A CASE STUDY OF TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A
CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW IN A CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

BY

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A Thesis Submitted to Faculty of Education
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
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Brandon University
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By
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Abstract
This case study looks at the alumni of one Christian high school in western Canada and the possible connections between their experiences in the Christian education program and their Christian worldview development. This study is grounded in transformative learning theory and Christian worldview development. The purposes of this study are to (a) relate the effects of the school’s Christian education program to alumni’s transformative learning experiences, and to (b) explore how alumni’s experiences in the Christian education program have influenced their Christian worldview development and, consequently, their long-term faith retention. The research questions ask: 1) What Christian education learning activities contributed to alumni’s transformative learning experiences? 2) What Christian education learning activities contributed to alumni’s Christian worldview development? and, 3) How do alumni perceive their interactions with religious thought and worldview development subsequent to their graduating from a Christian high school? To answer these questions, the researcher utilizes a parallel research method including an anonymous electronic survey and in-person semi-structured interviews. The findings show that the Christian education program in this case study may not have had a significant impact on the respondents’ transformative learning experiences and the development of Christian worldview development; however, other school influences did have an impact. These influences include staff and student relationships, event-based activities, school missions trips, and extra-curricular activities. Based on these findings, the researcher recommends (a) that Christian school staff work to collectively understand the process of worldview formation and develop an inclusive worldview statement, (b) the development of a discipleship pathway for staff and students to refer to, and (c) the increased incorporation of varied disorienting dilemmas into Christian education programs.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis marks the final step in a very long journey. I began my Masters of Education studies at Brandon University seven years ago when my oldest son was three and my second son was ten months old. Seven years later, we have added another boy and they are now nine, seven, and four. Life has been full and busy with the addition of graduate studies to teaching full time and being a wife and mother, but being a student again has resulted in many blessings in my life.

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needed time to work. I love walking this crazy but beautiful journey with you. I love you. And to my heavenly Father- to You be the glory, forever and ever. May this thesis be used by You for Your greater glory.
DEDICATION

To the Christian education teachers who work tirelessly to help their students develop personal relationships with Jesus Christ and who envision the generations to come who will do mighty things for God.

To those alumni who bravely spoke their truth. It is my prayer that I honored your stories.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In 2011, James Penner released his informative study entitled “Hemorrhaging Faith: Why and When Canadian Young Adults are Leaving, Staying, and Returning to the Church.” This study was a Canadian response to the research published in 2006 by the American polling firm, the Barna Group, which reported that “6 in 10 [American] churchgoing teens become spiritual disengaged after high school” (Penner, 2011, p. 9). Penner’s research revealed that only 23% of Canadian young adults raised with a Christian worldview remained actively engaged in Christian churches after leaving high school (p. 28). This active engagement is synonymous with long-term faith retention or the development of a Christian worldview, meaning that the individual was “still affiliate[d] with a Christian [religious] tradition”, and “express[ed] a participatory posture inside the church”, including “an openness to a supernatural referent” (p. 28). Long-term faith retention and Christian worldview development will be used interchangeably throughout this thesis. This revelation was a startling and harsh wake-up call for many Christians across Canada.

For those who had dedicated their lives to helping young Christian men and women ground themselves in their Christian faith, this study was also troubling. Administrators, teachers, and support staff in many Canadian Christian schools discussed the research and how it should impact their teaching practices and school culture. For those at a small Christian school in western Canada, it was no different. Personal interactions of the administrators and staff with school alumni, whether in person or through social media, often revealed the same reality as outlined in Penner’s study—many of the Christian school’s alumni were no longer living lifestyles marked by Christian values after leaving high school. This was discouraging, puzzling,
and troubling for many. How could students who were excited and on fire for Jesus Christ while in high school turn so completely from their previously held worldview?

**Background of the Case Study School**

This case study will focus on one Christian school in western Canada. The school is based in a small city with a population of 215,000 people. The school was started in the early 1980s, growing from 20 students at its inception to its current enrollment of 425 students from kindergarten to Grade 12. There are thirty teachers, seventeen in the elementary and thirteen in the high school. The first graduating class was in 2003.

The mission of the case study school is “in partnership with the home and church, to provide a Christ-centered education equipping students spiritually, academically, and physically to pursue a life of Godly character for service to the Lord Jesus Christ and others” while partnering with home and church. The vision of the school is to “produce graduates that will demonstrate a personal commitment to Christ, giving Him pre-eminence in all things…. [and] to provide an academic and spiritual environment, which will encourage each student to develop personal gifts and talents for service to our Lord, other Christians, and the world”.

The school board and administration have chosen to structure the school as a discipleship school with the goal of discipling students as they grow in their Christian faith through the process of transformation. The Christian education program is a foundational aspect of the discipleship process at the school. All students from preschool to grade twelve are required to participate in Bible education courses. The elementary classes use curriculum from Purposeful Design while the high school classes use the provincial Christian Ethics curricula as the basis for instruction. Elementary Bible classes are taught by homeroom teachers and most of the Bible classes are taught by a few different teachers at the high school level. The courses focus on
Bible memory work, Bible reading, classic Christian literature, journaling, and classroom discussions.

Outside of the classroom, there are many opportunities for students to grow in their faith and Christian worldview development. Students are encouraged to participate in various community service projects. Many are on the Inner City Missions team where they volunteer with an inner city community school, participating in gym blasts, school carnivals, and support projects. Students may also participate on chapel worship teams, student-led Bible studies, and other volunteer projects. Many students choose to go on the annual school mission trip where they run vacation Bible schools for the children in the villages and work on building projects in Guatemala.

Through the rigorous academic Bible education courses, as well as the many varied participatory activities and experiences students can take part in, school administrators and staff believed that students had ample opportunity to cultivate both head and heart knowledge and a greater understanding of a Christian worldview and faith tenets. The sheer number, however, of alumni who choose to walk away from their previously held Christian-beliefs after graduation is testament to the fact that for many of these students, their worldview and beliefs were not actually transformed through their learning experiences at the case study school. The question remained- how can a Christian school best cultivate transformative learning experiences that will result in the transformation and solidification of students’ worldviews, propelling them on to a life of faith after high school graduation?

**Theoretical Perspective**

The Biblical foundation for the school’s mission and vision regarding Christian education is derived from Romans 12:2 which states, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be
transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (New International Version). This case study considers current research in transformative learning theory and worldview development, both theoretical and in relation to Christian education. Transformative learning theory incorporates the process of “develop[ing] autonomous thinking [through]… the process of effecting change in a frame of reference” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 9). It is a cyclical process that “involves transforming frames of reference through critical reflection of assumptions, validating contested beliefs through discourse, taking action on one’s reflective insight, and critically addressing it” (p. 11).

Transformative learning occurs as “through some event…an individual becomes aware of holding a limited or distorted view. If the individual critically examines this view, opens herself up to alternatives, and consequently changes the way she sees things, she has transformed some part of how she makes meaning out of the world” (Cranton, 2002, p. 63).

The literature on transformative learning theory and worldview development is very clear on the importance of critical reflection, authentic discourse within a safe and caring community, and the need for perspective reformation for the transformation of worldview to occur.

**Significance**

Several studies (Barna, 2006; Cardus, 2012; Penner, 2011) have provided important information for administrators and staff at Christian schools across Canada. The research, however, appears to be too broad and general for teachers to use to inform their own teaching practice and classroom environments, or for administrators to use to direct the development of school culture. This study is designed to explore the connection between transformative learning experiences and, specifically, the case study school alumni’s Christian worldview development. This study looks to extend the body of research regarding transformative learning, Christian
worldview development, and perspective transformation in regards to Christian faith in the following ways:

1. This study seeks to explain the relationship between transformative learning experiences and alumni’s Christian worldview development.

2. This study extends the body of research regarding transformative learning theory, Christian worldview development, and Christian education.

3. Because of the lack of research regarding this relationship specifically for Christian schools, this study provides school administrators, staff, and students with information regarding the interplay between transformative learning, Christian worldview development, and long-term faith retention.

**Research Problem and Purpose**

The purposes of this study are to (a) relate the effects of the case study school’s Christian education program to alumni’s transformational learning experiences and to (b) explore how alumni’s experiences in the Christian education program have influenced their Christian worldview development. The specific research objectives include (a) to explore the level of engagement with matters of faith of Christian school alumni, (b) to identify factors of a Christian education program that influenced alumni’s decisions in regards to their tenants of faith, and (c) to explore the experiences of transformation and worldview development of Christian school alumni.

To fulfill the purposes of the study, two research instruments were developed. The first was the Transformative Learning Survey (Appendix A), a quantitative survey administered online. The second was a qualitative semi-structured interview (Appendix B) that followed the survey.
Research Questions

The researcher sought to answer the following main research questions:

1. What Christian education learning activities contributed to alumni’s transformational learning experiences?

2. What Christian education learning activities contributed to alumni’s worldview development?

3. How do alumni perceive their interactions with religious thought and worldview development subsequent to their graduating from a Christian high school?

Purpose of Study

Students at the case study school are provided with many varied opportunities for transformational learning and worldview development experiences. This study looks to provide the administrators, staff, and parents with additional information about alumni’s personal experiences within the Christian education program and their perceptions of their transformational learning experiences. This information may inform how staff members work to facilitate course curriculum development, unit planning, and the development of school culture and classroom environments.

This study may enlighten other Christian schools within Canada as they seek to produce graduates with a well-reasoned and critically evaluated Christian worldview that is able to provide a foundation for their life choices and beliefs. Although the data is not generalizable, the themes derived from the data can be interpreted for other contexts and used to consider best practice in Christian worldview development and transformative learning. The research instruments developed for this study may also be useful for other Christian high schools.
interested in the same research questions. The instruments can be easily adapted to other school contexts and the questions tailored to each school situation.

**Research Process**

The research process was:

1. A general review of the literature regarding transformative learning theory and worldview development was conducted.

2. A specific review of the literature regarding transformation learning theory and Christian worldview development in regards to Christian education was conducted.

3. Factors relating to best practices in facilitating transformative learning experiences and developing Christian worldview were identified based upon the empirical literature.

4. Draft instrument questions were reviewed by the thesis committee members for face validity.

5. Permissions were obtained from Brandon University Research Ethics Committee (BUREC).

6. Research instruments were revised according to peer and committee feedback.

7. School alumni were contacted by the school’s development officer.

8. The quantitative online survey was administered.

9. The qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted by the researcher.

10. Results from both data collection methods were analyzed and themes identified.

11. Connections between transformative learning experiences and Christian worldview development were assessed.
12. Findings and suggestions for further research were discussed.

Definitions of Terms

Christian Education

In addition to academic and social development, Christian education focuses on the “formation and growth of individuals… in their Christian faith, life, and ministry, in response to God’s sacred presence through Jesus Christ” (Littleton, 2008, p. 565).

Christian Education Program

A Christian education program is comprised of various elements. These may include, but are not limited to: Bible education courses, curriculum, worship chapels, devotional time, school-based mission trips, and extra-curricular activities. The purpose of a Christian education program is the development of students’ Christian worldview and the discipleship of the individual students in matters of faith and theology.

Christian (Biblical) Worldview

A Christian worldview accepts the tenets of orthodox Christian faith as defined in the Apostles’ Creed (Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics, 2016), regardless of denominational allegiance. It is predicated on the belief that Christians view the world through the story of Jesus Christ within the context of the metanarrative of Scripture and that this view should inform all human interactions (Foote, 2013; Kanitz, 2005; Thomson, 2012).

Critical Insight

Critical insight is “the ability to analyze, to deconstruct, and to reconstruct theological and sociological contexts” with the goal of looking “carefully at received cultural and theological constructions and the way these inform the fashioning of relationships” (Conde-Frazier, 2007, p. 114).
Critical Reflection

The first part of the transformative learning process, critical reflection is the conscious act of reassessing the long-held beliefs and patterns of behavior within which individuals have previously interpreted their interactions with the world, others, and themselves. This must closely follow the introduction of new knowledge, values, or experiences. Critical reflection must be modelled and taught as a skill as it includes high-level mental processes (Cranton, 2002; Fleischer, 2006; Mezirow, 1990, 1997; Smith & Scales, 2013; Taylor, 2008).

Discipleship

Discipleship is an “intentional relationship in which we walk alongside other disciples in order to encourage, equip and challenge one another in love to grow toward maturity in Christ”. Discipleship also “includes equipping the disciple to teach others as well” (Ogden, 2009, p. 17).

Disorienting Dilemma/Disjuncture

The instance when current experience or new information is at odds with previously held beliefs or frames of reference leading to the start of the learning process (Jarvis, 2008, 2011; Nohl, 2014).

Frames of Reference

Structures of assumptions, including cognitive, connotative, and emotional aspects, that frame a person’s point of view and through which all meaning is derived from perceptions, cognition, feelings, and experiences (Mezirow, 1997; Taylor, 2008).

Meaning Perspectives

Provide the overall structure and principles necessary for interpreting new knowledge, values, beliefs, and experiences for the making of meaning which shape our view of the outside world (Fleischer, 2006; Kitchenham, 2008; Mezirow, 1990, 1997; Taylor, 2008).
Meaning Schemes

“Sets of related and habitual expectations governing if-then or cause-effect, and category relationships as well as event sequences… [and] habitual, implicit rules for interpreting [meaning]” (Mezirow, 1990, p. 2).

