

**THE EDUCATOR'S PORTRAYAL OF LEARNING TRANSFORMATIONS IN A
POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY ADULT LEARNING COURSE ROOM: A QUALITATIVE
STUDY**

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Abstract

As a relatively new field of psychology, positive psychology generates momentum to enlighten a reciprocating view of human nature, to look at human potential as opposed to human shortfalls. In the course of building the field and theoretical foundations, courses and programs in adult learning environments have been established to educate students. Quantitative measures of formative and summative evaluation evaluate one type of learning. Given the idea stemming from Aristotle philosophies that noted education as part of meaning in life (as cited in Curren, 2010), the established theoretical view that meaning itself is created by an individual and sets a path for a more flourishing life. Thus, by creating meaning from integrating established knowledge and new knowledge, the transformation processes takes place. For the reason that these types of transformations cannot be quantifiably measured, a collective case study was used to support the theoretical foundations for the presented research. The presented research paper reflects the critical element of data collection and interpretation. The research study details the qualitative dissertation exploration of the research question: How do educators teaching Positive Psychology in the adult learning environment describe students' personal transformations in response to the curriculum? The specific research investigation was to explore the perceptions of the presiding educators and to realize their portrayals of the learning transformations in the positive Psychology adult learning environment. After addressing inclusive criteria for a bounded unit, data were collected from seven presiding educators of the adult learning positive psychology environment. Additionally, the participant wrote reflective narratives to deepen and widen the perspective of the study. The interviews consisted of conversational open-ended

questions, and the narrative was a free-writing exercise to purposely unburden participants from parameters. From the data collected, a code list was generated and then categorized into themes through a constant comparison of similar of codes from within and between individual participant cases. The themes represented generated patterns across data that created a description the phenomenon associated with the research question. As a result of the findings, implications of usefulness and recommendations for further studies were discussed.

Keywords: Qualitative, collective case study, positive psychology, transformative learning

Dedication

This work is dedicated to the many individuals, who have inspired me, stood by me, and above all have been my champions. Primary are my two wonderful children, Amanda and Jake. Without them, I would not have been reminded that each day is a blessing and regardless of the workload tasks and that every day had the potential to be a happy day. Second, I make a dedication to my wonderful and amazing students. My calling and teaching perspective would not be where it is today without my inspiring students. This goes to all my former students, many of whom have made it a habit of checking in on me and sharing their achievements as they attain their life and educational goals; you all inspire me to want to be not just a good educational leader, but to be a great educational leader. Last, I dedicate this work to every person who has not given into labels associated with disabilities and has found ways to overcome and persevere. To all of those who were once thought only to carry a glimmer of light and somehow summoned the ability to ignite the world, I honor you with this work.

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First and foremost I want to acknowledge my mother Barbara Gaiser who has been a pillar of strength throughout my entire life; without her I would not be the person I am today. Next, I would like to offer my humble gratitude to my mentor and my committee members. Your guidance, grit, and determination to see me through the process are a beacon of the type of educational leader and role model I aspire to be. Without you, I would not have shattered the limits of my potential. Above all, no words can express my deep gratitude for the time and mentorship that Dr. Mark McCaslin and Dr. Mike Doogan afforded to me during this journey. Scholarly words would fail to capture the genuineness of what has transpired over the past year.

To express the nature of how an amazing mentor can bring a budding seed to maturity of a beautiful flower, I offer the journey as seen through the eyes of following the yellow brick road—a cowardly lion transformed into a brave soldier; a tin man reminded of the heart and soul of the human connection and that we all need a little help; and a scarecrow with a scattered brain made to appreciate the potential from within. My gratitude for my mentors, Dr. McCaslin and Dr. Doogan will be realized by my commitment to pay it forward.

As a final and very important acknowledgement, I want to express my deepest gratitude to all of the contributors who took the time out of their very busy schedules to support this research effort. I sincerely appreciate that you saw worth in the study and agree to contribute your views. Without all of you, this would not have been possible. You have allowed me to realize a dream. I will forever be deeply grateful.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

Within the constructs of both adult learning environments and the accelerating status of the field of positive psychology, a common agreement ascends; both are under-researched, and both have the underlying goal of creating new ways to develop personal growth (Boshier, 2006; Ross-Gordon, 2011; Kristj´ansson, 2012). Inherently, measureable coursework outcomes have been realized by grades, quizzes, and test scores. However, the growing interest in the adult learning field has a redirected focus to capture how students make material personal and useful in a variety of ways within the context of their personal lives (Knowles, 1975, 1980, 1984; Cross, 1981, Candy, 1991; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Lombardi, 2007; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007; Russo-Netzer & Ben-Shahar, 2011).

The idea that adult learning coursework be constructed in such a manner as to make outcomes meaningful was supported by the 2003 qualitative study conducted by Wlodkowski and Kasworm. The study revealed perceptions of a positive adult learning environment that incorporated active learning, student participation, collegial classroom atmosphere, classroom interaction, and organization. This work reflected the theoretical ideas of a transformation from pedagogy (teacher centered) to andragogy (learner centered) that was a central key focus (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998). Thus, understanding the need for the metamorphic change comes from understanding how the adult learner constructs knowledge in meaningful ways.

Constructing meaning is derived from a dimensional perspective focused on two questions in the adult academic environment, specifically in asking what is worth teaching and what is worth learning. To answer these questions, one should understand that the educational environment is not isolated from ways in which learning becomes meaningful and ways in which meaning is found in life. Instead, it can act as a catalyst to find cumulative meaning (Curren, 2010). Given that the true adult education environment is multi-dimensional, it can be inferred that the information provided in the class setting is provided in a way that can promote outcomes that exceed educational standings or goals. However, to explore adult learning theory (andragogy) and the focus of the positive psychology curriculum does not fully illuminate what exactly transpires in these classrooms. To understand an outcome other than quantitative measures, the transformative learning theoretical framework provides a connecting underpinning that binds these two entities.

Acknowledging the increase of interest in adult learners and connections to finding meaning in life, it is as important to set focus on the commonalities and ways in which the three entities work conjunctively to produce a holistic outcome realized by transformations of mindsets. As addressed by Mezirow (1997), Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), and Russo-Netzer and Ben-Shahar (2011), intentions are to acknowledge present reference frames, to challenge the references, explore and learn new reference frames by transforming the frames, and integrating the frames by habituating new reference frames. The fundamental model of transformative learning challenges past

and present methods of addressing etymological meaning of education from a perspective of what we know to how we know (Kegan, 2000).

The foundations of positive psychology are rooted as the newest recognized discipline within the field of psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Learning and understanding factors related to positive psychology attempts to change ways in which people think, opening perspectives to a more creative and flourishing life (Russo-Netzer & Ben-Shahar, 2011). The attributes of the course not only focus on building human strengths, but also fit naturally with adult andragogical learning theories and practices. Andragogy defined by Knowles (1980) was “the art and science of helping adults learn” (p. 543). The collective research has indicated that adult learners want more from the educational environment; they want meaningful information that can be applied to everyday life (Knowles, 1980, 1988; Cross, 1981; Brooks & Brooks, 1993; Russo-Netzer & Ben-Shahar, 2011). Thus, continued education is part of the whole person and is what makes life meaningful.

Russo-Netzer and Ben-Shahar (2011) discussed the importance of a pedagogical (andragogical as applies to adults) style or classroom application within the context of adult learners as one that provided access to elements of positive psychology: gratitude, FLOW, optimism, resilience, mindfulness, and forgiveness, in meaningful ways. In turn, the authors attributed ways in which adult learners desire to learn, and the classroom dynamic as one that is conducive to creating new abstract meaning. From a research standpoint, one might ask what the worth is of understanding the phenomenon that ties andragogical learning application and positive psychology. This is answered by

understanding the philosophies and theories indicative to adult learners and how learning positive psychology functions as a means to flourish personally, educationally, and professionally.

The adult learning forum is continuously changing as discoveries are made concerning this unique group. One historical view claimed that adult learners lost motivation. The author supported his stance by stating, “this is only natural since many people cease learning upon reaching adulthood because they feel that they have learned all they need to know” (Ruch, 1933, p. 393). By mid-century, the zeitgeist of human philosophy and views of development were steering toward human potential and growth (Farson, 1974). The author credited the work of Maslow and May, but ultimately attributed the work of Rogers for igniting the humanistic movement. The author stated:

Rogers saw people as being on an endless growth journey—a journey which is sometimes blocked by negative or incongruent images of oneself, sometimes by inhibiting cultural conditions. Freeing people so that they might accelerate this journey became the great challenge of humanistic psychology. (Farson, 1974, p. 200)

Rogers’ insight secured recognition of human potential and the human’s innate abilities to grow through self-guided experience (Walters, 2008). The author pointed out that Rogers may well be more remembered for his contribution to the therapeutic world, but is well documented for his contributions to education. Rogers used his client-centered philosophies (the journey is guided by the client) as a bridge to the student-centered classroom. The student-centered classroom focused highly on mutual respect,

acceptance, and understanding (Farson, 1974). Today, the remnants of Rogers' ideas can be found in several adult learning theories (Knowles, 1975, 1980, 1984; Cross, 1981; Candy, 1991; Lombardi, 2007). Acknowledging the theoretical differences, the core consensus reveals the idea that adult learners desire to find meaning through discovering what curriculum means to them and how it can be uniquely applied.

The investigation, or gained knowledge regarding how meaning is created through transformations that take place within the paradigm of a Positive Psychology classroom has yet to be studied. Therefore, the problem is the lack of empirical study regarding how educators teaching positive psychology courses in the adult learning environment describe students' personal learning transformations in response to the curriculum. This study will add to the empirical databases of adult learning theories, transformative learning, and positive psychology by filling the gap in existing literature and research.

To summarize the importance of investigating the junction of positive psychology, andragogy, and transformative learning, the reduction point is recognized through finding parts of meaning in life. The broad view of positive psychology serves as an expanded comprehensive look at human potential. As explained by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), positive psychology "as a science of positive subjective experience, positive individual traits, and positive institutions that work to improve quality of life" (p. 5). To learn such factors associated with positive psychology makes educational institutions rich grounds with the ability to provide ways of learning; theoretically being the venue to create life meaning through learning transformations.

Concentrating exclusively on the adult learner will support a restatement of the initial question, namely to determine the worth of learning, and what makes learning meaningful.

Statement of the Problem

Recognizing the vast number of studies corresponding to the three entities discussed in this research (andragogy, positive psychology, and transformative learning), there has yet to be a study that fuses the entities and magnifies the potential holistic outcomes in the positive psychology adult learning environment. The problem addressed by the present study was the lack of empirical qualitative research and theoretical development of learning outcomes, other than test scores, as revealed through the perspectives of educators who teach positive psychology in an adult learning environment. The lack of this type of research left a gap in the literature that focused explicitly on understanding the educators' holistic view of student transformations (outcomes and/or changes) because of learning factors associated with positive psychology. The present study aimed to fill the literature gap and in turn address theoretical postulates that add to understanding the learning transformations that occur in Positive Psychology adult learning environments.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the collective case study was to describe and interpret how educators teaching positive psychology in the adult learning environment portray students' personal learning transformations in response to the curriculum. Imploring the utility of a qualitative collective case study permitted the presiding educators to provide

rich descriptions of their personal portrayals of learning transformations in their classrooms. The research explicitly explored the educators' discerning evaluation, informally and by cumulative tendency insight, from the review of formal or constructed assignments. Extracting this type of information as a reflection of the adult learning environment, throughout the process of learning curriculum factors associated with Positive Psychology, provided a better understanding of what the educators' viewed as holistic outcomes. This study provided information to fill the gap in literature by directly addressing holistic views concerning learning outcomes in an adult learning positive psychology course room.

Rationale for the Study

Over the past decades, adult education theorists such as Knowles, Bruner, and Tough have argued that academics must capture the elements of making the learned curriculum meaningful and transferable. This aspect focused commonly on how to create learning environments that supported academic achievement and classroom satisfaction. Zacharakis, Steichen, deSabates, and Glass (2011) focused on what the students believed promoted success in learning. Donovan, Branford, and Pellegrino (1999) described authentic learning methods that supported students' desire to explore, discuss, and construct meaningful ideas related to the context of the real world and were seen as relevant to the student. Knotts, Henderson, Davidson, and Swain (2009) described their qualitative research regarding first year higher education instruction as an exploration to evaluate teaching philosophies, strategies, and roles as educators that motivated students

to learn. In the midst of addressing these issues, no study has focused on understanding the perceptions of the educator in the adult Positive Psychology learning environment.

Despite the fact that transfer has been a focus in the adult learning environment, the ability to transfer knowledge has largely rested on the ideas that attained skills and knowledge will transfer to other environments or settings. According to Tough's (1971) model of learning, adults were most frequently motivated by the reasonable projection that learned knowledge would be applicable to other parts of their lives. While these proposals have been corroborated, empirical research negated to focus on the transitional area of specifically looking at the process of change as personal outcomes over quantifiable measurable outcomes. This opinion was supported by Russo-Netzer and Ben-Shahar (2011) in pointing out that learning about the basic factors associated with Positive Psychology is not a decisive influence on frame of reference changes happening in the mind or by actions. The current research study provided an augmenting view of how educators perceived transformative changes in adult students learning factors associated with the field of positive psychology.

Significance of the Study

Insights stemming from the research question provided understandings useful to researchers, educators, administrators, and counselors. Existing collective support research has indicated that adult learners wanted more from the educational environment; this group wants meaningful information that can be applied to everyday life (Houle, 1972; Knowles, 1980, 1988; Cross, 1981; Brooks & Brooks, 1993; Seligman, 2005; Russo-Netzer & Ben-Shahar, 2011). As a method to gain access to these abstract views,

Muir and Wells (1983) highlighted the attributes of informal and unstructured assessment as types of assessment that do not interfere with instruction and can include story-telling, writing samples, journals, naturalist scenarios, debates, and role-plays. While students are often a part of the evaluation process, it is the facilitator/educator that umbrellas the scope of the learning process for the entire class population, therefore can provide the greatest information regarding types of changes happening in the classroom.

An on-going issue in adult or higher education learning settings has been highlighted by several theorists that indicated creating meaning that transfers into life is a cornerstone of adult learning (Houle, 1972; Knowles, 1980, 1984, 1988; Cross, 1981; Candy, 1991). Pedersen and Min (2002) supported this idea by arguing that learning institutions focus highly on the testable outputs of prepackaged instruction and do not do enough to focus on the cognitive experience. The authors recognized past studies that investigated links between study habits and grades, feedback and course satisfaction, and self-regulation and grades.

The point of the argument was that these types of quantitative outcomes did not reveal the cognitive process of self-reflection in the classroom that provided a foundation for discovering meaning from learning course work. Further, Eggen and Kauchack (2007) supported the idea that learners benefited when they were given the opportunity to construct their own knowledge during educational learning experiences, as opposed to knowledge and information being conveyed through another source. The product of this type of learning then becomes meaningful through teaching applications and helping the individual find personal growth.

Possible outgrowth of research from the present study could provide underpinning essentials by understanding the combinations and elements that support learning factors associated with positive psychology as a means of potential personal growth in diverse populations. This study added a cohesive and expanded body of knowledge that articulated the integral working of andragogy, positive psychology, and transformative learning.

Research Design

The present study applied qualitative research methods; specifically, a collective case study that extracted portrayals of learning transformations as told by educators who teach positive psychology in the adult learning environment. The value of the collective cases supports the opportunity of gaining a stronger clarification or understanding (Stake, 2000). This study specifically addressed attainment of stronger interpretation of the learning transformation experiences in the positive psychology course-room. The design approach collected information using two methods. The first method was a focused open-ended interview that provided extensive data from the descriptive stories of the educators. The second method used to collect data from the educators was a written personal reflective narrative that elaborated on the portrayals of learning transformations. Both methods of data collection provided a concentrated pool of data reflected in the thick, rich portrayal descriptions of the educators.

Research Questions

The collective case study uses more than one unit or case to investigate “a phenomenon, population, or general condition” (Stake, 2000, p. 437). For this study, the

population comprised of educators who teach courses in the realm of positive psychology with determined parameters that made the participants a bounded system. Further, Golafshani (2003) described the naturalistic approach of qualitative research as one that looks to understand a context of a real world setting.

As a guiding practice, Creswell (1998) advised the use of a single broad question and several in-depth or detailed sub-questions. The author attributed success of the research through devotion of the researcher to attend to this practice. In light of seeking the personal perspective of this unique group of educators, the present study focused on the main research question: *How do educators teaching Positive Psychology in the adult learning environment describe students' personal learning transformations in response to the curriculum?*

The sub-questions were as follows:

RQ1. If you could tell a story about what teaching positive psychology is/was like, what would that story be?

RQ2. In your words, how would you describe student transformations that happen in your positive psychology classroom?

RQ3. How would describe what is happening during the process of a learning transformation in your positive psychology classroom?

RQ4. From your experience, what do you perceive are outcomes of student transformations in the positive psychology classroom?

RQ5. From your perception, what kinds of student learning transformations do you see in your positive psychology classroom?

RQ6. Tell me about a time in your classroom when you experienced a student having a learning transformation because of learning a topic associated with positive psychology?

RQ7. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding your perception of the learning process in the positive psychology classroom?

RQ8. What advice or insight would you give to school administrators, other educators or counselors regarding transformations associated with learning topics of positive psychology?

RQ9. What do you perceive are learning factors associated with transformations in your positive psychology classroom?

Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions

The case study approach is rooted in sociology and is valued by generating deeper understandings of unique problems or situations in comprehensive ways (Patton 2002). With the selection of a collective case study, expected assumptions could be applied. A primary assumption was in the nature of the type of data collected. The nature of the research was to study the human elements within the context captured by stories and artifacts that otherwise are not captured in raw numbers (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009). The present study did not attempt to investigate a relationship, but rather explored the personal perspectives of educators who teach the course positive psychology in the adult learning environment.

As an additional assumption, the group of participants had a common bound that binds the group as a system in some manner. The assumptions of the bound group are realized by the unique common attributes of the educators, namely teaching positive psychology in the adult learning environment. Merriam (1998) recognized the bounded system as the unit of analysis rather than actual characteristics or matter under investigation. Further noted, the bound system is in some way intrinsically bound. In essence, the author referred to the idea that parameters are being created to focus on what is being studied. The assumption distinguishes this aspect of the collective case study by delimiting the participant selection through purposive sampling to those persons who have experienced the particular educational environment, and further by the parameters of time and activity. This assimilates the participants by experiences generated from time in the positive psychology classroom not granted to those not possessing the highlighted traits. The unique traits of this group are what make the bounded system.

Limitations

Fervent critiques of qualitative research challenge this method of research for lack of rigor and inclusive value to research (Yin, 2009). Advocates for qualitative studies argued that unlike quantitative studies that produce measured results, qualitative studies add value from understanding the holistic view by engaging a naturalistic perspective in the real world (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). To counter the criticism, Yin (2009) was adamant about the need for qualitative cases studies to follow procedural guides meticulously and maintain a high level of rigor, resulting in the research effort meeting high quality standards. Yin (2009) obstinately professed the necessity for researchers

address standards within the design stage as well as within the planning stage.

Regardless of employing a meticulously structured research design frame, limitations of a collective case study inherently apply.

An additional limitation is the researcher and field of study connection.

Researchers commonly conduct research within their chosen field of expertise. However, concealing the connection could affect how the reader perceives the study. The current study notably recruited higher education educators that either paralleled or surpassed the credentials of myself as the researcher. This placed the researcher and participants in what could be considered the same professional cohort. Patton (1990) pointed out the subjective nature of qualitative studies. The author supported the idea by describing qualitative studies that utilize the researchers as the main instrument and often coming in personal contact with the participants, or becoming close to the situation during the study.

As part of the methodical process of planning and the design of the study, as the researcher, I had to be aware of relationships that could potentially form. As asserted by Yin (2009), the researcher should be prepared to deal with the unavoidable mutual connection to participants and/or influences on the study. This includes acknowledging reflexivity (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995), which was defined as the acknowledgment by the researcher that they have, to a degree, an influence on the study simply by being an attached part of the study.

Additionally, an inherent limitation to qualitative studies is the ability to generalize to a larger population (Myers, 2000). Given the common belief amongst veteran qualitative researchers of making a strong argument regarding the value of

qualitative case studies, it is imperative that researchers create and follow procedural protocols for each step of the research effort (Stake, 1995; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009; Creswell, 2013). The strength of the case study lies in the ability of the researcher to understand why the approach is the best approach and to create a strong study by addressing procedural issues as forethought. Even with this strong stance in support of qualitative studies, and when a study is meticulously designed, a resounding common criticized limitation is the question of value placed on a sample size too small to be considered enough to claim generalizability (Hamel, Dufour, & Fortin, 1993; Yin, 1994).

Scope

The present study extracted rich in-depth portrayals from educators describing learning transformation in the adult learning positive psychology environment. The information was purposely realized through the stories of the individuals who act as the collection data bank, namely the classroom facilitator/educator. As part of the educational continuum, even course room assessments have been seen as a scale that involved the students using the learned material and extending knowledge gained to real-life contexts (Knowles, 1988). Within the paradigm of the adult learner theories, assessment is not always addressed by means of test scores or concrete evaluations, but by self-assessments addressing interpretation and effectiveness of use in real-life situations. The present study captured a holistic outcome not able to be described by concrete quantifiable measures.

Definition of Terms

Adult Learning Environment

For the purpose of this study, the adult learning environment was described as either an online configuration course-room or an on-ground educational facility being either a two-year, four-year, or above type of accredited academic institution.

Andragogy

For the purpose of this study, andragogy was defined as a teaching method focused on adult learners' needs for the learning environment to be student-centered as opposed to teacher centered (Knowles et al., 1998). The assumptions of andragogy are that (a) adult students are self-directed learners, (b) adult learners desire to have more control over their learning, (c) adult learners bring with them a wealth of experience, and (d) adult learners have expectation that the material learned will in some way be useful to their lives (Knowles, 1984).

Curriculum

For the purpose of this research, curriculum was defined as a compliment of learning factors associated with the field of positive psychology and development of strategies and practices that acknowledge unique attributes of adult learners. Following the adult learning practices of Knowles (1988) and Pratt (1994), adult learning curriculum is defined as teaching factors associated with the field of positive psychology with foundational pillars that support transformative learning. Knowles (1988) specified adult learners as: (a) self-directed, (b) learner's experience is a source for learning, (c) the learner's readiness to learn is associated with personal life tasks or problems, (d) learning

is task- or problem-centered, and (e) learner's motivation is resultant from internal reasons or curiosity. Pratt (1994) explained that curriculum planning must address problems current to life, worldly, and personal events. The author stated, "The function of curriculum is to enhance human wellbeing" (Pratt, 1994, p. 5). Thus, the curriculum is a tandem combination of information and educational practices.

Educator

For the purpose of this study, educator was described as one who holds a title of professor, instructor, lecturer, and who holds a degree enabling them to teach adult learners in a higher education setting of a college or university or alternative format, whereby the educator is skilled in teaching.

Personal Transformations (transformative learning)

For the purpose of this study, transformative learning was described as the ability to acknowledge present reference frames, to challenge the references, explore and learn new reference frames by transforming the frames, and integrating the frames by habituating new reference frames (Mezirow, 1997).

Positive Psychology Course

For the purpose of this study, positive psychology was defined generally as the learning and understanding of aspects related to the field of positive psychology. The field of positive psychology investigates human strengths as a balance to the study of human imperfections and abnormalities. The goal is to challenge ways in which people think, opening perspectives to a more creative and flourishing life (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Russo-Netzer & Ben-Shahar, 2011). The attributes of a positive

psychology not only focuses on building human strengths, but includes worldly topics and concepts such as (a) personal strengths, (b) flourishing life, (c) optimism versus pessimism and well-being, (d) positive education, (e) positive work, (f) resilience building, (g) efficacy, esteem and self-concept, (h) eastern and western holistic views, (i) potential and motivation, (j) stress and healthy habits, (k) mindfulness, (l) cognitive reconstruction, and (m) forgiveness, gratitude, empathy, and hope.

