

**AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY OF
TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING IN LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

A Dissertation

by

LINDA CHASTAIN POWELL

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2007

Major Subject: Agricultural Education

**AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY OF
TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING IN LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

A Dissertation

by

LINDA CHASTAIN POWELL

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Approved by:

Chair of Committee, Christine Townsend

Committee Members, Richard Cummins

Joe Townsend

Jennifer Sandlin

Head of Department, Christine Townsend

August 2007

Major Subject: Agricultural Education

ABSTRACT

An Ethnographic Case Study of
Transformative Learning in Leadership Development. (August 2007)

Linda Chastain Powell, B.S., Texas A&M University

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Christine Townsend

This qualitative study investigated how transformative learning and membership in a community of practice influenced leadership development. It sought a phenomenological understanding of how participants made meaning of their experiences in a collegiate leadership development organization. Data were collected utilizing in-depth interviews and field observations during a prolonged period of engagement in the setting. An inductive approach was taken in data analysis using a constant comparative method in development of coding categories of recurring concepts and identification of themes. A creative synthesis of the findings is told through a richly descriptive metaphoric narrative tale of novice freshmen following a transformative spiral path to become master senior-class leaders and is graphically displayed in a leadership development model. A crystallization concept of triangulating the data and the creative analytic practice criteria of substantive contribution, aesthetic merit, reflexivity, impact, and expression of a reality framed the validity and authenticity of the study.

Findings and conclusions from this ethnographic case study included the value of a holistic approach to transformative learning and leadership development; relationships founded in an ethic of caring are instrumental in fostering transformative learning and

leadership development; individual meaning of leadership is constructed through participation in relational and cultural contexts; cultural values shape leadership developmental objectives and outcomes; and location “on the edge” is a very powerful teaching place and learning site for leadership development.

DEDICATION

To my very own Aggies and Guiding Spirits:

Amber Marie '05, you brought me back to A&M as an Aggie Mom.

Jordan Michael '06, you paved my path on the Quad as a Corps Mom.

Without either of you this dissertation would not exist.

You both have my deepest love and appreciation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My words of thanks must begin with my chair, Dr. Chris Townsend, for being the first to recognize what I might bring to the ALEC department as both a student and instructor—you intuitively knew and shared my passion for education. Thank you for being my role-model of what a master teacher does in the classroom: actively engage the students. Your guiding hand and encouraging words have sustained me throughout my journey back into academia. I offer you my deepest gratitude and warmest hug. Dr. Joe Townsend, you embody what it is to carry students in your heart and be a dedicated and devoted advocate on their behalf. Thank you for caring so much about Aggie students, especially the Corps of Cadets. Dr. Jenny Sandlin, you planted and nurtured the qualitative seed in me and taught me how to be a “detective” in the lives of my research participants. Thank you for pushing me to be a better writer and find my voice as a researcher. Dr. Dick Cummins, my sage. You have mentored me through so many insightful (and delightful!) conversations. Your profound wisdom and practical advice are my beacons for life on and off the Quad. Thank you for believing in me.

To the classes of '06, '07, '08, '09, and '10 of Gator 2: you are the living embodiments and co-creators of this heroic tale. I sincerely could not have produced this research without your open hearts and unconditional willingness to share your lives in allowing me into your private ‘circle’. Words can barely express the depth of my gratitude but know I thank each and every one of you from the very bottom of my heart and soul. I must also thank the cadets from many other outfits whose disclosing

discussions, both in formal interviews and casual conversations, brought numerous concepts to light in my understanding of how 'life on the Quad' is experienced.

Since I am not technologically savvy, I owe many thanks to Susan Dean for her formatting and editorial skills in the presentation of this dissertation. I am also deeply indebted to my husband, Chris, class of '80 and former member of Squadron 15, who first mentioned the role serendipity plays in the Corps of Cadets' leadership development process. Thank you for your love and patience during my own adventures along a path of discovery and enlightenment.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	iii
DEDICATION	v
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS	viii
 CHAPTER	
I INTRODUCTION.....	1
Statement of the Problem	1
Purpose of Study and Research Questions	5
Significance of Study	6
II REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	7
Introduction	7
Framing Leadership as Metaphoric Paradigms	7
Contextual Learning within a Community of Practice.....	11
Transformative Learning as Meaning-Making in a Community of Practice.....	15
Locating Leadership Development in a Community of Practice	21
Summary of Literature Review	22
III METHODOLOGY	24
Research Design	24
Sample Selection	26
Data Collection.....	28
Data Analysis	32
Narrative Writing as a Way of Knowing	34
Researcher’s Position/Reflexivity	38
IV LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT: TRAVELING A HERO’S PATH	40

CHAPTER	Page
Situating Texas A&M University’s Corps of Cadets.....	41
The Alchemy of a Hero’s Journey in the Corps of Cadets.....	43
Crossing the Threshold to Answer the Individual Call: Culture Shock.....	45
Facing Hardships and Challenges: Disillusionment and Despair	48
Discovering Serendipitous Guides: Resonance through Relationships	65
Passing through the Gates: Stories, Symbols, and Signposts.....	76
Summary and Discussion of Findings: Returning to Answer the Call of Service.....	85
 V CONCLUSIONS, INSIGHTS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	 91
Conclusions and Insights.....	91
Recommendations	100
 REFERENCES	 101
 APPENDIX A	 110
 APPENDIX B	 111
 VITA	 112

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Leadership, like art, is an activity that calls on the whole person. Like art, leadership involves the mind, heart, and spirit. Leadership and art are both essentially indefinable, more something we know intuitively when we see it, than something we can specify and codify. Learning how to practice art and learning how to practice leadership both require more than learning skills; they both require developing humanity.

Using an Art Technique to Facilitate Leadership Development

Change ... growth ... development. Positive or negative, it happens all around us, everyday. Our physical world transforms itself every season. Societies and individuals also transform with the passing of time. As much as humans would often like to slow down or stop movement towards change, we cannot. It is the natural order of the world and its living systems to evolve. As the world moves forward and rapidly changes there is a tremendous need to prepare and support capable leaders (Huber, 2002). This requires a deeper understanding of how individuals develop leadership capacities.

Statement of the Problem

Peter Vaill (1998) stated leadership is “mainly learning” (p. 119). Development and learning are marked by change. In an inquiry of leadership development we must examine the learning processes involved in the change process. Our understanding of change—whether sudden or gradual—might be informed through transformational learning theory. Change itself is the cornerstone of transformative learning theory, as Mezirow (1996) emphasized, transformative learning is “understood as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of

This dissertation follows the style of the *Journal of Leadership Education*.

one's experience in order to guide future action" (p. 162).

Taylor (2000), in his critical review of research on transformative learning theory, did not find answers in the literature as to: "How does a perspective transformation manifest itself such that participants act on their lives differently?" and "What does a perspective transformation look like behaviorally?" requesting research studies to be "initiated that allow the research to observe the change in behavior in response to a perspective transformation" (p. 298). He continued this call in his most recent critical analysis (Taylor, 2005) of the transformational learning theory literature, stating most of the scholars' writings lacked "any extensive empirical research to support their theoretical assumptions about transformative learning ... reflected both in the nature of the transformative process and the practice of fostering transformative learning" and asked for studies that offer more "insight into varied sites of practice of adult education" and reveal "the practicality of fostering transformative learning" (p. 463).

Townsend (2002) also addressed behavioral change and educational programs after conducting a review of leadership studies concluding that "true leadership education—where behavior changes are expected—should be organized as long-term sustained effort" (p. 38) and challenged leadership educators to seek an understanding of what the best learning environments might be for leadership education. Investigating a four-year leadership development program in a collegiate setting provided an opportunity to expand our awareness of the environments and processes of both transformative learning and leadership development.

Texas A&M University Corps of Cadets

The Corps of Cadets is a student organization that once comprised the entire student body when Texas A&M University was established in 1876 under the land-grant system dedicated to the training of citizen-soldiers (Adams, 2001). Even though service in the armed forces is no longer a requirement as a member in the Corps of Cadets the organization remains true to its roots. The continuation of a four-year, military-style framework directly contributes to the Corps of Cadets' vision of itself being "[t]he leader development program of choice in the state and region" (Texas A&M University Corps of Cadets, 2007) and remaining "one of the finest leadership laboratories in the country" (Adams, 2001, pp xvi). "The Corps experience—it's about a structured lifestyle that supports students' academic efforts. It's about forging habits that will contribute to students' success in life, and developing one's capacity for leadership. And it's about establishing friendships that will last a lifetime" (Voelkel, 2006, p.1).

Community of Practice

The Corps of Cadets can be considered a *community of practice* in that it is a group of individuals bound together by a shared expertise and passion of a joint activity or common interest (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Learning in a community of practice occurs through interactions and relationships with others from participating in shared activities. This social exchange creates new knowledge that is woven throughout the fabric (culture) of the community and becomes integrated into the community's values, beliefs, languages, and ways of operating (Wenger, 1999). Snyder and Wenger (2004) provided a structure for investigating leadership development within the Corps of Cadets: the

domain is leadership; the *community* is the Corps of Cadets' student organization, specifically the individual outfits the cadets are members of; and the *practice* is the development of the cadets in learning their domain of leadership.

Wenger (1999) explained that transformation of insights into knowledge is able to happen only in a context that creates opportunities for participation within communities of practice. Looking at the Corps of Cadets' participation in their domain, community, and practice involves an examination of their organizational and cultural context. Pennington, Townsend, and Cummins (2003) distinguished significant relationships between organizational culture and leadership practices and called for new studies to be designed pursuing this area of research. Thinking about leadership development through the lens of a community of practice requires us to see it as a living system where learning and leading are embedded within interdependent relationships. McCormick and Dooley (2005) used a community of practice perspective in their analysis of written reflections from selected members of the Corps of Cadets indicating that the majority of students perceived they learned leadership through a relational cognitive leadership model.

Transformative Learning

Adding a transformative learning perspective to this line of research addressed what Taylor (2000) stated as "a lack of attention given to the role that relationships play" in that "there is much not known about how relationships and related elements (trust, honesty, friendship) play a role in transformative learning" (p. 308). Komives, Longerbeam, Owen, Mainella, and Osteen (2006) also used relationships as a context for

understanding leadership identity development of college students but linked it to student development theory leaving a gap in the literature as to the influence of transformative learning experiences in student leadership development at the collegiate level. Alfred (2002), Brown, Cervero, Johnson-Bailey (2000) and Tisdell (2003) reported that power relationships based on race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and ableness within cultural contexts impacted learners' experiences concluding further research is needed to illuminate the dynamics of these issues in transformative learning.

Studies on transformative learning need to be taken from a vantage point of the researcher being "present during the transformative experience so he or she can observe and record in addition to interviewing the learner" (Taylor, 2000, p. 319). This statement exposed a gap in the literature concerning aspects of capturing transformative learning. Taylor (2000) noted qualitative studies have been predominantly "conducted in retrospect of the transformative learning experience" (p. 319) seriously limiting the research with respect to participant recall in remembering specific events, reflection, and learning encountered.

Purpose of Study and Research Questions

The purpose of study was to examine how transformative learning and membership in a community of practice influenced leadership development among participants of a collegiate student organization. The following questions guided the direction of this study:

1. In what transformative learning experiences were participants engaged?
2. In what leadership development experiences were participants engaged?

3. How did membership in a community of practice influence transformative learning and leadership development?
4. How was the meaning of leadership constructed by participants?

Significance of Study

Investigating a well-established leadership development program through the intersection of a transformative learning lens with a community of practice lens will further expand the theory and practice of leadership education and enhance the scholarly body of knowledge in leadership development literature. Gaining a deeper understanding of a community of practice's contextual and cultural influences on transformative learning will contribute to the transformational learning and communities of practice "conversations" in adult learning theory literature. Findings gathered from this study will allow us to enrich our comprehension of leadership development and transformative learning processes with additional implications for leadership education and adult education programmatic design and implementation.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

How does one become a leader? The long-standing argument of whether leaders are born or made has filled volumes of scholarly discourse. An easy compromise would be to say both, leaders are born *and* made—but perhaps the concept that *leaders are developed* would make more sense, because even if individuals are “natural-born” leaders or are “made” through circumstance or intention, learning and development transpired on some level to allow them to make use of their leadership capacities. Understanding the *what*, *where*, and *why* involved may help to answer the *how* of leadership development. Chapter II is my synthesis for you, the reader, of what I have come to currently know and believe relevant to my research from sources across many disciplines about leadership, learning, and development. It is an attempt to “set the stage” (Merriam and Associates, 2002, p. 32) for the presentation and interpretation of my study of leadership development through two lenses: community of practice and transformational learning theory.

Framing Leadership as Metaphoric Paradigms

From Confucius and Plato to Machiavelli and Shakespeare leadership has always had a place in ancient musings and classical writings (Shriberg, Shriberg, & Kumari, 2005). Bass’ (1990) contention that leadership is one of the world’s oldest preoccupations is just as evident today. Leadership is a topic of conversation

continuously present in the news, corporate boardrooms, classrooms, on military battlefields and sporting fields, as well as at international symposiums and local coffeehouses. Northouse (2001) began his book, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, with the assertion that “leadership is a highly sought-after and highly valued commodity” (p. 1). The abundance of popular press books, magazine articles, and films indicates how interest in leadership has found its way from traditional arenas to everyday life.

In light of an ever expanding discussion of leadership a commonly accepted definition still “does not exist and might never be found” (Antonakis, Cianciolo, & Sternberg, 2004, p. 5). Bennis (1994) described leadership as being “like beauty: it is hard to define, but you know it when you see it” (p. 1). This illustrative statement paints an image that helps us to conceptualize leadership. Burns (1979) noted the elusiveness of leadership as one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth. Leadership might be best viewed through metaphor in an attempt to gain insight into its complex and diverse nature. Such imagery allows a concept’s “essence” to be understood and experienced in terms of another concept in an attempt to make sense of it and derive meaning.

However, making sense of a particular concept is dependent on your perspective or worldview. The use of metaphor in describing something is based on a paradigm, or mind-set that represents a fundamental way of thinking about, perceiving, and understanding the world (Daft, 2002). In the time of Newtonian physics, the world was known as predictable and linear, just as atoms were known to only move in a specific trajectory determined by external forces.

This thought process led to the rise of organizations exhibiting command and control, top-down, vertical hierarchies (Daft, 2002). Decisions are formulated at the top and members of the organization are expected to do precisely what they are told. Burns and Stalker (1961) coined this worldview *mechanistic*. Stability and control are maintained by breaking the whole into parts and applying standardization. An assembly line illustrates the efficiency of this type of organizational structure: division of labor is in small routine tasks with strict, formal procedures requiring little or no experience or education on the part of the workers in producing reliable, consistent results (Daft, 2002). This mechanical view of the world is the foundation of what is known as the *industrial paradigm of leadership* (Rost, 1991). Organizations that operate from this frame of mind are often referred to as bureaucracies “grounded in rational, linear, and quantitative assumptions about how the world works” (Shriberg et al., 2005, p. 208).

Paradigms shape what we “see” as our reality and are capable of evolving as our understanding of ourselves and the world grows and changes (Kuhn, 1970). When the scientific world stepped in once again our awareness of how the world operates shifted. Recent discoveries in physics exposed a world we had not known existed of “ever-smaller elements of matter and ever-wider expanses of the universe” fostering quantum mechanics from which emerged “new understandings of order, disorder, and change” (Daft, 2002, p. 13). In contrast to mechanistic, Burns and Stalker (1961) termed this worldview *organic* because in a constantly changing external environment, internal processes must be less rigid, more free flowing, and adaptive to survive.

Rost (1991) recognized the need to re-conceptualize how organizations operated in this new worldview, proclaiming we are now in the *postindustrial paradigm of leadership* because the old one was not adequate to explain new realities of the world. Rapid globalization, instant information, exploding technology, and increasing population diversity are creating change so quickly that what was believed to be an orderly and stable singular reality has come to be seen by many as blurred, chaotic, and unpredictable multiple realities (Shriberg et al., 2005). In a mechanistic worldview the leader takes personal responsibility for leadership, leaving followers responsible for only being good followers (Drath, 2001). In an organic organization authority to make decisions is awarded to even the lowest level members and they are assigned roles rather than tasks in which discretion and responsibility are encouraged in accomplishing their jobs. It is in this mind frame that recognizing how followers play a significant reciprocal role in the leadership process is brought to light.

Resonating with quantum physics and ecology, this new paradigm of leadership realizes the world is not made up of separate parts, instead its dynamic lies in their interdependence. Wheatley (1992) contended, “Nothing exists at the subatomic level, or can be observed, without engagement with another energy source” (p. 14). “Relatedness is the organizing principle of the universe” according to Jaworski (1998, p. 59).

Peter Senge, in his introduction of Joseph Jaworski’s (1998) book, *Synchronicity: The Inner Path of Leadership*, spoke of a “shift from seeing the world made up of things to seeing the world that’s open and primarily made up of relationships” (p. 10). Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, and Flowers (2005) asserted that connectedness is the “defining

feature of the new worldview” based on an understanding of reality that differs fundamentally from the world of isolated particles and isolated selves (p. 188). “The whole exists through continually manifesting in the parts, and the parts exist as embodiments of the whole” (Senge et al., 2005, p. 6). In this vein, the dominant image of organizations moved from that of a static, well-oiled machine to one of a *living system* or web of interaction in constant flux (Wheatley, 1992).

Contextual Learning within a Community of Practice

Communities of practices are types of organizations based on a living system design or “ecology of interaction” (Snyder & Wenger, 2004, p. 39). People in communities of practice share experiences and knowledge freely as they share a passion for joint enterprise and learn new approaches or best-practices from each other (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). As “embodied and emotional contexts for learning” communities of practice are able to “retain knowledge in living ways” making learning “a vibrant process” (Kupers, 2004, p. 885).

Learning within a community of practice depends on three structural dimensions: *domain, community, and practice* (Snyder & Wenger, 2004). The first structure, domain, refers to the unifying topic, activity, or common body of knowledge that gives the community focus. The very essence of the domain defines the community of practice’s identity, activities, and what it cares about—their very reason for existence.

The second structure, community, refers to the social environment and quality of relationships that bind members together. The ‘feeling of community’ is essential (Snyder & Wenger, 2004). Through regular social exchange involving joint pursuits and

discussion, trusting and mutually respectful relationships are established and maintained. Especially important is the creation of safe psychological spaces that encourage a willingness to share ideas, reveal one's shortcomings, ask pointed questions, and be intellectually innovative (McCormick & Dooley, 2005). Common purpose and cohesive group interaction set the stage for learning and shared knowledge creation.

The problem that arises with this unified approach to knowledge construction is in the continuation of status quo points of view within a community. Brown, Cervero, and Johnson-Bailey (2000) claimed that those “privileged by the system may perceive that there is no inequity” (p. 284). Differences and diversity are often “masked” and “rendered equally silent and invisible” (St. Clair, 1998, p. 6). Power relationships structured around positionality—“ways in which people are categorized in a Western hierarchical society primarily by race, gender, class, physical ability, and sexual orientation”—have a profound effect on all teaching and learning” (Brown et al., 2000, p. 273). In as much as community provides the context in which positive relationships are formed, attention needs to be paid to issues of power that exist in interpersonal relationships and how it affects members' learning processes.