Parallel Research Design

“An approach to inquiry involving collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, integrating the two forms of data, and using distinct designs that may involve philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks” (Creswell, 2014, p. 32).

Personal Worldview

Eclectic and idiosyncratic, personal worldviews are made up of “certain norms, values, and ideals that can (or not) include practices that arise from organized worldviews” (van der Kooij et al., 2013).

Perspective Transformation

“The process of becoming critically aware of how and why our presuppositions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; of reformulating these assumptions to permit a more inclusive, discriminating, permeable, and integrative perspective, and of making decisions or otherwise acting upon these new understandings” (Mezirow, 1990, p. 14).

Organized Worldview

Worldviews that are founded on a “view on life that has developed over time as a more or less coherent and established system with certain (written and unwritten) sources, traditions, values, rituals, ideals, or dogmas” (van der Kooij et al., 2013). Each organized worldview has a
body of believers who adhere to the worldview. Religion is an example of an organized worldview.

**Transformative Learning Theory**

The process of grappling with deeply engrained understandings, frames of reference, and worldviews in light of new knowledge and experiences through the process of critical reflection, authentic discourse within a safe and caring community, and perspective transformation leading to transformation (Cranton, 2002; Mezirow, 1997; Mezirow & Dirkx, 2006; Taylor, 2008)

**Worldview**

Referring to beliefs systems or information, knowledge, and beliefs that help one interpret the surrounding world including interpretations of meaning, significance, purpose, and reality (Esqueda, 2014; Foote, 2013; Schultz & Swezey, 2013; van der Kooij, de Ruyter, & Meidema, 2013).

**Summary**

Why are so many young adults raised with a Christian worldview, often attending Christian high schools, walking away from their Christian faith after high school? This trend seems to be reflected in the case study school’s alumni and is troubling to the school’s administration and staff. Of particular concern is the connection between transformative learning and Christian worldview development experiences within the Christian education program and alumnus’ long-term faith retention. This parallel research study explores the relationship of alumni and their transformative learning experiences and their Christian worldview development.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Transformative learning theory is one of many learning theories grounded in a constructivist ontology. Originating from studies on adult learning, transformative learning theory has broadened to include other areas of education such as K-12 and post-secondary education. First developed by Jack Mezirow in the 1970s, transformative learning theory is influenced by “Kuhn’s (1962) paradigm, Friere’s (1970) conscientization, and Habermas’ (1971, 1984) domains of learning” (Kitchenham, 2008). Developing his theory from his experiences in adult education, Mezirow (1997) noted that “we do not make transformative changes in the way we learn as long as what we learn fits comfortably in our existing frames of reference” (p. 7).

Transformative learning theory is complex and varied, looking at the process of how students’ worldviews and frames of reference change and transform. Transformation can occur unnoticed or casually, but it is most effective when a person is aware of and engaged in the process of the transformation that is occurring (Cranton, 2002; Meidema, 2014). Understanding the worldviews that students currently hold, as well as the process of the transformation of those worldviews, is important for Christian schools to help better prepare students to retain their faith after graduation.

This literature review will draw heavily from Mezirow, along with others, who have contributed to the discussion of transformative learning theory and worldview development over the past fifty years. The literature review will begin with a brief discussion of worldview, faith, and education, before turning to a broad overview of transformative learning theory, including relevant definitions. Next, this review of the literature will consider the importance of critical reflection, authentic discourse, and perspective transformation in transformative learning theory. The interconnectivity of Maxine Greene’s critical pedagogy and transformative learning theory
is briefly examined. The role of the teacher and the role of the student, as well as instructional strategies that encourage transformational learning, will also be discussed in light of the literature. Finally, this review will narrow in focus to the connection between transformative learning theory, worldview, and Christian religious education as noted in the extant literature and research. Due to the limited scope of this study, the literature will be interpreted in light of high school students (grades 9 to 12) and will only be evaluated in relation to Christian religious education.

**Worldview as a Concept**

There are many perspectives on what constitutes a worldview. The term itself is not precise and various researchers and authors use and understand it differently. First coined by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, the idea of worldview (weltanschauung) gained momentum as a credible concept “under Reformed scholars such as James Orr, Abraham Kuyper, and Francis Schaeffer” (Thomson, 2012, p. 179). How these philosophers and theologians imagined worldview influences current understandings of worldview. With globalization and the heightened exchange of ideas, however, it is important to note that even formulating a definition of worldview is in and of itself worldview dependent (Schultz & Swezey, 2013).

Worldview can be seen as predominantly referring to belief systems (Esqueda, 2014) or information, knowledge, and beliefs about the surrounding world (Schultz & Swezey, 2013; van der Kooij, de Ruyter, & Meidema, 2013). Understanding worldview, however, also necessitates the recognition of “the set of assumptions and presuppositions through which one interprets the world. It is the framework through which one sees the world, the lens through which one views the concepts of meaning, significance, purpose, and reality” (Foote, 2013, p.33). Defining
worldview is often done “in terms of ideas and philosophy”, but those wanting a fuller understanding of what worldview entails also “need to understand the practices and processes of [worldview] formation” (Smith, as cited in Thomson, 2012, p. 180) and how worldviews come to be, not just what constitutes the worldview.

Much of the literature on worldview formation focuses on the development of individual worldviews (Esqueda, 2014; Meidema, 2014; Mittwede, 2013; Schultz & Swezey, 2013; Thomson, 2012). van der Kooij et al. (2013), however, fleshed out the concept of worldview further. They believed that individuals could hold both personal and organized worldviews and that a personal worldview can be influenced by an organized worldview, but that personal worldviews are often more “eclectic and idiosyncratic” (van der Kooij et al., 2013, p. 213). These researchers believed that personal worldviews consist “of certain norms, values, and ideals that can (or not) include practices that arise” from organized worldviews (van der Kooij et al., 2013, p. 213). van der Kooij et al. (2013) defined organized worldviews as those that encourage “a view on life that has developed over time as a more or less coherent and established system with certain (written and unwritten) sources, traditions, values, rituals, ideals, or dogmas” (p. 212) and noted that each organized worldview has a body of believers who adhere to the worldview.

Although an abundance of literature exists about the importance of worldview formation and religion (Bertram-Troost, de Roos, & Meidema, 2007; Esqueda, 2014; Kanitz, 2005; Meidema, 2013, 2014; Mittwede, 2013; Schultz & Swezey, 2013; Thomson, 2012; van der Kooij et al., 2013), various authors disagree on the role of religion in worldview formation. van der Kooij et al. (2013) argued that every religion is an organized worldview but that not all worldviews are religions. Meidema (2014) proposed that religion is actually a subclass of
worldview. Although all religions look to help their adherents develop faith-centered worldviews, the scope of this literature review only allows for the discussion of the Christian worldview.

**Christian Worldview Formation**

The role of the Christian faith in worldview formation and development was seen in the literature as crucial to students’ ongoing faith retention (Esqueda, 2014; Kanitz, 2005; Mittwede, 2013). The question that remains, however, is this—what is a Christian worldview? There are varying views on this. Kanitz (2005) referred to the prevalent and widespread “assumption that there is ‘the’ Christian worldview [which] requires generalizations that gloss over differences within Christianity” (p. 100). These differences often affect how “students understand Christian doctrine, the Bible, their calling and vocation, and other fundamentals of faith” (Kanitz, 2005, p. 101). It is important for a Christian studies teacher to recognize that all students enter the classroom with personal worldviews (van der Kooij et al., 2013), but that they also enter with various perspectives or ideas of what a Christian worldview actually is.

Thomson (2012) argued that a Christian worldview is predicated on the belief that “the world is to be understood through the story of Jesus Christ in the context of [the metanarrative of Scripture] including creation, the fall, and redemption, a story which can and should inform all human interactions” (p. 180). In the same vein, Kanitz (2005) contended that to encourage students’ Christian worldview formation, the emphasis must be put on the shared tenants of the Christian faith that transcend denominational and cultural differences. The core beliefs of the Christian faith that most Christians adhere to are laid out in the Apostles Creed which was adopted by the early Christian church. The Apostles Creed follows:
I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth; And in Jesus Christ His only begotten Son our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose from the dead; He ascended into heaven; and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from whence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy Catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen. (Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics, 2016)

As many students are applying post-modern principles to the evaluation of a Christian worldview (Kantiz, 2005), teachers need to be cognizant that many of their students may not adhere to all components of the Apostles Creed, and hence, a Christian worldview. Conde-Frazier (2007) noted that “theology is a reflection of our worldview and this shapes our beliefs and expressions of faith” (p. 111). The dissemination of a one-size-fits-all Christian worldview should not be the driving focus behind Christian worldview formation. The process of worldview formation is dynamic (Baumann, 2011) and students must be discipled throughout the process. Ogden (2009) defined discipleship as an “intentional relationship in which we walk alongside other disciples in order to encourage, equip and challenge one another in love to grow toward maturity in Christ. This includes equipping the disciple to teach others as well” (p. 17). Discipleship embraces the learning process which is different for each person and allows each person to grow and develop holistically “rather than merely gaining understanding of a system of knowledge” (Mittwede, 2013, p. 301). The goals of teachers teaching Christian worldview formation should include influencing and modeling critical insight for their students. Critical insight, as defined by Conde-Frazier (2007), is the “ability to analyze, to deconstruct, and to
reconstruct theological and sociological contexts” with the goal of looking “carefully at our received cultural and theological constructions and the way these inform the fashioning of our relationships” (p. 114). Christian religious education should focus on helping students form Christian worldviews through the process of promoting critical insight and questioning.

**Christian Education and Worldview Formation**

Christian education differs from secular education in that, in addition to academic and social development, it also focuses on the “formation and growth of individuals…in their Christian faith, life, and ministry, in response to God’s sacred presence through Jesus Christ” (Littleton, 2008, p. 565). Education plays a pivotal role in worldview formation (Foote, 2013); however, “very few [Christian schools] are able to provide a substantive definition of worldview or identify how they determine success or failure in attaining the goal of instilling such a worldview in their students” (Schultz & Swezey, 2013, p. 228). Before Christian schools can effectively teach a Christian worldview and disciple students in the process and practices of developing a Christian worldview, Christian administrators and teachers must fully understand what a Christian worldview is and how best to instruct students in Christian worldview formation (Roebben, 2015).

Meidema (2014) argued for intentional worldview education, recognizing that “all personhood education in schools is inherently worldview-laden, because it has to do with meaning-presenting, meaning-giving, meaning-making, meaning-taking, and meaning-in-action” (p. 94). Within this understanding of worldview formation, teachers must recognize the preeminence of the process and practices of worldview formation over information gathering (Thomson, 2012), and choose to engage students in critically understanding their own personal and organized worldviews. It is imperative that the Christian education classroom become a
place where “asking worldview questions is a way to open up the [Christian] culture to deeper scrutiny. It ought to provide a fuller, richer experience of the world around us” (Bertrand, 2007, p. 14). Worldview education in Christian education classes should include teaching and learning about and from worldviews, not just teaching about worldviews (Meidema, 2014). Henschel (as cited in Thomson, 2012) contended that worldview education would “remain ineffective if it is limited to the teaching of norms and principles”. He continued on to note that “the concern must be not to instill timeless ideas, but to cultivate the concrete person” (p. 193). The content of Christian education courses dealing with worldview formation is not the only important factor in students’ development and retention of a Christian worldview; Christian teachers and their relationships with students are also vital to the development of the whole person, and consequently to the process of students’ worldview formation.

Teachers are seen as the “the key element and the greatest influence for authentic Christian higher education” (Esqueda, 2014, p. 98), or as Roebben (2015) states, Christian teachers are “the most ‘meaningful other’ in the quest for Christian worldview formation in students” (p. 494). Christian teachers must be aware that they bring their personal and organized worldviews, including their “interpretations, perspectives, and intentions” (Conde-Frazier, 2007, p. 111) to the classroom and to the disciplines that they teach. The process of teaching Christian worldview formation should begin with Christian teachers knowing and understanding their own personal and organized worldviews and having a fuller realization of how those worldviews were formed or conceived (Conde-Frazier, 2007; Miedema, 2014; Schultz & Swezey, 2013). Baumann (2011) believed that worldviews are “more caught than actively taught,” and that worldview formation “will be a process that requires an active and supportive community engaged in progressively developing and implementing a biblical worldview” (p.
Teachers with Christian worldviews who are actively engaged in discipling their students (Mittwede, 2013), who teach for transformation rather than information (Conde-Frazier, 2007; Miedema, 2014; Thomson, 2012), and who purposefully introduce new concepts and ideas to their students (Mittwede, 2013) will have greater success in helping students form Christian worldviews that are deeply rooted in the core beliefs of the Christian faith.

Most Christian teachers desire students to form and embrace a Christian worldview. They strive to model and teach, both implicitly and explicitly, the tenants of the Christian faith and how a Christian worldview allows “one to assess what the world is like” and to “[form] an idea of what things should look like and what actions might be taken to bring about the desired end” (Baumann, 2011, p. 8). The task, however, is often daunting as many students apply postmodern principles to worldview analysis (Kanitz, 2005), and teachers and students continually encounter “ever-expansive vertical shifts in perspective” (Fleischer, 2006, p. 158). Many students, even though appearing to conform to a Christian worldview throughout high school, leave their Christian faith behind upon graduation (Penner, Harder, Anderson, Desorcy, & Hiemstra, 2011). How can Christian teachers better structure both the learning environment and the learning activities to help students develop a robust Christian worldview that is able to withstand cultural pressures outside of the classroom? Transformational learning theory provides the key to this question.

