

PARTICIPATORY REALITY CONSTITUTION:  
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF GENERATIVE EXPERIENCES  
IN HIGHER EDUCATION CLASSROOMS

by

Sean M. Avila Saiter

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Palo Alto, California

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I certify that I have read and approved the content and presentation of this dissertation:

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Glenn Hartelius, Ph.D., Committee Chairperson

---

Date

---

Harris Friedman, Ph.D., Committee Member

---

Date

---

Leslie Allan Combs, Ph.D., Committee Member

---

Date

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## ABSTRACT

### Participatory Reality Constitution:

#### A Phenomenological Study of Generative Experiences in Higher Education Classrooms

by

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This phenomenological inquiry into the felt experience of participatory sense-making and collaborative presence in small groups explores where and when a common field of resonance is generated among individuals. The experience is named *participatory reality constitution* (PRC). Nine co-participants who met criteria of having experienced PRC in a higher education classroom context were interviewed. To gain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon 2 research methods were synthesized: (a) the phenomenological method of Giorgi, and (b) Hartelius' somatic phenomenology. This inquiry uncovered a general meaning structure for PRC by attending to the entire description given by each co-participant and conducting a thematic analysis of interview transcripts. In this small sample, the analysis revealed that an individual has to come into a small group space with an intention to collaborate in order to create the conditions for PRC to be experienced. This intention is experienced as a sense of openness, which results in the building of trust, authenticity, and bonding via personal connection. These qualities contribute to an increasing depth of the experience. A sense of effortlessness becomes present, accompanied by excitement, awe, joy, and a sense of adventure. This leads to a deeper process of emergence or generativity of new insights, which have a clarity to them that leaves the individual feeling part of something greater. The individual feels inspired and has a strong desire to recreate the experience and is often positively transformed in a way that leads to long-term changes in identity or life goals. These results contribute to a nuanced understanding of PRC as an embodied generative process that serves as a meaning structure for further research and practice in psychology, education, and wherever such

small groups occur. This study exemplifies a contribution to the development of transpersonal phenomenology based on a participatory worldview.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my wife, Isabel, for her love, support, and constructive critique. Words can barely express how grateful I am for your beautiful loving presence throughout the writing and research process of this dissertation. May the auspicious birth of this dissertation and the coinciding birth of our child bring infinite virtue into the world.

I also dedicate this work to all of my various teachers in this lifetime, in particular, my Chairperson, Glenn Hartelius, who gently encouraged me throughout this process with wisdom, patience, and foresight. Your level of attention and care to this work is truly remarkable.

Thank you for such an incredible gift.

I also would like to dedicate this work to the timeless spirit of the transpersonal vision, in all of its multitudinous forms.

May all merit accumulated through this labor of love benefit all beings and the collective wisdom contained within each and every one of us. We are social first, and then we are individual.

We are social beings, through and through.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

At the risk of sounding cliché, I would like to say that it truly takes a village when it comes to writing anything as herculean and masochistic as a dissertation. In this spirit, I would like to acknowledge that this dissertation is not only about our human intersubjective nature but it is truly born out of intersubjectivity. Thus, I would like to give special acknowledgement to my Chairperson, Glenn Hartelius, for not only agreeing to work with me—without reservation—but also for the tireless and painstakingly detailed work that you gifted me with. I extend this gratitude to my committee, Harris Friedman and Leslie Allan Combs, each of whom taught me, in their own way, to sound the depths of what it truly means to be a scholar. I would also like to acknowledge and thank Olga Louchakova-Schwartz for her initial encouragement and support during the early stages of my inquiry.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

*The hidden harmony is better than the obvious one.* —Heraclitus

This phenomenological inquiry investigated the experience of participatory sense making (i.e., a shared experience of meaning making in a small group; Gallagher, 2009) and of collaborative presence (i.e., a neologism that means the sense, in a small group, of active collaboration through shared presence and common focus of attention), hereby both referred to as the neologism *participatory reality constitution* (PRC). The inquiry of PRC was founded on the question: “How is the shared sense of reality co-constituted?” or “What is it like to experience moments of group cohesion, where there is a sense of working not just as individuals who happen to be together, but almost as if the group has an identity and intention of its own, besides and beyond that of its members?”

This experience has been described as having value and significance to people who have described it as transformative and inspiring (Heron & Lahood, 2007; Osterhold, Rubiano & Nicol, 2007). Yet there is little research-based description of this as a phenomenon. Therefore, the establishment of an *essential general situated meaning structure*—that is, in this research, a description drawn from the lived experience of a group of participants [the terminology of which is constructed in accordance with Giorgi’s (2009) phenomenological method and Varela’s (1996; Varela & Scharmer, 2000) neurophenomenology]—was sought for understanding the experience of PRC using a combination of the scientific phenomenological method (Giorgi, 2009) and somatic phenomenology (SP; Hartelius, 2007). The latter somatic approach was added to track the body-based ways of knowing associated with PRC.

While there are numerous and complex theoretical ways of describing PRC and PRC-like phenomena in small groups, there are few studies that provide a coherent and reliable framework

based on direct reports from individuals that specifically address the epistemological demands of a post-Cartesian phenomenology (i.e., from ways of knowing that go beyond the subject/object divide).

In the literature, PRC may be associated with certain experiences described as oneness, communion, nonduality, and presence (see e.g., Bache, 2008; Osterhold et al., 2007). The sense of self-expansiveness (and self-contraction) may also be associated with PRC, especially to the extent that one strongly identifies with any group seeing oneself as part of the collective, where the felt-sense of self is expanded into that arena (Friedman, 1981, 1983; Friedman & Pappas, 2006). Here, the level of self-expansiveness was originally defined by Friedman (1983) as being “the amount of the self which is contained within the boundary demarcating self from non-self through the process of *self-conception*” (p. 38) and later expanded to include and integrate an inverted approach using the construct of self-contraction (Friedman & Pappas, 2006).

Self-expansiveness and self-contraction are complementary processes of transcendence and immanence (Friedman & Pappas, 2006), two themes that the results of this study have revealed as being co-present in the experience of PRC as related to the terms agency and communion. That is, transcendence and immanence are two ways of approaching transpersonal phenomena and may prove to be useful in framing PRC in small groups. Self-expansiveness and self-contraction may be congruent with the articulation of PRC in this study but they are constructs primarily focused on the level of the individual rather than the group (although, self-expansiveness and self-contraction can be easily placed as the center of a group).

PRC as presented in this study takes the level of the psychological (individual) as its base (primarily through phenomenological psychology and interviews with individuals) but it goes beyond the individual not only in its methodological approach (through the articulation of intersubjectivity in Husserlian phenomenology as well as through the group interview and the nature of PRC as

being a participatory group phenomenon). Thus, the constructs of self-expansiveness and self-contraction (Friedman & Pappas, 2006), to be useful in this study, must address PRC as being an expression by individuals of a group (shared) phenomenon. If people in a group are all being self-expansive or self-contraction, then it may be possible that PRC could be described in terms of collective self-expansiveness or collective self-contraction. Collective self-expansiveness and collective self-contraction would then be addressing a missing element to the dialectic of transcendence and immanence: the second-person level of intersubjectivity. This is the same level that is explicitly explored in the following chapters, especially in regard to the Husserlian phenomenology of intersubjectivity as being the “middle way” between subjectivism and objectivism.

Based on a pilot study that was conducted with two co-participants (see Appendix M), PRC is an experience that is also prone to ineffability and mystery. Co-participants in the pilot study, as well as individuals that the researcher has spoken with informally, have reported that, although they have had experiences consistent with the concept of PRC in small groups, they tended to struggle to put words to these experiences. Based on the pilot study (Appendix M), PRC seemed to be more of an embodied experience, a felt sense (Gendlin, 1992) phenomenon, which may explain why it has been difficult to capture with more cognitive or rational intellectual language.

Given that this domain of experience seemed less tractable to ordinary language (i.e., harder to describe), this study incorporated the methodological insights of SP, which enables phenomena perceived through the use of the felt sense to be described in a way that is more similar to familiar quantitative descriptions of the object world. For example, it could be quite complex to articulate in intellectual terms an experience that might be described in simple felt sense terms as “a chill went down my spine.”

The following sections provide a brief outline and introduction to the research, as a framework from which to understand the following chapters. The personal relevance of the study to the researcher is introduced as a means to provide a context for the seeds of the research. Then an introduction to the importance of Husserl's phenomenology of intersubjectivity is discussed, which is essential to ground the phenomenon of PRC in higher education classrooms in Husserlian terms. The relevance of PRC in higher education classrooms and Husserlian phenomenology to transpersonal psychology is then introduced and followed by an introduction to somatic phenomenology as an additional method in the study of co-participants descriptions of PRC. The last section outlines definitions of the major terms used in this dissertation.

### Personal Relevance

I have, on a number of occasions, experienced what I would call instances of consciously recognized PRC. While at first these experiences remained hard to describe, it was through my intellectual pursuits into participatory spirituality and the nature of intersubjective reality that I came to recognize those experiences as phenomena related to or indicative of what I now call PRC.

One example of PRC in my own life has been on occasions when I have been in a small group of friends (usually 3 to 4 people) and we have been discussing topics concerned with the meaning of life, transcendence, and other such abstract, philosophical concepts. In these moments, I felt as if there was an intelligence other than myself that was coming through me via the words I spoke and infused the conversation with a sense of presence. In these instances I felt physically and mentally energized and inspired. I also recall a sense of flow (see Csikszentmihalyi, 2008) in the conversation that both my friends and I experienced during those moments. Such experiences have been relatively brief but profound enough to create in me a yearning to understand them and recreate them.

I have also experienced similar phenomena in small groups, within classroom contexts. At the time I began the research inquiry proposed in this dissertation project, my experience with PRC in small groups was difficult for me to recall in any detail. Although these experiences created a lasting feeling with specific qualities, my ability to connect with them on a more intellectual level was challenged by my lack of a useful conceptual framing of these phenomena. That is, at the time of these personal experiences, I did not explain them to myself in any way that exemplified what I am now calling PRC. However, despite my initial lack of formal themes to describe PRC, these personal experiences led to this dissertation. Only after embarking on this research did I come to realize that Husserl's phenomenology, in particular, contained a sophisticated philosophical articulation and way of inquiring into such experiences.

#### Edmund Husserl's Phenomenology

Early on in the research into PRC it became clear that Husserl's (1970, 1973, 1975, 1982, 1993) conceptualization of how the lifeworld—the everyday world that humans live in, as opposed to the idealized scientific or theoretical world—is co-constituted via intersubjectivity, is central to the inquiry. Husserl's middle to later works reflect a strong recognition of the central importance of what he called *transcendental intersubjectivity*. For example, Husserl wrote about transcendental intersubjectivity as an “open community of monads” (as cited in Kockelmans, 1994, p. 295), and, later, as the foundation for the lifeworld (that realm of everyday life in which all of us, as human beings, dwell in on a day-to-day basis).

In Husserl's view, prior to reflection and conscious constructions of lived experience lies a prereflective level through which the world is “taken in.” Phenomenology describes this “taking in” in a variety of ways. Two central means through which reality is constituted are signified by the terms direct perception and intersubjectivity. The former refers to (a) the direct, prereflective, experience of the world, and the latter to (b) the way in which reality is cocreated and contingent

upon the existence of other minds and one's interaction with the subjectivity of others (see Thompson, 2001a, 2001b; Zahavi, 2001a). Husserlian phenomenology recognizes other structures such as, for examples, intentionality (as a higher-level term encompassing direct perception), self-awareness, temporality, intuition, inner time-consciousness, and embodiment (among others) (Kockelmans, 1994; Russell, 2006; Sokolowski, 2007; Zahavi, 2003b).

A significant portion of the review of the literature in Chapter 2 is focused on Husserl's phenomenology of constitution, intersubjectivity, and the lifeworld. By beginning the review of the literature on (a) PRC-like phenomena in higher education classrooms, there is then a move to explore (b) Husserl's phenomenology of constitution and intersubjectivity. After doing so, other correlative constructs and examples are then explored in the literature as they specifically relate to (c) neurophenomenology (NP) and somatic phenomenology (SP), and (d) participatory philosophy, and (e) other correlations less relevant to the current study.

#### Relevance to Transpersonal Psychology

Transpersonal psychology has its historical roots not only in diverse spiritual traditions (chiefly, mystical epistemologies, e.g., the perennial philosophy, Vedic philosophy, and Buddhism), but also in essential insights and inspirations taken from existential-phenomenological psychology (via humanistic psychology; see Rothberg, 1986; Valle, 1998). That is, transpersonal psychology and existential-phenomenological psychology, despite their differences, are rooted in many of the same philosophical assumptions (see Rothberg, 1997; Wertz, 1999). For example, both transpersonal psychology and existential-phenomenological psychology are interested in what Husserl called the lifeworld or *Lebenswelt*: "the prescientific world of experience" (as cited in Zahavi, 2003b, p. 125).

There are some branches of phenomenology such as Varela's (1996) neurophenomenology (discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3) that seem congruent with many of the approaches of transpersonal psychology. In particular, the phenomenological aspect of neurophenomenology

recognizes the phenomenological reduction as a shift to a different state of consciousness, a recognition that is supported in the transpersonal literature (Tart, 1972, 2000). Areas of phenomenology that are less congruent to transpersonal psychology include the approach taken by Daniel Dennett (2003) in his proposal for heterophenomenology, a proposal that is much closer to physicalist and naturalist approaches than it is to transpersonal psychology (where transpersonal psychology tends to challenge naturalist approaches in favor of human science approaches emphasizing consciousness over a subjective/objective world). However, even a basic version of Dennett's heterophenomenology may be amenable to transpersonal approaches because transpersonal experiences can be expressed verbally. This means that such experiences can be studied phenomenologically, despite Dennett's subtle Cartesian (where he retains an implicit subject/object bias) propositions (cf. Hartelius, 2006).

The varieties of phenomenology along the lines of Varela's (1996) neurophenomenology, resonant as it is with shifted states, are amenable in a transpersonal psychology context. Given this, there is a common ground from which to base this study as being exemplary of a *transpersonal phenomenology* (Levin, 2000): an application of phenomenological method to a transpersonal area of study. The phenomenological aspect of neurophenomenology incorporates a shifted state that Varela has compared to the Eastern contemplative practice of mindfulness and the focus on state specific science (Depraz, Varela, & Vermersch, 2000; Thompson, 2008). This suggests a clear alignment with other approaches in transpersonal psychology (many of which explicitly attempt to incorporate both Eastern contemplative practices and state specific science into their research agendas).

Transpersonal psychology has been defined in three primary ways: as a psychology that studies beyond-ego phenomena, as an integrative-holistic psychology of the ego as interconnected with its context, and as a psychology of transformation (Hartelius, Caplan, & Rardin, 2007). The

experience of PRC, situated as it seems in domains of felt sense experience that are beyond the intellectual ego, may be better studied through a transpersonal lens than from the viewpoint of a cognitive approach.

Furthermore, the perspective of late Husserlian phenomenology (Husserl, 1970, 1973, 1975, 1982)—as represented by his later works on intersubjectivity (which views the person as wholly interconnected with the world)—is fully compatible with transpersonal as an integrative-holistic psychology. In Husserl’s phenomenology of intersubjectivity, the intersubjective refers to reality as composed of subjects in relation. That is, not as interconnected subjects in relationship with an objective world but as social acts that are “as real events experienced by each perceiving subject in a preconstituted intersubjective field of experience, events in which several human subjects participate” (Husserl, 1973, p. 478).

Given the fact that some scholars describe PRC-like experiences as being transformative, this study is also in line with transpersonal psychology as a psychology of transformation. This research then embodies the three major ways in which transpersonal psychology has been defined, that is, beyond ego, pervading personhood, and changing humanity (Hartelius et al., 2007).

#### On Method: Somatic Phenomenology

Phenomenological inquiry is an approach that seeks core structures and themes of experience that are as free as possible from theoretical presuppositions or speculation (Moran, 2000; VandenBos & American Psychological Association, 2007) and yet are sensitive to the embedded contexts surrounding the phenomenon. The scientific phenomenological psychological method (Giorgi, 2009) was used in this study because it provided a means for the development of a rich description of the lived experience of PRC and retains the richness of the dialogue between the particular stories and the larger context(s) in which the stories reside. However, the scientific phenomenological method could not attend to the *embodied* quality inherent in the experience of

PRC in the detail and clarity desired for this study without modification. Thus, another method was added: somatic phenomenology (SP; Hartelius, 2007) as an adjunct to adequately research PRC in higher education classrooms. SP is a state-specific method for articulating felt sense experience in both its spatial and qualitative dimensions. Both methods and their use in this research are detailed in Chapter 3.

The intention was to establish a general situated meaning structure for PRC in mundane psychological language without losing the greater meaning contexts in which the experience was embedded. An online questionnaire was developed and distributed to various university and college departments in the San Francisco Bay Area, targeting anyone who was willing to share their positive and inspiring experiences in higher education classrooms, terms that were determined to be sufficiently broad so as to not suggest any biased meanings from the researcher. The main criterion for selection of co-participants was that each had lived experiences that resonated with the concept of PRC within the context of a higher education classroom. (See Chapter 3 for a full description of the sample and the method).

### Definitions

The following provides clarification of key terms and concepts used in this research. These terms are complex and contain many, and oftentimes conflicting, potential meanings. Thus, they warrant more precise definition within the current context. These are intersubjectivity; constitution; emergence and generativity; and experience.

#### *Intersubjectivity*

Intersubjectivity, though not synonymous with PRC, is a fundamental process essential to the adequate understanding of PRC. Since PRC is participatory and social, it presumes human intersubjectivity. Intersubjectivity implies subjectivity in relation to other subjectivities, rather than in relation to any presumed objectivity. To use a spatial metaphor, one way to describe intersubjectivity

is as the shared space of experience between subjectivities. Husserl also used the technical terms alterity to mean “otherness” and ipseity to mean “I-ness,” both being crucial to the phenomenological understanding of intersubjectivity (see Adamo, 2002).

It is important to note that the perspective of phenomenology in general, and intersubjectivity in particular, is at odds with a more conventional subject-object (Cartesian) understanding of the world that is typical of much of naturalistic science and Western philosophy. From a dualistic, Cartesian view in which the world is a pre-given collection of independent objects, the topic of this study would not be seen to have any substantive reality apart from the cognitive processes and neurological structures that might be associated with the experience of PRC. That is, intersubjectivity, in this study, does not presume a subject/object divide devoid of the intersubjective. In particular, this study challenges commonly held beliefs in an objective world “out there” and at the same time seeks to avoid the opposite tendency toward any extreme relativist approach rooted in idealist (mind only) presumptions (c.f., the “myth of the isolated mind” in psychoanalysis: Stolorow, Atwood, & Branchaft, 1994).

Rather, this study engages Husserl’s phenomenology of intersubjectivity (transcendental intersubjectivity) where “the objectivity of the world is constituted intersubjectively” and “my experience of objective validity is mediated and made possible by my encounter with a transcendent other, and that this transcendence, which Husserl designates as *the first real otherness and as the source of all kinds of real transcendence, endows the world with objective validity* (italics added)” (Zahavi, 2001a, p. 159).

### *Constitution*

As it pertains to PRC, the constitution of objects or other subjectivities means to “actualize its truth” (Sokolowski, 2007, p. 92). To constitute other persons means to be subject to how others are given to subjective consciousness. In this sense, to constitute others is to be subject to the way others disclose themselves: “To ‘constitute’ a state of affairs is to exercise our understanding and to

let a thing manifest itself to us” (Sokolowski, 2007, p. 93). Based on this, PRC points to *the act of actively participating in the co-constitution of a shared experience*. Constitution for Husserl primarily refers to perception but in the context of this study, the focus is not on the primacy of perception being operative in PRC but on the primacy of the body as a participant in the process (cf. Gendlin, 1992). This distinction is articulated in detail in Chapter 2.

### *Emergence and Generativity*

Of special emphasis in this research is the existence of an emergent or generative (Steinbock, 1995a, 1995b) quality to the experience of PRC. These terms refer to a particular creative or enactive property, where something new arises, emerges, or reveals itself from the interaction that did not exist just moments before or was not previously recognized by any one individual or group of individuals at the time of the emergence.

Emergence and generativity, are both a principles of newness that correlate to the term construction, and the mutual constructing of experience. These co-emergent principles also have relevance to Husserl’s (1975) use of the terms intentionality and constitution, both of which he preferred to use to designate the active participation of the ego in the structuring of experience. Because constitution is preferred in translations of Husserl’s works and because it has specific and nuanced meaning within phenomenology that relates to PRC (that is more relevant than the term intentionality), the use of this term is favored (i.e., participatory reality *constitution*). The meaning and use of constitution is described in greater detail in Chapter 2, Chapter 4, and Chapter 5.

### *Experience*

Within this study, experience refers to *lived* experience within the context of phenomenology. Experience is that which is given to human consciousness and the way in which is given. It refers to both the particular lived phenomenon of PRC as well as the more general “experience” of any phenomena whatsoever. In German, there are two different words for experience: Erlebnis and

Erfahrung. Erlebnis “encompasses all awareness a subject can have” (Kockelmans, 1994, p. 82), and Erfahrung is a more limited category which means the “full-fledged experience or act of consciousness in which something real is given to consciousness as what it genuinely is” (p. 82). Generally, when the term *experience* is used to describe lived experience in the psychological sense, Erfahrung is the preferred referent.

### An Outline of the Following Chapters

In addition to the current chapter (Chapter 1), this dissertation includes a detailed literature review (Chapter 2) of direct relevance to PRC covering (a) PRC and higher education classrooms, (b) Husserl’s phenomenology, (c) Francisco Varela’s neurophenomenology (NP) and Glenn Hartelius’ somatic phenomenological method (SP), (d) participatory philosophy in the context of transpersonal psychology, and (e) other correlations that were determined to be relevant but peripheral. The literature review is followed by Chapter 3, which details the research method used in the study of PRC. Chapter 4 details the treatment and analysis of the individual interviews with 9 co-participants and the group interview with 6 of the original 9, in the articulation of the experience of PRC in higher education classrooms. The final section—Chapter 5—is a discussion and interpretation of the findings.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many correlative examples from which to obtain leading clues in the establishment of a greater understanding of PRC. The examples given in the following pages have been chosen based on what is seen to be relevant. These examples, given in this chapter, are organized by (a) concrete examples of PRC-like phenomena in higher education classrooms, (b) Husserl's constitutive phenomenology of intersubjectivity, (c) neurophenomenology and somatic phenomenology as the methodological means to apply and extend Husserlian phenomenological philosophy in the study of PRC, (d) participatory philosophy, and (e) other correlative examples that provide contexts beyond either phenomenology or the classroom.

Since there is not general agreement on the nature or existence of PRC, the review of the literature progresses from the specific to the general. By starting with specific examples as starting points and then building up to more general examples related to PRC, this chapter builds a case for PRC that is more inductive than it is deductive—an approach that is consistent with qualitative research in general (see Creswell, 2007).

### PRC and the Higher Education Classroom

#### *The Living Classroom*

While PRC is a phenomenon that may occur in a variety of settings, it has received particular attention in the higher education classroom; this is also the setting for the current study. The classroom is perhaps one of the most common contexts in contemporary Western society where there is an intention to create collaborative focus on a particular topic; higher education classrooms, in particular, have the opportunity to be both smaller and more open-ended in format, and thus particularly conducive contexts for the study of PRC.

Christopher Bache (2008) in his book *The Living Classroom: Teaching and Collective Consciousness* discussed the lived experience of resonance, group fields, and collective consciousness in college classrooms. Bache discussed these phenomena as being a product of his experiences teaching religious studies courses to undergraduates at Youngstown State University in Ohio.

After several years of regularly teaching courses on religion and philosophy, Bache (2008) began to notice a field effect where “fields of influence grew around the courses I was teaching, the learning taking place in one semester influencing the learning taking place in subsequent semesters” (p. 1). Bache went on to describe the process where his personal spiritual practices outside of class began to implicitly influence the quality of the interactions in the class. He also described what he called *group mind*, *group fields*, *learning fields*, and *informational fields*, each of which can be further classified as being a part of both: *course fields* and *class fields* (Bache, 2008, p. 54).

These fields are “content specific” and

register and carry the mental exertion that previous students have invested in understanding specific ideas—their breakthroughs and their resulting insights. . . . Where the learning has been greater, the fields will be stronger, and they continue to grow stronger through the years as more and more students take the course. (Bache, 2008, p. 54)

Bache (2008) stated, “when these learning fields make themselves felt in a room, they can unleash a power that can overwhelm the student or the instructor and therefore they require careful management” (p. 62). Of more direct relevance to PRC, Bache (2008) stated:

When people open themselves to each other and focus intensely on a common goal, their individual energies become synchronized in a way that can mediate contact with levels of intelligence and creativity that are beyond the reach of these same individuals acting alone. (p. 68)

Bache’s (2008) detailed descriptions of both his lived experiences, his students lived experiences, and his theories regarding collective consciousness and field effects in the classroom have high correlation to PRC in higher education classrooms. Of particular note is that Bache used much of the same language, examples, and literature that have been encountered in the research on

PRC presented here, which is elucidated in the following sections on participatory philosophy. Based on this commonality, Bache's reflections and case studies provide examples and a review of much of the relevant theory from which to derive a better understanding of PRC in higher education classrooms.

### *A Participatory Case Study*

Another example that relates to PRC in higher education classrooms comes from a study entitled *Rekindling the Fire of Transformative Education: A Participatory Case Study* (Osterhold et al., 2007). The authors described an inquiry process that they carried out in the Spring of 2005 while in a graduate classroom in the East-West Psychology Program at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) in San Francisco. Osterhold et al. (2007) presented a "case study of a graduate-level course as an example of an integral and participatory approach to transformative learning" (p. 221). The purpose of the formal inquiry was to discover the essential nature of transformative educational outcomes by using a research method called cooperative inquiry (Heron, 1996; Heron & Reason, 2001, Reason & Heron, 1996). That is, the researchers actively collaborated with the class to better understand how transformation in the classroom happens and to better understand "collaboratively formulated spiritual questions" and to "present the foundations of participatory and cooperative research methods in the context of transpersonal and spiritual studies" (Osterhold et al., 2007, p. 223). The researchers decided to focus their inquiry on a class (offered by faculty member, Jorge N. Ferrer) called "Embodied Spiritual Inquiry" (Osterhold et al., 2007, p. 222). The class participants were "twelve graduate-level students, four men and eight women of both the doctoral and master level enrolled in a variety of CIIS Programs" (Osterhold et al., 2007, p. 222).

According to the researchers, the primary objective of the course was to "inquire individually and collectively into collaboratively formulated spiritual questions, using methods that encouraged integral ways of knowing" (Osterhold et al., 2007, p. 223). However, the researchers did not make it

clear what their roles in the course were beyond that of being researchers. That is, they did not indicate whether they occupied roles as faculty members, students, or simply researchers. The researchers did indicate that the course itself was based on the same cooperative inquiry research method that they themselves employed in their research (Heron, 1996; Heron & Reason, 2001; Reason & Heron, 1996). Because the research method was used in their inquiry as well as in the course, there was a considerable amount of overlap that made it difficult to distinguish between the two:

Although the inquiry was externally initiated (i.e., by Ferrer's autonomous design of the course) and originally conducted through inquiry tools introduced by the facilitator [Ferrer] . . . the participants decided to take greater responsibility for the learning methods and research decisions in the second half of the course. (Osterhold et al., 2007, p. 223)

The researchers did acknowledge, however, that cooperative inquiry works toward breaking down difference between the facilitator (instructor or researcher) and the participants.

Osterhold et al. (2007) indicated that the class met every Wednesday night for 3 hours during a 12-week semester (p. 224). These basic parameters for the course were preceded by a 2-day retreat where the same participants in the class decided they wanted the course to focus on the question, "What is the nature of relational spirituality?" By using this question as the theme of the course, the collective inquiry of the class centered on "the experience of the self, the other, and the mysterious space 'in-between' that can emerge during conscious relational encounters" (Osterhold et al., 2007, p. 224). The researchers also indicated that within the boundaries of the course, they participated in two inquiry cycles rather than five to eight cycles, the latter of which is what Heron (1996) recommends in the utilization of cooperative inquiry. Here, cycles delineate periods of experiential immersion. For the course, Osterhold et al. (2007) indicated that the two cycles aligned with the way the course was split into two halves, each with four sessions (classes). Within the first cycle, the researchers and the participants inquired "into a collectively formulated question" (Osterhold et al., 2007, p. 224). The second cycle involved "individually formulated questions of choice emerging

from the first cycle” (Osterhold et al., 2007, p. 224). Each cycle also included an “integration session at the end . . . to allow participants to reflect on their overall thread of experience as a first step to elaborating and integrating the knowledge gained from the experiential explorations of the previous sessions” (Osterhold et al., 2007, p. 224). Finally, the researchers indicated that the last session “included a ritual to close the 12-week inquiry process” (Osterhold et al., 2007, p. 224).

Osterhold et al.’s (2007) study reveals many of the same themes and ways of describing PRC that have been discovered in the literature as well as in the pilot study detailed in Appendix M. For example, regarding the difficulty of articulating the experience of PRC in the classroom, the researchers stated that “a number of participants voiced their difficulties in expressing and synthesizing their experiences and embodied insights around questions of relational spirituality in verbal terms” (Osterhold et al., 2007, p. 229).

Also, as with Bache’s (2008) students, Osterhold et al., (2007) discussed how early on in the course, students “started referring to a *shared field* that they experienced as they practiced the dyadic IEMs [interactive embodied meditations] to explore the nature of relational spirituality” (p. 230). The researchers also identified three main themes that emerged from their inquiry, which included the experience of (a) oneness, (b) communion, and (c) nonduality (Osterhold et al., 2007, pp. 231-235). These themes were connected to specific “transformational and practical outcomes” (Osterhold et al., 2007, p. 235) that included (a) integration of embodied knowing, (b) modulation of personal boundaries, (c) longing for communion versus fear of engulfment, and (d) pearls of wisdom in the centers of inquiry (Osterhold et al., 2007, pp. 236-242). Of particular importance to PRC in higher education classrooms, the researchers also emphasized the embodied, somatic qualities of their collaborative process and inquiry into relational spirituality which they contrasted with ways of knowing that are typically accessible only in “purely cognitive pathways” (Osterhold et al., 2007, p. 238). For example, they stated that “the quality of knowing that emerged . . . is perhaps a

manifestation of the attainment of embodied knowing. This was experienced as very different from the feeling tone typical of academic discussions” (Osterhold et al., 2007, p. 243). Of note is that the researchers emphasized the atypical nature of the outcomes. For example, they stated at the end of the study that “several class members reported experiencing the mind as now a relaxed, cooperative participant in an integral inquiry process, as opposed to the dominant and often stressed nature of the mind in ordinary consciousness” (Osterhold et al., 2007, p. 241). While the experientially positive elements of the inquiry process are not without merit, the researchers failed to explain what the participant meant by “ordinary consciousness.” Such a distinction can be useful but within the boundaries of the study, the bias against “ordinary consciousness” was apparent in the participant accounts chosen by the researchers.

Although Osterhold et al. (2007) chose to focus their inquiry on the “mysterious space ‘in-between’” (p. 4) by exploring with the class the question “What is the nature of relational spirituality” (p. 4) while using cooperative inquiry, their resulting themes and first-person student narratives reveal a similarity to PRC and the other case examples reviewed in this section. An example of this correspondence comes from what one of the participants reportedly said about their process: “Something else was present, something mystical and elemental. I felt like a vessel of presence and activity with no clear emotions and not even a distinct body” (Osterhold et al., 2007, p. 241). Osterhold et al. (2007) chose to actively participate in the inquiry process as it was happening. Also, their inquiry had an explicit spiritual focus that the current study on PRC does not. Regardless, PRC and Osterhold et al.’s (2007) study parallels and supports the current research into the experience of PRC in higher education classrooms.

#### *Presence as a Contemplative Framework*

Another example that parallels and supports PRC in the classroom was work done by Olen Gunnlaugson (2009) who completed a doctoral dissertation on presence as a contemplative

framework for inquiry in higher education classrooms. Gunnlaugson's research is an exploration into the existence of presence, contemplative approaches to education, conversation as an intersubjective field of inquiry, and ontological conceptions of teaching, all of which are themes similar to the study of PRC provided here.

Gunnlaugson (2009) cited Otto Scharmer's (2007) work as being instructive of how to cultivate the qualities of presence and collaborative inquiry in the classroom (p. 2). Scharmer's work centers on how to bring these phenomena into organizational contexts but Gunnlaugson built upon Scharmer's and other's works to establish precedent for such phenomena in higher education classrooms through the exploration of presencing and dialogue to create new ideas and realities to emerge in group process.

Basing his understanding on Scharmer's (2007) work, Gunnlaugson (2009) discussed presencing through dialogue as a process of creative emergence; he stated that "when new meaning or knowledge that arises in a presencing conversation is not deductible from the existing knowledge or understanding of the class . . . we are participating in a process of strong emergence" (p. 98). He went on to say that "the process involves attending to the field of conversation, drawing from an emergent sense of self that is co-enacted with the group conversation and co-participating in a transpersonal process for unfolding new knowledge" (Gunnlaugson, 2009, pp. 98-99).

Gunnlaugson's exploration of presencing as a contemplative framework in higher education classrooms goes far beyond Scharmer's model of presencing in groups. However, despite Gunnlaugson's broad survey of presencing in classrooms, his analysis was limited to a meta-theoretical approach. Gunnlaugson did not conduct any direct human subject research of his own. Regardless, his work draws many strong parallels to the exploration of PRC offered here.

*The Courage to Teach*

One other case example of PRC-like discussion in the context of classrooms comes from the work of Parker Palmer (1998). In his book, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*, Palmer wrote in detail about his thoughts and experiences of what it means to be in community, both inside and outside the classroom. At one point during his discussion, he introduced what he called the “third thing” (Palmer, 1998, pp. 115-120); “True community in any context requires a transcendent third thing that holds both me and thee accountable to something beyond ourselves, a fact well known outside of education” (p. 117).

Here, Palmer (1998) stated that this third thing is operative in religious life and in political life as well. He suggested that without this third thing, communities lose sight of that something that is greater than the community. As a result, problems arise when communities lose what he called the “transcendent center” (Palmer, 1998, p. 117). When this happens, all sorts of shortsighted ills may arise as a result. When relating the presence of the third thing to the classroom, Palmer (1998) stated:

The subject-centered classroom is characterized by the fact that the third thing has a presence so real, so vivid, so vocal, that it can hold teacher and students alike accountable for what they say and do. In such a classroom, there are no inert facts. The great thing is so alive that teacher can turn to student or student to teacher, and either can make a claim on the other in the name of that great thing. Here, teacher and students have a power beyond themselves to contend with—the power of a subject that transcends our self-absorption and refuses to be reduced to our claims about it. (p. 117)

Palmer’s (1998) third thing, which is based on what he called a “subject-centered” classroom (pp. 117-118) may be pointing to a phenomenon that goes beyond and is in many ways different than PRC. However, the relation to a transcendent third that goes beyond the individuals in the classroom is highly germane to the PRC-like cases brought up in the context of this review of the literature.

The examples of PRC-like phenomena given in this section provide correlative case studies of how to research and thematize the experience of PRC in higher education classrooms. However, none of the above examples provided an explicitly phenomenological perspective. Because one of the unique contributions of this research is its phenomenological approach to the lived experience of PRC—which possesses similarities to the accounts provided above—the following section details key themes within Husserl’s phenomenology that are directly relevant to the experience of PRC in the classroom.

### Husserl and Intersubjectivity

One’s subjective sense of self resides in the *lifeworld* (Husserl, 1970). The lifeworld, when used in this inquiry, is that realm of everyday life in which human beings dwell in on a day-to-day basis. It is the ground of one’s experience of the world and the place of interaction with other people. The lifeworld is the subject matter of the social sciences. It is also synonymous with the German word *Lebenswelt* (Sokolowski, 2007). Merleau-Ponty (1973, 1997) used another term—the *interworld*—to describe the place where the self actively makes a pact with others in addition to merely living with others (see Kwok-ying, 2004). Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy has a strong and explicit dialectical element to it, which is analogous to the experience of PRC. The dialectic in Merleau-Ponty points to how meanings arise between people and objects in relation. Examples of the dialectic and how it transcends the subject/object divide can be seen in his *Adventures of the Dialectic* (Merleau-Ponty, 1973) and in *Phenomenology of Perception* (Merleau-Ponty, 2008).

Intersubjectivity is pertinent to the present study of PRC because the foundation of the lifeworld is intersubjective experience. Intersubjectivity, though not synonymous with PRC, is a fundamental process essential to the adequate understanding of PRC. In this sense, intersubjectivity as treated in phenomenology appears to have high correspondence with all human participatory and social phenomena. Applying the phenomenological notion of intersubjectivity to PRC in classrooms

will therefore aid in the development of a conceptual understanding (see Appendix A for examples of other relevant constructs). By starting with intersubjectivity in Husserlian phenomenology, one can then begin to see how other *higher* aspects of intersubjectivity such as empathy, sympathy, and altruism become relevant to PRC as well (see Haney, 2002; Midgley, 2006; Ziman, 2006).