Expected Findings

The plausible assumption was that the findings of this study would reflect an outcome that revealed positive transformations. Support for this view was evident in the views of Russo-Netzer and Ben-Shahar (2011), who pointed out that the positive psychology classroom by methodical applications “is where theory and practice create a positive reinforcing spiral” (p. 469). The authors explained crucial elements that incorporated supporting students in a way that helped them identify their challenges, reflect on thought processes, and connect stories (past and present) to meaningful or enlightened perspectives. Applications in the classroom consist of reflective writing, story sharing, critical thinking, and analyzing events linked to factors addressed in positive psychology course work. Further support for the plausible assumption was the empirical consensus that adult learners looked for the ability to transfer knowledge and application (Knowles, 1980; Zemke & Zemke, 1984; Ross-Gordon, 2011) that bridged to real life applications by the learner.

Even with a strong foundation to consider such plausible results, in the realm of qualitative research, it would be presumptuous to assume any particular type of outcome.

At the very heart of the qualitative case study is the meaning of the data, which only becomes known through the rich, thick descriptions of the participants (Creswell, 2007). Unlike quantitative methodologies, qualitative studies use the emerged information to construct a descriptive narrative that articulates the findings. This systematic approach reduces the data to show significant recurring thoughts, perceptions, and views (Creswell, 2013). Stake (1995) defined this method as aggregative interpretation. Within the process of aggregating and categorizing, the researcher additionally develops a method of recognizing interpreted meaning.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

As a prelude to the subsequent chapters, the overview of Chapter 1 provided (a) an introduction to the research study, (b) a notable synopsis and background of the study, (c) the statement of the problem, (d) a theoretical framework, (e) the research question, (f) methodology and methodological fit, (g) setting and context, and (h) the study's projected contributions to an overall significance. Succeeding chapters are arranged in the following presentation. Chapter 2 contains the literature review to include the theoretical orientation, methodological literature, and synthesis of literature and a critique of previous research. Chapter 3 presents the methodological structure of the study to include the purpose of the study and intricate design features. Further, Chapter 3 presents the sampling strategy, the instruments to use in the study, research question, data analysis techniques, and expected findings. Chapter 4 contains the data analysis strategies carried out in the study, description of the sample population, detailed interpretation of the analysis, and a summary of the results. Chapter 5 provides a summary and discussion of

the result. This chapter also considers the limitations and discusses recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain an understanding of what is transpiring holistically as part of the process or product of learning positive psychology in the adult learning environment, as expressed through the portrayals of the presiding educators. To accomplish this, probes into the descriptive portrayals conveyed by the presiding educators provided descriptive information that led to an enhanced understanding of what was transpiring in these course-rooms. The goal of this study was to answer the broad question of how educators teaching positive psychology in the adult learning environment describe students' personal transformations in response to the curriculum.

As pointed out by Creswell (2013), the crucial aspect of the literature review is to survey general or specific aspects of an area of interest and to express the prominence of studying such topics. Further, Taylor and Proctor (2008) supported the idea that the literature review serves two key functions, in that it allows the researcher to demonstrate information seeking abilities, and allows the researcher to demonstrate the ability to perform a critical discerning review of the established literature. As part of the literature review process, Creswell (2013) promoted fabricating a type of literature review map or visual plan to develop core aspects of the research topic. Following this guide, the literature review for this study focused exclusively on positive psychology, adult learning environments, and transformative learning. Additional support for a systematic approach to finding and analyzing existing research relating to the topic was provided by Bordens

and Abbott (2008), who noted that the cumulative information gathered through a literature review, can provide insight into the gap or void of empirical knowledge.

Chapter 1 of this study provided an outline of the study that included a study introduction, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, background of the problem, and a clear research question. Further, the first chapter expanded the range of the research by discussing limitations of the study, scope of the study, associative terminology, and expected findings. The succeeding literature review will present a representation of empirical articles and pertinent selections reflecting research that provides insight into the woven foundations of positive psychology, the adult learning environment, and transformative learning. The literature review was accomplished by executing an extensive search effort for exceptional research.

The extensive search for exceptional literatures pertaining to positive psychology, adult learning, and transformative learning was divided into a three-part search. The initial search included an exhaustive search of keywords such as *positive psychology, adult learner, adult learning environment, adult learning attributes, adult learning theories, andragogy, adult pedagogy, positive education interventions, transformative learning, holistic outcomes on the adult learning environment, transformative learning in the adult learning environment, education and happiness, and finding meaning in education.*

A second search of relevant websites was surveyed to pinpoint recent developments in studies pertaining to the three elements of focus. The search included the following sites: Authentic Happiness, International Positive Psychology Association

research database, Transformative Learning Center, and eLearning Adult Learning Theories. The third type of search used to find empirical literatures and research was an exploration of several databases that yielded research studies, journal articles, and dissertations. Databases surveyed included ProQuest Education Journal, Academic Search Premier, Dissertation and Theses, EBSCO, ERIC, Sage Journals, Summon, and Journal and Book Locator. The literature review examined, evaluated, and reserved only pertinent articles, studies, and dissertations.

Theoretical Framework

Epistemology refers to the nature of knowing or how knowledge is acquired. Hathaway (1995) described epistemology as understanding aims, perspectives, and assumptions in their contextual environment. One assumption that binds adult learning theories and positive psychology course work is that the adult learner arrives to the classroom with a much more refined set of expectations than the younger learner does. Ross-Gordon (2011) offered an additional assumption that adult learners re-enter the academic setting as a means to attain personal and professional goals. This supported the idea that adult learners attempt to create more meaningful lives through a number of approaches (Seligman, 2005).

In principle, the heart of adult learning is not simply to construct information, but to find meaning. A fundamental theme of transformative learning is that adult learners have the capability to reflect on their ways of thinking, reshape, and build new ways of thinking that impact their views and actions in life (Cranton, 1994). Given the actualities that each underlying theoretic theme (andragogy, positive psychology, and transformative

learning) has similar foci, the transformative learning theory is a clear choice as the theoretical foundation.

Consideration to determining a theoretical framework is realizing what provides relevance for a study, what indications drive a researcher to journey down a particular path of discovery, and what would be the benefit of learning about transformative outcomes from a positive psychology adult learning environment. This can be answered by the perception that understanding ways of learning and outcomes of learning have considerable merit in the adult learning environment (Merriam et al., 2007). Mezirow (1997) offered a perspective linking the unique adult learner to abstracted and idealized ways of learning. Transformative learning is a theory that incorporates development and the notion that “learning is understood as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience in order to guide future action” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 162).

The foundational background of this study merges the philosophical and theoretical postulations of adult learning (Knowles, 1980, 1984, 1988), learning the factors associated with positive psychology, and the ways in which adult learners cumulate and integrate information as a catalyst to discover new meaning and frames of reference (Mezirow, 1990). This combination creates meaning whereby the newly formed frames of reference become meaningful to their lives (Knowles, 1980, 1984, 1988; Zemke & Zemke, 1984; Candy, 1991). As previously noted, the rooted research question of the proposed study focused on how educators teaching positive psychology in

the adult learning environment describe students' personal transformations in response to the curriculum.

Acknowledging the research question, the present study recognizes the expert perceptions and evaluations of the students' transformations as part of the ways in which to understand how the three elements come together. Commonly, the collective entities have addressed the importance of critical reflection and aspects of active learning (Knowles, 1980, 1984, 1988; Mezirow, 1990; Seligman, 2005; Russo-Netzer & Ben-Shahar, 2011) as key characteristics of the adult learning environment. Thus far, the entities remain highly individual in the structure of research and philosophy. The present study pulled together the entities with the intent to study the uniting point at which these theories and philosophies join in commonality and underpinnings. The purpose of this case study is to describe and interpret how educators teaching positive psychology in the adult learning environment portray students' personal learning transformations in response to the curriculum.

Review of the Research Literature

The addressed learning process, in lay terms, is that the realization or cognitive discovery moments based on critical reflection and the merge of new information is, at times, referred to as "Aha' moments," whereby the student cultivates new ways of thinking from integrating pieces of knowledge (Mezirow, 1990; O'Sullivan, 1999). The change of reference frames is not an educational outcome that can be measured by quantifiable methods, but can best be realized from a personal perceptible (Cranton, 2000). O'Sullivan (1999) viewed these changes as taking place globally by a creative

process that linked alternatives to ways of being and acting in the world through connecting education to life. Mezirow et al. (1990) advocated the use of (not exclusive) reflective exercises that included (a) metaphor analysis, (b) life histories, (c) reflection of critical incidents, (d) participating and social action, and (e) reflective writing.

As an educator/facilitator in an adult learning environment, the researcher is in a pivotal position to use formal and informal evaluations that become an extension of the instructional material (Brooks & Brooks, 1993) to evaluate changes of students' frame of reference. It is from the comprehensive evaluations reviewed or observed by the educators, both formal and informal, that the current study extracted the perceptions of what transpired concerning student learning processes in the positive psychology classroom, other than measurable outcomes. This type of information holds the possibilities of expanding knowledge related to outcomes associated with learning positive psychology factors in an adult learning environment and bridging to create new meaning.

An in-depth review of the literature highlighted the intersection of the underpinning goals related to (a) adult learning theories, (b) positive psychology course curriculum taught at a higher education institution, and (c) practices and the foundation of transformative learning. Historical literature has paralleled the growth and diversification of adult learning, thus changing from pedagogical practices to andragogical practices (Knowles, 1975, 1980, 1984; Merriam et al., 2007). The consensus among researchers was that adult learners (a) are self-directed learners, (b) arrive to class with prior experience, (c) have the desire for material to be personally relevant, and (d) hold the

view material provides compounding meaning and purpose (Knowles, 1980, 1984, 1988; Ross-Gordon, 2011). Naturally, transformative learning provides the avenue through which students can use prior and/or current knowledge to recognize current frames of reference and incorporate new material to change frames of reference, consequently creating new frames (Mezirow, 1997; Russo-Netzer & Ben-Shahar, 2011; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2011).

Given the very nature of the field of positive psychology, namely that which focuses on human strength and deliberates factors associate with human potential and happiness, the combined works within the realm of positive psychology focus on breaking cognitive barriers and shifting reference frames to support well-being and flourishing in life (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009; Aspinwall & Tedeschi, 2010; Russo-Netzer & Ben-Shahar, 2011). Expanding on this idea focused on the adult learning environment, the connection is made by understanding that the educational environment is not isolated from ways in which learning becomes meaningful and ways in which meaning is found in life.

Instead, education can act as a catalyst to find cumulative meaning (Curren, 2010). Russo-Netzer and Ben-Shahar (2011) pointed out the importance of pedagogical (andragogical as applied to adults) style or classroom application within the context of adult learners as one that provided access to elements of positive psychology such as gratitude, FLOW, and forgiveness in meaningful ways. In turn, Russo-Netzer and Ben-Shahar (2011) attributed ways in which adult learners desire to learn, and the classroom dynamic as one that is conducive to creating new abstract meaning.

Potential growth and personal achievement in the adult learning environmental cannot be separated as parts from the whole. Knowles (1980) described the appearance of an andragogical learning environment as one that created meaning in many contexts of the learner's life, which is a clear position within the positive psychology paradigm. As noted by Seligman (2005), finding meaning and flourishing in life through higher understandings is a driving force behind positive psychology. Gable and Haidt (2005) generalized the function of positive psychology as "the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions" (p. 104). Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) integrated the person and positive traits that included vocation, interpersonal skills, and positive human capacities (innate human strengths), with a subjective level of valued personal experiences and factors that supported a holistic view of well-being.

Seligman, Parks, and Steen (2004) interpreted the concept of human growth and human potential as one that identified by three elements of "happiness—pleasure, engagement, and meaning" (p. 1379). This view was supported by a qualitative study conducted by Wlodkowski and Kasworm (2003), which revealed perceptions of a positive adult learning environment that incorporated active learning, student participation, collegial classroom atmosphere, classroom interaction, and organization. The transformation from pedagogy (teacher centered) to andragogy (learner centered) was a central key focus. Thus, understanding the need for the transformational change comes from understanding how the adult learner constructs knowledge in meaningful ways.

Transformative learning supports underlying factors of both the goals in teaching positive psychology and andragogical practices. As a binder, transformative learning maintains the need for reflection in the form of content, process, and premise (Mezirow, 2000); in turn, the process of changing frames of reference begins. Premise reflection consists of critically “questioning our presuppositions underlying our knowledge” (Kreber, 2004, p. 31). Russo-Netzer and Ben-Shahar (2011) substantiated this idea by describing the learning process of factors associated with positive psychology as one that incorporates the essential elements of reflection.

Kerber (2004) pointed out that reflection, in itself, is entrenched in the experiences of the individual. Changing frame reference, changing frame of mind, and associated future actions are at the core of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997). As an example, Schoenholz-Read (2000) studied the outcomes reported by students that confirmed they had in some way expanded or changed their perspective. The research unveiled the notion that many of the students felt an emotional affect due to their learning. As reported, students indicated an elevated feeling of empathy, self-confidence, and patience. Additionally, students reported feeling less overly sensitive to others’ perspectives and more responsive to diverse ideas.

In light of the fact that diminutive research combining positive psychology factors associated with learning in an adult learning environment and transformative learning practices have been accomplished, past research clearly displays how each of the intersections support theoretical ideas and positions of one another. The framework reveals how learning particular elements (positive psychology) via a certain applications

(transformational learning) within an acceptable parameter (adult learning theories) can come to mean more to the individual through the process of making meaning. The holistic aspect of combining the mind-body captures the essence of creating ways in which students develop meaning in the academic setting. This philosophy is captured in the essence of the holistic view of the mind and body connection.

The mind-body connection is not a novel concept with respect to education. Curren (2010) articulated works of Aristotle by interpreting “the general aim of political science is to determine the truth about human happiness (*eudemonia*)—’the highest of all goods achievable by action’—and to guide societies and households towards happiness” (p. 543). The author bridged the idea to virtues and ethics that require “the possession and exercise of intellectual and moral virtues” (Curren, 2010, p. 543), with education being the driving factor to nurture these features. The author conveyed Aristotle’s thoughts:

The highest good and happiest life for human beings is a life devoted to intellectual inquiry or ‘contemplation’ as its highest aim. The most intuitive of his reasons was the idea of what is most satisfying is putting our greatest gifts, our intellectual capacities, to good use. (Curren, 2010, p. 558)

Specific to the Topic or Research Question

The foundations of positive psychology are rooted as the newest recognized discipline within the psychology field (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Learning and understanding factors related to positive psychology attempt to change ways in which

people think, opening perspectives to a more creative and flourishing life (Russo-Netzer & Ben-Shahar, 2011). The attributes of the course not only focus on building human strengths, but also fit naturally with adult andragogical learning theories. Knowles (1980) defined andragogy as “the art and science of helping adults learn” (p. 543). Collective research indicated that adult learners want more from the educational environment; they want meaningful information that can be applied to everyday life (Knowles, 1980, 1988; Cross, 1981; Brooks & Brooks, 1993; Russo-Netzer & Ben-Shahar, 2011).

Russo-Netzer and Ben-Shahar (2011) pointed out the importance of pedagogical (andragogical as applies to adults) style or classroom application within the context of adult learners as one that provided access to elements of positive psychology in meaningful ways. In turn, the authors attributed ways in which adult learners desire to learn, and the classroom dynamic as one that is conducive to creating new abstract meaning. From a research standpoint, one might ask, what the worth is in understanding the phenomenon that ties andragogical learning application and positive psychology. This is answered by understanding the philosophies and theories indicative to adult learners and how learning positive psychology functions as a means to flourish personally, educationally, and professionally.

The adult learning forum is continuously changing as discoveries are made concerning this unique group. One historical view claimed that adult learners lost motivation. The author supported his stance by stating, “this is only natural since many people cease learning upon reaching adulthood because they feel that they have learned

all they need to know” (Ruch, 1933, p. 393). By midcentury, the zeitgeist of human philosophy and views of development were steering toward human potential and growth (Farson, 1974). The author credited the work of Maslow and May, but ultimately attributed the work of Rogers for igniting the humanistic movement. The author went on to state,

Rogers saw people as being on an endless growth journey—a journey which is sometimes blocked by negative or incongruent images of oneself, sometimes by inhibiting cultural conditions. Freeing people so that they might accelerate this journey became the great challenge of humanistic psychology. (Ruch, 1933, p. 200)

Rogers’s insight secured recognition of human potential and their innate abilities to grow through self-guided experience (Walters, 2008). The author pointed out that Rogers may well be more remembered for his contribution to the therapeutic world, but is well documented for his contributions to education. Rogers used his client-centered philosophies (the journey is guided by the client) as a bridge to the student-centered classroom. The student-centered classroom focused highly on mutual respect, acceptance, and understanding (Farson, 1974). Today, the remnants of Rodgers’ ideas can be found in several adult learning theories (Knowles, 1975, 1980, 1984; Cross, 1981; Candy, 1991; Lombardi, 2007). Acknowledging the theoretical differences, the core consensus reveals the idea that adult learners desire to find meaning through discovering what curriculum means to them and how it can be applied uniquely.

Through life meaning, the broad view of positive psychology serves as an expanded yet inclusive look at human potential. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) explained positive psychology “as a science of positive subjective experience, positive individual traits, and positive institutions that work to improve quality of life” (p. 5). Kristj’ansson (2012) claimed that positive psychology in the education realm was far under-researched and had yet to amass conclusive studies within the education paradigm. This is no truer than in the area of understanding the adult learner. Concentrating exclusively on the adult learner, this returns research back on the initial questions determining the worth of learning, more specifically in discovering what gives meaning to learning.

Knowles built the andragogical (adult learning) model on the premise of five central assumptions, namely (a) *self-concept*: as a person matures, self-concept moves from reliance on others to that of being self-directed; (b) *experience*: maturity supported growth experiences acting as a resources for further learning; (c) *readiness to learn*: maturity was linked to developmental tasks related to social roles; (d) *orientation to learning*: learning shifted from subject centered to problem centered, where application of task knowledge was related instantly rather than delayed; and (e) *motivation to learn*: maturity reinforced the motivation to learn moving focus from external to internal motivation (Knowles, 1984). These foundations acted as a vantage point from where educators built the student-centered learning environment.

Knowles (1984) focused on the idea that the material being presented was learner centered, relevant, and enticing to the learner, allowing the learner to construct ways in

which the martial would become relevant in a realist dimension. Knowles (1980) associated this to creating an environment where adult learners feel the need to learn by exposing the learner to material that opened the door for potential growth and self-fulfillment. Russo-Netzer and Ben-Shahar (2011) concurred with Knowles' idea, taking it further by implying that within the purview of teaching positive psychology, material should be relevant to the teacher and student on a personal level. The emphasis rested on the philosophy that to be able to achieve a higher meaning (other than quantifiable outcomes), the curriculum should allow students to reflect and find personal meaning using interdisciplinary and integrated approaches. At the core of the Positive Psychology curriculum are a range of topics. Carr (as cited in Russo-Netzer and Ben-Shahar, 2011) identified these foundations as:

Happiness, gratitude, flow, relationships, strengths, humor, mindfulness, and optimism, together with various topics that touch on other areas in the science of psychology but are relevant to the human pursuit for a life of meaning, fulfillment, and happiness (such as self-esteem, creativity, perfectionism, goal setting, and the mind–body connection). (p. 468)

Zemke and Zemke (1984) proposed that adult learners associated learning with bettering their lives in some way. Adding to this, Tough (1979) found personal motivation and being actively engaged in the learning process as being supportive of the adult learning environment. From Tough's (1979) research, a learning model was created, a model resembling Knowles' andragogical application to learning, highlighting the idea that adults were most frequently motivated by the reasonable projection that

learned knowledge would be applicable to other parts of their lives. Knowles' andragogy view matched this model on the level that Knowles maintained the notion that the learning process was a journey created by the learner and the facilitator role is to match the needs and goals of the learner. Knowles recognized the fact that adults carry with them experience and knowledge; therefore, to enrich adult learning, the information must be relevant to experiences and important in their lives (Knowles, 1984).

Potential growth and personal achievement in the adult learning environmental cannot be separated as parts from the whole. Knowles (1980) described the appearance of an andragogical learning environment as one that created meaning in many contexts of the learner's life, which is also a clear position within the positive psychology paradigm. As noted by Seligman (2005), finding meaning and flourishing in life through higher understandings is a driving force behind positive psychology. Gable and Haidt (2005) generalized the function of positive psychology as "the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions" (p. 104). Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) integrated the person and positive traits that included vocation, interpersonal skills, and positive human capacities (innate human strengths), with a subjective level of valued personal experiences and factors that supported a holistic view of well-being. Seligman et al. (2004) interpreted the concept of human growth and human potential as one that identified three elements of "happiness—pleasure, engagement, and meaning" (p. 1379).

Knowles (1980) proposed the notion that adult learners knowing and willingly incorporate education goals into life commitments. Thus, the ways in which adult

learners come to find meaning in the education environment becomes a crucial issue to address. Knowles (1988) saw the process of the learning experience rising from a created environment that was problem-orientation; meaning that the learners' focus was on investigating ideas and diagnosing different viewpoints to come to a personal understanding regarding the exercise. This could be accomplished by using one of three techniques, namely emphasis on experiential technique, emphasis on practical application, and unfreezing and learning to learn from experience.

Emphasis on experiential techniques implemented the use of (a) practical exercises and application (how the learner would use the knowledge gained; Knowles, 1988), (b) case discovery method (assessing the application of knowledge to a specific case), and (c) demonstration of practical skills. Because adults are themselves richer resources, the assumption adheres to the idea that the activeness of the learner “plays a role in the process, the more they are probably learning” (p. 50). Russo-Netzer and Ben-Shahar (2011) realized that within the positive psychology classroom, methodical applications “is where theory and practice create a positive reinforcing spiral” (p. 469). The authors explained crucial elements that incorporated supporting students in a way that helped them identify their challenges, reflect on thought processes, and connect stories (past and present) to meaningful or enlightened perspectives. Applications in the classroom consist of reflective writing, story sharing, critical thinking, and analyzing events linked to factors addressed in Positive Psychology course work.

This methodology was furthered by the notion that students desired to be able to transfer knowledge and application (Knowles, 1980; Ross-Gordon, 2011), and could be

realized through the emphasis on practical application that involved the role of the educator as a facilitator to transform academic information that bridged to real life applications by the learner. As part of the educational continuum, even course room assessment was seen as a scale that involved the students using the learned material and extending knowledge gained to real-life contexts (Knowles, 1988).

Within the paradigm of the adult learner theories, assessment is not always addressed by means of test scores or concrete evaluations, but by self-assessments addressing interpretation and effectiveness of use in real-life situations. McKillop (2005) pointed out factors that supported healthy growth as a combination of reflecting upon actions and acting on reflections. The author addressed the concepts of reflection and self-analysis in the learning environment as key constituents in learning. Russo-Netzer and Ben-Shahar (2011) articulated active reflection as a learning application that facilitated learning from experience that positively influenced a student's development and wellbeing, and improved the potential of retaining meaning of material or concept.

As the last element of Knowles' proposed process, the concept of unfreezing and learning from experience was to build upon already learned information (in any given format). Then, the experience must unfreeze to free the learners and let them look at themselves more objectively; that is, freed from any preconceptions. The outcome of this methodology was projected to show how adult learners can transform information and think abstractly about novel ideas and concepts (Knowles, 1988). These ideas and methods are richly evident in the positive psychology learning environment. Russo-Netzer and Ben-Shahar (2011) conceptualized the idea that the overall educational

experience of learning positive psychology immerses in several factors that support personal growth through academic interventions.

The practice and idea of reflective classroom work increases learning (Keeton, Sheckley, & Griggs, as cited in Russo-Netzer & Ben-Shahar, 2011). Changing the paradigm in the adult learning environment allows students to discover meaning while developing a sense of well-being and strengthening retention of the material presented. This concept ruminated in the ideas presented by Knowles (1984) that unfreezing as part of the learning experience, which allowed students to look at their previous thoughts and understand their own perspective from an objective standpoint.

Within the framework of the andragogical approach and positive psychology views, both models idealized the potential growth of the adult learner through a realized view of human potential and the need to allow adult learners to guide, discover, and flourish at the hand of their own strengths. It was evident that Knowles followed this perspective as he notably veered from previous theories that focused on the inability of adult learners to be independent thinkers (behaviorist view), and moved toward the idea that adult learners had innate capacities to take responsibility for their own learning and themselves create meaning through learning (Knowles, 1980). This stance could not be closer to the ideas behind Positive Psychology and the learning factors associated with Positive Psychology.