**What is Transformative Learning Theory?**

Mezirow (1997) believed that “transformative learning develops autonomous thinking…. [and that it is] the process of effecting change in a frame of reference” (p. 9). Cranton, another major player in the discussion on transformative learning theory, defined it as being “elegantly simple. Through some event… an individual becomes aware of holding a
limited or distorted view. If the individual critically examines this view, opens herself up to alternatives, and consequently changes the way she sees things, she has transformed some part of how she makes meaning out of the world” (2002, p. 63). Cranton recognized the inherent simplicity of transformative learning theory that can, upon further contemplation, also be very complex and intimidating.

Dean Elias, as cited by Mezirow and Dirkx (2006), expanded the definition of transformative learning theory to include the important aspect of learning outside of awareness. Elias defined transformative learning theory as “the expansion of consciousness through the transformation of worldviews and the specific capacities of the self: transformative learning is facilitated through consciously directed processes such as appreciatively accessing and receiving the symbolic contents of the unconsciousness and critically analyzing underlying premises” (p. 125). It is important to recognize that learning occurs both consciously and unconsciously, and that each type of learning contributes to one’s frame of reference and worldview.

In the literature, Dirkx often took a different stance to Mezirow on what transformative learning looks like. He referred to transformative learning as “deep learning that challenges existing, taken-for-granted assumptions, notions, and meanings of what learning is about” (2006, p. 126). A greater awareness of what constitutes learning is crucial to the better understanding of transformative learning theory. The learning that transforms students’ foundational beliefs and ideas must move past the surface to encourage students to engage with their most firmly held understandings and worldviews. Only by grappling with these deeply engrained understandings and worldviews in light of new knowledge and experiences can students come to a fuller understanding of themselves and the world around them.
Another important aspect of transformative learning is the process of students experiencing new knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and beliefs which then leads to the interpretation of those experiences to create meaning. Edward Taylor (2008) described the learning process as “constructing and appropriating new and revised interpretations of the meaning of an experience in the world” (p. 5). Meaning is heavily dependent upon perception of the learning process and can vary greatly between students. Taylor drew attention to the fact that transformative learning is a cyclical process of the discovery of new information or experiences, the analysis of that information or the interpretation of the experience, and the determination of meaning that results from both of those processes. As new information or experiences are encountered, students’ foundational understandings are challenged and either reinforced or adapted. These broad foundational understandings are known as frames of reference.

**Frames of Reference**

Crucial to the understanding of transformative learning theory is the concept of frames of reference. Mezirow (1997) defined them as “the structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences. [Frames of reference] selectively shape and delimit expectations, perceptions, cognition, and feelings” (p. 5). He further explained that frames of reference: encompass cognitive, conative, and emotional components, and [are] composed of two dimensions: 1) habits of the mind - broad, abstract, orientating, habitual ways of thinking, feeling, and acting influenced by assumptions that constitute a set of codes. Codes can be cultural, social, educational, economic political, or psychological. Habits of the mind become articulated in a specific point of view. [The other dimension is] the resulting point of view - the feelings, beliefs, and judgements of others (1997, p. 5).
Taylor expanded on Mezirow’s definition, stating that “frames of reference are structures of assumptions and expectations that frame an individual’s tacit points of view and influence their thinking, beliefs, and actions (2008, p. 5). Frames of reference are not always based on fact, but perception. Recognizing and understanding how and why frames of reference are developed and reinforced, both consciously and subconsciously, is important to understanding how to address inaccurate or harmful frames of reference. Perceiving how important frames of reference are, Mezirow (1997) pointed out that they are transformed “through critical reflection on the assumptions upon which our interpretations, beliefs, and habits of our mind or points of view are based (p. 7).

Making Meaning

Transformative learning theory concerns itself with understanding how students make meaning from their personal experiences within the world. Mezirow (1990) identified two different dimensions of making meaning. The first, meaning schemes, is the “sets of related and habitual expectations governing if-then or cause-effect, and category relationships as well as event sequences…[and] habitual, implicit rules for interpreting [meaning] (p. 2). Meaning schemes, however, fit within the larger framework of meaning perspectives. Meaning perspectives provide the overall structure and principles necessary for interpreting new knowledge, values, beliefs, and experiences for the making of meaning. They include the “higher-order schemata, theories, propositions, beliefs, prototypes, goal orientations, and evaluations” (Mezirow, 1990, p. 2) through which new knowledge and experiences are filtered and personal interpretations of that knowledge and experiences are developed. Both Kitchenham (2008) and Fleischer (2006) noted that meaning perspectives are comprised of sets of specific meaning schemes that are subconsciously used to interpret the world around us and how we
interact within that world. Fleischer continued, saying that “our meaning perspectives shape our praxis of the world” (p. 149). Crucial to transformative learning theory practice is the understanding that personal interpretation of new knowledge and experiences is based upon how each individual student perceives that knowledge and experiences and how his or her perceptions dictate the meaning that is internalized.

New meaning is created and meaning perspectives are altered when students experience a disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, as cited in Nohl, 2014) or disjuncture (Jarvis, 2008, 2011). Jarvis (2011) defined disjuncture as “the feeling of no longer feeling at home in the world; when one is forced to ask ‘why’ or ‘how’” (p. 86). Meaning perspectives alter and change naturally, usually in response to common life experiences. Perspectives can, however, change radically and dramatically based on traumatic life experiences that illicit powerful responses from the individual. These experiences are often viewed as pivotal. Experiencing disjuncture, the realization that what has been previously known, understood, and experienced is either wrong or partially wrong, can result in personal crisis for the student. Disjuncture usually leads to “a varied and complex experience, but it is from within the disjunctural that [students] have experiences that start [their] learning processes” (Jarvis, 2008, p. 556). Transformative learning can only take place when new knowledge and experiences do not fit comfortably into previous meaning perspectives (Kitchenham, 2008; Mezirow, 1990). What is previously unknown will either reinforce the meaning perspectives that are already formed, or will challenge these preexisting perspectives. As students encounter new experiences or information, they develop and strengthen meaning within their frames of reference as they pass through the phases of transformative learning.
The Phases of Transformative Learning

Understanding the different phases of transformative learning is important for teachers looking to incorporate transformative learning into their teaching practice. Mezirow (as cited in Nohl, 2014) first distinguished ten phases of transformational learning:

1. A disorienting dilemma. 2. Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame. 3. A critical assessment of assumptions. 4. Recognition that one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared. 5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions. 6. Planning a course of action. 7. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans. 8. Provisional trying of new roles. 9. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships. 10. A reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s new perspective (p. 36).

Nohl (2014) believed the number of transformative learning phases to be five: 1. Non-determining start. 2. Phase of experimental and undirected inquiry. 3. Social testing and mirroring. 4. Shifting relevance. 5. Social consolidation and reinterpretation.

Both Mezirow and Nohl interpreted the phases of transformative learning to be linear and prescriptive. Patricia Cranston (2002) disagreed and proposed that transformative learning “is not a linear process, but a spiral-like progression” (p. 64). Cranston’s perception of the transformative learning process recognized that students’ grappling with new knowledge, beliefs, values, and experiences is continuous and might not allow for the full consolidation of new meaning perspectives before the process begins again. It also allows for students to reach the phase of exploring options of new roles, relationships, and actions, with the understanding that this exploration in and of itself might be the source of disjuncture that starts the process anew.
An individual student’s learning processes and his or her ability to deal with change are crucial in understanding how each student will navigate the phases of transformative learning.

**Critical Actions of Transformative Learning**

A study of the literature relating to transformative learning theory reveals three critical actions that must occur for students’ meaning perspectives and worldviews to be transformed. The extent to which students engage in these critical actions determines the extent to which their worldviews transform. The three critical actions are critical reflection, community discourse, and perspective transformation.

**Critical Reflection**

Critical reflection is an action. An individual must choose to engage in the process as it cannot be passively undertaken. It is the vehicle by which a student assesses the validity of his or her past experiences, knowledge, opinions, ideas, or worldviews (Jarvis, 2008; Mezirow, 1997; Saines, 2009). For transformative learning to occur, critical reflection must closely follow the introduction of new knowledge, beliefs, values, or experiences (Cranton, 2002; Fleischer, 2006; Mezirow, 1990, 1997; Taylor, 2008). Critical reflection “addresses the question of the justification for the very premises on which problems are posed or defined in the first place…[students] becoming critically aware of [their] own presuppositions involves challenging…established and habitual patterns of expectation, the meaning perspectives with which we have made sense out of [their] encounters with the world, others, and [them]selves” (Mezirow, 1990, p. 12). Taylor (2008) noted that critical reflection is the “conscious and explicit reassessment of the consequence and origin of our meaning structures” (p. 6). Critical self-reflection is a skill that must be taught and developed if students are to be able to understand their previously held perceptions and worldviews as well as the interplay between what they
have previously thought to be true and the new meanings that they are interpreting based on currently understood knowledge, beliefs, and experiences (Mezirow, 1997; Fleischer, 2006).

Critical reflection can encompass a variety of activities, but it always includes high-order mental processes (Mezirow, 1990). Some examples of high-order mental processes that encourage the reassessment of past ideas and beliefs, as well as students’ “orientations to perceiving, knowing, believing, feeling, and acting” (Mezirow, 1990, p. 13), are making inferences, analyzing and evaluating arguments, problem-solving, synthesizing old concepts to make new ideas, and the development of projects or activities that encourage creativity and ingenuity.

Critical reflection must be understood as a “developmental process, rooted in experience” (Taylor, 2008, p. 11). Reflection can often be uncomfortable, especially for students who are unfamiliar with the process. Educators must endeavor to not only teach the process, but to model it so students can see that the process of transformative learning is not applicable only to the young, but to everyone who values continuing education and learning (Mezirow, 1997; Smith & Scales, 2013). Mezirow identified three types of reflection that are imperative to students’ ability to reflect critically about their own learning processes.

**Content reflection.** Content reflection involves “thinking back to what was done and might involve a transformation of a meaning scheme” (Mezirow, as cited in Kitchenham, 2008, p. 114). Content reflection scratches the surface of students’ long-held perspectives and frames of reference when new information and experiences are encountered. Meaning schemes focus on causal relationships, and new information often disrupts these relationships (Fleischer, 2006; Kitchenham, 2008; Mezirow, 1990). The transformation of a meaning scheme rarely results in a profound personal crisis, but rather “allows for growth in practical wisdom” (Jarvis, 2011, p. 92).
**Process reflection.** Process reflection occurs when students delve deeper into their own thought processes and understandings. Mezirow noted that process reflection “causes a [student] to consider the etiology of actions and whether there are other factors yet to be unveiled” (cited in Kitchenham, 2008, p. 114). Etiology is the study of causation or origination and is important in the understanding of process of thinking. Without a deeper understanding of how and why they think as they do, students are unable to fully grapple with the ramifications of their thinking and how it directs their perception of the world and their interactions in it. Process reflection can result in the transformation of meaning schemes as new knowledge, beliefs, and experiences are incorporated into preexisting schemes (Kitchenham, 2008).

**Premise Reflection.** Premise reflection is necessary for transformative learning. Premise reflection “requires the [student] to see the larger view of what is operating within his/her value system and could transform a meaning perspective rather than a meaning scheme” (Mezirow, as cited in Kitchenham, 2008, p. 115). Premise reflection leads to a reevaluation of meaning perspectives, resulting in an evolution in the framework through which knowledge, beliefs, values, and experiences are perceived, meaning is developed, and worldviews are created. This process is intensive and can lead to students’ withdrawing from the learning process if the experience becomes overwhelming. It is important for teachers to teach and model the process, along with walking through the transformative process with their students (Jarvis, 2008; Mezirow, 1997; Smith & Scales, 2013).

Premise reflection, and by extension critical reflection, are paramount to fostering student autonomy (Mezirow, 1997), another goal of transformative learning theory. Reflection allows students to “rediscover power and help[s them] develop an awareness of agency to transform society and their own reality” (Taylor, 2008, p. 8). No longer are students passive learners,
taking in information and experiences because they are told what is important; instead, they are active participants in the learning process that revolves, for the most part, on their development of meaning based on their own perspectives. Students are encouraged to be critical and ask questions, to push further, and truly claim their knowledge as their own. Genuine engagement in critical reflection leads to greater awareness of personal frames of reference and meaning perspectives, reflective interpretation, participation in discourse, and perspective transformation (Cranton, 2002; Dirkx & Mezirow, 2006; Mezirow, 1990).

Role of Community Discourse in Transformative Learning Theory

The role of discourse, or interaction regarding newly processed information, is essential to transformative learning theory after students engage in the process of critical reflection. Discourse entails any written or spoken communication or debate about a subject, leading to the ability to speak authoritatively about a subject or topic. Discourse also includes the exchange of information or ideas between people. Engaging in discourse allows students to process knowledge and experiences into meaning within their learning community. The importance of a safe community where ideas and thoughts can be discussed and questioned is important for students to process new information without feeling threatened (Fleischer, 2006; Glennon, 2008; King, 2005; Roebben, 2015).

