

An Essay on Transformative Learning in Relation to Jungian: Synchronicity and Individuation

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Abstract

This essay is an exploration of transformative learning in relation to synchronicity and individuation. It is meant to offer for discussion another way or model in which to understand and explore transformative learning. It is a reflection of my own interest in this exploration as well. As such, I am focusing this exploration on applications for transformative learning from writings of William James and Carl Jung in the following areas:

- 1. William James's "compass needle" within the psyche turning to successor stages or emergent transformation of consciousness (1987, p. 214).*
- 2. A closer look at the margins of the psyche where these successor stages happen.*
- 3. The emergence of the individuation process through imaginal work in the unconscious and conscious that involves fantasy thinking and active imagination (Jung, 1989, p. 171).*
- 4. The connection involving the "phase transition" concept of synchronistic emergence as part of the successor stages in the individuation process (Cambray, 2009, p. 64).*

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Introduction

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2. A closer look at the margins of the psyche where these successor stages happen.
3. The emergence of the individuation process through imaginal work in the unconscious and conscious that involves fantasy thinking and active imagination (Jung, 1989, p. 171).
4. The connection involving the "phase transition" concept of synchronistic emergence as part of the successor stages in the individuation process (Cambray, 2009, p. 64).

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Definition of Terms

1. Synchronicity:

I begin this exploration with what is meant by the term "synchronicity". According to the glossary in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (MDR, Jung, 1989), it is considered a "meaningful coincidence or equivalence of a psychic and a physical state or event without a causal relationship . . . an inwardly perceived event that has correspondence in external reality" (p. 400). When Carl Jung coined the term in his Richard Wilhelm Memoriam, he did not consider it an abstraction but a concrete continuum with qualities and conditions that manifest simultaneously in different places (1989, p. 400). He emphasized that the most important part of this manifestation was "the meaningful arrangement" (p. 400). In his view, meaningfulness was the essential criterion, not just a simultaneousness of two events. This corresponds to the importance of meaningfully charged experiences in the transformative learning work of Mezirow (1978), Cranton (2006) and Kegan (2000). Cambray adds to this a synchronistic phase transition process that emerges in the consciousness to create a larger whole (2009, p. XIII). I see this emergence as coming from a general "field of consciousness" that includes a "magnetic field" within each individual psyche that contains the compass needle referred to in the introduction (James, 1987, p. 214). William James (1987) goes on to say that there is a "unity of purpose", the result of which is always more complex and different (p. 547). This corresponds with complexity theory as researched in nature (Adamatzky, 2013) and is reflected as well in my current research involving teacher classroom action plans which grew in complexity and purpose as they were implemented.

2. Individuation:

The concept of individuation seems to have originated with William James (1987) when he referred to "the conditions of individuation or insulation in the mother sea" (p. 1264). He described this mother sea as a continuum of cosmic consciousness or environment. Somehow, the relations between this cosmic consciousness and matter help to shape "the individuations in the psychic sea" (p. 1264) or "private destiny" (Herrmann, 2014, p. 29). In James's (1987) development of pragmatism, he goes on to discuss the "unity of purpose," explaining that "every living being pursues its own particular purposes" (p. 547). In my opinion, part of transformative learning's role is to explore and develop this purpose in the classroom for teachers and students. This could be compared, as well, to Jung's contention that the discovering of one's personal destiny occurs by way of certain resonances that speak to each person "rhythmically and metaphorically" (Herrmann, 2014, p. 32). So, onward now with how this speaks to me and the application to my vocation "aimed at this world and this life" as Carl Jung advocated (1989, p.189).

Application to My Current Research & Vocation

"The calling to live by" (Herrmann, 2014, P. 57) that I have is my dedication to the teachers with whom I work. I am passionately committed to this work supervising, coaching and supporting these teachers in realizing their potential in ways that continually develop and transform their teaching so that student engagement and learning are equally transformed in very challenging inner-city circumstances. As such, I have chosen to look closely at what triggers and accompanies Jung's "the meaningful arrangement" (1989) of synchronistic phase transitions and reorganizations created by the breaking of conscious symmetry that can transform teaching and

learning (p. 400). My recent research looking into this involved mixed method and grounded theory approaches with triangulation components using direct and indirect interview formats, field note observations and mappings, written self-reflections and collaborative inquiry cycles. It was conducted in two parts and produced the following findings:

Findings

Part 1

- **Intrinsically motivating areas of the classroom can result in teacher *a-ha* moments of inspiration, meaning and ownership that facilitate transformative learning.**
- **Such moments can often be linked to unconscious/conscious synchronicity that occurs prior to, during and after these moments.**
- **Using tools that collaboratively focus attention and reflection on this linkage produces trackable, connective data points and insights for action plans and goals that transform learning in the psyche and classroom.**

The second part of the research looked more closely through a Jungian lens at what triggers and accompanies synchronicity phase transitions and reorganizations created by the breaking of conscious symmetry through the emergence and implementation of these teacher action plans. The transformative teaching and learning effects of this emergence were reviewed in relation to transformative learning theory as well. Analysis of the phase transition data resulted in the following findings:

Part 2

- **1 A repeated theme regarding the importance of the imaginal process, which was slow/sporadic/pondering occurred for these teachers.**

This is in line with Baumgartner's (2001) analysis of transformative learning theory as viewed through the lens of Dirks and Healy regarding "the role of imagination in facilitating learning" (p. 18). Mezirow (1997) values as well the role of "imagination to redefine problems from a different perspective" (p. 10). This role may be reflective of the need for the psyche to imagine at both subconscious and conscious levels the process of emergence before it is actually realized or experienced. It certainly did for teachers in this research investigation. The initial, intrinsic impulse of being drawn to an area of the classroom developed into each teacher's action plan by beginning with an inner imaginal experience. According to Carl Jung (1989), such a process "liberates itself from the concretism of the object and attempts to sketch an image of the invisible as something which stands behind the phenomenon" (p. 336). This imagining process results in Jung's "rising up" (1989) or, in this research framework, an emerging into consciousness as the prospective function of the psyche (p. 292). It seems that the importance of this inner imaging or active imagining and pondering is "prima materia" for the emergence of individuation and one's "particular purposes" specifically here in the classroom (Jung, 1989, p. 199; James, 1987, p. 547). This mental fantasizing helps to clarify one's thoughts as well (Jung, 1989, p.174).

Taking this concept of images further, Jungian researcher J. Cambray (2002) states that when these images or "symbols are accessed by consciousness and experienced affectively, they often coincide with a sense of deeper purpose or function"

(p. 417). Viewed through a spiritual-integrative lens as reported by Baumgartner (2001), transformative learning is equally facilitated when “further knowledge comes...through symbols” (p. 18). Additionally, both Mezirow’s approach and developmental ones to transformative learning affirm the importance of “meaning-making” (Baumgartner, 2001) in the learning process (p. 17). This may have been what happened when the teachers initially identified an area of the room they were drawn to and had heightened interest in that was then photographed. Exploring the choice of each photo through collaborative dialogue and inquiry, it was found that each one was reflective of a deeper interest as part of each teacher’s own “individuation” that emerged in their action plans, the phase transitions of which became the subject of the findings in Part II here (phase transition classroom photo collages available upon request). This corresponds to transformative learning theory regarding a triggering event that may be the tip of a longer cumulative process of events (Baumgartner, 2001, p. 18-19). It could also be reflective at a deeper level of the teacher being predisposed or ready for a transformative learning experience as described by Baumgartner (2001).

- **1a A subsequent theme based on this first one is the way in which the phase transition emergence appeared. It was more often than not rapid/exponential.**

This fits with the research (Adamatzky, 2013) that has been done in the natural sciences on the breaking of symmetry in systems and it also supports the Jungian view that the emergence erupts into consciousness rapidly and somewhat exponentially (Cambray, 2009, p. 64). This could be due, perhaps, to the imaginal formation reaching a saturation point. In natural science, this is considered concentration, overload or perturbation that forces the reorganization of the system by the breaking of an old symmetry to create a larger, less rigid, more varied and complex whole in keeping with the apparent nature of evolution in the universe that is often connected to exponential power laws (Adamatzky, 2013). This phenomenon was easily seen in the room mapping diagrams (available upon request) reflecting one teacher’s need to continually ‘declutter’ (as he put it) the chaos of a room he inherited to allow his own reorganization to emerge.