The third structure, *practice*, refers to the shared repertoire of tools, frameworks, methods, stories, activities, words, symbols, in addition to any other communal resources (Hansman, 2001; Snyder & Wenger, 2004). These are used to support members' learning, development of skills, and improvement of the community's practice. Expertise is located in the community's shared insights (Stein & Imel, 2002). Critical theorists demand we recognize “power as a commodity” expressed in a

community's practice (Kilgore, 2001, p. 57). The shared repertoire provides a means of developing hegemony, a reinforcing logic or common-sense lens, through which members of a community make meaning of their everyday experiences, hence, perpetuating the definition of reality that serves the dominant class (Kilgore, 2001). Learning from a critical worldview involves questioning the practices of a community with the possibility of acting to change the "material and social conditions" as well as the "commonly held assumptions that reinforce" the status quo (Kilgore, 2001, p. 55).

Learning in community is an illustration of situated learning in which knowledge acquisition and construction are done in a social setting (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Resnick's (1987) analysis of instruction taking place inside traditional classrooms and the contextualized, collaborative nature of learning occurring outside of school first introduced the move of learning theorists from viewing learning as being located in an individual's isolated mind to emphasizing the social nature of cognition and meaning development because learning is a result of interpersonal interactions. Resnick's (1987) seminal study launched the development of situated activity and participatory perspectives of learning in context (Barab & Duffy, 2000). Learning is not a segregated activity as often found in conventional classrooms that have a prevailing mechanistic worldview to produce a "uniform, standardized product as efficiently as possible" (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers, 2004, p. 4). Learning occurs in a community of practice's context just by participating and being a member of a living system.

Vygotsky (1978), a twentieth-century Russian psychologist and early pioneer of sociocultural learning theory, contributed to the concept of contextual learning with his work based on the idea that all human activities take place in a cultural context which provides shared beliefs, values, knowledge, symbol systems, and structured relationships. The industrial paradigm of a purely rational, linear process of knowledge construction construes learning as being disembodied from experience and ignores the impact of context and culture. This perspective of learning fails to acknowledge how issues of positionality and cultural identity influence the learner's experience (Alfred, 2002; Tisdell, 2003).

Situated learning in contextually-based interactions among peripheral participants and full participants in a community of practice is "characterized by modeling of both mastery of practice and the process of gaining mastery" (Jacobson, 1996, p. 23). Such learning may be thought of as a type of apprenticeship because participants work on authentic activities and tasks in the ordinary practice of the culture (Pratt, 2002). Participants create their own knowledge out of the "raw materials of experience, i.e., the relationships with other participants, the activities, the environmental cues, and the social organization that the community develops and maintains" rather than acquiring information in organized packages (Stein, 1998, p. 1). Learning is "dilemma driven rather than content driven" (Stein, 1998, p. 2). Learners are put into situations that challenge their intellectual and psychomotor skills (Lankard, 1995). The structure of learning is implicit in the experience of cooperation and

participation rather than in the subject matter alone. Knowledge is created through dialogue and reflection among community members (Stein, 1998).

Lave (1997) described the processes of “way in” (period of observation in which a learner watches a master and makes a first attempt at solving a problem) and “practice” (refining and perfecting the use of acquired knowledge) as ways knowledge is obtained in contextual learning. Novices enter at the edge and participate on the periphery, gradually moving in, but as their engagement deepens and they move closer to the center, they acquire enough knowledge and skill to become full participants. Learning moves beyond developing skill competence to transformation of participants’ identities as they progress through the social network. The novice’s change in identity is fundamental to moving from the peripheral to the center of the community (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Transformative Learning as Meaning-Making in a Community of Practice

Transformation of identity brings forth images of caterpillars emerging as butterflies (Baumgartner, 2001). Transformation is about change resulting in “*how* we know” not in “*what* we know” (Kegan, 2000, emphasis in the original, p. 49).

Acquisition of skills and content knowledge is *what* a novice learns about their domain and practice but transformation of their identity to a master in the community through relationships and cultural discourse is *how* they come to know. Taylor (2000) reported the “importance of relationships” to be the “most common finding among all studies reviewed” in his analysis of research concerning transformational learning and found the essential ingredient in the transformative process to be “developing relationships with

like-minded individuals” (p. 307). Sveinunggaard’s (1993) study revealed “that the transformative learning processes are social in nature; that an interdependent relationship exists between the individual and his/her context. This relationship is both reciprocal and reactive—impact on one was felt by the other” (p. 278).

Through engagement with the community’s culture and activities the participants’ learning and sense of identity become inseparable and “are aspects of the same phenomenon” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 115). A person’s identity rests on their individual self-concept being “rooted in the contexts of relationships in which it is being formed” thus, changing through the “social relations of learning” (Jacobson, 1996, p. 24).

Barab and Duffy (2000) promoted the notion of “development of self through participation in a community” (p. 35) because the context of community places personal relationships at the very heart of shaping its’ members identities. St. Clair (1998) extended this concept, “In as much as people create and recreate community relationships, we create and recreate ourselves, defining ourselves by constraint, but also in terms of possibility. The nexus of these relationships bounds the social being, and binds it to other social beings” (p. 8). He advocated “community as relationship” in that ‘community’ is not a product of interpersonal action but is the “very *stuff* of personal interaction” (St. Clair, 1998, p. 8).

Transformation of an individual’s identity within a community of practice is a direct result of personal interactions. The relationships formed and nurtured influence a participant’s frame of reference or meaning perspective—a structure of assumptions and

expectations—that impressions are filtered through to make sense of the world (Mezirow, 2000). A person is actually changed—transformed—when their deeply held assumptions of themselves and the world are not adequate to understand a certain experience; therefore, they negotiate new meaning causing a core shift in their frame of reference (Mezirow, 2000). Our minds make ‘arrangements’ that create coherence out of our experience—making sense of something to understand what *has* happened and what *is* happening to predict what *might* happen—constructing knowledge of ourselves and the world (Drath & Palus, 1994). This new knowledge is important, but as Bohm (1984) believed, the capacity to perceive or think differently is of greater value. Although movement in meaning perspectives occurs within an individual it does not happen independently. Tension is created when different perspectives and ways of being are encountered causing us to question what we thought was to be true. If this reality is held by people we are not familiar with we might easily disregard it; however, conflict arises if it is held by those we trust and have a relationship with (Southern, 2005).

Social relationships offer the context (Clark & Wilson, 1991) in which individuals exercise significant components of transformational learning: critical reflection and reflective discourse (Mezirow, 2000). Critical reflection provides the means by which we explore our current assumptions and beliefs, “assessing their validity in the light of new experiences or knowledge, considering their sources, and examining underlying premises” (Cranton, 2002, p. 65). This is done in reflective discourse through a “back-and-forth dialectical manner that uncovers the essence of meaning or interpretation” (Scott, 1997, p. 46) from which an individual determines if their current

perspective matches with what is being discussed. Even though Einstein is often conceived of as the autonomous originator of relativity, we need to take a step back and view the context in which he developed his theory. It was his personal perspective transformation mediated through participation within a scientific community of ongoing interactions and conversations that influenced him to “change the subject” of that conversation and start a new direction of thought (Drath, 2001). Participating in this process within an established relationship is pivotal in creating a supportive environment that facilitates transformation (Cranton, 2002; Sveinunggaard, 1993).

Discourse is not only shared communication but also a means of constructing culture and a shared meaning system reflective of the community’s values. Fenwick (2001) described discourse as a “system of norms, values, and symbols (images and words) shaping particular beliefs and behaviors” (p. 9). Critical theorists question whose interests are being served by the dominant discourses in a community and how positionality affects the creation and advancement of such discourse. A community’s discourse controls knowledge and its production by discussing certain things, at times making them visible and important, while ignoring other things, rendering them invisible and not important (Fenwick, 2001). Objects, artifacts of the community’s culture, are a source of discourse portraying values in which some items are held in higher stature and deemed desirable while others are cast aside. Hidden messages in cultural discourse can be empowering to some members of a community while oppressive to others (Alfred, 2002; Brown et al., 2000; Sandlin, 2000). Even community members’ identities are controlled by behaviors that are endorsed and other behaviors that are considered deviant

or abnormal, thereby favoring segments of the population and marginalizing others (Fenwick, 2001).

Hansman (2001) placed learning in context at an intersection of people, tools, activity, and social environment. The knowledge produced through this learning process is interwoven with the context and cannot be separated from the situation. According to Brown et al. (1989) knowledge is “a product of the activity, context, and culture in which it is developed and used” (p. 32). Members of a community socially construct knowledge through negotiating the meaning and purpose of the tools they use along with the activities and relationships they engage in (Brown et al., 1989). As people interact in a community of practice they begin to understand and participate in that community’s history, assumptions, rules, and cultural values (Lave & Wenger, 1991). They become “embedded in the culture in which knowing and learning have meaning” (Wilson, 1993, p. 77). The drawback to this process is noted by Ross-Gordon (1999) in that ‘encultured’ gender identity development theory locates learners in a social and historical context, and if an individual is immersed in “social practices that convey both male privilege and vigilance to male-female differences, the individual (albeit unwittingly) comes to collaborate in the reproduction of male power” (p. 30).

Alfred (2002) pointed out that even if certain values and behaviors of the dominant members of a community are thought to be superior, it isn’t because of the “inherent goodness or rightness in the values themselves,” it is due to the power the group holds over the marginalized members (Nieto as cited in Alfred, 2002, p. 7). However, in the sociocultural perspective of learning in a living system, socially

constructed multiple realities keep the values held by the dominant class from being treated as the ultimate or only valid truth (Alfred, 2002).

Even if a discourse has existing power dynamics in operation, the community members who are silenced can in turn exercise their individual and collective voices to challenge and act upon hegemonic practices to change cultural norms (Alfred, 2002; Billett, 2001). Alfred (2002) argued that a person's interest level, priorities, personal values, and perceptions guide their ways of knowing and level of participation in activities and relationships. The agency of individuals to choose how they engage in learning cannot be overlooked because it ultimately determines what is learned (Billett, 2001). The ability of an individual to be an agent in and on their own life, actively changing the course of one's thinking and action, falls into the critical pedagogy of Freire's (1970) idea of transformational learning through a process of 'conscientization' in which they bring to the surface of their awareness oppressive social structures that have influenced them and recognize their own power to change their current reality (Clark, 1993; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Movement from being unaware of external forces that shape your thoughts and behavior to a realization that you do have some control in directing your life involves a transformation in which your assumptions, beliefs, values, and way of seeing the world and your place in it are brought into question through either a sudden 'disorienting dilemma' (Mezirow, 2000) or gradually from an 'integrating circumstance' that happens after an earlier period of exploration and searching for a 'missing piece' in your life's puzzle (Clark, 1993). It takes critical reflection *and* other ways of knowing to understand

and make meaning from the disorienting dilemma or newly-found missing piece (Belenky & Stanton, 2000). According to Grabove (1997), transformative learning has “two layers that work in tension: At the center is the person. The transformative learner moves in and out of the cognitive and the intuitive, of the rational and the imaginative, of the subjective and the objective, of the personal and the social” (p. 95).

Locating Leadership Development in a Community of Practice

Learning is considered by some as “an increase or change in knowledge or skill that occurs as a result of some experience” (Maurer, 2002, p. 14) and as a process of constructing meaning and how people make sense of their experience (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999) by others. However, development is “an on-going, *longer* change or evolution that occurs through *many* learning experiences” (Maurer, 2002, p. 14). As such, transformative learning is part of the developmental process of ‘learning’ leadership (Kegan & Lahey, 2001).

In Day’s (2000) review of leadership development research he reported *leader development* as being about individuals developing competencies to be more effective but *leadership development* as learning how to formulate relational bonds and collective meaning-making. Since “leadership is not a solitary endeavor” (Huber, 2002, p. 29) developing leadership capacities requires being in relationship with others. Drath and Palus (1994) determined leadership is meaning-making in a community of practice; this is not their definition of leadership, it is a metaphor to help conceptualize what happens in the enactment of leadership. People in a community of practice are united not just by membership, but also through involvement with one another in the course of relationship

and action (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Leadership development in a community of practice involves a process of experiential meaning-making for its members. Those involved in shared activity and culture create shared ways of knowing and understanding themselves and their world. This social meaning-making takes place so members of a community are able to communicate and function together. Meaning-making in the collective sense, for instance, happens when framing experiences together, solving problems or actively engaging in dialogue and thus, leadership development occurs through participation in the community of practice (Drath & Palus, 1994).

Summary of Literature Review

Members in a community of practice are individuals who are bound together through shared activity of a common interest. Participants in a leadership development community of practice start on the peripheral as novice followers and travel to the center as master leaders. This movement occurs over time through participation in the community's cultural discourse and social interactions of its members. Leadership capacities are developed not only as participants acquire new skills and knowledge but also as they make meaning of their experiences.

As members in a community of practice construct and reconstruct their self-perceptions in reaction to their lived experiences (Taylor, Marienau, & Fiddler, 2000) they are involved in transformation. Kegan (2000) strongly suggested “*trans-form-ative* learning puts the form itself at risk of change” (emphasis in original, p. 49). Lord and Brown (2004) concluded that in the process of leadership followers change how they envision themselves. In a community of practice this change process—transformation—

occurs as novices on the peripheral progress toward the center. Movement along the way involves development of knowledge, skills, and identity. Once in the center they in turn act as leaders to the new members, bringing them “into the fold” in a regenerative fashion. Such is the life of a living system! It is continually renewing itself. Self-perpetuation is the keystone of communities of practice (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). Yet this self-renewal is not always seen as a positive aspect. In an attempt to conserve and protect ‘corporate knowledge’ communities of practice may not critically challenge their standard practices and common-place information, sometimes leading novices to learn improper procedures or behaviors of more experienced members (Fenwick, 2001).

Leadership development in a community of practice can be thought of as “an adaptive process that coordinates and maintains the equilibrium of the community, both within itself and in its relations with the world-at-large” (Drath & Palus, 1994, p. 21). Transformative learning is part of the adaptive process in leadership development as community members’ new meaning perspectives evolve and frames of reference and worldview paradigms shift.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A *qualitative* approach was taken with this *ethnographic case study* because I needed an “inductive investigative strategy” (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 179) that allowed me to understand how the participants made meaning of their transformative learning and leadership development experiences in the Corps of Cadets. Janesick (2000) agonized over how “we have lost the *human and passionate element of research*. Becoming immersed in a study requires passion: passion for people, passion for communication, and passion for understanding people. *This is the contribution of qualitative research*” (italics added, p. 394). Being the primary instrument of data collection and analysis provided the opportunity for me to explore from an open and nonlinear perspective while bringing passion back into the world of research. I was able to flow in the direction of the findings as they emerged and “return to a discourse on the personal” as Janesick (2000, p. 394) called for in capturing the cadets’ lived experience.

My own philosophical orientation is from a *naturalistic-constructivist paradigm* (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen, 1993) of which there is not one objective reality ‘out there’ but rather multiple realities constructed from multiple perceptions. Multiple perspectives brought parts of the data into the whole. Erlandson et al. (1993) stated, “[b]y ‘understanding the whole’ we refer to a working comprehension of the interrelationships that give definition to it” (p. 14). Added to the participants’ voices

were field observations that captured a holistic view of the phenomenon under study within its own context. Guba and Lincoln (1981) advocated the central use of observation in qualitative research to maximize “the inquirer’s ability to grasp motives, beliefs, concerns, interests, unconscious behaviors and the like. Observation allows the inquirer to see the world as his subjects see it, to live their time frames, to capture the phenomenon in and on its own terms, and to grasp the culture in its natural, ongoing environment” (p. 193). Constructivism means we do not find or discover knowledge, rather we construct it by inventing “concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of experience, and we continually test and modify these constructions in the light of new experience” (Schwandt, 2000, p. 197). In this paradigm researchers aim to produce a reconstruction of participants’ understandings and the meaning they make of their experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

I situated this leadership development research as a case study because it is the best format in understanding processes while discovering “context characteristics” that “shed light” on an issue (Sanders, 1981 as cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 33). The Corps of Cadets is a bounded system with a “finite quality” in terms of time, space, and components (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 128). Concentrating on this single entity allowed me to examine leadership development within a particular context giving way to a rich descriptive end product with hopes it might “illuminate the reader’s understanding” in addition to bringing about “the discovery of new meaning” and “confirm what is known” (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 109).

Merriam and Simpson (2000) defined a “sociocultural analysis of a single social unit or phenomenon” as an ethnographic case study (p. 109). This case study is ethnographic in the fact that it attempts to describe and interpret the culture of the Corps of Cadets as a community of practice and site for transformational learning. For the purpose of this study, culture is viewed as “embodied in the signs, symbols, and language” as well as the “knowledge people have acquired that in turn structures their worldview and their behavior” (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 236). The intent of ethnography is to interpret “a situation that incorporates the participants’ symbolic meanings and ongoing patterns of social interactions” (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 108).

Sample Selection

Two levels of *purposeful sampling* were involved: first, the actual case or bounded system of Texas A&M University’s Corps of Cadets as the overall unit of analysis was selected for its information-rich context. Second, a *theoretical sampling* (Merriam, 1998) or, as Patton (1990) refers to it, an *opportunistic sampling* of individuals to interview and activities to observe were chosen from the larger unit of analysis affording me flexibility in following new leads during my fieldwork. Thus I was able to take advantage of the unexpected. I believe these strategies best served my purpose of truly understanding my participants’ experiences. Merriam (1998) described the researcher’s use of theoretical sampling as beginning with “an initial sample chosen for its obvious relevance to the research problem” in which the data will guide the investigator to “the next person to be interviewed, and so on” (p. 63). All levels—

freshman, sophomore, junior, senior—were formally interviewed in-depth, to include: 8 white males, 2 Hispanic males, 2 white females, and 1 African-American female for a total of 13 Corps of Cadet members. In addition, during field observations I was able to engage in casual conversations with many cadets from various outfits throughout the Corps that significantly furthered my understanding of what their learning and developmental experiences were. Analysis occurred “simultaneously with identifying the sample and collecting data” and as data were collected I looked for “exceptions (negative-case selection) or variants (discrepant-case selection) to emergent findings” (Merriam, 1998, p. 64). As Glaser (1978) remarked about theoretical sampling, “It is never clear cut for what and to where discovery will lead. It is ongoing” (p. 37).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated, “In purposeful sampling the size of the sample is determined by informational considerations. If the purpose is to maximize information, the sampling is terminated when no new information is forthcoming from new sampled units” (p. 202). This is where I most struggled during my research. “No new information” ... how can that be? To me every cadet in the Corps had a story to tell with perhaps that one extraordinary insight or fascinating piece of information lingering within. How many in-depth interviews would give me the maximum amount of information? I found comfort in Wolff’s (2002) wisdom when he wrote it “lies not in some externally sanctioned number, but inside the one who embodies the research process. If there were an ideal number, knowing when to stop would be easy” and that the researcher will “recognize” when that moment arrives rather than “decide” (p. 117). I did not have a predetermined number which turned out to be a good thing because so

many cadets were coming to me, as they heard about my research, requesting to tell their story. The freshmen and sophomores especially wanted an opportunity to “talk through” their experiences as they were happening. The cadets who approached me had a tremendous impact on my data collection because they are the ones who gave the rich descriptive details of being “in the moment” that permitted me to vicariously experience their membership in the community of practice and better understand the transformative journey in which they were firmly entrenched.