Transformative learning theory is “rooted in the way human beings communicate” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 10). Communication is necessary for the process of transformative learning; therefore, a teacher must ensure that he or she is intentionally creating a formative learning environment and community within his or her own classroom (Winkelmas, 2004). Teachers must endeavor to teach and model proper engagement in discourse, providing opportunities throughout the learning process for students to engage with classmates and teachers about what
they are learning and how it is impacting their prior knowledge and understanding. Students will most likely need to be taught the vocabulary necessary to properly and fully articulate their thoughts, or be provided with alternate ways to communicate their thinking processes. These forms of communication can include written or artistic expression. Formative learning communities will also engage in shared learning experiences (Glennon, 2008; King, 2005; Mezirow, 1997; Taylor, 2008; Winklemas, 2004). Taylor (2008) noted that “[shared] learning experiences establish a common base from which each [student] constructs meaning through personal reflection and group discussion…the meanings that [students] attach to their experiences may be subjected to critical scrutiny” (p. 6).

Authentic discourse is dependent upon the creation and maintenance of a safe learning community. The relationships between the teacher and the students, and the students to each other, are crucial to developing a safe learning community. Dirkx (2006) believed that “meaning in our lives is intimately bound up in our relationships with others and the greater whole…we are deeply connected…through deep emotional and spiritual bonds that seem a part of the very fabric of our being” (p. 129). Discourse that will lead to deeper level thinking can only occur when students feel loved, valued, and safe. A teacher focused on authentic discourse will “acknowledge the interrelationship between [teachers], students, and the truths they seek together” (Glennon, 2008, p. 32). Authentic discourse between learners occurs in a classroom environment that incorporates cooperative and collaborative learning which fosters community by encouraging student participation (Saines, 2009). The development of this classroom environment needs to be intentional in the planning and can only be maintained by the concerted effort of all involved.
Authentic discourse is only possible when both teachers and students are willing to be real with others as well as with themselves. Dirkx (2006) noted that both teachers and students “enter more fully into this relationship by deepening our understanding of ourselves, of the inner worlds which seem so much a part of us…to connect with the whole, we need to know ourselves, who we are, and what we are about. Our relationships with others are only as strong and deep as the relationship we have with ourselves” (p. 129). Dirkx’s discussion implies that both teachers and students need to feel safe enough to share their thoughts and ideas and to wrestle with new information and experiences in a comfortable and caring environment, where they are surrounded by others who are either going through the same experiences or have already gone through the process.

**Perspective Transformation**

Critical reflection and authentic discourse within a safe community after encountering a disorienting dilemma or disjuncture, often lead to perspective transformation. Mezirow (1990) defined perspective transformation as the “process of becoming critically aware of how and why our presuppositions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; of reformulating these assumptions to permit a more inclusive, discriminating, permeable, and integrative perspective, and of making decisions or otherwise acting upon these new understandings” (p. 14). Taylor (2008) noted that transformative learning theory often results in the “revision of a frame of reference in concert with reflection on experience that is addressed by the theory of perspective transformation- a paradigmatic shift” (p. 5). A perspective transformation occurs when the new knowledge, beliefs, values, or experiences that are encountered radically alter existing meaning scheme and perspectives. The purpose of this
transformation is the evolution of a “more fully developed (more functional) frame of reference” (Taylor, 2008, p. 5).

There are two types of transformation discussed in the literature (Jarvis, 2008; Kitchenham, 2008; Mezirow, 1990). The first, straightforward transformation, occurs through content and process reflection resulting in the transformation of meaning scheme. The second, profound transformation, occurs only when students engage in critical reflection on the frames of reference and perceptions they currently hold, resulting in changes to long-held meaning perceptions. Teachers must be cognizant that not all students will be willing to engage in the learning process resulting in profound transformation, but they may be willing to enter into straightforward transformation. Transformation cannot be legislated, but only encouraged and supported (Foster, 2003).

**Transformative Learning Theory and Pedagogy**

Pedagogy is widely understood as the method and practice of teaching. To better understand how transformative learning experiences can be maximized in the classroom, teachers would do well to have a fuller understanding of how transformative learning theory and pedagogy are interconnected. Maxine Greene (2007), a foremost scholar on critical pedagogy, noted that pedagogy is about “becoming- [teachers] becoming, [students] becoming” (p. 1). Greene understood critical pedagogy as involving the need for teachers to “develop the critical empathy needed for enabling the [student] to find his or her own way” (Greene, 2009, p. 89), which is congruent with transformative learning theory’s focus on providing learning “experiences that sustain significant, and at times deep structural shifts in thought, feelings and action” (Meneely, 2015, p. 90).
Greene posed important questions regarding a critical pedagogy that work to broaden the understanding of transformative learning theory for educators. She asked “How can [teachers] awaken others to the possibility and the need for action in the name of possibility? How can [teachers] communicate the importance of opening spaces in the imagination where [students] can reach beyond where they are?” (Greene, 2009, p. 86). A transformative learning theory perspective based upon a critical pedagogy foundation encourages both teachers and students to “come freely together in speech and action to take care of something that needs caring for, to repair some evident deficiency in their common world” (Greene, 2009, p. 90). Greene (2009) encouraged teachers “to teach in such a way as to arouse passion” and to develop “a new camaraderie, a new en masse” (p. 96) with students so as to develop critical reflection about the surrounding world and the ideology that constantly surrounds people. Transformative learning theory, as filtered through a critical pedagogy, will also look to create “such spheres, such spaces, where a better state of things can be imagined, because it is only through the projection of a better social order that [teachers and students] can perceive the gaps in what exists and try to transform and repair” those gaps (Greene, 2009, p. 95). Consequently, the role of the teacher in the transformative learning process is crucial as teachers often walk with their students through the transformative process.

**The Role of the Teacher in Transformative Learning Theory**

Throughout the literature, the role of the teacher in transformative learning theory is acknowledged as being highly significant to the transformation of students’ perceptions and frames of reference (Cranton, 2002; Fleischer, 2006; Jarvis, 2008; Meidema, 2013; Mezirow, 1997; Smith & Scales, 2013; Winklemas, 2004). Mezirow was influenced heavily by Freire’s (1970) identification of the banking theory of education that compared the teaching process to
banking where teachers deposit basic information into students for future use. Mezirow’s transformative learning theory countered the then current teacher-centric model of education. Transformative learning theory, instead, was based on the philosophy that creating and allowing for student experiences leading to disjuncture, and the provision for critical reflection and authentic discourse, will lead to perspective transformation (Dirkx & Mezirow, 2006; Mezirow, 1990, 1997). The creation of shared learning experiences, the development of an environment conducive to critical reflection and authentic discourse, and the opportunities to relate transformed meaning perceptions to real life are all facilitated through the role of the teacher. The transformative learning teacher must fulfill the role of model and mentor, create a safe and inclusive learning community, and provide varied learning opportunities (Fleischer, 2006; Meidema, 2013; Mezirow, 1997; Smith & Scales, 2013; Taylor, 2008).

**Teacher as Model and Mentor**

Many transformative learning theorists acknowledge that the foremost role of the teacher in a transformative learning classroom is that of model and mentor (Fleischer, 2006; Smith & Scales, 2013; Taylor, 2008). Teachers themselves must be transformative learners, willing to critically evaluate their personal meaning perspectives and frames of reference, if they are to encourage their students to become transformative learners. Teachers must recognize that understanding their own meaning perspectives are crucial to the cultivation of their relationships with their students (Cranton, as cited in Fleischer, 2006). They must be open to reassessing personal frames of reference and to modelling the role of transformative learner. In a transformative learning classroom, the teacher becomes a co-learner and partner in the learning process, rather than the imparter of all knowledge which Taylor (2008) described as a horizontal relationship. The teacher “works as a political agent on equal footing with the students” (p. 8) for
the expressed intent of allowing students the autonomy to engage in the transformative learning process as needed. Teachers must also realize that they “are responsible for modeling and mentoring toward the idea of entrustment, entrusting [students] with knowledge and information” (Smith, 2013, p. 90).

It is important that teachers focus on developing relationships with each of their students to facilitate the transformative learning process. The effectiveness of modelling and mentorship are dependent upon the quality of the relationships that develop within the classroom environment. Students are more willing to share thoughts, ideas, doubts, and questions when they feel they are equal members in a relationship. The development of relationships also allows for educators to teach the process and language of transformation (Mezirow, 1997) while contributing to the development of an accessible learning community.

Creation of a Safe and Inclusive Learning Community

The importance of the teacher in cultivating a safe and inclusive learning community was noted throughout the literature (Mezirow, 1997; Saines, 2009; Winkelmas, 2004; Fleischer, 2006). Mezirow (1997) identified the importance of the teacher recognizing “both the [student]s’ objectives and long-term goals”, and their need to structure the learning environment and community in such a way as to help students “reach their objectives in such a way that they will function as more autonomous, socially responsible thinkers” (p. 9). The development of safe and inclusive classroom communities is largely dependent upon teachers’ abilities to “learn about what students know by discovering their conceptions and models of learning, and apply[ing the] findings in order to improve [their] teaching” (Saines, 2009, p. 335). Winkelmas (2004) recognized the magnitude of this undertaking for teachers as deciphering each student’s prior conceptions and models of learning can be daunting. The importance of this information,
however, is for the teacher to have a greater understanding of what each student will need to be able to enter into and engage in the transformative learning process. The teacher is then better able to tailor the environment to more efficiently facilitate student change.

To facilitate personal critical reflection and authentic discourse, teachers must create a classroom community that is conducive to sharing and engagement. Fleischer (2006) determined that “educational climates [within the classroom] that are loving and engaging, assisting others in their movements towards authenticity and self-transcendence; honoring other’s questioning; helping [students] explore their stories, experiences, and questions with depth and integrity, and calling forth new questions that can broaden their empathy and evoke ever-expansive vertical shifts of perspectives” (p. 158) are crucial to authentic discourse. Classroom seating arrangements, the use of class sharing procedures, scheduled interview times, or integration of information sharing through technology can all help facilitate students’ willingness and ability to share and engage with others about their transformative learning processes.

**Provision of Varied Learning Experiences**

Plato once said that “nothing that is learned through compulsion stays with the mind” (as cited in Franchi, 2011, p. 307). One of the main roles of the teacher in a transformative learning classroom is the creation and implementation of varied learning experiences and strategies to create opportunities for transformation (Meidema, 2013; Taylor, 2008; Winklemas, 2013). Meidema (2013) stated that “transformative pedagogy is about creating opportunities for students to respond; to speak, to take a stance, positively or negatively, towards knowledge, facts, practices, doctrines, narratives, traditions, and visions” (p. 90). What these opportunities look like will vary between different classrooms depending upon the individual group of students; however, Jarvis (2008) argued that “nearly all good teaching is providing secondary
experiences for learning” (p. 555). The importance of providing a variety of learning experiences is to “offer opportunities [for students] to practice recognizing frames of reference and using their imaginations to redefine problems from a different perspective” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 10). The implementation of varied learning experiences will provide the widest range of possibilities for disorienting dilemmas to occur and for students to be faced with the reassignment of meaning within their frames of reference. Teachers must be intentional about the instructional strategies that they utilize to help students progress throughout the transformative learning process.

**Instructional Strategies within Transformative Learning Theory**

Although teachers cannot teach transformation and expect consistent results, they can set the stage for it to occur (Cranton, 2002; Jarvis, 2008; Taylor, 2008; Winklemas, 2013). Jarvis (2008) noted that experience cannot be taught, but instead can only be offered. The responsibility falls on the student to engage in the experience and learn from it; the role of the teacher in this context is to provide the experience. Cranton (2002) explained that “we cannot teach transformation. We often cannot even identify how or why it happens. But we can teach as though the possibility exists that a student will have a transformative experience” (p. 67). She also argued that “no particular teaching method guarantees transformative learning… [but that] an environment of challenge underlies teaching for transformation” (p. 65). Developing an environment of challenge is dependent upon teachers becoming adept at incorporating a number of instruction strategies that allow for challenge.

There are many different instructional strategies that can be used within a transformative learning classroom. The importance of students being able to actively engage with new knowledge and experiences being presented in the context of their own lives cannot be
overemphasized. Glennon (2008) described the importance of student-centered learning through strategies such as learning contracts/covenants, group projects, inquiry projects, role play, case studies, and simulations as crucial to transformational learning. Cranton (2002) believed that best practice for transformational learning included incorporating the process of creating an activating event, articulating assumptions, critical self-reflection, openness to alternatives, engaging in discourse, the revision of assumptions and perspectives, and then the acting on revisions and experiential learning. Taylor (2008) noted that the use of reflective journaling, classroom dialogue, and critical questioning assisted students in developing the skills needed for critical reflection. Although there are many instructional strategies that can be implemented to encourage transformation within the student, it will be beneficial for teachers to remember that the transformation process occurs at a different pace for each learner and that the consistent evaluation of the usefulness of a certain instructional strategy is important to reassess throughout the learning process.