The notion that education in the format of self-development and discovery can provide a means of finding meaning is riddled throughout the views of positive psychology. Positive psychology seeks to understand how people flourish with innate

personal strengths and through the ones nurtured over time by making sense and creating meaning from within (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Seligman et al., 2004; Aspinwall & Tedeschi, 2010). From the two positions, that of positive psychology and andragogy, a fathomable theoretic partnership is transformative learning.

Synthesis of the Research Findings

Changing frame reference, changing frame of mind, and associated future actions are at the core of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997). Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) postulated the idea that over the past several decades, human research has focused largely on defining what is wrong with people over what is right with people and, hence, the frame of reference was reflected in a trickle-down effect. The authors noted the importance of understanding the previous medical model as one that focused on correcting what was wrong over the newer health model, which focuses on helping each person realize their potential through strengths and introspective insights (on the individual level of positive psychology). Simply learning about factors associated with positive psychology is not a decisive influence for change to happen in the mind or in actions. Mezirow (1997), like Russo-Netzer and Ben-Shahar (2011), highlighted the essential elements of critical reflection. The first is to recognize a problem, as well as to identify current thoughts and assumptions upon which the thoughts are based. Next is challenging the thought process and ultimately creating new ways of thinking.

The process of challenging one's own thoughts or ways of thinking about the world is not always met with enthusiasm. A common entity of human nature is to discard or classify ideas as immaterial or underserving of attention and thought if the idea does

not correspond to our own predetermined thoughts (Mezirow, 1997). Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) ultimately challenged the entire field of psychology by pointing out the general focus aimed not at human strengths, but at human flaws. In essence, the field itself had created a heuristic mirror by which individual's judge and perceive themselves and others. Seligman (2005) proposed that the undermining beliefs created assumptions and a reference frame regarding the views and stigmas associated with mental illness, learning (dis)abilities, and comparative self-concepts; specifically the entirety of the ability to lead a flourishing life. From top to bottom, meaning became influenced by what was already known or previously created. Mezirow (1997) discussed the creation of meaning in two ways, namely meaning schemes and meaning perspectives.

Meaning schemes shape interpretation-based perspectives of "belief, judgment, and feelings which shapes a particular interpretation" (Mezirow, 1994, pp. 223). Mezirow (1991) described meaning schemes as the foundation that moves us in particular situations; the underlying influences of one's behaviors developed through recurring use schemes that go unchallenged. For example, how one acts around a double amputee. What pre-judgments are made regarding this individual? How has societal, cultural, and individual-formed beliefs influenced subsequent actions or behaviors from an individual? In addition, meaning perspectives are developed throughout childhood into adulthood and influence how we come to know and think what we know and think. This type of perspective is uninfluenced by culture, environment, social exchanges, and personal influences of teachers, parents, and mentors. The influences provide the context through

which individuals judge situations, values, others, and themselves. Over time, the individual uses these perspectives to gain a rationalization of their world. “A collection of meaning schemes made up of higher-order schemata, theories, propositions, beliefs, prototypes, goal orientations and evaluations” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 2).

Meaning perspectives provide a broad and global view from a personal point of view in which a frame of reference is derived (Mezirow, 1991). For example, what is a common perspective regarding mental illness? Are these individuals able and capable? Can they perform at the same levels as other individuals do? Is life satisfaction at the good or bad end of the spectrum? Based on what society, teachers, and other influences model, the individual rationalizes their own thoughts comparatively. Meaning and creating meaning within the context of one’s own life is perhaps nowhere more important than in the realm of what the field of positive psychology has been attempting to create.

Seligman (as cited in Snyder & Lopez, 2006) created the learned helplessness paradigm in which individuals accept that they are powerless to control what happens to them and in turn, their behaviors and outlooks become passive and coping abilities diminish. As an opposite end of the pendulum perspective, Danner, Frienden, and Snowdon (2000) analyzed 180 nuns between the ages of 75 and 95. From short essays, the researchers extracted positive emotional statements. Seventy years later, in 2001, the mortality of each nun was analyzed. The study revealed that the nuns whose essays contained the most sentences conveying positive sentiments lived an average of seven years longer compared to the nuns whose stories contained the fewest. Consequently, Danner et al. (2000) came the understanding that what is learned and what one comes to

know in meaning schemes and meaning perspectives has great influence on an individual's life.

The transformative approach to learning is not piece work, but rather a holistic view that accepts the student as a whole-person entity to include the holistic elements of an intuitive nature, spiritual, and physical (Mezirow, 1991). Within the milieu of transformative learning, the individuals' frame of reference is considered as a composite of three components, namely emotional, connotative, and cognitive. The frame of reference channels through habits of the mind and point of view. With the assumption that developmental ways of thinking are created in unique ways, people develop broad and abstract habits of the mind that influence ways of being, thinking, feeling, and acting. This includes the idea that codes, stemming from cultural, social, educational, economic, political, or psychological references, articulate particular viewpoints.

Habits of the mind and point of view influence how individuals see themselves in the world in relation to others, as well as how thoughts are formulated about those unlike themselves. Mezirow (1991) described ethnocentrism as a point of view whereby one sees their ethnicity as being superior to other ethnicities. This notion is comparative to how individuals perceive those with mental or physical disabilities in a light that is inferior in some way (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The authors called on the field of psychology theorists and practitioners to change ways in which they influenced the view of human nature. Ultimately, the authors were asking not to end the study of problems, but to counter those studies with enlightenment of what people do right, how they flourish, create resilience, and live good lives. Like Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi

(2000), Mezirow (1990) invited a higher level of learning by shifting the pendulum from an individual view to a worldview.

To create this shift, Mezirow (1996) provided a structural foundation to support an expansive frame of reference. This included “one that was more (a) inclusive; (b) differentiating, (c) permeable; (d) critically reflective; and (e) integrative of experience” (Mezirow, 1996, p. 163). The outcome frame of reference was supported by identifying phases of perspective transformation and practices of reflection that acted as a fulcrum of change. Merriam et al. (2007) highlighted the differences of Mezirow’s types of reflection as (a) *content reflection* students reflect on the content or description of a problem, (b) *process reflection* included problem solving abilities and strategizing new outcomes, and (c) *premise reflection* investigated the significance of the concern or issues itself which looks at beliefs or values that undermine the issue. Within and surrounding the boundaries of reflection, Mezirow (2000) identified 9 phases of perspective transformation:

1. A disorienting dilemma.
2. Self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame.
3. A critical assessment of assumptions.
4. Recognition that one’s discontent and process of transformation is shared and that others have negotiated a similar change.
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions planning course of action.
6. Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans.

7. Provisionally trying out new roles.
8. Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships.
9. A reintegration into one's life based on conditions dictated by new perspective.

These building blocks served as a foundation in the construction of the positive psychology course room by the acknowledged importance of rituals and cognitive change. The rituals or ritualizing included adopting new practices or thought processes associated with learning aspects of positive psychology with the prospective outcome of lasting change over back-to-baseline. Russo-Netzer and Ben-Shahar (2011) promoted the idea that reflection sets into motion events that change behaviors, actions, or thought processes that support goals and life choices. By ritualizing through mindful activities such as gratitude journals, meditation, creating time, and altruistic acts, the process and patterns become capacious. Thus, the notion that change comes about not from knowing that we know, but from knowing that we can create a new way of knowing through questioning our knowing, is created.

Critique of the Previous Research

Pervious research supported that the theoretical underpinnings of each element only loosely tied to one another. For example, as part of the theoretical understanding of transformative learning, the epistemology and ontology provided the crux for understanding the transpiring changes between what one knows and what one has the potential for knowing. O'Sullivan (1999) pointed out this included a deep structural shift in the awareness of one's being in the world that included one's location, relationships

with others and connection to the natural world. Dirkx, Mezirow and Cranton (2006) further described the meaning-making potential associated with transformative learning as an autonomous way of being and behaving in life to reciprocate and generate self-actualization. Thus the experience of learning acts as a fulcrum to focus on life as it is right here and right now as not a dress rehearsal for life, but as life itself. Transformative learning incorporates development and the notion that “learning is understood as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience in order to guide future action” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 162).

The reality of this being that it is not possible to undertake a eudemonistic journey without experiencing a paradigmatic shift in consciousness. Previous research established links between education and finding meaning in life. The one element missing from the pool of empirical data is bringing the postulates to reciprocation point of finding meaning through education. Russo-Netzer and Ben-Shahar (2011) elucidated this process in the reflective nature used in the positive psychology classroom that supported cognitive changes and frames of reference. As implied by Mezirow (1997) and O’Sullivan (1999), the definitive shift happens when an openness to create pathways is consciously built. As part of the Aristotelian eudemonic theory, education becomes a catalyst for growth in life.

Learning theoretical aspects of positive psychology provides gateways for nurturing personal transformations through understanding and experiencing eudemonia. Given the originality of uniting the three entities and realizing outcomes through personal perceptions, the present study may act as a pool from which several fields and disciplines

could use the information to discover further ways in which to build educational bridges to outcomes that necessitate holistic recognition of outcomes over exclusive quantifiable measures.

Summary

The adult learning environment has vastly moved away from sage on stage toward a learning environment that assiduously recognizes theories and application associated with positive and personal adult learner outcomes (Knowles, 1980, 1981, 1984; Russo-Netzer & Ben-Shahar, 2011). This is nowhere more evident than in the positive psychology classroom, where the learner is the focal point and the beneficiary of information learned (Russo-Netzer & Ben-Shahar, 2011). The benefits are not realized through just simple means of absorbing the information, but by transforming and finding meaning within and for the information. Thus, transformative learning is a natural theoretical foundation to understand the experience of the positive psychology adult learner classroom, given that positive psychology rests on the belief that for views to change and growth to happen, a new way of thinking must prevail (Mezirow, 1990; Russo-Netzer & Ben-Shahar, 2011) .

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

The focus of this study was to holistically understand what was emerging in the adult positive psychology learning environment. The natural and obvious method of gaining access to this type of knowledge was by gathering the rich, descriptive stories from those educators who immersed themselves in to the positive psychology curriculum and student population during the educational process. The information from this study provided a better understanding of educators' portrayed outcomes, other than quantitative measures, in the adult positive psychology learning environment, and filled the gap in the empirical data.

Chapters 1 and 2 provided an overview of the presented study, and an extensive literature review binding past studies to entities on the present study; supporting the need for the present study. The present chapter expands on the methodology to extensively cover (a) purpose of the study, (b) research design, (c) target population and participant selection, (d) procedures, (e) instruments, (f) data collection, (g) ethical considerations, and (h) expected findings. Areas expanded will cover rationale and descriptions identifying how each element fit into the presented study.

Purpose of the Study

The presented collective case study interpreted and described how educators teaching positive psychology type courses in an adult learning environment portrayed students' personal learning transformations in response to the curriculum. Further, the purpose was to explore the bounded system of a group of educators to add trustworthiness to the study. In response to the notion of ensuring trustworthiness, it was

acknowledged that gathering the story of just one or two educators cannot capture a true perspective. Gathering multiple stories from those in a bounded system created a broader and more complete perspective, permitting a more vivid and whole description. These types of gathered stories, rich in depth and breadth, exemplified the superlative and most accurate perspectives from this learning environment.

The initial research question, “How do educators teaching positive psychology in the adult learning environment describe students’ personal transformations in response to the curriculum?” captured the quintessence of a holistic investigation concentrated on a bounded group of individuals who share a common experience. Reflected in the belief that influences over human behavior cannot exclusively be broken in to parts, analyzed numerically, and interpreted as wholeness (Deutscher, 1966), there is much to learn from the holistic study of the human experience. This study goes beyond investigating learned and remembered knowledge in a course-room; measurably evaluated, venturing into what transpired from the course-room on after what the students learned as factors associated with positive psychology. The data attained from this study supported the discovery to the answer of the research question by capturing what Patton (1990) indicated as the influence of qualitative research through deeper “portrayals of holistic settings and impacts is that great attention can be given to nuances, settings, interdependencies, complexities, idiosyncrasies and context” (p. 51).

Assumptions and Rationale for Qualitative Design

Case study questions answer specific questions unable to be answered by quantitative methods (Creswell, 2013). More specifically, the research question

generated must match the design of the selected case study type. Contingent on what is being investigated, the researcher must decisively select a type of study that matches the research question. This endorses the importance of the question itself being clearly written and substantiated (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The question and type of study selected sets the tone, acting as a guide for the following steps of a study (Yin, 2009; Creswell, 2013). In the presented study, not only did the research question explore the adult learning positive psychology environment, but addressed this environment from the portrayals of a bounded group, namely the presiding educators. Thus, the ontological assumption was that the presiding educators possess an extensive pool of knowledge concerning the explored environment.

To elaborate on the rationale of the selected methodology of design, a case can consist of more than one unit bound, thus making it a case, or a single case study can be defined as a single unit explored as a case (Yin, 2009; Creswell, 2013). Single case study or holistic case study has been determined as having merit within the research paradigm (Yin, 2009). However, the consensus is that collective study adds to the reliability of the study by presenting compounding information that is similar in nature throughout several cases (Tellis, 1997; Baxter & Jack, 2008). Yin (2009) indicated that collective case studies allow the investigator to discover differences within and/or between cases by identifying repeated patterns. For these reasons, the presented study implemented the collective cases design to address reliability.

An additional component used to address the rationale of the design was the given comparative nature of collective cases. The cases were chosen purposefully to enable the

researcher to foresee similar results across cases. Appropriately, the researcher must also consider the number of units and cases needed to adequately deliver hallmark results.

Merriam (1998) indicated a drawback of single case studies is that they are not generalizable. This aspect of case study works in tandem with identify and constructing the research question, for it is essential the researcher know what the actual case is made up of and what the emphasis of the study is attempting to answer. The presented study addressed specific rationales to ensure the methodology aligned with the focus and research question. Participants were selected based on their qualifications to add to the depth and breadth of the knowledge pool directly supportive of the research question.

Research Design

The presented research study used qualitative research methods; a collective case study design approach of and initial projected eight to ten participants, or enough participants to realize saturation. This research approach aligned with research question and theoretical frameworks discussed earlier. Additionally, due to the nature of inquiry, the approach aligned with the epistemological and ontological assumptions. The collective case study uses more than one unit or case to investigate “a phenomenon, population, or general condition” (Stake, 2000, p. 437). For this study, the population was comprised of educators that teach positive psychology type courses.

The value of the collective cases supports the opportunity of gaining a stronger clarification or understanding (Stake, 2000). Furthermore, Golafshani (2003) described the naturalistic approach of qualitative research that as one that looks to understand a context of a real world setting. In light of seeking the personal perspective of this unique

group of educators, the collective case study supports the research question. The presented study followed the guides of a collective case by nature of the unique common attributes of the educators; teach positive psychology type courses in the adult learning environment. For this research, the bounded system was identified as educators who teach the positive psychology type courses in the adult learning environment with the aim of collecting qualitative data.

Qualitative research addresses inquiry from a different perspective than that of the quantitative perspective. Research design motivation stemmed from ideas presented by Rappa (2003), which identified Comte's positivist theory to be an underpinning force of quantitative research. These ideas described positivism as a kind of scientific arrangement needed to discover knowledge. In this paradigm, human beings became the center of the universe replacing religion as the focus of cosmological activity. A common theme became the idea that events and phenomena could be explained scientifically. This was contested by researchers who sought answers to questions of *why* and *how*, and that sought different types of data to fully appreciate the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The underpinning of qualitative case study was linked to a constructivist or interpretivist view. This philosophy was built on the idea that individuals interpreted information and constructed their own reality (Searle, 1995; Stake, 1995). With this in mind, the researcher connects the topic and research question with the significance of the study. Astutely, there must be a consideration for the type of qualitative research based on the research question.

Alternative methods of design were ruled out based on the type of data being collected and the research question. The heuristic approach is acknowledged as one that begins from within and encourages the researcher to explore and pursue a creative journey. Researchers immerse themselves in the discovery (process or experience) to find meaning or gain rich insight (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985). Hiles (2008) provided interpretation of Moustakas' humanistic view of heuristics research by adding the explanation that heuristic approach, like case study approach, is exploratory in nature but, unlike case study, is not concerned with discovering theories; heuristic approach is concerned with self-inquiry and human knowing.

Douglas and Moustakas (1985) reminded readers that the word heuristic stems from the Greek word *heuriskein*, which means to find and discover. The author connected the definition with key factor that the researcher is highly integrated into the research study, thus becoming the focal point of the research through self-discovery and finding importance in meaning (Hiles, 2008). Researchers using the case study approach act as a tool within the context of the study, but do not become personally involved in the actual experience. Case study follows a particular structure “the problem, the context, the issue and the lessons learned” (Guba, as cited in Creswell, 1998, p. 36).

The phenomenological approach pursues the essence of *what*, what is the lived experience (Stake, 1995). McCaslin and Scott (2003) provided the example of a phenomenological question, “discover[ing] the shared lived experiences of one quality or phenomenon in others” (p. 450). Like qualitative case study, the intent is to understand *what* and *how* associated with the research question (Yin, 2009). However,

phenomenology is more interested in the essence of the lived experienced (Rossman & Rallis, 1998), rather than investigating a bounded system; person, persons, event, system, organization or process with in a context (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenology reduces the described (by participants) common meaning of the lived experiences to a phenomenon; being the object of the human experience (Yin, 2009).

Both approaches use analysis techniques to realize themes (Yin, 2009; Creswell, 2013). Phenomenology uses reduction methods that reduce data revealing themes. Case study analysis commonly involves aggregation or data reduction (iterative, spiraling, or cyclical process) that moves from general to more specific interpretations (Creswell, 1998). Miles and Huberman (1994) added that data reduction could additionally include quantification elements such as data matrices, tables, and figures. From obtaining the data, phenomenology relies heavily on the personal interviews producing thick descriptions of the lived experience (Patton, 1990). Interviews are used in case study approach as one of several ways to obtain data. The case study approach relies on several types of information (journals, interviews, and reflection papers) to reveal themes.

A subsequent alternative design method is grounded theory. This theory was ruled out on the bases of approach. While both case study and grounded theory approach can be accomplished in a natural setting, within the natural setting context grounded theory approach describes stages of a basic social process (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). The intent of ground theory is to ascertain a theory regarding a particular situation or process through abstract analytical representation of phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). This is accomplished by multiple field visits and constant compassions of the data. The value of

this type of research is in the ability of the data to ultimately ground the theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Setting aside the idea that both types of research can be accomplished in the natural setting, case study departs course from the grounded theory approach from theoretical inception. Yin (1994) stated, “Theory development prior to the collection of any case study data is an essential step in doing case studies” (p. 24). This factor influences the data collection and the analysis. Case study data collection and analysis is an iterative process accomplished when all the data has been collected. Yin (2009) maintained that data analysis consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating, and testing. Strauss and Corbin (1998) described the analytical process of grounded theory as an ongoing comparison of data that used codes and categories. The continuous emergence of process codes were compared until no new codes or categories could be produced: reaching the point of saturation.

The final comparison was with that of ethnography approach. Ethnographical studies give the researchers an opportunity to investigate “a culture at work” (Creswell, 1998, p. 225). A lead question for this type of research is “If I could experience a different culture by living/observing it, I would choose to experience” (McCaslin & Scott, 2003). Creswell (1998) pointed out the interpretation of the cultural system or group within a natural setting becomes the focal point of investigation. This differs from the case study approach that investigates the system or group and that may or may not be associated by culture but by other unique commonalities.

Ethnographers attempt to attain vital information by immersing themselves into the culture over long periods. This type of research relies heavily on a variety of information gathered from the cultural group and from abundant field notes assembled by the researcher (Creswell, 2007). The case study approach similarly attains information from a variety of sources *without* the researcher injecting themselves into the crux of the researched population. Ultimately, case study approach attempts to understand the human experience from a sociology perspective, as opposed to ethnography that attempts to understand the human experience from a cultural perspective (Creswell, 2007).

Probing alternative types of qualitative studies showed how qualitative methods can stem from similar philosophies and perspectives; the nature is to study the human element within the context, captured by stories and artifacts that otherwise are not captured in raw numbers. Within the theoretical framework of construct and interpretive assumptions of qualitative studies lie the diverse approaches to investigation. This poses issues when deciding how to structure research design—heuristics, phenomenology, case study, grounded theory, or ethnography. McCaslin and Scott (2003) provided a guideline, five questions to select the “color” to paint a qualitative design that contributes to the reasoning behind selecting one approach above another approach. Highlighted in the case study approach, this type of research seeks to answer *what* questions, or “discover what actually occurred and was experienced in a single lived event” (McCaslin & Scott, 2003, p. 450). Compared to case study research, the noted additional approaches attempt to answer different questions by investigating and gathering data in diverse ways.

The initial research question sought to understand how educators describe the transformation from a holistic portrayal. Therefore, the qualitative collective cases study approach was well suited, and was appropriately selected, to the question and purpose of the research design by nature of what the research was attempting to uncover. To expand the aims of case study approach, Creswell (2007) stated, “If it relates to developing an in-depth understanding of a ‘case’ or bounded system” (p. 496) and if the purpose is to understand “an event, activity, process, or one or more individuals” (p. 496), then case study is the methodology that should be used. The nature of the presented research was to study the holistic human elements within the context captured by stories and artifacts that otherwise are not captured in raw numbers (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009). The presented study did not investigate a relationship, but rather explored the personal perspectives of the educators who teach positive psychology type courses in the adult learning environment.

Added reliability and trustworthiness considerations of the design addressed the methodical intent to select educators from different institutions and locations. A final design consideration that further strengthened the trustworthiness of the study was the number of participants for the study. Creswell (2007) pointed out that using too many cases could “dilute” (p. 62) the information. Using too few cases could yield unique or specific discoveries influencing the qualitative transferability (Russell & Gregory, 2003). The presented study consisted of an initial projected eight to 10 participants, or enough participants until saturation was reached, to provide enough information to reasonably reach a level of saturation without clouding the data. Eight initial participants made up

the initial roster with a backup list of four participants. One participant dropped out prior to the interview process. Saturation had been reached at the sixth participant. The decision to maintain only the initial roster of participants was made and seven participants were used for his study.

Target Population and Participant Selection

The target population for this study consisted of individuals who met the criteria as part of the design protocols. The intent was to gather data from a specific group of individuals who shared a common experience of teaching a positive psychology type course. Given the focus of the design and type of data being collected, the sampling procedure for the presented study followed the guiding principle of convenience purposive sampling. Justification for using purposive sampling was described by Patton (2002) as a sampling technique that “selects information-rich cases for in-depth study-size and specific cases depend on study’s purpose” (p. 182). For the presented research study, a typical case sampling focused on investigating what is “typical, normal, or average” (p. 182) was used. The presented study surveyed a number of public access professional groups to screen for prospective participants. Given the environmental criterial for the study as the adult learning environment of a positive psychology course, prospective participants were screened for the associative set criteria. The set criteria included (a) possessed the qualifications to teach positive psychology, or type of positive psychology course in the adult learning environment, (b) to have taught at least one positive psychology type course in the adult learning environment, and (c) to have taught at least one positive psychology type course within a year of the onset of data collection.

Further, purposive sampling is described as nonrandom selection of participants that focuses the research in a specific direction. As a bounded system, the selected educators of the positive psychology course are acknowledged as possessing the sincere perspectives that will best be told through their personal stories that helped to guide the direction of the study. An additional consideration addressed was the authentic desire of participants. As noted by Colaizzi (1978), the participant must have the experience, interest, and willingness to talk. To address this and ensure the data were of the highest quality, each potential participant was questioned about their willingness to talk about their experience and to have their stories submitted as part of the research study. The main purpose of surveying for prospective participants was to find individuals who were truly interested in being a part of the study. The responses to the initial prospective participant survey were noted by a very high willingness to participate.

Participants were recruited using a protocol of prospective participant pre-survey sent through public professional site. The sites were surveyed for credentials and associations to the professional aspects of Positive Psychology and the empirical/research basis of the group or site foundation. A site search was performed to gain information regarding individuals who possessed credentials and ability to participate in the study. From the search a list of names was created. Further, an extensive list of researchers and educators of positive psychology was provided from field leader in Positive Psychology. Potential participants were sent a pre-survey letter with no expectation of commitment, just an acknowledgement of interest.

Procedures

Prior to engaging in a working relationship with potential participants, the application to conduct the research was submitted to the Capella's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and approval was received. Upon receiving notification of research approval from the IRB, the formal process of securing participants, screening the participants, and addressing ethical issues began. The procedures meticulously followed protocol guides to maintain a high level of rigor acknowledging dependability, credibility, and transferability. Both Yin (2009) and Stake (1995) developed protocols to function as a frame of operation. Yin (1994) offered a direct protocol approach that stressed the importance field procedures, constructing case study questions, and properly presenting the write up results. Stake (1995) presented similar protocols, adding the importance of philosophical underpinning and the need for thick description of context; a more naturalistic view.