Evan Thompson (2001b), a contemporary phenomenologist, has described intersubjectivity as fundamental to knowledge of the world, “Individual human consciousness is formed in the dynamic interrelation of self and other, and therefore is inherently intersubjective” (p. 31). Other phenomenologists strongly support this notion by looking to what Husserl had to say regarding the foundations of the social world. For example: “What we might, with Hegel, call ‘objective spirit,’ or with Marx and the heirs of Hegel’s philosophy of right, call ‘society,’ appears in Husserl under the concept of ‘intersubjectivity’” (Gadamer, 2000, p. 281). In his essay *Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity, Subject and Person* (Gadamer, 2000), went on to say “for his part, Husserl claimed the meaning of intersubjectivity as *constitutive* [italics added] of the world” (p. 282).

Jürgen Habermas (1991), though not strictly a phenomenologist but still within the Continental tradition, stated:

I cannot simply just for myself maintain the Ego which in my self-consciousness appears to be given to me—it does not “belong” to me. Rather, this Ego retains an intersubjective core because the process of individuation is channeled through the network of socialization and history. (p. 138)

Stated another way: “consciousness is not a purely individual phenomenon” (Midgley, 2006, p. 103).

The theme of intersubjectivity in Husserl’s body of works are concentrated in *The Paris Lectures* (Husserl, 1975), the fifth meditation in the *Cartesian Meditations* (Husserl, 1982) and the *Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy* (Husserl, 1970). These texts represent the bulk of his later philosophy, completed toward the end of his life (Zahavi 2003b). They remain the most cited examples of Husserl’s turn toward intersubjectivity even though much of the latter was published posthumously. Although, the *Nachlass*

writings published as *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität* (Husserl, 1973) is also an excellent example of Husserl's development of the problems of intersubjectivity.

Intersubjectivity implies subjectivity in relation to other subjectivities. One way to describe intersubjectivity is as the “common space” between subjectivities. Husserl used the technical term *alterity* to mean “otherness” and *ipseity* to mean “I-ness,” both being crucial to the phenomenological understanding of intersubjectivity (see Adamo, 2002). Husserl's study and development of intersubjectivity as the starting point for the proper understanding of the social world and the nature of the lifeworld became progressively more sophisticated over the course of his writings. His most relevant and critiqued work is the fifth meditation in the *Cartesian Meditations* (Husserl, 1982, pp. 89-151), which is where he formally introduced transcendental intersubjectivity for the first time.

Husserl devoted more pages, quantitatively, to intersubjectivity than any of the phenomenologists that came after him (Zahavi, 2003b). Similarly, contemporary scholars recognize the problems of intersubjectivity as one of Husserl's great, unfinished projects (see Zahavi, 2003a). This is especially pertinent considering that Husserl's work is strongly associated with the first-person perspective and has been accused of being solipsistic in nature. This research maintains that Husserl's work is *not* solipsistic. However, a detailed discussion of this issue is beyond the scope of this study.

In Husserl's formulation of intersubjective reality (or, the community of monads) is the first and foremost condition of experience: “The intrinsically first being, the being that precedes and bears every worldly Objectivity, is transcendental intersubjectivity: the universe of monads, which effects its communion in various forms” (Zahavi, 2001b, pp. 12-13). Again, another example of the centrality of intersubjectivity for Husserl (1997), “Transcendental intersubjectivity is the absolute and only self-sufficient ontological foundation. Out of it are created the meaning and validity of

everything objective, the totality of objectively real existent entities, but also every ideal world as well” (p. 249).

Husserl (1970, 1975, 1982) also used the related concepts *mitwelt* and *transcendental empathy* in place of his prolific discussions related to transcendental intersubjectivity but he tended to rely on the latter when referring to this most essential ground of experience in the world (Husserl, 1970; see also Appendix A). For Husserl, transcendental intersubjectivity is the place where the seemingly isolated ego understands its reality as the cocreation of the community of selves, that is, reality as participatory (Husserl, 1982).

#### *Transcendental Subjectivity*

In Husserl’s phenomenology, to treat subjectivity as separate from intersubjectivity would be problematic and incomplete (Zahavi, 2001b). To understand Husserl’s phenomenology and how it relates to the phenomenon of PRC his treatment of transcendental subjectivity has to be understood. Husserl (2007a, 2007b) introduced the concept of transcendental subjectivity in *Logical Investigations*. From here his thought and method developed in several important moves and finally culminated in his introduction of transcendental intersubjectivity and the problems of the lifeworld in the *Cartesian Meditations* (Husserl, 1982) and *The Crisis* (Husserl, 1970). In Zahavi’s (2001b) words:

Intersubjectivity and subjectivity cannot be treated separately. Hence one cannot assume—as sometimes mistakenly happens in treatments of Husserl’s *Crisis*—that all the difficulties connected with examining the relation between subjectivity and intersubjectivity simply vanish if one merely takes the shared, generatively handed down lifeworld as one’s point of departure. (p. 99)

#### *Transcendental Intersubjectivity*

In the Cartesian-based model of consciousness (phenomenal normative experience) subjectivity precedes intersubjectivity. The evidence presented here, in Husserlian phenomenology, is that one’s sense of self and reality is ontologically intersubjective (Coelho & Figueiredo, 2003; Gadamer, 2000; Habermas, 1991; Kral, 2007; Markova, 2003; Oliver, 1995; Thompson, 2001b;

Zahavi, 2001b, 2003a). That is, intersubjectivity provides the ground or basis (precedes) the subjective or personal: “Now everything becomes complicated as soon as we consider that subjectivity is what it is—an ego functioning constitutively—only *within* [italics added] intersubjectivity” (Husserl, 1970, p. 172). This view finds support in other domains outside of phenomenology (see Midgley, 2006; Ziman, 2006).

In other words, Husserl’s work strongly supports the view that one experiences self before one experiences the other (or Other) but that once one goes far enough in the analyses one encounters the intersubjective as primordial:

While at first the transcendental subjectivity disclosed through the transcendental reduction is indeterminate, in further reflection it is displayed in its fullness as transcendental intersubjectivity, since the deepest and most universal self-meditation of the philosophizing ego leads to the discovery of absolute intersubjectivity. (Zahavi, 2001b, p. 63)

For some philosophers (e.g., Schutz, 1966), however, the *Cartesian Meditations*—as Husserl’s most direct treatment of the problems of intersubjectivity—do not provide a strong enough basis for an adequate phenomenology of the Other (see Backhaus, 2005; Bergo, 2007; Costelloe, 1998; Crossley, 1996; Gadamer, 2000; Jones, 2000; Levinas, 1969; Russell, 2006; H. R. Wagner, 1984). Husserl’s treatment of intersubjectivity in this text was never satisfactory for many phenomenologists, most especially to Schutz (1966), whose critique of the fifth meditation centered on the notion that to understand the social world one must begin one’s inquiry in the natural attitude rather than the transcendental attitude.

Transcendental intersubjectivity is uniquely Husserlian. Why it is specifically “transcendental” in nature is still being debated among some scholars (for example, see Backhaus, 2005; Costelloe, 1998; Gorner, 2000; Haney, 2002; Smirnova, 2004; Zahavi, 2003a). It is, however, rooted in the idea that there is an a priori, ontological reality that affects consciousness and actions (Zahavi, 2001b). Husserl would have said that intersubjectivity too has a distinct character that lies outside of or prior to the world of perception: “Nor is it yet clear why he considered

intersubjectivity to be a transcendental problem, and saw its appropriate treatment as a *conditio sine qua non* for a phenomenological philosophy” (Zahavi, 2001b, p. 1).

Zahavi (2003a) has contributed a great deal to emphasizing the importance of intersubjectivity in the works of Husserl. Zahavi (2003a) has gone to great lengths to describe Husserl’s notion of intersubjectivity and why it is so critical:

He was convinced that it contained the key to a philosophical comprehension of reality, and since Husserl considered this problem, or more exactly, an account of the constitution of objective reality and transcendence, as one of the most important concerns of transcendental phenomenology, it should be obvious what kind of systematic importance his analyses of intersubjectivity poses, and how much is actually at stake. (p. 235)

What is actually at stake is not only the whole project of Husserl’s phenomenology but also a more authentic understanding of the nature of reality itself. That is, Zahavi is asserting that a detailed understanding of intersubjectivity and its implications for the study of lived experiences (such as PRC) is essential to any rigorous phenomenological inquiry.

### The Given

The given, in philosophy, refers to that aspect of experience that is “given” in awareness: “the phenomenal world as disclosed by consciousness” (Zelazo, Moscovitch, & Thompson, 2007, p. 84). It is the raw input of the internal experience of the world taken at *face value*. However, the notion of the given is not one of value or meaning (as cognitive mediations) but of the affective phenomena of lived experience.

This notion is central to the uncovering of the essence, or the invariant structure (what is essential to the phenomenon for it be that phenomenon), of PRC because the experience is given to the consciousness of the co-participants in higher education classrooms even though it may be pre-cognitive or even unconscious to some extent. PRC is experienced as arising in a manner that is given to one’s awareness in particular ways that will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 3.

### The Horizon of Experience, Appresentation, and Apperception

The horizon of experience, in Husserl's formulation, is explained by the way in which an Other (person) can perceive the same object but from a different angle (i.e., they can know the same object in a way that you cannot see at the moment but could as a potential). Husserl called this act of perceiving *appresentation*, which "involves the perception of the other side of any object which is not directly presented to the consciousness" (Tripathy, 1992, p. 4). Appresentation, in turn, is based on *apperception* "an analogizing transfer of an original sense to a new instance" (J. W. Brown, 2002, p. 26). Although appresentation and apperception are not central terms in this study, they do shed light on the experience of PRC because they suggest complexity at the heart of the way each co-participant experiences his or her sense of what is happening in the classroom. Appresentation and apperception are Husserlian examples of how individuals actively participate in *filling in the gaps* of awareness in an intersubjectively shared space, thus often preconsciously constructing experience beyond what is purely given to awareness. Such an insight can lend itself to the understanding of how PRC and related experiences are recalled *a posteriori*.

### The Constitution of Others

The meaning of constitution in Husserl's philosophy underwent a considerable amount of development over the course of his career. This development contributes to a certain amount of ambiguity concerning the exact meaning of constitution in his phenomenology. Yet, the meaning of constitution in his latter works, principally, *Cartesian Meditations*, is more discernable than in his middle or early works (Kockelmans, 1994).

Husserl made a distinction between the constitution of different types of objects, the correlative constitution of one's own ego, and the constitution of other egos as sources of meaning

(Kockelmans, 1994). An analysis of these distinctions is highly complex and is beyond the parameters of this study. Nonetheless, constitution can be understood in three main ways:

First, constitution refers to a logic of the building of meaning, a process through which the meaning we find in experience has come to be established and organized in its particular manner. Given any phenomenon, it is possible to trace out the way in which it has come to be formed. Second, constitution may be understood as a *self-generating dynamic of consciousness* [italics added] . . . a third sense of constitution . . . one of *world-creation* [italics added] and as though consciousness built up not only the order of meaning but the nature of reality. (Natanson, 1996, pp. 93-94)

Based upon Husserl's complex use of constitution in his phenomenology, PRC points to an experience that is both rich with meaning and essential to one's sense of reality as one actively co-creates it in the moment, a theme, based on the results of this study, that is explored in more detail in Chapter 5.

When Husserl referred to the constitution of other egos in the context of his latter philosophy, his analysis covered what he called *active and passive synthesis* in the "sphere of ownness" (Kockelmans, 1994, p. 282). More specifically, the constitution of objects or other subjectivities means to "actualize its truth" (Sokolowski, 2007, p. 92). To constitute other persons means to be subject to how others are given to subjective consciousness. In this sense, to constitute others is to be subject to the way others disclose themselves: "To 'constitute' a state of affairs is to exercise our understanding and to let a thing manifest itself to us" (Sokolowski, 2007, p. 93). Based on this, PRC points to the act of actively participating in the co-constitution of a shared experience. Constitution for Husserl primarily refers to perception but in the context of this study, the focus is not on the primacy of perception being operative in PRC but on the primacy of the body (cf. Gendlin, 1992, 1997a). This means that it is the somatic felt sense of the constitutive dimensions of direct (pre-cognitive) lived experience that have been given primary consideration.

Although phenomenology, in the most general sense, has always sought a means to study the constitutive dimensions of direct experience (*apodicticity*; Husserl, 1982), there has been a curious

absence in phenomenology of a useful means to account for lived experience in terms of implicit knowing as somatic *felt sense* explicitly attending to experience as process based in the body rather than in occularcentric, head-centered perception (Hartelius, 2007; cf. Behnke, 1994; Gendlin, 1978-1979, 1992, 1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2009a, 2009b; Gendlin & Johnson, 2004). For Gendlin (1999), the felt sense is the body's ability to sense itself and its surroundings. If the bodily felt sense of experience is a primary means of knowing the world—perhaps more foundational than occularcentric perception (Gallagher, 1997; Gendlin, 1992, 1997a, 1997b, 2000a) that pervades so much of Western culture (see Ihde, 2002; Levin, 1988, 1989, 1993, Washburn, 1995)—then the development of such a method seems overdue.

The constitution of others in Husserl's phenomenology is germane to the study of PRC. However, being philosophically based, it does not easily lend itself to research with human subjects without significant modification (Giorgi, 1970, 1995, 2000, 2009; Hein & Austin, 2001; Kockelmans, 1987; Moustakas, 1994; Valle, 1998). Husserl envisioned a formal phenomenological research tradition. However, his philosophical phenomenology was never well adapted to the scientific demands (e.g., methods and techniques necessary to collect and analyze data) of the human sciences. In response to this problem, numerous varieties of phenomenology have been developed, each of which attempt to bridge the gap between Husserl's philosophical phenomenology and the human and social sciences (see Behnke, 1994; Bentz & Shapiro, 1998; Braud & Anderson, 1998; Finlay, 2005; Giorgi, 1985, 1989, 1995, 2009; Kockelmans, 1987; Moustakas, 1994; Psathas, 1973, 1999; Valle, 1998; van Manen, 1990; Varela, 1996; von Eckartsberg, 1986).

Among these post-Husserlian human science formulations is neurophenomenology (NP; Depraz et al., 2000; Gallagher, 2007; Lutz & Thompson, 2003; Thompson, 2008; Thompson, Lutz & Cosmelli, 2005; Varela, 1996) which seeks to combine Husserlian phenomenology with other approaches that were seen to be missing in the broad and interdisciplinary research goals of

consciousness studies. Neurophenomenology—as presented through somatic phenomenology (Hartelius, 2007)—though not without its shortcomings, is an approach that is instrumental to researching PRC in large part because it simplifies the phenomenological research process without sacrificing its depth.

### Neurophenomenology and Somatic Phenomenology

Francisco Varela’s (1996) proposal for a “methodological remedy for the hard problem” (p. 330)—neurophenomenology (NP)—ushered in a new course of research and debate in consciousness studies that has had lasting effects. In particular, it is his proposal to combine phenomenology, cognitive science, and contemplative (Buddhist) practices that has inspired a new way of approaching research endeavors into consciousness. Varela’s approach to phenomenological analysis is based on what he called the “three gestures of awareness” (Depraz et al., 2000; Varela & Scharmer, 2000). He suggested combining three different established means for accessing first-person experience. They are (a) introspection, (b) phenomenology, and (c) Buddhism (Varela & Scharmer, 2000). The three gestures of awareness, as parallel processes, are Varela’s version of the three different parts of the cycle of the phenomenological reduction or epoche. They are ordered as they are experienced when moving into the reduction, (a) suspension, (b) redirection, and (c) letting go (Depraz et al., 2000; Varela & Scharmer, 2000).

#### *Neurophenomenology as Pragmatic*

As a remedy to the adequate study of consciousness, NP seeks to combine the methods and techniques of phenomenological first-person accounts with the methods and techniques of cognitive science (Gallagher, 2007; Lutz & Thompson, 2003; Thompson, 2008; Thompson et al., 2005; Varela, 1996). In the context of the study of PRC in higher education classrooms, NP is unique in that it provides a pragmatic way to apply Husserlian phenomenology that is compatible with other approaches to the science of consciousness (i.e., cognitive neuroscience; Hartelius, 2007). Though

NP combines phenomenological approaches with cognitive neuroscience approaches (e.g., neurological correlates), the study of PRC in this research only uses the phenomenological approach proposed by Varela (1996). The core of this approach is the Gesture of Phenomenological Reduction (GPhR), which is also a key constituent of somatic phenomenology (SP; Hartelius, 2007). From the GPhR (based on NP via SP) quasi-objects are defined as phenomena in the same way as objects that are phenomenological, even though they are not as stable as most phenomena that are considered to be objects. These quasi-objects of somatic experience, what Hartelius now calls presence-based structures (G. Hartelius, personal communication, February, 15, 2012) are then described in terms of their size, shape, valence, and location by the co-participants (Hartelius, 2007). In this way, the GPhR is used as a methodological means to study the experience of PRC. The details of the use of the GPhR via SP and NP are given in Chapter 3.

#### *Naturalization of Neurophenomenology*

NP is supported by a number of contemporary consciousness researchers (Depraz et al., 2002; Lutz & Thompson, 2003) and is a part of the move to “naturalize” (i.e., orienting to natural science) phenomenology. Such a move is indicative of contemporary consciousness research, which seeks to take an interdisciplinary approach to the study of consciousness (Gallagher, 1997, 2007; Gallagher & Schmicking, 2010; Kriegel, 2005; Petitot, Varela, Pachoud, & Roy, 1999; see also J. Smith, 2011). For example, Max Velmans has given broad support to such an interdisciplinary approach with special emphasis on phenomenological accounts to truly account for difficult to describe experiences such as PRC:

Although existing first-person methods can be combined with third-person methods in a variety of useful, complementary ways, there is a clear need to develop more sophisticated first-person methods, particularly for those aspects of experience that are relatively complex, impermanent, unstable, or variable, or are difficult to describe, measure, or control. (Velmans, 2000, p. 354)

Although the research proposed here does not make any explicit claims toward supporting or not supporting the naturalization of phenomenology (cf. Hartelius, 2006), it does substantiate insights provided by NP as a means to operationalize and apply Husserl's phenomenology to the experience of PRC in higher education classrooms. On its own, Husserl's phenomenology is difficult (if not impossible) to apply in a psychological research setting without significant modification. Varela's (1996) NP is only but one of many such attempts to operationalize Husserl's original call to *go back to the things themselves*.

The experience of PRC both in and outside the classroom, meets the list of conditions from Velmans' (2000) quote in the previous paragraph. That is, PRC is complex, impermanent, unstable, variable, and difficult to describe, measure, and control. Thus, NP provides a contemporary means to study PRC with the addition of Giorgi's (2009) phenomenological method serving as robust structural procedure in conjunction with Hartelius' (2007) somatic phenomenological method (i.e., the combination of somatics, NP, and quantitative descriptions of felt sense perception), all of which are explained in greater detail in Chapter 3.

### Participatory Philosophy

#### *Martin Buber's "Between"*

The "between" or the "in-between" is also a term that has been thematized by some scholars and echoes the same themes present in the experience of PRC (see Landon, 2003). In 20th-century Western thought the use of the *between* as a third ontological presence, a third space unto itself, has roots in Martin Buber's (1996, 2006) theological philosophy (and is sometimes also referred to as a philosophical anthropology). Buber's thought is firmly embedded in his notion of "I and Thou" as being the core of one's experience of God and the sacred. Through his focus on mutuality, Buber (2006) referred to the "realm of the between" (p. 243) as being the crux, center, and foundation of one's experience of a greater reality. He also at times referred to what he called the "dialogical

principle” (Buber, 2006, pp. 249-264). For Buber, “reality arises between agents as they encounter and transform each other. In a word, reality is dialogical” (Audi, 2006, p. 104). The between as described by Buber holds correspondence to PRC in that both point to the existence of a space that is created as a result of the confluence of two or more people coming together in intentional mutuality. Buber’s philosophy of the between repeatedly arises in the works of contemporary transpersonal thinkers concerned with the description and exploration of participatory phenomena.

#### *Bohmian Dialogue*

David Bohm’s (2008) description of the process and product of dialogue is rich with examples of the transformative potential of a phenomenon closely related to PRC. The principle of the space in-between is central to his theory of dialogue: “It is something *between* the individual and the collective. It can move between them” (Bohm, 2008, p. 31). Bohmian dialogue echoes many of the same characteristics of the experience of PRC. It may also serve as a concrete example of how to actively cultivate PRC in a variety of group settings.

#### *Relational Spirituality*

PRC was echoed when John Heron and Gregg Lahood (2007) referred to *relational spirituality* described as “the realm between persons where a sacred presence may manifest . . . a shared transformative event, a shared occasion of enhanced human flourishing” (pp. 1-2). Heron and Lahood (2007) have supported their views regarding relational spirituality in their co-participation in an ongoing peer inquiry group that had, at the time of their writing, been meeting consistently (every 2 weeks) for over 12 years. The experience of their participation in this group inquiry process was explored using collaborative inquiry, which both Heron and Lahood used to support their view that spirituality is essentially grounded in participatory process.

Lahood (2010a, 2010b), in particular, has seen the participatory *turn* in transpersonal psychology as a restoration to Buber’s realm of the between. For Lahood (2010b), a cornerstone of

relational inquiry in small groups is “the intentional practice of mutuality and co-responsibility: care for each-other and for nurturing along the outcome” (p. 69). PRC in higher education classrooms seems to rely on intention and the bringing of conscious attention to group process.

Peter Reason (1998), in his discussion of different approaches to participative inquiry, validates qualitative research methods that are grounded on the belief that “this worldview sees human beings as cocreating their reality through participation: through their experience, their imagination and intuition, their thinking and their action” (p. 262). By cocreating, Reason (1998) meant that shared “reality is a product of the dance between our individual and collective mind ‘what is there,’ the amorphous primordial givenness of the universe” (p. 262). For Reason, the participatory worldview is founded on the idea that individuals and collectives actively create their sense of reality in response to what is already given in a pre-existing world. In other words, all human experience is based on an objective reality that transcends human consciousness but is at the same time conditioned by the active participation of human consciousness.

#### *Ferrerian Participatory Spirituality*

Similarly, through his term participatory spirituality, Jorge Ferrer (2002, 2009, 2011; Ferrer & Sherman, 2008) described this phenomenon as part of the true heart of spiritual experience: “Transpersonal phenomena, I argue, can be more adequately conceived not as individual inner experiences, but as participatory events that can emerge in the locus of an individual, a relationship, a collective identity, or a place” (Ferrer, 2002, pp. 2-3). For Ferrer, transpersonal phenomena are participatory in nature. This view of such phenomena transcends transpersonal psychology’s historical reliance on “experientialism, inner empiricism, and perennialism” (Ferrer, 2002, pp. 4-5). In regard to human experience of reality, Ferrer (2002) stated that “human intentional participation creatively channels and modulates the self-disclosing of Spirit through the *bringing forth of visionary worlds and spiritual realities* [italics added]” (p. 157). Thus, participatory spirituality in this sense is

grounded in the view that each individual actively co-creates the collective sense of reality in a fundamental way, that is, there is a co-enaction or “bringing-forth” of reality. Participatory philosophy as represented in the transpersonal literature offers a philosophy that can be used to give context to PRC in higher education classrooms because PRC is a participatory event co-created through conscious intention by each individual present in the group.

### *Deep Empathy*

Tobin Hart (2000), another transpersonal psychologist, discussed what he called *deep empathy* and *transcendental empathy* which arises between individuals in various contexts such as in therapy and in the classroom. Hart cited other similar concepts such as sympathetic resonance, empathic resonance, attunement, and interbeing (Hanh, 1995) as being resonant with deep empathy. Hart (2000) gave a personal example of what deep empathy is that bears some similarity to the experience of PRC in higher education classrooms:

I seem to experience the other’s feelings directly in my own body or recognize patterns, histories, or meanings that do not appear to come from interpreting the words and gestures that we exchange. I remember this phenomenon happening spontaneously in my first psychotherapy internship, when I would experience an unusual connection with some clients. The moments seemed timeless; light in the room changed; background sounds retreated; and the boundaries between us seemed to collapse. I recall a sense of the client and myself being in a kind of luminous egg. Later, I experienced the deep connection as an exchange, like spiral waves flowing back and forth. Later still, I usually became less aware of the sensations and instead entered a more open awareness (p. 253)

Even though this account of deep empathy is in a therapeutic context, it has many of the same qualities, characteristics, and themes inherent in the experience of PRC in higher education classrooms such as spontaneity, non-verbal communication, timelessness, boundary dissolution, and open awareness.

### *Feminist Epistemology*

Feminist epistemology is worth mentioning in the context of PRC and participatory philosophy. A detailed account of this significance is beyond the scope of this study. Regardless,

many of the frameworks and conventions used in this study employ inherent feminist epistemological lenses. For example, the explicit inclusion of the researcher and co-participant as co-constructing the meanings contained in the descriptions and interpretations of PRC is a framework common to feminist approaches to qualitative research (Olesen, 2005).

Feminist research acknowledges the ways in which individuals participate in the construction of meaning, a view that correlates with the approach taken in this dissertation. It may prove fruitful to frame PRC in feminist research approaches since the phenomenon is inherently participatory, the role of the researcher affect the process, and may contain hidden patriarchal dimensions related to power (Lather, 1991; Olesen, 2005). For example, the relative rarity of PRC as a collaborative and inspiring process may be a result of traditional, male-dominated styles of discourse in higher education. Again, whether or not this may be the case is beyond the delimitations of the current study.

#### Other Convergences

This section of the literature review contains other correlative examples that may prove to be relevant to this study. However, each of them is ultimately beyond the boundaries of this research and thus serves as exemplars of the variety of ways one can approach PRC in small groups. Some are more directly connected to the current study and some are indirectly relevant and peripheral. All of these examples provide a basis for understanding the experience of PRC beyond classrooms: Husserl's phenomenology; neurophenomenology and somatic phenomenology; and participatory philosophy.

#### *Intersubjectivity Theory in Psychoanalysis*

##### *Stolorow and Atwood*

Robert Stolorow and George Atwood (2002; Stolorow, Atwood, & Branchaft, 1994) have also contributed a cogent account of what they call the intersubjective perspective in psychoanalysis

that informs this inquiry of PRC. Stolorow (1997) stated, “We [Stolorow and Atwood] hold that any psychological constellation can be grasped only in terms of its unique intersubjective history, the relational systems in which it originated and is continuing to be maintained” (p. 340). Stolorow (1998) stated in another venue that “intersubjectivity theory holds that closer and closer approximations of ‘what is really going on’ are gradually achieved through an analytic dialogue in which the domain of reflective self awareness is enlarged for both participants” (p. 425). Their view of the intersubjective nature of all psychoanalytic work is an example of the implications and import of intersubjectivity as the basis of our human experience of the world. Though their context is mainly concerned with the dyadic relationship between analyst and client, their theory of the intersubjective nature of this relationship correlates with the small group context in the current inquiry of PRC in classrooms.

*Facilitators’ Perceptions of Group Synergy and Collective Resonance*

*Collective Resonance*

Allison Cressy Wilson’s (2008) dissertation *Facilitators’ Perceptions of What Contributes to Group Synergy and Collective Resonance*, is comparable to the current study. In her dissertation, A. C. Wilson discussed the phenomenon of collective resonance in similar terms to those outlined here. The major difference between A. C. Wilson’s study and the current one is that she focused on people who facilitate group work of various kinds and did not create or use any method for controlling for the use of language presumed by the researcher or the participants (i.e., controlling for confirmation bias), though, it must be stated that this is not a requirement for all qualitative research (A. C. Wilson used a basic interpretive qualitative design influenced by organic inquiry, i.e., not phenomenology). For example, case studies and narrative inquiry do not place as much emphasis on the preexisting categories and terms used to frame a phenomenon (as does phenomenology) and instead emphasize the establishment of rich descriptions of a well-defined phenomenon based on first-person reports.

Also, A. C. Wilson's (2008) study did not account for the experiences of those in the group (choosing to focus on group facilitators) and, similarly, focused on how facilitators (she interviewed 30 small group facilitators) sought to create the conditions for group synergy and collective resonance.

A. C. Wilson's (2008) study relied on an earlier dissertation completed by Renee Levi titled *Group Magic: An Inquiry Into Experiences of Collective Resonance* (as cited in A. C. Wilson 2008). A. C. Wilson cited most of her sources based on Levi's study, which A. C. Wilson stated was the most influential work on her thinking around collective resonance. A. C. Wilson also stated in her literature review that researching collective resonance posed fundamental challenges to the researcher, the most important being the lack of agreement about terms and definitions to define the phenomenon: a problem that has been present in the current study and that I have sought to overcome through the research design (Chapter 3).

A. C. Wilson (2008) cited Levi as having defined collective resonance as "a felt sense of energy, rhythm, or intuitive knowing occurring in a group of human being that positively influences the way they interact toward a common purpose" (p. 2). This definition coincides with many of the same themes and qualities explored in the current study, although, it is an ambiguous definition that poses more questions than it answers. For example, the terms energy, rhythm, and intuitive knowing can be understood in divergent ways and can themselves be the topics of much discussion and debate. As such, they are poor descriptors, without adequate defining, for a scientific study. Fortunately, Levi did define what she meant by these terms.

#### *The Transsubjective Field*

Another example of field-like effects that may have similarities to PRC in higher education classrooms is Judith Blackstone's (2007) conception of nonduality, intersubjectivity, and the *transsubjective field*. Blackstone based much of her work on Stolorow and Atwood's (2002) and

Stolorow et al.'s (1994) intersubjectivity theory as it pertains to the dyadic relationship between client and therapist. However, she went beyond intersubjectivity theory in psychoanalysis when she proposed that “the therapeutic process can be experienced as a progression toward uncovering the unfragmented, nondual relational field” (Blackstone, 2007, p. 92). She stated that when in this nondual state, the therapist and client enter into a shared field, “We might call this mutual space of subject/subject unity a ‘transsubjective field’” (Blackstone, 2007, p. 92). Such a formulation of the therapeutic process is beyond the scope of this research. In addition, Blackstone’s work suffers from an oversimplified definition of nonduality that apparently conflates simple phenomenological consciousness (cf. Varela, 1996) with states achieved by advanced practitioners of traditions such as Buddhism and Hinduism (cf. Berkhin & Hartelius, 2011). Yet, the conception of a shared transsubjective field of experience correlates to PRC in higher education classrooms.

#### *The Wisdom of Crowds*

Participatory philosophy and intersubjectivity theory may be cogent examples of similar phenomena and ways of construing the experience of PRC in classrooms but they are generally not known outside of specialized communities with similar interests. James Surowiecki’s (2004) book *The Wisdom of Crowds: Why the Many are Smarter than the Few and How Collective Wisdom Shapes Business, Economies, Societies, and Nations* is an exception and as such is an example of appealing to a wider audience using a narrative, journalist writing style.

In *The Wisdom of Crowds*, Surowiecki (2004) described how groups can make decisions that are superior to any one individual in that group, including experts. He cited several examples of how this has happened—from the behavior of bees to stock markets and the development of the CIA after World War II, among other numerous case studies.

The relationship between Surowiecki’s (2004) in-depth examples and formulations to the phenomenon of PRC and PRC-like phenomena in the classroom lies in the potential that Surowiecki

may be touching upon some of the same issues surrounding how consensus realities are co-created. To put it another way, the thesis of *The Wisdom of Crowds* may provide certain corollaries to the way in which individuals have experiences in small group contexts, such as the higher education classroom. This is especially pertinent since the proposition that groups are smarter than individuals (under the right conditions), as Surowiecki suggested, may be instructive in the understanding of what happens in a higher education classroom when the individuals present in those classrooms experience the qualities that are explored in this study.

At one point, Surowiecki (2004) stated, when discussing small groups, that:

Small groups have the opportunity to be more than just the sum of their parts. A successful face-to-face group is more than just collectively intelligent. It makes everyone work harder, think smarter, and reach better conclusions than they would be have on their own (Surowiecki, 2004, p. 176).

He went on to give an example taken from a book called *The Amateurs* by David Halberstam (1985) where Halberstam discussed an experience recounted by an experienced oarsman (the story was about an Olympic rowing team). The oarsman recounted a time when he felt in sync with his fellow oarsmen, which he called *swing*. In Surowiecki's (1985) words:

When a boat has swing, its motion seems almost effortless. Although there are eight oarsmen in the boat, it's as if there's only one person—with perfect timing and perfect strength. So you might say that a small group which works well has intellectual swing. (p. 176)

The experience of swing is similar to Csikszentmihalyi's (2008) discussion of the experience of *flow* and seems to be pointing in the direction of the experience of PRC in higher education classrooms.

### *Social Constructionism*

Social constructionism—rooted in the social phenomenology of Alfred Schutz—is heretofore defined as the belief and understanding that reality and knowledge is the “product of our social practices and institutions, or of the interactions and negotiations between relevant social groups” (Audi, 2006, p. 855; also see Popkin, 1999). This view presupposes that a significant part of

human reality is codetermined and codependent on mutually agreed upon interpretations and constructions of meaning and purpose. Varieties of social constructionism come in mild to extreme versions. See the *Handbook of Constructionist Research* for detailed descriptions of constructionist inquiry (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008).

The seminal text in the articulation of social constructionism is *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* by Peter L. Berger and Tomas Luckmann (1967). The accumulated response to this text, since its publication, has been regarded as the main treatise in the articulation and inspiration of social constructionism, a worldview that has become implicit in much contemporary debate. Both Berger and Luckmann (1967)—basing much of their work on the social phenomenology of Alfred Schutz but also the German sociological tradition associated with Talcott Parsons, Max Weber, Max Scheler, Emile Durkheim, and Carl Mannheim—sought to establish a “systematic, theoretical treatise in the sociology of knowledge” (p. v). Berger and Luckmann (1967) represent, one of the earliest formal propositions of social constructionism and certainly the most influential; “The book took the social sciences by storm, encouraging empirical attention to the ordinary, taken-for-granted reality-constructing processes of everyday life” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008, p. 4).

Regardless of the history of social constructionism, it is a view that retains a great deal of currency in contemporary thought and one that is relevant to any discussion of PRC as it is presented in this study: “The leading idea always has been that the world we live in and our place in it are not simple and evidently ‘there’ for participants. Rather, participants actively construct the world of everyday life and its constituent elements” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008, p. 3).

Since this study presumes that the essence of a phenomenon, in this case PRC, can never be known in a *pure* way, free from social constructions, it is apparent that this school of thought must be a significant part of the implications of the findings presented in Chapter 4. Social

constructionism as a particular worldview will be explored in more detail when discussing the implications of attempting to connect PRC in classrooms to the work of Alfred Schutz in Chapter 5.

### *Social Representations*

Another example from social psychology of a phenomenon that has relevance to PRC-like phenomena is the theory *social representations*. The theory of social representations originated from the work of the European social psychologist, Serge Moscovici (2001) and has its roots in the works of Emile Durkheim, Kurt Lewin, the social phenomenology of Alfred Schutz, and the sociology of knowledge tradition associated with Berger and Luckmann's (1967) treatise *The Social Construction of Reality*.

Firmly rooted in a small group paradigm (Tsoukalas, 2006; see also Hogg & Abrams, 1988), the theory of social representations is based on the idea that there are deep structures that exist independently as phenomena, not concepts, that are not contingent on any one person but on the collective aggregate of those persons and that determine the ways in which we see and experience the world around us. Moscovici (1976) defined social representations as

A system of values, ideas and practices with a twofold function: first, to establish an order which will enable individuals to orientate themselves in their material and social world and to master it; and secondly to enable communication to take place among the members of a community by providing them with a code for social exchange and a code for naming and classifying unambiguously the various aspects of their world and their individual and group history. (p. xiii)

The theory is also based on the idea that knowledge is shared and seeks to uncover what deep structures of knowledge are and how they influence human lives. Social representations are ideas that take on a life of their own and develop in complex and dynamic ways. In Moscovici's (2001) words, "All human interactions, whether they arise between two individuals, or between two groups, presuppose such representation. Indeed, this is what characterizes them" (p. 26). In a similar vein, W. Wagner et al. (1999), explained that:

A social representation is a collective phenomenon pertaining to a community which is co-constructed by individuals in their daily talk and action. . . . Instead of imagining representations *within* minds it is better to imagine them *across* minds, resembling a canopy being woven by people's concerted talk and actions (cf. Sugiman, 1997). In summary, *a social representation is the ensemble of thoughts and feelings being expressed in verbal and overt behaviour of actors which constitutes an object for a social group.* (p. 95)

The theory of social representations may help to explain some of the dynamics at play in any experience of PRC in higher education classrooms since it is concerned with the mutual co-construction of meaning *across* the minds of those individuals who report the experience. Furthermore, social representations are a powerful way to understand and study the ways in which the meaning of an event is experienced and how it is interpreted *a posteriori*. It may be that PRC is simply another way of describing the very same process that social representations seek to describe.

#### *Shared Reality*

In a paper by Echterhoff, Higgins, and Levine (2009) titled *Shared Reality: Experiencing Commonality With Others' Inner States About the World*, the authors critically examined some of the main theories of shared reality including “empathy, perspective taking, theory of mind, common ground, embodied synchrony and socially distributed knowledge” (p. 496), and then proposed their own understanding of the creation of shared reality in interpersonal communication.