Data Collection

The data were collected using two qualitative methods: *participant-observer* notations integrated with in-depth *interviews*. As a volunteer Corps Academic Mentor and Executive Leadership senior seminar course instructor for the Corps of Cadets, I participate in many of their daily activities. Therefore, assuming the role of a participant-observer in this research was a natural fit because I had already committed to a *prolonged period of engagement* in the setting and established an environment of trust and rapport (Merriam & Simpson, 2000) with many of the members. This allowed me to gain deep insights into their ‘life’ and experiences within the Corps. Merriam and Simpson (2000) related participant observation as being a “schizophrenic condition” because during the participation portion “one must be an observer, remaining as objective as possible while collecting information” (p. 105). Keeping a true objective distance between the subject and object would have kept me from ‘feeling’ the cadets’ stories and absolutely would have made me a schizophrenic! I was more than an observer in this study. I was a true participant in their lives while being fully engaged in

my fieldwork with my eyes, arms, and heart wide open (Thorp, 2001) enabling me to truly *hear* and come to *know* their stories. A “hearing heart picks up signals rather in the way radio receivers pick up waves from the ether” connecting “us to that which is unseen and unsaid” (Sweet, 2004, p. 57).

Persistent observation of the researcher is a characteristic of prolonged engagement which “accentuates that presence by actively seeking out sources of data identified by the researcher’s own emergent design” (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 136). I felt it was not about being ‘in the field’ for a lengthy amount of time, actually the amount of time became secondary after a while, but it was my near obsessive curiosity that lead me to pick up on the little bits of information overheard or offered up by the cadets in random conversations that I continuously inquired about and relentlessly pursued. The cadets were more than gracious and patient in explaining what may have seemed so obvious to them and did not mind when I repeated the very same question again to someone else to see whether that was their perspective or experience. Seizing the moment and taking personal risks, Lightfoot (1983) felt, were skills necessary for persistent observation and, trust me; the questions I asked could have made me look foolish. Participating in some of their activities, in the beginning, when I had no idea what was going on, really made me feel like I was in a foreign land, that is until my enculturation formed a strong enough foundation to build an understanding of their world. Prolonged engagement provided my research with “scope” while the persistent observation gave it the much needed “depth” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 304).

The in-depth interviews (lasting approximately one hour in length or longer when the interviewees wished to continue) were of a semi-structured nature with open-ended questions (see Appendix A) regarding participants' experiences in the Corps of Cadets. The interviews provided opportunities to understand how the cadets organized their world and the meaning they attached to what was happening to them (Patton, 1990). Each interviewee was asked to review and sign a consent form (see Appendix B) in which they could accept or decline the interview to be video/audio taped, and that included an explanation of confidentiality and their rights as a human subject in this study. A copy of the signed consent form was given to each interviewee and one kept for my records.

The interviews were video/audio taped using a video webcam connected to a laptop computer and recorded directly onto the laptop's hard drive. They were then transferred to a portable hard drive immediately afterwards and deleted from the laptop computer. The current generation of students in the Corps of Cadets, at the time this dissertation was written, is so dependent on communicating through computers ("facebook me" or "talk with ya on im later" is part of their technology-driven vernacular) that having a laptop on the table with a webcam recording never even fazed any interviewee.

The consent forms, hard drive, and subsequent transcriptions of the interviews were stored in a secure place. Confidentiality of the participants was a top priority. Participants were given the option, though none did so, to not answer any of the questions or stop the interview if they were ever uncomfortable. *Member checks* with the

participants were conducted in order to clarify information from the interviews and observational field notes (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 1998). These member checks were especially important to my interpretation of the data in designing the findings chapter as a portrait of the cadets' experiences. Lightfoot (1983) contended case studies are, in fact, portraits because they capture an 'essence' of the subject by telling its story "from the inside out" (p. 7).

Asking interviewees to review the descriptions written then refining the case study's 'portrait' from their responses kept me true to my intended purpose of having their voices be the main momentum driving the understanding of their transformative experiences in leadership development. I had several cadets come to me afterwards wanting to discuss ideas or realizations that occurred as a result of our "conversations" during the interviews. I found very similar experiences with my cadets in comparison to those of Lightfoot's (1983) participants in her study in that they responded with thoughtfulness and enjoyed the focused attention. The depth of reflection on the cadets' part was astounding and contributed significantly to my data collection. I believe my involvement in their environment—even if it was just walking up the stairs to my office located in their dorm thereby giving them easy access to me (and me to them) to ask a quick question or tell me what had been on their mind—tremendously influenced my perceptions of their experiences. Walking down the hallway to my office often permitted me to hear casual conversations among the cadets or make unexpected observations of their behavior I would not have normally encountered, greatly adding to the richness of my data collection—and analysis.

Data Analysis

This naturalistic study involved “an inseparable relationship between data collection and data analysis” (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 114). An interactive process of data collection and data analysis took place causing adjustments in interview questions and observational strategies as new information emerged. A *constant comparative* method was employed in the analysis of developing coding categories from the data followed by identifying (comparing) similarities and differences between the categories until distinct patterns were evident (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Merriam, 1998). Curry and Wells (2004) offered invaluable guidance for me as I analyzed interviews and field notes through a transformative learning lens by asking “how has the topic of investigation operated in this person’s experience; what kind of transformation did this person experience; and how did this experience change how this person interacted with their world?” (p. 81). Themes became apparent from analysis of initial observations and were continually refined until a generalized pattern of the cadets’ experience was established. *Triangulation* of different data sources was used in my collection and examination of data to “build a coherent justification” for the categories and themes (Creswell, 2003, p. 196).

It is important to note here that recognizable categories did not lie only in the data itself but consistent patterns in my own understanding of the cadets’ stories emerged as I collected data, analyzed it, reflected on it, collected more data, and further analyzed and contemplated the data with even more reflection. In fact, my analysis technique for this study is best captured by the five phase *heuristic approach* of

Moustakis (1990): immersion in the setting; incubation of thoughts; illumination of awareness and understanding; explication of participants' experiences through description and explanation; and finally, creative synthesis of the whole.

In all this endeavor I must admit *peer debriefing* (Erlandson et al., 1993) with other graduate students involved in their own dissertations outside of my study's context was extremely helpful in keeping my sanity and sustaining my level of comprehension. They played the "devil's advocate" while patiently listening time and again to my free-flowing ideas as I tried to piece it all together. At times I would call one of them and explain an incident I had witnessed or a comment overheard, knowing it meant something but not quite sure what and just by talking to someone about it I was able to make sense of what was floating around in my head. Bohm (1996) explained my experience when he spoke of dialogue and collective thought being more powerful than the individual fragmented thought in creating understanding and shared meaning.

Case studies have at their core the purpose of establishing a framework for dialogue about a phenomenon and, in desiring to educate readers about a process, they do not need to be a replication of events, but more of an interpretation (Yin, 1994). Instead of presenting numerical data, literary techniques of a descriptive and imaginative nature are often used in analysis, and later, in the 'telling' of the researcher's findings (Merriam, 1998). Since there are no set guidelines in crafting a case study's findings the researcher "is left to rely on his or her own instincts and abilities" (Merriam, 1998, p. 42) to report the data in a manner worthy of a reader's time and attention. I used the term triangulation earlier because it is the most recognizable wording when referring to a

fundamental qualitative research strategy ensuring *validity* and *reliability*. However, my intuitive sense tells me *crystallization*, as Richardson (2000) and Janesick (2000) have suggested, is a more appropriate approach to my data collection and analysis in determining categories and themes reflective of the cadets' stories.

Narrative Writing as a Way of Knowing

Laurel Richardson (2000) eloquently entices us to think beyond the normal realm of research writing when she stated, "Writing is also a way of 'knowing'—a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it. Form and content are inseparable" (p. 923). Richardson continued that qualitative writing "carries its meaning in its entire text" and must be "*read, not scanned; its meaning is in the reading*" (italics added, p. 924).

The challenge in 'writing up' my research was in creating a text that is "vital," "attended to," and "makes a difference" (Richardson, 2000, p. 924) while keeping that sense of flow present during the data collection and analysis cycle. I was not able to write from a static state concerned mainly with the parts but required a more openly creative process representing what I 'saw' as the whole. Thorp (2001) wrote about a "style of knowing" that comes from being "present with one another" in narratives because in "hearing the 'truth' of another's story we actively participate in knowledge creation; a reciprocal knowledge of self and other in dynamic interplay, a dramatically different proposition from the distanced, dispassionate, objective experience of knowledge idealized in Western science" (p. 51). I am best able to explain this departure from a mechanistic worldview (described in Chapter II) that is held on to so tightly by

standard academia as a need to travel off the beaten path to one of an organic worldview of a living systems design much more suited to represent the cadets' story of transformation and leadership development. Mechanistic writing tends to be free of context while organic writing uses illustrative language laden with the context's imagery and is open to the reader's personal interpretation depending on the experiences they bring to the material.

I returned to my literature review and pulled forward into my findings the idea of metaphoric paradigms. Using a metaphor to describe and explain something unfamiliar to the learner is often used in education. In my 'former life' as an early childhood educator I relied heavily on fairy tales and fables to teach a particular concept. Therefore, I am naturally inclined to do so again, but this time Joseph Campbell's (1968, 2001, 2003) "monomyth" of the hero's journey seemed most appropriate to portray the transformative experiences the cadets undergo in their leadership development while participating in a community of practice.

Analogy and comparison are used in metaphoric translations to best arrive at understanding and experiencing one thing in terms of another where the "boundary between narrative and analysis" dissolves (Richardson, 2000, p. 927). Extending a metaphor into a narrative story invites the reader into the participants' world as the writer seeks to explain the meaning they give to their lived experience. Analyzing and 'telling' of the data in a metaphoric storyline enhances the *generalization* of my research findings due to the universal quality stories inherently possess. The tendency to impose a narrative on our experience is innate for humans because we need to "make a story that

fits our understanding of a situation” in striving to “establish who we are in the changing context of our lives” (Clements, 2002, pp. 86-87). A narrative should have a “discernable” beginning, middle, and end with “*events placed in time*” sequencing them into “unified episodes” that “take on significance and meaning” (Thorp, 2001, emphasis in original, p. 51).

Richardson (2000) proposed, “There is no single way—much less one ‘right’ way—of staging a text. Like wet clay, the material can be shaped” (p. 936). I do not claim to have, as Richardson argued against, a “definitive representation” (p. 936) in writing my findings, but prefer to say the writing of Chapter IV was my avenue of truly understanding and internalizing the data. As the interviews progressed I began to notice a common storyline—not identical to the hero’s journey yet an embodiment of it—although experienced slightly different for each cadet filtered through their own interpretative lens—but still overwhelmingly similar.

The hero’s journey is a synthesis of Campbell’s decades-worth of research and extreme passion for the many myths, folk tales, and legends that cut across cultures and time with “each version being but an elaboration of the single, simple formula of separation—initiation—return” (Chisholm, 2000, p. 7). Bruner’s (1986) idea that stories are the perfect vehicle for tracing personal change contributed to my consideration of the cadets being “heroes” in a developmental sense. Arthur Frank’s (1995) work of narrative storylines parallels the hero’s journey in his identification of the quest narrative when its “author” experiences a departure of known territory through illness, directly faces their suffering, and comes to a realization of the meaning of their pain resulting in a true

clarification of their values and closer relationships with loved ones. These narrative models—what I like to think of as “extended metaphors”—provide a structure for explaining the transformative learning experienced by the cadets as they move to the center of their community of practice and come to understand their own identity as a leader and how the leadership process unfolds within an organization.

I chose Richardson’s (2000) *creative analytic practice* criteria for framing the *authenticity* of my study with a desire to achieve a venue of validity with crystallization through “point of view, tone, texture, sequencing, metaphor, and so on” (pp. 936-937); thereby paying tribute to the multiple perspectives and “no single truth” (p. 934) concepts embodied in qualitative work. The five criteria categories for evaluating CAP (creative analytic practice) ethnographies developed by Richardson (2000, emphasis in original, p. 937) are listed below with her defining questions I asked of myself while writing my dissertation chapters. I invite each reader to also consider them in hopes that as you turn the pages of this text you feel a resonance with it somewhere among the words.

1. *Substantive contribution*: “Does this piece contribute to our *understanding* of social life? Does the writer demonstrate a deeply grounded (if embedded) social scientific perspective? How has this perspective informed the construction of the text?”

2. *Aesthetic merit*: “Does this piece succeed aesthetically? Does the use of creative analytic practices open up the text, invite interpretive responses? Is the text artistically shaped, satisfying, complex, and not boring?”

3. *Reflexivity*: “How did the author come to write this text? How was the information gathered? Is there adequate self-awareness and self-exposure for the reader to make judgments about the point of view?”

4. *Impact*: “Does this affect me? Emotionally? Intellectually? Does it generate new questions? Move me to write? Move me to try new research practices? Move me to action?”

5. *Expression of a reality*: “Does this text embody a fleshed out, embodied sense of lived experience? Does it seem ‘true’—a credible account of a cultural, social, individual, or communal sense of the ‘real’?”

Researcher’s Position/Reflexivity

Lincoln’s (1995) idea of reciprocity between the researcher and participants was essential because of the “person-centered nature of interpretive work” and the “kind of intense sharing” that marked our relationships with a “deep sense of trust, caring, and mutuality” (pp. 283-284). This reciprocal relationship was first established through my position as a Corps Academic Mentor and then later expanded when I became an instructor of a senior level course in the Corps of Cadets’ Leadership Excellence Program. I believe this gave me a distinct advantage in collecting and analyzing the data of their experiences. I did not require a “gatekeeper” or insider to the community acting as a key informant (Hebert & Beardsley, 2002, p. 206) necessary in many ethnographic case studies. I was already a peripheral member of the Corps of Cadets’ community of practice at the onset of this study.

Another ‘advantage’ I had in conducting my research is what Anderson (1998) characterized as “sympathetic resonance” or an “immediate apprehension and recognition of an experience spoken by another” (p. 73). My strong empathetic nature easily connected me to the cadets and their stories. The analogy offered by Anderson (1998) of plucking a string on a cello causing a string of another cello across the room to vibrate beautifully illustrates the type of communication and understanding I often felt during the in-depth interviews.

I realize my collection of data was influenced by the cadets’ experiences and their individual abilities in articulating the quality of those experiences. However, I believe my prolonged engagement and persistent observations in the field yielded enough concurring data along with my diligent efforts of member checks and thick, rich description all brought strong *credibility and trustworthiness* to this study (Erlandson et al., 1993). Even though the Corps of Cadets has traditionally been a closed culture, the cadets themselves gave me unprecedented access to both their physical and psychological ‘spaces’ for which I will be eternally grateful. They did not have to let me into their lives so deeply—yet, they did—unconditionally and very willingly. Weighing heavy on my heart is my desire to return the respect and honesty the cadets have shown me as I attempt to authentically tell their “sacred stories” of personal transformation and leadership development.

CHAPTER IV

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT: TRAVELING A HERO'S PATH

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.--Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1968, p. 30)

In this chapter the findings are interwoven with discussion to keep the integrity of the study's "unbroken whole"—the story of how members of the Corps of Cadets are learning leadership—intact. In ethnographic research, understanding the context of the phenomena under study is vital to comprehension of the findings. Therefore, information on the bounded case, Texas A&M University's Corps of Cadets, and background on the mythology of a hero's journey are first discussed to help place the reader into the participants' lives and show why cadets are "heroes" in their own right. Heroism in this study is not demonstrated by the actions of someone saving lives or running into burning buildings but rather is portrayed in the mythological dimensions of courage and sacrifice. The cadets' travel along the hero's path will be told through a metaphorical journey format describing the transformative and leadership experiences encountered as a result of participating in a community of practice. In summary, a leadership development model is presented and explained illustrating the spiral movement of each cadet's transformation from novice follower to master leader during their hero's journey.

Situating Texas A&M University's Corps of Cadets

The rich heritage and lasting legacy of the Corps of Cadets is firmly grounded in the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 that established a “network of ‘national agricultural colleges’ on the rigid model of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point” (Adams, 2001, p. 4) giving rise to the “Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas” in 1876, consisting of a uniformed all-male student body to be trained in military tactics as well as general academics in the education of citizen-soldiers ready for national emergencies.

Eventually, Texas A&M University, as did other land-grant institutions, turned its official military training duties over to the armed services’ national Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) program, however, there were some distinctions. Unlike other colleges with an ROTC cadre, students have the option of being in the Corps of Cadets without obligation to serve in the United States military, they wear a uniform characteristic only to A&M on a daily basis, and perhaps the most significant aspect, cadets participate seven days a week as full-time members residing in a section of the campus solely dedicated to their organization. This separate area of the campus consists of a dining facility, band hall and practice drill field, uniform warehouse, and numerous red brick dorms built in the 1930s outlining a quadrangle with open areas of grass and trees. This special space was referred to as “sacred ground” by a father and former cadet, himself, who had come to watch his son participate in *Fish Review* (an event at the end of Freshman Orientation Week that showcases to family and friends what new recruits have learned in the past week).

The Corps of Cadets is what has kept Texas A&M University a unique environment of higher learning and sets the experience of attending college here apart from any other university in the nation. Even for those not in this student organization, the depth and breadth of what it means to be an “Aggie” from Texas A&M is dynamically intertwined with the traditions of the Corps of Cadets. Texas A&M’s most significant and cherished traditions—Silver Taps, Muster, Yell Leaders, Midnight Yell Practice, and Reveille (the mascot)—originated in the Corps of Cadets (Texas A&M University Corps of Cadets, 2005) and continue to flourish today through the strong presence of their culture. The Corps of Cadets are considered to be “Keepers of the Spirit” and they charge new members to be “Guardians of Tradition” (Adams, 2001). These sentiments were reverently echoed by the cadets involved in this study, with one in particular telling me, “I didn’t just want to go to A&M, I wanted to *be* A&M” (emphasis in the original).

Texas A&M has been transformed many times over throughout its rugged history to become a world-class institution of higher education consistently ranked among the top 20 universities nationally (Texas A&M University, 2007). The enrollment at Texas A&M University is the sixth-largest in the nation, with the current student population having risen to over 46,000, including approximately 1, 800 Corps of Cadets’ members (Texas A&M University, 2007). The Corps is structured into major components representing the Air Force, Army, Navy-Marine, and the Aggie Band with further division into over thirty individual outfits. Being such a small percentage of the student body, yet remaining a powerful force that still actively shapes the face, persona, and

prestige of the College Station campus, requires truly dedicated and heartfelt individuals who are willing to visibly stand out among their peers and “take the road less traveled.” Cadets live a completely different lifestyle than all the other A&M students while attending the same academic classes and fulfilling identical rigorous scholastic requirements. The reward for choosing and completing this challenging “heroic” journey is undeniably worth it to *every* cadet I encountered in my research.

The Alchemy of a Hero’s Journey in the Corps of Cadets

An old Arabian alchemist, Morienus, said: “This thing [the philosopher’s stone] is extracted from you; you are its mineral, and one can find it in you.” The alchemical stone (the lapis) symbolizes something that can never be lost or dissolved, something eternal. (Carl Jung, 1964, p. 226)

In the alchemy of medieval science attempts were made to transform base metals into gold, but the alchemy that is sought in the Corps of Cadets is the transformation of “novice” college freshmen followers into “master” senior-class leaders. By following the hero’s journey a cadet becomes an alchemist of their own life. Their ‘gold’ is transformation of self. Students choose to participate in a four-year-residential apprenticeship-style leadership development program that moves them in a spiral fashion from their community of practice’s peripheral to its center. This choice takes them on a journey of self-discovery and is the “personification of the recursive and inevitable transitions” mythological heroes travel (Brown & Moffett, 1999, p. 35). “[T]he whole sense of myth is finding the courage to follow the process” (Maher & Briggs, 1989, p. 67). Movement along the Corps of Cadets’ leadership developmental path requires courage to begin and even more courage to continue on the path once extreme hardships are encountered.