The framework protocols for this study to address participants included (a) contacting each potential participant via e-mail to ensure participation was voluntary and they still wanted to participate; (b) sending the initial welcome letter and packet of a welcome letter, demographic sheet (see Appendix B), informed consent, outline and instruction of instrument 1 interview (see Appendix C), outline and instructions for instrument 2 narrative (see Appendix D); (c) obtaining signed informed consent forms; (d) scheduling a time for a virtual-electronic type of interview; (e) conducting the interviews following the procedural guides, and (f) obtaining the reflective narratives. The intent of the protocols was to provide guidance and a consistent checklist for each

step of the research effort. Yin (2009) articulated the protocols to rigor that strengthen dependability, credibility, and utility as outcomes of a good research effort.

Screening of the participants began immediately to ensure each potential participant met the inclusive criteria. There were no exclusion criteria based on race, religion, age, sex, nationality, ethnicity, or impairments. Simultaneously, site permission letters were sent or e-mailed to the IRB of the facility where the participants worked. Facility IRB offices or authority representatives acting on the institutions behalf were recognized as the authoritative figures to allow or not allow participants to be interviewed.

Participants were pre-briefed on (a) the objectives and goals of the study, minimal threshold of risk to participants and any confidentiality issues; (b) informed of monetary compensation not for recruitment purposes but to cost associated with mailing or reproducing documents if needed; and (c) inform the potential participant that there would be no deception associated with the research study. Upon site approval (or verification that approval was not needed) and accomplishment of screening for inclusion and acknowledgement of free-will intent to participate, a master list was accomplished to reflect the included secured eight participants with a backup list of four participants .

Recruitment processing of new participants and scheduling interviews of secured participants was accomplished simultaneously to perpetuate the flow of data. As part of the participant protocol, securing and scheduling participants was accomplished on an individual basis aligning to the participants' personal and professional schedules. Given that the individual participant interviews and reflective narratives were separate entries

and did not influence one another, processing and interviewing did not pose cross-influencing problems with this part of the process. Personal narrative pieces were collected on a flexible basis as not to pressure participants and to obtain the best quality data possible.

Prior to generating the list of participants, a decision was made on the type of interview and supplemental narratives that would comprise the data form each participant. To address credibility and reliability by how and what types of questions would be asked to the participants, a set of predetermined open-ended questions was fabricated, and an instruction format was generated as a document for each participant, sent along with the welcome package. This included following guides set forth by Yin (2009) that acknowledged the interview process and gathering of additional data as an important part of the design. The process identified by Yin (2009) entailed “developing instructions and specific steps associated with the overview of the research, field procedures, development of case study questions, and directorate on how the data will be analyzed and reported”(p. 64). This study addressed the open-ended questions and personal reflective narrative in this manor:

Open-Ended Conversational Interviews

The open-ended conversation questions that were used to guide the interview were:

RQ1. If you could tell a story about what teaching positive psychology is/was like, what would that story be?

RQ2. In your words, how would you describe student transformations that happen in your positive psychology classroom?

RQ3. How would describe what is happening during the process of a learning transformation in your positive psychology classroom?

RQ4. From your experience, what do you perceive are outcomes of student transformations in the positive psychology classroom?

RQ5. From your perception, what kinds of student learning transformations do you see in your positive psychology classroom?

RQ6. Tell me about a time in your classroom when you experienced a student having a learning transformation because of learning a topic associated with positive psychology?

RQ7. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding your perception of the learning process in the positive psychology classroom?

RQ8. What advice or insight would you give to school administrators, other educators or counselors regarding transformations associated with learning topics of positive psychology?

RQ9. What do you perceive are learning factors associated with transformations in your positive psychology classroom?

As a cornerstone to the interviews, the presented study followed the key motivation that the interview was aimed at understanding the meaning of what the participants is conveying throughout the interview that captures both factual and abstract meaning levels (Kvale, 1996). To address this, there were several considerations to

account for when employing a qualitative interview. First was the protocol for the interview itself. Creswell (2007) addressed the protocol issue by noting the researchers should develop a well thought out plan to conduct the interview. The described protocol addressed: who, what, where, and when before, during, and after the interview. To capture the essence of experience, Patton (2002) suggested a methodology of constructing interview questions that allow in-depth explanations and descriptions of experience. Open-ended questions allow for this type of information to unfold during an interview.

Procedural protocols applied to developing and implementing interview questions. For this study, and aligned with the case study approach, the interviews were open-ended. Following the methods noted by Tellis (1997), this type of interview will allow the research instrument (myself), the researcher to gain a deeper insight into an event and propose solutions to corroborate evidence from other sources. As an educator of counseling, I used the open-ended conversational methods to interviewing (client-centered), similar to that used in counseling sessions, which allowed the interviewees to share their perspectives with no preconceived feeling of judgment or right and wrong answers.

This type of interviewing drew on answers that were elaborated and explained by the interviewees in relation to an event. Interviews allow for a richer understanding of the interviewees' experience. According to McNamara (1999), the wording of the question is important in maintaining consistency. The guided interview approach gives the interviewer the ability to obtain information from the same general areas from each

interviewee. It is a way to maintain focus and still allow for a degree of flexibility and freedom, which allows the interviewees to tell their stories. It is from these interviews and other gathered data that rich stories provide abundant information for analysis (Stakes, 1995; Yin, 2009).

Protocol for conversational interviews. Conversation interviews followed protocols with flexibility and acknowledgement of work schedules, time differences, and unforeseen technical difficulties. Prior to the interview, acknowledgement of participation consent, confidentiality, and understanding of the interview being recorded was obtained. An interview time and method of capture was agreed upon (face-to-face interview, FaceTime, Net-meeting, Skype, or other electronic capture). The interviewees were sent a reminder e-mail within three days of the interview and sent an additional copy of the interview questions and instructions for the narrative along with the reminder e-mail.

The interview process used the conversational open-ended interview format (see Appendix C) with a flexible time allotment of 60-90 minutes, or as long as the interviewees needed to tell their stories. As part of the pre-research package sent to the participants, the participants were informed of time and structure interview parameters. Arrangements were made to schedule and complete interviews that accommodated the interviewees' schedules and communication capabilities.

Upon making initial interview contact with the interviewees, the interviewees were again made aware of the informed consent and that the interview would be recorded. All interviews were recorded using two methods of voice capture, the EchoPen™, and a

computer generated recording application. The interviewees were made aware of security measures taken, both physical and relating to anonymity. Any items recorded and transcribed were identified only by a number corresponding to a master list secured by the researcher. No items identified by personal names would be maintained as part of the study. Further, all recordings were stored on a secure password protected computer until transferred to a flash drive. As a secondary measure of security, the memory devices were stored in an electronic pass code safe in a secured office.

At the onset of the interview, the participants were again asked if they wished to participate, if they understood the informed consent or had any questions, and if they agreed to be audiotaped. Participants were also made aware that the interview environment on the interviewer's end was in a secure room and the conversation was confidential. This was to create a cooperative working relationship and put the interviewees at ease. Once there was an acknowledgement of agreement, the interview began. Questions were read to the interviewees, giving them time to collect their thoughts and respond in their own words. Interviewees were asked to elaborate on questions that stemmed new areas of insight, or where examples were warranted. At the end of the interview, the participants were thanked for their time and told that they would be receiving portions of their inputs via e-mail as part of member checking to ensure their story had been captured in the essence of how they wished it to be told.

As part of the security protocol for face-to-face interviews and electronic interviews, captured recordings were removed from computers and stored on individually

numerically marked (for anonymity purposes) flash drives and secured by the researcher in a locked storage file cabinet in a locked secure office.

Written Prompted Reflective Narrative

As pointed out by Yin (2009), journals and other personal written documents are acceptable products to use for collective cases study analysis. The author also noted that collected documentation was a source to “corroborate and augment evidence from other sources” (p. 103). Procedural protocols will apply to instructions given to all participants regarding the reflection journal. The prompted reflective narrative (see Appendix D) was a component that supports data triangulation by providing an additional form of information that captures the participants methodical personal thoughts not confined to time limitations or guides structured interview questions. These types of documentation were discussed by Sfarid and Prusak (2005) as an element of qualitative research that could extend the descriptions of the meaning or experience through a historical account that is integral to understand the lives or experience of the storyteller.

The narrative instructional document (see Appendix D) was sent as part of the participant package via e-mail and mail. The instructional document purposely had very little structural direction. The reason for this was to allow the participants to be free of parameters and write how they felt about their experience. In addition to the instructions, the document also indicated how the materials would be handled and the security used to keep autonomy of the written pieces. Participants had the choice to mail back copies of the narrative or to send their written piece via e-mail to a secure computer.

Protocol for written reflective narrative documentation collection. Upon completion of the narrative, the interviewee was instructed to make one additional copy for back up and to send the original copy in the pre-paid return envelope to the research office address, or to send via e-mail attachment. E-mails sent as part of the research study were secured by using a password-protected computer located in a secure locked work office. Products received or produced as part of the study were maintained in an electronic secure passcode safe when not being used for research purposes.

As part of the data collection protocols, ethical and security consideration was made to ensure confidentiality, protect ethical standards, and to safeguard personal material by storing all materials in a locked safe with limited access. All documents will be stored for the length of seven years or until the researcher deems the materials are no longer needed. When the materials are no longer needed, the pieces will be destroyed using a professional service.

Instrument

In a qualitative case study, the primary instrument is the researcher (Denscombe, 1999). In most cases, this consists of the researcher being the individual who prepares the research questions and conducts the interviews, as was the case for this study. Besides addressing the ethical guides of interviewing, it is important for the interviewer to have a general knowledge of how to interview. Kvale (1996) offered 10 notable factors associated with successful interviewers, namely knowledgeable, structuring, clear, gentle, sensitive, open, steering, critical, remembering, and interpreting. Merriam (1998)

categorized these characteristics of a researcher as being sensitive regarding knowing when to continue question in the interview and when not to probe deeper.

While these techniques are innate within the field of counseling (American Counseling Association, 2005), not all researchers possess the background or training that would give them an understanding of the issues concerned with interviewing. As pointed out in the Belmont Report, *beneficence* is associated with minimizing risk (Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1979). For an untrained interviewer, this could mean not recognizing minimal mental entities that could negatively affect a participant. Prior to interviewing a participant, the researcher has an ethical obligation to attain training that allows them to conduct interviews (APA, 2014). Addressing these issues, the researcher (myself) holds a degree in counseling and has over 14 years of professional training combined in the counseling field, and teaching counseling interview techniques and research methods.

Patton (1990) pointed out the subjective nature of qualitative studies. The author supported the idea by describing qualitative studies that utilized the researchers as the main instrument and often coming in personal contact with the participants or becoming close to the situation during the study. As part of the methodical process of planning and design of the study, the researcher should be aware of relationships that would be formed, and like the proposed protocols by Yin (2009), the researcher should be prepared to deal with the unavoidable mutual connection to participants and/or influences on the study. One way this was addressed was to openly acknowledge the connection and to step back and bracket personal perceptions. Fischer (2009) proposed that researchers set aside

pervious knowledge of topic or subject and examine incoming external data critically to gain the essential perspective derived from the collected data.

Additionally, other influencing factors included acknowledging reflexivity (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995), which was defined as the acknowledgment by the researcher that they have, to a degree, an influence on the study simply by being an attached part of the study. These types of relationships can also be addressed as potential biases. As part of the instrument element of this study, this was addressed by fabricating the list of open-ended conversational questions and the verbose instructions for the narrative prior to data collection. Participants were also informed prior to the interview that there would be little interaction from the interviewer, other than asking for elaboration or probing questions on topics developed from the interviewee's perspective.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Stake (1995) advised that studies are generated based on seeking further understanding of an issue. At the center of the study lies the research question, the assembled words that indicate what question will attempt to be answered from gained knowledge of the study. Expressively, McCaslin and Scott (2003) deemed this question "the grand tour question" (p. 452). In keeping with this idea, the overarching question that guided this study is, "How do educators teaching positive psychology in the adult learning environment describe students' personal transformations in response to the curriculum?" This research study addresses the expert perceptions and evaluations of the students' transformations as part of the ways in which to understand how the three

elements of adult learning, positive psychology, and learning transformations come together.

To further address the research question and how the overarching question was ultimately answered; nine open-ended conversational questions (see Appendix C) were used to draw out descriptive stories to understand how the researcher developed the question. Creswell (1998) offered explanations that indicated the research questions should follow a specific approach and be “open-ended, evolving, and non-directional; restate the purpose in more specific terms” (p. 99). For this reason, the interview questions and the personal reflective narratives were used to provoke memories of unique experiences, as recalled through the senses of the interviewees. The story responses provided personal recollections and examples of connecting elements within the paradigm of their perspectives of the learning transformations in their positive psychology courses.

Data Analysis

In accordance with the notion that data analysis initiates simultaneously with data collection (Corbin & Strauss, 1990), this research study follows these board guides using thematic analysis. “Data analysis consists of: examining, categorizing, tabulating, or otherwise recombining the evidence to address the initial propositions of a study” (Yin, 1994, p. 140). This included the process of transforming the data that were included from notes and interviews. The data reduction process was an important element in the analysis of the data. This allowed for recognition of emerging themes that occurred continuously throughout the life of the project. According to Stake (1995) and Creswell

(2013), there is no set formula for analyzing a case study. However common steps set the stage for data analysis.

Thematic analysis of the data followed the general guides and steps, as discussed by Aronson (1994) and Boyatzis (1998). Within the paradigm of analysis, the objective was to naturally identify patterns and themes. In the present study, this task was accomplished by allowing for specific a coding list to evolve for each case, and later be matched between cases. Using Yin's (2009) credence regarding protocols, the initial step was to collect the data; the present research study recognizes the data as the captured audiotape focused open-ended questioning interview and the personal reflection narrative document elements. Once the data were collected, the protocol followed the recommended methodology stated by Aronson (1994) to list code patterns emerged from the data. To achieve this, codes were created using acronyms to reflect perceived meanings.

Boyatzis (1998) identified this stage as crucial to the encoding of data by developing a code system to identify patterns and emerging themes. For the present study, initially a line-by-line analysis was performed on each transcribed or produced document. The recognized approach was used to develop a code system. As noted by Boyatzis (1998), this descriptive method enhances the ability of this type of research to enrich and elucidate the insights and personal stories of the participants. The next step was identifying similarly coded patterns from all data collected. Aronson (1994) recommended the subsequent step as one that acknowledges the collected patterns and places them in sub-themes. As part of the protocol for the thematic analysis and to

enhance credibility of the research, member checking was incorporated to verify and substantiate identified themes and sub-themes. Last, Aronson (1994) suggested that the researcher strengthen the support for selecting the themes by providing literature that bonds the themes to the story and provides a rich foundation. For this purpose, a meaning abridgment was provided for each theme.

As part of the coding procedure, Boyatzis (1998) identified this stage as crucial to the coding of data by developing a code system to identify patterns and emerging themes. The present study follows the protocol of initially reading each individual case document line-by-line to absorb the full content of the document being examined. Second, the documents were read again line by line to generate a code list reflecting particular meaningful thoughts, perceptions, and portrayals. Each individual participant case was reviewed and examine in the same manor, following the same protocols. Noted by Boyatzis (1998), this descriptive method enhanced the ability of this type of research to enrich and elucidate the insights and personal stories of the participants. Ultimately, a full code list was generated from the collective participant cases that included the entire data set.

Following the initial protocol steps, the subsequent step included identifying similarly coded patterns from all data collected. This step was accomplished by methodically organizing codes to evaluate for commonalties and exclusiveness. Codes where then analyzed for each participant case independently to cluster code patterns and groups and construct emerging themes, and then collectively across the data set. This

step evaluated for overlap of codes or proximity of meaning to ensure exclusivity of theme description and meaning.

Once the completed code list was completed, the analysis protocol for translating codes into themes was initiated. Following the recommended steps indicated by Aronson (1994) and Cruzes and Dybå (2010) the clustered codes and patterns were placed into an ordered sub-theme and theme model. During this stage of analysis, sub-themes and patterns were analyzed across individual participant cases to evaluate meaning and relationships between themes. As a final check point in this phase strengthen trustworthiness and credibility of the research method, member checking was incorporated to verify and substantiate identified themes. Explained in chapter 4, member checking was a done by identifying segments of the interview interpreted to be associated with a particular theme and sent to the participant for acknowledgement of proper interpretation. Upon verification from the participants, codes and themes were solidified as credible from the validating feedback.

Ethical Considerations

Markedly, ethical issues are always a paramount concern with any type of research using human subjects. Within the context of discussing case study approach, it is important to highlight the ethical concerns of interviewing and obtaining personal documentation as forms of data. The American Psychological Association (2014) set parameters regarding what a researcher should and should not do when human subjects or sensitive data is involved in a study. Furthermore, The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (1979) generated the *Belmont Report*, which acts as guidelines for ethical

research. This report focused on three critical areas, namely respect for persons, beneficence, and justice.

While ethical concerns are certainly cornerstone for any type good research, researchers must pay particular attention to how the participants are treated during interviews and how the data gathered is physically handled. Creswell (2013) discussed the idea that researchers reveal the intent of study to the participants and “do not engage in deception” (p. 132). Another concern is events that unfold during the interview. The author discussed issues concerning “off the record” (p. 133) or sensitive information that could breach faith of a participant. Besides addressing direct concerns of the participants, the researcher must also pay close attention to how sensitive data material is handled.

Creswell (2013) indicated physical and computer-generated data should follow guides that protect anonymity and security and guard against potential loss of data. Ethical considerations are woven throughout the research process and addressed reciprocally with the protocols. Acknowledging these important aspects of good research, particular and careful steps were taken to inform participants and be very open with them regarding the research effort, and to include them in knowing how the materials would be handled and what security measures were being taking during the course of the study.

Expected Findings

To include an expected finding would mean that there is a prediction or a likelihood of an outcome. As one of the roles of a qualitative researcher, it is prudent not to have expectations or predict outcomes; the very nature of the holistic study unfolds by

inspiration of the stories told by the participants. As Stake (1995) pointed out, the roles of the researcher are derived with the understanding of how the researcher fits into diverse paradigms and aspects of the study. Just as the broader definitions of researcher roles are a crucial aspect throughout the process, so too are the technical aspects addressed by the researcher. These aspects include understanding the importance of the research problem, purpose, question, planning and design, and reporting (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009) that provide direction for the study.

In fitting the last piece of the puzzle, the researcher must also concern themselves with more worldly elements that affect participants, the field of research, and interpretations that lead to further discoveries. As appraised, it is not a simple or single task responsibility when a researcher embarks of the journey of qualitative case study discovery. For these reasons, the findings are not a premeditative thought but are a process of discovery. Noted by Corbin and Strauss (1990), rather than seeking existing information already known, the idea of qualitative study is to find meaning from original place not yet explored. This study supported the design that meaning would be realized through the told stories of the participants, thus no expected finding was anticipated.

Summary

Chapter 3 reviewed the methodology and design to include protocols implemented within the paradigm of constructing a trustworthy research study. This included explaining why the collective case study fit the nature of this particular study and why other types of qualitative studies were ruled out. The problem statement, the purposes of the student, and the research questions were reintroduced as articulating

elements of the design. Elaboration was discussed in the areas of population, sampling method, and data collection. The subsequent chapter, Chapter 4, expands on data collection and analysis.

CHAPTER 4. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The purpose of this chapter is to present the analysis results based on the design methodology process of data collection, analysis of the data collected, and the process of realizing emerged themes through pattern cluster codes. The aim of this study is to answer the research question, “How do educators teaching positive psychology in the adult learning environment describe students’ personal transformations in response to the curriculum?” and to join current research with research areas lacking empirical outcomes derived from this study.

The bounded system collective case study is customarily used to investigate “a phenomenon, population, or general condition” (Stake, 2000, p. 437). The personal interviews conducted for the present study give a voice to the group by allowing their experiences to come to life through rich description and meaning. The idea behind grouping the collective cases was to support the opportunity to gain stronger clarification or understanding (Stake, 2000).

Collected data from the participants are used to describe how the educators portray learning transformations in their positive psychology adult learning environments. Based on Creswell’s (2007) notion, “the point is to gather enough information to fully develop (or saturate) the model” (pp. 62–63). Interviews conducted for the present study continued until data saturation was achieved. This chapter is organized to provide a discussion of the methodical sequence for presenting collected data in a meaningful and valuable manor. The chapter is formatted as such: (a) the study

and the researcher, (b) description of the sample, (c) research methodology, (d) presentation of data and results of analysis, and (e) summary.

The Study and the Researcher

It is not uncommon for a researcher to conduct research within his or her chosen field of expertise. However, concealing the connection could affect how the reader perceives the study. McCaslin and Scott (2003) suggested that the researcher make known, up front, the connection between the researcher and the study to safeguard the importance of transparency throughout the stages of the study to include roles played by the researcher, researcher bias, and the need to reveal the researcher's perspective. As the primary researcher who conducted this study, I acknowledge I hold a master's-level degree in counseling. Additionally, I am qualified to teach and construct course curriculum at the adult education, bachelor, and master's level.

To further address competence, training, and evaluating, it is important to acknowledge the scope to which the researcher can carry out the entire task involved in the study. As previously addressed, the interviewing process holds merit in ethical and professional standards. The matter of merit holds true, too, with research design, data collection, and data analysis. Within the confines of research design, Yin (2009) firmly advised researchers to adhere to the protocols. While the researcher's stance is one of producing quality research, the protocols flood over into ethical and professional guides. The APA (2014) noted the boundaries of competence indicate a researcher can only carry out research in areas in which he or she is competent by virtue of education and/or training. As part of my counseling psychology background, I possess highly developed

skill to recognize patterns emerging from client notes and documents, and the ability to use coding.

As primary researcher and instrument associated with the presented study, I have been an adult educator for more than 10 years and a field counselor prior to becoming an educator. Professional and educational interest in human nature generated the desire to investigate humanism and life meaning through acknowledged potential. Associative compounding works (e.g., Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi, & Damon, 2001; Kahneman, Diener, & Schwarz, 1999; Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2005; Russo-Netzer & Ben-Shahar, 2011) articulated the potential for building life meaning through understanding building meaning in life. This potential carries over into all aspects of life, including education. Within the paradigm of watching students grow in building life meaning, questions were forming regarding what types of transformations were transpiring in positive psychology adult learning environments as a whole. Thus, the interest to further explore this area was the motivation for this study.

Due to the nature of my role as the researcher having some sort of connection to the study, and in turn with participants, I acknowledged and addressed this connection. With the understanding as the primary researcher that the participants are a unique group of individuals who hold similar career qualities, I was mindful to address this issue protocols and to partition myself out of the education realm and act accordingly as an ethical researcher. Additionally, as pointed out by Patton (1990), the subjective nature of qualitative studies in which the researcher serves as the main instrument who often comes

in personal contact with the participants means the researcher becomes close to the experience during the study.

This subjectivity included acknowledging reflexivity (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995), which was defined as the acknowledgment by the researcher that she has, to a degree, an influence on the study simply by being an attached part of the study. As part of the methodical process of planning and design of the study, I followed the protocols proposed by Yin (2009), to be prepared to deal with the unavoidable mutual connection to participants and/or influences on the study. To address this matter as the researcher, I placed the greatest emphasis on the notion that the personal stories of the interviewees were at the center of the research and my interjections during the interviews would be minimal. Personal thoughts and ideas regarding the learning transformations did not invade the interviews. Purposely, participants were procured for the study by open call to participate. This approach addressed the element of not attracting the participant pool from a specific institution, highly vested interest group, or predisposition to partiality of the research study.

The researcher is the primary instrument in a case study. In most cases, this role includes being the interviewer. Besides addressing the previously discussed ethical guides of interviewing, it is important for the interviewer to have a general knowledge of how to interview. Kvale (1996) offered 10 notable factors associated with successful interviewers, namely knowledgeable, structuring, clear, gentle, sensitive, open, steering, critical, remembering, and interpreting. Merriam (1998) categorized these characteristics of a researcher as being sensitive regarding knowing when to continue questioning in the

interview and when to not probe deeper. While these techniques are innate in the field of counseling (American Counseling Association, 2005), not all researchers possess the background or training that would give them an understanding of the issues concerned with interviewing. As primary researcher and instrument for the present study, I am well versed and knowledgeable in conducting and guiding personal interviews.