One important note in the discussion of instructional strategies leading to transformative learning is the centrality of critical reflection and authentic collective discourse to the transformative process. Teachers cannot just assume that these activities will happen unless they are scheduled into the regular classroom schedule, even in the midst of tight schedules and full curriculum loads. Students must also be given opportunities to act on their new frames of reference because action is indicative of perspective transformation (Fleisher, 2006; Taylor, 2008; Winklemas, 2013). Taylor (2008) noted the importance of the planned opportunities to act because “without experiences to test and explore new perspectives, it is unlikely [that students] will fully transform” (p. 11).
The Role of the Student in Transformative Learning Theory

Although not as heavily emphasized in the transformative learning theory literature as the role of the teacher, the role of the student is also very important (Cranton, 2002; Fleischner, 2006; Mezirow, 1997). The transformative learning process is only as effective as each individual student wants it to be. Each student must engage with the process as transformation cannot be forced nor coerced. Students must be willing to wrestle with new knowledge, beliefs, and experiences and allow for disjuncture to happen. Mezirow (1997) thought that “transformative learning occurs when new information is incorporated by the [student] into an already well-developed symbolic frame of reference, an active process involving thought, feelings, and disposition” (p. 10). Student engagement is critical.

Students need to recognize the importance of understanding their habits of the mind, meaning perspectives, and frames of reference and be willing to continuously reevaluate these, recognizing that the transformative learning process is cyclical and perpetual. For many, it is safer and easier to maintain their previously held habits and frames of reference than to change. Disorienting dilemmas, or disjuncture, which usually occur in the form of personal crises, are often the only things that leads students to question their previously held assumptions and beliefs (Cranton, 2002). The literature supports the belief that the more engaged students are in the transformative learning process, the greater the extent of transformation that will occur (Cranton, 2002; Fleischer, 2006; Mezirow, 1997; Saines, 2009). Getting students to ‘buy in’ to the process might be the hardest aspect of transformative learning, but it is unquestionably the most important.

Students must also be willing to communicate and engage within the learning community that the teacher develops. The importance of critical reflection and authentic discourse within
the learning community is well documented (Bauman et al, 2014; Cranton, 2002; Conde-Frazier, 2007; Dirks & Mezirow, 2006; Fleischer, 2006; Foster, 2003; Jarvis, 2011; Littleton, 2008; Mezirow, 1997; Nohl, 2014). If students are given opportunities to discuss their experiences of disorienting dilemmas, to share their personal narratives and understanding, and to voice their meaning perceptions, yet choose not to reflect critically about their personal experiences or enter into the community discourse, transformation will be unlikely. Students must be willing to be authentic in their interactions with other students and with the teacher for sincere transformation to occur (Fleischer, 2006).

**Transformative Learning Theory in Christian Religious Education**

Although much of the literature regarding transformative learning theory is derived from adult education studies, transformative learning theory has gained traction within Christian religious education circles in contrast to other religions. Many religions seek transformation in accordance with their varied ideals and beliefs; however, exploring other religions and their experiences with transformative learning theory lies outside the scope of this literature study. Consequently, only Christian religious education and transformative learning theory will be explored.

The connection between transformative learning theory and Christianity is based on the underlying tenant of Christian worldviews that “all aspects of faith and learning begin with God [Jesus], and consequently, Christian beliefs should form the structure, the context, and the perspective in which we engage our areas of inquiry” (Esqueda, 2014, p. 98). Christians are charged by Paul in Romans 12:2 to “be transformed by the renewing of [their] minds” (NIV), encouraging Christians to develop a “comprehensive worldview that addresses… questions” (Esqueda, 2014, p. 93). Throughout the literature on both transformative learning theory and
many researchers presented Jesus himself as a transformative learning theorist who was bent upon challenging his listeners’ long-held personal and cultural meaning perspectives (Bauman et al, 2014; Fleischer, 2006; Foster, 2003). Fleischer (2006) noted that “Jesus’ life continually provoked ‘distorting dilemmas’ for his audience. He was a provocateur who created a host of trigger events that led to his listeners’ reevaluation of their current meaning schemes and perspectives; his call was a constant invitation to conversion…[and] transformation” (p. 154). Within Christian education, the goal of educating should include the ongoing engagement with students on what is believed to be known and what is still unknown. Looking to Jesus as a model of transformative learning, teachers and students must continually engage with each other to grapple with the diverse and complex concepts and ideas prevalent in Scripture (Foster, 2003; Franchi, 2011; Littleton, 2008) and the resulting impact on students’ worldview development.

Romans 12:1-2 states that Christians are to “not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind…that you may discern the will of God, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (NIV). Discipleship is, in and of itself, the process of radical transformation. It is the process of lifelong transformation from sinful self into a character that reflects the image of God. This transformation is often evident in people’s change in focus- from self-interest to prioritizing relationships with God and others and the resulting sacrificial giving that will accompany this change in priorities. Discipleship is also an “intentional relationship in which we walk alongside other disciples in order to encourage, equip and challenge one another in love to grow toward maturity in Christ. This includes equipping the disciple to teach others as well” (Ogden, 2009, p. 17).
Although many grow up in the Christian faith and are unable to think of a time when faith was not a part of their lives, some experience a moment of conversion from previous held worldviews and ideas to a Christian worldview. Lonergan (as cited in Fleischer, 2006) speaks “of conversion as fundamental to religious living” and describes conversion as “evoking a ‘radical transformation’ that shifts perceptions, values, and relationships (p. 155). Teaching for transformation within Christian religious education must include an implicit explanation of the process of discipleship and the discussion of how and why belief in Jesus Christ leads to transformation of the whole person—body, mind, and soul.

In many ways, the pairing of Christian religious education and transformative learning theory is ideal. One of the main goals of religious education is to provide students with opportunities for spiritual formation so that students’ lives will be transformed (Foster, 2003; Littleton, 2008). Secondary goals of Christian religious education are the transformation of culture through transformative consciousness “seeking social, political, economic, or religious change” (Foster, 2003, p. 325), and the “integration of faith and learning, both curricular and cocurricular” (Esqueda, 2014, p. 98). Many Christian education teachers seek to provide their students with experiences and opportunities for disjuncture and for their neatly appointed beliefs systems to be challenged so that they understand the practical implications of faith (Jarvis, 2008; Smith & Scales, 2013). To accomplish this, Christian teachers must “teach for transformed relationships with [God], the earth, each other, and the mystery behind and beyond creation” (Foster, 2003, p. 327). Teaching for religious transformation is often a problematic and precarious undertaking.

Consequently, teachers often find providing authentic and engaging experiences for students to personally respond to particularly difficult. Jarvis (2008) recognized that “religious
experience is fundamental to our understanding of religion” and that teachers “cannot teach anybody religious experience- [students] have to experience that for themselves and learn from it” (p. 563). Christian education teachers can only provide the experiences and then walk beside the students as they interpret meaning from their experiences based on their frames of reference. Within Christian religious studies, students are also able to draw from long established religious frames of reference. Christian education teachers must provide opportunities for students to learn about and question the established interpretations of Christianity—including, but not limited to, our “theology, religious history, philosophy, and morality” (Jarvis, 2008, p. 564).

The theological tension within the Christian faith community is a critical component adding to the disorienting dilemmas that students may experience. Conde-Frazier (2007) pointed out that “theology is a reflection of our worldview and thus shapes our beliefs and expressions of faith” (p. 111). Christian education teachers must be cognizant of this tension between students’ theological frames of reference and work to model understanding of students’ varied worldviews and theological stances while encouraging authentic discourse. This tension can become the catalyst that, although it “cannot be easily resolved [and] is perhaps better if it is openly recognized” (Jarvis, 2008, p. 565), could lead to disorienting dilemmas and student transformation.

In teaching for religious transformation, teachers must also realize that they are providing secondary religious experiences which might not feel authentic or as impactful as organic religious experiences. Jarvis (2008) states that “in teaching religion, we [must acknowledge] a tension between the methods of academic study, religious experience, and faith interpretation and [that] this tension cannot be easily resolved and needs to be identified” (p. 565). Being transparent about the limits of religious transformation that can occur within the walls of a
classroom is important both for the teacher and the students to know and understand. That being said, transformation is possible anytime and anywhere.

**Conclusion**

Transformative learning theory, although initially focused on adult education, shows promise in changing how Christian education teachers teach high school students. Both teachers and students must comprehend the importance of understanding personal frames of reference and how students decipher meaning from their experiences. As these understandings are emphasized more within classrooms, students will have greater opportunities to be actively engaged in their own learning. As more and more teachers realize the importance of disorienting dilemmas, critical reflection, authentic discourse, and perspective transformation, the number of students who experience personal spiritual transformation within Christian education classes will hopefully increase. Transformative learning theory, when coupled with Christian religious education, will continue to be modified and altered, hopefully with the end goal of helping Christian education students become transformed individuals.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purposes of this case study are to (a) relate the effects of the case study school’s Christian education program to alumni’s transformational learning experiences and to (b) explore how alumni’s experiences in the Christian education program have influenced their Christian worldview development. As explained in Chapter 2, the literature suggests that student perspective transformation only occurs when students experience disorienting dilemmas, or disjuncture, followed by opportunities for critical reflection and authentic discourse regarding new ideas and concepts within authentic community, leading to perspective transformation. Although the administration and staff at the case study school thought that the transformation of students’ frames of reference and beliefs was a regular part of the Christian education program, they recognized that the number of alumni who were observed living lives not reflecting belief in the Apostles Creed belied this idea. The focus of this study was to address this growing concern that the Christian education program was not as effective as previously thought or currently desired.

This chapter will outline the study’s research philosophy, the research design, the research questions, participant selection, instrumentation, variables, data analysis, and study limitations.

Research Philosophy

The spiritual and social aspects of transformational learning and worldview development this study draws upon are best understood through an interpretivist, or constructivist, research philosophy. Each student’s experience within the Christian education program is experiential and, as such, is subjective. Wahyuni (2012) recognized that “reality is constructed by social actors and people’s perceptions of it”, also noting that “individuals with their own varied
backgrounds, assumptions, and experiences contribute to the on-going construction of reality” (p. 71). Recognizing that each individual’s experiences are best shared through dialogue which allows for “rich descriptions of social constructs” (Wahyuni, 2012, p. 71), a constructivist approach was adopted which focuses on the details of an individual’s experience, “the reality behind [those] details, [and the] subjective meanings and motivating actions” (p. 70) that underlie all social interactions. Based on the understanding from the literature that transformative learning only occurs through critical reflection and authentic discourse within a community of belonging, it is crucial to note the importance of social interactions in determining alumni’s transformational learning experiences.

Recognizing that “objectivist and subjectivist perspectives are not mutually exclusive”, although this study is fundamentally constructivist, it also incorporates elements of a pragmatist philosophy of research which views research as a “continuum,” with the focus on using the tools best suited to find information (Wahyuni, 2012, p. 71). A purely positivist or post positivist philosophy is not being used in this study as it would be impossible to fully understand the nuances of individual alumnus’ transformational learning experiences in the Christian education program only from empirical data without the benefit of their stories.

**Research Design**

For this study, the researcher will utilize a parallel methods research design. Creswell (2014) recognized parallel methods research as “an approach to inquiry involving collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, integrating the two forms of data, and using distinct designs that may involve philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks”. He also noted that using “a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches provides a more complete understanding of a research problem than either approach alone” (p. 32).
Creswell (2003) argued that choosing a research design is “less [about] quantitative verses qualitative and more how research practices lie somewhere on a continuum between the two” (p. 4). Although quantitative research methods contribute valuable information to transformative learning theory studies, the numerical data without the context of the people’s lives that these numbers represent leave the researcher with a limited understanding of the complex realities that form people’s perceptions. Relying predominantly on qualitative data, however, denies the researcher the ability to assess the breadth of data available that can provide crucial information needed to draw conclusions regarding the research questions. Graff (2013) argued that parallel research “offers a practical approach to addressing research problems and questions and the potential for increased applicability because these problems and questions are examined in different ways” (p. 48). A parallel research design is best suited to answer this study’s research questions, to reach triangulation when searching for recurring themes, and to “examine the overlapping and different facets of a phenomenon in order to obtain a more meaningful understanding of the phenomenon” (Graff, 2013, p. 47). Using a parallel research design allows for the gathering of quantitative information regarding the largest number of alumni’s experiences while the qualitative narrative data recognizes the importance of people’s stories as adding valuable data.

The researcher will specifically utilize a parallel research design with two phases of data collection for this case study. In a parallel research study, “a researcher collects both quantitative and qualitative data, analyzes them separately, and then compares the results to see if the findings confirm or disconfirm each other” (Creswell, 2014, p. 269). The two phases will occur with a slight time lapse from each other, with the quantitative survey commencing before the qualitative semi-structured interviews are scheduled to begin. Two different research
instruments will be used to explore the research questions, allowing the researcher to “draw conclusions or make inferences based on the data from each phase” so that the researcher is able to “integrate [her] conclusions from the quantitative and qualitative phases to make meta-inferences” (Graff, 2013, p. 51). This type of research design is best suited to explore the specific research questions that this researcher seeks to answer. A parallel research design also allows for the researcher to identify emergent themes and to determine codes to index these themes.

![Figure 1. Parallel Research Design. Adapted from J. Creswell, 2014, Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches, p. 270.](image)

Although a parallel research design is the best choice for this research study, there are challenges that a parallel research approach must overcome. These challenges include “the need for extensive data collection, the time-intensive nature of analyzing both qualitative and quantitative data, and the requirement for the researcher to be familiar with both quantitative and qualitative forms of research” (Creswell, 2014, p. 267). To best mitigate the challenges that may arise, the researcher will use a side-by-side approach by first considering the quantitative statistical results and then considering the qualitative data and how the two data sets inform each other.
Research Questions

This case study looks to answer the following main research question: To what extent have transformational learning experiences within the Christian education program influenced alumni’s Christian worldview development?