The path known as the “hero’s journey” was made famous by Joseph Campbell with his book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, originally published in 1949, in which he not only provided a composite portrait of the heroic journey taken from multitudes of worldwide religions and mythologies, but he also

sought to unearth the meaning and symbolism contained in these stories. The tales are more than exciting adventures. They tell, through metaphor, the story of the journey we all must make from dependent childhood to autonomous adulthood. In this all-important journey of life, we discover our purpose and define individual identity. (Chisholm, 2000, p. 7)

It is the story you have heard countless times or seen in numerous movies where the main character leaves the comforts of home (or the familiar) to face challenges in order to return and share what they have learned about themselves and the world. *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Lion King*, *Shrek* and especially the Bilbo Baggins, Luke Skywalker, and most recently, Harry Potter adventures are all modern versions of the hero’s journey. Fairy tales, fables, and legends have a more mythological tone to them. But do not be fooled by the concept of myth. We often dismiss myth as not true, as “make-believe.” Campbell (2001) emphatically stated, “[M]ythology is not a lie, mythology is poetry, it is metaphorical” (p. 163). Myths are instructive in revealing patterns of human experience giving “clues” to the “stories of our search through the ages for truth, for meaning, for significance” and provide “help in our passages” (Campbell, 2001, p. 5).

Transition from childhood to adulthood in traditional cultures occur with “rites of passage” during the heroic journey when individuals are “physically removed from family and community and put through study and training that culminates in a series of

tests” (Chisholm, 2000, p. 10). These tests come in the form of hardships and challenges yet they are not solitary endeavors because there are guides, mentors, symbols, and signposts to illuminate the quest’s path and final destination. “[W]e have not even to risk the adventure alone; for the heroes of all time have gone before us; the labyrinth is thoroughly known; we have only to follow the thread of the hero path” (Campbell, 1968, p. 25). I invite you to come with me as we “follow the thread” and come to know the “labyrinth” of the Corps of Cadets’ heroic journey translated from my field observations and the cadets’ own words during interviews and “sharing” conversations.

Crossing the Threshold to Answer the Individual Call: Culture Shock

To begin a heroic journey each individual answers the “call to adventure” (Campbell, 1968, p. 49) in which they must leave their familiar surroundings and comfort zone to enter a new world of ideas and places. To mark the beginning of every freshman’s (known as a *fish*) transition into the Corps of Cadets they participate in Freshman Orientation Week (*FOW*), a seven-day training period held one week before the fall semester begins. They cross many thresholds both figuratively and literally during this time. Regardless of the reason (their individual call to adventure) a fish chose to join the Corps of Cadets; they now question that decision during these seven days because their entire world is turned upside down. As one cadet confessed, “I had to ask myself, ‘what were you thinking?’ cause I wanted to leave after the first night—and a buddy is lying if they say they didn’t want to quit sometime during FOW— or just plain fooling themselves.” The fish fall down the proverbial rabbit hole into a strange, mixed-up crazy place where everyone is ordering them around, talking and acting in odd ways,

and expecting entirely too much out of them! The freshmen cadets begin to suffer culture shock which is the “normal process of adaptation to cultural stress involving such symptoms as anxiety, helplessness, irritability, and longing for a more predictable and gratifying environment” (Church, 1982, p. 540). What started out as “pure excitement” quickly turned into “dreading what’s coming next” with a feeling of “being all alone even though I was surrounded with people everywhere,” expressed a freshman about his first few days of FOW.

During this time the fish experience a lack of sleep, tremendous amounts of physical activity and mental stress, limited food choices, and most devastating: restricted contact with the “outside” world. They are denied access to their watches, cell phones, and computers. Fish wake up, shower, dress, talk, eat, move about, and go to bed when told to do so. They are instructed by the junior class on “how to be a fish”—how to march, stand at attention, wear a uniform, *wire* (arrange) items on their uniform and in their *hole* (dorm room), polish brass, enter and exit upperclassmen’s rooms, *whip-out* (introduce themselves to upperclassmen), ask and answer questions, walk in the dorm hallways, eat *chow* (food or meal time), *sound-off* (speak forcefully and with confidence), to be *hard* (intense and intentional) in their actions— and the most critical “lesson” of all: how to be a follower. A dramatic (and sometimes traumatic) event causing freshmen to realize (and internalize) their role as followers, is to strip them of their old outer identity by cutting their hair into a *fish cut* (very little hair on top of head with bare skin showing on sides and back) at the beginning of the week.

Another technique to teach the fish they are no longer recognizable as individuals, but are to develop a collective identity, is to dress them all in white t-shirts, khaki-colored shorts and Texas A&M ball caps with a white water bottle and room key strung around their necks during FOW. Their first name is not spoken by the upperclassmen (it has been replaced with “fish”) until the end of the year. The goal is to put the new freshmen under as much emotional and physical stress possible so they are totally immersed into the cadet way of life and *being*. In just a matter of days they no longer look, act, or feel the same. A fish responded, “I had to do a double-take in the mirror every time I walked in my hole and when I looked it wasn’t me outside—or in.”

FOW would be considered in transformational learning theory as the defining “disorienting dilemma” faced by every cadet entering the Corps (Mezirow, 2000). It is a ‘tried and true’ method and seems to work quite well since the fish immediately begin to pick up the lingo and behavior of those around them. Taylor (1994) explained this type of “intercultural competency” as “a transformative process whereby the stranger develops an adaptive capacity, altering his or her perspective to effectively understand and accommodate the demands of the host culture. The competent stranger does not passively accept the social realities defined by others; instead, he or she is able to actively negotiate purpose and meaning” (p. 156-157). Mansell (1981) hits the target with perfect precision in describing the “consciousness which transforms an individual’s perceptions of the world and imparts a sense of unity between self and surrounding” (p. 99) that begins to overtake each fish as the enculturation process deepens.

Facing Hardships and Challenges: Disillusionment and Despair

Those who do not quickly internalize the values and beliefs of this new culture are the ones who *punch*—leave the Corps—early in the fall semester. Even though I often heard, “the Corps isn’t for everyone,” a fish dropping out is not easily accepted by their *buddies* (cadets in the same entering freshman class of an outfit). The entire structure of the Corps is founded on the class system: each entering freshman class is identified by their anticipated graduation date, four-years into the future. For example, if you are a freshman entering the Corps in the fall of 2006, you are considered the “class of ‘10” and your loyalty is to those other freshmen in your individual outfit who, as explained to me, “suffered through FOW” with you, and as a “class” you endured “blood, sweat, and tears together” throughout the first year. You begin to think of yourself in terms of that group, not as an individual, so to lose one of the members of your group is experienced as losing part of yourself. However, there are cadets who are not able to handle the constant demands on their time, energy, and sense of individuality. They are miserable and homesick and, regardless of the amount of encouragement and support they are given, they are unwilling to surrender themselves to the process. Every fish class has several that do not feel strong enough or trust the process enough to make it through. It takes internal resolve and courage to get up day after day and face ‘being a fish’ without total despair.

The hardships and challenges of cadet life to a freshman are so numerous and unrelenting that it often appears there is no light at the end of the tunnel. “There is never a minute to myself. Someone always wants something out of me or there is always

something that has to be done—it is never-ending!” exclaimed a fish recently to me at chow. As a mentor to one of the outfits, I eat with the fish class several times a month to have time away from the upperclassmen. This is when I get an ear-full of what is going on in their lives and I am able to witness their development as individuals and as a class. Sometimes when they are complaining about being *boofed* (a catch-all term for waste of time, effort, or resources) by the upperclassmen, the *PT* (physical training to include push ups, sit-ups, and aerobic running) being hard that day, the “meaningless” tasks they have been assigned or how “stupid” a particular upperclassman is, the fish speak as if being in the Corps is just plain ridiculous and seem disillusioned by the whole experience. This could be described as a “down” day, when their moods and energy are hitting rock bottom. But then, when I see them the very next day, they are excited about an academic accomplishment or a simple Corps-related one that would be insignificant to a *non-reg* (a “non-regular” student, a term originally used when every undergraduate at Texas A&M was a cadet, in reference to those who were (and today are) not in the Corps) such as being given the special privilege of watching television. So they are “up” again (talk about an emotional rollercoaster!)—it does not matter if it was their own accomplishment or one of their buddy’s—and they feel it together.

This experience stems directly from their sense of *unity* (“being one”) which is the core concept of fish year and the very essence of their role as a follower in the Corp of Cadets’ leadership developmental process. Being unified in *everything* within their own outfit is the determining factor of a successful fish class. They must look alike (hair and clothes), speak alike (in unison), act and think alike (same demeanor and responses

when walking and talking), and even live alike. For a group of people to try to be the “same person” is extremely hard, especially in our American culture where individuality is strongly stressed and highly prized. During *flag detail* (different cadets are responsible every morning and evening for raising and lowering several American flags that fly at the main entrance of the campus) I was questioned by a fish, as I took pictures of him folding one of the flags, as to whether I knew if the upperclassmen in his outfit were “disappointed” in his fish class “since it’s taking so long to earn our brass.” When I indicated “yes” and asked what he thought the problem might be, his facial expression fell, he shook his head and said, “We’re too individualistic, going our separate ways.” It was weighing heavily on his mind, but he wasn’t sure how to correct the situation. Putting one’s ego on the ‘back burner’ for the sake of the group continually came to the surface in conversations I had with cadets and it is what they believe to be one of the greatest challenges they experience throughout all four years. It is hardest for freshmen to rise to this challenge, because individuality is sacrificed the most during that first year. As cadets advance each year, there is more freedom to “be yourself” yet they are still required to show various forms of unity as a class, more so in words and actions than in what they wear or what their room looks like.

Each dorm room is approximately 10 feet by 15 feet and houses two cadets. Upon entering you immediately understand why this cramped space is referred to as a “*hole*.” A freshman’s room is as bleak and barren as you can imagine. My voice often echoes in a fish’s room because there is *nothing* in there to absorb sound; although this starkness does permit upperclassmen to “hear through doors” and stay aware of ongoing

activity and conversations within the room. The floor is cold, hard, dingy tile and only blinds cover the window. An often-flickering fluorescent light casts an institutional glow about the room. A *monster* (air conditioning unit and small built-in bookcase with shelves on the reverse side) takes up floor space alongside a single sink. Two *racks* (beds) are raised up loft-style against opposing walls; underneath each is a small wooden desk and metal-frame chair that leave a narrow path in the middle of the room as the only empty space. The remaining wall space is lined with two wooden dressers. The only personal furniture-type item allowed is a locked footlocker, brought by each fish to hold a few “hidden treasures,” a fish revealed with a sly smile. Each fish has one standard-size pillow and white sheets on their bed with an “issued” thin maroon bedspread. No blankets are allowed; however, fish are given the privilege to use a sleeping bag as long as it is put away during the day. The cement walls are empty of any decoration except for a small, permanently-attached bulletin board, used to post required paperwork. All the furniture and small items on display must be *unified* (arranged exactly the same) in all fish rooms. To visually enforce the concept of unity, no expression of individuality is permitted in clothing or furnishings for the entire freshman year.

Room inspections for the freshmen are performed on a regular basis by upperclassmen. If your *ol' lady* (roommate) has class or is absent, it is your responsibility to have the entire room and all uniforms (including your roommate's) inspection-ready because *cuts* (demerits) are given to both cadets in the room, regardless of who was at fault. In fact, if one fish does something wrong during the course of the

day, the entire class gets in trouble. On the other hand, if one fish is given a special privilege for executing a task requested by an upperclassman, every fish enjoys the privilege. It truly is a ‘one for all and all for one’ mentality that is reinforced in action and words over and over again everyday!

The one enduring memory each cadet I interviewed talked about, in becoming unified as a class, is *brass push* (a series of mental and physical hardships and challenges of increasing difficulty, intentionally placed on the freshmen throughout several weeks and not recognized as individual, but rather as class, accomplishments). One of the tests includes personal scrutiny of each cadet’s uniform, with nametags and medals being measured for placement and a determination of whether other requirements for wearing an absolutely perfect uniform have been met. A fish will ask an upperclassman for their “uniform perfect” inspection when he or she feels ready. It seems the upperclassman is always able to find something wrong, no matter how incidental, on the first, second, and perhaps, third go-around. Attempting again and again for uniform or room “perfects” along with the other multitude of tasks piled on them, in addition to their academic duties, causes a tremendous amount of stress and anxiety for the fish—individually and collectively—and most likely the deepest sense of tension they have ever encountered in their young lives.

To complete brass push and earn the right to wear their own outfit’s *brass* (insignia) rather than Corps-wide brass on their uniforms, the upperclassmen must see a visible demonstration of unity among the fish class—that they have truly embodied the concept of being one entity—not individual entities. Some of the cadets mentioned in

their interviews that this was a new perspective they had to adapt to because in high school they were only responsible for their own accomplishments and never held back because someone else in the group failed to perform a task. This is not the mind frame in the Corps of Cadets; a failure of the individual is considered a failure of the group, especially during the formative freshman year. During their freshman year, fish experience many chances to meet failure head-on. Failure is built into the system. “They [upperclassmen] set us up to fail and once I figured that out I wasn’t so hard on myself—better here and learn to deal with it than in a job where the stakes are higher,” a freshman realized. He continued:

I had to come to terms with the fact I can’t do it all myself. I would be the leader of a group project in high school because I didn’t trust anyone else to get it right. It’s impossible to be responsible for all that is thrown at us now. I don’t like to give up control but if you’re gonna survive fish year you have to. That was a big one for me—stepping aside and letting someone else take the reigns—learning to trust others to do the job even if it wasn’t exactly how I’d do it. It just mattered that it was accomplished and if it wasn’t right we’d all have to pay the price then turn around and try again. We certainly get lots of chances to show we know how to do what is expected of us.

A strong recurring sentiment from the cadets centered on performance in the here-and-now as a measurement of success or failure. A speech is given during FOW on the subject of taking high school letter jackets and t-shirts back home, because none of those items are to be worn while a fish in the Corps. A fish’s accomplishments from the past are left outside the *arches* of the *Quad* (a series of red brick arches through which you enter into the physically and mentally challenging environment of the Corps of Cadets). It is within this quadrangle that a student must be fully engaged at all times in their role as a member of the Corps of Cadets.

It is where *Corps games* (activities that involve learning how to be a cadet or experiencing the Corps of Cadets' traditions and culture) are enacted. Recognition and advancement are granted, based on how well you perform your cadet duties and responsibilities. Fish are told they are completely equal to each other, and for that reason none of them are put into a designated leadership position until they have proven themselves. Freshmen all wear the same rank; an indication that no one is above anyone else.

A major test designed to benchmark the freshman class during the spring semester is *guidon trials*. This is a competition for the privilege of being the sophomore responsible for maintaining and carrying the “guidon”—outfit flag—during outfit runs, march-ins, and *formations* (required assemblies of the Corps of Cadets before official functions of morning and evening chow, football games, military reviews, etc.). It is a time of intense physical training and mental and emotional challenges. In the beginning, all freshmen are required to participate so everyone has a “taste of what is expected,” a fish commented, then further elaborated, “but some of my buddies aren't interested at all in being the guidon so they drop out right away—no one is forced to continue—only us crazy ones keep going out to practice after practice.” When I asked why he felt they were “crazy” for staying with it, he laughed and said:

Well, crazy in the fact we'd run ourselves silly carrying a broomstick over our heads, seems pretty ridiculous if you really think about it. But it meant everything to us and we didn't mind being pushed past the point of physical exhaustion—just knowing your buddy was right next to you doing the same thing and pushing you on to finish—we really needed each other to get through it cause it became as much as a mental game as a physical accomplishment.

Each week the intensity of physical training increases in guidon trials and, as the other fish watch, their admiration and respect for those who continue to compete seems to grow in proportion, evident in a fish's observation of a buddy, "I never knew he had it in him. You couldn't have told me at the beginning of the year he'd be one of the last ones standing. He puts out for grades and guidon. It blows my mind but sure lets me know what he's made of." Whenever I would eat with the fish during guidon trials, I noticed the ones serious about competing to the best of their abilities did not drink soda or eat sweets during their meal even though it was a "privilege" to have these when a guest is present during mealtime. I inquired if they felt nutrition was a factor in being successful and every one of them agreed whole-heartedly, adding that "to be at the top of our game" attention to hydrating with water and Gatorade and getting enough sleep was very important. It is amazing to witness the evolution of physical appearance and self-perception of certain fish. One expressed he "never felt better" about himself. He acknowledged that it wasn't just about fitting into his uniform better, but it was about knowing he had set a goal for himself during guidon trials and stuck to it because in the past he had quit things when it got rough.

Even though FOW was a shock to their entire being—body, mind, and spirit—and set the stage for transformation, guidon trials last several weeks longer and appear to have a more profound effect than FOW for many of the ones who make it as *guidon brothers* (the fish who complete guidon trials and are in contention for being selected as the "guidon"—also known as the guidon bearer). The mother of a fish guidon brother stopped me during Parents Weekend, right before the outfit awards ceremony was about

to start, to tell me she did not even realize it was her son walking towards her the day before. He had lost so much weight during guidon trials and looked the best he ever had in his life. She noticed, “He even carries himself differently now.” Another mom discussed the changes that had taken place in her son over the last few weeks, saying she hoped this had laid a foundation for the future and that “he’ll continue to take care of himself and respect his health” which was something she felt she had never been able to instill in him. A set of parents even spoke that weekend of their son’s, also a guidon brother, belief that his accomplishments during guidon trials surpassed those of obtaining the rank of Eagle Scout, and they expressed gratitude to the current guidon for training and mentoring their son through the difficult process.

Each outfit within the Corps of Cadets emphasizes the guidon bearer’s position differently. Some view the position purely in terms of physical strength: a reflection of someone’s military bearing and physical ability to *high port* (carry the 8 ½ foot wooden pole attached to the flag, horizontally, high above your head with both hands during outfit runs, never allowing it to drop below your head), while many believe the guidon bearer must also possess and display strength of character. The “guidon is the outward symbol of what our outfit has to offer in the sophomore class. That person visibly demonstrates in words and actions the values we hold and is the defining role model for the freshman class,” is how a former guidon explained it. The upperclassmen responsible for choosing the new guidon observe how fish handle themselves at all times and how they treat their fish buddies, from the very first day of FOW, all the way through guidon

trials and finally during guidon interviews. Behavior and attitude during their freshman year is taken into consideration along with future potential for leadership capability.

Lack of personal space is a difficult and challenging component of the Corps of Cadets' lifestyle that may seem obvious at first, when observing the close quarters they live (and learn) in, but its influence in shaping attitude and behavior is much more powerful than what meets the eye. "There is NOWHERE to hide. You are never by yourself. Even if you are alone in your hole, anyone can come in at any time. It was unnerving in the beginning," complained a fish about her first semester, who now feels differently, "This semester I'm almost lonely if I'm not with a buddy. I always look around for someone to run an errand with me. I don't go anywhere without someone else." The freshman class "eventually figures out there is safety in numbers" and moves about the Quad and when they are off-campus in "pairs or even as a tight pack," explained a sophomore. It no longer surprises me to see fish or sophomores pile onto the couch in my office in their dorm. It is only a loveseat, but four of them will be seated on it quite comfortably, not even caring that they are literally on top of one another. I have become accustomed to the fact that cadets tend to stand closer to me than other students while talking, or follow closely when I am walking across campus.