While biases are not directly addressed in the same manner as in quantitative studies, they can best be understood in the realm of reflection from the statements of Merriam (1998), Stake (1995), and Yin (2009), all of whom spoke to the integrity of the overall research design. Yin (2009) described methods and protocols for a rigorous researcher design that addresses each step of the study. Further, the authors associated particular validities with steps of the protocol process. These validities included (a) construct validity with data collection and composition, (b) internal validity with data analysis, (c) external validity with research design, and (d) reliability with data collection. To address these potential biases, the remedy was to prudently integrate protocols, ethical guides, and validate commitment to the study. As a researcher who has taught positive psychology and is an educator, I addressed the potential for bias by adhering to protocols and upholding the integrity by relying on ethical guidelines.

Description of the Sample (Participants)

The initial parameter for the sample size was established at eight to 10 participants, or until saturation was achieved. Eight primary participants were vetted to ensure inclusion criteria were met, and secured. An additional two back-up participants were vetted for inclusion criteria, and procured. One participant dropped out prior to the

interview stage. Saturation was reached at the sixth interview; the determination was made to include the seventh interview as part of the initial group. The back-up participants were not needed for the present study.

The present study consisted of an initial eight to ten participants with the provision of *or* until saturation was reached. Due to the abundant interview transcripts data supplemented by a personal reflection piece submitted by each participant, saturation was noteworthy at participant six; participant seven was included for verification of saturation. Additional participant information carried the risk of clouding the data. As noted in the proposal and IRB consent, the parameters indicated the words “or until saturation was met.” The recruited participants met the requirements of (a) educational and position criteria, (b) had taught at least one positive psychology type course, and (c) had taught one positive psychology type course within a year prior to the onset of the data gathering phase. Four female and three male participants from the age range groups of 35–74 participated in the study, with the average mean of 51 years old. All of the participants self-disclosed the ethnicity of Caucasian. All participants held a professional master’s-level degree or doctoral degree. Two participants identified their native nationality as the United Kingdom; one participant was from Canada, and four participants from the United States. No other data sources were accessed as part of the participant description.

Research Methodology Applied to the Data Analysis

The research methodology applied to the data analysis followed the thematic case-oriented approach to understanding the experience from the participants’ portrayals.

As noted by Schutt (2011), this approach reflects an interpretive philosophy to discovering happenings of a social phenomenon through holistic outcomes not intended to be causal. According to Yin (1994), “data analysis consists of: examining, categorizing, tabulating, or otherwise recombining the evidence to address the initial propositions of a study” (p. 140). For the present study, this approach included the process of transforming the data from interviews and narratives. The data reduction process was an important element in the analysis, allowing emerging themes to occur continuously throughout the life of the project.

Acknowledging the generally accepted consensus that there is no one set way of qualitative analysis (Aronson, 1994; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Yin, 2009), certain theoretical undertones supported particular analysis methods. As pointed out by Braun and Clark (2006), a theoretical thematic analysis reflects the notion that the researcher has a vested interest in the research area and thus, the study is researcher-driven as opposed to data-driven. The study aimed to follow the theoretic thematic track due to the design and purpose of the study. Thematic analysis of the data followed the general guides and steps, as discussed by Aronson (1994) and Boyatzis (1998), to naturally identify themes and patterns.

Using Yin’s (2009) guidance regarding protocols, the initial steps were to collect the data. For the present research study, the data were acknowledged as the captured audio-taped conversational open-ended questioning interviews and the personal reflection narrative documents. Following Aronson’s (1994) recommendation, once the data were collected, I created a master code sheet to note patterns as they emerged from the data.

Boyatzis (1998) identified this stage as crucial to the encoding of data by developing a code system to identify patterns and emerging themes. The use of thematic analysis, including developing a code system, was a descriptive method that enhanced the ability of this type of research to enrich and elucidate the insights and personal stories of the participants.

The next step was to identify similarly coded patterns from all data collected, including transcribed audio tapes and written narratives. Aligned with the recommendations of Aronson (1994), the subsequent step was one that acknowledged the collected patterns and placed them as grouped sub-themes. As part of the protocol for the thematic analysis and to enhance credibility of the research, I incorporated member checking to verify and substantiate identified themes and sub-themes. As a last checkpoint to strengthen the support, I incorporated literature to bond the themes to the story as a rich foundation (Aronson, 1994).

Opening Description

This study pursued personal perspectives to better understand the adult learning experience in a positive psychology classroom, as described by the presiding educator using qualitative collective case study methodology. The research specifically addresses the unique dynamic of educators' informal discerning evaluation of adult learners throughout the process of learning curriculum within the paradigm of positive psychology.

Restated Research Question

How do educators teaching positive psychology in the adult learning environment describe students' personal transformations in response to the curriculum?

Data Analysis of Personal Interviews

Each participant was identified as a numeric. A master copy of corresponding name to numeric identity was kept in a locked safe and safeguarded by the researcher, with only the researcher knowing the corresponding names and numeric equivalents. As part of participant file, numeric labels were generated to associate each item belonging to that participant's file. I adhered to the following protocols for each participant:

Step 1. The interview was transcribed verbatim and safeguarded.

Step 2. Three working copies were made from the original document and safeguarded.

Step 3. Using Working Copy 1 each interview was read through line by line to ensure that the transcription product was comprehensible. Any questionable wording was verified by contacting the participant and verifying the accuracy of the wording.

Step 4. Using Working Copy 2 each interview was read through line by line and marked with acronym codes relating to specific features realized. Markings were noted on the document and written on a master code sheet for that participant.

Step 5. The code sheet was labeled and stored in the participant's file for further use in within-case and between-case analyses.

Data Analysis of Personal Narrative

Each participant was identified as a numeric. A master copy of corresponding name to numeric was kept in a locked safe and safeguarded by the researcher, with only the researcher knowing the corresponding names and numeric. As part of each participant's file, numeric labels were generated to identify each item belonging to that participant's file.

I analyzed each individual participant case independently for emerging themes. Each piece of participant datum was coded initially, and then coded a second time after the complete list of codes had been exhausted and finalized. The individual case produced specific codes that emerged into themes generated from the participants' perspectives. Reasoning behind listing codes followed the methodological views of Creswell (2007), who stated that the descriptions (codes) could help add layers and compound important information that emerges for a case.

Once all the interviews and narratives were completed, the codes and themes were added to a master table spreadsheet that included all the participants' codes and thematic analyses of the interviews and narratives. This step was purposely accomplished after all the individuals' narrative code and themes had been produced to avoid preconceived codes and themes already identified in previous participants' narratives. Once population of the master table was accomplished, I used a systematic approach to reduce the data to show significant emerging thoughts, perceptions, and views. This methodology followed the ideas of methodically using step-by-step protocols, as noted by Creswell (2007).

To further analyze individual cases and comparative codes across cases, the codes were linked to the participant cases using QDA Miner to track and analyze the number of codes, cases in which the codes appeared, and overall percentages of individual code hits as part of the overall code population. From the emerged themes, a theme list was created. Finally, the individual participant cases were analyzed across cases to identify richness of the themes. This process was accomplished as a comparative look at the individually analyzed cases and by identifying similar themes (Creswell, 2007).

Presentation of the Data and Results of the Analysis Codes

Coding was established using descriptive acronyms, as can be seen in tables 1 through 3 below. These codes are used throughout this chapter and the next chapter to provide a concise and clear method of discussing the analyzed results. Patterns and expressions present in the study indicate how group codes developed into the emerged themes based on representation throughout the collected data and collective bonding of portrayals that express commonality within cases and across cases.

Examples of the direct quotes from the participants have been grouped together and demonstrate the pattern threading associated with each code pattern and emerged theme. The total expressions represent the number of patterns represented in the entire data set and indicate which patterns appear, in frequency, throughout the data set. The examples of the direct quotes support the nature and code/pattern of the emerged themes. Table 1 is arranged to specify grouped patterns. Table 2 specifies the emerged patterns, and Table 3 stipulates the occurrence of the patterns throughout the data set.

Table 1

Patterns

Patterns	Example direct quotes from transcripts that support pattern	Total expressions (<i>n</i>)
Positive transformative self-awareness of influence on others	(P3) The shift towards more “positively” oriented ways of thinking about their situations can be enough to have quite dramatic impact upon their domestic situation, their relationships, or their work situation. (P5) “What a tool to share with others! It truly expands one’s perspective.” (P7) So, she was sitting there going, “Oh, my god. That’s what I’m doing to people around me?” You know and so you could just see one of those moments where the veil was lifting.	52
Learning transformations that led to positive life-changing perspectives	(P1) In reference a life choice decision . . . a student told me it was because they were taking this [positive psychology], the student was taking a very strong, honest look at life, and it had clearly transformed and had something to do with transforming as a person who was maturing and growing. (P3) In reference to a student’s decision “to engage in a deeper level; to engage with people who are far more senior than them. A CEO that they trust in the context of looking for a mentorship.” (P6) Again, this is more of a process than a content outcome, but I’ve had students tell me they’ve found it a very useful framework for their lives outside of class.	49
Humanistic traits (bonding and learning) within the scope of learning positive psychology	(P3) And that’s where it becomes this nice symbolic relationship where we’re all in this together and we all want to explore these things and it’s not just you giving information hoping they’re learning it and test them on it. It feels very different. (P7) I think the course also provides fantastic opportunities for community building within the class. I described that we have, um, a culture within that class that allows students to do one thing in particular and that’s to talk positively about themselves. (P4) It’s an atmosphere about connecting to some of the best in us as human beings, and it’s, it’s about connecting to the best in us as individual human beings, but connecting with our story of what we most want.	48

Table 2 (continued)

Patterns

Patterns	Example direct quotes from transcripts that support pattern	Total expressions (<i>n</i>)
Positive personal introspective learning transformation	<p>(P1) By the end of that semester, he was questioning why he was in therapy as much as he was, and why he was constantly stuck in talking about his problems instead of doing something about it, taking action and figuring out that he had the courage and the grit to take action to make positive changes in his life, what authentically felt and solving his own problems without constantly having to ask permission of his therapist, whether his therapist probably thought it was a good idea or a bad idea.</p> <p>(P3) I think whenever you see a student realized that actually I can be doing something more than I'm already doing and that can be interpreted in different ways then naturally you're setting quite a significant transformation taking place. The students talk about the sense of self and control.</p> <p>(P5) They were writing about their experience. I noticed it was about little, simple stories about their lives, but then, you start noticing their strengths throughout it and how they start seeing themselves differently.</p>	42
Transformative outcomes from experientially applying empirical based curriculum	<p>(P2) He, he started practicing this every day. We explained everything about the tool and what it means. So we, showed [the student] the science behind it, but also that it will help you make some steps . . . after about two months he kept practicing this and he said, "I can't believe this. I made some steps because of this."</p> <p>(P3) We see the transformations more near the end of the modules . . . the students us their journals to reflect on that experience. So we are getting that balance between their reflections and link to the literature. The experiential element of it, that the encouragement to actually experience it as the first hand and try it out. They put aside the notion of being a psychologist or thinking like a psychologist or a researcher; think about it as a person.</p> <p>(P4) With regards to the presented material, they're going in and they are exploring; they often extend the literature. We ask them to learn experientially. So, we don't, we don't just teach from the books. We say pick a bit of it and go out and do I and they're coming back with the experience...And what they work on is what's important to them, so it becomes more than academic, it becomes personal.</p>	41

Table 3 (continued)

Patterns

Patterns	Example direct quotes from transcripts that support pattern	Total expressions (<i>n</i>)
Implementing positive practices based on positive psychology learning outcome	<p>(P1) And the student has gone on to become an administrator in a huge university. The student took everything from the positive psych class, and is applying it to teach other people how to let go, to appreciate themselves for who they are, to be okay with making mistakes, being able to bounce back, resilience and grit.</p> <p>(P5) You can see it on their faces and you can see it in their body language; just that refocusing on what's working. Student reflection "we get so caught in what are the problem and the stress and just to reconnect with all that is going right personally and professionally."</p> <p>(P6) So, I do feel although I've never measured it, I do feel like people are applying it to themselves and they do say it has helped them make some positive changes. . . . The people who do say that they did it [the exercises], say they feel a lot better. The gratitude journal is probably our number one hit. A lot of students are going ahead and doing their own positive psychology intervention on themselves anyhow throughout the semester they say "I feel so much better now" which is really pretty nifty.</p>	38
Methodical pondering reaction to presented material	<p>(P2) Often students will come at the end of the class to share their experience and ask questions. So it has more to do with the process of I guess connecting the material.</p> <p>(P3) For example, some students may have never really considered before what their "strengths" might be, or that there are things they can do to impact their subjective levels of "happiness," or that their own 'happiness' is even something that is a priority and that is OK for them to allow themselves to focus on this.</p> <p>(P7) Some of the younger ones who just have really great capacity for thinking and pondering. . . . Oh, we also talked about what they learned, one student said "Hang on, It's coming to me" where she had a real revelation. So, fixed versus growth mindset and that to some extent she had a fixed growth, a fixed mindset about, "Well, this is just who I am, you know." And then realized, "Oh, yeah but then there's that growth mindset thing" you know, and how, how cool that can be, right?"</p>	35

Table 4 (continued)

Patterns

Patterns	Example direct quotes from transcripts that support pattern	Total expressions (<i>n</i>)
Action transformation through revelation of strengths	<p>(P1) She took everything about strengths in the positive psych class, and she’s applying it to teach other people how to let go, to appreciate themselves for who they are, to be okay with making mistakes, being able to bounce back, resilience and grit all of that stuff.</p> <p>(P6) I think for her, the strengths were a big thing because she hadn’t seen herself really as a person with strengths.</p> <p>(P5) Our students tell us, “Focusing on my strengths instead of my weaknesses was incredibly empowering and even life-changing. What a gift for me! What a tool to share with others! It truly expands one’s perspective.”</p>	30
Direct transformative bonding to material	<p>(P3) Quite early on as soon as people start engaging with material, there have some of them already start to do practices themselves. You might read some of these things and go yeah; I can believe perhaps a few journals would have a positive impact.</p> <p>(P5) It was like it was like food for them; like that they were starving for. The reports that came back were like, “Oh, I wish this class was longer,” or “I had,” and so much fun.</p> <p>(P4) One of those descriptions involves reaching a personal mastery of the literature and the discipline. In that we were inviting them to find their experience and their view and to see that as mastery. It gave them permission to have their views, their experiences and their journey. They grabbed the permission, and it marked the teaching process from that moment forward. There was one beautiful moment when we were exploring a technicality around human strength’s when I needed to move the students on to another topic. One of them said to me (courteously but firmly), “Professor, be quiet, we haven’t finished, we need more time.” They talked for another half hour, and found their mastery. And so they’re producing changes right from the word go.</p>	26

Table 5 (continued)

Patterns

Patterns	Example direct quotes from transcripts that support pattern	Total expressions (<i>n</i>)
Transformative willingness to break away from medical model	<p>(P1) One student was in therapy and was constantly stuck in talking about problems instead of doing something about it, taking action and figuring out that [the student] had the courage and the grit to take action to make positive changes in their life.</p> <p>(P3) And for some people they really haven't done that before, so really is a moment of realizing for them and redirecting attention from focusing on what's wrong and what they tend to not very good at to actually what they are really good at.</p> <p>(P6) From the students perspective: But if it's a therapy framework, that's for people with problems and I'm not going to admit I have problems . . . but a positive psych intervention, I'm all over that, I'm making myself into what I want to be. . . . You know, I'm being a better me and that's completely acceptable and, encouraged.</p>	15
Enduring transformative affect from learning positive psychology	<p>(P3) We keep in close contact with our students; the ones that have gone on to graduate. So, some of them talk about how they use what they learned in their work and others how it affects their daily life with family and friends. One of the outcomes that you know is very, very long term and then not only that but it's spread out to so many other people, too.</p> <p>(P6) Compared to the other classes I've done similar projects in, people are much more attached to these [growth assignments] I think because a lot of times, they've related them to their own life . . . one student was very adamant about getting the project back at the end of the semester.</p> <p>(P7) Sometimes these observations don't come to my attention until after the course is done. I've also had students comment after the course was done that it wasn't until they'd gained some distance from the content that they were able to appreciate all the growth they really experienced.</p>	10

Table 6

Emerged Themes

Theme	Description
1	Transformative of growth through self-awareness and desire to change.
2	Transformative of growth through recognition of community collaboration.
3	Transformative growth to make a worldly positive difference with future goals.
4	Transformative growth to change personal interactions positively.
5	Bonding reactions to presented empirical and exploratory positive psychology information.

Table 7

Theme and Related Support Patterns

Theme	Support patterns for theme
1. Transformative of growth through self-awareness and desire to change	Action transformation through revelation of strengths(30) Implementing positive practices based on positive psychology learning outcome (38) Learning transformations that led to positive life-changing perspectives (49) Positive personal introspective learning transformation (42)
2. Transformative of growth through recognition of community collaboration	Positive transformative self-awareness of influence (52) Humanistic traits (bonding and learning) within the scope of learning positive psychology (48) Positive transformative growth through trust and acceptance (15)
3. Transformative growth to make a worldly positive difference with future goals.	Enduring transformative affect from learning positive psychology (10) Learning transformation connected to helping others through future career goals (16) Interest in program development based on positive psychology learning outcomes (4) Learning transformation of positive connection beyond self (32)
4. Transformative growth to change personal interactions positively.	Awareness of mood influence on others (9) Awareness of personal health and wellness (5) Awareness of positive interaction with family and friends (11) Awareness of showing gratitude and appreciation (6)
5. Bonding reactions to presented empirical and exploratory positive psychology information.	Transformative outcomes from experientially applying empirical-based curriculum (41) Methodical pondering reaction to presented material (35) Direct transformative bonding to material (26) Skeptic settling attributed to empirical or tested support (21) Transformative willingness to break away from the medical model (15)

Evaluation of Codes and Theme Strength

Based on code count, percentile of code presence, and presence of code in cases, positive transformative self-awareness of influence, learning transformations that led to positive life-changing perspectives, humanistic traits (bonding and learning) within the scope of learning positive psychology, transformative outcomes from experientially applying empirical based curriculum, and learning transformations that led to positive life-changing perspectives were the strongest transformations noted from the portrayals of the educators.

Assessment of Themes and Associative Coding

Theme 1: Transformative Growth Through Self-Awareness and Desire to Change

Theme 1 consists of four code descriptions, namely (a) implementing positive practices base on positive psychology learning outcome, (b) learning transformations that led to positive life-changing perspectives, (c) positive personal introspective learning transformation, and (d) action transformation through revelation of strengths. The patterns of Theme 1 are clustered together by the descriptions that bond personal introspection as a reflective element in response to the material learned and how it is perceived by the student progressively using the new knowledge to construct positive changes as actions or perspective changes.

One example highlighting this phenomenon was described by Participant 3 as the following portrayals:

I have seen students experience the most transformational educational experience, as they have experienced first-hand how focusing on positive psychology principles (e.g., gratitude journals, strengths spotting, cultivating positive emotions, etc.) impacts on their wellbeing, engagement, etc. For some students,

simply the shift towards more positively oriented ways of thinking about their situations can be enough to have quite dramatic impact upon their domestic situation, their relationships, or their work situation. For example, some students may have never really considered before what their “strengths” might be, or that there are things they can do to impact their subjective levels of happiness, or that their own happiness is even something that is a priority and that is OK for them to allow themselves to focus on this. The context of the assignments gives them permission to focus on this for a period of time as they have to do it for an assignment! Whereas, as students in the context of having to do it for an assignment over a period of 10 to 12 weeks, then they have a justification of what the meaning of the assignments becomes, oh, and lo and behold, they find that actually it has quite the impact on their well-being; and they see that quite quickly.

Further, as part of this theme, the holistic aspect of action as part of the realization was revealed through the words of Participant 5’s description of the process of the students experiencing the text information and articulating the use as part of a well-being strength support in their lives:

So we referenced the Pennebaker work of meaning and purpose, finding meaning and purpose in the difficult things that have happened to you, and that was really enlightening for them, too, moving them from that perspective of not just surviving but thriving, and flourishing in the face of really difficult life experiences.

As part of the positive personal introspective learning transformation element of this theme, Participant 1 noted that students “felt that they developed a sense of who they were as people” as a reflective response to learning factors associated with positive psychology, Participant 2 revealed the perspective that the students “get in touch with something deep within themselves,” and Participant 7 discussed the introspective aspect of learning factors associated with positive psychology by stating “they evaluate the current status of things in their lives and things they have had. They have a chance to

reflect on the goals they've established and to what extent are they control their own goals.”

The implementing positive practices based on positive psychology learning outcomes and learning transformations that led to positive life-changing perspectives were described in the portrayals of participants 1, 4, and 6, respectively. Participant 1 described a stressful life experience of a student that had gone unattended. Through the experience of learning positive psychology, the student was able to break through the barriers that prevented the student from addressing the situation. Participant 1 described the outcome:

He told me it was because he was taking this class, he was taking a very strong, honest look at his life, and it clearly transformed his way of thinking, and it had something to do with his transforming as a person who was maturing and growing.

Participant 4 addressed the notion of transformation happening as a learning outcome by describing the cohort experience that led to positive changing perspectives in the following manner:

But for the majority of the students, what you see is, is essentially they are life-changing. They relate to something that changes their lives, changes the way they work, changes the way they deal with other people, and [it's] extraordinary to watch it happening.

Further, as a response to implementing positive practices with fellow learners, family, and at work, Participant 4 described interactive reflective conversation with students as follows:

Studying the discipline is giving the student the courage to stay engaged with their [sic] child in exceptionally difficult circumstances. He works in quite challenging environments and it's extraordinary to see he's become almost a coach of his clients because part of his relationship with that is to appreciate the

strengths and they are experiencing that from him. What that person did was take the ideas associated with happiness interventions, well-being, gratitude, positive memories; those point of patterns, and integrated them into the care of an elderly relative.

Relating to specific assignments and reflections, Participant 6 described the portrayal of implementing the material learned in other ways besides classroom application:

It's really clear in the creative project presentations that a lot of students are going ahead and doing their own positive psychology intervention on themselves throughout the semester. Some comments I hear are things like, "I feel so much better now," which is really pretty nifty.

Theme 2: Transformative Growth Through Recognition of Community

Collaboration

Theme 2 consists of three code descriptions, namely (a) humanistic traits (bonding and learning) within the scope of learning positive psychology; (b) positive transformative self, awareness of influence on other; and (c) positive transformative growth through trust and acceptance. This theme was realized through an interactive element of the learning environment; the interactions of student and professors, students and students, and students and the larger environment. The interactions supported humanistic learning through professors acting and mentoring more collaborative in nature and over-time producing a growth relationship establishing a community style of learning that recognized the student's ability to make changes. These connective changes resulted in the students taking humanistic action to support other students, to support professors, and to feel empowered to go on to use what they had learned to make positive changes using humanistic connections.

Describing the portrayal of how the learning transformations happen as part of humanistic environment that nurtures trust and growth, Participant 4 stated,

It doesn't happen every time and with every person; however, it does happen with the majority. When you teach this discipline and when you try and live the discipline, supporting the unfolding of others in an open way, a way that accepts their story and journey by using what some might see as unconventional in this context: love. I think many of the students experience it in those terms and actually respond with love, too. The learning environment can be extraordinary.

Supporting the idea of learning, growing, and applying simultaneously, Participant 4 revealed that part of humanistic growth students formed groups that were naturally responding to each other's needs and were taking care of one another as a cohort.

Additionally, as a learning community in the positive psychology realm, students became unafraid and accepting of trust and help from cohort and staff. This acceptance was a reciprocal effect of the realization of individual ability to show caring and compassion to cohort and staff members, and acceptance of everyone being involved in creating an open and caring learning atmosphere.

As part of the humanist experience of growth and transformations in the positive psychology learning environment, Participant 2 expressed the need for change of the academic environment based on developing human strength and needs. This notion stemmed from what Participant 2 portrayed as learning experiences that go beyond quantitative measures:

I believe the process that we do in academia level [sic] needs to be changed. I say that is because if we want to teach you people to not just to have knowledge, but to change and to help others, we have to be able to help them make the changes in their lives, not just to compile knowledge.