The rapid phase transition process seemed to be dependent, as well, on the timing when emergence was “right for it” or “ready” (Jung, 1989, p. 307; Baumgartner, 2001, p. 19). Jung states that “there is unlimited knowledge present in nature... but can be comprehended by consciousness only when the time is right for it. The process . . . is like what happens in the individual psyche” (Jung, 1989, p. 307). This seems to mirror the process in nature when self-organizing is required due to chaos or intense concentration on the margins of the phenomenon (Hogenson, 2005, pp. 273-275). J. Cambray (2009) also looks at studies done on “self-organizing criticality,” postulating an underlying commonality with nature in a power law relationship of intensity and frequency variables involving emergent properties of the field (p. 68). Jung reinforces this relationship to nature, stating that “our psyche is set up in accord with the structure of the universe and what happens in that macrocosm likewise happens in the infinitesimal small and most subjective regions of the psyche ” (Jung, 1989, p. 335). Additionally, this breaking of symmetry in phase transitions, whether in the psyche or through perturbations in natural systems (Adamatzky, 2013), can be compared to Jung’s view on opposites which are always seeking to achieve a state of balance in the exchange of energy resulting from their collision (Jung, 1989, p. 346).

- **2 A second theme involved the following specific factors facilitating the phase transition process:**
- **2a Physical engagement with implementation elements resulted in significant phase transition actions.**

Actually doing the action or what Embree (2011) refers to as having the experience produces the most results in terms of the phenomenon emerging into a larger whole. Researcher Dr. Rick Hanson from the Greater Good Science Center at the University of California, Berkeley attributes this emergence to the neurological change in the brain produced by the close attention paid to the physical experience by the brain (Hanson, 2015).

Additionally, the neuroscientific work of Barton (1994), Freeman (1983, 1991, 1999), Melloni (2007), Molle (1996), Tononi (1998) and Varela (2001) reinforce the importance of brain self-organizing systems that can facilitate change and transformation (research paper available upon request). Such self-organizing systems involve information and stimuli, both external and internal, that are processed by neural assemblies in rapid, coordinated, synchronous and simultaneous bursting forth or firing of cooperative neurological connections, collaborations, computations and coalitions to result in conscious awareness and learning. This takes place through neurons linked by ever-ready, re-entrant loops and dynamics that rapidly and continually synchronize meaningful coherence of vibrational frequency oscillations, using carrier waves, chaotic attractors, etc. to self-organize, regulate, manage and assign informational meaning. This process results in increasingly complex structures, symmetries and relational, spatio-temporal patterns that produce behavior from which learning can take place. Relaxing the mental framework through exploration and engagement allows for higher degrees of freedom, interaction and integration among neuronal assemblies to produce novel and innovative thinking, abstractions, generalizations, creative perceptions, insights and *a-ha* moments that further transformation and learning. In addition, learning is facilitated in an attractor landscape by focused observation, intention, reflection and brain search images. Such intrinsic brain dynamics and self-organizing systems work together in a reciprocal way to allow for increasing integration of information in meaningful context (Kelso, 1995). In this case, the meaningful context was the focused physical engagement with the action plan elements. As a result of such self-organizing engagement, attention and integration in the brain and psyche, these teachers were afforded the opportunity for greater levels of awareness, understanding, integration, discernment, emergence and individuation of each one's essential self, vocation, purpose and evolutionary direction. In so doing, learning and wholeness that had transformative dimensions was facilitated.

- **2b Increased motivational interest and insight resulted while attending to and engaging with the implementation elements.**
- **2c Interaction with unexpected and surprising aspects of one's own thinking and others encouraged creativity and continued investment in the process.**

Such interactions seem to be connected to aspects of emergent self-organization that “evoke a feeling of surprise” according to J. Cambray (2009, p. 107). This concurs with Mezirow’s (1997) research on the importance of discovery in the transformative learning process and other aspects of the process as well (King, 2002).

- **2d Collaborative discourse and reflection supported emergent learning.**

This reaffirms Mezirow's (1978) view of the importance of critical reflection and discourse in the transformative learning process. This could be part of bringing into consciousness the slower/pondering imaginal process that was going on before, between and during implementation of teacher action plan elements. In such discourse, there was possibly a collaborative or "Powers of Two" effect (Shenk, 2014) that was greater than each single person's experience and, in so doing, created more inventive, unexpected and surprising connections that saturated the system as it currently existed and propelled a system symmetry to be broken so that a larger whole could emerge. Additionally, MRI studies indicate that collaborative factors involving social interaction, empathy, emotional overtones, etc. activate various brain regions between people which often breaks the symmetry of old systems to create more complex ones that involve greater knowledge and understanding (Cambray, 2009, pp. 73-76). Such conditions point to the importance of interdependent relationships that build trust and echo the need for primary conditions in the environment to be open, safe and trusting for transformative learning to occur (Taylor, 2000, p. 307; Baumgartner, 2001, p. 19-20).