This does not happen at once but, rather, evolves over time. Rarely do the fish know each other before entering a particular outfit. The very first time they meet each other they will shake hands and stand at what would be considered a normal social distance apart from one another. As soon as the freshmen are *put on the wall* (standing at attention with their backs against the wall), on the first day of FOW, they encounter what

will become normal to them: another person an inch away from them at all times, whenever they are being trained, disciplined, or engaged in conversation. Several times a day the fish class enters their *fall-out hole* (an assigned freshman room in the middle of the hallway where the fish gather before every activity, such as chow or training). If the class is small, of about 12 or so, the space seems adequate, but when there are 20 to 30 people in one class, that 10 foot by 15 foot space becomes very confining, especially if it takes a long time for the group to discuss or accomplish an activity. So much close proximity causes the fish to lose their sense of personal space. “It just became natural to be in constant physical contact with my buddies,” reflected a sophomore. “And we haven’t broken from that mentality yet,” he continued. In fact, part of this mentality includes not only sharing personal space but personal items, as he added, “My stuff is all of my buddies’ stuff. We are constantly borrowing uniform parts, food, CDs, cars, computers, you name it. If we need something and a buddy doesn’t have it, upperclassmen are always willing to share too. That’s just the way it is around here.” Becoming accustomed to the sharing of personal space and possessions during fish year significantly contributes to the unification concept that underscores the entire Corps of Cadets’ leadership development process.

Sophomores continue to deepen their collective consciousness as a class along the same lines they followed fish year, with unified rooms and a shared identity but with a few new freedoms. They move about the dorm with greater ease and do not have to begin every question to an upperclassman with, “Mr. _____, sir. Fish _____ requests permission to ask a question, sir,” as they did during freshman year. Their rooms contain

additional items, considered privileges, such as carpet, a refrigerator, and one wall poster for each cadet in the room. A sophomore commented he never thought he'd think of a "tiny piece of carpet" as a "luxury." Although sophomores have "earned" these items by completing their freshman year, in an instant, any one of these may be taken away by upperclassmen as punishment for wrong-doing or not completing an assigned task. Just as fish are, sophomores are responsible for each other at all times, and are rewarded or penalized as a class for an individual's actions. They also must, like the fish class, come together in their designated fall-out hole before outfit activities, whereas juniors and seniors no longer meet and are not held nearly as accountable for one another. Along with the fish, sophomores have to "*sit CQ.*" Call to quarters is a designated study time, for three hours in the evening Sunday through Thursday, and is not required of the juniors and seniors.

Some things become easier in advancing to the *pisshead* (an "affectionate" term for sophomores) level but in many ways cadet life becomes more complicated. Although sophomores no longer have to *walk walls* (walk with their right shoulder touching the wall, at all times, whenever in a dorm hallway), arrange furniture in their rooms in exactly the same manner or endure other such restrictions, they do assume many more responsibilities. Sophomores assume their role as direct trainers of the freshmen, after they have been put through a series of physical and mental challenges by the upperclassmen, that is, similar to, but, a shorter version of earning their brass as fish. It was explained by a junior that this is done to ensure each sophomore is properly prepared to be the "shining example of what every fish aspires to become."

Sophomores are expected to be “perfect” in dress and mannerisms. Their job is to stay intense at all times, especially during training and inspections, never breaching the barrier of the professional relationship that they have established between themselves and the fish. Sophomores liken themselves to military drill instructors in their style of training, in an attempt to promote the best performance from each freshman possible—perhaps a “tough-love” approach without much “loving” going on! The “touchy-feely” part is left to the *white belts* (a term that distinguishes juniors and seniors, who wear white uniform belts, from freshmen and sophomores, who wear black belts). White belts have *good bull* (fun, playful, positive interaction) with freshmen, while sophomores maintain a professional distance. Sophomores believe having a stern expression on their face and solemn tone in their voice conveys to the freshmen that training is serious business and not to be taken lightly.

The number of hardships they experience starts to diminish during sophomore year, and more personal challenges arise. At this stage cadets begin to have more control over and the ability to shape their leadership persona, in addition to deciding how they want to influence the organization as a whole. Sophomores may vie for the few Corps of Cadets’ staff positions available at that level or request a certain position, such as scholastics corporal. Positions may also be sought in other areas such as: athletics, public relations, recruiting or within their individual outfits where they believe their strengths and talents might be best utilized. They begin to experience the day-to-day operations of the Corps and develop an understanding of the bigger picture that was unseen to them as freshmen. Fish are expected to do exactly as they are told and worry only about what is

immediately before them. Long-range planning or execution duties are not required until sophomore year. The challenges become more personal because the cadet chooses his or her own path of active participation, beyond the requirements of being a trainer of the fish class. Those that assume additional duties and responsibilities are choosing to further their own growth. Some sophomores do not desire to invest their new-found freedom of having more personal time back into the outfit, and decide to sleep more, hang around with non-reg friends or pursue other activities. However, there are many others who prefer to spend time in the dorm rather than being out and about campus or in town, to “be there for the fish” as one sophomore said.

Developing a “training style” was at the forefront of many conversations I had with sophomores. Deciding what type of “impression” or “presence” each sophomore wanted to have on or with the fish class was heavily considered and openly discussed among the class. A sophomore described his emerging training style as one designed “through replication and emulation of those above you mixed with my own natural way of interacting with others.” This is the foundation for formulating an operating leadership style and philosophy for the cadets. Fundamental to the process is having the opportunity to practice and refine what they believe about themselves and their influence over others. When one sophomore’s very tough and aggressive training style was not motivating a particular freshman to achieve a higher performance level, he talked with his buddies about changing his approach to better suit the situation or, perhaps, to change members in their squads.

Motivating others to achieve is a challenge faced, to some degree, in freshman year in trying to get buddies to work together or accomplish a certain task, but it is in the sophomore year that it becomes a direct responsibility and reflection of you, personally, as a leader and is taken very seriously. “Self-examination is critical if you want to be a positive force in the lives of those you are charged with,” responded a sophomore when I asked why he would take the time and effort to assess whether he was being effective. The sophomores, who step up to the plate and want to make their freshmen the absolute best, or *red-ass*, truly care about the fish and the future of their outfit. This loyalty to the outfit is what distinguishes Texas A&M’s Corps of Cadets from the military service academies, in the view of a cadet who visited West Point as part of his Army ROTC training. What he discovered in talking with other ROTC cadets during that trip and at national competitions he has participated in, is that other ROTC cadets are taught individual excellence as the primary focus in their training. In contrast, he sees the Corps of Cadets at A&M emphasizing excellence and service at the collective level through continually concentrating on “unity within your class and within your outfit so much so it becomes second-nature.” Hardships and challenges are overcome through group effort and it is the sophomores who reinforce this concept on a daily basis to the freshmen class.

Juniors (also called *surgebutts* or just *butts*) and seniors (known as *zips*) do not suffer definable hardships, since they have almost as much freedom as any non-Corps of Cadets student at Texas A&M. Not only are unified dress and dorm rooms not required anymore, but they also do not have specified bedtimes. They are able to come and go on

campus without asking permission, and do just about anything they want, that is, within reason. Yet, many juniors and seniors often suffer *white belt apathy*, a condition whereby they neglect their duties and responsibilities as cadets; for example, not showing up for formations before chow, not participating in outfit activities or not maintaining an inspection-ready uniform. It is a personal challenge to be held accountable for “honoring your commitment to uphold the Corps of Cadets’ high standards of appearance and behavior when no one is breathing down your neck to do so,” a senior explained; then added with a grin, “like when the *bag monster* (imaginary creature residing in cadets’ beds) keeps you from getting up for the morning run.”

Juniors, as indirect leaders, and seniors, as executive leaders, mentor the underclassmen and provide guidance in training issues while overseeing the daily operations of the Corps of Cadets. Depending on their staff or outfit role, they encounter challenges in various administrative duties such as goal-setting, implementing policy and enforcing rules and regulations, in addition to “making the hard decisions that no one else will do,” one senior Corps staff officer remarked. Those who have taken on key leadership positions learn valuable lessons that are not often experienced until later in an individual’s personal or professional life. One outfit commander offered this insight:

You cannot please everyone. When I first got into a leadership role I didn’t want tension or confrontation and would hesitate to make a decision. As time went on I found there would always be people on either side of the fence. I learned that it is better to discover what is right and best for the unit and then make my decision. Once the decision was made I needed to be confident in my choice no matter the disagreement. I always worked to re-ignite the relationships and be the bigger man, putting it behind me. I would go back and talk to them, telling them why and the reason behind it. They weren’t as combative then, even if they didn’t agree.

Leading their peers is one of the hardest challenges felt by all of the cadets I talked to in prominent leadership positions, because all cadets start out as equals during freshman year. “It is through years of hard work and dedicated service to the outfit that you gain the respect of your buddies. They see this and come to respect your decisions,” clarified a senior commander.

Keeping each other “in check” as far as the use of “power over those under us” is a challenge faced even by cadets “not in charge,” said an upperclassman. A senior told of an incident during his junior year when he had to “pull a buddy off” of a fish. The other junior was attempting to discipline the freshman for a minor infraction but was taking it too far. “There are those times you might have to step in and correct a buddy for the sake of the fish. He didn’t talk to me for probably a month saying I didn’t have any right to do that. Maybe he was right but I was willing to take the risk. He got over it and we moved on.” A cadet revealed that at the beginning of sophomore year many feel a:

[s]urge of power that comes with training. Some want to rip into the fish and be as intimidating as possible. Yelling in their face is one thing but prolonged or abusive behavior is another. We just aren’t going to put up with that from a buddy and our juniors are always watching, especially in the fall to make sure we don’t go all pisshead on the fish. Our whole class will get in trouble for just one of us being stupid.

Learning the proper use of power is a vital component of the Corps’ experience. Every cadet has the potential to distort it when issuing a task or just walking down the dorm hallway because the social structure is set up for underclassmen to be obedient at a moment’s notice. It takes moral courage to stand up to your own buddies or to get involved as an upperclassman when you see or hear of power being exploited. These cadets have the rare opportunity to experience the use and abuse of power during their

time in the Corps which has a direct influence on their character—and leadership—development.

Discovering Serendipitous Guides: Resonance through Relationships

“Thee lift me and I’ll lift thee and we’ll ascend together.”
—Quaker Proverb

The individuals who are “buddies” or peers within a class year group have the greatest impact on a cadet’s experience in the Corps. The development of these deeply bonded friendships is the energy field that sustains the Corps of Cadets. All of my in-depth interviews contained heartfelt dialogue on buddy relationships. Every cadet spoke of their buddies with a form of reverence. Such undying devotion to one another is not something that can be mandated or manipulated. It is an organic process: the natural flow of overcoming challenges and hardships together where learning is intertwined with a sense of connectedness and caring.

Freshmen who enter the Corps of Cadets almost always join a particular outfit because of some type of association with another person in that outfit. Often it is because they had a family member—dad, brother, cousin—in the outfit, or just someone they knew from their hometown or high school. Although selection of an outfit is usually not arbitrary, the mixture of freshmen who make up the fish class of each outfit and the relationships they form occur mainly by chance, as a senior discovered:

I came into the Corps thinking I was invincible. I’d achieved a lot in high school, often having to pull myself up by my own bootstraps. But FOW slapped me right in the face. It was my buddies that got me through those first few weeks. I would have never chosen some of them as friends so it really took me by surprise the ones who came through for me then and still continue to have my back.

Another cadet expressed a similar sentiment:

Our first sergeant told us on the first day of FOW that we'd 'marry and bury' the guy standing next to us. I thought, 'yeah, right, you're crazy, he's weird.' How stupid I was! Your perception of other people changes fast when your survival depends on them, especially when they really *put out* (dedicate time and energy) for you, in ways that your friends back home never would have.

Buddy—or class peer—relationships are the primary ones established during an individual's four years in the Corps of Cadets although secondary ones with cadets from other year groups are integral to the program. In fact, how upperclassmen interact and relate to underclassmen is the basis of the entire Corps of Cadets' developmental process. As one senior reasoned:

I'm a chilled out type of guy so when a fish comes to my room I'll tell him to relax pretty quick and be on friendly terms. But I'll get mad if he doesn't at least lock it up and properly report in or acknowledge me and my 'ol lady. You have to jump through the hoops and walk the walk each year and it's my responsibility to make sure they do.

Freshmen must address upperclassmen in their own outfit as Mister or Miss, never using their first name until the end of the year when they *drop handles* (a ritual of asking a fish "what does your momma call you" and when the fish responds with their first name the upperclassman will tell their own by saying "it's _____" thus authorizing the fish to be on a first name basis with that upperclassman).

Maintaining class boundaries is essential to the training of not only the fish class but also in teaching sophomores and juniors what they need to learn. This also extends to the senior class in the lessons the *bulls* (adult military training officers) have to offer.

Always respecting and honoring those ahead of you is an ingrained tenet of the Corps.

This doesn't mean that friendships do not exist across class lines. They do, but on a

limited basis, always mindful of the class system. Juniors and seniors tend to be on a more personal level with one another, almost as equals, while they do not usually develop as close of a relationship with sophomores or fish. What does occur is an identification of sorts among individual members of different classes. A fish learns how to be a cadet by watching then imitating upperclassmen. They pick and choose the words and actions of upperclassmen they like and pattern themselves after them. Freshmen and sophomores will seek out information and help from the upperclassmen they identify with or admire. However, upperclassmen who are “always pulling out *bad bull*,” (purposely mean or acting with ill intentions) as articulated by a fish about one of her seniors, are avoided at all costs and garner no respect.

In mythology a hero never travels the journey alone. In the Corps of Cadets an individual is never on the path of follower to leader alone. There are always guides and companions—some being kindred spirits, others are wise ‘elders’ of the community, and some may even act as foils—to steer each cadet’s heroic passage. Although every cadet should be familiar with *The Standard*, the Corps of Cadets’ policy and regulations manual, it does not teach the intangibles necessary to successfully progress through the four years. It is from each other this is discovered. It is by being “in relation” with one another that the cadets’ greatest lessons of leadership are learned.

This is the serendipitous portion of the process because it can never be predetermined or orchestrated as to how the relationships between buddies or with upperclassmen will take root and grow or what type of influence cadets will have on each other. During freshman year the fish are told by upperclassmen to go out together

off campus and spend as much time as possible getting to know one another. “The sooner they understand how each other ticks,” as one junior said, “the faster they will learn each other’s strengths and weaknesses and come together as a team.” Not everyone participates at the same level in this “togetherness” attitude. Some buddies within a year group work extremely hard at establishing and maintaining relationships while others do not see the need. “We like to go out after training on Fridays to eat and hang out—just ‘buddy time’—but there are some who bring their girlfriends and that just changes the dynamics,” a freshman commented.

The cadets who are not “team players” tend to be the main source of friction within a class yet often provide some of the best instruction on interrelationship skill-building. It is during freshman and sophomore years this is most evident and has the greatest impact on buddy relationships. As time goes on they are not necessarily outcast from the class but are not included in on major decisions or given some of the more valued positions within the outfit. As long as they do not hinder training of the freshman class they are left alone to come and go as they wish. It is when they become a detriment to the outfit that their buddies confront them and demand accountability. A junior cadet reflected:

I now see the benefit of having ‘bad buddies’ since it has forced me to keep interacting with that type of person. In other instances I would have just walked away and blown them off. I can’t do that here and I’ve actually gotten better at dealing with disruptive people and learned how to handle those kinds of situations.

It is to the underclassmen’s advantage to have a variety of leadership role-models—good and bad—available for them to observe. Most observations occur on an

informal basis during the course of daily activities. However, the *white belt mentor program* in some outfits is intentionally structured to establish a connection between a freshman and a junior or senior. Each fish is paired with a volunteer white belt upperclassman to provide mentoring whether it be an academic problem or anything else a freshman might need advice or guidance on. The fish are very reluctant to approach upperclassmen at the beginning of the year; therefore, having an assigned mentor gives them a sense of safety and opens the door to that unknown world. Yet, as beneficial as many mentoring partnerships turn out to be, serendipity is a factor. The structure of a mentorship program can be put into place, but the relationship between the two people involved will follow its own inherent course. Some cadets form a true friendship and move beyond the surface while others never do, as one senior told of his experience:

I guess I got lucky. My white belt mentor my freshman year was great. He would make bets with me about exams and take me out for steak if I ever got a higher grade in any of my classes that week. Several of my buddies would play video games as a reward with their white belts but some didn't have as much to do with theirs for one reason or another. It meant a lot to me that mine really cared. It made my fish year so much better! I'm trying to do the same with my fish this year and I think we've got a good relationship going. He comes to me with personal problems sometimes and I think he knows I care.

Even if a fish and their white belt mentor do not resonate enough to develop a close relationship, having an assortment of upperclassman role-models to choose from offers the opportunity for a freshman to find someone they respond to. This was illustrated to me through a first sergeant's account of a fish in his outfit who had decided she was not coming back to the Corps next year. She wanted to devote more time to A&M's triathlon team and had already spoken with several people about it, but no one

was able to convince her to stay. When upperclassmen talk to fish about the advantages of completing the entire program, they usually focus on the long term benefits, often forgetting it is the day-to-day issues and survival that concern the freshmen. During their conversation he was able to root out what was really bothering her. Much of it had to do with the uncertainty of what lay ahead for her as a sophomore, and how her absence from the outfit, during training time for practice and competitions, would be perceived. She wanted to excel at being both a cadet and athlete, and wasn't sure how to do it on a daily basis. He broke down a typical week's training schedule with her, and determined which times were the most critical for her to be present. The other times could be covered, somehow. Her demeanor shifted and she now seemed receptive to staying, but wasn't prepared to completely commit. She asked him if he would pray for her to make the right decision, to which he absolutely agreed. When he returned to his room later that night he found a note card under the door from her. She had written a promise to come back next year—and the next—and finally, to return the last year to wear her senior boots. It was signed and dated by her and “witnessed” by her female buddies who had been valiantly trying to get her to stay. His approach was exactly what she needed. What he said and was willing to do for her made the difference. I believe an important element to the whole experience was the development of trust between each other, in fulfilling the agreement of when she could be absent from her unit. Learning to trust and honoring your word are two invaluable lessons in growth, for both the follower and leader in their character and leadership development.

What I have recognized about many cadets in key leadership positions is that they often adopt a parenting role towards the underclassmen in their outfit. Even though there may be only one, two, or three years difference in their ages, the upperclassmen would refer to the fish as “kids” or ask “when are they going to grow up?” in reference to the freshmen becoming accountable for themselves. This is most apparent in the behavior of many outfit commanders and first sergeants who are ultimately responsible for the health and welfare of their members. When a fish was admitted to the campus health center for severe food poisoning his commander came as soon as he was informed and stayed until the freshman was allowed to go back to the dorm. I was amazed how attentive he was in understanding the doctor’s discharge instructions. The questions he asked about follow-on care procedures were as thorough as any parent’s might be. This type of genuine care and compassion was also displayed by a first sergeant in responding immediately to a buddy rushed to the hospital for gall bladder surgery. He stayed with him through the night until his parents arrived from out of town. Both the commander and first sergeant demonstrated a level of maturity far beyond other students their age in taking personal responsibility during these emergencies and are known for extending this dedication to any of their cadets in physical or emotional need.