Examples noted by Participant 2 included that students gained a sense of grounded and learned optimism through experiences of being willing to try personal well-being and holistic exercise in a nonthreatening environment. Additionally, Participant 2 mentioned that students experienced a sense of control over their lives and engaged in new experiences based on being in a learning environment that supported their life goals, as well as that students celebrated new experiences together.

One of strongest codes within this theme was positive transformative self-awareness of influence. While this code entwines with the other two codes in this theme, it forks at the revelation of one's impact on others through recognizing one's own strengths and abilities. This phenomenon was described by Participant 3 as, "You see a student realize, that actually I can be doing something more than I'm already doing, and that can be interpreted in different ways. Then that is naturally setting quite a significant transformation taking place." An example given by Participant 3 was of a student deciding to engage in the work environment at a deeper level. This engagement required approaching people who were far more senior than the student was. This process meant that the agent of trust had to come into play for the student in the context of trusting the senior leadership to acknowledge the request and to become a mentor. This personal growth stemmed from the coursework learning of using one's strengths to be a mentor and to grow and flourish. Thus, students begin to realize that they have abilities within themselves, and that ability means projecting their influences on others who, through trust, can in turn help realize goals.

The humanistic trait (bonding and learning) within the scope of learning positive psychology was described as a phenomenon that happened because of uniqueness and among all involved in the positive psychology learning environment. Participant 5 described the process phenomenon as realizing outcomes from students saying, “Oh, I wish this class was longer,” or “I had so much fun.” The comments were made in response to learning about one’s own personal strengths, which in turn motivated the educators to build their mission around creating environments that led to these types of outcomes. As a stepping-stone process of teaching students from the viewpoint of being empathetic to their stressors, Participant 5 revealed,

We came in, we, we did a lot of fun activities around strengths, we got them telling stories about each other that included appreciative inquiry stories. Great things, things that you really were impressed with or that happened at work that you admired. You can, within the first 45 minutes; you can feel the change, like, “Oh my goodness! A chance to really appreciate each other.” It was just extraordinary. . . . It was just extraordinary that they had connected in a way and learned stuff about each other in a way that they had never known before. And then we have them doing, um, playful activities that were so good at, all the creativity. We did this really fun thing where we did giant, um, we had them doing giant murals of islands.

Other responses that magnified the humanistic theme of transformations through connections or community were evident by what the students revealed to the educator. Participant 7 indicated appreciation for moments of understanding the how the positive psychology course room influenced students through comments such as the following:

This course just pulled our whole group together . . . students often stated that they finally understand the behavior of some individuals who are close to them . . . and a formed trust where students were felt comfortable enough to open up and share goals, exciting visions of the future, and areas in which they were struggling.

Further, Participant 7 excitedly told a story of one particular experience that seemed to embrace the underlying nourishment of positive psychology foundations and how it could move people to engage freely and without fears of worldly constraint and expectation:

I have to share one particularly delightful moment. I typically arrive several minutes before the start of my classes, and as students are arriving, I play a piece of music. It is usually current and relevant to the topic of the day. The end of the song signals the start of class. While the music is playing, I do my final organizing of notes and handouts, etc. This particular day happened to be International Happiness Day, for which Pharrell Williams's song "Happy" was chosen as the theme song. Clearly, that was the most logical choice for me to play before the start of that class. While the song was on, I proceeded to pull out my notes, and so forth . . . at one point, I looked up from what I was doing to see a handful of students DANCING at the back of the class! I don't think I can express how uplifting that moment was. I laughed, applauded, and thanked them for creating my favorite teaching moment of all my 10 years in the classroom!

This awareness of a nontraditional teaching format, as applied to a community connection, was further portrayed by Participant 3:

From that experience is a sense of wow, it's a lot where I [students] can engage with and feel very motivated and very inspired . . . we are enormously interactive. Whenever we do a lecture, I prepare material that is quickly open to them for discussion . . . yes, it's quite risky teaching compared to what might have been in the past where you have a way much more prepared and you have an activity and you keep all quite contained and often limited and even limited encouragement to get engaged with it with these students typically. As the professor, you try to sort of bring them back in where you want to because they're really engaged in it nicely, but you need to control it. So it's a nice challenge . . . it's the kind of teaching which [sic] is being talked about in regards to how you inspire students. It is not about delivering materials so much as it is about how they are digesting it and thinking about it, and that's great.

The outcome from this theme reflects the ideas that not only are students affected by the foundations of the factors in learning positive psychology, but the microcosm of

the learning environment as a holistic abridgement transcends the learning environment and all those connected to the positive psychology learning environment.

Theme 3 Transformative Growth to Make a Worldly Positive Difference with Future Goals

Theme 3 consisted of four code descriptions, namely (a) interest in program development based on positive psychology learning outcomes, (b) learning transformation connected to helping others through future career goals, (c) learning transformation of positive connection beyond self, and (d) enduring transformative affect from learning positive psychology. The connecting strength of Theme 3 was identified in the patterns as changing thoughts and actions taken as a result of experiencing the positive psychology learning environment. This change included action to change methods of business approach, developing new businesses, developing patterns of practices to change relationships, well-being and mindset, and implementing attitudes and tactics to live a more gratifying life.

Participant 1 described an enduring transformational experience with a student as the student being so drawn to learning about positive psychology as a field of study that the student volunteered to be a teaching assistant for the following semester. The reasoning behind this volunteerism was because “he wanted to continue with the discussion with a new group of people, so he really volunteered to come back and talk about positive psychology.” The continued experience with the student was that the student went on to bridge what was learned to the bigger world:

And then he got a job as a counselor for troubled teenagers, where, by interacting with them, he would help them to find their strengths. So he really took what he

had learned to heart . . . he is just one example of literally hundreds and hundreds of students that [sic] took to heart some of the things that we did in the classrooms. Some of the things that are done in the empirical research, and he [the above-mentioned student] did it, he figured out on his own how to put that into practice for the job that he continues to have now, which is several years later.

Making a positive difference and having an enduring affect was not only experienced in a therapeutic type of setting, but also in relation to work, family, self, and giving back in some way. Participant 3 indicated that a small group of students had taken the information learned in the positive psychology program and created an online company to help other businesses integrate positive psychology into the work environment. In another instance, Participant 3 recognized the concurrence of students that realized the benefits from what they had learned in many environments:

A lot of students will just go by what administration says, but I do find that a lot of my students from positive psychology seem to be a little more assertive. They seem to kind of put their fists up and say, “Hey, yeah, people should be, you know, kinder to each other.”

In another instance, Participant 4 told a story about a student’s parent who had a terminal illness and was met with a crossroads decision to continue the program or tend to family needs. After a heart-to-heart collaborative discussion of what was most important in the student’s life at that time, and how the student could bring with him all he had learned to the real-life experience of being with the parent during the following period, a decision was made to be with the parent. The decision was one that supported quality of life through nurturing a unique bond, and “the student took positive psychology principles to the parent and I know it fundamentally changed the quality of both of their experiences.” The nature of this type of experience was attributed to not just learning

positive psychology, but by living it. The crux of the true nature of this knowledge was expressed by Participant 4, who said, “What I’m saying is if you go and be deep, be in the really deepest sense with your parent and, and live that part of discipline that is the most important thing you can do, that is learning.”

Contained within this theme was the notion that students experienced a profound affect from learning positive psychology and matriculated the affect with ways in which they would be able to use what they had learned to help others. The portrayal of this type of experience was expressed by Participant 1 from the experience of a personal conversation with a senior psychology major. During the conversation, the student noted,

It never occurred to me to look at people’s strengths. It never occurred to me, as I was heading into finishing up my bachelor’s degree in psychology, that there were more options than simply working with mental illness or working with people who had mental problems.

Participant 1 continued to sum up the conversation by stating, “Even more than that, they felt that they developed a sense of which they were as people in what they could bring to whatever client that they had in the future.”

As part of this theme, it was established that the information the students were learning had a profound effect on shifting their views in many ways that became an influencing guide. For example, Participant 3 talked about students who had realized internal strength of communication in both their personal and professional lives as a stepping-stone. Participant 3 stated, “It is really neat to see one of the outcomes that you know are very long term, on [*sic*] only that, but it is spread out to so many other people.” Participant 5 strengthened this perspective by sharing the reflection that students found that learning about their personal strengths was empowering in their lives. This

sentiment was substantiated by the end-of-course feedback and by the follow-up messages received on supplemental websites. Participant 6 indicated that many of these follow-up e-mails contained attributes of life-changing redirection and were posted from months to years after taking the course.

Theme 4: Transformative Growth to Change Personal Interactions Positively

Theme 4 consisted of four code descriptions, namely (a) awareness of positive interaction with family and friends, (b) awareness of personal health and wellness, (c) awareness of showing gratitude and appreciation, and (d) awareness of mood influence on others. The connection beyond self was not exclusively defined as an endurance aspect of this theme, but viewed as a process of how students came to connect and make the connection from what they learned in the positive psychology learning environment. Participant 6 reflected on a story that was framed around a learning exercise and a student. The exercises were completed over extended period break times or other extended periods that involved at least one of the three types of positive experience, namely (a) the pleasant life, or the meaningful life; (b) the engaged life; or (c) the meaningful life. As part of the learning process from these exercises, students often reported activities that embraced two or even three of the domains. An example given was that of one student who emerged her actions in effects that made her feel good in actions that created some sort of meaning in the student's life. From the evaluation of the pleasant and meaningful actions the student had taken, the student indicated that the process of continuing to perform these actions made her feel as if "she was doing good things in her life."

Integrating several of the codes within the theme, Participant 4 portrayed a complex learning transformation through the following story: a student in the class appeared to doubt himself at times, even given the extent of knowledge acquired throughout the positive psychology program. At one point, the student made a conscious decision to combine the positive psychology interventions along with gratitude, savoring memories, and personal reflections, using them as a foundation to care for a relative. The experience became two-fold for the student. First, the appreciation and gratitude to be able to care for the relative became meaningful to the student through savoring and mindfulness of the time together. Second, the student was able to influence others who acted as care providers for the relative to embrace the positive interventions that lifted the care level of the relative. This experience was reported to have a positive impact on the holistic quality of the relative's life.

Participant 2 explained a transformation portrayal of a student who, through learning the mindfulness techniques in the course, expressed a newfound perspective of engaging in the world, and it has become an epiphany moment for her. This phenomenon also held true in areas where students engaged in practicing rituals of expressing gratitude or consciously preparing their mindsets to be positive for the day. From this position, Participant 2 expressed relayed feedback of students reaching elusive goals, feeling holistically better, and engaging in more frequent exercises that were positive in nature.

The codes of this theme often overlap, whereby the well-being of the students was affected simply by their own decisions to take action through affecting others in a positive way. Participant 3 discussed the transformative outcomes of a learning program,

noting the most moving reactions from the students coming in the final weeks of a 4-year master's in applied positive psychology program:

I have seen students experience the most transformational educational experience, as they have experienced first-hand how focusing on positive psychology principles (e.g., gratitude journals, strengths spotting, cultivating positive emotions, etc.) impacts on their well-being, engagement, etc. For some students, simply the shift towards more positively oriented ways of thinking about their situations can be enough to have quite dramatic impact upon their domestic situation, their relationships, or their work situation.

Participant 3 further described the reaction of the students as a discovery of a clear sense of journey. This reaction was reflected in the shared expression that while learning about positive psychology as a field, it became more than that, “many cases they felt that this has helped them especially in challenging times (e.g., through a bereavement, illness, stressful work situations, etc.)”. As a cohort in the program, the relationships do not typically end at graduation. Participant 3 indicated that there was a keen intent to maintain, build, and nurture the community that formed among the students and the teaching staff who contribute to the program. Within the paradigm of this environment, there is a sense of perpetuating learning within the classroom, experiencing the positive interventions, taking the learned skills outside the classroom, and creating a community of support and connection.

Noting the portrayals in previous sections overlap into this one, the idea that students gain confidence and become more willing to personally take learned material and apply it to relationships and work environments is also reflected in how the cohort of students relate directly to one another. In one instance, Participant 4 shared an experience in which one student was having a particularly rough time. As a class, the

students came together to help this student in a supportive way and continued to help him; any students in difficult situations were truly helped by the other students.

Participant 4 continued with the idea that as students grew in their learning of positive psychology, empathy was not only extended to one another, but also even to professors they perceived as working long hours.

Theme 5: Bonding Reactions to Presented Empirical and Exploratory Positive Psychology Information

Theme 5 consisted of five code descriptions, namely (a) transformative outcomes from experientially applying empirical-based curriculum, (b) methodical pondering reaction to presented material, (c) skeptic settling attributed to empirical or tested support, (d) direct transformative bonding to material, and (e) transformative willingness to break away from the medical model. This theme was reflected in the methodical process that students undergo as they learn about positive psychology. The portrayals of this theme are generated from the actions of the student as a response to learning in a holistic cognitive methodical processing manner. This theme includes actions taken to try out or test theories, pondering the materials learned in the course, and gathering additional knowledge to gain a deeper understanding of theoretical material. This theme includes how students come to matriculate the material and form new perspectives by either personally engaging in methods and practices or synthesizing material to formulate new perspectives.

Participant 2 noted:

Often students will come at the end of the class to share their experience and ask questions [related to the lecture topic]. I stay in the room for these important

moments because, as a professor, I learn a lot from their reactions to the lectures. Not only do I learn a lot, but [also] the other students that [sic] stay learn from hearing each other's stories.

Participant 7 articulated a compiled portrayal of associative experiences in the positive psychology course room through the expressed observation of “over the years, I've had students claim that other psychology courses were powerful agents of change for them, but not in the numbers and to the degree that I've heard this from positive psychology students.” Further, Participant 7 connected crucial material and exercises of meaningful reflective writing. Participant 7 recalled this emotionally charged story:

The transformations I see in the students' reflections are sometimes overwhelming. There are comments about how course activities changed their relationships with loved ones. They wrote about gaining clarity around difficult relationships they've had in the past. They have often stated that they finally understand the behavior of some individuals who are close to them. Most powerful, I think, is how students express understanding themselves much more clearly and that they are now able to accept those parts of themselves that have been challenging to come to terms with. Sometimes these observations don't come to my attention until after the course is done. I hear from students in the hallway, or through a third party, occasionally, comments such as, “Student X was telling me how fantastic the positive psych course was at helping her through a really challenging time in her life. The student was so glad they [sic] had taken the course.” I've also had students comment after the course was done that it wasn't until they'd gained some distance from the content that they were able to appreciate all the growth they really experienced. This, of course, makes me think of that old proverb about hindsight being 20/20. The most compelling after-the-fact story was shared with me in a spontaneous e-mail from a mature student [, who had] a rough-life experience to another student; despite the family struggles, education had been encouraged in the house. The single parent sorted this through the growing of the kids. The student wrote the gratitude letter, read it to her parent over the phone, and sent it off. Two weeks after the parent received the letter, the parent passed away. The student was in tears as she told her story to the fellow student, commented that there had never been a proper show of thanks or gratitude to her parent for all the support, and if not for that class assignment, what a loss that would have been. . . . My own student went on to comment how powerful this course had been for her, too, and that she was also very grateful that she had chosen to take it. You can only imagine the reaction I had to all this! I certainly also got pretty misty-eyed as I was reading my student's e-mail!

In exploring the element of breaking away from the medical model of focusing on what is wrong with people, Participant 6 revealed scenarios in which students engaged in actions to discover strengths in people stemming from what they had learned in the positive psychology classroom. An example of this action was how two students created a video about courage. The students interviewed people regarding what they believed courage embodied. As a creative element to the exercise, the students had the interviewees wear a captain's hat. This hat was a representation of being in charge of one's own efficacy and process of building courage. Participant 1 related a portrayal story of how students felt the need to test out theoretical material: "Time and time again, they took the different exercises that we did in class and they utilized those to learn about themselves equally in a professional capacity and in a personal capacity."

This outcome of testing theoretical material was further described by Participant 1 in a story of two students. Both students learned the same material in the course. Student X accepted the material and had a much more optimistic and positive outlook, while student Y remained skeptical/ nonreactive to the presented material. After graduating, Student X reported a maintained level of optimism and happiness, while Student Y was reported to be unhappy in his or her job and remained pessimistic.

Participant 2 portrayed an experience where a learner felt skeptical about visualization exercises. After practicing the exercises for just over 2 months, the learner reported a breakthrough experience of recognizing an unmet desire to travel and then attaining the opportunity as part of visualization. Participant 2 reported that this was an "Aha!" moment for the learner, who went on to embrace the concept of visualization as a

positive experience in life, so much so that the learner sought a deeper sense of learning visualization techniques.

In other instances in which students had methodically processed the theoretical information, they reported that “they felt they had become more successful; life success that includes more than just relationships or work. They were more open to trying meditation and other positive interventions” (Participant 1). Participant 3 recalled how one student had committed himself or herself to being a strength finder in others through devoting the time to understanding the theory of strengths and applying that to how he or she could build up those he met.

The idea behind this theme is generated from more of a slow-growth perspective that becomes adaptable holistically in students’ lives. The notion that the theoretical material is evaluated, judged, and tested becomes a focal point for change and integration. The movement from academic theoretical understanding is changed by the way the students manipulated the context of the material into a life-meaning context. The actions taken by the students to evaluate and test the theoretical presentations were applied in different ways to further understand how the paradigm shift becomes even more meaningful in application.

Supplemental Findings of a Triangulation Interview from a Student’s Perspective

This idea was further corroborated by an interview with a senior student in a master’s-level positive psychology program. Twenty predominant codes made up the five dominant themes, which included positive transformative self of influence, learning transformation that led to positive life-changing perspectives, humanist traits (bonding

and learning) within the scope of learning positive psychology, positive personal learning introspective transformation, and transformative outcomes based on experientially applying empirical-based curriculum. These same codes were found within the interview construct of the student, who revealed his or her portrayal of the learning experience in the positive psychology course room.

Using similar open-ended questions, a student was asked, “If you could tell a story about what taking positive psychology courses was like, or is like, what would that story be?” The student responded,

If somebody asked me that question, I would say that it’s been a journey of discovery for me as a person. I think, for the group as a whole which [sic] took the courses, it was the same for them as well. It has been a rollercoaster of a ride, because we’ve been learning so much about positive psychology and how people use it successfully. . . . I have been able to use some of the interventions from positive psychology in order to help me, to overcome some parts of the rollercoaster.

Further, the student was asked to think about the experience of learning positive psychology and what process was experienced. The student indicated that the application of acknowledging his or her own strengths, and using them in life-situations, had a positive effect in his or her life. Additionally, using mindfulness and savoring helped the student engage in life and be in the moment, more so than prior to learning positive psychology. As an outcome, the student discussed the feeling using all three of these themes to reduce life’s stress and anxiety, and to appreciate things in life much more. As a motivation aspect of making the changes, the student stated “the mindset shift” meant moving beyond zero to flourishing and understating resilience through “giving ourselves

permission, to change . . . and for me, that was quite a powerful and impactful thing to do. That was a real mindset shift for me.”

As described in the portrayals from the educators, the student noted the bonding environment (humanistic traits bonding and learning with the scope of learning positive psychology) as one factor that clearly played a role in how students took information and felt comfortable in making choices to try out or implement concepts learned in the positive psychology course(s). The student described the environment as highly interactive and engaging. The student noted,

I think that was one of the things that I really liked about the course. It wasn't just a lecture of sorts of; talking at us for a whole day, or a whole weekend. It was actually quite interactive, and that's where a lot of ideas were thrown up between the group, ourselves and with the professors. So yes it helps get towards the flourishing. I think the course itself is a perfect example of how to do that.

The intent of the additional interview was not to use the information as part of the research investigation, but rather to reciprocate a notion that links the possibilities for future discovery and to strengthen the credibility. From the ancillary interview, the top five codes materialized through the perspectives and stories told by the student. Additionally, all five major themes were linked through the rich descriptors of what the student perceived as transformations in the learning environment.

Supplemental Findings of Unexpected Outcomes: Educator Transformations

Within the paradigm of the relationships in the positive psychology classroom, it is a common assumption that the presiding educators are knowledgeable about the subject matter and the existing research literature that supports the learning outcomes. What is not understood is the reflexive action and responses within the learning environment that

happen directly to the educators. Reflectivity is acknowledged, as Participant 1 stated, as follows:

My pedagogy included the principles of positive psychology; “other people mattered” was a main theme. Community building was glue that held each semester together. Positive psychology has taught me to be resilient. The most beneficial thing that came out of teaching was learning that I wanted to contribute in a more significant way than adjunct teaching in a school that rejects nontraditional teaching/learning just because it was “different” . . . today’s undergraduates crave knowledge in nontraditional and more modern concepts.

Participant 2 stated,

To teach positive psychology you have to live positive psychology. . . . What I am talking about here is that you need to be the first to try any and every intervention you teach. Some will work for you and others will not. It’s okay. . . . This will give you the experience you can share with your students. . . . Students, class participants know a lot: keep that in mind. They may not know a lot about the science but they have their stories, their experiences and I have learned so much from them.

When your course completes, you feel accomplishment. You feel you have done something that helps other people have better lives. There is no more amazing feeling than that. Your thoughts stay with the class. You keep thinking what else I can do to help these people live more meaningful and happier lives.

Participant 3 stated, “My experience of teaching positive psychology has been very rewarding.” Participant 3 continued,

My own experience has been one where I find myself getting more out of this teaching than any other teaching that I have been involved with to date. This is partly due to my inherent interest in the material, but also due to the enthusiasm and engagement I get from the students.

Participant 5 stated, “I appreciate my students even more now, because I know I am using and modeling my strength of appreciation of beauty and excellence.”

Participant 5 continued,

I love giving them the language to talk about strengths and positive emotions, and I see this makes such a difference in how they approach things. For example, in

art therapy, we find ourselves “inspired” a lot, but then to get to share how researchers have defined and studied inspiration is really interesting. . . . Teaching positive psychology has made me more aware of living what I teach, remaining focused on my character strengths, and trusting the process. I am grateful for it.

Participant 6 shared a story of overseeing a creative assignment from students, where several of the pieces created formed a deep meaning for the students and was prospectively touching to the educator. Further, Participant 6 noted,

The best part of assigning the papers is telling students that I want to know what conclusions *they* draw from the empirical literature they are reviewing. Too often, I think that students are rewarded for parroting the thoughts of experts and are unable to see themselves as becoming experts. One of my happiest teaching moments was when I was describing the paper the first time I taught this way and a student raised her hand and said, “So you want to know what WE think?” I believe I actually jumped up and down—YES, but I want to be sure it is an informed conclusion. I think that the inherent interest in positive psychology topics makes the paper task more palatable to students than other topics might [be].

Participant 7 stated,

We get increasingly adept at noticing patterns of thought and preconceived notions among our students, and we hope to see some movement of the needle in the barometer of their understanding of the world, themselves, or those who are close to them when we teach any psychology course. Inevitably, *something* resonates, and there is that “Aha!” moment for a good number of students who come into our classes. For me, those revelations are what keep my batteries charged up. Teaching is a tough, challenging profession if you want to do it well. I strive to present memorable content, and be a teacher who is able to impact students in the best possible way. When I’m teaching positive psychology, those personal goals are a lot easier to attain. . . . One of the changes in ME that have [*sic*] resulted from exploring and teaching positive psychology that cannot be overlooked and I really must share—has to do with how I deal with students in ALL of my courses. Historically, I was all about remediation any time that I’d have a conversation with students where there was a concern about their progress. Sometimes students self-identified that they were struggling; in other cases, I would invite a student to my office after any major evaluation that garnered a failing mark. Regardless of how the student ended up in my office, my approach would be the same: I’d rhyme off all the resources the college had to offer for students who needed help. In retrospect, I’m convinced that did little to

encourage or motivate students, and if anything, may have sent the completely opposite message to what I should have been conveying. As a result of my involvement in positive psychology, I began using strength spotting as an opener to my conversations with at-risk students. I would describe for them, in great detail and with concrete evidence to back my claims, all the things I saw them doing RIGHT in my classes. We talked about what excited them in life, in general, and how those areas of interest might be leveraged in whatever courses they were struggling in. Sometimes my course was the focus of attention; other times, it was another course in their program. In case after case, I found that students turned things around. . . . As a result of my involvement in positive psych, I began using strength spotting as an opener to my conversations with at-risk students. I would describe for them, in great detail and with concrete evidence to back my claims, all the things I saw them doing RIGHT in my classes. We talked about what excited them in life, in general, and how those areas of interest might be leveraged in whatever courses they were struggling in. Sometimes my course was the focus of attention; other times, it was another course in their program. In case after case, I found that students turned things around. I can only think of one student among about a dozen or so with whom I had these sorts of conversations, who fell short of his or her own goal by the time the semester was over. It has been a remarkable phenomenon to observe, and I can only attribute the change in my approach to students to the various positive psychology tenets that I also share in the classroom. It may sound grandiose, but it is absolutely true that getting into positive psychology has changed the trajectory of my final years in my current profession. What I'll do in my retirement from teaching has most assuredly been driven by my exploration of positive psychology.