Echterhoff et al. (2009) cited empirical evidence supporting their conception of shared reality and stated at one point that:

Although our approach is new, it is comparable with earlier conceptualizations in phenomenological sociology (Schutz, 1932/1967) and ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967; see also J. H. Turner, 1987). Scholars in these fields understood that social actors “are motivated to create a sense, even an illusory sense, that they share a common universe,” so that they might “generate a tacit presumption that there is an external factual order out there” (J. H. Turner, 1987, p. 19). (p. 501)

Shared reality, as proposed by Echterhoff et al. (2009) and the other related theories they critique can provide insight into what is happening during the experience of PRC in higher

education classrooms. Participatory reality constitution may be a different framing of similar phenomena reported in their discussion of shared reality.

Echterhoff et al. (2009) first explored the term *shared* as having four possible meanings (a) “communicated or disclosed to others,” (b) “divided up into portions,” (c) “partaking in a consensus,” and (d) “held and experienced in common” (p. 497). The authors then elaborated on possible conceptions of shared reality whilst presuming four conditions for shared reality:

In brief, we propose that shared reality is the product of the motivated process of experiencing a commonality of inner states about the world. Our conceptualization presumes that four main conditions underlie shared reality. First, the commonality between individuals that is implied by a shared reality refers to their inner states and not just their overt behaviors. Second, shared reality is “about something”—that is, it implies a target referent about which people create a shared reality. Third, shared reality as a product cannot be divorced from the process through which it is attained—in particular, the underlying motives. Fourth, there is no shared reality unless people experience a successful connection to someone else’s inner state. (Echterhoff, Higgins, & Levine, 2009, p. 498)

The researchers then moved on to support these presuppositions through presenting empirical *saying-is-believing* studies (e.g., Higgin & Rholes, 1978; McCann, Higgins & Fondacaro, 1991; Sedikides, 1990; for reviews see Higgins, 1992, 1999; McCann & Higgins, 1992).

These studies have demonstrated that when people are asked to recall a referent essay by another person after also hearing other people’s versions of the referent essay, those same people will tend to believe and remember what other people had to say about the essay rather than the original essay itself. In other words, the saying-is-believing effect demonstrates that “people’s mental representations of an experience can be profoundly shaped by how they verbally describe the experience to others” (Echterhoff et al., 2009, p. 502). Thus, in these studies, “communicators’ memory representations of the target person (assessed by free recall) were biased by their audience tuning under conditions that support creating a shared reality but not under conditions that undermine creating a shared reality” (Echterhoff et al., 2009, p. 502). Echterhoff et al. (2009) felt

that the creation of a shared reality can fail when any of the four conditions stated earlier are not met (p. 502). In other words, what these studies suggest is that people create shared reality predominantly based on the desire to “comply with external demands (e.g., behaving in a polite or unprejudiced manner)” (Echterhoff et al., 2009, p. 504).

Echterhoff, et al. (2009) went into great detail in their insistence that shared reality is still not clearly understood despite saying-is-believing studies (though, it is possible to state that culture is a self-perpetuating group sharing reality constructs). They cross-referenced many sources in the literature including the theory of social representations (Moscovici, 2001), socially distributed cognition (see Hutchins, 2000), and theory of mind and admitted that their inquiry was not exhaustive but suggestive that to truly understand how shared realities are created (especially in small groups), one needs to consider these diverse sources and ultimately look beyond them for answers that have yet to be found.

#### *Collective Consciousness*

In a book chapter titled *Collective Consciousness*, Kay Mathiesen (2005) explored the idea of collective consciousness in the context of Husserl and Schutz’ phenomenologies. Mathiesen (2005) proposed collective consciousness as forming a collective subject by taking a first-person plural perspective (p. 235).

According to this account, collective consciousness is obtained through individuals who simulate the consciousness of the collective that they form. Along the way, Mathiesen (2005) reviewed and rejected three views of collective consciousness common in the literature on consciousness. They are (a) group mind: “collective consciousness is a stream of consciousness that is literally shared by more than one conscious subject” (Mathiesen, 2005, p. 236), (b) emergent mind: “collective consciousness is a kind of emergent consciousness dependent on a number of interacting individuals” (Mathiesen, 2005, p. 236), and (c) socially embedded consciousness: “collective

consciousness describes the fact that all individual consciousness is dependent on a social context” (Mathiesen, 2005, p. 236).

In her discussion of collective consciousness, Mathiesen (2005) supported the notion that out of the intentions, thoughts, and imaginations of individuals come a form of collective consciousness that is rooted in the simulation by those individuals of collective beliefs, attitudes, and values:

In one sense the collective and the collective’s beliefs, values, attitudes, etc. do not exist independently of my and my fellow members beliefs about them. There is no collective existing separately from my (our) thoughts, emotions, beliefs, and actions—the thoughts of the collective simply are the thoughts of the members qua members of the collective. So, in this sense, simulating the thought processes of a collective is like simulating the thoughts processes of a fictional character. (Mathiesen, 2005, p. 248)

This account is arguably subtle and should be taken in the context of other arguments found in phenomenology and the philosophy of mind. Yet, what Mathiesen (2005) proposed in her chapter is different from, say, the theory of social representations, which supports the idea that representations do have an ontological existence beyond that of individual minds.

What Mathiesen argued for in her conception of collective consciousness is another example of how to approach group phenomena such as that found in the classroom and the exploration of PRC in this study. Yet, a major hurdle to Mathiesen’s argument is the lack of evidence at the level of lived experience to support it. Mathiesen’s account, though sophisticated, is solely theoretical and lacks the citation of empirically oriented cases that would ground her claims.

#### *Socially Distributed Cognition*

A small but steady research project on the study of socially distributed cognition (sometimes referred to as extended mind) has been developing in the cognitive sciences largely since the seminal publication of Edwin Hutchins (2000) *Cognition in the Wild*. In this book, originally published in the 1980s, Hutchins proposed that researchers in cognitive science should take the view that cognition

does not exist in the minds of individuals but that it resides in the environment that individuals share by way of information encoded in symbols.

This subfield seeks to determine and explore the nature of cognition as existing beyond the brains, bodies, and minds of individual human beings. Theoretically, distributed cognition is a framework similar to other research projects presented here including, but not limited to, social representations, social constructionism, and the sociology of knowledge. However, in practice and in its origins, the theory of distributed cognition is firmly rooted in the cognitive sciences and, as such, prefers the language and experimental methods of this rich, interdisciplinary tradition. Thus, the goal of research is the same as many of the other examples provided in this review but the approach is different. The exceptions in the context of this study are neurophenomenology and somatic phenomenology (NP and SP contain explicit cognitive frames of reference).

#### *Socially Distributed Cognition in Classrooms*

Interestingly, socially distributed cognition has been studied in classrooms contexts, although such studies are few and far between. One noteworthy example here comes from a chapter written by A. L. Brown, Ash, Rutherford, Nakagawa, and Campione (1997). In this study, the researchers examined grade school science classes in the context of “how expertise is spread throughout the classroom and how such distributed expertise influences the community of discourse that provides the seeding ground for mutual appropriation” (A. L. Brown et al., 1997, p. 191).

A. L. Brown et al. (1997) were not only interested in how expertise is distributed but also in how to actively create the conditions for these types of communities of learning. Their inquiry revealed that the teacher, though instrumental to the functioning and containing of a classroom, was not in sole possession of the information and expertise sought. One way that this happens is through ideas and ways of knowing becoming part of common knowledge. They went on to state that expertise is “shared and distributed within the community by design and by happenstance” (A.

L. Brown et al., 1997, p. 224) and that the classroom is a special environment where zones of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) are fostered and knowledge is continually negotiated and renegotiated which helps to create a community of discourse (A. L. Brown et al., 1997, pp. 224-225).

The research program affiliated with socially distributed cognition seeks to avoid any metaphysical claims such as those associated with participatory spirituality explored earlier in this review. As such, it supports grounding its claims in empirical evidence. So far, there is a growing contingent of cognitive researchers who support the claim that mind is extended beyond brain, body, and world: “Some of the most intriguing experimental research in the cognitive psychology of memory specifically studies processes that span brain, body, and world” (Sutton, Harris, Keil, & Barnier, 2010, p. 553). Such claims are supported by ongoing empirical research and bode well for coming to understand many of the same themes and principles explored in this study.

#### *The Shared Field*

Similarities to PRC can also be found in theories concerning *group fields*. One of the earliest theoretical examples here is Kurt Lewin’s (1951) work on field theory. Here, Lewin set the foundation for much of 20th-century social psychology through his exploration of field-like effects in groups. Lewin (1951) combined principles from Gestalt psychology and applied them to social dynamics and personality theory. Field theory was founded on the idea that human behavior is conditioned on both the individual and the environment in which the individual resides. Field theory, according to Lewin (1951), postulated that:

1. Behavior must be derived from a totality of coexisting facts.
  2. These coexisting facts make up a *dynamic field*, which means that the state of any part of the field depends on every other part of it.
  3. Behavior depends on the present field rather than on the past or the future
- (Daniels, 2003).

Though Lewin's (2000) field theory does not presume the phenomenology of field-like effects as they are lived, it is an early precursor and example of how the concept of the *field* beyond the individual (an idea similar to the ecological psychologies of Roger Barker (1968) and Jerome Gibson (1979), both of whom set forth propositions that human behavior is always situated and context dependent on the environment of the individual, but different in that Barker and Jerome did not give attention to the totality of the objects in the field, the gestalt, but, rather, to the particular objects and situations present for the subject)—influences and conditions human experience. As it relates to PRC in higher education classrooms, Lewin's field theory may be an early example in social psychology of how to account for phenomena that is similar to PRC in small groups— with the caveat that his field theory uses a spatial metaphor to understand the interrelatedness of discrete parts that could still be treated as being separate, whereas the phenomenology of intersubjectivity being emphasized in this study takes a step back into the level of the consciousness of the observer and proposes that the world of objects and other subjectivities is fundamentally interconnected.

#### *Transcendental Meditation and Crime Reduction*

Hagelin et al. (1999) conducted a 2-month experiment in 1993 to study the effects of a large group of meditators on crime reduction in Washington, DC. They hypothesized that the level of violent crime would decrease as a result of approximately 4000 participants practicing transcendental meditation at the same time. They included an independent review board of 27 professionals from the metro area, which included sociologists, criminologists, representatives from the police department, and the city government to monitor the progress of the research.

The results of their study found that there were statistically significant data to conclude that crime in the Washington, DC metro area went down as a direct result of the size of the group of meditators. The justification for their findings was highly detailed and exhaustive. Notwithstanding

such detailed procedures, this study suggests the effects of group intention on the outcomes of human behavior. This study by Hagelin et al. (1999) has been supported by numerous follow-up studies, many of which were explored in detail in Nicol (2010). These studies suggest the existence of field-like phenomenon as potentially arising whenever groups of people come together with focused intention, a convergence that may be relevant to PRC in higher education classrooms.

However, Hagelin et al.'s (1999) study was criticized by a number of scholars as being fundamentally flawed. One of these critiques, which focused on a similar study by Orme-Johnson Orme-Johnson, Alexander, Davies, Chandler, and Larimore (1988), argued that the theories and methods used by both Orme-Johnson, et al. (1988) and Hagelin et al. (1987, 1989) did not “cohere well with other strongly confirmed theories, hence conflicting with the evidence supporting those theories” (Fales & Markovsky, 1997, p. 522). Fales and Markovsky (1997) based much of their argument against what Orme-Johnson and Hagelin called the unified field effect as failing to adhere to the standards of consensus-based science. Fales and Markovsky (1997) also claimed that the transcendental meditation experiments needed a great deal of supporting data to be amassed, for which there was little, and “an indefinitely large body of established science will have to be overturned or revised to accommodate the new results” (p. 522). Such critiques of field-like effects regarding groups need to be taken into account. Regardless, the study by Hagelin et al. (1999) serves as an example of the difficulty inherent in the establishment of agreed-upon explanations regarding PRC-like phenomena.

#### *Other Critiques of Group Fields and Similar Constructs*

One example of a challenge to the idea of a shared field came from Floyd Henry Allport. In an article titled *The Group Fallacy in Relation to Social Science*, Allport (1927) provided one of the earlier examples of a researcher who did not agree with the idea of group fields. For him, there was no such thing as group mind or crowd mind theory, “There is no such thing as a group mind; it is a

misleading and harmful conception in every way, whether it is applied to crowd behavior, social conflict, revolutions, or the theory of the superorganic” (Allport, 1927, p. 1). Allport’s rejection of theories of group mind or group fields remains noteworthy because there has remained a strain of researchers in the social sciences whose critique of group fields, however conceived, is grounded in similar notions.

The challenge to ideas of group mind or group fields has a long and established tradition in American social psychology. This tradition, largely spurred by Allport’s (1927) critique, has been known as *individualism* and has philosophical roots in the works of John Stuart Mill and Herbert Spencer (Greenwood, 2009; cf., Huebner, 2008; M. B. Smith, 2009). Individualism maintains that any conception of mind beyond the confines of the individual is indefensible and needs to be challenged.

John Frederick Dashiell (1930, 1935), a contemporary of Allport’s (both Allport and Dashiell were past presidents of the American Psychological Association), and an early proponent of Watson’s behaviorist approach to psychology as a natural science, was also a proponent of individualism in psychology. For Dashiell, all psychological processes were rooted in sensory-based stimulus and response with sharp boundaries between the individual and the social (Wozniak, 1997; cf., Greenwood, 2009; R. Wilson, 1995, 2001, 2004, 2005).

This study does not support the contentions of individualism nor does it claim to demonstrate a group mind phenomenon. It does, however, support the phenomenological view of individuals in relation to other individuals in the co-creation of experience. From the perspective of this dissertation, the debate over individualism versus phenomena such as group mind is mired in a Cartesian worldview where subjectivity is in relation to other subjectivities in an objective world, a debate that is important to consider in light of the findings of the study but one that the study ultimately seeks to transcend through the adoption of an intersubjective phenomenological lens.

*Confirmation Bias and Other Potential Issues*

Confirmation bias is “the tendency to gather evidence that confirms preexisting expectations, typically by emphasizing or pursuing supporting evidence while dismissing or failing to seek contradictory evidence” (VandenBos & American Psychological Association, 2007, p. 215)—in the context of small groups tends to be a common problem. An example of the dangers of confirmation bias was given by Surowiecki (2004) and his discussion of the space shuttle *Columbia* disaster (the shuttle disintegrated upon re-entry into the Earth’s atmosphere) that occurred on January 21, 2003.

Confirmation bias was at work in the lead team that was pivotal in potentially avoiding the crisis had the lead team been more aware of the small group dynamics that had been present at the time. In other words, what Surowiecki (2004) was pointing to was that small groups have a tendency to emphasize consensus over dissent. Confirmation bias and the tendency to emphasize consensus in small groups are well known to social psychologists who study this type of phenomena. Such dynamics may be at work in the experiences of PRC in higher education classrooms and can be informative toward learning about what to be mindful of in terms of making sense of the phenomenon.

The felt sense of participatory reality constitution in classrooms (PRC) may be caused, in part, by a group’s unconscious need to seek consensus and to support preexisting ideas of what is possible and what is not possible in such situations. If, for example, a class has been designed to foster the exploration of participatory spirituality, and those students who participate are already primed for this exploration by the simple fact that they have found themselves in this particular classroom (presumably not on accident), then it stands to reason that much of what happens in the classroom has been unconsciously agreed upon before anyone enters the classroom. In a colloquial sense, the instructor may be “preaching to the choir,” which is not necessarily problematic as one of

the characteristics of PRC in small groups is the prerequisite that those participating work toward a common goal (collective intentionality). However, from a qualitative viewpoint, this does not always need to be seen as a problem.

Other problems related to the potential for confirmation bias being operative in the descriptions of PRC in higher education classrooms may be the tendency to romanticize, anthropomorphize, or reify one's experience. The tendency to romanticize one's experience is prevalent in transpersonal psychology and is particularly so in experiences that are generally positive, inspiring, and transformative (see Friedman, 2005, 2009)—qualities present in the experience of PRC.

Troubling and problematic group phenomena, though not explicitly addressed in this study, are of potential concern to understanding PRC. For example, *groupthink*—“the mode of thinking that persons engage in when *concurrency-seeking* becomes so dominant in a cohesive ingroup that it tends to override realistic appraisal of alternative courses of action” (Janis, 1971, p. 43; also see Janis, 1972), may be an important consideration given that PRC is a experience where participants come with an intention to collaborate.

Similarly, the phenomenon of *emotional contagion*—“a process in which a person or group influences the emotions or behavior of another person or group through the conscious or unconscious induction of emotion states and behavioral attitudes” (Schoenewolf, 1990, p. 50; also see Barsade, 2002; Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1993; Kelly & Barsade, 2001); *mobbing*—bullying or abuse of an individual by a group (see Davenport, Schwartz, & Elliott, 2005); *collective narcissism*—“an in-group identification tied to an emotional investment in an unrealistic belief about the unparalleled greatness of an ingroup” (Golec de Zavala, Chiocka, Eidelson, & Jayawickreme, 2009, p. 1074), and other such behavior exhibited by groups attest to the reality that not all group phenomena is positive or healthy. More importantly, group phenomena are powerful reminders of

the complex ways in which individuals can be deceived, misled, or otherwise caught in a shared perception that is not shared beyond the group itself. This fact is especially important to keep in one's frame of reference when coming to understand the descriptions of PRC—as a positive, inspiring, and transformative experience—presented in this study.

### Conclusion

Intersubjectivity is a theoretical way of describing a fundamental aspect of the social world. It represents an essential “building block” of what it means to be in the world and what it means to be in relation to others. As such, it is fundamental to understanding the richness and relevance of the experience of PRC.

Since PRC is situated in the classroom in this study, this review has presented some key examples that relate to PRC in the higher education classroom context, which supports the existence of PRC as a lived experience. The primary examples cited include Bache's (2008) experiences with teaching and collective consciousness and Osterhold et al.'s (2007) cooperative inquiry in a transformative education classroom. Key themes from Husserl's phenomenology of intersubjectivity that bear relevance to the phenomenological project proposed in this dissertation were introduced. After covering these themes, Husserlian phenomenological philosophy was bridged with the contemporary applied research approaches of somatic phenomenology and its use of specific frameworks and techniques from neurophenomenology and somatics. Finally, some of the participatory philosophy relevant to this study was discussed in an effort to provide other contexts outside of higher education classrooms and phenomenology. As the key sources for participatory philosophy within transpersonal psychology, there was a review of Buber's (1996, 2006) philosophical anthropology of the between; Bohmian dialogue (Bohm, 2008); Heron and Lahood's (2007) experience and theory of relational spirituality; Reason's (1998) support for participative inquiry; Ferrer's (2002, 2009) theory of participatory spirituality as the true heart of spiritual

experience; Hart's (2000) discussion of the experience of deep empathy in therapeutic contexts; Stolorow and Atwood's (2002; Stolorow, Atwood, & Branchaft, 1994) intersubjectivity theory in psychoanalytic work; Kurt Lewin's (1951) field theory; Judith Blackstone's (2007) transsubjective field; Surowiecki's (2004) wisdom of crowds; social constructionism; Moscovici's (2001) social representations; shared reality as presented by Echterhoff, Higgins, and Levine (2009); collective consciousness as presented by Kay Mathiesen (2005); socially distributed cognition (A. L. Brown et al., 1997; Hutchins, 2000); the critique of field theory represented by Allport (1927); transcendental meditation and crime reduction (Hagelin et al., 1999); and a discussion of confirmation bias and other potential problems associated with groups.

Given all of the convergences given in this chapter related to the experience of PRC or PRC-like phenomena, there still remain many areas potentially relevant but intentionally beyond the boundaries of this dissertation. A few examples included the areas concerned with corporate personhood (the literature on corporations as possessing characteristics of individual persons; see Hartmann, 2010), animal behavior (e.g., bee hives exhibiting coordinated behavior that has been interpreted as evidence of group consciousness; see Bloom, 2000; Seeley, 2010; E. O. Wilson 1971, 2009), the broad field of artificial intelligence (AI; see Dennett, 1992; Dreyfus, 1999; Nillson, 2010), and transhumanism (the cultural movement and theory to support the use of technology to enhance or transcend the limitations of the human body; see Hansell & Grassie, 2011). These examples possess potential points of correlation to PRC and PRC-like experiences but they have not been included in the review of literature because they represent areas that lie beyond the boundaries of the phenomenological psychology explored in this study.

PRC can be conceptualized as a group state; yet, this study has gathered phenomenological data to both ascertain the usefulness of this construct (PRC as group state) as well as to describe this hypothetical phenomenon. As such it is different from notions of corporate personhood and the

behavior of bees, neither of which refer to states of consciousness or phenomenological description. Similarly, collective consciousness as society wide states has a long pedigree, in sociology, under the aegis of Emile Durkheim (1995), who supported the notion that such society wide states were inducible and attainable via collective representations (see also Hunt, 2009 for a discussion of Durkheim in relation to transpersonal psychology).

None of the studies or theories covered in this literature review explicitly connects phenomenological inquiry with PRC or PRC-like phenomena in the classroom (cf. generally, the symbolic anthropology of Clifford Geertz, 1973, which borrowed phenomenological terminology from Alfred Schutz, closely approximates the aims of this study. However, Geertz did not explicitly study PRC-like phenomena in classrooms). This research fills this gap by researching PRC in the classroom using a contemporary phenomenological method of inquiry. To date, the phenomenon of PRC lacks adequate consensus regarding terminology and definitions. Not only this, but PRC has not been treated in light of contemporary research whilst taking a phenomenological approach. The research outlined in the following chapters fills this gap. The specific method and design of this research project is detailed in the following section.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODS

This study used somatic phenomenology in the context of Giorgi's approach to phenomenological psychology to inquire into the experience of participatory reality constitution (PRC) in higher education classrooms from the perspective of teachers and students. A rich, state-specific description of the lived experience of PRC was developed from interviewing 9 ( $N = 9$ ) co-participants through an online screening questionnaire, an individual screening interview, an in-depth semi-structured individual interview, and a half-day group workshop with 6 of the 9 co-participants.

### The Overall Approach and Design of the Research

#### *Rationale and Approach*

This study employed methodological procedures and guidelines for an eidetic scientific method taken from (a) Giorgi's (2009) scientific phenomenological psychological method (i.e., his structural procedures for the concrete execution of the method); (b) specific aspects of Varela's (1996) neurophenomenology (NP); and (c) Hartelius' (2007) proposal for a somatically based, quantitatively informed somatic phenomenology (SP)—a methodological implementation of Tart's (1972, 2000) proposal for state-specific science, where state of consciousness is defined, regulated, and monitored as an attention posture: a specific situatedness of the body-located sense of self (Hartelius, 2007). The interview phase, relied generally on guidelines from (d) Kvale (1983), Kvale and Brinkmann's (2009), and Irving Seidman's (2006) instructions and insights for conducting qualitative interviews, and (e) the dialogal phenomenological approach (Halling & Leifer, 1991; Halling, Leifer, & Rowe, 2006; Strasser, 1969). Dialogal phenomenology applies the same principles and techniques used in phenomenological psychological approaches but uses group work with individuals who are trained in phenomenology to explore a topic or question (see also Rowe &

Halling, 1998; Sayre, Lambo, & Navarre, 2006). It is for this reason that the results of the group interview were validly compared with those of the individual interviews.

The inquiry process incorporated—for the half-day group workshop—a somatically based method of controlling the state of consciousness (SoC) of both researcher and co-participants called the Gesture of Phenomenological Reduction (GPhR) as coined by Depraz et al. (2000) and further specified by Hartelius (2007) as a particular attention posture. For the half-day group workshop, the researcher and his chair attempted to

1. Lead the co-researcher into a similar state as evidenced by a specific attention posture,
2. monitor the co-researcher's attention posture (a) by attending to self-report from the co-participant, or (b) by attending to the space through felt-sense observation,
3. monitor the researcher's own attention posture,
4. actively seek out the qualitative elements of the lived experience of PRC, and
5. notice and record any discernible quantitative properties of those qualitative elements such as spatial dimension, duration, location, and movement dynamic relative to the physical body.

The researcher combined the individual interview reports from each of the co-participants following the procedures and steps following the guidelines of the scientific phenomenological method (Giorgi, 2009). The analysis of the in-depth interviews (the second, individual interviews and the group interviews)—which followed specific steps as outlined in Giorgi's scientific phenomenological method—was conducted from within the GPhR as well as drew on both a natural and a theoretical attitude (Husserl, 1970, 1993). This multiple-states approach was also employed during the interpretation and discussion phases of research (Chapter 5).

One of the purposes of this research was to establish a reliable and scientifically valid foundation for the understanding of the experience of PRC within a precisely defined method and

frame of meaning. Without such a foundation, PRC in any context is subject to relative meanings created by the paradigms and methods used by different researchers, typically without identified controls on the SoC. In subtle phenomena such as PRC, failure to adequately disclose and control for SoC may create results from different researchers that are at too great variance with each other. In phenomenology, “the phenomenologist approaches such situations [replicability in research] in terms of discovering an essence—or invariant structure—that can comprehend multiple situations” (Giorgi, 2009, p. 84). This study does not presume that essential structures are necessarily invariant but that they are forward moving processes with characteristics that can be generalized only based on the particular contexts in which they reside. The pursuit of a reliable meaning structure from which to base subsequent research is one of the main goals of an eidetic science, which this research models itself on.

### *Eidos*

*Eidos* is a Greek concept with roots in Aristotelian thought, adopted by Husserl, which means, roughly, essence. An eidetic science—which much of Husserl’s phenomenology aspires to be—is concerned with determining the invariant structures (i.e., essential structures) of phenomena (cf. Husserl, 1993; Kockelmans, 1994; Ricoeur, 1999). By carrying out eidetic analysis through what Husserl called the epoché—that is, the transcendental reduction (Husserl, 1970, 1982), imaginative variation, and other methods such as sensitivity to *durée*, the use of the second reduction—the psychological phenomenological reduction (Giorgi, 2009; Kockelmans, 1987), and horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994), one can arrive at what he called apodictic truths, or truths that can be seen to be necessary: “Apodicticity characterizes what is primary. It is that to which all mediate evidence refers, viz., the inconceivability of the non-being of the evident thing or state of affairs” (Ricoeur, 1999, p. 86).

These invariant structures refer to the fundamental meaning unit of a particular phenomenon. It is the eidetic core of a particular lived experience and is one of the goals of phenomenological analysis. Some experiences may not have merely one essential structure but several essential structures. Husserl's notion of invariant structures and apodictic truths may overstate the case since the study proposed does not assume that universal invariant structures in the classical, Husserlian sense can be achieved. However, it does point toward the usefulness of recognizing regularities in various instances of what has come to be defined as a particular phenomenon, in this case, PRC. Discovering these essential structures and regularities requires rigorous and exacting research. Such research, as presented here, is concerned with the discovery of these essential structures of experience as bundled similars from a particular set of lived experiences that lie in the pre-cognitive dimension of one's lived awareness.

There is a tension between Husserl's search for invariant structures, and Gendlin's de-emphasis of structure relative to forward-moving process (cf. Gendlin, 2000b). SP, as initially formulated by Hartelius (2007), draws on the domain of Gendlin's felt sense, and adds to this not so much a quest for invariant structures as an observation of structural regularities that allow a certain set of phenomena to be tentatively classified together and referred to with a descriptive handle (for the use of the term, handle, cf. Gendlin, 1979). This handle then points not at a universal pattern, but rather at a bundle of similars drawn from a pool of lived experience. Because lived experience is always expanding, the bundle of similars refers to an active sorting process that has taken place at a particular moment in time, and also to the fact that this sorting process can and must continue alongside the flow of lived experience (cf. Gendlin, 1991). Therefore, while this research has followed the method of Giorgi's (2009) scientific phenomenology, it holds the essences that were derived from thematic analysis of interviews more as bundled similars from a particular set of lived experiences than as invariant structures. It is through the use of the GPhR as a state-specific

platform of engagement that such bundled similars can be grounded in a “standardized epistemic frame” that is stable and “based on measurable criteria” (Hartelius, 2007, pp. 35-36).

The GPhR is a specific type of phenomenological reduction (cf. Husserl, 2001; Kockelmans, 1994; Russell, 2006) that can best be described, for the typical Westerner, as a “movement of the attention, or self-sensation, from a location in the head to a location in the belly” (Hartelius, 2007, p. 37). The GPhR incorporates the movement from the natural attitude of everyday life—which represents one’s habitual and unthematized way of being and acting in the world—to a phenomenological attitude that is grounded in a bodily way of knowing and experiencing. The natural attitude is a particular way of being in the world that presumes the existence of the world “out there” existing in the same way for all people as our *paramount reality* (Schutz, 1971).

The suspension of the natural attitude through the phenomenological reduction (PhR), in the Husserlian sense, means practicing a shift or *gesture* (Varela & Scharmer, 2000) of awareness where, according to Husserl “one places oneself in the sphere of ‘absolute clear beginnings’ in which one can perceive the things themselves as they are in themselves and independently of any prejudice” (Kockelmans, 1994, p. 14). However, this research, conducted within a post-positivist frame, maintains that there is no such thing as an *absolute clear beginning*. There are always mediated influences on one’s perception. Here the things in themselves are not necessarily objective things but rather transcendent phenomena that are beyond the knower’s usual boundary of self but not independent of the knower. That is, things in themselves transcend and include the knower in the sense that the knower plays an active and participatory role in the determination and construction of how the phenomena are experienced. By shifting into the phenomenological attitude one is able to perceive the phenomena of experience as given to awareness but not free from mediation.

The GPhR is unique as a type of phenomenological reduction because it explicitly draws awareness into an embodied SoC. Based on the results of the pilot study and SP it is being

hypothesized that the experience of PRC by an individual can be more readily described by speaking from an embodied place. Thus, the GPhR is proposed as being a shift in SoC from head-centered ego to an ego whose center of gravity is closer to the lower belly and who ceases to assume that experience of any sort is equivalent with the cognitive categories typically used to contain it.

The phenomenological reduction (PhR) is necessary because in order to make experience analyzable in a rigorous way one needs to suspend everyday assumptions about how the world works in order to thematize the phenomena of experience (cf. Husserl, 1993; Kockelmans, 1994; Marion, 1999; Merleau-Ponty, 2008; Natanson, 1996; Ricoeur, 1999; Sokolowski, 2007; Zahavi, 2003b). This shift in SoC (through the PhR) is necessary because in order to establish a rigorous science of consciousness (Husserl, 1970) it is necessary to establish a means to train researchers to achieve a clearly defined, attainable, and replicable SoC (Varela, 1996) that is both scientific (i.e., subject to the standards of validity and reliability; Giorgi, 2009) and phenomenological (where attention is turned away from habitual reflection and interpretation toward the source of the experience of phenomena; Varela, 1996; cf. Tart, 2000). Thus, since the natural attitude reflects a state of consciousness that is not adequate to the task of a rigorous science of human consciousness, the reduction becomes the means to achieve this goal. This is because the assumptions implied by the naturalistic attitude already presume ways of understanding phenomena that may not be at the heart of experience: “There are prepersonal, subjectively constituted meanings that are of interest to psychology and can be properly understood within the context of subject-world relations without being naturalistic” (Giorgi, 2009, p. 188).

However, the phenomenological method is by no means homogenous. There are a number of other ways of approaching the phenomenological reduction, many of which appear in highly complex philosophical ways. For example, Husserl distinguished between what he called, at different times, the philosophical reduction, the eidetic reduction, the transcendental reduction, the

phenomenological reduction, and the psychological phenomenological reduction, all of which are ambiguously delineated from each other such that it is debatable as to which one is different from or the same as the other (see Kockelmans, 1994; Moran, 2000; Zahavi, 2003b).

Though these various reductions all suspend the natural attitude, none place emphasis on the somatic method used in this research (SP). Since there is no agreement on how to practice the phenomenological reduction (PhR), there are a variety of different ways of describing and practicing the PhR. The GPhR as described by Hartelius (2007) explicitly incorporates a specific and pragmatic means for establishing this SoC in an embodied way by bringing the attention to the body's felt sense and then posturing the body felt sense of self in a particular way, described as an attention posture.

The shift from a natural attitude to a phenomenological SoC occurs in simple steps or “movements” of the attention, or self-sensation, within the body (Hartelius, 2007, pp. 43-45). These steps include: (a) shifting attention from narrative to sensation by gently bringing one's hands to the head by either touching different sides of the head or by cupping one's face in the palms of the hands; (b) then one brings one's attention from a state of dispersion to a state of focus by gently touching one's forehead lightly with one's finger and then pulling it away. One then imagines this spot on the forehead a round marble or as a glowing ember, which gently glows in response to one's inward and outward breath. One imagines the breath coming in and out of this spot; (c) the third movement brings one's attention from anticipation to present-time consciousness. In this movement one imagines the marble or glowing ember to slowly move inward toward the center of the head or the midbrain while keeping the sensation that the movement of the breath causes the ember to glow in response; and (d) the final movement brings the attention from visual space to felt space by visualizing the glowing ember or marble to slowly drop down the front of the spine and behind the organs and to rest in the lower belly. After the attention has been transformed through

these four movements, the attention is then resting in the GPhR and ready to explore PRC. It is crucial that at the end of this process the self-sensation reside in the belly, rather than having the attention remaining in the head and from there merely observing a sensation in the belly. This attention posture is distinguishable from hypnotic induction techniques in that the attention remains focused rather than diffuse, as can be the case with hypnotic states that increase suggestability or dissociation through a diffusion of attention and, concomitantly, a decrease in focused self-sensation.

Like all types of phenomenological reduction, the GPhR represents a specific state of awareness that is atypical of how most people in the West see the world (Hartelius, 2007). However, unlike other forms of the reduction in phenomenology, it places emphasis on “dipping into” (Gendlin, 1995) one’s bodily felt-sense and sustaining presence there, which in turn opens one up to a domain of phenomenological awareness suitable for the exploration of the experience PRC. By doing so, one can establish a relatively stable somatic-epistemic frame, which is one of the main criteria for any science (Hartelius, 2007; Tart, 2000; cf. Varela, 1996).

#### Validity and Reliability

Questions of validity and reliability in phenomenological research are different from traditional (positivistic) empirical methods. The main difference lies in the reframing of what constitutes truth. Objectivity and subjectivity are not as clearly defined due in large part to phenomenology’s emphasis on the experience as it is given to one’s awareness, not on the presumed objective existence of phenomena. Thus, phenomenology assumes a theory of science that is different from that of the rational-empirical scientific point of view that typically drives the inclusion of questions of validity and reliability in research. Giorgi (2009) explained that the validity and reliability of the data obtained from phenomenological analysis is grounded in the fact that the psychologist as researcher is employing an intersubjective attitude to the data. This intersubjective

attitude means that the “researcher is not responding as an individual but as a member of a community whose criticism he or she is well aware will pursue the analysis” (Giorgi, 2009, pp. 133-134).

Another key point to understand about validity in the use of scientific phenomenological psychology is:

To realize that because of the intentionality thesis the meanings intuited by the researcher also transcend his or her consciousness. The meanings are not in consciousness. Consequently it is not as critical to check and see if the same meanings arise in someone else’s consciousness as with empiricism. If the meanings are rather for one’s consciousness, then they can be for another as well. Thus, the intermediary of a judge is not called for. (Giorgi, 1989, p. 84)

The employment of the GPhR in this research answers the question of validity. That is, in using the phenomenological reduction:

No reality claim is being made. Instead, each reader of the research report becomes a critical evaluator of the researcher’s essential intuition. The whole process is more holistic, and different ways of treating the contingency of the empirical are used. Only if these differences are appreciated can the phenomenological alternative be properly evaluated. (Giorgi, 1989, pp. 83-84)

The modified version of the scientific phenomenological psychological method used here retains its scientific status because the problem of researcher bias is answered by the fact that the data of the research is other co-participant’s lived descriptions of an experience—that is, descriptions that are as close as possible to what it was like to be in that experience. That is,

Validity is a temporally unfolding process that possesses a certain quality that happens to an individual. The theory is that if it can happen to one individual, it certainly must be able to take place in another and so each reader is invited to participate in the process. (Giorgi, 1989, p. 84).

## Research Design

### *Overview*

Four main steps were conducted in this research. These steps included (a) an online questionnaire to establish the participant pool; an initial screening interview of 20 to 30 minutes with

respondents, resulting in the selection of nine individuals as co-participants; the use of SP (in the context of Giorgi's Scientific Phenomenology) and the GPhR in the conducting of 9 ( $N = 9$ ) in-depth, semi-structured individual interviews; and one half-day group workshop; (b) the analysis of the interview transcripts (data); (c) the establishment of essential meaning units, constituent themes, and the essential structure(s) followed by (d) presentation (Chapter 4) and discussion (Chapter 5) of the results.

Concrete descriptions (i.e., via the nine in-depth interviews and the half-day workshop) of the experience of PRC were collected. Each of these interviews is presented in a descriptive fashion and exhibited through examples in Chapter 4. The GPhR was used during the conducting, transcribing, and analysis of the interviews by the researcher in the attempt to establish a reliable frame of reference.