A parental instinct “just comes with the territory” responded a commander when I wondered why he invested so much of himself in caring for his cadets. A first sergeant asked me to sit in on a counseling session he was having with a freshman concerning a display of undesirable behavior and attitude that occurred at another freshman’s home over the weekend. In the course of the conversation the first sergeant used very judicious

tactics in first eliciting the freshman's side of the story and then discussing why what had happened was inappropriate and will not be tolerated. He laid out a course of action for resolution of the situation and what expectations he had of the freshman for the future. Afterwards when I asked about his choice of what approach to use he smiled and said, "That's how my dad handled me in high school."

Parents have a huge influence on how successful many of the students are in the Corps of Cadets. "They are my main motivation for being here. Mom said on the phone the other night how proud she was of me," commented a fish. So very often cadets come to value their parents more and realize the sacrifices they made to raise them. One cadet admitted:

I went to A&M Galveston last year and might not have talked to my parents for over a week or two but now I talk to them pretty much every day. I got an email from my dad one time last fall when I didn't want to be here that brought a tear to my eye because he was so encouraging. I get to see my parents this weekend. I'm excited.

Not all parents are enthusiastic about their son or daughter being in the Corps of Cadets. This factor directly impacts retention, as a senior explained, "No one can do it alone. This is tough business and unless you have a support system you won't make it. Having someone listen without judgment as you vent might be all you need to make it another day as a fish."

An essence of family is created and perpetuated within many outfits. A freshman disclosed, "During the fall semester I felt our commander was this protective father figure, always looking out for all of us fish," and the upperclassmen were, "like big brothers who gave us a rough time but also had our best interest at heart. Everyone

honestly cared about you and kept pushing you to work out any differences you might have with your buddies—they weren't going to let you get away with outwardly not getting along.” Accepting a roommate for who they are and learning to share such a confined amount of space felt to one freshman what she thought marriage might be like in the sense that “there is so much give and take” and “a rhythm develops between you and your ‘ol lady from constantly being together.”

Another aspect of family relationships is apparent when cadets refer to an underclassman they have chosen to replace them in certain positions as “my son” or “daughter” and take personal responsibility for training them. This concept reaches back several sets of classes with “he is my granddad” or “great granddad” in reference to other cadets who have held that position within a particular outfit. “It gives me a feeling of direct connection to the guys who have gone before me and I don't want to disappoint them in how I do my job,” a sophomore remarked. In some special Corps-wide units that are comprised of cadets from many different outfits your successor is chosen for you yet you are still required to train them. You may not agree on the selection of that person but dedication to the organization usually wins out and a relationship is forged. A female spoke of her “dad” in a special unit as being a “traditional male cadet not in favor of women in the Corps” so it was difficult at first to bridge that gap of him not wanting to spend much time teaching her. She pushed through this and persisted in seeking his help. When he finally admitted she was doing a good job and seemed to accept her based on her performance she felt victorious.

Allowing females into the Corps of Cadets was an extremely controversial issue when first initiated several decades ago and it still continues today to be a touchy subject for many. Opinions on the matter vary from one extreme to the other. Some are staunchly against it because they believe having females “weakens the training process,” as cited by a cadet who belongs to an all-male outfit. Within gender integrated outfits there are ‘middle-of-the-road’ cadets who would prefer not to have women but accept it, with the reasoning of one such male being that, “Females are equal members in the military and if they want a commission and are students at A&M then this is the best way to prepare to be an officer—male or female.” Many male cadets are very supportive of having females in the Corps, indicated by this senior’s statement:

Our leadership experience is not reserved for males only. Holding women back because of antiquated beliefs of what the Corps is about is wrong. We cannot have this cocoon of our own social forces forever. Gender integrated outfits are essential if you want to stick around in the 21st century. Diversity is important to our credibility with the outside world. My class has a female buddy and she deserves to be here as much as any male because she went through the same things we did. That isn’t to say there aren’t some females that shouldn’t be here—just like some males—but if they are productive members then they are beneficial to the outfit.

Several freshmen agreed that they would take a “strong female over a weak male buddy anytime.” Being *squared away* (top performing) surfaced as the yard stick of acceptance by most cadets despite gender. However, a gap exists in the training of freshman females when no upperclassman female is in the outfit. Males felt at a disadvantage at times because they didn’t want to touch a female’s uniform while she’s wearing it when measuring the placement of her brass or see “certain items” during room inspections. The “reality of the situation is that there are many physical and psychological differences

we have to get used to and it takes time to adjust. We do the best we can but sometimes the females don't receive as much training as the guys do," commented a male sophomore. Another sophomore felt these differences between men and women caused them to lead in different ways, "A male often leads through physical and mental intimidation while a female relies on the size of her confidence."

I found, unlike gender, ethnicity did not play a role in how cadets felt about each other or admittance to individual outfits. "A black male is still a male—he's more like me than a white female. Differences in sex are more defining than the color of your skin. I've never personally known racial prejudice on the Quad but we aren't that progressive with gender," stated a white male senior. In discussing race and ethnicity during formal interviews and informal conversations in the field all of the cadets denied it was a factor in friendships, training, or leadership positions. The consensus was that as long as someone pulled their own weight and got the job done racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds did not have any influence in those areas. However, several did admit to joking with one another about it, giving me some examples: "We took a picture of the buddies and you can't see _____ since it's at night," and "I like to tease _____ about worrying so much, saying he has to get over all that Catholic guilt forced on him." One freshman said, "It's all in fun. That's our way of dealing with our differences. And actually through this year I've come to realize when you get down to it we really aren't as different as I once thought we were." This change in perspective is a result of "becoming comfortable in your own skin," said a sophomore, as he explained that the 'fish bowl' environment they live in exposes any insecurities or negative attitudes cadets

may have about themselves or others, adding, “Eventually you have to deal with it because buddies constantly push the issue and don’t let you forget until you adjust your attitude or behavior.”

Passing through the Gates: Stories, Symbols, and Signposts

It is from the moment individuals answer the call and embark on the Corps of Cadets’ heroic journey that they begin shedding their differences and old ways of thinking and operating in the world. A physical and emotional transformation of identity, through cultural osmosis, must occur in order for cadets to successfully find their way in this new land. Many signposts direct their voyage and indicate passage from one stage to the next. Accomplishment of the hardships and challenges intentionally placed in their path are clearly marked through symbolic icons and artifacts, ceremonies, customs, and traditions. This tapestry of cultural symbolism is woven so tightly into their transformation of follower to leader that it cannot be separated from the developmental process.

The philosophical foundation of the Corps of Cadets’ collective identity “*Per Unitatem Vis*”—through unity strength—is inscribed on the corps brass insignia worn on every cadet’s uniform collar. In addition, the ideals of “soldier, statesman, and knightly gentleman” are symbolically represented on it with a sword, fasces (a bundle of rods carried by ancient Roman magistrates), and knight’s helmet. Beyond the standard brass worn by all cadets, additional *chest candy* (ribbons, medals, and cords) adorn many uniforms to mark individual and outfit achievement. “Thank goodness we won again and get to wear the cord next year. I was dreading being a *brown bag* (wearing a plain khaki

uniform with no ribbons or cords), and having nothing to show for our hard work this last year,” confessed a freshman after the annual Parents Weekend Corps of Cadets Awards Presentation and Military Review.

Everyday, when a cadet puts his or her uniform on, they see, touch, and hear the stage they are currently at on their journey. Each year, from beginning to end, is uniquely distinguished, sometimes in ways only a cadet would know. This attention to detail is one of the defining features of cadet training and is imposed through as many facets as possible. Uniforms are a prime example. Freshmen wear cotton black belts that look exactly like the nylon ones sophomores wear, just as juniors must wear cotton white belts, while the seniors are allowed nylon white belts. The difference being that cotton is much harder to keep clean, forcing freshmen and juniors to be more diligent about their appearance until they earn the right to wear an easier-maintenance uniform part.

“Learning to notice the little things in the Corps has taught me how often the little things add up and eventually make a difference,” commented a freshman. Other small details that create distinction among the classes, not easily recognized by the general public, are slightly different uniform belt buckles and the peak shape and braiding on their garrison caps. “Just changing out a few things on my uniform when I went from a freshman to a sophomore made me know I had moved up in the ranks and earned the right to wear them. I was proud of myself,” responded a cadet.

However, there is nothing on the Quad, or anywhere else on the A&M campus, that noticeably represents authority and prestige more than the sight and sound of the glorified Corps of Cadets’ senior boots, as a senior shared:

I'll never forget the first time I heard my own boots echo in the Academic Building. Groups of people separated and made room for me as I came down the hall. Pretty powerful stuff I hadn't felt until then. I also started receiving more 'Sirs' from non-regs than ever before which was unnerving at first.

Individually handcrafted from brown leather, these English style riding boots are meticulously polished by their owners to a high glossy shine. "Hearing the 'chink' of my spurs makes me walk a little taller," emphasized a senior. Another cadet exclaimed:

You would never believe the instant respect you get when you wear your boots. Parents valued my opinion more as a senior in boots during summer recruiting than when I was first sergeant in *low quarters* (cadet uniform shoes) even though I was saying the exact same thing each year.

Having a striking daily reminder of what lies ahead, is a strong incentive that motivates and inspires freshmen to stay the course. As one cadet rationalized, "Every person in boots did what I'm going through and they made it just fine. If I keep putting one foot in front of the other I'll be in their shoes soon enough. And for sure, I'll enjoy my turn when the time comes."

Freshmen cadets must learn a set of *campusologies* (over thirty facts and quotations about the traditions and history of Texas A&M) to be recited at a moment's notice whenever an upperclassman asks. This training teaches the Corps of Cadets' purpose and core values among many other ideals every member must know and uphold. The campusologies are not only written in handbooks for the cadets to see and memorize, they are verbally repeated over and over while vividly being put into action through the hardships and challenges of daily life in the Corps. A sophomore confided:

I've never been very good at memorization so the campusology perfects were hard for me. One of my buddies kept after me though and would come into my hole all the time to help me. She wrote them on note cards

for me and we did flash cards like in the third grade. I would encourage her at the *O course* (obstacle course) and on outfit runs. In speaking to the fish about their *campos* (campusologies) I tell them they aren't just words on a page—perseverance, teamwork, loyalty—it's who we are.

This holistic approach—mind, body, spirit—to learning imprints the Corps of Cadets' culture so deeply on its members that it becomes part of their identity.

Each individual outfit has its own unique organizational culture within the larger Corps of Cadets' cultural framework. What each outfit is “known” for, be it athletics, scholastics, service, their chaplain program, or as *Reveille's* (Texas A&M's mascot) outfit, to name a few, is what they build their organizational identity around and devote most of their collective energy towards. Outfits recruit members using their cultural identity and freshmen who do not have any affiliation with a particular outfit are influenced by this. A cadet told me that as an incoming freshman last summer she walked around the recruiting open house, “trying to find what the best fit was for me and what personalities the different outfits had. Some were more obvious than others. I believe I made the right choice.”

The set of values each outfit personifies is evident not only in their outfit t-shirt design worn as part of *PT gear* (clothes and shoes for physical training) but also in the cultural icons displayed throughout the dorm space they occupy. Often hanging from the ceiling in the middle of the hall are one or more *slap boards* (wooden signs with painted words expressing an outfit's ideals). Members of that outfit might reach up and slap the boards when they walk under them to “signal to others your intentions” in that “you don't just go through the motions, you actively live out the principles,” clarified a senior. For instance, one outfit has a slap board with the word “INTENSITY” on it to

communicate the single-most important characteristic each member is expected to exhibit as a cadet. The outfit's commander explained, "Everything you do is to be done with intensity: putting your absolute best effort into how you look and act. Living your life as a cadet to the fullest."

An important part of carrying on the culture of an outfit is the giving of a *passdown* (any type of object that has symbolic meaning) to your successor that is representative of the role or position to be assumed. Passdowns range from large objects, such as a big wooden sign containing the names and class years of everyone who has held that position in the past, to small objects such as a uniform rank with its predecessors' engraved initials. Some passdowns have a rich heritage and deep meaning attached to them, such as a saber that is ceremoniously presented to the new commander of a particular outfit each year. It is cared for and kept by the first sergeant in a glass case during the year, and worn by the commander only at *Final Review* (end of the year military review), in honor of the Aggie military officer whose saber it was while a cadet at A&M, class of 1935, and who died in a World War II Japanese prison camp. Other passdowns are less serious and just for fun, like a baseball bat with a golf club sock on the end that is given to a particular outfit's Most Athletic Fish. New ones tend to originate with the whim of an upperclassman wanting to leave a mark on the outfit. A freshman disclosed:

Mr. ____ asked the fish class for volunteers for the [unofficial] position of 'caffeine corporal' he wants to start next year. I said I'd do it since sophomores don't get coffee pots and I really like coffee, but I have to do some crazy calculations about caffeine content in coffee versus tea and some other things, he said. I guess this is how I'm going to 'earn' it.

The upperclassmen often think up silly actions for the fish to perform in earning passdowns or privileges. Creating an atmosphere of fun, amongst the hardships and challenges, helps reduce everyone's stress level and adds to the bonding experience. Plato's words have wisdom in them: "You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation." Sometimes the willingness to put bunny ears on and sing a song, or pretend to joust with trash cans illuminates a dimension of character that otherwise would never reveal itself. Genuine laughter was often heard as much as booming training-style voices during the course of a day. "When an upperclassman sends one of us on a goofy detail just to mess with us it can be annoying but most of the time it turns out to be hilarious," commented a freshman. Even as difficult as FOW is, there are moments of "play" to break the tension. A staged water fight among the new fish class members takes place with a tone of good sportsmanship and friendly competition.

An absolute favorite pastime of the fish is to imitate their upperclassmen. Once they get going, an entire scene is re-enacted. Their use of voice, verbiage, and mannerisms would make any acting coach very proud! They earnestly pay attention to every detail about an upperclassman. Nothing goes unnoticed. It is this fact that made me realize just how interconnected their developmental experiences are: training teaches them to be obsessively observant, which fuels their creative playfulness, which builds their relationships, which supports their transformation into leaders.

When an upperclassman stops a fish in the hall and has him or her stand at attention while asking ridiculous questions to make the freshman *buzz* (break the

concentrated, serious look on their face into a smile or outright laughter), they are relating in a way that teaches self-control on the freshman's part, and allows them to get to know one another in a Corps of Cadets' culturally acceptable manner. Another reason to stop a fish in the hall is to ask, "What's for evening chow?" or some other "training" question. When I asked some of the fish if this bothered them, they said no, because they knew which upperclassmen liked them and cared about them from how often they would take the time to joke around. I noticed a great deal of this interaction took place in the dorm hallway early in the fall semester, if by chance a white belt happened across a fish. After Christmas Break, the upperclassmen started seeking certain fish out, standing in their open doorway to talk. By the time Spring Break came, more and more of the interaction seemed to take place inside their rooms. By Parents Weekend, in mid-April, the interaction among the fish and upperclassmen became more of a conversation than a question and answer session.

My attention was drawn to the use of hallway space, when I was asked by the first sergeant to not have any lengthy discussions with the fish in the hall because it was "training space," and he preferred I talk with them in my office. This was during the week following FOW and the fish were still learning the "ins and outs" so they would quickly try to ask a question of me, if an upperclassman wasn't around, thinking that it was okay. It took some conditioning for members of the freshmen class to not strike up a conversation in the hall. In wanting to respect their culture I have always tried my best to follow the "rules" but this was difficult also for me because so much of how to act, what to say, who has what privileges and so on, is tacit knowledge. I had to learn it just like

the fish: by participating in the culture day-by-day. I did have one advantage though. Unlike the freshmen, I was allowed to ask direct questions of anybody. And ask I did! Part of the culture is to not let the fish—and even the sophomores at times—know the big picture or sequence of events. They are left to their own devices to figure out the process that is happening to them, which forces them to collaborate with each other. Everyone has a piece of the puzzle, and only by working together can they understand enough to solve the mystery.

In mythology, clues that help the hero discover secrets or unlock passage gates encountered along the path, often come in the form of stories told by mentors or guides. The Corps of Cadets has its *Old Army* (referring to the “way it used to be” and usually perceived to be better than the present way of doing things) stories of cadet adventures and crazy antics that took place in the past. Put two former cadets in a room, no matter the class year, and they will talk for hours about their experiences and how they “survived” the Corps. They love to explain fish year and what they would *pull out* (do or say something that was not their privilege) on the upperclassmen or how they accomplished certain assigned tasks, such as the long-standing tradition of making of their *fish spurs* (flattened bottle caps, of a quantity equal to the freshman class year, strung on a wire clothes hanger that is shaped to wear on uniform shoes in the fashion of senior boot spurs). So many of the Corps’ traditions are passed down orally and each outfit’s culture teaches and implements them in different ways. “I like that the bottle caps on our spurs are painted. Makes us stand out from the other outfits,” remarked a

freshman. There is not an instruction booklet on how to make fish spurs yet every cadet leaves the Corps knowing how to create a slightly different version of them.

During training the upperclassmen tell stories to illustrate the points that they want the fish or sophomores to learn. The underclassmen may be doing physical training while listening to the upperclassmen. As one fish noted:

We are a captive audience during PT. Mr. _____ tends to like to hear himself talk, so sometimes I'll tune him out but I pay attention when others talk. A lot of the time I get caught up in their stories to take my mind off how much I hurt from pushing and usually I'm so tired my mind is blank and it's easier to listen than think on my own.

Another freshman expressed, "I like to know about our upperclassmen—what happened during their FOW or guidon trials or why someone had to *sit a weekend*" (punishment for misconduct, or excessive demerits). While hearing these stories, the cadets start to understand the larger context and figure out how they fit into it. Through connection with other cadets' stories, they are able to derive meaning from their experiences.

The final gate to pass through, marking the end of the journey from follower to leader, is *Final Review*. It is held on graduation weekend of the spring semester. It demonstrates the formal exchange of leadership within the Corps of Cadets for the coming year. Two military reviews are held in succession. In the first *pass* (marching in front of the military reviewing stand) cadets stay in the position they have held all year. Before the second pass they go back to their dorms and put on the uniforms they will wear next year, and assume their new leadership positions in formation on the Quad. The graduating senior class replace their uniform shirts with their outfit t-shirts and stand on the sidelines, signifying they no longer hold a place in the ranks. Their time is over and,

now, they are to let the cadets they have trained take command. The “new” Corps of Cadets marches back to Kyle Field for the second review. This is the only time there is no fish class present. The ‘freshly minted’ sophomores are excited beyond belief that they are no longer fish. The now-junior class members have their white belts on and are relishing all the new privileges that come with wearing it. Yet, no one is strutting more boldly than the incoming senior class in their hard-earned and well-deserved senior boots. “Wearing them around the dorm this semester, trying to break them in, was fun but it won’t even compare to that first official step-off,” an eager junior told me.