Participant 4 stated, "If you are going to take on teaching positive psychology, be prepared to change yourself." Participant 4 continued,

My experience of positive psychology from the course preparation stage is it carried me. What I mean by that is when you get into the depth of the discipline, the ideas, and the intentions, and then my work and style shifted. . . . When you teach from the discipline, when you try and live the discipline, when you try and support the unfolding of others in an open way, a way that accepts their story and journey, then using an unconventional word in this context, it is a form of love. I think many of the students experience it in those terms and actually respond with love, too. The learning environment can be extraordinary.

Summary

The data collection and analysis of the present study was conducted to realize a holistic view of the portrayals of learning transformations in an adult positive psychology learning environment. As pointed out by Morgan and Smircich (1980), qualitative research attracted interest in light of quantitative research shortfalls that failed to find significant answers to problems within the paradigm of social sciences—answers found in the rich, descriptive stories told from a personal perspective. The present research study uses the portrayals of the presiding educators, revealing that the environment of learning positive psychology becomes much more holistic and complex through the personal interactions of students and staff, through self-discovery journeys, through evaluation and testing of material concepts, and through displays and actions of affecting others. These outcomes are holistic and can only be revealed and understood through the rich depth and breadth of stories told by those immersed in the environment.

To gather data for the present study, I acted as the research instrument in conducting conversational interviews with the participants who had been vetted as meeting the inclusion criteria. The open-ended conversational interviews were captured using electronic recording devices and then transcribed verbatim. As an additional technique used to capture data, I obtained a personal reflective narrative from each participant. To further understand the transformations in the classroom, several visual creative exercises were shared as part of the theoretical material with which students engaged through experiential learning.

The transcripts provided abundant information to capture the full essence of the personal stories told from the educators' perspectives. Individual cases were coded and analyzed once by hand and, as verification, by the QDA Miner qualitative research computer program. After the individual cases were analyzed, code verification was run through the QDA Miner program as a comparative analysis. The plentiful information provided enough data to reach saturation at Participant 6. Analysis was carefully performed and only two brief instances of inaudible audio transcript data were noted during periods between questioning. I decided that these two instances did not affect the analysis.

CHAPTER 5. RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As part of the educational continuum, even course-room assessment has been perceived as a scale that involved the students using the learned material and extending knowledge gained to real-life contexts (Knowles, 1988). Within the paradigm of adult learner theories, assessment is not always addressed by means of test scores or concrete evaluations, but by self-assessments addressing interpretation and effectiveness of use in real-life situations. As a collective recurring assumption in both transformative learning and positive psychology, outcomes are related to the conscious shifts of thought patterns into ways of thinking or frames of reference expressed by students and/or acknowledged by the educator. The present study captured an outcome not able to be captured by quantifiable measures.

The purpose of this study is to describe and interpret how educators teaching positive psychology in the adult learning environment portray students' personal learning transformations in response to the curriculum. This description was best captured by the one individual who acts as the course collection data bank, namely the classroom facilitator/educator. The study addressed this specific group of educators as a bound system. These educators are in the preeminent position to gather assorted means of information from the students and observe changes resulting from learning and making known these perceptual changes through rich description.

The overall intent of this study is to gather information that could be interpreted in a holistic way to understand transformation learning outcomes in the positive psychology

adult learning environment. The present research study sees to understand the question, “How do educators teaching positive psychology in the adult learning environment describe students’ personal transformations in response to the curriculum?” To support the research intent and to develop a deep theoretical understanding of what transpires in these learning environments, the portrayals revealed personified persisting themes realized through the rich and thick descriptions of the stories relayed by the presiding educators.

The findings from this study indicate that the learning environment provides deeper attachments to self and others that become part of students’ perspectives, or a new way to view the world and to be in the world. Throughout the process, there are concepts that students quickly grasp, and there are concepts that need lengthy periods of processing. Through the engagement of creative, theoretical research, pondering, and evaluating material, students create their own meaning and ways of utilizing the materials to move past summative evaluations and create a new meaning paradigm that positively affects their own lives, as well as extends to others to influence others’ lives in a positive way.

The relationships of the theoretical framework—transformative learning as a holistic application in the adult learning environment, learning theories and concepts associated with the field of positive psychology, and the interpreted stories of the participants and ancillary student interview—provide a holistic richness to addressing the real lived experiences regarding outcomes from learning positive psychology, other than those that can be measured. To expand the understanding of the created codes and

themes realized in the present study, further interpretation through a summary of the results follows.

Summary of the Results

The bonded unit was made up of presiding educators teaching positive psychology type courses in the adult learning environment. Each participant completed an interview consisting of conversational open-ended questions (see Appendix C) and a personal reflective narrative (see Appendix D). Data saturation was achieved with the Participant 6's interview; however, the seventh interview was included to add depth and breadth of verification. The interview data provided thick, rich descriptions of portrayals of the transformative learning outcomes, as told through the stories of the presiding educators. Telling personal narratives gave the participants time to recall and ponder instances in their learning environments that further expanded their experience and portrayal of learning transformations in their classrooms. The combination of the two types of data, plus the literature, allowed for data triangulation and created a depth and breadth to expand perspectives to the complimentary venues.

Each piece of data was analyzed line by line from the transcripts and narratives for each participant. Codes were generated from the data by process of association and commonality. This coding process made use of a master list that was expanded continuously throughout the analysis until no more codes were generated independently. Through the process of code comparison from the line-by-line analysis, five themes emerged that embraced the collective represented voice of the participants. These themes described a holistic theoretical model representing the process of learning and reacting to the

presented material. Learning outcomes were composed of influences of processes other than measurable consequences. The themes are discussed in the following sections.

Theme 1: Transformative of Growth Through Self-Awareness and Desire to Change

Theme 1, or transformative growth through self-awareness and desire to change, consists of four code descriptions, namely (a) implementing positive practices based on positive psychology learning outcome, (b) learning transformations that lead to positive life-changing perspectives, (c) positive personal introspective learning transformation, and (d) action transformation through revelation of strengths. Transformative growth through self-awareness and desire to change was realized by portrayed events articulated as a personal life change resulting from learning factors associated with positive psychology. The transformative stage description aligns with Mezirow's (1996) idea of reference frame shift. Mezirow provided a structural foundation to support an expansive frame of reference. This foundation included "one that was more (a) inclusive; (b) differentiating, (c) permeable; (d) critically reflective; and (e) integrative of experience" (Mezirow, 1996, p. 163). The outcome frame of reference is supported by identifying phases of perspective transformation and practices of reflection that act as a fulcrum of change. The students' shift in actions in the positive psychology learning environment are linked from previous ways of being in the world to new actions implemented after learning factors associated with positive psychology are experienced.

Theme 2: Transformative Growth Through Recognition of Community

Collaboration

Theme 2 consists of three code descriptions, namely (a) humanistic traits (bonding and learning) within the scope of learning positive psychology; (b) positive transformative self, awareness of influence on other; and (3) positive transformative growth through trust and acceptance. Transformative growth through recognition of community collaboration is realized in the portrayals of how students' frames of reference change because of a shift of responsibility and ability to make a difference in their community. This transformation is supported by the quality of life education designs illustrated by O'Sullivan (1999), who identified the breaking of historical boundaries of in-group and out-groups (power inequity) by including all members in the environment and meaningful entities and appreciation for creative diversity, devoid of dominance and subordination. This transformation nurtures trust and acceptance among group members and supports "equity, partnership, and community life" (O'Sullivan, 1999, p. 248).

Theme 3: Transformative Growth to Make a Worldly Positive Difference with Future Goals

Theme 3 consists of four code descriptions, namely (a) interest in program development based on positive psychology learning outcomes, (b) learning transformation connected to helping others through future career goals, (c) learning transformation of positive connection beyond self, and (d) enduring transformative affect from learning positive psychology. Transformative growth to make a worldly positive

difference with future goals is realized in the connection to future goals or altruistic acts that represent eschewing hedonistic or monetary relationships between actions and potential subjective well-being. The hedonistic idea, as noted by Seligman (2005), espouses the connection of economic value and tangibles, but expectation does not provide the crucial ingredient for life happiness. Diener, Diener and Diener (1995) highlighted the factors that predict the subjective well-being and associations of such influences as the need to be happy for the right reasons, stemming from a moral imperative, not simply a hedonistic one.

Theme 4: Transformative Growth to Change personal Interactions Positively

Theme 4 consists of four code descriptions, namely (a) awareness of positive interaction with family and friends, (b) awareness of personal health and wellness, (c) awareness of showing gratitude and appreciation, and (d) awareness of mood influence on others. Transformative growth to change personal interactions positively includes how students' learning about factors of positive psychology specifically affects actions in their daily lives to enhance their own well-being, the well-being of random people, those closest to them, and acknowledging how perception of one's own mood influences environments or a relationship. Lazarus (1991) defined dispositional affect as a person's characteristic at the individual level, or the ability to influence and be influenced. This concept addresses the cognitive ability of a person to absorb information and consciously make decisions to be more positive in a way that influences his or her own well-being or positively influences others.

Binding a cross-over into how one can affect others and reciprocally be affected, George (1990, 1996) proposed that some groups could be considered as having a dispositional level of affect. George (1996) referred to this capacity as group affective tone that could describe the group's characteristic level of positive or negative affect. The author further indicated that within this paradigm, the processes of selection and socialization occur because they are encouraged through development. This idea additionally includes the acknowledgement of transferring affect by personal action. Kelly and Barsade (2001) referred to this idea as an implicit and explicit process of affect sharing, which can include conscious and unconscious emotional contagion of individual affective states to other individuals with whom those individuals connect.

Theme 5: Bonding Reactions to Presented Empirical and Exploratory Information

Theme 5 consists of five code descriptions, namely (a) transformative outcomes from experientially applying empirical-based curriculum, (b) methodical pondering reaction to presented material, (c) skeptic settling attributed to empirical or tested supported, (d) direct transformative bonding to material, and (e) transformative willingness to break away from the medical model. Bonding reactions to presented empirical and exploratory positive psychology information are realized through the portrayals of students questioning the learning objectives and how learning positive psychology specifically affects the field of psychology and their personal lives. These bonding reaction transformations take place in a number of ways. One such way is how the students evaluate and research the course material through empirical data and curriculum. A second way bonding occurs is through experiential learning and

acknowledging personal changes resulting from implementing practices associated with positive psychology. Last, the breakaway transformation is acknowledged as interpretations of seeing or personally experiencing how breaking away from the past medical model and embracing the holistic model is a positive change.

The remainder of this chapter includes a discussion of the results of the present research study. Discussion of the results includes theoretical associations to the list of codes and the themes presented. Additionally, the following sections of this chapter address the results, discussion of results, and conclusion, limitations, recommendations for further use of this research study, and the dissertation conclusion.

Discussion of the Results

The results of this study reveal five emerged themes. The five themes reflect the relationships of the theoretical foundations to the literature as existing between themes. The themes reveal processes of ways in which students connect to material supported by a number of influencing factors. The information learned becomes relative to meaningful entries of life by no specific common process, but rather by what is relevant in a specific learning atmosphere, what is important to the student, how comfortable the student feels in the learning atmosphere, and through a willingness to be open and explore and evaluate empirical evidence and application methodology.

The theme of transformative growth through self-awareness and desire to change is portrayed as thoughts and actions revealed during the learning process and/or as the result of the learning process. The shift of paradigm that reveals a shift in thought process or newly generated point of view is realized not through formative and

summative evaluation, but by the methodical actions taken in response to learning the factors, concepts, and theories associated with positive psychology. Thus, transformative learning is a natural theoretical foundation to understand the experience of the positive psychology adult learner classroom, given that positive psychology rests on the belief that for views to change and growth to happen, a new way of thinking must prevail (Mezirow, 1990; Russo-Netzer & Ben-Shahar, 2011).

What the presiding educators described is a new way of thinking that provides pathways through reflection of material and developing meaningful personal integrated experiences in one's own life. The transformative stage description aligns with Mezirow's (1996) idea of reference frame shift. Mezirow (1996) provided a structural foundation to support an expansive frame of reference, which included "one that was more (a) inclusive; (b) differentiating, (c) permeable; (d) critically reflective; and (e) integrative of experience" (p. 163). The outcome frame of reference is supported by identifying phases of perspective transformation and practices of reflection that act as a fulcrum of change.

The fulcrum of change is portrayed by the presiding educators as ways in which students react to the material and make conscious decisions to either test it out or to model processes that, in turn, motivate changes to support personal and radiating well-being. An example of this mechanism is noted in Participant 1's comments; this educator shared that a student talked about a desire to change but felt bound by social constraints. After learning about the basic concepts of human strengths and the motivating theories

behind positive psychology, the student made conscious decisions to address life issues and go beyond by helping others, using positive psychology as a foundation.

Within the structure of Mezirow's (1996) foundational support is the idea that an issue or struggle could be present and persisting. Of interest from the data collected is the revelation that Theme 1 is the strongest theme among the themes. This theme supports the idea that students consciously want to make the changes and act on the material learned in the positive psychology classroom.

Regardless of external influencing factors, the outcome is to reflect on meaning and value of information learned and to use the information in ways that filter positive meaning, either outwardly or inwardly. The outcomes are reflected in the captured codes clustered in Theme 1.

The theme of transformative growth through recognition of community collaboration emerges through the acknowledgement that learning is a social event, and through a supportive environment, learning environments can become rich, fertile grounds for creating meaning. One such projection was made by Knowles (1984) when he described adult learners as those who prefer to be a part of creating learning and meaningful experiences. Knowles (1984) acknowledged the constructive and social aspects that became part of the andragogy definition "the art and science of helping adults learn" (Knowles, 1980, p. 43). This sentiment was echoed by Shunk (2000), who remarked that knowledge construction transpires through social interactions with the environment and others, and through reflection of using prior knowledge to build new knowledge. O'Sullivan (1999) designated the outcome of social learning environments

as those that nurture trust and acceptance among group members and support “equity, partnership, and community life” (p. 248).

Additionally, part of this outcome involves the methodology of giving students the freedom to evaluate and personalize information learned. Cook (1992) explained the importance of collaboratively negotiating curriculum and why it was vital to student growth:

Learners will work harder and better, and what they learn will mean more to them if they are discovering their own ideas, asking their own questions, and fighting hard to answer them for themselves. They must be educational decision makers. Out of negotiation comes a sense of ownership in learners for the work they are to do, and therefore a commitment to it. (Cook, 1992, p. 16)

Within the model of the positive psychology learning environment, this concept was addressed by participants 1, 2, 3, 7, and 8 as holistic factors that acknowledge the learning environment as nontraditional or unconventional, as compared to formal classrooms.

Participant 3 relayed the ideas that the environment of learning becomes a shared experience through students and educators acknowledging the material, accepting the shared capacity to teach learn and grow, and to develop a sense of living that which one is teaching or learning. Participant 2 echoed this phenomenon, noting that the environment is not exclusively students partaking in learning and growing, but the educators themselves are affected. Participant 4 revealed the importance of trust and acceptance in the classroom as feelings that support a student’s deeper life understanding of evaluating priorities and transporting the knowledge gained in the positive psychology classroom into a life decision supported by faculty and mentors; hence, the learning

became meaningful reality. The conclusive outcome of this theme is extensively unified by the nature of multiple transformations transpiring simultaneously, supported by the collective knowledge and actions taken by everyone in the shared environment.

The theme of transformative growth to make a worldly positive difference with future goals is portrayed as learning transformations that compel students to make life changes that affect their future work or personal goals or affect the well-being of others. Curren (2010) described the Aristotelian thoughts in relation to the idea that education outcomes are part of human flourishing:

To show that the highest good and happiest life for human beings is a life devoted to intellectual inquiry or 'contemplation' as its highest aim. The most intuitive of his reasons is that what is most satisfying is putting our greatest gifts, our intellectual capacities, to good use. (Curren, 2010, p. 553)

The conclusion I have reached from conducting this study is not that students complete mandatory assignments to attain grades to meet their academic goals, but that the material learned in the course becomes part of students' lives as a tool to generate personal life satisfaction and as a connective component to understanding how the students can positively influence others and their environments. Within the constructs of learning, Bruner (1971) considered the process of learning to actively link past knowledge that is enhanced by new knowledge to construct ideas and concepts. Bruner's theory proposes that cognitive structure play a key role in the learner's ability to transform information, cultivate hypotheses, and thus make decisions. This concept was apparent in educators' portrayals that revealed students make decisions to use positive psychology interventions as a foundation for a budding business (Participant 3), to go on

to mentor adolescences who could benefit from positive psychology intervention, and to help clients (Participant 1).

Beyond shifting life career goals, students react to material learned in the positive psychology environment in ways that prompt daily interactive ways of being in the world. This concept was noted in the participants' collective portrayals that students perceive that a sense of mindlessness helps them strengthen relationships by being in the moment with loved ones and acknowledging strengths of others to the degree of reflecting to them their positive attributes in the world. The transformative shifts also bring to fruition a person's sense of higher life satisfaction and positive feeling of well-being, knowing he or she can influence positive changes.

The theme of transformative growth to change personal interactions positively is portrayed as transformative outcomes that lead to students' heightened awareness of outcomes that stem from absorbing learning information from the positive psychology learning environment and ritualizing the practices within their own life. This heightened awareness includes aspects of appreciating life events and social connections that enhance the students' well-being. The enhanced awareness exemplifies Lazarus's (1991) notion that the cognitive shift relates to dispositional affect as a person's characteristic at the individual level, or the ability to influence and be influenced. The story told by Participant 7 regarding the reaction to music being played in the classroom and the filtering-in students' perceptions of a group emotional charge that led to dancing in the back of the room is an indicator that the students were influenced by the environment, and reciprocally perpetuated the influence on others.

In another portrayed engagement, Participant 2 explained how one student embraced visualization and the personally acknowledged benefits to the extent that he or she went on to conduct his or her own exploration into the application. This education philosophy is expounded upon through Candy's (1991) work by the idea that there are two fundamental keys associated with the ways in which students construct what is socially negotiated and contextual; learners build their reality through acquiring knowledge. The transformations uncovered by this study acknowledge a holistic idea that students filter information that they recognize is beneficial and incorporate that information as awareness to change thoughts, behaviors, and actions. As a result, students reported back to the presiding educators that the outcomes had made them more aware of their own well-being and happiness, enhanced their relationships with parents, children, friends, and spouses and instilled a deeper appreciation for relationships and influences that generate happiness within their life.

The active transformation, as discovered in this study, is an inclusive process to realize the how the students themselves use the information to shape their views and actions. A meaning scheme is "the constellation of concept, belief, judgment, and feelings which shapes a particular interpretation" (Mezirow, 1996, p. 223). The process is shaped by the reflective feedback in the adult learning environment that unconditionally allows and supports students to discover their own interpretation and evaluate meaning. As demonstrated in the present study, the presiding educators noted that this process was accomplished through short- and long-term reflections. Through reflection, the students were able to understand themselves in a deep sense and to realize

how learning factors associated with positive psychology motivated them to change viewpoints. Mezirow (1991) proposed four ways of learning, namely refining or elaborating our meaning schemes, learning new meaning schemes, transforming meaning schemes, and transforming meaning perspectives. The resultant revealed thoughts and actions of the students in the positive psychology learning environment highly reflect these outcomes of ways of learning.

The theme of bonding reactions to presented empirical and exploratory positive psychology information includes reactions that were almost immediate, and those that required long periods of methodical processing and expressively acknowledged years after the student had completed the positive psychology coursework. As illustrated by the presiding educators, the curriculum in the positive psychology course rooms is a unique combination of empirical evaluation, scholarly review, and application, experiencing the empirical literature through experiential learning, control and self-directed learning, reflection, and life integration. This process becomes the foundational field within which students evaluate material to embrace or discard. Notably, not all students bond equally to material presented and, as collectively stated by the presiding educators, students bond uniquely to what they find meaningful to them and their life, and this bonding can be accomplished quickly or require an extended period of time as the students sort through skepticism and a need to find practical and meaningful application.

Within this theme, one recurring code appeared implicitly and explicitly, namely the transformation willing to break away from the medical model. This code was

portrayed through the students learning about human strength and applying the strengths personally and/or identifying and nurturing the strengths in others. There was a noted contrasting view of how the students reacted differently within the context of the learning environment to apply characteristics of altruism, optimism, human connectedness, empathy, mindfulness, and other positive interventions. This concept was portrayed as students (and educators) shifting the focus from human shortcomings to capitalizing on human strengths.

Participant 4 talked about how students went out after a lecture on trust concepts, and then reported beneficial aspects of what they (the students) had experienced. While this type of experiential or discovery learning can be applied in many courses across the disciplines, the outcomes from learning factors associated with positive psychology are of value to creating a shift in perspective that supports well-being and a more flourishing life for the students and for those with whom the students share human experiences.

The collective view of the presiding educators was that there was not an absolute buy-in of all the material presented. At times, students required just a short period of time for the information presented to trigger an epiphany of articulating the material. At other times, students needed elaboration and extended amounts of time to absorb, reflect, and introspectively find meaning themselves through a self-discovery process. From inception of learning factors associated with positive psychology to the experiential transfer, students who engage themselves wholly in the process report feeling better about themselves, creating moments of memories with loved ones, an overwhelming

gratefulness for not missing lost opportunities with loved ones, attaining a feeling of passion for direction in life, and a plethora of other noted outcomes.

Discussion of the Conclusions

The findings from this study allowed me to reach five main conclusions related to portrayals of transformative learning outcomes in a positive psychology learning environment. The presiding educators expressed a collective story that reveals adult learners in the positive psychology learning environment rely on a number of influencing factors to generate transformations. The transformations are unique and diverse for each student. As a response to the material presented in the classroom, the presiding educators witness learning transformations that develop into growth resulting from the students' self-awareness and desire to change, and subsequently taking action to make the changes. The second conclusion addresses the type of transformative learning associated with growth as part of the adult learning pedagogy.

Within the paradigm of constructing knowledge, student growth is supported by a dyad of humanistic relationships that included the student cohort members and the mentors/educators. The growth and bonding is not associated so much with the actual time of being together, but from an increasing enlightenment of appreciating and applying the concepts and models learned in the positive psychology classroom. Students' collaboration leads to them developing and cultivating a feeling of freedom and ability to be free of judgment. The positive psychology learning environment factors move beyond the classroom and transfer to lived experiences that affect ways of being in the world and actions taken as response to the learned material.

Students not only seek outcomes from the information learned in the positive psychology classroom to make their own life more fulfilling, but use the information learned as a springboard to formulate new perspectives that guide their choices and lead to more meaningful experiences in the world. This spring-boarding includes ways in which students relate and communicate with others randomly or with those close to them, actions taken to altruistically or humanistically affect the well-being of others, a shift in mindset of how one relates to clients or customers, or shifts career goals and choices. These behaviors are adapted to make a long-term difference in the world.

Further, as represented by the stories told by the educators in the present study, the vast majority of students uniquely develop a deep sense of transfer associated to the material learned in the positive psychology learning environment. The transfers and shift in perspectives are realized through multiple alterations in thought and behavior. For example, students experience a shift to empathetic views, desire to want to better understand those close to them, and display selfless acts to enhance the well-being of others and to comfort others. There is also an aspiration to take learned material and further the research or idea of integrating a concept to help others or promote positive campaigns in the world. Finally, there is the embracing of learned material through a need to hold on to or keep projects and assignments as artifacts to connect to positive memories and savoring times remembered for deep personal reasons.

To complete the picture, the learning, as represented by the educators in the present study, occurs in a nonspecific manner. Some students embrace ideas and theories quickly, while other materials are challenged and tested, and either not embraced or

embraced through a sense of discovery and the perception of control over outcomes and pathways. Students feel compelled to take what they learn in the positive psychology classroom and to apply it within a realm of their own lives. As examples, Participant 3 shared that one student developed a method of strength finding in others in the work environment, and Participant 1 stated that a student was intrigued and had a mindset change, saying “it had never occurred to them to look at a person’s strengths.” These examples combine the recognition that students not only ponder material, but also shift away from the exclusive medical model view.