A simple body-based technique for getting co-participants to enter the GPhR was used in the first half of the half-day group interview/workshop. Both the co-participants and the researcher—with the guidance of the dissertation Chairperson as a cofacilitator and auditor to monitor for SoC—was utilized to establish this epistemic frame of reference (the GPhR) to control for SoC and to access the unique qualities of the experience of PRC. To monitor and confirm that each co-participant was in the specific SoC that is the GPhR the researcher utilized one or both of the following techniques (as needed): (a) self-report: asked the co-participant to describe what they are feeling and experiencing and then judging if they are in the GPhR based on what is known about this SoC; and (b) felt sense observation of the co-participant's felt sense processes (Hartelius, 2007) in order to confirm and corroborate, or challenge, the co-participant's report.

The transcendental phenomenological reduction as articulated by Husserl was not employed, but, rather, a type of reduction—the GPhR—that is not only standardizable but that is also operationalizable in both “abstract concepts and qualia, but also in terms of somatic quanta within

felt space” (Hartelius, 2007, p. 35). The explicit attention to somatic felt space is a unique modification of the more common approach taken by other forms of phenomenology, especially Giorgi’s scientific phenomenological psychology, which focuses on perception and visual space.

Each interview was transcribed separately. The order of the interviews (as they were conducted and as they were written-up) was based on convenience. That is, each interview was conducted based upon the logistics of meeting times and availability. Each participant was given the requisite informed consent and release forms before the interview (Appendices B and C). The researcher made sure that the identities of co-participants were protected based upon the recommendations of the ethics review committee (REC) and the dissertation Chairperson.

Confidentiality of co-participants includes: (a) the assigning of fictitious names used on all transcripts and recordings (pseudonyms); (b) all recordings and electronic transcripts were secured on the researcher’s personal password-protected laptop computer which was secured in the researcher’s private home office; (c) all audio recordings and transcripts were backed-up onto a password-protected remote server; (d) all paper copies of transcripts were secured in a locked-filing cabinet in the researcher’s home office; (e) only the primary researcher and, if needed, the dissertation committee, had access to the passwords and filing cabinet keys; and (f) all co-participants, transcribers, and the dissertation Chairperson acting as auditor were required to sign a confidentiality agreement form before the recording or conducting of interviews; and (g) co-participants were asked after the interview if they wished to receive a copy of the transcript of their own interview and/or receive the results of the research. If a co-participant wished to review and edit their transcripts from one or both the individual interview and the group interview, that co-participant had 1 week per transcript to review and return it to the researcher. Each co-participant was informed about his or her options regarding privacy and non-disclosure (see Appendix B).

Transcribed interviews are presented in summarized form, based on constituent themes, and the interviews are organized in a clear and meaningful way in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 moves into a rich discussion of the descriptions provided in Chapter 4. This last and final phase is where an interpretive exploration (exegetical reflection) of PRC was conducted in relation to the literature review and the results. From this, logical connections to other key themes and contexts as they revealed themselves through the process of “dipping” (Gendlin, 1995), interpretation, and explication, are presented. Here, dipping refers to the process of bringing one’s attention to one’s bodily felt sense so that one moves away from the realm of logical forms to one’s understanding as it is felt in the body in the moment (Gendlin, 1995).

#### *Sample (Co-Participants)*

This research project used criterion sampling (Creswell, 2007). The researcher conducted three interviews for each co-participant that met the criteria: The first interview was a 20 to 30 minute screening interview, the second was a 60 to 90 minute in-depth interview, and the third interview was a half-day group workshop/interview co-facilitated by the researcher and the dissertation Chairperson (the results of the interview process are presented in Chapter 4). Each interview focused on the phenomenology of co-participant experiences of being in a higher education classroom where PRC or PRC-like phenomena occurred. The purpose of the individual interviews was to gather the participants’ naïve descriptions of such experiences and the purpose of the group interview was to intentionally “saturate” the group process by openly discussing all possible meanings and experiences related to PRC.

After the initial interviews were conducted, the six ( $n = 6$ ) co-participants came together as a group and participated in a half-day group workshop of approximately three hours’ duration. The half-day workshop was conducted using principles and techniques inspired by the dialogal phenomenological approach (Halling & Leifer, 1991; Halling et al., 2006; Strasser, 1969; cf. Rowe &

Halling, 1998; Sayre et al., 2006)—which employs small group dialogue as a means to explore a question or topic.

In the workshop the researcher presented the conceptual framework of PRC in higher education classrooms in the language of somatic phenomenology (SP) and previous research, (i.e., through constructs that reflect a somatic frame of reference as well as examples from the literature presented in Chapter 2). The dissertation Chairperson then guided the co-participants through an experiential induction into the GPhR as described by Hartelius (2007), and introduced an experience of PRC as modeled in SP. The researcher then asked co-participants to reflect on similarities and differences between the SP modeling of PRC and their previously described experiences in the classroom in a dialogal fashion. The group conversation was recorded, transcribed, and analyzed in the same manner as the individual interviews. The total time requirement for all interviews for each co-participant was about 4.5 to 5 hours plus at least 1 week for an optional review and edit of two transcripts.

The sample of 6 to 9 co-participants is based on guidelines for conducting phenomenological psychological research (Creswell, 2007; Giorgi, 2009; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). The pilot study that was conducted suggested that PRC in higher education classrooms was difficult to describe. Based on this, a sample size of 6 to 9—with two interviews, and a group workshop—was used as a minimum number based on the in-depth nature of the phenomenological research proposed here (see Creswell, 2007). The sample size of 6 to 9 co-participants is based on phenomenological research guidelines which state that the average for such research may use anywhere between 3 and 10 co-participants (Creswell, 2007; Giorgi, 2009).

## Data Collection Procedures

### *Online Questionnaire*

An online questionnaire containing five questions was created and used (see Appendix H). The online questionnaire served as a means to draw from a larger pool of potential co-participants without using leading terms and concepts that would narrow the frame of reference only to those who might identify with the language and frame of the researcher. In other words, the use of the terms “positive,” and “inspiring” to attract potential co-participants were determined to be sufficiently broad enough in their scope so as to not unduly limit the findings, and sufficiently non-specific so as not to suggest to co-participants the concepts of the researcher. This process is further illustrated in Chapter 4.

The online questionnaire began with a short introductory paragraph and followed with the first question (Q1) which was: “Please describe, in as much detail as possible, any positive and inspiring experiences you had in an undergraduate or graduate classroom. Please use descriptive terms that reflect actual experiences that you have had in a higher education classroom.” The questions that followed asked (Q2) whether the co-participant had at least one year of graduate school, (Q3) whether or not they lived in the San Francisco Bay Area, and if they did, (Q4) what part of the Bay Area. Questions 5 (Q5) asked: “If selected for this study, would you be open to participating in a 60 to 90 minute, in-person interview (“at a location convenient to you”) and a free half-day workshop/group interview (“date and site TBD”), both to go into greater detail concerning your inspiring experiences in classrooms?” After answering these questions, potential co-participants were provided space for them to leave their email address, phone number (optional), and name (optional). There was also optional space for respondents to leave any comments or other information that may have been helpful.

The questionnaire was distributed both electronically and as a paper flyer at various higher education institutions in the San Francisco Bay Area including the Graduate Theological Union, UC Berkeley, the University of San Francisco, The Wright Institute, Holy Names University, Mills College, Saybrook University, Meridian University, and the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology. The researcher analyzed the results of the survey using the GPhR paying special attention to the qualitative descriptions provided in Q1. If the responses reflected an experience or series of experiences that fit with what the researcher knew about the experience of PRC in a classroom at the time and that respondent met the basic criteria for the study, the researcher then contacted that person via email and asked them if they would be interested in participating in a 20-30 minute screening interview over the phone.

#### *Screening Interviews*

Each potential co-participant was selected during the initial 20 to 30 minute screening interview in which the participant responded to the query, "Please tell me about any inspirational experiences you may have had in the graduate classroom context." Co-participants were selected based upon specific criteria that included: (a) responding to the interview question with reports that describe experiences in a higher education classroom context that were positive and inspiring experiences that include resonance, presence, a felt shift in the room, shared space, timelessness, transrationality, and transcendence of self in the company of others. Other requisite criteria included (b) having had at least 1 year of graduate school; (c) able to conduct one in-depth interview and one half-day group workshop with the other co-participants.

The screening interviews were conducted via telephone and in a non-leading and open-ended manner. During these first interviews, the researcher wrote down the co-participant's PRC-related phrases and terminology and used this terminology for cueing in the second, semi-structured, in-depth interview (so as to rely on their words and terms rather than the researcher's).

*Semi-Structured Individual Interviews*

The collection of data was conducted through the conducting and recording of semi-structured individual interviews with 9 ( $N = 9$ ) co-participants. Each interview was 60 to 90 minutes in length, and conducted in person at a comfortable, convenient, neutral location suitable to this type of interview. All in-depth interviews were audio recorded. All voice recordings were secured on the hard-drive of the primary researcher's password-protected personal laptop computer. All interview material was also backed-up on a remote server using a personal password-protected storage account. Once the interviews were transcribed into physical print copies (on paper) they were secured in a locked filing cabinet in the primary researcher's home office. The researcher was the only person to have access to the remote server password or the key for the filing cabinet.

The structure of each in-depth 60 to 90 minute interview was based on an active receptivity to openness in an attempt to bracket as much of the primary researcher's preconceived notions and assumptions about the nature of the experience. This openness was also guided by questions that explicitly sought to keep the interviewee focused on their lived experience of PRC. These questions were based on the relevant terminology and phrases that were written down during the first interview. The researcher repeated the relevant terminology and phrases to the co-participant so as to provide non-leading cues that directed the co-participant to the phenomenon of PRC in higher education classrooms.

The primary researcher's attitude was one of openness and receptivity to the unique way which the co-participant chose to describe their experience. Guiding questions were asked only in the event that the co-participant diverged from the lived recollection of the phenomenon or if the co-participant found it difficult to understand or respond to the primary researcher's open-ended, guiding questions, and, insofar as possible, framed the phenomena within the language that had been uttered by the co-participant (so as to avoid confirmation bias).

### *Group Interview*

The third interview phase was a single, half-day group workshop, which was 3 hours in length. Each co-participant who participated in the second research phase (the semi-structured individual interviews) was asked to participate in this group process. Six of the original nine co-participants took part in the group interview.

During this group phase, the researcher presented his conceptual framework for describing PRC and co-participants were led in a somatic group process designed to evoke the experience of PRC as modeled in SP. Co-participants were then asked to compare and contrast their experience of PRC as modeled in SP with their previous PRC-related experiences in higher education classrooms. They were also asked about how useful SP—via the somatic exercise lead by the Chairperson—is in the re-construction of experiences of PRC, and other related questions exploring and deepening the meanings that arose around PRC in higher education classrooms.

Examples of guiding questions included: “Tell me about your experience with PRC.” “What has been your experience?” “What was it about your experience that made it feel that way?” “What was the quality of connection with the people in the room?” “How much space did the quality of connection take up relative to the size of the room?” “Can you locate the feeling in or near your body when this happened?” and “If you can locate the feeling in your body can you describe it in spatial terms such as size, shape, and location?”

The completion of all steps of the research process (e.g., interview, transcription, establishment of meaning units, etc.) was done by the researcher with the assistance of an auditor (the Chairperson) being present in the group interview, a professional transcriber and qualitative software (to assist with transcription), was used at select times.

## Timeline

All of the above phases were completed within 7 months from the time the proposal was approved. After approval, the proposal was immediately submitted to the dissertation department and the research ethics committee (REC) along with the co-participant forms provided in the Appendices. This phase took between 2 to 3 weeks.

After the ethics committee approved the proposal, research began with the recruitment, selection, and scheduling of interview participants. The time for approaching, scheduling, and sending out the online questionnaire and all three interview phases (initial screening interview, in-depth individual interviews, and the half-day group interview) took 7 months and depended on the availability of each co-participant, arrangement of places to meet, and a variety of extraneous factors.

Transcription of interviews commenced immediately after each interview was conducted. This process took the entire 7 months to complete in its entirety. Both the conducting of the interviews and the transcriptions of the interviews overlapped to a significant extent. This overlap of conducting interviews while transcribing previous interviews was done in an effort to keep the project moving in a timely fashion. Despite this effort, this phase of the research took the maximum amount of time originally proposed (5 to 7 months) mainly due to the changes in the wording of the recruitment flyer (several weeks of recruitment needed to be dropped) and the addition of the questionnaire (which had to go through the REC).

As each transcription was completed for both the individual and the group interviews they were (optionally) given back to the respective co-participant along with the co-participant thank-you letter provided in Appendix D (each co-participant received the transcript from their in-depth interview and the group interview at the same time). If opted, the co-participants were free to check both transcripts for accuracy in meaning. If editing was needed, each co-participant was then asked to return their respective transcript within 1 week from the time it was given to them. The total time

each co-participant took in the overall study was 4.5 to 5 hours plus 1 week to review and edit transcripts, depending on whether or not the co-participant was present for the group interview.

After the interviews were conducted and transcribed they were then organized and analyzed as a whole. The researcher followed the same guidelines used in the pilot study (Giorgi, 2009): (a) read for the sense of the whole, (b) determine the meaning units, (c) transform co-participants natural attitude expressions into phenomenologically psychological sensitive expressions, and (d) the writing of the general situated structure which took 7 weeks (nearly 2 months) to complete. The collection, preparation, and analysis of the data were conducted with a significant amount of overlap, depending on what could be completed at any given time. The exceptions, as noted, is in regard to (a) the group interview, which had to be conducted after each individual interview, and (b) the final comparative analysis of both datasets and the final general situated structure, which had to be conducted after all of the above steps were completed.

After the establishment of the general situated structure the researcher holistically continued to build-up the literature review, make sure that Chapters 1 through 3 were consistent and complete, write Chapter 4 (Results), and the final, interpretive discussion contained in Chapter 5. The final stage (Chapter 5) took roughly 2 weeks to complete. In sum—from the initial forays of proposal phase to the submission of the final draft—the entire research project was completed in nearly three years time.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

### Data Collection

Early in the data collection process, a recruitment flyer was created and distributed. The call for participants was distributed via online sources, email, and by paper to college and university campuses throughout the San Francisco Bay Area. Efforts were directed to universities and colleges in the city of San Francisco, the East Bay area (Berkeley and Oakland), and a few schools in the North Bay area of Marin County.

During the first round of recruiting, there was success in making contact with interested students from the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) in San Francisco. Four potential co-participants from CIIS were interviewed and there were two more scheduled for an interview before it came to the researcher's attention that the language (the terms "presence" and "resonance") that had been used in the recruitment material had been deemed to be too leading by the committee and that changes in the wording of the flyer needed to be made. The initial four interviews conducted were not used in the study. This was a researcher error and was corrected through the rewriting of the recruitment material and starting over with the pool of potential co-participants.

Use of the constructs "presence" and "resonance" were too suggestive and, thus, needed to be changed to reflect a more generalized and less leading recruiting style. This was a problem because, as stated in Chapter 1 (Introduction), there were no commonly agreed upon terms to describe the phenomenon; thus, the specialized term *participatory reality constitution* (PRC) was created and used. The use of the specialized term, PRC, would not have made any sense to prospective co-participants and, therefore, doing so would have been counterproductive. Thus, the concern of not being specific enough regarding the phenomenon is discussed further in Chapter 5.

Changes were made to the wording of the recruitment flyer by eliminating the two leading terms, *presence* and *resonance*. These terms were substituted with two more generalized terms *positive*

and *inspiring* to describe one's experience in a higher education classroom. Thus, potential co-participants were asked if they had a "positive and inspiring experience in a higher-education classroom." Also, in an effort to provide added incentive, the flyer mentioned that a \$20 gift certificate to a local bookstore in Berkeley would be offered to any potential co-participant who completed the study.

A questionnaire (see Appendix H) was also added to the study, which originally had not been proposed (see Chapter 3). This questionnaire was designed to assist with the screening process and to narrow the potential pool of interested individuals while, at the same time, potentially reaching a larger audience more willing to commit to a brief questionnaire rather than a phone interview. After the questionnaire was approved, a simple, five-question, online questionnaire using Survey Monkey (<http://www.surveymonkey.com>) was created.

Efforts were targeted to online groups such as those found on Facebook and other social networking sites, e-mail listservs (after being granted permission by group administrators), or via paper flyer to these institutions of higher learning: various schools at the Graduate Theological Union including the Pacific School of Religion, the Starr King School for the Ministry, Church Divinity School of the Pacific, the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology, the Franciscan School of Theology, and the Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University in Berkeley. Additionally, other institutions were contacted such as Holy Names University in Oakland, Mills College in Oakland, the Mills College School of Education, Meridian University in Petaluma, Saybrook University in San Francisco, the School of Education at the University of San Francisco, and specific departments at the University of California, Berkeley including those in Education, Rhetoric, Art, Environmental Design (Architecture), Anthropology, Music, Psychology, and Theater, Dance and Performing Studies.

Twenty-six individuals responded to the questionnaire and 25 completed it in its entirety. Of these 25, individuals who met the basic criteria were selected and contacted via the e-mails they provided at the end of the questionnaire. Most of these individuals agreed to the 20 to 30 minute screening interview via phone and the final number of co-participants who agreed to meet for the 60 to 90 minute face-to-face individual interview came to 12. The interviews were conducted and of these 12, 9 ( $N = 9$ ) were selected to continue with the study and were asked to return for the group interview. Of these 9, 6 ( $n = 6$ ) participated in the group interview.

#### *Demographic Information*

Data were collected from 9 ( $N = 9$ ) co-participants: 6 women and 3 men. Each of the co-participants met the basic criteria for participation in the study including (a) currently living in or near the San Francisco Bay Area, (b) having had at least 1 year of graduate school, and (c) willing to describe their experience in detail. After conducting the online questionnaire and the screening interviews, each of the 9 co-participants agreed to the terms of the informed consent before their individual interview and was given a basic demographic form (Appendix I) to fill out.

The co-participants were between the ages of 22 and 55. Three of the women identified as either African American ( $n = 2$ ) or Black American ( $n = 1$ ), 1 woman and 1 man identified as Hispanic ( $n = 2$ ), 1 man identified as Caucasian Jewish ( $n = 1$ ), and 1 woman and 1 man identified as White ( $n = 2$ ).

The co-participants were also asked to identify their current occupation. One ( $n = 1$ ) person identified as a “student and a teacher,” 1 ( $n = 1$ ) as an “office administrator in human resources,” 1 ( $n = 1$ ) as a “psychotherapist/researcher,” 4 ( $n = 4$ ) identified as graduate students (either “grad student,” “doctoral student/teacher,” or “doctoral student/school psychologist”), and 2 ( $n = 2$ ) identified as either a “teacher” or a “professor.” However, when interviewed, each of the co-participants ( $n = 8$ ) primarily gave descriptions of their experiences from the perspective of being

a student with the exception of 1 ( $n = 1$ ) co-participant who primarily spoke from the perspective of being a professor.

The combined educational affiliations of the co-participants at the time of the interviews included (in order of frequency and relevance to interviewees), the University of California, Berkeley (primarily the Department of Education and the Department of Psychology), the University of San Francisco (School of Education), Dominican University (San Rafael, CA), the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology (Palo Alto, CA), Reed College (Portland, OR), The Evergreen State College (Olympia, WA), The Starr King School for the Ministry at The Graduate Theological Union (Berkeley), the University of Southern California (Los Angeles, CA), and Case Western Reserve University (Cleveland, OH).

An optional question concerning the co-participant's spiritual or religious background was included. All but 1 co-participant ( $n = 8$ ) answered as: Baptist ( $n = 1$ ), "raised Catholic but now open" ( $n = 1$ ), "Buddhist Mystic" ( $n = 1$ ), Jewish ( $n = 1$ ), Unitarian Universalist ( $n = 1$ ), Christian-Pentecostal ( $n = 1$ ), "none" ( $n = 1$ ), and "Agnostic/Yuruba" ( $n = 1$ ).

Table 1

*Co-Participant Demographics*

Name/ pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity	Occupation	Highest/ current education	Spiritual/ religious orientation
Chelsea	22	African American	Student/ teacher	BA, grad student	Baptist
Jasmine	23	Hispanic	Office admin, human resources	BA, MA student	“Raised Catholic, open to other religions”
Solomon	26	Caucasian/ Jewish	Psychotherapist/ researcher	Ph.D.	Buddhist-Mystic
Edith	28	White	Graduate student	BA, Ph.D. student	Jewish
Elizabeth	32	Black American	Doctoral student/ teacher	MS Ed.	Christian- Pentecostal
Jared	32	White	Graduate student	Pursuing M.Div	Unitarian Universalist
Barb	33	White	School psychologist/ doctoral student	MA, Ph.D. student	None
Chuck	44	Hispanic	Teacher	MA Student	None
Meredith	55	African American	Professor	Ph.D., pursuing 2nd Ph.D.	Agnostic/ Yuruba

*Note.* There were 6 female participants and 3 male participants.

### *Location of Interviews*

Each of the individual interviews was conducted in a neutral place conducive to an in-depth, semi-structured interview. Six ( $n = 6$ ) of the 9 co-participants agreed to meet for the group interview. The group interview was held on the University of California, Berkeley's main campus in a small, private room in the Student Union. Of these 6 co-participants, there were 4 ( $n = 4$ ) women and 2 ( $n = 2$ ) men.

### Treatment of the Data: Data Analysis

The treatment of the data entailed techniques used in descriptive phenomenological analysis modeled on Giorgi (2009), Hartelius (2007), Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), Seidman (2006), Varela (1996), and Varela and Scharmer (2000). Each interview (the in-depth individual interviews) was transcribed at different times based upon when the interview was conducted and the timing of the interview in relation to the other interviews. The half-day group interview was conducted and transcribed after each in-depth interview was completed.

The researcher continued this process until all interviews were transcribed in both print and electronic document format. Any transcription of materials not conducted by the researcher was conducted only after the transcriber signed a Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement (Appendix D). Before the researcher commenced with the analysis of the data, each co-participant was given the option to review and edit his or her respective individual-interview transcript as well as the final group-interview transcript. If opted, the co-participants were given at least 1 week to read and return any changes made in their transcripts. They were given the option to obtain copies of both the transcript from their individual interview as well as from the group interview. In the case of the latter, the co-participant had the option of making changes to what they said but not to what other co-participants said. The estimated amount of time each co-participant needed for this process was around 1.5 hours or less.

The researcher then proceeded to read all of the interviews to gain a sense of the whole. This initial reading was done to orient to the data and to get a better sense of the data from a more intuitive perspective. At this stage, the researcher did not focus on specifics or detailed readings.

Data analysis of the two datasets—(a) the 2nd in-depth individual interviews, and (b) the group interview. This entailed the use of four basic steps followed by exegetical reflection and discussion: (a) read for the sense of the whole, (b) determination of meaning units, (c) transformation of co-participants natural attitude expressions into phenomenologically sensitive expressions, and (d) the writing of the general situated structure from constituent themes (Giorgi, 2009).

The two datasets were kept separate throughout the analysis and then combined only during the establishment of the final general situated structure. Both data sets, complete with constituent themes, examples from the transcripts, and the general structure(s), are presented in the following pages and then compared and contrasted in the discussion in Chapter 5. The comparison in Chapter 5 examines (a) similarities and differences between the two datasets, (b) co-participants' report of similarities and differences between the two experiences reflected by the two datasets, (c) co-participants' evaluation of the usefulness of the concept of PRC in the group interview, and (d) discussion of the final general situated structure based on both datasets.

#### *Read for the Sense of the Whole*

This first phase of the research was conducted from the Gesture of Phenomenological Reduction (GPhR). This means that it was not a “mechanical application of frequency count or coding of selected terms” (van Manen, 1990, p. 78); it was, on the other hand, “a free act of ‘seeing’ meaning” (p. 79) without bringing any conscious presuppositions to the process. In reading for the sense of the whole, the researcher paid particular attention to the overall context and scope of the meanings in the transcripts. The researcher focused on what the general sense of what the

description was about (Giorgi, 2009) at the level of psychological reality where one does not “retreat to the highest perspective on consciousness” (p. 98) (the transcendental reduction), but which is “closer to the level of lived reality at which psychologically lived experiences dwell” (p. 98).

#### *Determination of Meaning Units*

The second step entailed the formal analysis of meaning in the descriptions. This step was based on the need to make the descriptions more manageable by breaking the transcript into discrete parts. These parts, or meaning units, were chosen based on any shift in meaning that the researcher perceived as he read the transcript. The selection of the meaning units was essentially arbitrary because this step was based on practical needs and did “not carry any theoretical weight” (Giorgi, 2009, p. 130).

The researcher determined the meaning units by reading through the whole transcript—starting at the beginning—and placing a mark at the place in the text where the researcher perceived a shift in the meaning of the description. As the researcher slowly read through the transcript and determined where the meaning units were, he continued to be sensitive to the psychological meanings inherent in the description (through the GPhR). Each meaning unit was typically, but not always, a few sentences to a paragraph in length.

#### *Transformation of Co-Participants Natural Attitude Expressions*

The third step was the most important step in the analysis of the data and constitutes the heart of the method. In this phase of the research, the researcher sought to transform the co-participant’s natural attitude expressions into psychologically relevant expressions. This step required patience and indwelling with the data (Giorgi, 1985; 2009).

The goal was to achieve a psychologically sensitive unit of meaning that was consistent with the context of the whole transcript without using psychological jargon (i.e., by using natural attitude expressions). To achieve this, the researcher used free imaginative variation “which includes

imagining the opposite of what one might desire to express, until one finds an expression that is suitable. The researcher wrote several versions before achieving the desired expression” (Giorgi, 2009, p. 132). These transformed meaning units provided the basis for the writing of the constituent themes and the situated structure(s).

#### *Writing the General Situated Structure*

The final step in the analysis of the data was to arrive at a general situated meaning structure, based on each dataset. The two structures were compared and contrasted and evaluated for efficacy. The situated structures of (a) the individual interviews, the situated structure of (b) the group interview, and (c) the final situated structure based on all the interviews are not the only goal of the research but represent one of the main objectives.

Each structure was achieved by holistically reading all of the transformed meaning units from all of the transcripts and then trying to aggregate them into one, coherent and psychologically sensitive structure of the experience of PRC. Before this was achieved, each meaning unit was analyzed to establish a list of essential constituent themes. These themes were the foundation for the writing of the situated structures. This required “comparing and contrasting what appear to be the most diverse ones in order to ascertain if they could have come from the same type of experience” (Giorgi, 2009, p. 166) and employing the technique of imaginative variation.

The relationship between the key constituent meanings and themes is the structure and “the key test of a structure is to see if the structure collapses if a key constituent is removed” (Giorgi, 2009, p. 166). The length of the final structure is essentially irrelevant but it is typically one to several paragraphs long. The pilot study presented at the end of this chapter provides 20 key constituent, invariant themes that were used to determine the first attempt at obtaining a general situated structure for PRC.

### *Exegetical Reflection*

In the final step of the data analysis, the constituent themes and the final general situated structures were used to create a more formal connection with the larger body of theoretical and interpretive literature on phenomena related to PRC. This phase was an active employment of hermeneutical (exegetical) reflection and discussion: “The structure is pregnant with implications that have to be spoken to just as a fact is surrounded by a horizon of possibilities, and in phenomenology both implications and possibilities contribute to the clarification of meaning” (Giorgi, 2009, p. 202).

The exegetical approach “may be organized by engaging one’s writing in a dialogical or exegetical fashion with the thinking of some other phenomenological author(s)—in other words, with the tradition of the field” (van Manen, 1990, p. 171). This exegetical approach also:

Treats the works of other authors as incomplete conversational scripts that require a strong reading in order to overcome the limits of those texts . . . While inserting himself or herself in the scholarly human science tradition, the researcher needs to bring to the reflective process his or her personal lived experience as well as other possible experiential sources and material. (van Manen, 1990, p. 172)

Other sources and examples are given to assist in the “fleshing out” of the essential structure and to provide a deep or rich understanding of PRC. This exegetical phase is contained in Chapter 5.

## Data Analysis Results

### *Procedures in the Analysis of the Two Datasets*

After the data were collected, each interview was transcribed and then analyzed. The analysis was conducted using the guidelines and procedures given by Giorgi (1985, 2009), Hartelius (2007), Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), Moustakas (1994), Seidman (2006), and Varela (1996, 2000) with emphasis being placed on Giorgi’s (1985, 2009) guidelines.

Using these guidelines and procedures (as outlined in the previous sections), a process of reducing nearly 200 pages of transcript text (including individual and group interviews), into

constituent themes and essential structures, was conducted. The individual, semi-structured interviews were treated as a separate data set from the group interview. Only in the final step of the analysis were the two data sets compared and combined to create one list of constituent themes and one general situated structure for the experience of PRC.

This process produced these main results from the individual interviews; (a) the establishment of constituent themes for each individual interview, (b) the establishment of a situated structure for each individual interview, (c) the establishment of constituent themes for all of the individual interviews (combined), (d) the establishment of an essential situated structure for all of the individual interviews (combined). For the group interview, similar results were produced, (a) the establishment of constituent themes, and (b) the establishment of an essential situated structure.

Once the themes and structures were obtained from the two data sets—(a) the combined individual interviews, and (b) the group interview—they were then compared and contrasted to determine what themes were consistent throughout all interviews and what themes were different in regard to the individual interviews and the group interview. This resulted in the establishment of disparate themes that only occurred in the individual interviews or only in the group interview as well as themes that both types of interviews had in common. Once the common themes were isolated using imaginative variation, the final general situated structure for the experience of PRC in higher education classrooms—based on all interviews—was established. These levels of themes and structures are outlined and described in the following sections.

#### *Constituent Themes of Individual Interviews*

The constituent themes from all 9 ( $N = 9$ ) of the individual interviews were obtained from analyzing the constituent themes and structures from each interview transcript in the description of inspired PRC. Each of the 32 themes is presented in summarized form; they are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

*Constituent Themes of Individual Interviews*

Number	Constituent themes of individual interviews
1	Intention (a) Intention to transcend particulars/worldviews (e.g., to collaborate)
2	Present-momentness (a) Absorption —via headspace —via heartspace (b) Immersion
3	Rigor/challenge as catalyst/provocation
4	Trust (a) Safety (b) Comfort (c) Vulnerability
5	Authenticity
6	Personal connection (a) Feeling personally seen/seeing (b) Sharing/hearing personal stories
7	Flow/ease/fluidity/effortlessness
8	Emergence/generativity (a) Inherent momentum (b) Self-generating (c) Transformation (d) New perspectives (e) Increasing depth
9	Transcendence of self/being a part of something greater than oneself
10	Transformative/long-term change in identity or goals
11	Desire for more/desire to recreate
12	Love/spirituality

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Number	Constituent themes of individual interviews
13	Intimacy/bonding/emotional openness (a) Being emotionally moved
14	Rare/unusual (a) Complexity (b) Fragility (c) Ineffability of experience
15	Sense of accountability or responsibility
16	Energy/excitement/feeling jazzed
17	Feeling inspired
18	Agency and Communion
19	Openness to experience (a) Of mind
20	Sense of adventure/sense of discovery (a) Spontaneity (b) Unpredictability
21	Awe/wonderment
22	Process over theory/ideas (process-oriented)
23	Somatic sense centered on heart area or solar plexus area.
24	Joy/pleasure/satisfaction/enjoyment (a) Fun (b) Playfulness
25	Like-mindedness
26	Long-term bonding/relationships beyond experience
27	Insight (a) Lucidity/clarity
28	Real-world focus/applied/pragmatic relevance

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Number	Constituent themes of individual interviews
29	Gratitude
30	Positive regard (a) Respect for other(s)
31	Complexity/ineffability/subtlety/fragility
32	Shift in emotional tone

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*Constituent Themes of Group Interview*

Each of the following 25 constituent themes established from the group interview are presented in summarized form in Table 3.

Table 3

*Constituent Themes of Group Interview*

Number	Constituent themes of group interview
1	Headspace (a) Acute mental clarity/lucidity of awareness (b) Ideas
2	Heartspace (a) Flow —Absorption/immersion (b) Emotions, pathos, empathy (c) Generalized awareness
3	Present-moment awareness
4	Lucidity of awareness/heightened awareness (a) Either headspace or heartspace
5	Process-oriented vs. goal-oriented
6	Intention (a) Intention to transcend individual and cultural differences/worldviews (b) Intention to collaborate/participate
7	Rare/unusual/delicate/fragile/uncommon
8	Joyfulness/pleasure
9	Flow/effortlessness/ease
10	Sense of adventure/exploration
11	Excitement
12	Engagement

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Number	Constituent themes of group interview
13	Emergence/generativity: (a) Insight —Individually —Collectively (b) Deepening expansiveness/spaciousness (c) Creation of new meanings/perspectives (d) Self-generation of culture/self-perpetuating beyond individuals (e) Driving force
14	Awe/wonderment
15	Authenticity (a) Pursuit/uncovering of essential truths
16	Trust (a) Vulnerability
17	Personal Connection (a) Sharing of personal stories (b) Feeling personally seen
18	Open-mindedness
19	Transcendence of self (a) Being or becoming into something bigger than oneself
20	Agency and communion
21	Inspiration
22	Nourishment
23	Experience as being owned by or inherently carried within individual
24	Desire for more/desire to recreate
25	Transformative/long-term change in identity or goals

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*Thematic Differences Between Individual Interviews and Group Interview*

The following is a list of the thematic differences between the individual interviews and the group interviews. The first 18 themes are those that were part of the individual interviews but missing from the group interviews. Whereas, the last five themes are those that were missing from the individual interviews.

*Individual interviews (missing from group interview).*

1. Rigor/challenge as catalyst/provocation
2. Safety
3. Comfort
4. Increasing depth
5. Love/spirituality
6. Being emotionally moved
7. Sense of accountability/responsibility to others
8. Somatic sense centered on heart area or solar plexus area
9. Fun
10. Playfulness
11. Like-mindedness
12. Long-term bonding/relationships beyond experience
13. Real-world focus/applied/pragmatic relevance
14. Gratitude
15. Positive regard
  - (a) Respect for other(s)
16. Shift in emotional tone
17. Spontaneity

## 18. Unpredictability

*Group interview (missing from individual interviews).*

1. Engagement
2. Distinction between individual and collective insight
3. Pursuit/uncovering of essential truths
4. Nourishment
5. Experience as owned by or inherently carried within participants

Among the more pertinent themes outlined as being different or not in common were rigor/challenge as catalyst; transformation; love/spirituality; spontaneity; unpredictability; pursuing/uncovering essential truths; and the experience as owned by or inherently carried within participants. These differences were notable because they represent themes that may be generally present in the experience of PRC but were explicitly mentioned in only one of the types of interviews. For example, the theme of experiences of PRC eliciting a sense of love or awareness of one's own spirituality or spiritual practice was explicitly mentioned only in the individual interviews but may have been implicit in the group interview. The possible reasons for this and the discussion of these differences are explored in more detail in Chapter 5.

### *Final Constituent Themes From Both Individual Interviews and Group Interview*

There are 22 final constituent themes from all interviews. Many of these themes contain relevant subthemes. A subtheme is dependent on the main theme it is categorized under. Each subtheme gives a nuance or quality not explicitly contained in the more general theme it is associated with. Many of the themes have significant overlap with other themes but all are considered to be essential and invariant. The 22 final constituent themes of this study are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4

*Final Constituent Themes From All Interviews*

Number	Final constituent themes from all interviews
1	Intention (a) Intention to transcend particulars/worldviews (e.g. to collaborate)
2	Openness to experience (a) Emotional (b) Intellectual
3	Trust (a) Vulnerability
4	Authenticity
5	Personal connection (a) Feeling personally seen (b) Sharing/listening to personal stories
6	Intimacy/bonding (a) Being emotionally moved (b) Empathy
7	Increasing depth of experience (a) Expansiveness/spaciousness
8	Present-momentness (a) Absorption/immersion —Via headspace —Via heartspace (b) Clarity —Focused (intellect) —Generalized (emotion/body)
9	Flow/effortlessness/ease/fluidity
10	Excitement/energy/feeling jazzed
11	Awe/wonderment
12	Sense of adventure/sense of discovery

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Number	Final constituent themes from all interviews
13	Joyfulness/pleasure/satisfaction/enjoyment
14	Emergence/generativity (a) Self-generation of culture/self-perpetuating beyond individuals (b) Creation of new perspectives/insights/worldviews —Individually —Collectively
15	Insight (a) Lucidity/clarity
16	Transcendence of self (a) The sense of being a part of something greater than oneself (b) Being or becoming into something bigger than oneself
17	Rarity/unusualness to experience (a) Complexity (b) Fragility (c) Ineffability of experience
18	Inspiration
19	Agency and Communion
20	Process-oriented (over theories/ideas/content or being goal-oriented)
21	Desire for more/desire to recreate
22	Transformation (a) Long-term change in identity or goals

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## The Constituent Themes

### *Intention*

One of the most consistently reoccurring themes is that of having or developing a strong intention to the experience. Intention can mean many things but in the context of the research findings, having intention primarily refers to the coming into a group situation with the intent to transcend the particulars of the context or to transcend the particular worldviews and opinions of each person in the room. This means that each of the co-participants expressed the importance of how they sought to collaborate with the group to achieve a shared goal or purpose for being there.

Intention also referred to a general sense of being open to the experience in a way that allowed for new or different perspectives and directions to arise. Having this type of intention was common among all the co-participants in that they were conscious of the fact that they were in the classroom to learn and/or to have their worldviews challenged in some way. This sense of openness was the second theme to be discussed, but it was always preceded by having a strong intent to collaborate and to participate due to extenuating reasons for coming together. In general, the theme of intention being present was largely implicit and not directly discussed.