Final Review is one of the most memorable and emotional events during the four years in the life of a cadet. “I won’t lie—there will probably be some tears,” responded a senior when we were discussing his upcoming Final Review, “mostly my mom’s but I’m sure a few will be mine.” Another senior reflected, “It doesn’t seem real yet. I know the end is near and I’m feeling a bit sad about leaving but I have to get through finals first. Guess it’ll really hit me on that final approach to the reviewing stand.”

Summary and Discussion of Findings: Returning to Answer the Call of Service

The ultimate aim of the quest must be neither release nor ecstasy for oneself, but the wisdom and power to serve others. (Campbell, 2001, p. xv)

Once a senior has passed through the ending ceremonial gate of Final Review, they remove their boots for the last time as a cadet. They have concluded their heroic journey of leadership development. Each individual went through an alchemical process as they were transformed from a novice follower to a master leader. Their gold comes from self-discovery. A senior disclosed:

In becoming a leader I think it's about getting to know your own self better. And developing as a person. It's the adversity in the beginning years that makes you know what you are and aren't made of. You learn what you value and what you'll go up against a buddy over. Things I used to get all worked up about don't bother me anymore. I'm calmer now. Suppose I've changed in other ways too, like my willingness to help people I don't really know or wouldn't have cared about before.

Cadets who have successfully accomplished their travels were immersed into a foreign culture with its own language and way of life. They faced many hardships, broke through personal limitations and uncovered hidden treasures in themselves and others. Now they must leave this mystical land and go back to the world they came from. "Fish year went on forever but the rest of it flew by. Everyone's off to a job or grad school—except a few going for that fifth year. I'm going to miss all this, most of all being with my buddies," remarked a senior.

In mythology, heroes must return to their kingdom to share the "boon" or treasures they have acquired. The hero has been changed, or as Campbell (1968, 2001, 2003) described it, "transfigured" because of the journey undertaken. It is their duty to enrich the lives of those in the community with their new-found knowledge and gifts. What started out as an individual call to adventure now becomes a collective call to serve others. Any hero who has truly embodied the lessons of their journey will give back what they have been fortunate enough to receive. A cadet acknowledged:

When I was a fish my first sergeant would tell us on outfit runs or during PT, 'You get out of the Corps what you put into it.' Watching him sacrifice for us was the most motivating thing I saw that year. He was right there with us during training time, as much as he could, and never seemed to take a *bag-in* (permission to sleep through morning formation). He dealt with our parents, the bulls and his own buddies, but still made time for us. You knew he cared and it made us care.

Cadets who have completed their four-year apprenticeship in leadership development carry with them a sense of service. They know from their experiences during fish year what it is to tap into the collective pool of synergy from those around you. Freshmen comprehended the need for each other, not only to survive, but to excel. As sophomores, they directly trained those under them to come to this same understanding. As juniors and seniors, some went on to serve at the staff level in order to keep the student organization operational. Others remained at the outfit level, to oversee the day-to-day “care and feeding” of the freshmen and well-being of all the members. “My desire is to leave the place better than I found it,” one commander told me. A junior who puts great effort into academics commented on his contribution, “Knowing I made a difference with one of my fish or sophomores whether it was helping them decide on the right major or just pass a class.” “I’ve never had any high position in the outfit. I’m here to support my buddies and make sure they don’t take themselves too seriously,” expressed a senior.

These cadets lived in service to others on a daily basis. It evolved into a way of life while they were members of the Corps and became part of their identity. Not everyone experiences the same level of self-sacrifice or commitment, but every cadet I interviewed spoke of being part of something larger than themselves while in the Corps, and how this insight shaped their thinking and behavior. They internalized an ethic of caring. According to Noddings (2003) ethical caring is an extension of natural caring. It is derived from a sense of moral duty that goes beyond naturally caring for loved ones:

an ethic of caring places service to others above individual self-interest. It is not established through verbal expression—it must be demonstrated through action.

Some people are naturally inclined to an ethic of caring because of their disposition. In others it arises through relationship as a result of feeling cared for and causes them to reciprocate (Noddings, 2003). “You learn to carry another’s burden,” stated a sophomore about his fish year. The cadets develop a sense of moral duty to others, deeply seated in their lessons of unity: it is not about you; it is about us. The collective is greater than the individual. They are forced to sacrifice their individuality in every sense of their being to discover this principle. In developing a feeling of unified connectedness—one identity—they are transformed into ethical caregivers or servant leaders. “I have come to the realization to be a good leader you must be a servant,” expressed a junior.

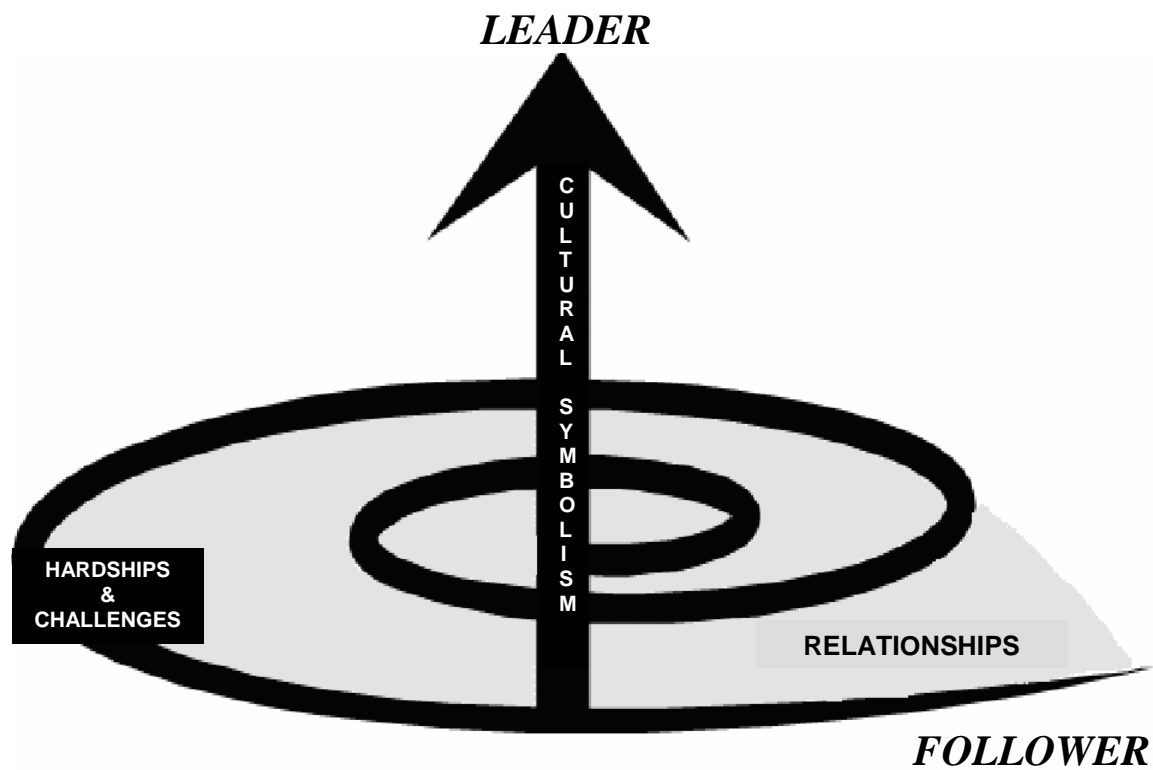
Robert Greenleaf’s (1977) framework for servant leadership was inspired by a mythological story in which a group of men looking for enlightenment travel for years with a servant named Leo. Everything is prosperous until Leo disappears. After a while the journey falls into disarray and the men realize it was Leo’s serving presence that had kept them together. Years later the narrator of this tale discovers Leo when he is taken to those supporting the journey. Leo turns out to be the noble leader of these sponsors, not a lowly servant. His mission had been one of fulfillment to others while on the journey—the manifestation of servant leadership. A servant leader’s primary concern is the consideration of their followers’ needs while providing an environment where they have the opportunity to become leaders themselves (Shriberg et al., 2005).

This is the intention of the Corps of Cadets at Texas A&M University, with its stated purpose being, “to develop well-educated leaders of character prepared to provide values-based leadership and service in the public and private sectors” (Texas A&M University Corps of Cadets, 2007). The Corps of Cadets’ leadership development process is visually displayed in Figure 1. Development is not a linear process in the Corps of Cadets—it is recursive. In this community of practice, novice followers start on the peripheral, moving in a spiral direction to the center as they develop into master leaders. Along the path are intentionally placed hardships and challenges infused with cultural symbolism to mark their passage. Relationships comprise the energy field that sustains the entire transformative learning and leadership development process. Cadets demonstrate heroic courage by stepping through their fear of unknown territory, and travel a path very few college students dare to embark on. They surrender to a force greater than themselves. Their individual psychic and physical boundaries are shattered as they merge into one collective and embody the Corps of Cadets’ foundational concept of unity. Cadets form binding relationships by going through the good and bad times together, resulting in an ethic of caring and awareness that service to others is the highest form of leadership.

Figure 1. Development of leadership in the Texas A&M University Corps of Cadets

Texas A&M University Corps of Cadets

Leadership Development Model: *A Transformative Learning Spiral*



CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS, INSIGHTS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

“Say not, ‘I have found the truth,’ but rather, ‘I have found a truth.’”
--Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet*

Conclusions and Insights

Texas A&M University and the Corps of Cadets have a longtime adage that people fall back on when words fail them in depicting the Aggie and cadet experience: “*From the outside, you can’t understand it. From the inside, you can’t explain it.*” As an emerging ethnographic researcher, this case study is my humble attempt at explaining the Corps of Cadets’ ‘story’ from an inside view so that you, the reader on the outside, might gain insight into their culturally unique leadership development process. Hopefully the cadets participating in this study and I have somehow disputed the above axiom and illuminated their world enough for others to come to an appreciative understanding of what their lived experiences have been.

The purpose of this study was to examine how transformative learning and membership in a community of practice influenced leadership development among participants of a collegiate student organization. The following questions guided the direction of this study:

1. In what transformative learning experiences were participants engaged?
2. In what leadership development experiences were participants engaged?
3. How did membership in a community of practice influence transformative learning and leadership development?

4. How was the meaning of leadership constructed by participants?

Data were collected using a purposeful sampling of members from the bounded case, the Corps of Cadets at Texas A&M University, through in-depth interviews, field observations and ‘sharing’ conversations during a prolonged period of engagement, which is commonly found in naturalistic-constructivist inquiry. An inductive approach was taken in data analysis, using a constant comparative method in developing coding categories of recurring concepts and in identifying themes. A creative synthesis of the whole is told through a richly descriptive metaphoric narrative tale of novice freshmen following a transformative spiral path to become master senior-class leaders.

Authenticity of my study has met with sincere verification by the ones who matter the most: my participants. My experience of validity and trustworthiness was identical to Jones’ (2002) when she spoke of her participants’ responses to the write-up of her study as being “overwhelming and unexpected. For almost every participant, reading the essay was an emotional experience. Several of them indicated that the essay was like a gift because it functioned as a mirror back to them. The participants delighted in telling their stories, but to see themselves in print was like returning their story to them. And for me as the researcher, this was the most authentic verification” (p. 177).

Recordings in my field notes of my participants’ positive responses and grateful words as they reviewed their interview excerpts and illustrative examples convinced me I had it right: “Wow, that’s exactly how it happened!” “Reading this brings back those feelings of complete confusion and exhaustion during FOW [Freshman Orientation Week]. My legs are going numb right now.” “This is awesome! My mom needs to read

your dissertation. She would understand my life here so much better.” “This means a lot. I think people want to know what goes on in the Corps but we don’t know how to share it. It takes over your life and you can’t put words to it. Maybe I will be able to once I’m gone and have other experiences to compare it to.” “Culture shock. That sums up FOW!” “You make the unity thing seem so clear, you know, its purpose and all. That’s the hardest thing to explain to someone not in the Corps.” “Now that I read this I do feel what we go through in the Corps is heroic. We might not be slaying dragons but we do fight some inner battles, like pushing yourself to make it through an entire outfit run without falling out or being strong enough to call out a buddy when he’s done something just plain wrong. Conquering those little things means something too.” This feedback served a dual purpose. For me, the member checks verified the authenticity of my study. For the participants, the sessions verified the validity of their lived experiences (Cranton, 2002) and contributed to their engagement in several transformative learning processes presented in Chapter II. As they read over and discussed their own quotes and other data in the findings chapter many cadets integrated one or more “missing” pieces in understanding their experiences (Clark, 1993)—that ‘ah ha’ moment— and through critical reflection and reflective discourse created new meaning perspectives from these experiences (Drath & Palus, 1994; Mezirow, 2000; Scott, 1997).

I found leadership development in the Corps of Cadets to be the process Covey (2004) defined as “seeing, doing, and becoming” and is evoked by “communicating to people their worth and potential so clearly that they come to see it in themselves” (p. 98). However, once again, I must state as I did in Chapter III, that I do not claim to have

the definitive portrait of leadership development or transformative learning occurring in the Corps of Cadets' community of practice. The conclusions I have drawn as a result of my research are only *a* truth, not *the* truth. They are meant to contribute to the "special conversation" Tom Gallagher (2002), Founding Editor of *The Journal of Leadership Education*, called for in advocating that leadership education "is not a singular focus," but instead "it sits at the nexus of two disciplines, the art and science of leadership and the art and science of education" (p. 3-4). I believe this to be true. Understanding leadership development requires understanding learning processes. For educators in the fields of leadership development and adult education, and to any other willing readers, I offer the following insights from my research:

Deep learning occurs holistically. Human beings are living systems comprised of a mind—body—spirit connection. All three dimensions are sites of learning. The Corps of Cadets' leadership development program transforms lives because it uses a holistic approach. The cadets' minds, bodies, and spirits have been imprinted with lessons of growth and development using multi-sensory visual, auditory, and kinetic teaching methods. During the course of my study I found research questions one and two, which asked what transformative learning experiences and what leadership development experiences were the participants engaged in, very difficult to answer separately because the cadets' transformative and leadership development experiences were symbiotic. The participants' transformative learning experiences—and resulting personal growth and development—were deeply intertwined with their leadership development experiences because of the holistic nature of the learning. Holistic learning promoted integration of

mind, body, and spirit generating whole-person leaders who engaged in holistic leadership. The physical training developed a strong body. The mental skills of focus, memorization, concentration, problem-solving, creativity and so forth developed strong minds. The will to overcome adversity and fear of the unknown, the ability to connect with others, sacrificing and surrendering ego, finding purpose and meaning in one's actions, the feeling of being part of something larger than yourself, a caring heart, and so much more developed a strong spirit. Cadets integrated these dimensions when they practiced empathy, made moral choices, became more self-aware, learned courage, used both their rational and intuitive minds, developed their humanity, and traveled their heroic path of self-growth and leadership development.

Caring relationships are fundamental tools in leadership development and transformative learning. Even though the world has physical boundaries and nations draw geographical borders, we cannot deny the fact that we are becoming a global society driven by the technological advances in satellites and computer networking. Technology provides a tangible means of linking with one another externally, but what is the intangible force that binds us internally? As witnessed in Chapter IV, an invisible source of a caring spirit has the ability to connect people. The human heart is the instrument of this cosmic connection. An interesting note from my study of the Corps of Cadets is that from its military beginnings during a mechanistic worldview, a hierarchical organizational structure was put into place, yet their basic foundation of leadership development—the concept of “unity” documented in Chapter IV—actually operates from an organic, living systems worldview. The transformation in perspectives

of the cadets that occurred when individual identities (parts) became a collective identity (whole) is so pervasive it is the dominant feature of their leadership development process, and permeates the overall functioning of the entire organization. As stated in Chapter II: “The whole exists through continually manifesting in the parts, and the parts exist as embodiments of the whole” (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers, 2005, p. 6).

Although the cadets’ connected relationships acted as the conductor of their transformative learning, it is the depth of these relationships that is the distinguishable attribute. Deep, trusting friendships served as the mechanism of profound identity transformation. Recognition of this characteristic illuminates possible answers to several questions introduced in Chapter I. Taylor (2000, 2005) was interested in knowing what role relationships played in transformative learning and what behavior was manifested as a result. I wanted to know, as research question number three asked, how participation in a community of practice influenced transformative learning and leadership development. My study demonstrated that membership in a community of practice provided the social environment, as mentioned in Chapter II by Clark and Wilson (1991), thus setting the stage for deep connections to develop. I believe it is from these intensely bonded relationships that an ethic of caring was manifested in the behavior of its participants, illustrated in this quote from Chapter IV, “You knew he cared and it made us care.”

It is also my conclusion that the depth of commitment in relationships is influential in leadership development. Leadership itself is a social process requiring people to relate to one another. It is the level of commitment in the relationship that is a key component in establishing an ethic of caring and investment in the leadership

development process. When people feel deeply connected they have greater concern for one another's growth. An example would be the Corps of Cadets' white belt mentoring program. The amount of time and effort either the mentee or mentor devoted to building and maintaining their relationship correlated with the degree of commitment they had to the relationship and each other, which affected the developmental process.

Cultural values shape leadership development objectives and outcomes. What a person or an organization values directs their intentions and actions. Values are manifested in an individual's attitudes, beliefs, and behavior just as they are in an organization's culture. The call from Pennington, Townsend, and Cummins (2003) for more research to be conducted in the area of organizational culture was cited in the problem statement. The symbols, stories, artifacts, language and other parts of a community's discourse, discussed in Chapter II, reflect and embody the values they champion. The discourse of the organization is used to teach skills and concepts believed to be important leadership capacities. What I have concluded from my research on the Corps of Cadets' community of practice and organizational culture is that the values held in highest regard become the main focus in 'training up' leaders from the grassroots. The freshmen are the DNA of the Corps and how that DNA expresses itself is dependent on the most prominent environmental (cultural) influence. Embodiment of unity was the number one objective in instruction of the freshman class during their development from follower to leader. The fundamental principle of unity instilled in each cadet has an outcome of service to others and affects how they take part in the leadership process.

An individual's meaning of leadership is constructed through participation in relational and cultural contexts. Individuals derive meaning from their experiences. Experiences occur within context. Relationships and culture influence context. Therefore, how people in a culture engage in leadership determines how an individual experiences leadership and makes meaning of it within that context. In answering research question number four, I found that cadets in the Corps experience a cultural context that emphasizes a collective identity, excellence in their endeavors, and servant leadership principles. The cadets' leadership competencies and skills were acquired through participation in their community's practice but the evolutionary change of their identity is what Kegan (2000), discussed in Chapter II, described as transformative learning resulting from "how" they came to "know" (emphasis in the original, p. 49). When asked what their definition of leadership was, every cadet mentioned an aspect of either role-modeling, accomplishing a goal together, or developing others. Every definition was relational in nature. This is because that is how they experienced leadership: it was taught that way and that is how they enacted it themselves. Their identity as a leader and their definition of leadership were constructed by participating in a relation-rich cultural context.

"On the edge" is a very powerful teaching place and learning site for leadership development. When an individual is thrust out of their comfort zone, faces great adversity or hardship, endures extreme sacrifice, or is challenged by any other condition that puts them at the edge of an unknown world, they are in "liminal space," the threshold of transition (Rohr, 2004, p. 135). This is similar to someone encountering

Mezirow's (2000) "disorienting dilemma" in transformative learning theory described in Chapter II. A person must adjust their way of thinking and being to accommodate what they are experiencing. When we are thrown off balance in life we need time to make sense of what has happened in order to learn a lesson that will make us greater than what we were before. In mythology when a hero crosses the initial threshold that sets them on their path they are in liminal space until they return to their kingdom. They have surrendered control and must make the journey to regain balance. Heroes need to stay in this liminal place long enough to experience a perspectives transformation (Rohr, 2004). It is acknowledged by established leaders that certain crucibles in their lives greatly influenced their development (Bennis & Thomas, 2002). And it is commonplace for people to say adversity makes you stronger and builds character. But these are examples of unexpected difficulties.