As a conclusion, the parts cannot be separated from the whole. The conclusion becomes a united finding of the many mechanisms that influence each other to lead to creating and finding meaning within the model of learning. The information provided in the positive psychology course room is that which becomes interesting and engaging to the students and their educators, not only through a personal desire to find unique meaning and ways of wanting to be in the world, but also is affected by those around them who encourage and create an atmosphere of exploration and discovery. Students relate uniquely to the material, pondering and questioning empirical studies that compel them to test theories and integrate concepts and methods that ultimately lead to a higher sense of having control over learning and applying what has been learned to their own lives.

As part of learning the factors associated with learning positive psychology, students acknowledge a sense of independence to take the material by “choos[ing] what belonged to them” (Participant 4) and applying it in the most beneficial way. This

change in being was accomplished through a holistic lens of evaluating, reflecting, acknowledging, applying, and reevaluating. These conclusions are important because they acknowledge the relevance of all factors, namely the materials presented, how the materials are presents, and how students are made to feel comfortable enough in the environment to test out the material and explore the humanistic interactions, reflections, and actions taken based on their newfound feeling of control and support reverberating from the positive psychology learning environment.

Limitations

Regardless of whether a study is qualitative or quantitative, a study is vulnerable to limitations (Creswell, 2007). While I followed the methodical protocol design in conducting this qualitative study, limitations are present as a common empirical acknowledgment of association to qualitative design. Specifically, limitations in the present study include aspects associated with data collection, analysis, and the predictive nature of the outcome. Each limitation is addressed in the following paragraphs to acknowledge these weaknesses.

As previously noted, an associative limitation of this type of qualitative case study is the connection between the researcher and the field of study. Notably, researchers commonly conduct research within their chosen field of expertise. Concealing the connection could affect how the reader perceives the study. Given that the participants were recruited from higher education institutions and the researcher is an educator teaching at the university level within the field of psychology, the researcher and participants are members of what could be considered the same professional cohort.

Additionally, as noted by Patton (1990), an innate characteristic of qualitative studies is that the researcher serves as the primary instrument and often comes into personal contact with the participants or becomes close to the situation being investigated during the study.

As part of the methodical process of planning and the design of the present study, as the researcher, I had to be aware of relationships that could potentially form. As Yin (2009) asserted, the researcher should be prepared to address and manage the unavoidable mutual connection to participants and/or influences on the study. This management includes acknowledging reflexivity (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995), which was defined for this study as the acknowledgment by the researcher that the researcher has, to a degree, an influence on the study simply by being an attached part of the study.

Accepting that this limitation would be a part of this study, I incorporated certain steps into the design to limit influences. McCaslin and Scott (2003) suggested that the researcher make known, up front, the connection between himself or herself and the study. I accomplished this task by adding the information pertaining to my interest in the study and my background into the initial prospective participant letter. McCaslin and Scott connected the importance of transparency throughout the stages of the study to include roles played by the researcher, researcher bias, and the need to reveal the researcher's perspective. Because of my mere association and divulged information of teaching the course of positive psychology, those involved in the study understood my perspective and motivation for the research.

Subsequently, this association flows into the role of the researcher having some sort of connection to the study, and in turn has connection with participants. While biases are addressed in the following paragraphs, it is important to point out that just as the reader must know who the researcher is in all aspects, it is as important for the researcher to know who he or she will become in relation to the research study. Patton (1990) noted the subjective nature of qualitative studies. Patton supported the idea by describing qualitative studies that utilize the researcher as the main instrument and often come into personal contact with the participants or become close to the situation during the study.

From the onset of the study, acknowledging that participants would feel a sense of commonality because of professional interests and the research study itself, I was aware of the relationships that would be formed in one way or another. As part of the importance of protocols noted by Yin (2009), I implemented protocol criteria to address relationship influence within the purview of the interview and additional data. This implementation was addressed by creating conversational open-ended questions that concentrated on the educators' portrayals through their stories, and focused follow-up elaboration questioning to verify meaning. The participants were made aware that my interjections during the formal interview would be minimal and would not reflect a collaborative discussion.

Potential bias was not only acknowledged and addressed in the protocols of participant selection, but also was further examined during the data analysis phase and through the post-ancillary interview with an altered participant perspective. After codes

were listed and themes emerged, I used a statistical count to evaluate within and between cases of code consistency and matching. Between-code analyses indicated a well-distributed percentage associated to the theme. The extensive number of codes indicated that the portrayal of stories themselves were personalized to the extent of uniqueness, yet still fit into the parameters of saturated emerged themes. Additionally, the code statistics for the ancillary student interview replicated similar code outcomes and themes.

While biases are not directly addressed in the same manner as with quantitative studies, they can best be understood in the realm of reflection from the statements of Yin (2009), Merriam (1998), Creswell (2013), and Stake (1995), all of whom spoke to the integrity of the overall research design. Yin described methods and protocols for a rigorous researcher design that addresses each step of the study. Further, Yin associated particular validities with steps of the protocol process. These validities included (a) construct validity with data collection and composition, (b) internal validity with data analysis, (c) external validity with research design, and (d) reliability with data collection. To address bias as a limitation within a cases study, the remedy lies within the parallels of protocols, ethical guides, and validating commitment to the study.

As the primary researcher and instrument in the present case study, my duties included acting as the interviewer. Besides addressing the previously discussed ethical guides of interviewing, it is important for the interviewer to have a general knowledge of how to interview. One limitation of the study was not being able to interview all participants face to face, due to geographical locations of the participants. The arm's-length nature of the interviews posed limitation problems concerning being able to

achieve good interviews supported by interviewee/interviewer working relationship and interview confidentiality.

To address the limitation of building a rapport with each participant, I sent pre-study e-mails to the participants to ensure they had full knowledge and disclosure of all expectations and process protocols. To support manageable times of the interviews, participants selected dates and times that fit into their schedules, putting them more at ease with being able to select a time and place that met their schedule needs.

Additionally, the limitation of being able to act as interviewer posed little issue with the present research. The protocols of the interview followed Kvale's (1996) recommendations, which designated 10 notable factors associated with successful interviewers, namely knowledgeable, structuring, clear, gentle, sensitive, open, steering, critical, remembering, and interpreting. Merriam (1998) categorized these characteristics of a researcher as being sensitive regarding knowing when to continue questioning in the interview and when not to probe deeper.

The limitation of the predictive nature of qualitative studies (Creswell, 2007; Howe & Eisenhart, 1990; Patton, 2002) is argued as one that prevents the researcher from foreseeing that similar results will prevail in a generalized setting. Addressing the present study, the nature of what is being investigated and for what reason incorporates the innate assumption that probability, correlation, or predictive nature is not a key interest of qualitative collective case study design. The reason for this distinction is that the intent of the study was not predictive of what will happen in the future, but rather to understand what is happening within the context of the positive psychology adult learning

environment in the present. This matter is described in nature through the idea that researchers, as in the case of the present study, select their designs based on the research problem and the research question being asked.

While limitations of generalization or predictive nature are affixed characteristics of qualitative studies, the idea of understanding a human or social problem from a human perspective is inclusive of constructing a holistically complex portrayal of what is being investigated (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2009; Patton, 2013; Stake, 2005). Regardless of the idea of predictive nature, the emphasis in this study aligns with the interpretation of how social reality is constructed or how meaning of phenomena is experienced by the participants in the study (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2013).

Acknowledging the limitation of being able to generalize this study, without follow-up investigation attributable to the nature of what was being investigated, the strength of attaining the understanding of the phenomenon outweighs the limitation of predictive nature.

In conclusion, an inherent limitation of qualitative studies is the ability to generalize to a larger population (Myers, 2000). Given the common belief amongst veteran qualitative researchers of making a strong argument regarding the value of qualitative case studies, it is imperative that researchers create and follow procedural protocols for each step of the research effort (Stake, 1995; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009; Creswell, 2013). The strength of the case study lies in the researcher's ability to understand why the approach is the best approach and to create a strong study by addressing procedural issues as forethoughts. Even with this strong stance in support of

qualitative studies, and when a study is meticulously designed, a resounding common criticized limitation is the question of value placed on a sample size too small to be considered enough to claim generalizability (Hamel et al., 1993; Yin, 1994).

Recommendations for Future Research or Interventions

The present study opens many possible areas of research that could prove valuable as continued qualitative discovery or by measuring the discovered outcomes through quantitative methods. Primarily, in conducting the present study, I sought understanding of transformative learning outcomes in the adult learning environment of positive psychology type courses through the portrayals of the presiding educators. Acknowledging that the study yielded insightful and useful information regarding the learning environment and learning transformations associated with positive psychology, there are more benefits to be gained by understanding the students' perspectives of the and the reflexive aspects of positive psychology on the presiding professors who change pedagogical applications as part of fulfilling meaning in their lives and creating more unconventional ways of teaching. This information could provide further insight into how learning becomes part of creating meaning in one's life.

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) challenged the field of psychology theorists, educators, and practitioners to change ways in which they influence the view of human nature. Ultimately, the authors were asking not to end the study of problems, but to counter those studies with enlightenment of what people do right, how they flourish, create resilience, and live good lives. Like Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, Mezirow (1990) made a similar challenge by inviting a higher level of learning by shifting the

pendulum from an individual view to a worldview. The outcomes of the present study aim to benefit educators, education administrators, mental health professionals, and other parties interested in creating meaningful life changes by providing educational venues that support personal growth. Addressing the entirety of the research study and all data inclusively exposed from a holistic standpoint, my recommendations extend far beyond simply addressing the transformative outcomes of the positive psychology learning environment associated with students. Stemming from the holistic view, three main areas of recommendation are encouraged, as discussed below.

Recommendation 1

I recommend administrators and educators in higher education embrace the value of an enduring outcome that all students could benefit from being exposed to learning positive psychology in some application during the course of an academic program.

Recommendation 2

I recommend administrators and educators in higher education engage in understanding a deeper level of relationship within the social context of scattered effects of the positive psychology environment.

Recommendation 3

I recommend counselors and community leaders become familiar and comfortable with a paradigm shift supporting benefits of a holistic atmosphere, including students/clients, educators/counselors/leaders, and those who benefit from the dissemination of knowledge and behavior associated with positive psychology environments.

The present study exposes the theoretical frame within the paradigm of creating learning environments that focus on positive psychology, within which the transformative process occurs holistically and surpasses influence exclusively on the students. The initial focus was to understand the transformative outcomes of the students as experienced and portrayed by the presiding educators; however, the collective interviews additionally reveal transformations personally experienced by the educator themselves. The educators' personal transformational experiences developed meaning within a deep level of professional appreciation and personal gratitude for the experiences as a result of engaging with the students and being a part of the shift of change that takes place in the positive psychology learning environment or from the exposure to influencing factors associated with positive psychology.

The present study is an exclusive look at the perceptions of educators whose unique positions give them access to multiple sources of incoming formal and informal information released by their students. The value of informal evaluation and perceptive evaluation of formal documents gave the participant educators a vantage point of a holistic perspective of the addressed learning environment. However, the portrayals of the educators are exclusively their portrayals. Although an ancillary interview was accomplished with a student associated with a positive psychology program and the outcomes indicated a similar perspective, the direct outcomes have yet to be exposed from a cohort or bound system composed of students who have taken positive psychology courses. Findings from these outcomes could be beneficial for school

administrators and educational professionals who seek to address the well-being of the student body.

As an education administrator, this type of information could be of particular interest when deciding core courses or prerequisites to entry-level higher academia. Statistics reported in *The Harvard Crimson* (Kaplan, 2004), according to which survey results indicate that more than 80% of all resident undergraduates admit to having some sort of emotional or mental issue at least one time over the course of the year. Given these statistics, it would be beneficial for administrators to consider a methodological course that academically challenges students while congruently supporting individual well-being, as reflected by Seligman's (2005) articulation of personal goals as a means of finding a good life. One way administrators could view this information is to understand that student well-being and satisfaction is associated with performance. Boekaerts (1993) expressed the idea that emotions or states of being are a catalyst for educational performance.

An additional practical application focuses on the rich descriptions provided by the educators as a means of considering how learning factors associated with positive psychology as an adult learner can provide substance for frame of reference change by acknowledgment and reflection. Likewise, the concepts of challenging and changing thought patterns is not foreign to therapists and counseling by way of attempting to change reference frames to create new and more acceptable ways of thinking. While the use of positive psychology as a supplemental aspect of counseling is a budding notion, this study could provide further information to counselors interested in integrating factors

associated with positive psychology into their practices as a methodological application and as seen through reciprocation benefits.

The present study illuminates the notion that the transformative environment is not compartmentalized entities, but rather layers of influencing atmospheres that create rippling supplementary effects. This distinction perhaps is the most complex idea stemming from the present study. As indicated by Participant 4, “If you are going to teach positive psychology, be prepared for you to change.” Acknowledging this ricochet outcome, the awareness of the affect could be beneficial as a preventive intervention linking the all-inclusive sequence of being benefited. Seligman (2005) noted that individuals in a positive state or positive mood are better able to take in and process information in more creative ways. This perception was reflectively noted by Bower (1991), who claimed that negativity decreases performance ability. While the present study was not conducted to examine state of well-being and performance, it is a noteworthy consequence stemming from the study. The outcomes from the present study suggest to students, faculty, and those moving from one environment to another that transformation in the positive psychology adult learning environment reflects a progressive positive movement towards finding meaning through learning and development of a happier, more flourishing life.

Comprehensive studies regarding happiness and positive interventions articulate an origin and result across diverse aspects of life. This connection not only addresses performance, but also personal relationships, work environments, and health and well-being (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009). Understanding the

transformations as an inclusive sequence could help therapists implement integrative practices that support the well-being of clients and of themselves. Further, Myers and Diener (1995) articulated the positive outcomes associated with the state of happiness and self-beliefs of enhanced health, intelligence, and social interactions as part of flourishing and efficacy. By understanding enlightening factors associated with learning positive psychology, the outcomes can further be explored in an expansive perspective of benefits to many groups.

Conclusion

For the reason that no other research effort has fully embraced the combined aspects of the present study, the relevance of previous research is realized by the elements of the present study as part of the holistic aspect regarding the advancement to the fields of education psychology, adult learning theories, and positive psychology. The comprehensive loop rests on the Aristotelian philosophy/treatises concerning the process of education as being an endless quest. In the quest for a good life, education becomes a catalyst through which a person finds ways of being or acting in virtuous ways. Thus, education becomes the facilitator of growth (Aristotle, 1980). The idea of growth, as related to adult learners, was described as follows:

Adult education is the process by which men and women (alone, in groups, or in institutional settings) seek to improve themselves or their society by increasing their skill, knowledge, or sensitiveness or it is any process by which individuals, groups, institutions try to help men and women improve in these ways. (Houle, 1972, p. 32)

The essence of the present study allows readers to gain an understanding of what transpires holistically as part of the process or product of learning positive psychology.

Within the realm of adult learners, research has unveiled specific factors associated with unique ways in which adult learners prefer to learn and offer reasons why this group wants to learn. Zacharakis, Steichen, de Sabates, and Glass (2011) conducted a qualitative study using a focus group to understand what adult students perceive as attributes to promote success. The attributes included (a) empowerment/agency/energy, (b) exigency, (c) personal barriers, (d) program challenges, (e) program strengths, and (f) self-perception. Cross (1981) determined that a learner is not a separate entity from life itself while attending higher education, but that learners and environments are complementary factors.

Cross (1981) noted that educational opportunities are prompted by life-changing events and, in turn, education provides motivational avenues for adult learners. These paths represent the need for socialization, external relationship, a desire to advance in career, social welfare, break from daily routines, or the desire to satisfy a need to learn something new. Taking into consideration the needs and desires of adult learners, the recurring element is the search for something more in life. Positive psychology as a field embraces personal growth through realizing human potential and ability to grow as a product of acknowledging the holistic being, reflecting, and discovering (Houle, 1972; Knowles, 1984; McKillop, 2005; Mezirow, 1994/1995; Oades, Robinson, Green, & Spence, 2011; Russo-Netzer & Ben-Shahar, 2011). The study adds value to the scientific knowledge base by providing a holistic view of outcomes linked to learning factors associated with positive psychology in the adult learning environment. Revelations of the study could offer missing information that connects the three entities as propagating

features that support Aristotelian philosophy of education as a factor associated with a good life.

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APPENDIX A. STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL WORK

Academic Honesty Policy

Capella University's Academic Honesty Policy (3.01.01) holds learners accountable for the integrity of work they submit, which includes but is not limited to discussion postings, assignments, comprehensive exams, and the dissertation or capstone project.

Established in the Policy are the expectations for original work, rationale for the policy, definition of terms that pertain to academic honesty and original work, and disciplinary consequences of academic dishonesty. Also stated in the Policy is the expectation that learners will follow APA rules for citing another person's ideas or works.

The following standards for original work and definition of *plagiarism* are discussed in the Policy:

Learners are expected to be the sole authors of their work and to acknowledge the authorship of others' work through proper citation and reference. Use of another person's ideas, including another learner's, without proper reference or citation constitutes plagiarism and academic dishonesty and is prohibited conduct. (p. 1)

Plagiarism is one example of academic dishonesty. Plagiarism is presenting someone else's ideas or work as your own. Plagiarism also includes copying verbatim or rephrasing ideas without properly acknowledging the source by author, date, and publication medium. (p. 2)

Capella University's Research Misconduct Policy (3.03.06) holds learners accountable for research integrity. What constitutes research misconduct is discussed in the Policy:

Research misconduct includes but is not limited to falsification, fabrication, plagiarism, misappropriation, or other practices that seriously deviate from those that are commonly accepted within the academic community for proposing, conducting, or reviewing research, or in reporting research results. (p. 1)

Learners failing to abide by these policies are subject to consequences, including but not limited to dismissal or revocation of the degree.

Statement of Original Work and Signature

I have read, understood, and abided by Capella University's Academic Honesty Policy (3.01.01) and Research Misconduct Policy (3.03.06), including the Policy Statements, Rationale, and Definitions.

I attest that this dissertation or capstone project is my own work. Where I have used the ideas or words of others, I have paraphrased, summarized, or used direct quotes following the guidelines set forth in the *APA Publication Manual*.

Learner ID and e-mail	_____
Mentor name and school	Dr. Michael Doogan, Harold Abel School of Social and Behavioral Sciences _____
Learner signature and date	<i>Lynn M. Soots</i> March 5, 2015 _____

APPENDIX B. DEMOGRAPHIC SHEET

Demographic survey questions for research study conducted by Lynn Soots PhDc

Please circle, highlight or X-beside your responses and send this form back with the signed consent form~ thank you

1. Gender

- female
- male

2. Age

What is your age?

- 25-34 years old
- 35-44 years old
- 45-54 years old
- 55-64 years old
- 65-74 years old
- 75 years or older

3. Ethnicity

Ethnicity origin (or Race): Please specify your ethnicity.

- White
- Hispanic or Latino
- Black or African American
- Native American or American Indian
- Asian / Pacific Islander
- Other

4. Education

Education: What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? *If currently enrolled, highest degree received.*

- Associate degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Professional degree
- Doctorate degree

*Please write in your response for this question

5. What is the country where you now reside? _____

APPENDIX C. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Focused Open-Ended Questions and Protocols

Protocol for Focused Open-Ended Question Interviews

You will have the option to complete the interview using an agreed upon method via an electronic interview. This can be face to face (face time interview), Skype, net meeting or another venue we agree to use. The interview will follow a semi-guided or focused format using a list of open-ended questions. The list of questions is provided below. The semi guided format will allow for additional information to transpire and be explored while keeping the focus of the research purpose. This is your time to tell your story, but there may be a need for me to ask a follow up question to further deepen the understanding of your story. To capture the interview I will be using an Echo Pen and a computer recorder.

Security: Interviews will be transcribed by a professional transcribing service to maintain the integrity quality of the transcribed interviews. Interviews sent to the professional service will not have your name on the transcript. Your interview will be identified by your appointed participant number.

Guided Interview Questions

Below are the questions that will be used for the interview. Please feel free to make notes ahead of time to help you remember what points you want to highlight during the interview.

1. If you could tell a story about what teaching Positive Psychology is/was like, what would that story be?
2. In your words, how would you describe student transformations that happen in your Positive Psychology classroom?
3. How would describe what is happening during the process of a learning transformation in your Positive Psychology classroom?

4. From your experience, what do you perceive are outcomes of student transformations in the Positive Psychology classroom?
5. From your perception, what kinds of student learning transformations do you see in your Positive Psychology classroom?
6. Think about a time in your classroom when you experienced a student having a learning transformation as a result of learning a topic associated with positive psychology, tell me about that experience.
7. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding your perception of the learning process in the Positive Psychology classroom?

Supplemental question if needed:

8. What advice or insight would you give to school administrators, other educators or counselors regarding transformations associated with learning topics of positive psychology?
9. What do you perceive are learning factors associated with transformations in your Positive Psychology classroom?

APPENDIX D. NARRATIVE INSTRUCTIONS

Personal Reflection Narrative

Instructions:

- This element of the study can either be hand-written (printed for clarity purposes) or completed using a computer.
- This element can be sent back via mail in the envelope provided, or sent via Email cut and pasted into the email, or as an attachment. Please keep an additional copy for your files and as a backup should an unforeseen misfortune arise.
- Additional lined paper has been provided for you. Any unused items can be recycled at your discretion. You may use the paper provided or your own paper.
- As a precautionary measure, please note that no specific names of students or other parties should be disclosed. You can use fictional names or alphabetic labels; example, Student X. This narrative focuses on your holistic view of any type of outcome associated with you, your students and learning Positive Psychology. The aspects of outcome are not limited to an end result but can also include your perceptions of the entire learning process.
- When you have completed your narrative: (1) please make one additional copy for your files as a backup (2) please send a copy in the pre-addressed/pre-paid/electronically tracked mailer or send a copy as an email attachment to the secure email address noted on the cover sheet of the information/instructional packet, and (3) send a verification email that the narrative has been completed and sent.
- For added security, a removable label is affixed to the narrative paper. If you elect to hand write your paper; please put your name on the removable label. It will be removed by the researcher and assigned your case number for anonymity.

Security: As part of the data collection protocols, ethical and security consideration will be made to ensure limited confidentiality; protect ethical standards of participants and to safe guard personal material by storing all materials in a locked safe with limited access.

The goal of the personal reflective narrative writing piece is to add depth and breadth to your story by allowing you time to personally reflect on your experience. The assignment is not bounded by time or environment and gives you the opportunity to complete the assignment in an environment that is comfortable, and allows you to take time to reflect, remember, and savor experiences before writing down the experience.

As part of the research study in which you are participating, a personal reflective narrative will help gain further understanding into your experience as the educator/facilitator of a Positive Psychology course in the adult learning environment.

The personal reflective narrative gives you (the participant) the opportunity to take the time and think about your experiences. The narrative is an interpretation of your holistic view of transformations in the classroom. This is an open-ended writing assignment with the only request being that the narrative be between 500 and 1500 words (approx. 2 to 5 pages: no longer than 6) in length. The focus is for you to reflect back on what you have experienced in the Positive Psychology classroom and to highlight events or situations that you feel are relevant to the connection of learning and positive psychology. The parameters are not confined to limitations of time or place. To elaborate, your narrative can include present perceptions in the classroom or connections out of the classroom, experiences surrounding past students who reconnect with you, or information divulged to you by others who connect in some way with your students who have taken or are taking Positive Psychology. The format does not have to be structured paragraphs and can take on whatever characteristics you feel most comfortable with to express your story. Below I have provided a few thought provoking questions as a mental prompt if you need a seed to get you started. Please keep in mind that this is your story and you can tell it any way you would like. Please be as detailed as possible.

Thought provokers:

1. What would you tell a new educator what the experience of teaching Positive Psychology was like and what they can expect?
2. What actions have you personally experienced or experienced through knowledge transfer from students that were affirming or helpful? What types of reactions did this evoke from you or the student?
3. As a holistic experience, how did the positive psychology education environment influence change in thought process, behavior, or actions either at the present time of teaching or after the experience.
4. What types of thoughts or experiences have transpired after a course was complete.

Please enjoy this element of the study as a captured reflection of your story. Feel free to begin when you are ready.