical friends practice on the student teacher. *English education*, 34(4), 258–280.
- Freidus, H. (1994). *Supervision of second career teachers: What's our line?* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA.
- Fuhr, T. (2017). Bildung: An Introduction. In A. Laros, T. Fuhr, & E. W. Taylor (Eds.), *TL meets Bildung: An international exchange* (pp. 4–15). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Giddens, A. (1984). *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Gregson, J. A., & Sturko, P. A. (2007). Teachers as adult learners: Re-conceptualizing professional development. *Journal of Adult Education*, 36(1), 1–18.
- Hofstadter, R. (1963). *Anti-intellectualism in American life*. New York: Knopf.
- Jensen, J. L. (2014). Designing for Profound Experiences. *Design Issues*, 30(3), 39–52. doi:10.1162/DESI_a_00277.
- Keltner, D., & Haidt, J. (2003). Approaching awe, a moral, spiritual, and aesthetic emotion. *Cognition and emotion*, 17(2), 297–314.
- Kevrn, J. & Webb, C. (2001). Focus groups as a tool for critical social research in nurse education. *Nurse Education Today*, 21(4), 323–333.
- Kitzinger, J. (1994a). Introducing focus groups. *British Medical Journal*, 311, 299–302.
- Kitzinger, J. (1994b). The methodology of focus groups: The importance of interaction between research participants. *Sociology of Health and Illness*, 16, 103–121.
- Kroth, M. (2017). Irreverence. *Human Resource Development Review*, 16(1), 100–108.
- Kroth, M. (2016). The Profound Learner. *Journal of Adult Education*, 45(2), 28–32.
- Kroth, M., & Carr-Chellman, D. J. (2018). Preparing Profound Learners. *New Horizons in Adult Education and Human Resource Development*, 30(3), 64–71.

- Levitan, J. & Carr-Chellman, D. J. (2018). Learning, selfhood, and pragmatic identity theory: Towards a practical and comprehensive framework of identity development in education. *Journal of educational thought*, 51(2), 140–162.
- Levitan, J. & Carr-Chellman, D.J. (n.d.). *Critical issues in second career teacher education: Finding an authentic teacher identity*. Unpublished Manuscript.
- Lynham, S. A. (2002). The General Method of Theory-Building Research in Applied Disciplines. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 4(3), 221.
- Massey, O. T. (2011). A proposed model for the analysis and interpretation of focus groups in evaluation research. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 34(1), 21–28.
- Mezirow, J. (2000). *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Morgan, D. L. (1997). *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.
- Newport, C. (2016). *Deep work: Rules for focused success in a distracted world*. New York: Grand Central Publishing.
- Palmer, P. J. (2007). *The courage to teach guide for reflection and renewal*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons.
- Perry, D. L. (2002). Profound Learning: Stories from Museums. *Educational Technology*, 42(2), 21–25.
- Reimer, B. (1995). The experience of profundity in music. *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 29(4), 1–21.
- Robinson, M., & Robertson, S. (2014). Challenging the field: Bourdieu and men's health. *Social Theory & Health*, 12(4), 339–360. doi:10.1057/sth.2014.8.
- Scupin, R. (1997). The KJ method: A technique for analyzing data derived from Japanese ethnology. *Human Organization*, 56(2), 233–237.
- Silvia, P., Fayn, K., Nusbaum, E., & Beaty, R. (2015). Openness to Experience and Awe in Response to Nature and Music: Personality and Profound Aesthetic Experiences. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, 9(4), 376–384
- Smith, L. D. G., Ham, S. H., & Weiler, B. V. (2011). The impacts of profound wildlife experiences. *Anthrozoös*, 24(1), 51–64. doi:10.2752/175303711X12923300467366.
- Stange, K., & Taylor, S. (2008). Relationship of Personal Cognitive Schemas to the Labeling of a Profound Emotional Experience as Religious-Mystical or Aesthetic. *Empirical Studies of the Arts*, 26(1), 37–49.
- System of profound knowledge (SoPK). BusinessDictionary.com (2018). Retrieved from <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/system-of-profound-knowledge-SoPK.html>.
- Templeton Foundation (n.d.). *The Philosophy and Theology of Intellectual Humility*. Retrieved October 2nd 2018, from <https://www.templeton.org/grant/the-philosophy-and-theology-of-intellectual-humility>.
- Threlfall, D. K. (1999). Using focus groups as a consumer research tool. *Journal of Marketing Practice: Applied Marketing Science*, 5(4), 102–105.
- Unger, R. M. (2004). *False Necessity: Anti-Necessitarian Social Theory in the Service of Radical Democracy*. London: Verso.
- Wilkinson, S. (1998). Focus Groups in Feminist Research: Power, Interaction, and the Co-construction of Meaning. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 21(1), 111–125.
- Wilkinson, S. (1999). Focus Groups – A Feminist Method. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 23, 221–244.
- Wilson, V. (1997). Focus Groups: A useful qualitative method for educational research? *British Educational Research Journal*, 23(2), 209–224.