Sub-questions that will be investigated include:

1) What Christian education learning activities contributed to alumni’s transformational learning experiences?

2) What Christian education learning activities contributed to alumni’s worldview development?

3) How do alumni perceive their interactions with religious thought and worldview development subsequent to their graduation?

Participants

Target Population

The target population for this study was alumni who have graduated from the case study high school. The school’s first high school graduates convocated in 2003 and 362 students have graduated since. All participants in the study ranged in age from 18-35 and represented both male and female students from various ethnic backgrounds.

Sample Selection

The study participants volunteered to participate in an electronic quantitative survey about their experiences in the Christian education program at the school. Participants were contacted through the school’s development office through alumni email and mailing lists, social media, the school website, and other means of advertising. Participants were also informed of the study through word-of-mouth interactions of staff and parents associated with
the case study school. Participants volunteered to be a part of phase two of the study— the semi-structured interviews— by including their contact information at the end of the online survey or by contacting the school’s Director of Development. Thirteen participants volunteered to be interviewed.

This study will not provide a comprehensive assessment of the connection between the Christian education program’s transformative learning activities and all alumni’s faith retention; however, it will lead to increased understanding for the school’s administration and teaching staff on how best to structure their Christian education program, and specifically their Bible education courses, to better provide opportunities for transformational learning to occur.

**Research Instruments**

Both quantitative and qualitative research instruments were used for data collection. Participants were asked to first complete a quantitative electronic survey. Those participants who desired to were then able to participate in a qualitative semi-structured interview. The advantages of using a quantitative electronic survey were the ease of distribution, the quick turnaround in data collection, and the ability to reach a large population of alumni regardless of their physical whereabouts. The advantages of using a qualitative semi-structured interview were the participants’ abilities to provide personal explanations and information, the increased depth of the answers given, and the opportunity for the researcher to have control over the follow-up questions that were asked.

**Quantitative Data Collection**

**Transformative Learning Survey.** (See Appendix A). A survey “provides a numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population” (Creswell, 2014, p. 201). The data collection survey used in this study was an
anonymous, confidential, self-administered questionnaire that consisted of thirty-nine closed-end and open-end questions, including six filter questions at the end of the survey. It was designed to take approximately twenty to thirty minutes to complete. The survey was cross-sectional with the data being collected only once. The structured, or close-end questions, included Likert-scale responses regarding participants’ experiences at the school in relation to their feelings of belonging, relationships, faith experiences, and current faith behaviours. The unstructured, or open-end, questions explored participants’ transformational learning experiences while at the school. Participants were given opportunities to provide alternate answers to those supplied and to include further explanation for answers given. The wording of the questions reflected theories and concepts identified in the current literature regarding transformative learning theory and worldview development as described in Chapter 2.

Various studies and books inspired the questions on the data collection survey. Questions were adapted from Hemorrhaging Faith (Penner et al., 2011), the Learning Activities Survey (King, 2009), and A Rising Tide Lifts All Boats: Measuring Non-Government School Effects in Service of the Canadian Public Good (Cardus Education Survey, 2012). Both the Penner study and the Cardus survey looked to explore the connection between students’ life experiences and faith retention while King worked predominantly in the adult education field, seeking to use the Learning Activities Survey to help better develop school curriculum and experiences to support students’ transformational learning. The factors included in the survey follow:

Table 1- Factors Included in Survey Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Factor Descriptors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>With staff, classmates, family, peer group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Transformation</td>
<td>Number of changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Breadth of changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Type of changes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Community
Belonging, identity and identification
Classroom/School culture
Classroom/School environment

Spirituality
Relationship with God
Spiritual Disciplines

Personal Reflection
Self awareness
Perception

The electronic survey was developed using Survey Monkey and the link was made available to school alumni through social media, the school website, and posters hung around the school. Participants were given preliminary information about the purpose of the survey, the researcher, and contact information for both the researcher and her university faculty advisor. Participants then indicated that they were willing to participate in the survey by checking yes, thereby giving informed consent. The survey was made available online for six weeks. Reminder Facebook posts were sent out periodically before the survey closed. The information recorded through the surveys was coded to maintain the participants’ confidentiality.

**Validity.** Validity refers to “how well the measure actually represents the true construct of interest- the thing [the researcher is] trying to measure (Remler and Van Ryzin, 2015, p. 106). The questions were constructed based upon the literature to increase their validity. Question format was also chosen to allow participants the best opportunity to give valid answers. The survey questions were reviewed for validity by several scholars in the field of education, with input from Dr. Karen Rempel, Dr. Tim Skuce, and Dr. Alexa Okrainec. All effort was made to ensure that the Transformative Learning Survey was a valid measure, but it is important to recognize that “few measures capture all dimensions of a complex construct” (Remler and Van Ryzin, p. 109) such as participants’ transformational learning experiences and worldview development.
Reliability. Remler and Van Ryzin (2015) define reliability as “the consistency of a measure” and note that “it is directly related to the concept of random error or noise” (p. 118). As this is a cross-sectional study, this instrument is deemed reliable in that it measures the opinions and perceptions of the participants at a specific point in time. Transformational learning experiences and worldview development are individualistic, and as such, the data cannot be applied directly to other individuals. The themes derived from the data, however, can be used to present underlying and ongoing trends within the Christian education program and students’ experiences within it.

Qualitative Data Collection

Semi-structured interview. The purpose of the qualitative phase of the study was to gain further understanding of participants’ transformational learning and worldview development experiences within the Christian education program at the case study school. With the desire to encourage participants to expound upon their answers given in the quantitative survey, a semi-structured interview guide was developed with questions based upon the review of the literature. The interviews allowed for the expounding upon or further explanation of the themes that emerged from the quantitative data. Participants were informed of the purpose and intent of the study, as well as their rights as participants, and then gave consent to be interviewed and for the interviews to be audio-recorded. Questions were designed to help participants identify transformational learning experiences they had while participating in the Christian education program, whether any particular individuals or learning activities contributed to their transformational experiences, and their current perspective and practice of their tenets of faith. Participants were also encouraged to offer ideas or opinions on how the Christian education program could better facilitate transformational learning experiences for future students.
The semi-structured interview was comprised of six open-end questions, some of which were adapted from Hemorrhaging Faith (Penner et al., 2011) and the Learning Activities Follow Up Interviews (King, 2009). Probing questions were utilized to encourage participants to share more detailed answers or to provide additional information for clarification of the participants’ answers. Factors included in the semi-structured interview follow:

*Table 2- Factors Included in Interview Questions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Factor Descriptors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Degree of Transformation</td>
<td>Breadth of changes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Types of changes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Change factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Belonging, identity and identification</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classroom/School culture</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Classroom/School environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality</td>
<td>Relationship with God</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Spiritual Disciplines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Activities</td>
<td>Bible Education Program assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bible Education Program classroom activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interview questions were prepared prior to the commencement of the interviews. Primary questions and clarification questions were asked of each participant. The open-ended questions included in the interview follow:

- Thinking back over your high school education, did you experience a time when you realized that your values, beliefs, or expectations had been challenged or changed?
- Briefly describe that experience and what might have triggered it.
- What could have been done differently in the Bible classes, or in other Bible related areas, that would have helped facilitate change? What specific activities?
- Do you believe that the teaching you received in Bible education helped you grow in your faith since graduation? Why or why not?

- Recalling your time in Bible education classes, do you believe you were given sufficient time to engage in:
  - Critical reflection?
  - Respectful discourse between students and staff?
  - Authentic community?

- Describe your present religious affiliation and church activity now. (Appendix B)

The interview was designed to take between thirty to sixty minutes to complete. The interviews were conducted by the researcher. Choosing to only interview a limited number of participants was motivated by numerous factors. The first factor is that of saturation. Remler and Van Ryzin (2015) believed saturation occurs when “few new questions or issues arise that have not already been discovered” (p. 78). Saturation can also be defined as “the point in the research where collecting additional data seems counterproductive: the ‘new’ that is uncovered does not add that much more to the explanation at this time. Or, as is sometimes the situation, the researcher runs out of time, money, or both” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 136). Due to the time constraints of this study and to restrictions of both the researcher’s and participants’ schedules, only thirteen participants were able to be interviewed.

The qualitative phase of the research study focused on interviews with a subgroup of the original sample. Participants were initially contacted through their contact information that they provided at the end of the quantitative online survey or through the school’s development office. Participants were given the option of interview location that best suited them. Interviews were conducted at local coffee shops and restaurants, in private homes, and over the phone.
Participants were informed of the parameters of the study and advised as to how the data collected would be stored and disseminated. Participants were also given the opportunity to choose a pseudonym and were informed of their ability to choose to not answer a question. Permission to have an audio recording made of the interview was granted by each participant prior to the commencement of the interview. Field notes were also written during the interview to document the flow of the conversation and the researcher’s impressions and observations. The interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed for pertinent themes and information (Creswell, 2014). All interview transcripts were kept confidential and any comments participants asked not to be included in the transcript were not noted.

Data collected through the interview process including field notes, audio recordings, and transcripts are kept in a secure location. Electronic data is secured in a password protected file on a password protected computer.

**Reliability.** Gibbs contended that qualitative reliability “indicated that the researcher’s approach [was] consistent across different researchers and different projects” (cited in Creswell, 2014, p. 251). Conducting interviews is a well-used research measure within qualitative, and by extension, parallel research design. To ensure the reliability of the researcher’s approach, the same interview script was used for each interview and the transcripts were checked for any transcriber error (Creswell, 2014; Remler & Van Ryzin, 2015).

**Validity.** The semi-structured interview questions were reviewed for validity by Dr. Karen Rempel, Dr. Tim Skuce, and Dr. Alexa Okrainec. Modifications were made to the questions based upon feedback from the committee.

Creswell and Miller noted that “validity is one of the strengths of qualitative research and is based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher,
the participant, or the readers of an account” (cited in Creswell, 2014, p. 251). The qualitative data collected during the interviews was validated through the use of several validity strategies. Triangulation occurred when “themes [were] established based on converging several sources of data or perspectives from participants” (Creswell, 2014, p. 251).

**Coding of Qualitative Data.** After the semi-structured interviews were completed, the audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed into textual data. This textual data was combined with the textual data from the open-ended questions from the electronic quantitative survey. The researcher used a method of cutting and pasting various participants’ recollections of experiences together which were similar. Once similar experiences were grouped together, the researcher identified the emergent themes that were present.

**Limitations of Research Design**

The means of recruiting study participants lends itself to a bias concern. By including only those participants who are able to be contacted by the school development office, who have access to the school’s social media, or who are still in contact with school staff, a cross-section of school alumni may be unintentionally excluded from the study. Those alumni who have stayed in contact with the school may be more inclined to continue participation in a Christian lifestyle which may skew the data to those who did experience transformational learning experiences that reflect a traditional Christian worldview.

In this research design, participants were asked to evaluate their own transformational learning experiences. Self-evaluation is subjective by nature and may result in responses that are biased, even unintentionally. Providing only a limited number of participants with the opportunity to expound upon their survey answers may also lead to an incomplete understanding of the connections between the school’s Christian education program, transformative learning
experiences, and Christian worldview development. A larger pool of interview participants could have provided a deeper understanding of the participants’ varied experiences.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The goals of this study are to (a) relate the effects of a school’s Christian education program on the transformative learning experiences of the school’s alumni and (b) explore how experiences in the Christian education program have influenced the Christian worldview development of the respondents. Two data collection processes were used: anonymous electronic surveys and semi-structured interviews. Respondents for both the surveys and the interviews were all graduates of the Christian school that was selected for this case study. This chapter presents the findings from the anonymous surveys and the semi-structured interviews. The first section of this chapter presents a descriptive analysis of the survey data. The second section presents the qualitative data analysis of the semi-structured interviews.

Descriptive Analysis of Surveys

The survey used in this study was an anonymous electronic questionnaire distributed through the researcher’s Survey Monkey™ password protected link. The survey included thirty-nine close-ended and open-ended questions, ending with six filter questions. Close-ended questions were based on a four point Likert-scale. In the following descriptive analysis and findings, participants’ answers of Strongly Disagree and Disagree have been grouped together; and, Strongly Agree and Agree have been grouped. Text from the open-ended survey questions were consolidated with the qualitative data.

The findings from the electronic survey have been organized into four categories.

1. A profile of the participants.
2. Participants’ educational experiences.
3. Significant influences for participants’ transformative learning experiences.
4. Spiritually important activities.
Profile of the Participants

The participants of the survey were all adults who had graduated in the past thirteen years. Males comprised 30% of the respondents while 70% were female. Of the respondents, 19% were males between the ages of 18 to 24 and 11% were males in the 25-35 age bracket. Females aged 18-24 made up 43% of the respondents and 27% identified themselves as females between the ages of 25-35. A significant portion of the respondents identified themselves as being either single (47%) or married (43%) while 8% indicated they have a serious partner. The remaining 2% of the respondents were engaged.