Having intention was expressed by Chuck when he said:

Chuck: It was amazing. I mean, just walking into the classroom each evening and knowing that you were going to share ideas that were valuable to you and that you were going to have people who were receptive to that, you are going to build a body of knowledge, you know, based on some of the theoretical frameworks that we're looking at.

Jasmine, when talking about one particular day within an ongoing course, said:

Jasmine: And yeah, that class, I don't know why, it was just so compelling. It was actually the one that stood out to me the most out of all the other kind of therapies that we had. I think it was maybe the amount of students—it was a really small class normally and it was actually half the amount of students in the class that day, so it was actually like maybe 10. And everyone was really open—it was actually a raining day, so it was raining outside. I don't know if it had anything to do with it, but I think people were a lot more open.

When asked about her experience visiting a class for the first time from nearly 10 years earlier, Edith said:

Edith: The conversation in and of itself had a kind of—I say momentum because I do mean that. There was a forward propulsion feeling. We weren't just circling around this in some sort of academic “Oh, because we have to” behavior kind of way. People were genuinely interested—asking questions, finding answers. Interrogating—in the best possible way: The material at hand and the text, and the folks in the room.

Chelsea alluded to having an intention to collaborate when sharing her experience as an undergraduate student who was not feeling engaged in her class before her professor took action to correct this:

Chelsea: But it changed the dynamic of the class. People would come to class. People would actually not just ask their one question but we would have a conversation. It wasn't just a question/answer: “Okay, who read last night?” [Where] everyone would raise their hands: “What are your questions?” Everyone would just ask their questions and he would answer questions. But it became more like, someone would ask a question and we would spend twenty minutes discussing that question without even the professor answering. You know, just having an actual learning experience as opposed to having a Q & A!

And Jared expressed it when he said:

Jared: I brought a certain level of interest to the course in the first place that I didn't have before. And so a part of it was having awareness of what it is exactly that would be of more interest to me.

### *Openness to Experience*

The second theme concerns the experience of being open to one's experience. The sense of being open to experience took one of two primary forms, either (a) emotional or (b) intellectual. For a few co-participants, there was little distinction between the emotional or intellectual qualities but most expressed one or the other likely as a result of their particular personal style. For the co-participants, this theme was either experienced as being an inherent quality that they brought to the group or as a quality that progressively developed as a part of the process of PRC in the classroom.

Jasmine shared how she and her classmates gradually increased their sense of being open to each other at the beginning of her class:

Jasmine: Yeah. It kind of seemed like it. I mean, some people were in the beginning a little hesitant to open up about it, but towards the end everyone was so open and I think it's just because we were all training to be Marriage Family Therapists that we knew, you know, we have to be open with one another to be open with our patients or clients. So, yeah, we all opened up. It was just like a really amazing—I think it's probably one of the best experiences I've ever had in a classroom, just because it was so open; I've never, ever had that.

Jared's experience of openness came while taking a year-long course as an undergraduate student. His experience gradually developed over this period of time rather than being a more sudden occurrence:

Jared: It was an open space of “this is what we've been reading” and folks just talked about what came up in their reading. So people would just talk and that's where the conversation ended up going.

Barb talked about how she was being open to her experience while participating in a research group as a doctoral student:

Barb: I think a lot of it is that they are incredibly intellectually challenging and rewarding experiences. So I think that's what I really enjoy about it. Is just that real time to sit with people who have overlapping interests and who can really discuss ideas at a high level and make me think about things differently. Or make me re-examine my understandings. I really value that—that's something I really value about graduate school.

Similarly, Edith talked about how the class she was in inspired her to be open to other people's political, social, and religious beliefs. For Edith, being challenged to keep one's mind open, a more intellectual form of openness, carried over into her thesis work:

Sean: So what came out of it? What was the product of your creative work?

Edith: For me, personally or for the class?

Sean: Both.

Edith: Well, for me, personally, I got my thesis out of it. Yeah, I got my thesis out of it, which was great.

Edith: And what I think that class did and a lot of the thinking I did around that class did was actually to help me talk to people. There was no way that I could have gone in and sat down with these incredibly sweet, incredibly religious, mostly older women, and say: “Well that's bullshit. That's wrong. Why would you even think that. Your Bible doesn't say that.” And the training that I got in that course was a perfect primer on how to have a much more reasoned debate. And also when to shut the heck up, right? Because when you are dealing

with people whose opinions you don't agree with—what I learned from that class was to listen a lot more. To listen and to think and to digest and to not always respond with a resounding: “That’s wrong!” You know: go home. Think about it and write it out and do some reading. Come up with some perspectives. Come back next week—and in a very reasoned tone say: “I have several points that I’d like to bring up.” Right? And so a lot of the work that I did around my thesis made me really angry. I mean, this was—I mean I had to take my bumper sticker against the amendment off my car so I could go to interviews, right? Because I couldn’t have it on the car. I really, really, really fundamentally disagreed with what this constitutional amendment said. But I needed to know that I wasn’t in total disagreement with some of their reasons. Some of them were quite more Libertarian. And they said they don't want government co-defining marriage in any way. All marriages should be civil marriages between two consenting adults and so “anything that works against that I’m against.” So there was really interesting stuff there that I wouldn’t have uncovered, I think, prior to that class and prior to some of the work and thinking that I did in that class.

Sean: So it seems like that whole process in that class sparked that desire to . . .

Edith: To know more. Yeah, and also more than just what other people think . . .

Sean: What about your classmates? What was their . . . ?

Edith: Yeah, I think it’s funny because I was dealing with a lot of Poly-Sci wonks in that class. I think a lot of them took it for the same reasons I did. They came in to rail against this new liberal or neo-conservative political agenda they saw in the world. They wanted to know more about it in order to strike it down. Because it was bad. Bad, bad, bad. And I think we all learned: “I disagree but it may not be bad. It may be quite useful. It may be quite appropriate. It may be born out of a deep and legitimate intellectual tradition. Right? It’s not just bad, bad, bad. It’s inappropriate, it’s ill-considered, it’s badly timed against how I think the world should be. But it’s not just bad, bad, bad and wrong, wrong, wrong. And as a group I don’t think a single person would have sat down and been like: “My views haven’t changed.” Which is kinda cool, if you think about it. It’s pretty neat.

### *Trust*

For all 9 co-participants, trust was a major issue and one that was either present to some extent before entering the classroom or developed over the course of getting to know their professors and classmates. Trusting the others in the room with personal information was often seen to be initially challenging as they came to know each other better but ultimately it was a quality that needed to be present for any sense of PRC to arise.

In general, when talking about their experiences, co-participant’s sense of trust toward the group came after experiencing a certain amount of vulnerability. Feeling vulnerable or exposed was

the price to pay for the development of taking a chance on trusting the group, whether the process was primarily emotional or primarily intellectual. Thus, vulnerability, for example, could take the form of not wanting to appear naïve about a certain topic or being reluctant, however brief, to share intimate details about one's life with what appeared to be strangers. This varied for each co-participant since some experienced PRC with individuals that they had already come know as friends and some came into the group without having had any prior contact or familiarity.

Chuck shared his experience of participating in trust-building exercises during a particularly engaging class he took as a graduate student:

Chuck: I mean, there were a lot of trust exercises, for example, which you know, you hear that and it sounds all very crunchy granola—but it wasn't really that at all; it was really a way to make whatever content was being sort of discovered that evening from our previous readings and previous class assignment—you know, to give it a context and give it life, and to sort of bring it up in a way that it could be tangible, and it could be sort of worked on, instead of just being a two dimensional sort of on-paper experience. So all these different exercises, and it was a remarkable experience. I mean, really exciting, and like just every night I left—almost every night—I can't say every single night—practically 95% of the time I left thinking, Shit, I really learned something. I mean, I actually had a real experience.

For Jasmine, trust in being able to be emotionally expressive in front of the class was a major issue that was eased by the way the group created a sense of safety:

Jasmine: So, for myself, I mean—I don't know, I'm always like whenever I have to talk in class, I'm always nervous or my hands are always shaking, so I kind of tend to hide them—kind of like this, or like under my like legs, or—you know, so they don't see me, like, shaking a little bit. And my voice—the tone of my voice changes. I think, you know, before I—not that I wanted to cry, but before I felt it coming, I kind of stopped myself, because I didn't want anyone to hear me quivering or getting to that point where I feel weak or not strong enough to finish a sentence without breaking—you know, breaking down—just a number of things.

Jasmine: But I think it's also, you kind of feel at ease. Like, my body wasn't as tensed up when I could see: “Oh, they're crying.” But it's also a little embarrassing: “Oh, God, they're crying about me,” you know, or they're tearing up or there's the lady in the class who acts like your mom, and she's, like, “It's okay, honey,” you know, like—It's just a bunch of things that.

Having a sense of trust in the process and the group was essential to Jared's sense of the year-long class he participated in as ultimately being a transformative experience:

Jared: I felt like I was in good hands, I didn't have complaints, I trusted the other people in the room, there was some community there that I wasn't in any of that defensive strategizing place that would have me fuse to my own experience and I wasn't in that checked-out place that would have me in just a bird's eye analytical view. I could just let go of all of that and just be there.

For Chelsea, this manifested as a sense of being "safe" sharing her views with her classmates:

Chelsea: I don't even know if I'm going to answer this right. If I could walk into a room and point it out the words I would use to describe it would be small. Because our group was small. With that it was a "wanting" also. It was a place where it was a small, cohesive want. In a way a happiness because you felt safe there. You felt safe with these people. And in a lot of my classes I didn't necessarily feel safe. I felt scared to answer questions because I didn't want to be wrong. But in this class I was safe because if I answered the question wrong nobody was going to be like: "Oh my God. Why are you talking?" It was a really safe space. And I think that brought us a lot closer. And if we did say something it was fun and not meant to hurt you. In this class, it was small, safe, and a kind of wanting.

Solomon's was unique in that rather than feeling a sense of vulnerability before the development of trust, he expressed the feeling of being vulnerable after he gave his presentation in class:

Solomon: So I was feeling vulnerable. I remember telling them too. I told them I was feeling defensiveness, I feel a lot of vulnerability. I did say that to them. And I felt that because after I came out of this present-moment awareness of fire, fierce grace, and love. Then the cognition started coming in about the anxiety and I knew I was feeling vulnerable, so that's why it came up. Because the space wasn't safely set for what I was doing because I chose to do something that was meaningful to my heart.

Solomon: But like I said, I'm not placing any blame here. Everything was great about the class, and the assignment was fine, it was just those moments of vulnerability. And I kept it real with them. And some of the people commented and said: "I really appreciate that you're down to get the feedback and be vulnerable."

### *Authenticity*

A strong and pervading sense of authenticity was common for all 9 co-participants. Even among the 6 co-participants in the group interview, authenticity was a central theme that arose as being essential to the experience of PRC. Authenticity was often related to a sense of being "real" or individuals being truthful about who they were and what they truly believed or felt. In the description of PRC in higher education classrooms, perceiving, experiencing, or expressing a sense of authenticity was a pervasive and ubiquitous quality throughout all aspects of the process.

For Chelsea, authenticity came in many ways. One of the first ways that she talked about had to do with the shift from not being intrinsically interested in the mandatory class that she had to take to being intrinsically engaged in the dialogue that was created:

Chelsea: At the time [laughs] . . . obviously you don't . . . it was a mandatory class, it wasn't even a part of our major. General education. So it was one of those classes where we had to take it and no one really wanted to. We were trying to connect it to how it's going to help me teach kindergarten or teenagers. This is not going to help me in any way. You know, so why do I have to do this? But from taking . . . just that shift and actually realizing that there is a purpose behind every class we have to take and that there is a learning experience. For that class that was a learning experience for us. I don't even think I really remember the philosophy that we learned or the books that we read, but that is what I do remember. And that is what I talk about with my roommates to this day: "Remember that class when we just got away with everything and half way through the semester—we actually didn't do work? Yeah, that totally sucked, I really hate that." But it definitely made us work harder. At the end of the semester when I turned in my paper, it was probably one of the best papers I have ever written, up until that point: Just because I cared about what I was doing. I think it came to a point where we were doing it for ourselves but we were also doing it for him. We wanted him to notice and that made us work harder and so that made us do better for him also to show him, hey: "We are paying attention, we are doing our readings, we do care."

Sean: So do you feel like it was just the professor doing those things that made the difference or was there something going on there with your classmates? You said that you guys were really tight and that you had been in a lot of classes together and you guys were basically working like a team. What was going on there at that time for you when the professor started doing things differently? What was that like for you?

Chelsea: When he took me aside to talk to me and then I was like: "I can do better. I know that everything you said was true." I felt like my class . . . we were all on the same page but then I think we all—something shifted, like a different mindset. We have to do this.

Chelsea: When someone calls you out, especially a professor, you want to try, you want to do better. And so from that I feel like since we were so close we vibed off of each other. Since someone wanted to do better, and that kind of pushed you to do better. So I feel like our class was like a domino effect: one person wanted to do something or needed to do something and everyone else fell into place. And yet, granted, some people did their own things, but the majority of the class caught on. It was something that everyone caught on to.

Chelsea: I've seen it happen in a few of our other classes when we didn't like a professor so much. And someone was like: "They're cool or whatever" and someone else was like: "I don't really care." But when the majority of us didn't like a professor and if we were getting C's then we would be like: "This is ridiculous!" It was like the whole movement—by the end of the semester, everyone didn't like the professor. You might still be getting an A! Everyone else was so much, because we were with each other so much, it just kind of rubbed off . . . I don't know, it was kind of sickening how close we were in a way! But it was something that

was really good for us at the time. It was something that helped us to succeed reaching our goals.

Authenticity became a main theme for Solomon when after giving a presentation in class that inspired and motivated him, he found himself giving an expanded version of the same presentation at an international conference. While at this conference, he gave a presentation to professionals in the field where, for Solomon, authenticity was essential to what made it so well received by participants:

Solomon: So, I get up and I'm fucking talking about these three qualities, you know: authenticity, the intention for human connection, stance on behavioral change. And I'm doing a similar thing that I did in the class: I'm using metaphors and concrete examples and explaining myself very well and I'm also noticing again that I feel the element of fire.

Solomon: I'm not like yelling at people or anything like that. I'm talking in a normal voice, you know, slightly elevated voice, not conversational: presentation voice, you know what I'm saying? But I can feel the passion under what I'm saying. And I can feel the fire. And I can feel the love because I'm so into this work.

Solomon: It was the same thing. I noticed everybody and I noticed that I had their intersubjective . . . their consciousness was directed toward me. I was the phenomenological object that they were being aware of at the moment. To put it in that field's terms . . . or the intentional object or whatever you want to call it [Smiles].

Solomon: And there was this, uh . . . I can feel that connection to them. I'm not saying it too clearly but when I say that intersubjective chord, I can feel that intersubjective connection. Like: "I got you. You're with me right now and I'm with you," you know what I'm saying? Like that, right there, you know?

Solomon: So, we do the presentation and just afterwards, the experience that I had: I never thought that I'd have this experience in my whole professional academic career: Fucking rock stardom: Standing ovation, me and my colleague. People are whistling! You know what I'm saying?

For Solomon, being authentic was essential to the quality and depth of his presentation, which was inspired by what happened during a classroom experience a few months earlier. What was authentic to him was his passion for the work that he does and the love that he feels for his clients. Being true to this meant that in order to give a worthy presentation at the conference, he had to be authentic to how he felt and who he was. Not only this, but one of the main messages that he

was trying to get across to the conference goers—a message that was initially inspired by his positive experience in the classroom—was that being authentic with his clients (incarcerated youth), was essential to establishing a positive relationship with them:

Solomon: The good round of applause and the chuckles was me saying: “Here’s some food for thought. Here’s a metaphor that you can rely on: If you go in there and point the finger, meta-communicatively, at incarcerated youth, they’re gonna point another finger back at you, but it’s not gonna be the same finger,” you know what I’m saying? Suggesting that they’re going to point the middle finger at you and say: “Fuck you. You’re just like everyone else.” I said it more eloquently at the time when I was presenting it. But that was another time within those 5 minutes that I felt very in relation to the group and really in an authentic place and in a present place that had the qualities of fire, fierceness, but also lightness at the same. Also humor at the same time, which I felt was a good balance.

And for Jared, the experience of authenticity helped him to experience a sense of openness and trust:

Jared: These were all people who were totally strangers who I had never met before. Before this one Friday morning. By mid Saturday, I was hearing them talk about . . . very openly and honestly about where they hurt the most and what is really important to them in life. And so it was really powerful to get the humanness that is there. Just that dramatic leap from total stranger to really deep intimacy. To get the dynamic range in there between those two things. And there’s something, and this is part of the course and something that I’m convinced of—there’s something inherently inspiring, attractive, to that aliveness of people being their most authentic selves. And so just getting to bear witness to that, it just, I don’t know, it felt like it blew the doors open for me.

### *Personal Connection*

Having a sense of personal connection was another common theme. Here, personal connection refers to (a) feeling personally seen, or (b) sharing or listening to personal stories. Having a sense of personal connection means that the level of discourse in the room would shift whenever there was a personal element brought in. In many ways, this meant, for example, sharing difficulties or hardships, past or present, which would elicit empathy and sometimes, strong emotional reactions from others in the room.

The sense of feeling personally seen by another always lead to a greater degree of openness and authenticity in the person receiving it. This would sometimes be a result of sharing one’s

personal story but was also described as a stand-alone occurrence which contributed to the dynamics leading to the arising of PRC. For Chelsea, being personally seen by her professor began a process of becoming inherently interested in the class, which she had not felt before her professor took action by confronting Chelsea and her peers about their collaborative effort to pass the class with little to no interest in the content of the class:

Chelsea: And being an undergrad at that time, the only thing I could think of was: you have to get the points. It wasn't really about the question you asked. You have to get the points to be done.

Chelsea: So, one time, I turned in a paper—it was an okay paper. I just got it done [Laughs]. It was just an okay paper. And after I turned it in he called me—I got a good grade on it. It's not like I failed—I got a B—I never got a C throughout my college experience. . . . He called me in his office to collect my paper and also to get stuff because I was leaving to go to a softball tournament so I was leaving to go travel away but when I went to his office he sat me down and went over . . . At first he said: "I know what you guys are doing in my class." And I said: "What are you talking about? I don't know what you are talking about. What do you mean? What are we doing?" And he was just like: "I know what you are doing. You always answer a question in the beginning [and then] you just do other stuff for the rest of class. But from your paper I feel like you are better than that and I feel like you can put more emphasis, you can put more detail, you can work harder than what you are/you are doing the bare minimum. You are just doing this to get by." And pretty much just saying: you can get the grade by getting by but you are not going to learn anything else after you leave. Which is true. I mean the first part of the class, for the first 2 months, I don't think I remember anything. But after that discussion with him, it really made me think I can do better. I am getting by and I knew that already. I knew what I was doing, it wasn't like I had no—I feel like the whole class: we knew what we were doing. We had been together since we were freshmen and most of us live in the same hall. So we all knew each other, it wasn't like we all didn't know.

Chelsea: But after that conversation a few weeks later, I took heed to what he said. Which got me really engaged in class. I didn't just ask the first question, I would . . . other people would ask questions and actually have conversations after their questions and would raise other answers. I don't know what he thought personally, I don't know if he talked to other students, he might have talked to a few other students, I can't remember but the whole dynamic of our class switched. People were actually interested in philosophy. People actually cared about what we were reading. Even though we didn't really get a lot of it. Some of it was way over our heads. But the stuff that we did grasp: "Oh, I understand what he is saying." We were able to understand and take heed to that.

Chelsea: And for me it wasn't just about the classroom but that talk with him made me change what I did in that class but not in other classes, what I took on the softball field where just being like, I had my position, I knew I was going to start but bringing more to the table. Being more than just being a player for this play. Being more than just barely getting

by. And I think that kind of just, for me that was a big impact. Maybe if I didn't have that conversation with him, who knows what road I could have been on, maybe I could have just gotten by on everything, you know?

Chelsea: It was really interesting just how that small conversation and the fact that he noticed, I think, meant a lot. And the fact that all it took was a conversation with me personally to make me change. And the fact that he did it in a way that changed the whole class. It wasn't just like something he did with me but it changed the whole dynamic of the class, it made everyone really want to engage in something more than just getting by but actually learning something that they would probably not have learned if anyone else was teaching the class. So that was a really dynamic experience for me in my undergrad.

And when Chelsea was speaking about another classroom experience, the theme of bringing one's personal self into the conversation:

Sean: So there was that process of talking about real, personal things. Would you say that was an important piece?

Chelsea: I would say that was one of the most important pieces. I feel like in that time, I've had the same roommate in freshman and sophomore years and not one time had I told her that my mom had cancer before this class. It was just something that I don't talk about. You know, some things you just don't bring up but people were sharing stuff about family issues, just stuff that came up in conversations—I've been living with this girl forever and never had brought it up before.

Another instance of how important having a sense of personal connection facilitated PRC came from the description provided by Elizabeth when she felt personally seen by her professor:

Elizabeth: I guess in Karen's class—like I told you before—with her coming to me being like: "I can't believe you bombed on this test, what happened to you?" That will forever stick out for me.

Sean: I see. So that was a turning point for you?

Elizabeth: Yeah, I guess I could say that. I guess I don't think of it as a turning point. It's more like her showing that she cared for me and cared enough about how I was doing in the class. I don't think I've ever—that year anyway, that semester—I don't think I had anyone else be that attentive to what was going on with me, performance wise. I guess that just really stuck out to me because that is what I would do as a teacher. If you have a kid that was doing really well and then all of a sudden they bombed something, there is something else going on there.

Having a sense of personal connection came in the form of sharing and listening to personal stories.

For Chuck, intimacy with the group was deepened by the sharing of personal stories:

Chuck: And every once in a while someone would share a personal experience, not necessarily an abuse that they encountered themselves, but that they witnessed. And . . . it's hard to convey—it wasn't like a sob-fest, but it was more like this actually happened, and you could sense the class taking a moment to sort of breathe it in. And so there'd be a calm for a minute or two. There was a lot of active, like, thinking [laughs] going on, and it was quiet. That's the closest to that, I think.

For Jasmine, there were many instances of the sharing of personal stories. One example in particular immediately contributed to an experience of insight:

Sean: Can you describe what it was about that experience that made it feel so open?

Jasmine: Well, the therapist was a huge part of it. I think, also, I must admit our actual teacher—he's a great teacher, but for some reason he stepped out for a big part of that class and came in only towards the end, and I think that might have had a lot to do with it—that people were actually a lot more open. I know in the beginning he shared his personal experience, and I remember he left. And that's when actually everyone started talking more about it and tearing up and whatnot.

### *Intimacy/Bonding*

A sense of intimacy and bonding with one's classmates or peer group was a natural product of the presence of the above themes and qualities. Intimacy and bonding shared a great deal of overlap with the sharing of personal experience. However, it is an invariant theme because it is an experience that, at times, manifested independently of whether the co-participant described having a personal connection or not.

A shared sense of intimacy and bonding came after (a) being emotionally moved, or (b) experiencing empathy for another. Distinguishing between these qualities is difficult and questionable but it was ultimately decided that they were invariant themes because being emotionally moved did not always mean empathy and empathy sometimes arose as being directed toward someone else rather a quality that one felt as a response. The difference is that being emotionally moved was experienced as something that one did independently and feeling empathy toward someone was more of an active, forward moving experience. Both, however, meant the deepening

of the undercurrent of increased intimacy and bonding with the group as a whole rather than being directed toward a single person.

Intimacy and bonding almost always occurred after the sharing of personal stories but sometimes there was a sense of bonding that developed from simply working with intention on the same assignments or projects. Personal connection in the form of being personally seen or sharing personal stories were more likely to occur in shorter spans of time, such as during a particular class on a particular day. Intimacy and bonding arose as a product of a longer process and often was seen to be an undercurrent related to but independent of the developing of a sense of trust and openness to experience. For example, during the course of his year-long course, Jared developed a strong sense of bonding with his peers after a particular instance of being emotionally moved:

Jared: I don't know how much this happened during the first quarter but in the second quarter when we were going over racism, sexism discussions . . . people would be really giving and putting all of themselves into those discussions and talking about personal stuff, because you know, we just spent the last 10 to 20 weeks developing this intimacy with one another and so fairly often there'd be a discussion in class where somebody would start crying from what they were sharing and a lot of times everyone else in class would start crying with them: really moving engagement with their own lives. How does the stuff we were studying—how does that impact this person and how am I impacted by knowing them and being in this space with them. And so I just remember myself being really moved by what people were bringing up and just feeling this depth to what was going on that I hadn't felt elsewhere.

Sean: So you said the second quarter was particularly interesting in that way?

Jared: Yeah.

Sean: Was there a certain class that you can recall?

Jared: I guess the only one I can remember specifically was this one woman from a fairly conservative background who basically talked about—who had a husband and kids—she basically talked about being in the closet her whole life because she didn't feel like it was safe to be who she was. That she hadn't told anybody that before.

Sean: Wow.

Jared: Yeah, and it was really impactful.

Sean: What did it feel like at the time? What was going on in your perception of it?

Jared: Um, I mean I felt really sad that that's where she was and that's what she had to deal with at the time. I felt a lot of empathy for what she was going through and felt kind of like I had a stake in her not having to live that way.

Sean: Was there a lot of dialogue in the class around that? Were you part of that dialogue?

Jared: I don't remember if I had specifically said anything during that particular dialogue.

I do remember . . . I'm not much of a crier. Uh. And I felt resistant to letting myself go there in that setting and I did resist going there but it was really challenging not to. It was really moving.

Sean: What was going on with the other people in the room?

Jared: Pretty much everybody else in the room was crying. I was maybe one or two people who was not.

Sean: So, how did the topic come up? What was the context?

Jared: I'm pretty sure we were going over heterosexism that week. And the makeup of the class: there were some queer folks there; there were some disabled folks. I was in a class that was mostly women. There were some people of color. So anything that we were talking about there was going to be someone that has that as their background and have that as their experience. And so when they shared, it was going to have all that experience to back it up. And it certainly felt really moving because of that.

Sean: You said that most of the other people in the room were tearing up. So I assume it was an emotional time.

Jared: Totally.

For Edith, intimacy was deepened by the experience of the group reacting to a personal experience shared by a student with deaf parents:

Edith: And it got really real. I remember this moment: one of the women in the class had two deaf parents. And was able to share with the class that she felt like the integration of deaf populations had completely demolished the deaf culture. And the conversation became very, very different. It became very personal. She became quite upset. So the mood changed pretty dramatically.

Edith: But I think what it did was—in the moment I was sort of annoyed. Because I kind of felt like it made it impossible to continue on a more academic footing. To be a little bit more detached and observational and critical. Right? When someone's upset it's hard to critique.

Edith: But what I think her addition to the class—and we sort of ended up getting around to it again was this notion that these are still people. That they still have lived experiences. That

what might be good for “society” in general is not necessarily good for the individuals that have to go through the change.

Edith: And I ended up—in the moment, I was a little prickly about it. I was like: “Stop crying. There’s no crying in baseball.” But then I remember talking about it a week later—about this experience. And I remember thinking: “That was a much better class than it would have been had she not been there.” And the mood certainly changed—and the mood certainly wasn’t what it had been. But I felt like bringing in a newly different perspective that wasn’t contained in the text—it was much richer for it.

Edith: Again, it was a small class and I think we all reacted slightly differently. My sense was to say: “Why are you so upset? Thank you for sharing that. Tell me more.” And I think some people’s responses would be: “Oh! Someone’s upset. Change the conversation!” And some people would say: “That has no place here.” So I think there were a couple of different responses in evidence. And I don’t know if we handled it as a group the way she would have wanted. I’m sure we probably didn’t. I think that kind of experience does bring you closer as a group though: the sense that someone’s actually shared out something of value. That there’s an intimacy to that.

Sean: Did you feel that at the time?

Edith: Oh yeah! Absolutely! Absolutely, there’s an intimacy there.

### *Increasing Depth of Experience*

Having a sense of an increasing depth of experience was an invariant theme that was uncovered while analyzing the above themes. Like intimacy and bonding, the sense of an increasing depth of the experience was rarely explicitly described. Generally speaking, for the co-participants, this quality was a result of co-participant *a posteriori* meta-reflection, as a global pattern across reports.

An increasing sense of depth to the experience also revealed the subtheme of expansiveness or spaciousness. Expansiveness, unlike the sense of increasing depth, was experienced explicitly in a few of the descriptions. However, it should be kept in mind that both qualities are different ways of describing the same phenomenon. That is, *depth* and *space* both refer to a general sense of the quality of interaction in the group becoming richer and more meaningful.

One of the most articulate examples of this came from Jared's description of the yearlong course he took as an undergraduate:

Jared: I guess what I was mentioning about getting to the end of the year and realizing what a deep experience it was. That I think it was a surprise to me that I wasn't really aware of that going along. I was enjoying myself and enjoying what I was learning and felt impacted and everything but not in a drastically different way from the economics class until I got to the end and I was like: "Oh, wow, what I have been experiencing has been totally different." And it has this very different meaning for me and I've grown in these different ways but I don't think as it was going on I was aware of that.

Barb expressed how her experience became deeper when talking about a research group that had been meeting over the course of several years and how a sense of accumulated familiarity with her peers was present:

Barb: So what makes part of this research group amazing is that I've been—lots of the people that I've known in the program for three or four years now: so we have quite a deep working relationship—coming together for 3 or 4 years once a week to meet and talk about ideas and think about things.

And from Chuck, a sense of increasing depth of the experience was expressed as a heightened sense of awareness:

Chuck: Yeah. A lot of the times when something like that would happen I felt a heightened sense of awareness, for one.

### *Present-Momentness*

Present-momentness was a recurring theme throughout the interviews. This is not surprising since the initial focus was on describing lived experience as it was happening in the classroom. What later became apparent was that the experience of PRC is a forward moving phenomenon of process with elements extending beyond any particular instance as well as qualities culminating in present-moment awareness.

Present-momentness was expressed as being a quality of absorption or immersion via either a sense of being more focused on "headspace" or more focused on "heartspace," that is, when

recalled, some co-participants described their reflection of the experience as being experienced primarily from one or the other.

In addition to being absorbed or immersed in present-momentness, co-participants also described having a strong sense of clarity that was on a continuum between (a) focused (as a result of discussing intellectual topics via “headspace”) or (b) a generalized clarity (as a result of touching into one’s emotions or somatic sensibility). Whether focused or generalized, present-momentness was almost always described as being absorbed in the present-moment. Co-participants even mentioned the sense of time slowing down or stopping and one’s awareness being acute and lucid.

For Solomon, present-momentness was described while giving a 5-minute presentation in class:

Solomon: So I developed this three-point talk on the most important qualities of a therapist or group facilitator—internal qualities that they bring to the table for working with incarcerated youth in a therapy situation. And I knew that I was gonna have a limited amount of time, so I wanted to say a little about each point in about 5 minutes. So I go in and I come up with these cool metaphors just to highlight the points and I say what I need to say. And it’s obvious that I’m in the moment. At this time, I’m feeling very present. I’m feeling like—it’s kinda hard to explain—I’m still developing the rhetoric and language for this.

For Edith, being in the moment was like going to a movie and being absorbed or immersed in the story:

Edith: But I do really want to parallel it with watching a movie. Where all of a sudden you realize you’re not eating popcorn any more. You’re not texting. You’re not doing anything else. You are in the moment of the movie. And it can move you or scare you or anger you but you are genuinely feeling it. You are genuinely thinking about it. For whatever reason it’s gotten so interesting. And I think that can happen frequently in classes. You have a chance to verbalize and to be more attractive in class, which I think is better, in some ways, than a movie. But it’s the moment when you stop think about: “Is that a dumb comment? Do I really want to say that?” Whatever it is you stop reacting and there’s this—that’s what I mean by energy. Everyone is so much in that moment—you look up and go: “Oh my God! It’s 2 o’clock—I have to go. I don’t want to go. I guess we have to” and that’s when it moves to the coffee shop.

Chuck described the experience well when he said:

Chuck: Yeah. A lot of the times when something like that would happen, I felt a heightened sense of awareness, for one. And I know that physiologically, for me, that meant kind of a sound dampening, [is] what was happening—I don’t know how to describe it, if this is what

you're looking for, but—that moment would crystallize and the time/space or the normal chronology of a moment would cease, and that's what I mean by sort of being heightened. I'm not talking about astral projection, but you just felt like everything was a little bit more acute. Everything was a little bit more keen. And breathing was, in my case, heavier, [it] kind of felt warm, and there was definitely a sense of empathic connection, it seemed like. And it wasn't necessarily always perfect, but it was a sense that for a large number of the individuals in the class at that time, we were all sort of humming at the same frequency.

For Barb, being in the moment was experienced as being focused on the ideas being discussed in the group:

Barb: I think that feels like being able to really focus on what the ideas are at hand. So not worrying about any social anxiety type issues. Or worrying about saying the right thing at the right time. Just being able to really focus on the content of the material. And then it probably also feels a lot like not thinking about what I'm having for dinner later. I guess a little in-the-moment-ish. Because you are working together on a project—that kind of collaborative energy—is probably what I think is the feeling of the contentedness.

*Flow/Effortlessness/Ease/Fluidity*

The experience of “flow,” effortlessness, or ease was common to all 9 co-participants as well. Unlike most of the other themes, this was among the least complex and was easy for the co-participants to describe. It occurred during peak moments of PRC often associated with present-momentness and excitement. For example, for Meredith, flow was the first trait to be mentioned when asked to reconstruct her sense of when “things are really working”:

Meredith: It's like you're in flow, and you just know you're doing the right thing. So, when you put your proposal together, there was a point where, in essence, you were, like: “Oh, I get this.”

Meredith: But I think it comes back to you. When you were talking about it in defense, you had to be in flow. You were nervous, but you knew what you knew. It's that feeling. Where you know what you know, and you know that it's going to be fine. Okay, it may not be exactly the way you want, but it's going to be okay. And that's what I feel a lot with this class.

For Jasmine, as sense of ease came to her as a result of expressing herself in the presence of her classmates:

Jasmine: But I think it's also, you kind of feel at ease. Like, my body wasn't as tensed up when I could see, Oh, they're crying. But it's also a little embarrassing: “Oh, God, they're

crying about me.” Or they’re tearing up or there’s like the lady in the class who kind of acts like your mom, and she’s, like: “It’s okay, honey.” You know, like— It’s just a bunch of things that.

Similarly, for Barb, this quality was experienced as having a sense of fun, which was suggestive of flow and effortlessnes:

Barb: Yeah. I think it’s fun. Yeah, that’s the word I used. So going to that group feels the most like sitting around just talking, you know? So say you and your friends went out to see a movie and then you all went out and talked about it in a casual and relaxed setting without ego involved. It doesn’t always happen when talking about movies but it’s nice when it happens. That is what this research group feels like except instead of talking about a movie we are talking about an article that we just read or about the direction of research so it’s this real comfortable ease with some quite engaging topics.

When discussing how his professor has created the general tone for the class, Jared talked about having a sense of ease that facilitated his overall experience:

Jared: Yeah, so there was that kind of positional authority they had over me but they weren’t acting from that place. I didn’t feel any of that quality in the way that we were being with each other. And certainly I could look to them as an authority figure and look up to them and try learn from them and have that from them but as far as the way they were presenting themselves it was just much more them being themselves as opposed to just playing the role of the instructor. And so I just remember having this sense of ease and welcome whenever I was around them.

Sean: Was that a feeling you had around the whole course? Were they just generally like that?

Jared: Yeah.

### *Excitement/Energy*

Another invariant theme was that of being excited, energized, or feeling “jazzed.” Such experience was similar to feelings of awe or having fun, pleasure, or satisfaction. However, from a psychological point of view, excitement and energy is a distinguishing quality to an experience that does not necessarily have to be associated with fun or awe, though, in nearly every interview, all three invariant themes were experienced concurrently. In this way, many of the examples have significant overlap with these other themes.

The clearest articulation of the feeling of being excited by the process of PRC came from

Chuck:

Chuck: And it was very exciting, because we were building—literally building that knowledge together. And at the end, you had the four walls just covered in text, in writing. And not like academicians but in real language and with experiences and with short little snippets of people’s histories and experiences. [It was] so very wild. And we did that together. And that really bonded the class. That was the night where we walked away, you know, laughing and everyone was very excited, because this is like early on, it’s a new exposure to some of these ideas, or at least a new way of looking at these ideas. As teachers—I think most of us in there were teachers—and we’d all had some exposure to this, but in a very sort of clinical scholarly fashion. This was a way of looking at it in a very real-time, student-centered fashion.

Chuck: But unless you’re immersed in it, you know, it’s very difficult to really relate and convey what that is inside the classroom, because it’s electric.

For Edith, a sense of energy and excitement occurred during her first college classroom experience while still in high school. She described a “luminescent” quality:

Edith: What I hoped at the time and what I discovered later as a student there is that this is not unusual. I hoped that it wasn’t a fluke. And I went to two other classes that day that were both really, really good. They weren’t quite as luminescent as that class. That class had a kind of . . . I don’t know—brightness is not the right quality—a kind of energy to it. Which is even more remarkable given that the professor wasn’t involved. There weren’t awkward pauses, there weren’t stupid comments that didn’t really get backed up: “I thought the antagonist was an idiot.” Right? “I didn’t think it was well reasoned because—explain.” That is a much more substantive comment. There was never a moment where I was like: “Ugh. What are we talking about?” Which so frequently happens in high school.