I believe what makes students in the Corps of Cadets heroic is the fact that they choose to go through crucibles and follow a path filled with intentionally placed hardships and challenges. They choose to put themselves in liminal space to become leaders. Being on the edge of unknown territory and willingness to traverse it teaches humility and adaptability. 'Practice *does* make perfect.' You create knowledge and belief in yourself that you can meet with failure and uncertainty and come out the other side to do it again when necessary. The participants in my study have learned this to the very core of their being and they have confirmed Kegan's (2000) suggestion from Chapter II that "trans-*form*-ative learning puts the form itself at risk of change" (emphasis in original, p. 49). They are willing to transform themselves and others. They are able to

initiate and respond positively to change. These are the capable leaders Huber (2002) called for us to prepare and support.

Recommendations

As a result of this study, I propose further research in the following areas with programmatic implementation of their findings to better facilitate and foster leadership development and transformative learning environments:

1. Longitudinal research of participants in this study as they continue to engage in leadership development and transformative learning experiences while members of their collegiate student organization with follow-on investigation after graduation.
2. The role self-reflection in transformative learning has in leadership development.
3. Peer relationships within communities of practice examining how the “*power of the pack*” influences learning at the individual and collective levels.
4. Holistic programs, such as Outward Bound or other extended experiential experiences, to gain a deeper understanding of the mind—body—spirit connection in transformative learning; in addition to the roles *intentional* personal growth experiences and self-authorship have in leadership development.
5. Gender issues in leadership development within student organizations identifying student response to actual and perceived barriers.
6. The influence rituals, symbols, stories, and imagery have in transformative learning and leadership development.

REFERENCES

- Adams, J., Jr. (2001). *Keepers of the spirit: The Corps of Cadets at Texas A&M University, 1876-2001*. College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press.
- Alfred, M. (2002). The promise of sociocultural theory in democratizing adult education. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 96, 3-13.
- Anatonakis, J., Cianciolo, A., & Sternberg, R. (2004). *The nature of leadership*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Anderson, R. (1998). Intuitive inquiry: A transpersonal approach. In W. Braud & R. Anderson (Eds.) *Transpersonal research methods for the social sciences: Honoring human experience* (pp. 69-94). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Barab, S., & Duffy, T. (2000). From practice fields to communities of practice. In D. Jonassen & S. Land (Eds.) *Theoretical foundations of learning environments* (pp. 25-55). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Bass, B. (1990). *Bass & Stodgill's handbook of leadership: Theory, research and managerial applications* (3rd ed.). New York: Free Press.
- Baumgartner, L. (2001). An update on transformational learning. In S. Merriam (Ed.) *The new update on adult learning theory* (pp. 15-24). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Belenky, M., & Stanton, A. (2000). Inequality, development, and connected knowing. In J. Mezirow & Associates (Eds.) *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress* (pp. 71-102). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Bennis, W. (1994). *On becoming a leader*. New York: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.
- Bennis, W., & Thomas, R. (2002). *Geeks and geezers: How era, values, and defining moments shape leaders*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Billett, S. (2001). Co-participation: Affordance and engagement at work. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 92, 63-72.
- Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. (2003). *Qualitative research for education* (4th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Bohm, D. (1984). *Wholeness and the implicate order*. London: Ark Paperbacks.

- Bohm, D. (1996). *On dialogue*. London: Routledge.
- Brown, A., Cervero, R., & Johnson-Bailey, J. (2000). Making the invisible visible: Race, gender, and teaching in adult education. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 50(4), 273-288.
- Brown, J., Collins, A., & Duguid, P. (1989). Situated cognition and the culture of learning. *Educational Researcher*, 18(1), 32-42.
- Brown, J., & Moffett, C. (1999). *The hero's journey: How educators can transform schools and improve learning*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Bruner, E. (1986). Ethnography as narrative. In V. Turner & E. Bruner (Eds.) *The anthropology of experience* (pp. 3-30). Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Burns, J. (1979). *Leadership*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers.
- Burns, T., & Stalker, G. (1961). *The management of innovation*. London: Tavistock.
- Campbell, J. (1968). *The hero with a thousand faces* (2nd ed.). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Campbell, J. (2001). *The power of myth: Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers*. New York: Broadway Books.
- Campbell, J. (2003). *The hero's journey: Joseph Campbell on his life and work* (Centennial Edition). Novato, CA: New World Library.
- Chisholm, L. (2000). *Charting a hero's journey*. New York: The International Partnership for Service-Learning and Leadership.
- Church, A. (1982). Sojourner adjustment. *Psychological Bulletin*, 91, 540-572.
- Clark, M. (1993). Changing course: Initiating the transformational learning process. *Proceedings of the 34th Annual Adult Education Research Conference*. University Park, PA.
- Clark, M., & Wilson, A. (1991). Context and rationality in Mezirow's theory of transformational learning. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 41(2), 75-91.
- Clements, J. (2002). *Organic inquiry research in partnership with spirit*. Palo Alto, CA: Institute of Transpersonal Psychology.

- Covey, S. (2004). *The 8th habit: From effectiveness to greatness*. New York: Free Press.
- Cranton, P. (2002). Teaching for transformation. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 93, 63-71.
- Creswell, J. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Curry, D., & Wells, S. (2004). *An organic inquiry primer for the novice researcher: The who, what, when, why, and how of a sacred approach to disciplined knowing*. Seattle, WA: Studio 403.
- Daft, R. (2002). *The leadership experience* (2nd ed.). Mason, OH: Thomson South-Western.
- Day, D. (2000). Leadership development: A review in context. *Leadership Quarterly*, 11(4), 581-613.
- Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (2000). *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Drath, W. (2001). The third way: A new source of leadership. *Leaders in Action*, 21(2), 7-11.
- Drath, W., & Palus, C. (1994). *Making common sense: Leadership as meaning-making in a community of practice*. Greensboro, NC: Center for Creative Leadership.
- Erlanson, D., Harris, E., Skipper, B., & Allen, S. (1993). *Doing naturalistic inquiry: A guide to methods*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Fenwick, T. (2001). Tides of change: New themes and questions in workplace learning. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 92, 3-17.
- Frank, A. (1995). *The wounded storyteller: Body, illness, and ethics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Seabury Press.
- Gallagher, T. (2002, Summer). The founding of a new conversation. *Journal of Leadership Education*, 1(1), 3-10.
- Glaser, B. (1978). *Theoretical sensitivity*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

- Grabove, V. (1997). The many facets of transformative learning theory and practice. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 74, 89-96.
- Greenleaf, R. (1977). *Servant leadership: A journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness*. New York: Paulist Press.
- Guba, E., & Lincoln, Y. (1981). *Effective evaluation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Hansman, C. (2001). Context-based adult learning. In S. Merriam (Ed.) *The new update on adult learning theory* (pp. 43-61). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Hebert, T., & Beardsley, T. (2002). Jermaine. In S. Merriam & Associates (Eds.) *Qualitative Research in Practice: Examples for discussion and analysis* (pp. 201-232). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Huber, N. (2002, Summer). Approaching leadership education in the millennium. *Journal of Leadership Education*, 1(1), 25-34.
- Jacobson, W. (1996). Learning, culture, and learning culture. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 47(1), 27-41.
- Janesick, V. (2000). The choreography of qualitative research design. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.) (pp. 379-399). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Jaworski, J. (1998). *Synchronicity: The inner path of leadership*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
- Jones, S. (2002). Becoming grounded in grounded theory methodology. In S. Merriam & Associates (Eds.) *Qualitative research in practice* (pp. 175-177). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Jung, C. (Ed.). (1964). *Man and his symbols*. New York: Dell.
- Kegan, R. (2000). What "form" transforms? A constructive-developmental approach to transformative learning. In J. Mezirow & Associates (Ed.) *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress* (pp. 35-69). San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Kegan, R., & Lahey, L. (2001). *How the way we talk can change the way we work: Seven languages for transformation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Kilgore, D. (2001). Critical postmodern perspectives on adult learning. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 89, 53-61.

- Komives, S., Longerbeam, S., Owen, J., Mainella, F., & Osteen, L. (2006). A leadership identity development model: Applications from a grounded theory. *Journal of College Student Development, 47*, 401-420.
- Kuhn, T. (1970). *The structure of scientific revolutions* (2nd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kupers, W. (2004). Learning organizations. In G. Goethals, G. Sorenson & J. Burns (Eds.) *Encyclopedia of leadership* (pp. 881-886). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lankard, B. (1995). New ways of learning in the workplace. *Information Digest 161*. Columbus: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 385778)
- Lave, J. (1997). The culture of acquisition and the practice of understanding. In D. Kirshner & J. Whitson (Eds.) *Situated cognition: Social, semiotic, and psychological perspectives* (pp. 63-82). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Lightfoot, S. (1983). *The good high school*. New York: Basic Books.
- Lincoln, Y. (1995). Emerging criteria for quality in qualitative and interpretive research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 1*(3), 275-289.
- Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Lord, R., & Brown, D. (2004). *Leadership processes and follower self-identity*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Maher, J., & Briggs, D. (Eds.). (1989). *An open life: Joseph Campbell in conversation with Michael Toms*. New York: Larson Publications.
- Mansell, M. (1981). Transcultural experience and expressive response. *Communication Education, 30*, 93-108.
- Maurer, T. (2002). Employee learning and development orientation: Toward an integrative model of involvement in continuous learning. *Human Resource Development Review, 1*, 9-14.
- McCormick, M., & Dooley, K. (2005, Winter). Leadership education in a community of practice. *Journal of Leadership Education, 4*(2), 16-26.

- Merriam, S. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S., & Associates. (2002). *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S., & Caffarella, R. (1999). *Learning in adulthood* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S., & Simpson, E. (2000). *A guide to research for educators and trainers of adults*. Malabar, FL: Krieger.
- Mezirow, J. (1996). Contemporary paradigms of learning. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 46, 158-172.
- Mezirow, J. (2000). Learning to think like an adult: Core concepts of transformation theory. In J. Mezirow & Associates (Eds.) *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress* (pp. 3-34). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Moustakis, C. (1990). *Heuristic research design, methodology, and applications*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Noddings, N. (2003). *Caring: A feminine approach to ethics and moral education* (2nd ed.). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Northouse, P. (2001). *Leadership: Theory and practice* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Patton, M. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Pennington, P., Townsend, C., & Cummins, R. (2003, Summer). The relationship of leadership practices to culture. *Journal of Leadership Education*, 2(1), 27-44.
- Pratt, D. (2002). Good teaching: One size fits all? *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 93, 5-15.
- Resnick, L. (1987). Learning in school and out. *Educational Researcher*, 16, 13-20.
- Richardson, L. (2000). Writing: A method of inquiry. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.) *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.) (pp. 923-948). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Rohr, R. (2004). *Adam's return: The five promises of male initiation*. New York: The Crossroads Publishing Company.
- Ross-Gordon, J. (1999). Gender development and gendered adult development. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 84, 29-37.
- Rost, J. (1991). *Leadership for the twenty-first century*. New York: Praeger.
- Sandlin, J. (2000). The politics of consumer education materials used in adult literacy classrooms. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 50(4), 289-307.
- Schwandt, T. (2000). Three epistemological stances for qualitative inquiry: Interpretivism, hermeneutic, and social constructionism. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.) *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.) (pp. 189-213). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Scott, S. (1997). The grieving soul in the transformation process. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 74, 41-50.
- Senge, P., Scharmer, C., Jaworski, J., & Flowers, B. (2004). Awakening faith in an alternative future. *Reflections: The Society for Organizational Learning Journal on Knowledge, Learning, and Change*, 5(7), 1-11.
- Senge, P., Scharmer, C., Jaworski, J., & Flowers, B. (2005). *Presence: An exploration of profound change in people, organizations, and society*. New York: Doubleday.
- Shriberg, A., Shriberg, D., & Kumari, R. (2005). *Practicing leadership: Principles and applications* (3rd ed.). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- Snyder, W., & Wenger, E. (2004). Our world as a learning system: A communities-of-practice approach. In M. Conner & J. Clawson (Eds.) *Creating a learning culture: Strategy, technology, and practice* (pp. 35-58). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Southern, N. (2005). Mentoring for transformative learning: The importance of relationships to create learning communities of care. *Proceedings of the 6th International Conference on Transformative Learning* (pp. 447-452), East Lansing: Michigan State University.
- St. Clair, R. (1998). On the commonplace: Reclaiming community in adult education. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 49(1), 5-14.

- Stein, D. (1998). Situated learning in adult education. *ERIC Digest No. 195*. Columbus: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 418249)
- Stein, D., & Imel, S. (2002). Adult learning in community: Themes and threads. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 95, 93-97.
- Sveinunggaard, K. (1993). Transformative learning in adulthood: A socio-contextual perspective. *Proceedings of the 34th Annual Adult Education Research Conference* (pp. 275-280), University Park: Pennsylvania State University.
- Sweet, L. (2004). *Summoned to Lead*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Taylor, E. (1994). Intercultural competency: A transformative learning process. *Adult Quarterly*, 44(3), 154-174.
- Taylor, E. (2000). Analyzing research on transformative learning theory. In J. Mezirow & Associates (Eds.) *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress* (pp. 285-328). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Taylor, E. (2005). Making meaning of the varied and contested perspectives of transformative learning theory. *Proceedings of the 6th International Conference on Transformative Learning* (pp. 459-464), East Lansing: Michigan State University.
- Taylor, K., Marienau, C., & Fiddler, M. (2000). *Developing adult learners*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Texas A&M University. (2007). *Texas A&M University facts*. Retrieved March 17, 2007, from <http://www.tamu.edu/home/aboutam/amfacts/tamufacts.html>.
- Texas A&M University Corps of Cadets. (2005). *About the Corps*. Retrieved October 30, 2005, from <http://aggiecorps.org/home/about>.
- Texas A&M University Corps of Cadets. (2007). *Purpose, vision and values*. Retrieved March 17, 2007, from <http://aggiecorps.org/home/about/pmvT>.
- Thorp, L. (2001). *The pull of the earth: An ethnographic study of an elementary school garden*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX.
- Tisdell, E. (2003). *Exploring spirituality and culture in adult and higher education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Townsend, C. (2002, Summer). Leadership education: Fantasy or reality? *Journal of Leadership Education*, 1(1), 35-40.
- Vaill, P. (1998). *Spirited leading and learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Voelkel, C. (2006). Texas A&M Corps of Cadets: It's all about development and leadership. *Texas A&M University Spotlight* (pp.1-3). Retrieved December 15, 2006, from <http://www.tamu.edu/home/spotlight/archives/corps.html>.
- Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wenger, E. (1999). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Wenger, E., & Snyder, W. (2000). Communities of practice: The organizational frontier. *Harvard Business Review*, 78(1), 139-145.
- Wheatley, M. (1992). *Leadership and the new science: Learning about organizations from an orderly universe*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
- Wilson, A. (1993). The promise of situated cognition. In S. Merriam (Ed.) *An update on adult learning theory* (pp. 71-89). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Wolff, R. (2002). Self-reflection: An essential quality for phenomenological researchers. In S. Merriam & Associates (Eds.) *Qualitative research in practice* (pp. 117-119). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Yin, R. (1994). *Case study research: Design and methods* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

APPENDIX A

CADET INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Intention of interview: To capture your experience as a member of the Corps of Cadets—do not limit yourself to the questions being asked—please talk freely during this “conversation” ... **I want to hear *your* story** ... Remember you are in control of the interview—skip any question or stop the recorder if ever uncomfortable—please add anything you would like to share.

1. Let's start at the beginning ... why did you join the Corps?
2. Why did you choose your particular outfit?
3. Describe your “fish” year.
4. How do you learn to be a “fish”?
5. Where or whom did you find support from during freshman year? Did you ever think about quitting? Why did you stay?
6. What have been some of the most challenging times? Rewarding times? What did you take away from these experiences?

7. What would you tell someone as to why the Corps is about leadership development?
8. What was your view/definition of leadership before entering the Corps? Has this changed? If so, why?
9. How would you define what a leader is?
10. In your opinion, how does a cadet ‘learn’ leadership?

11. What is the role of a sophomore? junior? senior? Does it get easier?
12. How does the physical environment affect the experience of being in the Corps?
13. Is there a “social” environment? If so, how would you describe it?
14. What role does gender or ethnicity play in the dynamics of your outfit? In being a leader? Is everyone treated equally? What criteria are used in judging a person's leadership abilities?

15. What is the most important aspect of the whole Corps' experience?
16. What would you say to someone thinking of joining the Corps? What are the benefits? What are the drawbacks?
17. Have you changed in any way since first joining the Corps?
18. What have you learned about being a leader while in the Corps?
19. What have you learned about yourself?
20. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about your experiences?

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

You have been asked to participate in a research study of 90 students concerning your leadership development experiences while in the Corps of Cadets. The information provided may be used in research presentations and publications; however, your individual identity will remain confidential. Your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw your consent at any time without any penalty and upon request, any results of your participation, to the extent that it can be identified as you, may be returned, removed from the records, or destroyed.

The purpose of this study is to gather information about leadership development within the Corps of Cadets. You may accept____ or decline____ that the interview of approximately one hour be video/audio taped. You understand that there is minimal risk associated with this research. What is chosen to share in the interview is entirely up to you. You understand that your identity will be kept confidential. While some comments may be used in research presentations and publications, your name will not be used. Your identity will be known only by the principal researcher conducting the interview.

The video/audio tape, transcription, and consent form from this interview will be kept by the principal researcher in a secure place and will not be made available to anyone else. The video/audio tape will be erased 1 year from the date of this interview. The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, either now or during the course of the project. Upon request, a report on this study's findings will be sent to you.

This research study has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board-Human Subjects in Research, Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding subjects' rights, you can contact the Institutional Review Board through Ms. Melissa McIlhaney, IRB Program Coordinator, Office of Research Compliance, at (979)458-4067, mcilhaney@tamu.edu.

Please be sure you have read the above information, asked questions and received answers to your satisfaction. You will be given a copy of the consent form for your records. By signing this document, you consent to participate in the study.

Participant's Signature

Linda Powell, Doctoral Student
Department of Agricultural Leadership,
Education, and Communications
lindapowell@tamu.edu
Scoates Hall, MS 2116
Texas A&M University
College Station, Texas 77843

Date

Christine Townsend, Research Advisor
Department of Agricultural Leadership,
Education, and Communications
leader@tamu.edu
107 B Scoates Hall
Texas A&M University
College Station, Texas 77843

VITA

Linda Chastain Powell received her Bachelor of Science degree in Education, Curriculum, and Instruction from Texas A&M University in December 1980. After spending twenty-three devoted years as a mom, teacher, and Air Force spouse, she returned to Texas A&M University to complete a doctoral degree in Agricultural Education in August 2007, with an emphasis in leadership studies and adult education.

She may be contacted through the Corps of Cadets Leadership Excellence Program, Leadership Development Center, 1227 TAMU, College Station, TX 77843-1227 or at lindapowell@tamu.edu.