Of the respondents, the majority’s (65%) highest level of education completed was a high school diploma. Of those respondents who have finished post-secondary schooling, 8% have received an Associate certificate or diploma from a Bible or community college, 16% have completed a Bachelor’s degree, while 5% have attained a Master’s degree. A few respondents (6%) indicated that they had received journeyman certification in cosmetology or training as a Teaching English as a Second Language teacher. Figure 2 presents a summary of respondents’ time as Christian education students.

![Graph showing the number of years respondents attended Christian School](image)

**Figure 2.** Number of Years Respondents Attended Christian School
Educational Experiences

There were several questions that asked respondents about their educational experiences at the case study school. These questions focused on the respondents’ attitudes towards the school, their Christian education experiences, adolescent faith experiences, and their current faith identity and current faith experiences. These questions provided further information on how the respondents perceived their time at the school, and specifically within the Bible education courses.

Attitude Towards School. Figure 3 presents a summary of the respondents’ responses for five questions that focused on attitude towards school. Almost 90% of the respondents agreed that the school in this case study was a close knit community. The majority of respondents (86%) believed that their high school teachers really cared about students and 81% agreed that they felt accepted as part of the school community. Nearly 25% of the survey respondents indicated that they were not proud to have graduated from the case study school. In regards to whether school staff handled matters of spiritual and religious matters well, 61% of respondents believed that school staff handled matters of spiritual and religious matter well while 36% disagreed. Of the respondents, 3% declined to answer this question.

Figure 3. Respondents’ attitudes towards school.
**Bible education course experiences.** Figure 4 summarizes the respondents’ answers to seven questions that focused on the respondents’ experiences in the Bible education courses at the school. A small number of the survey respondents responded to the questions regarding their experiences in the Bible education courses. The researcher cannot determine whether this is significant of not. Of the number of respondents who did respond, 69% remembered learning a lot in their Bible education courses at the case study school while 31% did not believe that their Bible education courses constituted a significant learning experience. When asked to determine whether the instruction they received at the school was informative and useful after high school, 56% agreed while 42% believed that their Bible education was not informative or useful after high school. Of the respondents, 69% felt that their time at the school was influential in determining their spiritual beliefs while 53% believed that their time at the case study school was instrumental in helping solidify their spiritual beliefs.

Of the respondents, 72% recalled being presented with opportunities for critical reflection during Bible education courses. When asked whether there were sufficient opportunities to engage in authentic discourse, 44% disagreed while 56% believed that there were opportunities for authentic discourse provided. In spite of many respondents’ beliefs that they were given opportunities for authentic discourse, 50% did not feel safe voicing differing opinions on spiritual matters while at the case study school. Half of respondents (50%), when considering whether the school prepared them for a vibrant religious or spiritual life, disagreed while an almost equal percentage agreed (47%).
Adolescent faith experiences. Figure 5 presents respondents’ responses for five questions referring to their adolescent faith experiences. Almost all (92%) of the survey respondents noted that religious faith played an important role in shaping how they lived as adolescents. Only 8% believed that religious faith was not a factor in shaping their adolescent lives. Of the respondents, 89% agreed that their families often talked about God, the Bible, and other religious or spiritual things when they were adolescents while 11% of respondents disagreed. When asked about their faith experiences while enrolled at the case study school, 57% agreed that they had a turning point where they became more committed to religious tradition, faith, or God, while 43% disagreed, stating that they did not become more committed to religious tradition, faith, or God throughout their time at the school. Of the respondents, 69% had turning points where they became less committed to religious tradition, faith, or God during their time at the school. Only 28% disagreed that they did not become less committed while 3% declined to answer the question. Considering their religious beliefs from high school, 61%
considered their current religious beliefs to be similar while 39% admit that their religious beliefs have changed.

Figure 5. Adolescent faith experiences of respondents.

Faith identity. Figure 6 provides a summary of six questions focusing on respondents’ current faith identity. When asked about their current faith or religious identity, only 19% of respondents identify as non-religious while the majority of 81% self-identify as religious. When asked whether religion plays an important part in their day-to-day lives, 78% agreed while 22% disagreed. Religious faith is considered important in shaping how they live as adults by 78% of respondents while 22% believe that religious faith is not important in shaping their adult lives. When considering whether their spirituality gives them a sense of fulfillment, 78% agree that it does, 11% disagree, and 11% declined to answer the question.

When asked to consider the one of the central tenants of the Christian faith, 83% agreed that there is no other way to salvation but through belief in Jesus Christ while 14% disagreed and 3% declined to answer. 25% of the respondents admitted to having doubts as to whether their religious beliefs are true while 69% disagreed, and 6% did not answer.
Current faith practices. Figure 7 presents a summary of six questions that focused on respondents’ current faith practices. Of the respondents, 77% agree that they actively try to strengthen their relationship with God while 20% disagree. When asked whether they experience a deep communion with God, 61% of respondents believe that they do with 36% believing that they do not experience a deep communion with God. When asked to consider their common habits, 64% confirmed that they participate regularly in spiritual disciplines such as Bible reading and praying while 36% did not consistently participate. Of the respondents, 69% agreed that they normally attend church services with 42% indicating that they attend a small group dedicated to spiritual support, discipleship, or prayer. When asked the same question, 28% of respondents affirmed that they do not regularly attend church services and 56% reported not attending a regular small discipleship group. Considering the relevance of God or the Bible in determining right and wrong behaviours, 75% claim to rely on God or the Bible for
moral decision making while 22% disclosed that they do not rely on God or the Bible for morals. 3% declined to answer.

**Figure 7.** Current faith practices of respondents.

**Significant Influences for Transformative Learning Experiences**

Question 9 on the electronic survey asked respondents to consider a time when they realized that their spiritual values, opinions, or expectations had changed and to identify what they believe the instigators of this transformative change were. Twenty-six options were provided for respondents to choose from. Respondents were also given the option to note other influences that were not listed and were given a space to write a further explanation. Respondents were encouraged to indicate all factors that they believed influenced their transformative change.

**The Influence of Teachers.** Figure 8 presents a summary of those options pertaining to the influence of teachers as indicated by the respondents as contributing to their transformative learning experiences. When asked who was the most significant person who contributed to their
personal transformative change, 41% of respondents believe that the most significant person was a teacher. Specifically, 14% noted that a homeroom teacher’s support was instrumental in their transformative change. Other students or classmates were seen as providing important support as respondents made transformative changes at 18% and 25% respectively. Support from staff members outside of teachers was noted by 18% as being influential while 18% regarded challenges issued by a teacher as the catalyst for their transformative changes.

![Response Count]

**Figure 8.** Human influences of respondents’ spiritual development

**The Influence of Academic Experiences.** Figure 9 presents a summary of those options pertaining to the influence of academic experiences as indicated by the respondents as contributing to their transformative learning experiences. For some respondents, academic assignments or activities contributed to their transformative change. Class discussions were noted by 18% as being influential, followed closely by opportunities for personal reflection by 14%. Christian service, classroom activities and exercises, mentorship, and personal journals were each noted as playing a role in their transformative change by 9% of the respondents. Writing assignments, including essays and the Creed, a lengthy essay expounding on personal spiritual beliefs and Christian doctrine, were noted as being influential by 5% of respondents.
Other Influences. Figure 10 presents a summary of other options as indicated by the respondents as contributing to their transformative learning experiences. Many other influences were noted as being important to respondents’ transformative change. Dealing with the death of a loved one was seen by 27% as influencing change. Respondents also observed that a loss of relationship (18%) or a move (18%) significantly contributed to transformative change. Divorce or separation of parents was regarded by 14% of respondents as being an important catalyst for change while 9% mentioned the sickness of a loved one and 5% the introduction of a new church or pastor. Other responses that were given included “experiencing the real world” (3%), “teachers’ lack of support” (3%), and personal issues (3%).
Spiritually Important Activities

Respondents were asked the question, “What of the following was a valuable part of your experience at the case study school, specifically in Bible education courses, in developing your spiritual beliefs?” Some of the options included activities that occurred in the classroom while others focused on extra-curricular activities that students could choose to participate in. Respondents were encouraged to check off as many options as were applicable.

Individual Activities. Figure 11 presents a summary of those options pertaining to individual activities as indicated by the respondents as contributing to their transformative learning experiences. Of those activities listed in the survey, many were activities meant to be undertaken or completed by individuals. Personal reflection was noted as being important in developing their spiritual beliefs by 42% of respondents and 28% contended that writing personal journals was noteworthy. The Creed was identified by 36% as being significant to their spiritual belief development. Christian service, or volunteering in the local community, was meaningful for 36% of respondents while reading assigned Bible passages was influential for 19%. Memory verses, as well as the chance to write about personal concerns or questions, were both recognized by 11% of the respondents as having made an impact on their personal belief development.

Figure 11. Individual activities that contributed to respondents’ spiritual development.
Community Activities. Many of the activities listed focus on group interaction. Figure 12 presents a summary of those options pertaining to community activities as indicated by the respondents as contributing to their transformative learning experiences. Of the options given, class discussion was chosen the most often as having had a significant role in developing the spiritual beliefs of 67% of the respondents. Weekly participation in chapels was effective for 39% and time spent in homeroom class or small group devotionals was important to 19% of respondents. Mentorship with school staff or outside adults was meaningful for 17% of respondents while 17% enjoyed class projects and 11% believed classroom activities or exercises contributed to their overall spiritual development. Of the listed community activities, only 9% believed that book studies were critical to their spiritual development.

![Bar chart](image.png)

Figure 12. Community activities that contributed to respondents’ spiritual development.

Event Based Activities. Figure 13 presents a summary of all options, including event-based activities, indicated by the respondents as contributing to their transformative learning experiences. Annual school trips, including the missions trip to Guatemala and the annual spiritual leadership retreat to a local Bible camp were seen as important by 53% and 44% respectively.
Other influences. Respondents were given the opportunity to note other influences of their transformative learning experiences and were offered space on the survey to write a further explanation. Of those respondents who named other influences, specific teachers were noted as having significant influence on the respondents’ spiritual development. Athletics was also offered as another factor in respondents’ spiritual development.

Figure 13. Activities that contributed to respondents’ spiritual development.
Findings from the Semi-Structured Interviews and Open-Ended Survey Questions

Thirteen respondents also participated in semi-structured interviews with the researcher to provide qualitative data through which to provide a more complete understanding of the research problem. The compilation of the qualitative data from the interviews and the quantitative data from the electronic surveys allows for triangulation when considering the themes derived from the data and the opportunity to obtain a more meaningful understanding of the participants’ experiences.

Audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed into textual data. This textual data was combined with the textual data (open-ended questions) from the anonymous survey. The researcher used a cut and paste process to code the data to uncover the following five emergent themes:

a. Triggers of Change and Impact
b. Contributions to the Development of Christian Worldview
c. Adherence to Christian Values
d. Reconciliation
e. Reflection

Each of these themes are described and elaborated upon in the following section.

Triggers of Change and Impact

Triggers of change and impact bring about disorienting dilemmas or the questions that a person has about his or her frames of reference, meaning schemes, or meaning perspectives. Disjuncture occurs when a person recognizes that what he or she have previously known, understood, and experienced is either wrong or partially wrong. For example, some respondents
related that experiencing these disorienting dilemmas resulted in the strengthening of their faith, often leading to transformation.

Katherine explained her disorienting dilemma like this:

*I once was dealing with an issue with my sister and the teachers were loving and caring throughout the ordeal. They encouraged and prayed for me and really helped me push through that tough time. They helped me take another look at the situation. I was no longer mad at God, but was thankful for the situation. This struggle helped me become who I am and I am stronger now in my relationship with God. My relationship with my teachers was one of loving support as I struggled through."

Richard experienced a disorienting dilemma when faced with the tragedy of the World Trade Centers’ terrorist attack. Richard described his experience like this:

*The terrorist attack of the World Trade Centers happened just after I began attending the school. I began to doubt God as I didn’t fully understand suffering and why God allows terrible things to happen to good people.*

Through his relationships with school staff, Richard was able to develop his theology of suffering, leading to a strengthening of his faith.

Daryl came from a very conservative church and family background. He experienced a disorienting dilemma when introduced to alternative theological traditions that were prevalent among other students and staff at the case study school. He remembered his experience as such:

*I grew up in an All Saint's church, so it was very conservative and close minded. I remember being taught that All Saints churches were the only places where God was. I later came to the school and I realized that that wasn’t the case. There were a lot of other Christians out there from many different*
backgrounds. Getting to know the teachers and other students, to hear their thoughts and ideas, was groundbreaking for me.

Although many of the respondents fondly remembered their experiences with teachers and staff that helped them process and understand their disorienting dilemmas, leading to the strengthening of their faith, others did not have the same experience. Stacey recounted her disorienting dilemma as this:

_The event that challenged my beliefs and values the most in high school was when my friend committed suicide. That experience really shook my belief system and forced me to consider a lot of different ideas such as, ‘How could something like this be in God’s plan? He was such a good person and why didn’t anyone know or realize that something was wrong?’ Some teachers offered support for a little while, but after a while I felt forgotten._

**Contributions to the Development of Christian Worldview**

The case study school provided various programs and activities that staff hoped would teach a Christian worldview through providing students with opportunities for authentic learning experiences. These programs and activities included the Bible Education program, chapel services, athletics, special events, and extra-curricular activities.