For Solomon, energy and excitement was described as feeling “the fire of passion” or “being on fire.”

Solomon: I felt the element of fire inside me. It wasn’t fire in an aggressive sense. It was like the fire of passion and I could feel that when I was speaking about what I was speaking about. Not only I was on fire, my heart was on fire. Everybody’s attention in the room was looking at me. Everybody was locked in to what I was saying. So I knew there was a process going on right there.

Meredith described her excitement and energy over being witness to her students progress and growth in her class as feeling “jazzed”:

Sean: I was wondering if you could tell me about that feeling you get when you get jazzed—can you describe that in more detail? What’s going on for you with that?

Meredith: It's just like, you know: yeah, they got it. [slightly laughing]—I'm helping them make the connections, because I can't make the connections for them. And it's also a validation of when you need to leap in and when you need to step back. And part of the reason why I love doing this particular class is, as you can imagine, it's a lot of work, but the work really results in your being able to see people's growth, and that's really why I think anyone teaches. And that's why I kind of do it, because, at least for me, I'm constantly getting these kinds of reinforcements.

When asked to describe a moment of insight, Jasmine described her energy as building up and exploding out of her mouth like a “Tasmanian Devil”:

Jasmine: Yeah, I mean, a lot of it is mental, but with mental comes, like, physical attributes that come—I mean, it's just a bunch of things that come together, like, you think of something and then you kind of feel it or you feel butterflies—getting nervous, and then just—it's kind of like an explosion that's like a small little Tasmanian devil unraveling, unraveling and then finally grows and he explodes out your mouth. I don't know how to explain it.

#### *Awe/Wonderment*

Common to positive experience in general is having a subtle sense of awe or wonderment. The co-participants experienced this quality to varying degrees. For the majority of them, awe or wonderment was not explicitly stated, but instead tended to a more implicit quality that discovered in the analysis of the transcripts. For Jasmine, the sense of awe was recognized when she checked-in with her peers after the class ended:

Jasmine: I think we all kind of knew without saying anything that we felt like: “Oh, this is pretty awesome.”

Jasmine: Yeah, and then of course after class, we all [were] kind of like: “Oh, that was awesome. See you later, but that was awesome”—you know [laughs].

When Chuck came into his class for the first time, not knowing what to expect, he described how he was “blown away” by the high quality of interaction he experienced:

Chuck: But I signed up. I said: “We'll see what that first semester brings, I can always withdraw, get my money back, maybe. And it doesn't have to be a total loss.” And I was blown away. I was really blown away from that first night. So, yeah, I mean, it was mind-blowing. I hadn't had that experience before.

For Jared, this sense was implicit in the overall interview. An example of how he expressed this occurred when he witnessed a classmate being emotionally expressive while sharing personal details about his life:

Jared: Yeah, I just, um . . . just hearing him talk about his relationship with his mom and how difficult that was for him and seeing him break down and not being able to talk. You know, it's totally foreign to my experience. I have never been in a situation where somebody had just let me in like that.

Sean: And he was basically a stranger up until that moment?

Jared: Totally. And so the quality of being led into that was just really incredible to me.

*Sense of Adventure/Sense of Discovery*

Co-participants reported experiencing a sense of adventure or discovery in terms of not knowing what was going to happen next. This particular felt sense was often exciting and full of anticipation. It was an integral part of what made the learning aspect of being in a classroom so rewarding. For Edith, this was a consistent theme that she talked about in all of her examples. For example:

Edith: So there was this really great sense about this class: you were always in for an adventure. You never knew what was going to happen in Ed's class. And I think I relayed the story about him pulling—we were talking 1 day about the encyclopedia's and we were working on Diderot and applications of accumulation of knowledge that were happening in the 16th and 18th centuries and how people were working on encyclopedia's and dictionaries and simplified spelling. And so it was this textual conversation—it was on text but it also had a lot of texture to it. And he's like: "Hold on one sec!" And he shuffled down the hall and came back with the French to German dictionary and Queen Elizabeth's coronation program. That was an official souvenir that had all of the stage directions in red. But the stage directions were written in the same language that the actual coronation ceremony was in, like: "Ye shall . . ." I don't even remember what the point was but there was the sense that the conversation can go anywhere and it could encompass any number of whacky subjects. And he was gonna come up with a piece of text that was gonna say: "This conversation is bounded and rooted in this incredible depth of learning, of knowledge, of history." And as crazy as our ideas got there was always the sense that there was a place to go with him. He wasn't the kind of professor who would shut you down or say: "That's not right. That's not the correct application. Or that's not the right way of looking at this." He was very good at that Socratic thing of: "Well why did your mind go there? What purpose or utility does this tangent possibly have? Who's spoken on this subject before?"

Edith: Because someone always touched on something. And so he gave this sense that: “Okay, you may be a little off-base. That happens, you’re 19. But go to the library and read this.” And it’s really exciting to get the sense that you are on to something. And I felt like that’s what he really fostered in us: “You’re on to something! You might not be onto the right part of something yet! But you should probably do all the reading.” But there’s something here and that’s really fucking awesome.

For Chuck, a sense of adventure was a prominent theme in his description of going back to school as a graduate student after an extended period of time being in the workforce:

Chuck: Yeah, it was neat—it was like being in camp. I don’t know how else to describe it. Like, every day was going to be—every teaching opportunity was going to have its new adventure. And that was very exciting. I mean, even just the physical space alone inside the classroom changed every time we were in it. Sometimes, we needed a big circle, sometimes we needed dyads. Sometimes we needed triads. Sometimes we did cubes. I mean, it was wild. Chuck: But so that helps a lot, too, where you can shape the physical environment. It makes a huge difference, you know—instead of coming into that military space, where you’re going to sit in your spot, and that’s where you sit for frickin’ ever. They go through the role call and you’re number 26 and all you have to do is be ready to hear, “Wachansky,” and then it’s your turn and then you can fall asleep again. And it was just this was very different and it was very exciting and vital.

Chuck: And these teachers were great, too, because one of the things that you do with critical pedagogy is you don’t throw curve-balls. But you’re exploring new ways to present information. And looking for the world around you. And you’re also doing things that are very contemporary, very immediate. So if something happened during the course of those 2 weeks between classes that in some way impacted whatever it was that you were studying, or related in some way, that was brought into the classroom. At a socio-political level, a philosophical level—whatever. And so it made the learning very immediate as well and very relevant. So that was exciting. Because you could always find yourself stepping into something kind of new. Which is great. I mean, yeah, it was like camp. I don’t know how else to put it.

### *Joyfulness/Pleasure/Satisfaction*

Once each co-participant moved past all of the preceding themes, the result was always an emerging feeling of joy, pleasure, or satisfaction. Many co-participants used the word “fun” to describe the effect of experiencing many of the other qualities and themes. Sometimes a sense of playfulness was brought into the group through the use of humor but this was generally an exception.

For Barb, being inherently motivated and engaged with her peers always came with a sense of fun or pleasure:

Barb: I think part of the fun of being in graduate school is getting to meet so many people that are similar to you and working hard and are invested in the same topic and who have thoughts about that and then being challenged by them or creating ideas together. When I think about experiences that have been the most valuable for me, it has been that experience of being in a research group. It always causes a bit of an extra bit of enjoyment if the professor himself or herself is like: “Yeah, that was a good idea” and adds to that conversation and treats you like an equal.

Barb: But thinking about it, it is almost just as fun to be doing that with just my peers. So it’s definitely the social aspect of it [that] is the most rewarding.

Sean: When you describe it as fun, can you unpack that a little bit?

Barb: Yeah, sure, so it can be different things. It can mean feeling challenged. I remember when I was first in the program, if I met students who had been in the program for several years, and so they would know much more than me or they would have been exposed to many more ideas than me—so listening to them talking about things and kind of not knowing what they were talking about was fairly intimidating during the first few months but after a while you realize that it’s a great opportunity to learn from them and it becomes kind of fun to be around all these people who have a lot of access to different theories and different ideas.

Barb: So over time as you become more and more able to talk about it, it feels more rewarding and you are accomplishing something because you have this ability to compare yourself to when you couldn’t participate in that conversation and you really didn’t know who these people were or these research methods they were talking about, like: “What was that they were talking about?” Now you have more a sense of it, so as you can feel yourself growing I think that feels fun but it’s also fun to debate about whether something is a good idea or not, whether or not it’s a good strategy or not, especially if you are thinking about designing projects or something: that whole process of building it together is very fun and often more rewarding than doing it on your own.

Jasmine experienced a sense of relief and satisfaction after sharing her personal story with the class:

Jasmine: I think it’s like a combo—it’s like a group. I think it wouldn’t have been the same if one aspect were missing. And also I remember we were all pretty cold, and we were wearing jackets, and I’m normally always cold, so I think—it’s kind of weird, but it was cold, but at the moment I felt, like, hot and sweaty and nervous, but also, cooling afterwards, because I was, like: “Okay, I shared”—It’s kind of like you—I don’t know, for me, I always feel better when I write things down. I have a diary or journal that I sometimes write in. So it kind of felt, after that session, that I had just written ten pages and put my diary away—it was, like: “Oh! Okay, I’m good.” It felt good to open up, so—yeah.

Jasmine: Yeah, it's like that feeling of that test you've been worried about and you've aced it or you just completed it, you don't have to stress about it anymore. It's kind of like a challenge you have within yourself that you kind of feel like you're getting to the top and it's tough and it's tough and you reach it and you're, like: "Oh, thank God it's done."

Elizabeth shared how she felt a pervading sense of satisfaction regarding the quality of her overall experience:

Elizabeth: I guess I feel content that I'm getting a wide-range of experiences right here at all for this Ph.D. that's so far over there. It's like I'm halfway through my program and I feel content in terms of those positive experiences. They don't fully characterize my learning or my experiences here but I feel happier, I feel content that I was able to have those experiences. It makes being a black woman in a place where there are so few people like me—it makes it worthwhile. It helps with the depression that comes with being a doctoral student. It helps with wanting to keep moving forward. It's just like with anything—if you've had negative experiences over and over again you're not going to want to keep moving forward in whatever that is.

#### *Emergence/Generativity*

After conducting each of the interviews and beginning the data analysis, the theme of emergence became prominent as one of the deep structures of the experience of PRC. It is central to the nature of the phenomenon but rarely was ever explicitly described by the co-participants. Instead, an emergent quality became apparent after considering the themes of the creation of new perspectives, insights, and worldviews as a result of confronting or being confronted by one's peers or professors.

Another form that emergence took was related to the theme of the phenomenon itself having a self-generating quality. This meant that the co-participants described how the momentum of the experience took on a life of its own and had a self-perpetuating quality that existed beyond any of the individuals in the group. An emergent quality was, at times, identified as being experienced by the individual co-participant or as being recognized by the group (collectively). Regardless, emergence was a quality of the culture and energy of the group process that was common in the interviews. When Barb was asked to describe her experience of moments in the

group when the process was working and flowing, she likened it to her work with children by offering a metaphor:

Barb: Well, the metaphor I can give that I think it's most like—and I think this is my best shot. So you can ask other questions but I don't think I'll do better than this: So when I was a preschool teacher there was this very fun activity that we would do. It was a non-directive activity where we would put a hose into a sandbox. An enormous sandbox and a hose. And that's the activity. The kids had shovels and buckets. And this one particular year there was a group of children who would always come and play with the sand and so they had a culture around that sand. Of building a dam, breaking the dam, how to build mountains and lakes and build cities. And so this culture of knowing how to do this was shared by the children. They didn't need to talk very much. It was collaborative and they knew: "Oh! That person is digging over there so I'll know to do this bit." And then they would just come together and know how to do this huge group project and some days they'd be like: they were going to make the biggest river ever and they'd all work on the biggest river ever and then it would get destroyed, but that was okay. The project was just doing it—the collaboration process. And then it was very sweet because when a group of children would leave the other children who had seen them do it would come in a pickup where they had started and remember what they had seen the other children doing. And the culture would develop and continue but it would be slightly different.

Barb: And so I remember at the time watching that and thinking: "Oh my God! I've never had a collaborative experience like that." Where you can just sit there in the zone with other people working and just work on this project and have it happen in such a unit. I was like, I never had a learning experience or any kind of experience like that with that repetition of experience. And so I think the thing that I most compare this research group to is something like that.

Emergence is a complex theme that has proved to be worthy of a more detailed discussion. More will be said about emergence as a core theme for PRC in Chapter 5.

### *Insight*

Having a sense of insight was a quality so general that it was difficult to distinguish from many of the other themes. For example, insight was experienced when there was a personal connection, intimacy, or "present-momentness." The theme that most closely resembled having insight was having a sense of clarity or lucidity, a subtheme of present-momentness.

Insight retained its status as an invariant theme largely because it was irreducible to other themes, despite the great deal of overlap. The following example from Elizabeth illustrates how insight was often described as an "Aha" moment. In this particular instance, she was discussing

experiencing insight during a non-collaborative class environment that she ultimately found to be enlightening in terms of accepting different perspectives:

Sean: Is there anything else about that class that really sticks out for you in terms of why it was such an eye opener?

Elizabeth: There wasn't a lot of collaboration in that class. We worked alone, I guess, I don't know. I guess I want the world to be different, right? And there are people who think that way too. But the ways in which we get at that and try to make a change in our world—it's different. So that was really salient to me. I think that was probably the biggest "aha" or real moment for me.

And for Chuck, the "Aha" moment of insight was when there was a sense of flow to the shared experience:

And even, in part, the truth part of that is do you ever get to an ultimate truth? The process is happening during that lived experience and you are creating the truth in that lived experience. And that's for me the "aha" moment. And that's what I mean by harmonics to a certain extent. No one is saying X plus Y is gonna equal Z. We're sitting here and talking and as we are sitting here and these ideas start percolating to the surface and you start playing with them you start getting to a place where everyone can touch the vein and it's that hot streak. But it's a flow, it's not an end.

Jared achieved a sense of pervading and lasting insight into "how to love" only upon his *a priori* meta-reflection of his overall experience:

Jared: And so that was one of my main takeaways from that year. Was learning how to fall in love from the first weekend.

Sean: Does that still feel like a lasting revelation or insight?

Jared: Yeah, totally. I mean I wouldn't say I'm always as present to it as I was then, but . . . [pause] . . . but, uh, I'm in a relationship with somebody now who I do love and I wouldn't say I'm always as keyed into it every time I see her. And there are also times when I'm more present to or less present to it but then there's also times that I'm less present to it and I'm like: "Oh, wait, I'm not checked-into what is going on right now" and it's there and I just need to tap into it.

Sean: So there is more capacity?

Jared: Yeah, exactly. There's a lot more capacity. And one of the other key turning points from the year was with this other person that I had fallen in love with at the time—it was sort of a long, dramatic saga—we had made plans to spend New Years together and things weren't going the ways I had planned and I was really feeling terrible and debating flying home. I was able to get enough perspective on my own experience of what was going on

that I could unfuse myself from it. And I was like: “Oh, this is what I’m doing and I’m making this into this and this is what’s happening. Okay. Cool. I don’t have to do this so I will stop doing this.”

### *Transcendence of Self*

Transcendence of one’s self came in the form of (a) the sense of being a part of something greater than oneself, and (b) being or becoming into something bigger than oneself. The main difference between these two subthemes is that one is about being *a part of* something and the other is *being or becoming* into something. This “something” often was described as having a sense of community and rarely, spirituality. Qualitatively, the difference is subtle but points to how co-participants articulated their experience. These subthemes were simply nuanced meanings of the general sense of transcending the boundaries of one’s own egoic sense of self.

Again, transcendence of self was experienced concurrently with many of the other themes presented here. Yet, it is an essential theme irreducible to other themes. An example of how this manifested in an interview comes from the account given by Chuck, who intentionally brought in his own sense of spirituality into the mix:

Chuck: Well, I know that—I could say there’s a spiritual dimension to it. I’m not a particularly religious person, and I considered myself an atheist for a very long time. And maybe in my old age, I’m mellowing and contemplating the possibility of there being something. But, for me, it has elements of that spiritual connection with something greater than yourself. And that’s part of being in that heightened state where you feel like you’re not doing this by yourself—that you’re really sharing in this phenomenon at this particular time, and that that’s going to carry you forward. There’s that quality about it. And I think that’s tied in very directly with also the idea of community.

For Edith, the sense of being a part of something greater came in a more subtle way:

Edith: I would say it was—the conversation had its own momentum. It had its own—people were propelling it forward and they were doing so in a way that was provocative and interesting and rich and challenging to the people in the room—without it ever becoming about me. Me, me, me. There was the sense that “I’m throwing this idea out there not to prove how smart I am but to genuinely, truly ask it.” And really wanting to know “Did you feel that also? Is that true for you?” Everyone spoke, everyone jumped in. There wasn’t this sense that the conversation was dominated by one person—

Edith went on to talk about how her sense of being a part of something greater came from being a part of a community of learners:

Edith: It was a yearlong course so there is that aspect of really getting to know you conference participants, which I think is unusual too. It was a small class, a small setting. There are no TA's. So you got this sense that there is a genuine community. You know people well and you have a sense of who they are and what their background is. By 6 months in you feel like you are arguing with a great depth of knowledge with those people based on conversations you've been having twice a week for a year.

For Solomon, transcendence of self is an essential quality that he felt when giving his five-minute presentation in class (the "original experience"):

Solomon: So there was just this connection that I felt to that original experience and it made it sort of like, this is kinda hard to explain. Like this experience, in a sense, is kinda timeless, you know what I'm saying? Because when I reflect back to those five minutes and reflect back to that original relationship that I had with the group with the rest of the class that I was fucking, you know, playing with and interacting within.

#### *Rarity/Unusualness of Experience*

Co-participants mentioned, at various times and in various ways, having a sense of the overall nature of the experience of PRC in classrooms as being rare or unusual. For most co-participants, this also applied to similar experiences outside of the classroom as well, but since the study focused on classrooms, it is not surprising that little was said of similar experience beyond the classroom. Co-participants expressed how special the experience was for them to the extent that for many it represented a pivotal and positively lasting moment in their lives. This quality has overt connections to other invariant themes such as transcendence of self, inspiration, the desire to recreate the experience, and transformation or long-term change in one's identity or goals. An example of the complexity of this theme is found in the account given by Chuck as he described his life-long search for a quality educational experience and finding it to be the exception rather than the rule:

Sean: And yet you said it seemed rare.

Chuck: Yeah, I think it is. I mean, you know, I've been sort of an itinerant professional student my whole life. And always looking, always searching and going and in different institutions and in different programs and every once in a while I would find instructors different somehow. But it was usually because the teacher was different. Not because the way the actual curriculum or pedagogy was laid out was different—it was a quirky teacher, you know, who decided to do it, a different way. And that's when I would kind of wake up a little bit and say: "All right, well, this is cool—this guy's bringing, or this woman—whomever—is introducing stuff in a different way, and even if it doesn't gel or it's kind of off a little bit, it's different." And that's when I would perk up a little bit. And for the most part, like I said, it was like that mind-numbing process—that mill, walk 'em in and walk 'em out—it was like cattle.

For Jared, the "norm" was feeling himself relating to others from a more intellectual or analytical place, a place that he broke free from during his exemplar classroom experience. Note that though Jared felt the experience to be relatively rare, he still felt it could be intentionally reproduced, given the right conditions:

Jared: I got the sense that everyone else was similarly moved. I don't think I experienced myself as not being dropped into the moment at the time. I think it's more like hindsight, reflection of like: "Oh! Right. That's what my norm was." So of course it would have felt weird that it was not in my normal, default way of operating.

Sean: So in that sense it was kind of unusual for you?

Jared: Totally.

Sean: Do you think it's something that could be recreated or that formative aspect of your whole experience was rare?

Jared: I would say *rare and* reproducible. I mean they've taught the class again since then. I haven't been in touch with them so I don't know if it went well or not.

Jasmine expressed her sentiment at how the experience was unusual for her with a sense of sadness that it was not more common. For her, this added to the sense of wanting more of the same type of experience, a theme directly related to the sense of rarity:

Sean: Yeah, and I'm curious about that quality of wanting to—did you say you wanted to recreate that experience? Or have that experience again?

Jasmine: It would be really awesome—it would be great if that happened more often in other classes, even if it wasn't therapy related. I mean, it's kind of hard to think of ways that could happen, but I think maybe because it was therapy related or centered, it kind of

brought it out more, but I mean, it would be great if it happened. Like, at least a few more [with a laugh] times before I finish school—yeah.

And for Edith, the sense of the experience as being rare came after considering all of the diverse and complex elements that have to be present for the experience to occur:

Sean: So it sounds like—does it feel like having those experiences where you’re in classrooms where you are engaged, where there is that passion, where you want to get involved and are drawn to it—do you feel like that happens, in your experience, readily or is it rare?

Edith: I think it’s quite rare. I think it’s pretty precious. Even at Reed, which I would say is an atmosphere dominated by that kind of interaction—I pull out Ed’s class as an example because it was a true experience of that, right? I could maybe find other classes that infrequently had that feeling. I think a huge amount depends on the professor. On the group of students you get. On the size of the group. On the composition of the group. On the character of the people. The readings. How good is the material we’re all putting in. It’s far too rare that I think a group manages to spark that kind of creative communal work. I think so frequently it’s like: “What does the article say? What does it mean? What do you think about what it says it means?” Right? Which is all good, it’s all useful to put it on the table. But I think part of what makes those classes really good—what makes those moments really good is when you have a depth of knowledge. Those conversations rarely happen in intro classes. Intro classes are about learning the material. More advanced classes are about parsing the material. And parsing each other’s ideas about the material.

Similarly, Edith expressed her feeling of the experience as being “fragile”:

Edith: But it’s fragile. That quality, you could disrupt it. You could have a wonderful class and your instructor gets sick and you get a new professor have way through the term and it is gone. There is a very liminal, ethereal, fragile quality, I think, to these moments.

### *Inspiration*

The feeling of being inspired is a quality that runs throughout the majority of the descriptions of PRC. Inspiration was often described as a particular moment during the process that was easier to recall than many of the other qualities already discussed, especially the themes that were revealed only after the analysis. Inspiration or the feeling of being inspired was conscious recognized by all of the co-participants. This is supported by the fact that every co-participant came into the study by being asked to describe their positive and inspiring experiences in higher education classrooms. The following examples illustrate the many instances of being inspired and the ways in

which they were an integral part of the overall process. The first example comes from Barb, for whom group experiences have been the most inspiring:

Barb: Well, so I think those are all very different experiences. But as I've been thinking about this, since we spoke last time, I think one thing that is very apparent to me—and I don't know if this is unique to me—the times that I've had the most positive or inspiring experiences have been group experiences.

For Jared, the feeling of being inspired was appreciated after he had time to reflect on what happened:

Jared: And there's something, and this is part of the course and something that I'm convinced of—there's something inherently inspiring, attractive, to that aliveness of people being their most authentic selves. And so just getting to bear witness to that, it just, I don't know, it felt like it blew the doors open for me.

For Meredith, being inspired came as result of being encouraged by a professor on an especially challenging task:

Meredith: It was really helpful in terms of being clear that this was something that I was going to do, and that I need to take stats again for this program—was simple—but I need to take stats again, because I actually want to learn how to teach it, because in essence, you don't really know it till you can teach [with a laugh] somebody else. Because I just feel like I understand the challenge associated with it, as a woman, as somebody who was maybe assumed to not be able to kind of go through the process. And so I think it's something important to me to ultimately at some point be able to kind of work through. So, I mean, that's how teachers have inspired me.

### *Agency and Communion*

Agency and communion are two aspects of a theme that arose overtly only during the group interview. Yet, the analysis of the individual interviews revealed the theme to be implicit in the descriptions. Here, agency and communion specifically refers to the perception of the presence of each person in a group needing to maintain a strong sense of themselves while experiencing the cooperative process of participation. That is, one must have a strong sense of one's agency for the communal processes associated with PRC to arise. The co-participants expressed this theme in a variety of ways, but the message was always the same: one must be true to oneself in order for the

collaborative process to work. An example of this comes from the group interview, where the co-participants dialogued about the use of the term “spirit” as a quality of the experience. There was a clarification of how agency and communion interact to create an emergent quality:

Edith: I have trouble with that. Not the spirit part. I am having trouble with the more lofty ambitions of that term. The problem I have is that it gives the moment and the process a lot of agency. And part of what I love about those moments is it's the people that bring the energy and bring that kind of creative fodder. And it's almost like we contribute to something and then we all take away a part of the meal. I think it lives with each of us as opposed to living in and of itself somehow in the world. And I think saying Spirit makes it feel like somehow it is imbued in the classroom now with that sense. And to me what is actually much more divine is the fact that it's a group process that we each take a part of and we get to grow individually and possibly as a group but also bring it to the next place. We're talking about having starting points and I think one group can give you an amazing starting point. And if you join another group you're a little lower or whatever the metaphor is. It's not that each moment is imbued but you've taken away something that is a lesson or a learning or some series of processes within themselves. And that's the meal, right?

Chuck: For me, it's more, and I'll go back to harmonic. The only way you are going to get that particular tone is if you are coming together. You are not going to have a choral session—you can stand there by yourself. You know what I'm talking about? You can get that timbre and the way to get that timbre is by rising. I guess that's what I'm trying to get at.

Jared: Yeah, I really liked what you were talking to me about: it's something that we come together and create and we pull back, it's still there. It's something that's dynamic, it's not something that we can grab a hold of. Because as soon as we try to grab hold of it, it's gone. It's not the same thing.

Barb: The agency needs to be there though, for me. You need to be a part of it. It's very possible to be in a group where everyone else is doing it and you are not a part of it. It doesn't need everyone there to be doing it. It's something that you have to be contributing to.

During his individual interview, Jared talked about gaining a sense of agency from the experience that lead to his positive action on a personal issue:

Jared: I was able to get enough perspective on my own experience of what was going on that I could unfuse myself from it. And I was like “Oh, this is what I'm doing and I'm making this into this and this is what's happening. Okay. Cool. So I don't have to do this so I will stop doing this.”

Sean: Perspective.

Jared: Yes. So that ability to have some agency around how I'm being was my other big takeaway.

*Process-Oriented*

For the co-participants, PRC is a phenomenon that is experienced over time with many variables. In particular, co-participants stressed the experience of PRC as an active process where one is less focused on the content of the discussion or some goal to be reach, both of which are often the reasons for the group to come together in the first place and provide the intentional quality to the overall experience.

For the co-participants, PRC as process was also contrasted with being focused on theories, ideas, or the content of the course. A few co-participants stressed that it was not the goal-oriented part of the process but the process itself that had an impact on them. While these other qualities were important, even essential to the quality of their interactions, all co-participants made it clear that inspired PRC was about being attentive to the process, as it was happening.

The following passages from the group interview clearly illustrates process as being central to the experience of PRC. During this part of the group interview, a few co-participants wanted to stress that to give the phenomenon a name or a reliable construct, it would be best if that construct reflected a “verb” quality versus a “noun” quality, so as to emphasize the process over a static idea:

Elizabeth: I think, for me, the reasons for being there are to grow one’s intellect . . . I am here to grow. I might fail at something and that’s fine but I’m going to learn from it. And I’m going to get better at my methods and I’m going to get better—but it’s all about that process of growing. That’s why I like the School of Ed., we get all As because it’s the process of learning. The goal isn’t to get a grade it’s to learn. So, I feel like knowing that helps me to be a learner whereas as an undergrad you are fighting against the other 300 people in your big lecture hall.

Edith: Sometimes at the end of the day, it’s not about any fixed end point. I don’t know what that would even look like.

Elizabeth: Right, it’s always a work in progress is what my advisor always says. For every paper there is still another version to write. I don’t see that end-goal yet. It’s about that process of learning and becoming a better writer. Like you said, you can’t really see what the outcome would even look like.

Chuck: And even, in part, the truth part of that is do you ever get to an ultimate truth? The process is happening during that lived experience and you are creating the truth in that lived

experience. And that's for me the "Aha" moment. And that's what I mean by harmonics to a certain extent. No one is saying  $X + Y = Z$ . We're sitting here and talking and as we are sitting here and these ideas start percolating to the surface and you start playing with them you start getting to a place where everyone can touch the vein and it's that hot streak. But it's a flow, it's not an end.

Elizabeth: I think I relate to other people in my program and other programs throughout the campus who have that same kind of idea. It's about this moment, it's about this lived experience. It's about the collective process, rather than "I'm going to do better than you on my paper."

Entire group (everyone): Yeah [Nodding in agreement].

Elizabeth: I don't like that kind of competitive spirit. That is not what graduate school is about.

Chuck: Thank you for saying that! I came here, for my undergrad, to Berkeley and it was just competition. It was about who could one-up the guy next to you. And that was ALL my undergrad experience was. And I talked to you [Sean] about the first time I walked into my grad class and everyone was like: "We are here for the process. We are here to talk about this stuff. We not here to outrank one another or see how I can make myself more eloquent and somehow more prestigious or to gain more esteem as a speaker. It's about how we all can come together and look at whatever we are looking at." That, to me, was mind blowing. I stayed away from academia for twenty years because of that. Precisely because of the experiences I had here of—because that was what was expected. And that was what your teachers wanted here. That was my experience as an undergrad. The excitement of walking into a space and that's part of that heart-space you are talking about—where it's okay to dialogue. It's the discourse that's important. Not the end result.

A little later in the conversation, the co-participants came back to this topic:

Chuck: For me, it's more, and I'll go back to "harmonic." The only way you are going to get that particular tone is if you are coming together. You are not going to have a choral session—you can stand there by yourself. You know what I'm talking about? You can get that timbre and the way to get that timbre is by rising. I guess that's what I'm trying to get at.

Jared: Yeah, I really liked what you were talking to me about: It's something that we come together and create and we pull back, it's still there. It's something that's dynamic, it's not something that we can grab a hold of. Because as soon as we try to grab hold of it, it's gone. It's not the same thing.

Entire group (everyone): [Nodding in agreement]

Jared: Which is part of why it's so hard to write about . . .

Edith: I do think there is something very active, very "verby" about it. There is something happening. That's why I don't like imbuing it with a solid state. It is a noun, you are absolutely right.

Chuck: The present-participle of the “-ing” is the “fluiding” of what is happening. You might want to consider that. Any term that you are going to put on the table is going to be loaded somehow. Everything to a certain extent has been plumbed. I like the “-ing.”

*Desire for More/Desire to Recreate*

There was also a common sentiment that the experience of PRC is highly desirable, given all of the qualities and themes described. Every co-participant found their particular experience to have a strong quality that was sometimes described as “addictive” or as a sense of “wanting.” The desire for more and the desire to recreate the experience is rooted in a strong and fundamental desire to connect with others in a real way. This quality is entirely conditioned on the existence of the other qualities. This quality is not always consciously recognized but when it is, it is powerful enough to change the course of one’s life. Chuck gave the most straightforward articulation of this feeling towards the end of the group interview:

Chuck: I’m constantly “Jones-ing” for it. That’s what I want in my classrooms. Sometimes being in the purely intellectual pursuit in the classroom can be interesting but I think I’d go crazy if that was the only experience I was ever going to have in the classroom—It’s a good conundrum [to have].

Chelsea expressed her sense of “wanting” in the context of feeling trust and safety in her class:

Chelsea: With that it was a “wanting” also. It was a place where it was a small, cohesive want. In a way a happiness because you felt safe there. You felt safe with these people. And in a lot of my classes I didn’t necessarily feel safe. I felt scared to answer questions because I didn’t want to be wrong. But in this class I was safe because if I answered the question wrong nobody was going to be like: “Oh my god. Why are you talking?” It was a really safe space. And I think that brought us a lot closer. And if we did say something it was fun and not meant to hurt you. In this class it was small, safe, and a kind of wanting.

For Edith, a desire for more manifested when she took some time off from her studies to go travel.

After some time had passed, she started to miss her positive classroom experiences of connecting with her peers—a fact that drove her to return to school with a renewed intention:

Edith: The year away from Reed had been so lacking in that kind of intellectual work that I was desperately hungry for it again. And I came back and was like: “Oh, thank God. Yes!” I have been missing this, I have been needing this. I have been wondering about a lot of

things. I want to engage again. I think a lot of people have this sense that you can read great books and understand the world and I think some people can. But clearly I'm a very verbal person and I need that cooperative work. I want to be in a class. I could just read that book—I could do that for free. That's the whole point of being in a class of people. Is that sense of interaction and cooperation and collaboration. And if you could get that on your own, (a) you'd be schizophrenic and, (b) why go to class? Why not just do that work yourself? I think being in class is a really special and different experience than sitting in a room and thinking everything.

### *Transformation*

At this point in the exposition of the constituent themes, the theme of transformation as an essential invariant may seem to be redundant. Transformation as an essential theme became apparent only after the analysis of the interviews and at several points during the process, it was tempting to not recognize it as such. Transformation is so fundamental to the overall experience that the co-participants seldom mentioned it.

This quality was mentioned during the exposition of the desire for more in the previous section because both support the existence of the other but each were seen to be distinct and invariant. The desire for more is not the same thing as transformation of self. Given this, the experience of transformation specifically refers to long-term or lasting change in one's identity or goals directly resulting from the experience of PRC in the classroom. For example, Solomon hinted at how his sense of identity changed as a result of giving his presentations:

Solomon: So there was this whole fucking—from the presentation—this whole transformation of who I was to this person.

And Edith suggested that everyone in her class, including herself, had been changed as a result of what transpired:

Edith: As a group I don't a single person would have sat down and been like: "My views haven't changed." Which is kinda cool, if you think about it. It's pretty neat.

Jared, when discussing an experiential class he took, directly mentioned how he felt transformed by what he experienced:

Jared: A lot of the weekend was individuals basically getting up in front of everybody else and just talking about who they were and people asking them questions. Very often what people had to bring, you know, a lot of the people were crying. That weekend felt very transformative for me.

Jared: And I learned . . . basically I learned how to fall in love. After that weekend. It was the first time that it clicked for me that there was something else in relationship beyond strategizing how to receive love from somebody else.

And Chelsea was deeply influenced to pursue a career in education and to pursue graduate school by her experience as well:

Chelsea: Yeah, that experience was a big part of the fact that my personality changed to do better and do more. Before my sophomore year I didn't do anything, I just wanted to be an athlete. But I always wanted to work but I couldn't do anything being an athlete. I wanted to get experience but my parents never made me work ever! Which I like and hate them for because I always wanted that work experience but I was like: "I think I can be a student ambassador. I think I can do something else." So I started there and I became an RA.

Chelsea: It pushed me to know that I can do more than I think I can. My limits are higher than I perceive them to be.

Finally, Barb described how her experiences of PRC influenced her to seek professional choices that were more in line with such experiences:

Sean: It's that process you want to revisit, you want to recreate?

Barb: Yeah. I think for me, I'm coming to the point right now where I'm going to graduate. At some point! Not any time soon but some point. And so the question is: What do I do? And I've got this degree and credential in school psychology and I must say the more I sit with that idea of just becoming a school psychologist, and I say "just" becoming a school psychologist because the idea of a school psychologist is a very prescribed task that is extremely individual. You write these reports, you work with these children one on one. You may do some individual counseling. There's no real team. And there's also no real working towards changing the system. You can get involved in professional organizations but your daily tasks would be nothing like that experience that I've just described liking. And I think that makes me really hesitate before actually becoming a school psychologist. And instead maybe somebody who teaches school psychologists or someone who does more research or something. I find myself more engaged with that collaborative idea.

Sean: You feel more drawn to that collaborative aspect?

Barb: Yeah.

### Situated Structure of Group Interview

The final situated structure of the group interview was achieved by analyzing and imaginatively varying the essential constituent themes of the group interview transcript with 6 of the 9 original co-participants. As mentioned in previous sections, the group interview was conducted to intentionally “saturate” the pool of meanings by introducing and openly discussing all of the possible themes that the researcher and the chairperson had discovered or contemplated to describe the experience of PRC—action that was intentionally avoided during the recruitment and conducting of the individual interviews where co-participants described their “naïve” accounts of PRC. The situated structure of the group interview is as follows:

For 6 of the 9 co-participants, the experience of inspired PRC is experienced in either a “headspace” or a “heartspace” but rarely from a “bodyspace,” which can seem unfamiliar and foreign. If one is inclined toward “headspace” then PRC is experienced as having an “acute mental clarity” and is associated with a pointed, focused awareness where one tends to connect with others through ideas rather than through direct, present-moment feelings. This attention mode of relating directs attention away from one’s bodily awareness yet allows for one to be more physically expressive.

If one is inclined toward “heartspace,” then this is experienced as the location of “flow” and the ability to connect with others in the same way that “headspace” is experienced. “Heartspace” is exemplified by engaging one’s emotions, pathos, and empathy and is conducive to connecting with others directly through feeling and sensing in present-moment awareness. For the participants, “heartspace” is associated with generalized awareness as opposed to “acute mental clarity.” Being in “heartspace” encourages one to be more present to the process as it is happening in the room, without overanalyzing one’s experience, rather than being absorbed in the ideas and constructs being shared or discussed. The attentional modes “head” or “heart” are experienced as being the effect of

individual and cultural differences. Both attentional modes can create a sense of resonance between all members of an intentional group.