- **2e Factors impeding the emergence of a larger whole were the availability of time affected by competing priorities and the amount of preparation needed to complete an implementation event.**

This, of course, is a very common reality in the life of a teacher. If correctly paid attention to, with sufficient time for teachers to not only think inductively and deductively about a transformative growth opportunity, but to actually have sufficient time to implement it, there could be great leaps forward in teaching and learning not only for teachers and students but the entire educational community as well.

- **3 A theme of fractal patterning or "fractality" similar to what occurs in nature emerged (Adamatzky, 2013, p. 153).**

It was quite evident in the mapping done with one teacher's classroom that fractal patterning regarding workstations and student design stations similar to the teachers' orientation and calming focus were mirrored throughout the mapping process in the mapping diagrams. This fractality theme in the extracted interview statements became evident over time in each teacher's implementation and transformation of lesson planning, classroom culture interaction, relationship building, multimodality usage and maximization of instructional time in varied and more complex ways similar to the way systems reorganize via fractality in nature. J. Cambray (2009, p. 80) contends that there is a similar fractal quality to the collective unconscious. He points to the work of scientists Rizzolatti and Iacoboni investigating mirroring neurons in the brain (pp. 131-136) as a type of "attunement" resonating with the same frequency. He also relates this to the fundamental idea of resonance in the I Ching (Cambray, 2009, pp. 68-69). He goes on to state that the frequency of this vibratory resonance increases to the point where the system cannot contain any more movement, so the system shatters the symmetry, dissipating energy to allow new forms of patterned emergence to occur that are able to contain greater amounts of information and complexity. He notes, as well, that in psychological systems, these forms of emergence are far more complex than they are in nature (Cambray, 2009, p. 66). He states that there is a mirroring capacity of the mind. He elaborates upon this further referring to Robert Fisher's work involving this mirroring capacity that can result in unconscious involuntary acts that transfer one's self into objects

(Cambray, 2009, p. 70) or, in this investigation, teacher action plans. This mirroring aspect can be compared to William James' pragmatism when he describes ideas as being inspired by experiences that guide one back to the "particulars of the experience again and make advantageous connexion with them" (James, 1987, p. 575).

Application of Findings to Individuation and Synchronicity

The preliminary findings of this investigation indicate that the same factors of self-organizing criticality, fractal patterning and exponential power laws exist in the psyche, nature and the brain. This seems a logical connection since the psyche (referred to in Webster's on-line dictionary as the mind, soul, spirit, and personality) exists in the body and brain of each human being. Additionally, it appears that the synchronistic phase transition process in the psyche is extremely valuable and useful for the emergence of new learning that is transformative for both teachers and students. Specifically, aspects of the phase transition process that involve sufficient time for imaginal thinking, physical engagement, collaborative dialogue, motivational interest, involvement with the unexpected and elements of surprise create the conditions for more complex and varied re-organized emergence in the classroom that transforms the space and learning there. These conditions produce meaningful, motivational information, connections and coincidences that increase pressure on current systems. In doing so, the symmetries of these systems are broken, allowing teachers to develop more of their own potential or, in Jungian terms, "individuation" involving each one's internal "compass reading" that keeps them evolving, interested and excited to teach and learn (James, 1987, p. 214).

It is important, however, to note the challenges within the psyche to allow these emergent transformations to occur. My research, in line with Baumgartner's (2001), indicates that transformative learning is not a linear process. My data reflects many starts and stops, sudden leaps forward and lagging resistance revealing synchronicity's *shadow* side or transformative learning's "feeling" side indicating that the process is more individualistic and fluid. (Taylor, 2000, p. 292). Such a process necessitates on-going reflection and training to manage "the dynamics of educational helping relationships" as well as discerning where each is coming from and going to on the various learning "bridges" (Robertson, 1996, p. 48; Kegan, 2000, p. 60) traversed. The work of Lipton and Wellman (2003) and the New Teacher Center at the University of California (Regents, 2008) contain excellent materials and collaborative learning tools for K-12 districts to use training teachers and coaches in these helping, shared learning roles.

Conclusion

Using Creswell's metaphor of a "crystal" (2013) with many shapes, symmetries, substances, dimensions and mutations that grow, change, alter, reflect and refract over time, I will keep viewing the exploration of this synchronicity/individuation "crystal" from many angles and perspectives as applied to transformative learning in the classroom (p. 249). In doing so, I hope to further effective support for the teachers with whom I work to develop their potential and individuation by allowing into their consciousness meaningful coincidences, insights and a-ha moments that re-organize and further their understanding and use of transformative learning for themselves and their students.

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