If one attentional mode is dominant in the group, then the tone and quality of the shared space will be accordingly different. Whatever the attentional mode, for inspired PRC to manifest, one must care about the people in the group, to some extent. As PRC develops and deepens there is a sense of movement and “flow” that is a part of the nature of PRC as a dynamic process based in a particular situation context, rather than a fixed and defined goal. Because of the dynamic and process-oriented quality, PRC is difficult to define using nouns instead of verbs and is perceived to be delicate, fragile, and uncommon.

When “flow” is present, participants experience absorption into the process, which is known as an absence of cognitive reflection on the process accompanied by feelings of joyfulness, effortlessness, excitement, and engagement. This experience of “flow” often arises spontaneously in response to the depth of the engagement of the participants in the group and provides the ground for specific moments of insight to emerge, which can be experienced individually or simultaneously as a group. For the participants, PRC is likened to the experience of awe or grieving with others. As PRC develops and deepens, participants experience a progressive “present momentness,” which is accompanied by temporal-visual-spatial elements of awareness fading into the background. A strong sense of authenticity both in oneself and in others is central to the experience of PRC. Having a sense of authenticity is facilitated by increasing trust, the sharing of personal stories, and the experience of “flow,” all of which are dependent on each other in a recursive, circular fashion.

Being authentically in the present moment is experienced as being accompanied by lucidity of awareness and having a sense of open-mindedness about the direction the shared space can take, which can sometimes be experienced as being vulnerable. This authenticity in the present-moment can also be experienced as a deepening expansiveness or increasing spaciousness within oneself

where there is a sense of being and becoming into something bigger or transcendent to oneself. Participants also experience the creation of new meaning while in the present momentness of the shared space. All of these qualities are contingent on a willingness to grow as a person and bringing an intention to participate in the process. This mindful intention must be accompanied by a sense of one's agency for the experience of a shared space of PRC to occur. For the participants, PRC is the result of a process of collaboration, not competition and is analogous to the collaborative writing of a cohesive but unknown "text." There is also the experience of being inspired by listening to other's personal experiences. When accompanied by sharing one's personal experiences trust is further developed.

When one feels seen on a personal level, one also feels inspired. Being "seen" is part of the experience of authenticity. Authenticity is often accompanied by the pursuit of essential truths. When essential truths are perceived to have been honored or uncovered, a sense of nourishment, excitement, inspiration, and a heightened awareness can arise. When sharing in this collaborating space, one can also have the sense of being on the "inside" of the dialogical space. The shared space of inspired PRC is perceived to be cultivated and residing within each individual as a potential, whether they are attentive to it or not. PRC is perceived to be "owned" by each person participating in the shared space. The experience of connecting with others in a shared, collaborative space of PRC is pleasurable and leads to a sense of adventure and excitement that is addictive and self-generating. This self-generating quality can be experienced as a "driving force" and is often leads to a lasting transformation of personal and profession goals towards actively seeking to recreate inspired PRC-like situations.

#### Final General Situated Structure From Both Individual Interviews and Group Interview

The experience of inspired PRC occurs when one comes into a structured group space with an intention to transcend particular differences or worldviews in an effort toward conscious

collaboration. This intention is experienced as an openness of awareness that is known in either emotional or intellectual ways and sometimes as a combination of both. A sense of adventure or discovery comes from this sense of openness. Trust arises from the experience of being vulnerable, whether intentional or not. A sense of trust is then aided by an ongoing orientation toward authenticity, which, when present throughout the experience, aids in the recursive development of trust, ease, fluidity, and a sense of “flow.” These qualities are always precipitated by the experience of having a personal connection with one or several other people in the room. This personal connection can be either having the feeling of being personally seen by an Other or the sharing/listening of personal stories.

A sense of intimacy can be inherent from the beginning or can develop as these qualities build. This intimacy taken with the experience of having a personal connection, trust, and flow lead to bonding with the others in the room. Intimacy and bonding are often heightened by being emotionally moved through personal connection or feeling empathy toward another. This can feel like a “deepening” or like an expansiveness or spaciousness of consciousness. Concurrently, at some undefined and spontaneous point during this process, the experience of present momentness arises in the form of absorption/immersion in experience, which can be known via either a “headspace” or a “heartspace” or sometimes both.

There is also the quality of clarity in this present-momentness, which can be either focused (via headspace) or generalized (via heartspace). One often comes to feel excitement, energy, or the feeling of being “jazzed” as a result of the arising of many of these qualities, which can lead to a sense of awe and wonderment. The net result of these qualities is the experience of joyfulness, pleasure, and satisfaction. Also, at undefined and spontaneous times, one can experience insight into one’s personal life situation with lucidity and clarity. After all of the above qualities have manifested, one then experiences transcendence of self in the form of (a) having a sense of being a part of

something greater than oneself, and (b) being or becoming into something bigger than oneself. The combined effect feels to be unusual and rare compared to the rest of one's experiences. The feeling that the experience is complex, delicate, and somewhat ineffable supports this sense of rarity. All of this is accompanied by the sense that the experience has an inherent force that is self-generating or self-perpetuating. This emergent quality is accompanied by the experience of the creation of new perspectives, insights, and worldviews arising either individually or collectively. One feels inspired by these experiences and can perceive the existence of the balance between agency and communion being present. This sense of agency and communion is experienced as each participant being authentic to who they are while being in communion with the group. Both are essential to the arising of PRC. The experience as a whole is perceived to be process-oriented rather than theory or goal-oriented. One develops an intense desire, either conscious or unconscious, for the experience to continue. This can manifest as continuing the process beyond the room into other contexts or by intentionally changing one's life goals to accommodate the creation of such experiences. Transformation of self occurs as a result of the experience. This transformation can go unnoticed but always leads to long-term change in one's identity or goals.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

### Overview of the Findings of the Study

What is participatory reality constitution? At the beginning of this research project, one of the main questions posed was “How is the shared sense of reality co-constituted?” The heart of this question was to better understand the place where meaning and sense-making is actively created when people come together and dialogue. The goal was to better understand the core themes, structures, and constructs of how the sense of what is real emerges through social process. This original question was difficult to articulate at the beginning of the research and has retained its complexity now that the research has been completed. Though this complexity remains, much has been gained in the understanding and clarification of this phenomenon.

As the research evolved, it became clear that I wanted to know not only how a shared sense of reality is co-constituted, but I also wanted to know more about those moments when things just seemed to “click” and “flow” when gathering in small groups. It became clear that, when asked about the project, the easiest way to summarize the goal of the research was to simply state that I was interested in learning more about those “magic” moments when small groups are “humming” at the same frequency and ideas and inspirations are flowing freely. I knew these moments had a lasting impression on me and I wanted to know what others had to say about it, to find out what the essence of the experience is, not to mention trying to find a stable way to describe the experience since there seemed to be little agreement on what to call it.

The results of this research suggest that participatory reality constitution, as experienced in higher education classrooms, is an emergent and generative process dynamically created out of the intersubjective and intercorporeal space (which may be experienced as a form of group self-expansiveness) experienced between participating individuals where a strong sense of energy and

flow arises (Friedman, 1983; Friedman & Pappas, 2006). The findings support the original contention that PRC is a highly complex phenomenon that eludes easy classification.

To the researcher's knowledge, this is the first phenomenological study devoted to the phenomenon of participatory sense-making and collaborative presence, that is, participatory reality constitution in higher education classrooms. It is also one of the first studies to address the somatic dimension inherent in the research process as well as the co-participant's experience of PRC. The findings from Chapter 4 suggest many things, among them the reality that when individuals come together with the intention to collaborate, great things can happen: not least of which is lasting, positive transformation in one's sense of self and one's life goals. It is apparent that the experience of PRC, an emergent and generative phenomenon that arises from intersubjective process, is highly desirable, pleasurable, and transformative.

Again, the findings suggest many things. Among them is not only the reinforcement of the complexity of the phenomenon but also that the two datasets revealed many themes that were previously unknown and other themes that were thought to be important but were found to be less central. For example, one of the main themes that was challenged concerns the presumption that PRC is best understood as an embodied felt sense. The findings still support this proposition but in a surprising way.

The following sections explore the findings with the main presuppositions given at the outset (during the proposal phase) followed by the second section (exegetical reflection), where a detailed consideration of how the findings are related to phenomenological philosophy and participatory philosophy, as outlined in Chapter 2. The third section focuses on existential reflections of the essential themes based on the constituent themes and structure(s) of this study. Finally, the fourth section presents possible next steps for further research.

### *Incongruities Revealed*

#### *Methodological Incongruities*

*Embodied felt sense.* Among the main findings established by this research is the incongruity between the presupposition that PRC is a phenomenon accessible via touching into one's somatic sensibility. Given the results, this may still be the case but the means to test it were not conclusive. There are a number of possible reasons for this, not the least of which is the desire to obtain "naïve" descriptions while attempting to not bias or "front-load" the co-participant's understanding of the phenomenon with leading terms or to intentionally not choose to interview individuals who identified as being more *somatically oriented*.

Likely, the inconclusive quality associated with attempting to assist co-participants with speaking from their somatic felt sense was a result of the level of discourse in higher education being generally centered in an intellectual milieu. The attempt to have co-participants become familiar with their embodied felt sense and to share their experience of PRC in the classroom may have required more training or time than was given during this study.

*Controlling for state of consciousness.* Another core finding that is similar to the approach outlined above concerns the need for refinement in the attempt to provide a stable state of consciousness (SoC) or frame for the co-participants during the group interview. The embodiment exercise that was designed to assist co-participants with getting into the controlled state of consciousness via dropping into one's body awareness yielded results that were unexpected to both the researcher and the Chairperson, for co-participants consistently rejected the inducted SoC as one associated with their own experiences of PRC. However, the fact that co-participants did not resonate with the embodiment exercise during the group interview does not negate the findings or the research method. Somatic phenomenology is based on the observation that, as phenomenological experience, the processes of the mind can be located and quantified as spatially located processes relative to the

body. The fact that a number of co-participants identified the interpersonal resonances of PRC as happening in either a headspace or a heart-space represents use of descriptors that is consistent with the concept of processes with both spatial dimensionality and bodily location. Furthermore, the fact that co-participants were able to discern that the front-of-spine-located SoC into which they were inducted was not resonant with their PRC-related experiences, and over against this identified their experiences as located in headspace or heartspace, also suggests that co-participants were capable of qualitatively discerning between different bodily located SoCs. In fact, co-participants as a group were quite vehement and certain in their distinction between the inducted reference state and the state associated with their own PRC-like experiences, indicating that they had considerable confidence in these discernments.

One possible reason for the significant discrepancy between the inducted reference state and the remembered experience of participants may be that in the United States, the mode of discourse in higher education institutions is overwhelmingly focused on the intellect. If the co-participant pool were to have been taken from a school that specialized in other modalities such as experiential and transformative learning more likely to explore one's somatic felt sense awareness, the results would have likely reflected this difference. More about these issues are mentioned in the section on limitations and delimitations.

#### *Differences and Similarities Between the Datasets*

The results of the data analysis revealed several incongruities between the two datasets (individual interviews and group interview). Chapter 4 presented these differences as being themes that occurred only in the individual interviews and themes that only occurred in the group interview. The reasons for these differences may be attributed to factors such as (a) having had time to consider one's experience in more detail after having conducted the first in-depth individual interview, (b) the nature of the group interview being intentionally open to the researcher's own

interpretations of PRC, (c) the sharing of one's experience as being informed and influenced by hearing others experiences (in the group interview), or (d) only having time to focus on particular dimensions or themes of the experience of PRC and thus privileging certain perspectives of PRC over others.

### *Individual Interviews*

There were 18 themes that were particular to the individual interviews. These themes are (a) rigor/challenge as catalyst/provocation, (b) safety, (c) comfort, (d) increasing depth, (e) love/spirituality, (f) being emotionally moved, (g) having a sense of accountability or responsibility to others, (h) somatic sense centered on heart or solar plexus area, (i) fun, (j) playfulness, (k) like-mindedness, (l) long-term bonding/establishment of relationships beyond experience, (m) real-world/applied focus/pragmatic relevance, (n) gratitude, (o) positive regard and respect for others, (p) shift in emotional tone, (q) spontaneity, and (r) unpredictability.

Among the main themes that manifested in the individual interviews but not in the group interview was experiencing rigor or challenge as a catalyst for the arising of PRC. Many of the co-participants mentioned how, when challenged by the professor, an assignment, or by another student, they felt that being challenged positively contributed to their overall experience in a positive way. Though anxiety was a common response, having been challenged to think about an issue or to respond in an emotionally open way became a catalyst for their engagement and participation in the group.

Given the frequency of the theme during the individual interviews (6 out of 9 co-participants explicitly mentioned it), it is surprising that academic rigor or challenge was not mentioned during the group interview. It is hard to speculate the reasons for this omission but it might be sufficient to state that perhaps if someone had mentioned it during the group interview, it may have arisen more strongly. Regardless, after the cross-comparison of the constituent themes from both datasets was

completed, it became apparent that rigor or challenge as a catalyst had more to do with other themes such as intention, openness to experience, trust, and flow/ease. Thus, during the analysis, it was not included in the final list of constituent themes.

Another example of a theme worth mentioning is that of like-mindedness. Many of the co-participants talked about how the individuals that composed their particular group were similar in some way. Even though there were always concrete differences, the similarities were seen to outweigh those differences. During the final analysis, like-mindedness became a subtheme of having the intention to transcend those differences and to being generally open to experience. Thus, like-mindedness as theme was merged into these more general themes.

#### *Group Interview*

Like the individual interviews, the group interview contained themes particular to the discussion. Unlike the individual interviews, there was much less variance, which makes sense given the time constraints and that each co-participant was present to sharing their views in a face-to-face situation. This was apparent despite having six of the original nine present for the group interview.

Given this, there were five general themes specific to the group interview. They are (a) engagement, (b) the distinction between individual and collective insight, (c) the pursuit and uncovering of essential truths, (d) feeling nourished by the process, and (e) the experience as being “owned” by or inherently carried within each co-participant.

As with the themes only contained in the individual interviews outlined above, these five themes were seen to be essentially alternate or particular forms of some of the main constituent themes arrived at through the combination of both datasets. For example, the theme of engagement or being engaged in the topics in the shared space of the classroom is essentially another way of describing how one’s intentionality was open to experience and accompanied by a sense of excitement or energy. Similarly, the distinction between individual and collective insight was

categorized as a variance of the invariant emergence/generativity where the creation of new perspective and insights was experienced in individual or collective ways.

The pursuit of the uncovering of truth was a variant of authenticity and nourishment was a variant of feeling excited and feeling pleasure or satisfaction. Finally, the experience of PRC as being “owned” by or inherently carried within each participant in the group was a variant of the theme of transcendence of self where there is the sense of being a part of something greater than oneself as well as the theme of emergence/generativity and the subtheme of the self-generating quality of the culture.

*Similarities Between Datasets: A Portrait of PRC as Narrative*

Taking into account the differences outlined above, the common themes from both datasets have been combined and presented in Chapter 4 as the final general situated structure. Given these common themes, PRC in higher education classrooms is experienced by an individual when coming into a small group space with an intention to collaborate. This intention is simultaneously experienced as a sense of emotional or intellectual openness, which results in the building of trust, authenticity, and bonding with the individuals in the room. These qualities are almost always facilitated by having some kind of personal connection such as feeling personally seen or sharing and listening to others personal stories.

These initial qualities, which can happen in a single meeting or over the course of several classes, contribute to a sense of the increasing depth of the experience, which is often experienced in moments of absorption or clarity via one’s heart-space or one’s headspace. As these qualities arise, a sense of flow or effortlessness becomes present which is often accompanied by excitement, awe, joy, and a sense of adventure. This then leads to a deeper process, often unrecognized at the time, of emergence or generativity of new insights and perspectives. These insights have a clarity to them that often leads to the individual transcending their sense of self and being a part of something

greater than themselves. In hindsight, the individual reflects on the experience as being unusual or rare. Regardless of this unusualness, the individual is left feeling deeply inspired by the experience of PRC. For the individual, PRC in the higher education classroom is a process that is lived in the moment. The overall effect not only leaves the individual feeling inspired but they also have a strong desire, which can be more or less consciously recognized, to have the same experience again. The individual is often positively transformed by the experience in that it leads to long-term changes in one's identity or life goals.

### *Limitations and Delimitations*

#### *Limitations*

Limitations of the study include the difficult to articulate nature of the phenomenon being studied. Other limitations include the dynamic and inconclusive nature of phenomenology and its numerous and, at times, conflicting meanings. Similarly, the core constructs used in this study are inevitably subject to a plurality of interpretations.

Another limitation includes the reliance upon translated versions of the original texts and articles written in German or French—especially concerning Husserl's written works and their central importance in this research. This means that any nuanced meanings of terms, such as constitution and reduction, lost in translation from German or French into English are more difficult to obtain. However, since there are numerous reliable phenomenological works in English, this limitation is not significant enough to affect the research process or the outcomes.

Finally, due to the delimitation (see next section) of the research topic, descriptors such as "subjectivity," "intersubjectivity," "other," "consciousness," and "transcendent" are limitations in the sense that they are necessarily broad and therefore subject to variability (i.e., inconsistency in meaning), depending on the theorist, school of thought, or interview subject. Every effort was made to clearly define these terms, where applicable.

*Delimitations*

The broader research questions of this study inevitably go beyond the scope of phenomenology and the human sciences. Thus, a delimitation of this study includes limiting the interpretive context to those works cited in Chapter 2 (the literature review). This is a delimitation chosen for the purposes of keeping the study within manageable bounds.

In an empirical-positivistic research model a larger sampling pool could be seen as being more useful for understanding PRC—especially considering that the experience is contingent on groups of people (e.g., its social nature). The delimitation to interview 6 to 9 co-participants is based upon the guidelines of phenomenological psychology in the context of a human science model, as well as limits on time and resources. Also, the choice to interview only individuals with at least one year of graduate school is a delimitation supporting the need to narrow issues around variance.

*Delimitations arising from research process.* As mentioned in previous sections, one delimitation that was not foreseen at the outset of the research was the choice to recruit a co-participant pool using generalized terms such as “positive” and “inspiring” instead of terms that would be more descriptive of the phenomenon. There was a delicate balance between seeking to avoid confirmation bias and being specific about what the phenomenon is (articulating the phenomenon to co-participants so that they received cues regarding the assumptions of the researcher). The choice was to err on the side of avoiding confirmation bias as one of the main goals of the researcher was to find generalized meanings beyond what one may find by interviewing individuals in one’s own peer group, (i.e., to avoid “preaching to the choir,” so to speak).

## Exegetical Reflection

### *PRC and Philosophy*

#### *Similarities and Differences Between Philosophy and Psychology*

Like philosophy,

The concerns of psychology are the concerns of people attempting to make sense of their lives. They do not exist outside of historically and socioculturally evolved traditions of knowing and understanding, and the kinds of experiences and actions embedded and constituted within such traditions. (Martin, 2004, p. 7)

Clarifying this relationship helps to further the discussion of the psychological aspects of this research with the theoretical insights and underpinnings—especially those associated with phenomenology, which contains strong elements of both psychology and philosophy.

#### *Psychologism*

I have avoided psychologism in my research by approaching the phenomenon of PRC not merely as a relative experience residing in the minds of individuals (though this is true to some extent), but mainly as a phenomenon with intersubjective qualities that exist beyond the boundaries of individual consciousness. That is, one of the more explicit presuppositions of this research is that PRC is characterized in this way. By accounting for both views—that of philosophy and psychology and how both can represent intellectualism, empiricism, or psychologism—I have adhered to Husserl's project for phenomenology as a *middle-way*.

In analytic/Anglo-American philosophy subjectivity typically precludes any notions of intersubjectivity. The American Psychological Association—being an example of the dominance of the analytic tradition in North American social science—defines intersubjectivity as “1. Empathic communication: the ability to share conscious experiences, for example, by shared gaze between infants and their caretakers. 2. A philosophical view that all public, objective events are in actuality shared subjective experiences” (VandenBos & American Psychological Association., 2007, p. 495).

The primacy of the individual as isolated, free subjectivity is, historically speaking, a recent development. Before the modern era, the individual was understood (implicitly or explicitly), as a part of a greater corpus (e.g., a state, a kingdom, a church). After the modern era, the Rationalists and the Humanists emphasized the freedom and will of the subject (the individual “I”), thus paving the way for modern notions of universal human rights and the inherent worth of the individual (this is also commonly known as the Cartesian model of the self). In this sense, subjectivity was not recognized as a thing unto itself, worthy of study, until the modern era (roughly around the time of the European Enlightenment).

Hegel, being a 19th-century German Idealist, created an alternative to this Cartesian self. He challenged the notion of the separate self through his doctrine of the State (Midgley, 2006)—along with other great European thinkers such as Descartes, Vico, and Kant— and inspired a whole branch of thought separate in many ways from Descartes’ mind/body distinction. He did this through the assumption of a collective subject that he called human “spirit” or *Geist* that evolved through history and thus transcended the individual. We can still see the influence of his thought through Marxism, critical theory, and the likes of French thinkers such as Merleau-Ponty and Lacan among other diverse schools of thought (Audi, 2006).

#### *PRC and Phenomenological Philosophy*

The findings, in particular, the constituent themes and the general situated structure, are rich in implied meanings. This section will explore some of these implications and attempt to make concrete connections with the literature presented in Chapter 2. Special emphasis has been given to connecting the finding with the phenomenological tradition and especially with the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and Alfred Schutz.

*First-person plural and the “We” domain.* Phenomenology is traditionally characterized as being primarily concerned with the eidetic structures and processes of lived experience. In this sense,

*intentionality* is often the starting point of inquiry within phenomenology. However, the realization that one's subjectivity is dependent on the subjectivities of others has long been a key insight in phenomenology, thus, intersubjectivity is a core structure for Husserlian phenomenology (Crossley, 1996; Kockelmans, 1994; Russell, 2006; Zahavi, 2001b).

The subjective self (first person) is connected to the life-world (third person) through the intersubjective sphere, that is, through either the second person (you) or the first person plural (we). Throughout this dissertation, emphasis has been placed on the first person plural, the collective "we" domain. It is this perspective, the intersubjective domain, that is the fundament or ground of the social world (Schutz, 1966).

#### *PRC and the Social Phenomenology of Alfred Schutz*

Much of Chapter 2 was focused primarily on Husserl's work because of the central and prominent place it occupies in phenomenology. Alfred Schutz's life work was strongly influenced by trying to come to terms with Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. Therefore, to truly understand Schutz, I have begun with Husserl. To understand Husserl is to understand the foundations of phenomenology. Yet, to do service to where phenomenology extends into the realms of the social sciences—psychology, sociology, anthropology, jurisprudence, economics, and so on (see Natanson, 1998)—one must recognize the direct line from Husserl to Schutz (this is typically from a historico-biographical perspective). In Schutz's social phenomenology, there exist relevant insights into the nature of PRC as a lived social experience. His work has much to offer any understanding of the nature of PRC. Thus, an account of PRC and Schutz' social phenomenology is detailed in the following section.

Schutz's work is where the social world and its ontology have the greatest impact in phenomenology for any extension into the social sciences and the foundations of the social world:

His papers, taken together, create a new paradigm in social thinking aimed at the study of the meaning sedimentation process, which constitutes the framework of

human thought and activity, and eventually the meaningful structure of the social world. It therefore lays the deepest foundation for human understanding in social life. (Smirnova, 2006, p. 203)

Tom Nenon (1999), while supporting Schutz as a foundation for the social sciences (and thus implicating psychology) said:

A phenomenological philosophy of the social sciences can then be foundational for them in the sense that it can exhibit general structures that underly the specific social structures, relationships, and institutions it studies. It can anchor the empirical results in more general structures that can ultimately be traced back to a basic phenomenon such as the awareness of duration. (p. 182)

*Typifications and relevances.* Schutz's philosophy is critically dependent on the idea of typifications, which he originally borrowed from Weber and von Mises (Smirnova, 2006). Weber used what he called "ideal types" (Schutz, 1972, pp. 224-229) to describe what the scientist performs when he or she attempts to attribute and classify structures in the lifeworld based upon meanings. The importance of ideal types was heavily stressed by both Weber and Schutz in the understanding of the social sciences:

Again and again, Weber refers to the problem of the ideal type as the central problem of all the social sciences. Our studies have shown how well founded this conception is. For the world of contemporaries and the world of predecessors can only be comprehended in an ideal-typical way. (Schutz, 1972, p. 226)

In other words, the constituent themes and essential structures obtained through the analysis of the interview data can be seen to be forms of ideal types of the lived experience of PRC.

Similarly, Schutz's novel use of relevances is, perhaps, even more central to his overall approach: "The bulk of Schutz's work is founded on and penetrated by his conception of 'relevance.' Relevance is, in my opinion, a key conception which underlies all his works and connects them with one another" (Nasu, 2008, p. 91). Not only this, but according to Nasu (2008), Schutz's theory of relevances is the foundation for his sociology of knowledge, thus, if he is correct, then his theory of relevances is an area of his thought that bears strongly on PRC in higher education classrooms. A sample of this import can already be seen in the volume *Schutz's Theory of Relevance: A*

*Phenomenological Critique* (Cox, 1978) and Schutz's own *Reflections on the Problem of Relevance* (Schutz, 1970).

*Provinces of meaning and multiple realities.* Schutz also made generous use of the concept of *provinces of meaning*. Here the idea is rather simple: the lifeworld is filled with *sub-universes* of meaning:

It is the meaning of our experiences and not the ontological structure of the objects which constitutes reality. Hence we call a certain set of our experiences a finite province of meaning if all of them show a specific cognitive style and are—*with respect to this style*—not only consistent with themselves but also compatible with one another. (Schutz, 1971, p. 230)

Provinces of meaning are akin to Husserl's notion of the horizon of consciousness. Here we have Schutz referring to a fundamental phenomenon of our experience of the lifeworld: There exist “bubbles” of reality in which people or societies exist in and base their standards on. They are by no means universal but more like tectonic plates of meaning that are ever shifting on the sea of the lifeworld.

Provinces of meaning are connected to the larger and more generalized idea of *multiple realities*, a term that Schutz (1971) borrowed from James' *Principles of Psychology*. In his essay regarding the same, one can clearly see some of the roots for later developments into the social construction of reality via Berger and Luckmann (1967). Multiple realities, as a core theme within Schutz's overall work, is a pivotal and fruitful place for any understanding or expansion of PRC:

Such a conception of multiple realities, which constitutes an essential part of his sociology of everyday life, makes important contributions to the methodology of the social sciences. Founded on these ideas, which are in turn firmly founded on his theory of *relevances* and on his penetrating insights into knowledge, Schutz can formulate postulates for research and concept formation in the social sciences, i.e., postulates of subjective interpretation, rationality, logical consistency, relevance, compatibility, and adequacy, all of which unite to “give the necessary guarantees that social sciences do in fact deal with the real social world, the one and the unitary life-world of us all, and not with a strange fancy-world independent of and without connection to this everyday life-world,” as well as ensure the open and creative circular-relationship between the world of scientific theory and the world of everyday life. (Nasu, 1999, p. 80)

Husserl's transcendental intersubjectivity has been contested, not least of all by Alfred Schutz. It is a key point of departure for Schutz (1966) from Husserl. It also represents—not as a

historical term, but in regard to its meaning—a fundamental issue in 20th-century continental philosophy (Backhaus, 2005; Costelloe, 1996, 1998; Fuchs & De Jaegher, 2009; Gadamer, 2000; Habermas, 1991; Haney, 2002; Jones, 2000; Russell, 2006; Smirnova, 2004, 2007; Tripathy, 1992; Zahavi, 2001b, 2003b). Husserl contended that the transcendental ego was further constituted in the transcendental intersubjective realm, which then leads to the constitution of the lifeworld. However, Schutz could not see how the intersubjective realm could be anything but mundane in nature (i.e., he thought Husserl made an error trying to approach intersubjectivity from a transcendental point of view) and thus built his philosophy on his disagreement with what he saw as Husserl's solipsistic idealism. His contention began as a serious question and, in the course of a few years, grew to become a virtual certainty:

His doubts about Husserl's ability in solving the problem of transcendental intersubjectivity on the basis of the concept of the transcendental subject would gradually become a certainty. In a paper on Sartre one can read that (Schutz, 1971c, p. 195) "it is one of the most difficult problems of phenomenology—perhaps an insoluble one—to reconcile the notion of *the* transcendental ego as the source of the constitution of the world with the idea of a plurality of coexistent transcendental subjects." (Hanzel, 2006, p. 180)

Schutz's conceptions of provinces of meaning and multiple realities have direct relevance to the phenomenon of PRC. For example, one aspect of the experience of PRC may have to do with how individuals recognize or "buy into" certain provinces of meaning. Also, with respect to Husserl's "horizons," provinces of meaning and multiple realities, as Schutz conceived of them, may shed light on shared, intersubjective qualities of the experience of PRC.

Thus, relevances, provinces or meaning, and multiple realities provide explanatory power to the phenomenology of PRC explored here. For example, what was relevant to the co-participant at the time of the interview may no longer be relevant after the fact. Conversely, the same holds true for what the co-participant held to be relevant before the interview was conducted. All that is given in this study is what the co-participant found to be relevant at the time. It is possible and desirable to infer the deeper meanings of what was said beyond the transcripts and beyond the structure(s). Not

only this, but it is possible to do so as part of the discourse community (e.g., phenomenologists and psychologists) which is the community this study will most likely benefit.

Provinces of meaning are a phenomenological correlation of the sense-making process that occurs during PRC and PRC-like events. In terms of the result of this study, understanding the co-participants as sharing their experience (with each other and with the researcher) from within particular and overlapping provinces of meaning may be useful in coming to terms with the complexity of the phenomenon.

Schutz' (1971) conceptions of multiple realities, as tied into relevances and provinces of meaning, has a quality to it that is much less abstract but no less important to sense-making around PRC. Taking his cue from William James, there is a section in Schutz' (1971) essay *On Multiple Realities* titled *The Many Realities and Their Constitution* where he gave a clear description of the nature of provinces of meaning and the theory of multiple realities that bears directly on the accounts of PRC given in Chapter 4:

In order to free this important insight from its psychologistic setting we prefer to speak instead of many sub-universes of reality of *finite provinces of meaning* upon each of which we may bestow the accent of reality. We speak of provinces of *meaning* and not of sub-universes because it is the meaning of our experiences and not the ontological structure of the objects which constitutes reality. Hence we call a certain set of our experiences a finite province of meaning if all of them show a specific cognitive style and are—*with respect to this style*—not only consistent in themselves but also compatible with one another . . .

Even more, this reality seems to us to be the natural one, and we are not ready to abandon our attitude toward it without having experienced a specific *shock* which compels us to break through the limits of this “finite” province of meaning and to shift the accent of reality to another one. (pp. 229-231)

In this section, Schutz meant to point to the phenomenological way in which the individual is usually “shocked” out of one reality into another because of what he, in other contexts, has called the *sedimentation* of knowledge. This means, according to Schutz' logic, that in regard to PRC, the co-participants needed to experience an intentional openness to their classroom experience and to the experiences and narratives of others in the class in order for the process to unfold in a manner that

eventually leads to the emergence (generativity) of new insights, worldviews, a sense of excitement, joy, present-momentness, and transcendence of self (to name a few of the more prominent constituent themes). In Merleau-Ponty's (2008) words:

Our problem, therefore, becomes clear. The perceiving subject must, without relinquishing his place and his point of view, and in the opacity of sensation, reach out towards things to which he has, in advance, no key, and for which he nevertheless carries within himself the project, and open himself to an absolute Other which he is making ready in the depths of his being. (p. 380)

For the co-participants, the essence of the experience of PRC is grounded in this shift from one province of meaning to another, from one sub-universe of meaning to another. The experience is highly exemplary of the process of encountering other universes of meaning (other people's perspectives) and the *becoming* involved in the development of a deepened awareness, especially in regard to one's inherent intersubjective (social) nature. This process is not always explicit or consciously recognized, especially as it is happening in-the-moment. It is upon reflection *a posteriori* that such deep generative structures of meaning are often revealed.

What seems to be happening in the moment during the experience of PRC is that such deep structures are being recognized on an intuitive, corporeal level of awareness—a level of awareness that is immediate and accurate (see Gendlin, 1995; 2000b). Therefore, if this is the case, then Schutzian social phenomenology's explanatory power combined with Gendlin's philosophy of the implicit can provide leading clues to the ways in which we bring awareness to transpersonal experiences such as PRC. Furthermore, by learning to attend to one's somatic felt sense, in Gendlin's terms, one can attune to these deeper generative structures of participatory reality constitution in small groups.

#### *Sociology of Knowledge and the Social Construction of Reality*

There is also much to say about Schutz's sociology of knowledge (see Barber, 1988) and how it can potentially be useful in explaining PRC in higher education classrooms. This is especially

pertinent if one were to attempt to bridge the microcosm of the classroom to larger social issues beyond the classroom.

Historically, sociology of knowledge distinguished itself as a type of inquiry during the same time that Husserl came to prominence in the German-speaking world of the early 20th century. Max Scheler and Karl Mannheim are the prominent historical figures (and founders) of sociology of knowledge though it was Schutz, based on Weber, Husserl, and Scheler, who became the leading inspiration for what later became social constructionism via Berger and Luckmann (1967).

The character and flavor of Schutz's work, overall, is fully in-tune with Husserl's larger vision of phenomenology as *philosophia perennis*. It is, somewhat paradoxically, a philosophy not of theoretical ideas but of the lived world. It is firmly rooted in and must always refer back to at every instance, the actual lived experience of the social world—in this case, PRC in classrooms—and one's place in it. In this sense, much like the vision for transpersonal psychology, it is a vision for a living and dynamic understanding that is ever-evolving, that is, in short, generative:

It rather partakes in Husserl's original phenomenological program clearly expressed in the maxim of an "original self-activity" directed back towards experience and like all phenomenology is a "moving, in contrast to a stationary, philosophy" (Spiegelberg, 1976, p. 2). In this sense, today just as before, Schutz's social phenomenology may be said to present an extensive field of research work which in principle is always open for fruitful further investigative exploration. Here, Schutz's work may not only be characterized in terms of its rightful place as a "classic," but, moreover, as a "living classic" by in essence opening up and out into the most profound depths of our living experience of the social world, while the integrated full humanity of the social thinker is inwardly brought back into the social sciences as a matter of ever expanding foundations and the social phenomenological aphorism. (Vaitkus, 2005, pp. 118-119)

Hisashi Nasu, in his essay *Between the Everyday Life-World and the World of Social Scientific Theory: Towards an "Adequate" Social Theory*, elaborated on this fluid and dynamic characteristic when he quoted Schutz:

Turning to the everyday life-world serves as a moment to relativize and objectify the world of social science, and *vice versa*, and consequently as a way to ensure the open and creative circular-relationship between these two worlds. Indeed, as Schutz clearly said, "it is exactly this paradoxical situation which prevents theorizing from [freezing into (added by Helmut R.

Wagner)] a strange solipsism by which any thinking self would remain secluded in its own private and fictitious world” (Schutz, 1996, p. 50). (as cited in Nasu, 2005, p. 137)

The social phenomenology of Schutz provides an adequate framework within the phenomenological tradition from which to build out a more robust understanding and explanation of PRC. The bridging of Husserl’s phenomenological project and the intersubjective domain of the social world is exemplified through Schutz’s philosophy (though, Schutz did not adequately treat the theme of embodiment in his work), which may be combined with Gendlin’s philosophy of the implicit. To pursue these investigations further would be fruitful and relevant to the particular phenomenon exemplified by PRC in higher education classrooms.

### *PRC and Transpersonal Theory*

#### *The Participatory Turn*

In Chapter 2, Jorge Ferrer’s (2002, 2009, 2011; Ferrer & Sherman, 2008) participatory spirituality was introduced and discussed in the context of this research project. Given the results presented in Chapter 4 and the discussion thus far, it seems entirely plausible to interpret the themes and structure(s) of PRC as indicative of an instance of the basic building blocks of participatory spirituality. To be sure, spirituality was not an explicit theme and one not need to take it this far. Yet, since the results do reveal deeper structures of human intersubjectivity and the realities they create, it would seem that a correlation could be made between PRC as a lived phenomenon and participatory spiritual events.

Barring any implicit metaphysical assumptions that come with such a leap, to say that PRC is a *transpersonal* experience is within the bounds of the results of this study. In particular, many of the themes and nuances revealed by the analysis are the same themes commonly associated with transpersonal experiences in general. For example, the analysis uncovered the themes of having an increasing depth of experience, present-momentness, awe, insight, inspiration, rarity, ineffability,

transcendence of self, and lasting transformation. All of these themes are well known in the transpersonal literature to be associated with the variety of transpersonal experiences recorded by transpersonal psychologists (Caplan, Hartelius, & Rardin, 2002; Hartelius et al., 2007; Lajoie & Shapiro, 1992; Shapiro, Lee, & Gross, 2003). Similarly, self-expansiveness and self-contraction, as outlined by Friedman (1983, 2005) and introduced in Chapter 1, are transpersonal constructs that provide insight into the themes above (especially concerning transcendence of self).

Not only this, but the contemporary transpersonal theory of Ferrer's participatory spirituality is a natural extension of the findings of this research. In fact, it can be seen as a logical extension of following Schutz's phenomenology of multiple realities and provinces of meaning:

What I am proposing here, then, is that *different spiritual ultimates can be cocreated through intentional or spontaneous participation in a dynamic and undetermined mystery, spiritual power, and/or generative force of life or reality. . . .* These worlds are not statically closed but fundamentally dynamic and open to the continued transformation resulting (at least in part) from the creative impact of human visionary imagination and religious endeavors. (Ferrer, 2009, p. 142)

To put this in different words, regardless of any metaphysical claims implied by this spiritual language, the point is that the *experience* of spiritual realities is conditioned on the same co-constitutive principles being explored in this dissertation. Here is where one can see the intersubjective social infinite of Hegel's (1977) dialectic (Nagel, 1997). Here is where Buber's (1996) insistence that God arises in the space between *I and Thou*, on the threshold of creation, becomes apparent:

Not the periphery, not the community comes first, but the radii, the common relation to the center. That alone assures the genuine existence of a community. The anchoring of time in a relation-oriented life of salvation and the anchoring of space in a community unified by a common center: only when both of these come to be and only as long as both continue to be, a human cosmos comes to be and continues to be around the invisible altar, grasped in the spirit out of the world stuff of the eon. (p. 163)

Such evocative language may point to a deeper place, beyond even the essential structures of generativity and the co-constitution of human realities. To this, I cannot make any claims. What can

be stated with confidence is that transpersonal events such as PRC in small groups should be pursued under the guidelines of a *transpersonal phenomenology* (Levin, 2000), which will be explored in the *Existential Reflection* section of this chapter. Furthermore, the research presented in this dissertation and especially the results of the data analysis support the participatory turn in contemporary transpersonal theory by way of the development of a transpersonal phenomenology:

My personal position is that (1) human spirituality can be understood as a process of participatory cocreation with both transcendent and immanent spiritual sources; (2) attention to the body and its vital energies gives the most direct access to immanent spiritual life; (3) immanent life stores the most generative potentials of spirit; and, therefore, (4) the active participation of embodied dimensions in unconstrained spiritual inquiry may lead to an increased plurality of creative existential and visionary developments. (Ferrer, 2009, pp. 147-148)

All of these points have been supported by the phenomenological analysis contained in this dissertation.

#### *The Living Classroom*

The results of the data analysis in Chapter 4 also support Chris Bache's (2008) theory of the living classroom presented in Chapter 2. During the proposal phase of this study, Bache's theory of classroom fields and group resonance was among a handful of contemporary works directly addressing the sacred, collective dimensions of experiences in higher education classrooms. Though Bache's field theory of classroom resonance and presence was germane to the proposal phase of this research, it would have been unsubstantiated to claim that the dynamics he chronicled were describing the same phenomenon as PRC outlined in these pages. That is, the correlation was strong but since Bache was reporting his experiences as a professor and building his theory based on these experiences, without recourse to more formal research, the correlation could only be assumed.

Given the results, it is fair to state that this correlation between Bache's (2008) descriptions and theories is not only still strong, but it is now perhaps even more robust. Many of the statements

quoted by Bache's students are nearly identical to the accounts presented by the co-participants in Chapter 4. For example, Bache quoted a female student from one of his classrooms:

All of us who have been in your classes feel a deep connection to one another. We don't know what it is. We only know that it is there. All that I know is that I have felt something binding us all together. I remember things going on around me in class with the other students. We were sensitive to each other's thoughts and feelings. There were times when I would pick up bits and pieces of certain people's thought. We could see the connections being made and we acted accordingly. I always wondered if you knew what was going on because you never said a thing in class! Strange things were happening. The students closest to you expected them to happen. Were we crazy? "What the hell is going on?" we questioned. Imagine all of this taking place on a college campus. A college class that wasn't only a class it was a community, semester after semester. (Bache, 2008, p. 44)

The results in Chapter 4 and Bache's (2008) exploration of his experience as a transpersonally oriented educator bear a great deal of resemblance. For example, not only did Bache chronicle his and his students experiences of collective consciousness in the classroom but he also proposed that such experiences (here correlated with PRC), had to contain the key components of "(1) Collective intention focused in an emotionally engaging group project, (2) a project of sustained duration, [and] (3) repetition of the project in approximately the same form many times" (Bache, 2008, p. 59).

Though there is much about what Bache (2008) presented in this text that is of great value and import for these experiences, the theoretical conclusions concerning field theory and collective consciousness do not dovetail with the conclusions of the current discussion. This difference lies chiefly in Bache's emphasis on fields of consciousness as being things existing beyond individual consciousness. That is, there is a subtle Cartesianism at play in many of the presumptions laid out in Bache's book. This subtle Cartesianism presumes the classic distinction between subject and object.

Bache's theoretical formulations, though quite inspiring, presumed the objective existence of the field of consciousness as residing beyond the individuals in the classroom but there was no mention of the field as being beyond both individuals and as beyond being a thing "out there." The language of field theory is borrowed from a natural science paradigm often associated with

dynamical systems theory. Bache's field theory of classroom consciousness was not adequately extracted from this objectivist bias, and thus, expressed this subtle Cartesian worldview in his discussion of collective consciousness and field theories of mind. This view is systematically challenged throughout this dissertation. To assist with putting this into a phenomenological perspective, Husserl's own words are instructive:

In no way, not even in the schema of description vs. explanation, can a science of souls be modeled on natural science or seek methodical counsel from it. It can only model itself on its own subject matter, as soon as it has achieved clarity on this subject matter's own essence. (Husserl, 1970, p. 223)

Regardless of any residual Cartesianism, *The Living Classroom*, strongly supports the findings of this study and provides numerous lifeworld examples of what to look for when pursuing PRC in higher education classrooms. The similarities of Bache's observations and the results of this research outweigh the differences. Thus, Bache's text stands as a richly descriptive and exploratory account of the process, effects, and possible implications of PRC in higher education classrooms.

## Existential Reflection

### *The Essence of PRC*

#### *Intercorporeality*

The corporeal dimensions of the experience of PRC given in the results have proven to be subtler than assumed at the outset. As mentioned, somatic sensibility is determined by socio-cultural milieu (in this case, the academic culture of the San Francisco Bay Area), and the particular styles and preferences of the individual.

In the interviews, there was little conscious recognition of the corporeal schema in the accounts of PRC in higher education classrooms. The analysis, however, suggests that the corporeal schema (specifically, one's somatic sensibility) is still present as an implicit reality. This means that the co-participant's bodily sensibilities were implied via their descriptions of feeling empathy, being

emotionally moved, being absorbed in the present-moment, experiencing excitement and joy, and feeling awe or wonderment. All of these themes can be traced to their roots in the body. Thus, though the co-participants tended to consciously recognize their experience as being part of a “headspace” or part of the “heartspace” the presence of the “bodyspace” can be inferred as the grounding influence of their descriptions of PRC. In other words, the body is a de-facto omnipresent reality co-determining all lived experience.

Thus, phenomenologically speaking, such a state of affairs makes sense given that attending to one’s awareness from the corporeal schema of one’s “bodyspace” means breaking free from the constrictions of one’s conceptual frameworks. The fact that the co-participants spoke of both their naïve experiences during the individual interviews and the “saturated” experiences during the group interview from the default “headspace” or “heartspace” can mean that their state of consciousness was not in a somatically felt “bodyspace,” at least, consciously:

Whenever there is a rigorously phenomenological return to the body of experience, there is a radicality that can sometimes, to some extent, twist free of the prevailing conceptual framework, for the richness of our experiencing can never be entirely caught within any net of concepts. (Levin, 2000, p. 277)

### *Co-Constitution*

To speak of the co-constitution of experience is to assert a position that transcends the subject/object divide. For example, Steinbock (1995b) alluded to this when he said

Constitution is not a metaphysical creation of transcendences, and the subject is not a creator of their being. Rather, the theory of constitution, “the greatest of all transcendental problems” (H III 212-14), is an account of how objects in the world and the world itself take on sense. (p. 13)

That is, constitution of the world is the fundamental way in which we, as conscious subjectivity, make sense of the reality given to us. To drive the point home, in Husserl’s own words:

Naturally, the world is not cobbled together out of the primordially reduced worlds. Each primordial [sphere] is the product of a reduction from an intersubjectively and generatively constituted sense; the ontic sense stems from the intersubjectively concordant experience of any one of these [primordial spheres], an experience that already has a sense-relation to

intersubjectivity. *As mundane experience, my experience (thus already each of my perceptions) not only includes others as mundane objects, but constantly includes them, in existential co-validity, as co-subjects, as co-constituting—and both are inseparably intertwined* (Ms. C 17 36a, italics added). (Zahavi, 2001b, p. 58)

Furthermore, as parts of this dissertation have explored already, when one's analysis goes deeper into the nature of this constitution, one uncovers the intersubjective infinite realm grounding one's subjective, egological constitution of reality. Thus, the lived experience of PRC is an example of how the objects in the world and the world itself take on sense via *co-constitution* as the foundation for the individual constitution of reality. Since co-constitution goes beyond the subject while making sense of the objects of the world, it in effect goes beyond the subject/object dichotomy. PRC is a lived description of what it means to transcend the subject/object worldview that is often associated with the persistent Cartesian lens that plagues so much of contemporary thought.

### *Emergence*

There are many correlations between the findings of this research and the research studies presented in Chapter 2. Within the findings, the essential theme of emergence—as being a quality of the self-generation of culture, the quality of PRC as auto-genetic beyond the individuals in the room, the creation of new perspectives and insights experienced both individually and collectively—is a theme with rich implications for what it means to be human.

Emergence as a principle is as an abstraction of a concrete lived experience. PRC, as presented in this study, is a description of how emergence is experience in a concrete situation at the level of psychological analysis. However, it is possible to infer philosophical (i.e., transcendental in Husserlian terms), implications and correlations of what emergence as a core theme in this research means.

As explained in Chapter 3, this research presumed a phenomenological psychology focused not on static essences as idealized by the early Husserl, but on generative essences rooted in socially constructed networks of particular situated contexts. This is why much of the literature review, in

Chapter 2 and the following sections on phenomenological and transpersonal theory, focus on works suggestive of knowledge and reality constitution as *negotiated ongoing processes*. Emergence, as a core theme, embodies this spirit, this essence of PRC since it is one way of describing how reality is generated by people coming together in shared space.

However, the principle of emergence can have subject/object (i.e., Cartesian) undertones. That is, when describing PRC in emergent terms, it is easy to objectify the process as occurring beyond oneself. This is a constant danger with the description of PRC, as best exemplified by the group interview, where co-participants wanted to make it clear that the experience is best described using action-oriented terms (verbs) instead of thing-oriented terms (nouns). Given this, emergence as a principle is one way of describing the essence of PRC but to say that it is generative may be more accurate. Thus, emergence and generativity can be likened to the outside and the inside views of one of the essential qualities of PRC.

### *Generativity*

Phenomenology cannot be merely *descriptive* [italics added] or a “reflection on” matters. It is not merely descriptive because the phenomenologist is caught up in generativity. Phenomenology becomes a *participation* [italics added] in the sense development of an intersubjective historical structure that is in the process of generation as we describe it and as we bring it about. (Steinbock, 1995b, p. 268)

Generativity here points to PRC as being a lived *process* that does not just embody an emergent quality suggestive of something that one can be witness to but also something in which one *participates*. That is, generativity is more descriptive of the overall experience of PRC as the active co-constitution and creation of meaning through dialogue with others when entering into “intercorporeal resonance processes” (Gallagher, 2009, p. 301). Rather than merely focusing on the way in which PRC creates a space with qualities of emerging insights, perspectives, and a sense of the experience as being self-generating by the establishment of a culture of dialogue or discourse, PRC is also generative in the sense that it is dependent on the co-participation of individuals in the

active creation of meaning, relevance, and perception. In other words, PRC is one place where the birth and ongoing development of one's sense of reality—what is real/irreal, what is relevant/not relevant—is negotiated.

Generativity may be one of the most cogent ways of describing the essence of PRC as it refers to the recursive, reciprocal process of en-action. Philosophically, this points to non-foundational accounts of phenomenological structures. That is, PRC is an example of generative phenomenology beyond static or genetic phenomenological analysis (Steinbock, 1995a; 1995b). PRC is a process of the ongoing generation of meanings, perceptions, and worldviews (realities), whereby essential structures are always situated in a particular time and place (e.g., the focus on present-momentness as an essential theme) in an ongoing dynamic. The general situated structure presented at the end of Chapter 4, is but a snapshot, a gesture, a leading clue toward an understanding and articulation of PRC as the place where reality is negotiated *between* egological subjectivities.

*Being and becoming through our experience.* Emergence and generativity are different sides of the same coin, so to speak. The coin, in this analogy, can be reframed as “being and becoming” through experience. Since all states and stages of human subjectivity concerns the ongoing constitution and givenness of experience, in all of its richness, at every moment along the way there is always already being in the present-moment and becoming through the generative process exemplified by PRC. Merleau-Ponty (2008) expressed this quality eloquently when he said, “The phenomenological world is not the bringing into explicit expression of a pre-existing being, but the laying down of being. Philosophy is not the reflection of a pre-existing truth, but, like art, the act of bringing truth into being” (pp. xxii-xxiii). I would like to add that, like art, the fundamental essence of the experience of PRC is too, a description of a particular form of the “laying down of being” as it is lived in the co-constitutive moment.

The experience of this moment, for the individual, is the opening into the field of possibilities and touching into the fundamental core of ourselves as intersubjective beings. This is why the experience is so pleasurable. This is why the co-participants talked about wanting more of it and making choices in their lives to accommodate creating the conditions to experience it again. In this sense, PRC is a *transpersonal* experience of *being* a part of the ongoing dialogue of *becoming* in communion.

### Possible Next Steps

#### *Socio-historical Contexts*

Phenomenology is a transdisciplinary school of thought and practice that has proven to be influential in a wide variety of fields. For example, cognitive science, philosophy, psychology, psychotherapy, art, and literature have all continued to find something of value to be found in phenomenology. Therefore, this study has honored this cross-disciplinary quality whilst unpacking underlying patterns of thought related to Husserl's transcendental intersubjectivity by way of PRC in higher education classrooms as a lived phenomenon. Concurrently, it is my hope that I have taken these revealed patterns and translated them into language that is accessible and relevant to the larger context of psychology, philosophy, sociology, and *human science* (see Burston & Frie, 2006; Gergen, 2001; Husserl, 1970; Mandler, 1996; Ricoeur, 1998)—as distinct disciplines.

Here human science is differentiated from the natural science approach (first articulated by Dilthey and Husserl and later emphasized by the humanistic approaches in psychology, sociology, and other interpretive approaches): “The assumption of this type of thinking is that the phenomena of nature and those phenomena pertaining to humans are sufficiently different to necessitate the development of different paradigms” (Giorgi, 1995, p. 27).

*Where to now?**Beyond Subject/Object: Toward a Transpersonal Phenomenology*

As previously mentioned, PRC in higher education classrooms, as it is presented in this dissertation, offers a case study in how a lived experience in the lifeworld embodies the reality that the subject/object divide is an arbitrary social construction that betrays the true nature of our existence as being generatively co-constituted from moment to moment. Furthermore, the results of this study also stand as exemplary for the development of a transpersonal phenomenology where the limitations of pre-modern and modern artifacts are finally transcended in favor of investigating transpersonal experiences from the inescapability of phenomenology's "middle way":

Transpersonal phenomenology becomes problematic as soon as it attempts to convert experiential reports into validity-claims framed in terms of the hegemonic paradigm of subjectivity and objectivity. The discourse of transpersonal psychology should not attempt to articulate its experiential treasures in terms of the traditional ontology and epistemology. To remain loyal to the old metaphysics does not *legitimate* transpersonal experience. On the contrary, such loyalty can in the final analysis only *betray* it. (Levin, 2000, p. 278)

A transpersonal phenomenology of this sort is necessary to the spirit of transpersonal studies if it is to ever do justice to the phenomena it purportedly seeks to understand. To get a better sense of the import of such a statement, turning to the preface in Merleau-Ponty's (2008)

*Phenomenology of Perception*, therein lies a leading clue suggestive of the project of transpersonal phenomenology based on the results of this research:

Perhaps the chief gain from phenomenology is to have united extreme subjectivism and extreme objectivism in its notion of the world or of rationality. Rationality is precisely proportioned to the experiences in which it is disclosed. . . . The phenomenological world is not pure being, but the sense which is revealed where the paths of my various experiences intersect, and also where my own and other people's intersect and engage each other like gears. It is thus inseparable from subjectivity and intersubjectivity, which find their unity when I either take up my past experiences in those of the present, or other people's in my own. (p. xxii)

If the transpersonal is defined as a style or way of seeing things and not by the contents of its analysis, as Levin does, then PRC represents a generative transpersonal experience of the always already present nature of reality as co-constituted through intersubjectivity:

What this shows is the *continuity* of transpersonal experience—the fact that, contrary to what the prevalent discourse of mystification has always claimed, transpersonal experience is (nothing but) a modalization of everyday perceptual experience, a structural transformation rooted in its underlying prepersonal nature. Because all perception, even the most articulate, the most ego-logical, is emergent from a prepersonally organized field, transpersonal experience is always an inherent potential already structured into the perceptual situation. (Levin, 2000, p. 293)

### *Lifeworld Suggestions*

A foundational understanding of the implicit themes and structures inherent in the experience of inspired PRC were established. Participatory phenomena of all types can benefit from continued research into the complex ways in which small groups co-create and collaborate to create presence and resonance. By taking a phenomenological approach that accounts for the embodied whole-person aspects of this type of experience, I hope to contribute to the literature in psychology and the human sciences. I also hope to contribute to practice-oriented approaches such as psychotherapy by adding rich descriptions of a phenomenon that may be difficult to describe yet may provide a sense of insight that may prove therapeutic when it occurs. The ability to articulate the experience of PRC in a therapeutic context could assist both the therapist and client(s) with an understanding of human experience that may have positive implications on the outcomes.

Another area that may benefit from this research is in the area of education. Both higher education and primary educational contexts could add the rich descriptions of participatory phenomena provided not only to the existing educational literature but also find ways of bringing the insights obtained by this research into the classroom in an effort to replicate instances of participatory reality constitution. Other people who work with groups in a variety of contexts such as, for example, business meetings, may find that a greater awareness of the processes surrounding

PRC-like phenomena may be desirable and thus more readily accessible as a result of the understandings sought by this research project.

#### In Conclusion

Participatory reality constitution in higher education classrooms can benefit from further research. The research presented in this dissertation is a step in the right direction to coming to understand this rich and complex phenomenon with greater precision. Furthermore, this research's value principally lies in the establishment of essential, constituent themes and a general situated structure using phenomenology within a generative, participatory framework.

Any future inquiry into participatory reality constitution would do well to incorporate the findings and the terms used herein in order to support the need for consistency in terms and constructs. Until now, there has been little consistency or agreement on the terms and essential structures involved in this class of experiences. It is with great hope and intention that this research may provide a firm and reliable grounding in this direction:

In the most powerful moments of dialogic, where in truth “deep calls unto deep,” it becomes unmistakably clear that it is not the wand of the individual or of the social, but of a third which draws the circle round the happening. On the far side of the subjective, on this side of the objective, on the narrow ridge, where *I* and *Thou* meet, there is the realm of the “between.”

This reality, whose disclosure has begun in our time, shows the way, leading beyond individualism and collectivism, for the life decision of future generations. Here the genuine third alternative is indicated, the knowledge of which will help to bring about the genuine person again and to establish genuine community. (Buber, 2006, pp. 242-243)

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## APPENDIX A: RELEVANT PHENOMENOLOGICAL TERMS RELATED TO PRC

Types of intersubjectivity in phenomenology:

generative  
 open  
 closed  
 constituted  
 transcendental  
 mundane  
 static  
 concrete  
 genetic  
 universal

List of related descriptors for “intersubjectivity” and “participatory reality constitution”

Mitwelt (Husserl)  
 Operative intentionality  
 Alterity (Husserl)  
 Empathy (Husserl, Stein)  
 Transcendental monadology  
 Spirit (Hegel)  
 Ecological self  
 Mutualism  
 Mutuality (Buber)  
 Social affordances (Gibson)  
 Social existence  
 Social knowing  
 Transactionalism  
 Social perception  
 Social psychology  
 Interpersonal  
 The problem of other minds (analytic philosophy)  
 Self and Other  
 The Other  
 The face of the other (Levinas)  
 Face-to-face (Levinas)  
 Intentional worlds  
 Second person  
 The “We”  
 Open intersubjectivity  
 Concrete intersubjectivity  
 Radical intersubjectivity  
 Interbeing (Hahn)  
 Interpersonal

Foreign subjectivity  
Connectedness  
Relationship  
The field  
The field of relationship  
Intimacy  
The Third (Haule)  
The third body  
Alter ego  
Transpersonal  
Participatory consciousness  
Communion  
Collective  
Collective Intelligence  
Collective Consciousness  
Communitas  
Being-Between (Watsuji)  
Interworld (Habermas)  
Distributed Cognition (cognitive science)  
Socially Distributed Cognition (cognitive science)  
Extended Mind (cognitive science)

## APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

To: Prospective Research Study Coparticipant:

From: Sean Avila Saiter, Primary Researcher

You are invited to participate in a study to learn more about positive, inspiring dynamics in higher education classrooms. Your participation may contribute to your own understanding of the impact these dynamics have had in your life. Your participation will consist of participating in an interview of 20 to 30 minutes' length with the researcher, Sean Avila Saiter, either in person, by telephone, or via Skype, sharing your experiences of positive dynamics in higher education classrooms. If, during the course of that interview, the researcher determines that you have had specific experiences that are of further relevance to this study, you will be asked to participate in a second phase of research regarding those particular experiences.

If you are invited to join the second phase of research, you will be asked to participate in a second, in-depth interview of 60 to 90 minutes' duration with the researcher in which you will be asked to describe your relevant experiences in clear, simple language, and with as much detail as you recall. The interview will be in person at a comfortable, convenient, neutral location suitable to an interview. The interview will be recorded, and the audio recordings will be transcribed and analyzed to assist the researcher in understanding the types of experience you have described, and may be used in the researcher's dissertation project. You may be asked to clarify and edit the transcription of your interview in order to uncover implicit or unclear meanings that may be present in the transcript.

If you joined the second phase of the research, then, at a later date (probably within 2 months of the initial interview), you will be asked to participate in a half-day workshop with the researcher and his dissertation chair, Glenn Hartelius, Ph.D., Assistant Professor at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology. This workshop will be conducted in a comfortable, convenient, neutral location suitable to a workshop. In this workshop, you will be guided into an experience that the researcher believes may be related to those that you were asked to describe in your more extensive, second interview. You will then be asked to join in discussion with the researcher, the dissertation chair, and the other workshop participants in describing and reflecting on this experience. The workshop will be recorded, and the audio recordings will be transcribed and analyzed by the researcher in furthering his understanding of the types of experience under study, and may be used in the researcher's dissertation project. You may be asked to clarify and edit the transcription of your responses in the workshop in order to uncover implicit or unclear meanings that may be present in the transcript. If you choose to participate, the total time requirement will be around 4.5 to 5 hours for all of the interview processes. You will also be given 2 weeks to review the transcripts. Optionally, you may edit the portion of the transcripts covering what you said or did not say during this time. Should you choose to participate in this entirely optional process of reviewing and, if necessary, editing the transcripts of your individual and group interviews, the estimated time for this process is 1.5 hours or less.

Neither the researcher nor the dissertation chair will share any personal information about you with any other party. To assure your privacy and the confidentiality of your interview responses, you will be asked to choose a pseudonym, and to write the pseudonym on the space provided at the end of

this form. All interview files, including audio files, will be kept either in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home office, to which only the researcher has the key, on the researcher's password-protected laptop computer, and, for electronic backup purposes, on a password-protected remote server. The researcher's personal password-protected laptop computer will remain secured in the researcher's private office. Additionally, all data collected using Skype will be automatically encrypted for privacy. Skype uses the AES (Advanced Encryption Standard), also known as Rijndael, which is used by the U.S. Government to protect sensitive information. Skype uses the maximum 256-bit encryption.

Any transcription of materials will be conducted only after the transcriber has signed a Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement. If you wish to obtain a copy of the transcript or analyzed results of each interview you participate in or a copy of the study upon its completion you may do so by indicating your interest at the end of this form, or by informing the researcher via the contact information provided below. Before signing this consent form and participating in the interviews, please consider the possibility that discussing your personal life experience may bring up memories or uncomfortable feelings. As with any qualitative research interviews, certain risks may include the arising of unpleasant memories or feelings and potential stress related to concentration and sustained attention. If at any time you have concerns or questions during the course of the interviews, the researcher is prepared to provide a referral to professional psychotherapy if needed. In addition, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or prejudice.

This study may help the field of psychology, higher education, and you to learn more about group phenomena. Certain benefits of your participation may include an increased understanding of your experiences. This may lead to increased insight into the nature and dynamics of the higher education classroom. These benefits may help facilitate the types of experiences that are desirable in classrooms or in other classroom-like contexts.

The researcher can be reached at (xxx) xxx-xxxx and at e-mail@domain.com. The researcher's address for correspondence is: Address, City, State, Zip. You can also contact Glenn Hartelius, Ph.D. (Chairperson of Dissertation Committee) at email@domain.edu or Fred Luskin, Ph.D. (Chairperson for the Research Ethics Committee) at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology at email@domain.edu or at (xxx) xxx-xxxx.

Statement of the Research Participant:

I attest that I have read and understand this consent form. Any questions I have about this research study and my participation have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary. My signature indicates my willingness to participate in this research study.

Write pseudonym here: \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant's Signature**

Date

I wish to receive information about the results of this study after it has been completed:

Yes    No    (Circle one)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's Signature—Sean M. Avila Saiter, M.A.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dissertation Chair's Signature—Glenn Hartelius, Ph.D.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX C: CO-PARTICIPANT RELEASE AGREEMENT

I agree to participate in a research study of positive and inspiring experiences in higher education classrooms. I understand the purpose and nature of this study and I am participating voluntarily. I grant permission for the data to be used in the process of completing a Ph.D. degree, including a dissertation and any other future publication. I understand that a brief synopsis of each participant, including myself, will be used and will include the following information: pseudonym, age, ethnicity, race, gender, and any other pertinent information that will help the reader come to know and recall each participant. I grant permission for the above personal information to be used. I agree to meet on the following date \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ for the first, initial interview of around 20-30 minutes. In the event that the researcher asks me to participate in a second, in-depth interview of 60-90 minutes, I agree to do so on the following date \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_. If participating in the second interview I also agree to attend a third half-day group workshop on the following date \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_. I also grant permission to audio record both interviews.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Research Participant/Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Primary Researcher/Date

## APPENDIX D: TRANSCRIBER CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

As a transcriptionist, I agree to maintain confidentiality with regard to all co-participant information, specifically identifying information and any other related material.

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Transcriber/ Name and Date

---

Signature

## APPENDIX E: CHAIRPERSON/AUDITOR CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

As Chairperson and auditor for the group interview phase of this research, I agree to maintain confidentiality with regard to all co-participant information, specifically identifying information and any other related material.

---

Chairperson-Auditor / Name and Date

---

Signature

## APPENDIX F: GROUP CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

As a co-participant in the group interview/half-day workshop phase of this research, I agree to maintain confidentiality with regard to all other co-participants information, specifically identifying information and other related material.

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Group Co-participant / Name and Date

---

Signature

## APPENDIX G: THANK-YOU LETTER TO CO-PARTICIPANTS

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for meeting with me in extended interviews and sharing your experience. I appreciate your willingness to share your unique and personal thoughts, feelings, events, and situations!

I have enclosed a transcript of your interview. Would you please review the entire document? Be sure to ask yourself if this interview has fully captured your experience of participatory reality constitution. After reviewing the transcript of the interview, you may realize that an important experience(s) was neglected. Please feel free to add comments that would further elaborate your experience(s), or if you prefer we can arrange to meet or talk again and audio record your additions or corrections. Please do not edit for grammatical corrections. The way you told your story is what is critical.

When you have reviewed the verbatim transcript and have had an opportunity to make changes and additions, please return the transcript.

I have greatly valued your participation in this research study and your willingness to share your experience. If you have any questions or concerns, do not hesitate to call or email me.

With warm regards,

Sean M. Avila Saiter  
email@domain.com  
(xxx) xxx-xxxx

## APPENDIX H: ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE

**Page 1** [introductory text]:

Hello! Thank you for taking the time to fill out this brief questionnaire. I am a doctoral candidate at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology in Palo Alto and I am conducting research into positive and inspiring experiences in college or higher education classrooms. If you have been or are a student or teacher and have had an inspiring experience in a higher education classroom, then please take a few minutes to fill out this very brief questionnaire. If you meet the criteria for this study, I would love to contact you to learn more about your experience. If you have any questions about this questionnaire, please contact me, Sean Avila Saiter, at e-mail@domain.edu All information is confidential.

**Page 2 (Q1):**

1. Please describe, in as much detail as possible, any positive and inspiring experiences you had in an undergraduate or graduate classroom. Please use descriptive terms that reflect actual experiences that you have had in a higher education classroom. [answer required to move onto next page]

[Space Provided]

**Page 3 (Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5):**

2. Have you had at least one year of graduate school?

Yes

No

Explanation (if needed) [space provided]

3. Do you currently live in the San Francisco Bay Area?

Yes

No

Explanation (if needed) [space provided]

4. If you do live in the Bay Area, do you live in the:

East Bay

Peninsula (including San Francisco)

North Bay

South Bay

Santa Cruz area

5. If selected for this study, would you be open to participating in a 60 to 90 minute, in-person interview (at a location convenient to you) and a free half-day workshop/group interview

(date and site TBD), both to go into greater detail concerning your inspiring experiences in classrooms?

Yes

No

Maybe

Comment [space provided]

**Page 4:**

6. Please leave your email, phone number, and name below. By doing so, you allow the researcher to contact you in the event that the description of your experience meets the criteria for a follow-up, phone interview.

Email: [space provided]

Phone (optional): [space provided]

Name: (optional): [space provided]

7. Other information that may be helpful (optional):

[space provided]

**Page 5:**

Thank you for your time! You may be contacted soon if you meet the requirements for this study. If you have any questions, contact Sean Avila Saiter at email@domain.edu

## APPENDIX I: DEMOGRAPHIC FORM

**Demographic Form**

(All information is confidential and subject to terms on informed consent form)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Pseudonym: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Ethnicity (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

Education (highest degree and where from): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Spiritual or Religious Orientation: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX J: PROTOCOL FOR FIRST INTERVIEW

1. “I would like to find out whether you meet the criteria for this study.”
2. “This process shouldn’t take more than 20-30 minutes.”
3. “It is important that I understand this experience in your exact words. Do I have your permission to record the conversation for the purpose of clearly understanding what the experience was like for you?”
4. “Please tell me about any inspirational experiences you may have had in a college or graduate school classroom context.”
5. “Is there one instance that you can recall and describe in detail?”
6. If needed, “Is there another instance that you can recall and describe in detail?”
7. “Do you possess a college or graduate degree?”
8. If yes to all of the above:
  - Are you able to participate in an interview of between one and one and half hours length and a half-day workshop (3-4 hours) with my Chairperson and a small number of other participants in the study?
  - When a group of participants has been recruited, may I contact you to set up an interview time?
  - May I send you the informed consent form for you to complete and return to me?
  - Thank you for your time and I look forward to talking to you in more depth!

## APPENDIX K: PROTOCOL FOR SECOND INTERVIEW

1. Informed consent form and participant release agreement completed.
2. Ask for a pseudonym if necessary.
3. Start recording device(s).
4. Give thanks to the participant for their time and participation.
5. Introduction to the interview, as spoken by the researcher.
  - a) “This is a phenomenological research project which means that what I am looking for is a description of a specific experience in a college or higher education classroom environment.”
  - b) “After a moment of silence to allow us to clear our minds of other concerns and issues, I am going to invite you to share that experience with me.”
  - c) “I would like you to describe it to me as if you were talking to a friend who has no idea what you are talking about. Use as much detail as you can; describe your thoughts, ideas, bodily sensations and feelings as you recall them.”
  - d) “Throughout the interview I may prompt you to expand upon a certain part or ask you to tell me more. I may remind you to talk more about your experience of the time rather than explain or analyze it.”
6. “Do you have any questions? Are you comfortable?”
7. Moment of silence. “I invite you to take a moment of silence to clear your mind of any other concerns and to come into the present-moment with me.”
8. “I would like to invite you to describe a positive, inspiring experience while in a college or higher education classroom setting.
9. Listen to the participant, prompt, and question when necessary.
10. Turn off recording devices
11. Give thanks.

APPENDIX L: GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR  
IN-DEPTH, INDIVIDUAL (2ND) INTERVIEW

- What was that like for you?
- Tell me about your positive, inspiring experience in the classroom.
- What has been your experience?
- What happened?
- Can you tell me the concrete details of your experience?
- What was it about your experience that made it feel that way?
- Can you describe for me the sequence of events from the time you entered the class to the time you left?

## APPENDIX M: PILOT STUDY

A pilot study was conducted to determine the parameters of my research. The clarification of terms, interview questions, and protocols was also a significant reason for conducting a pilot study. The results revealed informative insights into the nature of PRC.

Two individuals, 1 female teacher and 1 male student, were interviewed. Many of the same protocols, questions, and general methods used in the pilot were robust enough to be used in the formal study. The themes and situated structure that came from these two interviews helped to support the conceptualizing of the study at the proposal phase and many of these same themes were used by the researcher to help determine whether participants in the formal study met the conditions for participation or not.

After each co-participant read and signed the approved informed consent (Appendix B) and the release agreement (Appendix C), they were given pseudonyms to protect their identity. Each interview was 60 minutes in length and was conducted in a semi-structured way. After a few minutes of settling into the interview and going over the nature of the phenomenon by rereading the working description of PRC, the researcher began by asking each of the 2 co-participants to describe for me their experience of PRC as it was lived in the higher education classroom. An example of this interview process can be found in the interview protocol found in Appendix E.

After the interviews were conducted they were then transcribed. Once the transcripts were complete, the formal analysis of the data was begun through the use of four concrete steps (Giorgi, 2009). The first step consisted of (a) reading both of the transcripts in their entirety to get a sense of the whole. Then (b) the determination of the meaning units by first changing all pronouns from first-person to third person to aid in reducing any chance that the researcher might personally identify with the data. Then marks were placed in the text where a significant shift in meaning was felt to take place.

Once the meaning units were established each was then (c) systematically transformed into a psychologically generalized meaning unit more appropriate to the level of analysis (Giorgi, 2009) while in the phenomenological psychological reduction. Each transformation was done while being sensitive to the context of the whole transcript.

*Constituent Themes and the General Situated Structure*

From these transformed meaning units 20 constituent themes were determined. These themes were considered essential and irreducible based upon the overall context of both interviews. They are listed below:

1. Recognition of the paradoxical relationship between the experience of the spirit-in-between being both common and rare.
2. Experience of transcendence of self in the company of others.
3. Experience of ineffability.
4. Perception of numinosity.
5. Experience of transrationality.
6. Experience of a felt shift in the room.
7. Experience of being moved to silence and contemplative meditation.
8. Experience of the influence of another dimension of reality.
9. Perception of the spirit-in-between arising spontaneously.
10. Perception of the experience as being co-created by all co-participants.
11. Perception of shared space.
12. Perception of the experience of empathy as being different from the spirit-in-between.
13. Heightened sense of timelessness.
14. Perception of the presence of a “third” intelligence beyond any individual or group of individuals in the classroom.

15. Experience of moving into a more foundational or ontologically deeper place.
16. Experience of sacredness.
17. Experience of positive emotions and feelings.
18. Perception of novelty or creative newness entering the room.
19. Perception of subtlety.
20. Embodiment as primary way of knowing.

Finally, these constituent themes were combined with an overall analysis of both interviews to create (step 4) a general structure of the experience of PRC (which was previously described as the “spirit-in-between”):

One experiences a spontaneous and strongly felt internal and external shift while in the presence of others all of whom are intentionally focusing on a particular theme, person, or event. This shift causes one to pause in a heightened state of silent awareness for a short amount of time, which is experienced as a sense of timelessness. In this pausing, one perceives the presence of a “third” intelligence (an Other) that arises, descends from, or emerges from another perceived dimensional reality that transcends the everyday lifeworld. This emergence is experienced as being creative and new. One perceives this Other as being both co-created by the group and transcending the group at the same time. The perception of the presence of this Other in relation to the interpersonal dynamics happening in the group elicits positive feelings such as pleasantness, joy, and connectedness that are immediately felt to be meaningful and sacred. One experiences the spontaneous shift and the subsequent presence of the third Other in a highly embodied way. This embodiedness transcends the limits of the rational mind, which immediately leads to ineffability and a heightened recognition of and participation in nonverbal communication between all members of the group. One also recognizes a paradoxical relationship of this experience being both familiar and rare at the same time in that it is both difficult to describe yet very distinctive from other experiences.

The objective of the pilot study was to clarify the meaning of PRC and to set the methodological procedures needed to conduct the study. These objectives were successfully met and supported by the above results.