Dara remembers her experience in the Bible Education program like this:

_Even though I wasn’t a Christian in high school, I really enjoyed my Bible class because it was discussion based. The discussions were very convicting for me because Mr. Jones was very pointed and direct in his questions, but he also gave people space to breathe out what they were thinking. I was given a lot of time to think through what I was saying._
Jessica characterized her experiences in the Bible Education program as such:

_I was often challenged in Bible class regarding other views and ways of thinking.

_The debates we conducted were the best for this. We craved those discussions as an opportunity to build relationships and as a place to discuss controversial issues that can divide people, but are worth discussing._

Many respondents noted specific assignments within the Bible Education program that had a lasting impact on their Christian worldview development. Stacey recalled writing her Creed with fondness:

_The Creed major assignment was an amazing project because it was important for me to leave school knowing what I believed in and why. I now have many non-Christian friends who want to know what I believe and why. Completing that project allowed me to know why I believe as I do, and I was then able to talk respectfully with others about my beliefs. A lot of my friends will say, “You’re one of the few Christians I can handle being around because you know what you’re talking about”._

Katherine recalled her Bible Education assignments as such:

_Doing the Bible readings and the journal entries caused me to really think about them and dig deep. They really opened my eyes, causing me to read the Bible differently and to better understand how to apply it to my life. Before coming to this school, I didn’t read my Bible regularly. I now have made it my routine, and the readings and journaling have helped me apply the Bible’s teachings to my life._

Chapel services were also noted by many as being beneficial in strengthening their faith.

Jane expressed her feelings about chapel time as follows:
I remember acting like I didn’t like chapels during high school, but I secretly
liked them. I enjoyed the relational aspect of chapel and how it allowed us to be
open, honest, and real.

Andrew remembered a critical chapel experience as follows:

I remember one day in chapel thinking, “God, you are real right now. Everyone
is calling your name and singing to you.” That was the moment for me when I
knew I was in the right place and made the right decision to go from a public
school system to a private Christian school.

Andrew also expressed how the school’s programs and activities helped him in his
Christian worldview development like this:

I feel like being at this school helped me be more convinced of the things I
believed in, and the ethics I already had grounded in me through my family and
church. I was sharpened a bit more through classes, chapel, athletics, and the
arts that I participated in. I learned about having integrity, trying my hardest,
and having good character.

Not all respondents recalled their experiences in the programs or activities that the school
provided for Christian worldview development as positive. One respondent recalled his or her
experience:

I feel like I was brainwashed for most of my life in a place that didn’t allow for
any other opinions, beliefs, or ideas to be explained or taught.

Bethany recounts her experience in the Bible Education program like this:

I don’t think my beliefs, values, or views changed much during high school. Even
in high school, I feel like my beliefs were more made known to me than actually
changed. It wasn’t until Grade 12 that I sat down and had a serious conversation with myself about what I believed.

Candice identified a time in Bible Education class when she desired to read a controversial theology book for the purpose of exposing herself to varied ideas, only to have her choice vetoed without recourse. She described her experience as such:

There are directions and theological issues I would have liked to have pursued early on with the support of my teachers. I wanted to consider the hard theological issues that are relevant and ask questions; I wanted a safe place to ask those questions and to feel safe doubting. I did not feel like I had that opportunity and I definitely feel like it limited my personal ownership of my faith.

Lucy expressed disappointment over her experiences in devotions, saying:

I think the devotional times were lacking and unproductive. It’s a really short amount of time and the same students would dominate the conversation every day. Everyone else just got used to that dynamic and would sit back and not engage.

There was a lot of potential for really good discussion and connection building, but that never happened.

Example of Change. Many of the respondents recalled their experiences in Guatemala during the school’s annual mission trip as pivotal to their Christian worldview development. Their experiences while encountering a vastly different culture often culminated in disorienting dilemmas. Each interview respondent who went on the short term missions trip recalled experiencing personal disorienting dilemmas. Most of these resulted from encountering Guatemalan children who had very few material goods, but had an abundance of faith. The respondents from Canada had an abundance of material
goods, but considered their faith small in contrast to the Guatemalans. This contrast often led respondents to a crisis of faith.

Andrew described his experience in Guatemala as this:

_I had always heard about other people around the world that didn’t have as much as me. My time in Guatemala was a chance to actually see people who did not have as much as I had, but I found they were happy and content with what little they had. I felt like I had so much stuff and yet constantly wanted more. Experiencing their joy in poverty firsthand was when my mindset officially changed._

Lucy characterized her Guatemala experience as opening her eyes to the practice of Christianity outside of North American culture. She explained her experience as follows:

_My time in Guatemala challenged my values and beliefs. A lot of our views of Christianity are from within a North American context but Christianity often is infused with culture. It was good for me to see Christianity through the perspective of a different culture where I could start to identify what is actually core Christian belief and what is culture._

Jessica identified her two experiences in Guatemala as being pivotal in her faith development. She recounted her experiences like this:

_When I first travelled to Guatemala, I was struggling with friends, family, and life in general. I was getting frustrated with God, as it seemed like I was constantly going through struggles. When I got to Guatemala, I wanted to be done with everything, but experiencing the people had a huge impact on me. I had to pay $3000 and travel to another continent for me to grow into the person God wanted_
me to be. On my second trip, I grew in my love for God and in my ability to relate to people.

**Adherence to Christian Values**

Many respondents remembered having difficulty with adhering to the prescribed Christian values believed at the case study school. Some respondents struggled with conforming to those values and mores. Conformity is described as actions that are in accordance with prevailing social standards, attitudes, and practices of a certain group of people. Many of the respondents recounted experiences where they grappled with the questions of “What makes a good person?” and “What makes a good Christian?”

Katherine described her feelings regarding her unwillingness to voice questions like this:

*I did feel like sometimes I couldn’t say something because I didn’t want to be judged. There was always this fear of what everyone else is going to do after I say this, what’s going to happen? I had fear bottled up in my chest and it was really hard to deal with. I felt like if I did say something, it would change the relationships I had with people around me.*

Others also struggled with being able to voice potentially controversial thoughts or ideas. Jake characterized his experience as such:

*I think if I would have come straight out and said, “Nope, I don’t believe in this, I think this is silly,” it would have been awful. I think the judgement cast from students and teachers would have been terrible. Students who were not as religious or who had alternate Christian beliefs never had a chance to fit in. They never really felt accepted and a number of them left before graduation.*
Jake also noted the divisiveness that some school rules caused. He identified the impact these experiences had on a fellow student as follows:

- *It was something as simple as a guy having an earring. How could the school be so presumptuous, discriminatory, and neglectful? There’s nowhere in the Bible where it says you can’t have one earring if you’re a guy. It totally alienated one student at the time and was a constant source of conflict for him. There wasn’t an acceptance and unconditional love shown for students regardless of what they’ve done.*

One respondent explained her experience this way:

- *Only those that could play by the rules and were model citizens or were the school favourites could stay. We were not given agency as students.*

Candice sought to explain the drive for conformity like this:

- *I grew up in a Christian culture where we followed what the leaders in our churches or our teachers said. We were trying so hard to stay away from disunity that we ended up not talking about the things that really mattered. They were often the more controversial topics.*

One respondent did note a personal benefit he experienced as a result of the drive for conformity he experienced. Andrew described his experience:

- *I didn’t find signing the code of conduct as challenging as others. It was weird to think that other people would find it challenging to not drink underage, curse, or have late assignments. These things really matter in the real world. I was also a privilege to be a part of a place where I felt like I wasn’t weird for not having*
premarital sex and where it wasn’t weird for me to not swear and to go to church.

I was encouraged to be a nice kid.

**Guilt and Negativity.** Many of the interview respondents’ experiences with conformity led to feelings of guilt and negativity towards faith. Some respondents noted experiencing shame as a result of their lack of conformity. Candice expressed the experiences of her friends as follows:

*There is no one I know of who didn’t break at least one rule on the code of conduct. I have so many friends who were sleeping around with their boyfriends in high school. There was this shame culture associated with sexuality and they were broken by it and they felt like they were trapped. It was fear based and led to people having private, secret lives. They felt like it was going to be the end of the world if anyone knew that they had failed.*

Andrew also described the shame he witnessed like this:

*Some in my class felt that it was a shame thing and they felt like they could never go back after having sex. That’s not how God really works.*

Jake remembered his experience as follows:

*There was an alarming focus on rules and public perception of the school. People were more concerned with how “Christian” the school appeared than what it actually should have been. I think if they would take a step back and be a little more relaxed and not bogged down in all the rules, they could spend less time wrist slapping and more time getting actual work done. This, I would have liked to have seen while I was a student there.*
Reconciliation

Many respondents related experiences of having to reconcile the Christian worldview and values they were taught in the Bible Education program with other faith doctrines or even other Christian ideology and beliefs. The resulting tension that occurred, both during their time in high school or after graduation, often left respondents questioning the Christian worldview they were taught and their faith in general. Some of the areas that were noted by respondents as especially causing tension were creation and evolution, human sexuality, and secularism.

Bethany described her experience like this:

_I have always struggled with what I believe about creation. It sometimes feels like I have one foot in the church and one foot in academia. Academia generally doesn’t accept the things that I have known and come to accept through my Christian education. I have to think that either what I learned is not true, and I then have to figure out what is true, or I have to think that what I learned in academia is just a theory and that I have been taught just another theory. I’m still trying to figure out for myself what is true._

Lucy recalled her experience in the science program as follows:

_I don’t remember ever having a discussion in science classes about evolution. I kind of knew some of the key words that I had heard tossed around, but I never had explicit teaching on the subject. I think that it would have been beneficial to learn about evolution from a Christian perspective so that when I entered my university science classes, I would have been able to intellectually formulate my argument against it. I don’t think it’s good enough to just say “I don’t believe in evolution” and leave it at that. It would have been nice to discuss evolution in a_
Christian environment so that we could have had help from the teacher to understand it.

Jake expressed frustration with the lack of integration between faith and science. He shared:

If the teachers had addressed the gap between religion and the way the world sees the science side of things, and if they were able to mesh those together in a way that could work, that would have been beneficial. There are definitely ways to mesh religion and evolution together and have them mix. There’s no reason that both can’t exist simultaneously, but through my education, I was always taught that evolution is impossible; it can’t happen. It’s not a real thing.

Bethany explained the struggle of grappling with the tension resulting from encountering contradictory ideas and theology as follows:

It is difficult when you have always thought in a certain way, when you have thought something was true but then you come to a point where you question whether or not it is true. You research the facts and look deeper into it, but you don’t want to let go of what you thought was true. You go through the stages of grief as you deal with that process. The Bible is so open to interpretation, that even then you cannot be certain about your beliefs. Sometimes you have to compromise a little bit in your own mind so that you can come up with a way of accepting what is true.

One respondent recalled his or her university experience as follows:

My beliefs have changed a lot since high school. Going to university helped me consider things more critically and to have more of an open mind to the issues
that were talked about at the Christian school. I was challenged in my faith many times, leaving me asking myself why I believed as I did. I have been able to travel and hear other people’s stories. I am stepping back to think about what I really do believe and what is important in life.

Reflection

Many respondents expressed positive memories of the times of quiet and reflection they were able to experience. Most respondents responded affirmatively that they were given sufficient opportunities for reflection to occur, usually citing times in chapel services or Bible Education classes. The exposure of respondents when in high school to moments for quiet reflection often led them to opportunities for meaningful reflection. Many respondents specifically mentioned Bible journaling as a method of reflection that, although they did not enjoy it at the time, developed a spiritual discipline and habit that they have continued far beyond graduation. Jane recounted her experience:

Journaling was really good for me. Mr. Brown would write messages back to me and have a discussion in my journal. I was going through a really tough time with family issues during Grade 10 so I was writing all of that stuff down. He would talk with me and that was awesome.

Daryl also reflected on the Bible journaling fondly:

Journaling was really, really good because it got you into the Bible and got you thinking about what you had read. I had come from a very legalistic church where you read the Bible, but you didn’t reflect on it a whole lot. This was something new for me and it really stuck with me.
Other respondents remembered times in community based contexts as having provided moments for reflection. Dara described her experience as follows:

*Mr. Jones was very good at giving us time for critical reflection. He provided space for a lot of discussion and gave us assignments that were specifically meant for us to engage in the process of truly understanding of our faith.*

Katherine believed that chapel services also provided opportunities for reflection. She recalled the following:

*In chapel services, Mrs. Green gave us time to reflect by allowing us to go to a private place to just sit and spend that one-on-one time with God. We had those little things that encouraged us to spend time with God to reflect and that pushed us to actually do it.*

**Summary**

This chapter reported the findings of the quantitative and qualitative data. Although the respondents believed that their school community was accepting, few commented on the impact of the Christian education program on their transformative learning experiences. The influence of teachers was viewed by the respondents as having the most impact on their transformative learning, with few noting Bible course assignments or activities as wielding influence. Specific events, such as the Guatemala mission trip or annual leadership retreat were seen as incredibly important by the respondents. Five themes emerged from the qualitative data analysis including triggers of change and impact, contributions to the development of Christian worldview, adherence to Christian values, reconciliation, and reflection. The data revealed that none of the people who participated in the interviews or contributed to the electronic survey were ambivalent about their experiences in the case study school’s Christian education program or about the
school itself. Respondents recalled their experiences with either extremely positive or extremely negative feelings.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Overview

This study looks to answer the following main research questions:

1) What Christian education learning activities contributed to alumni’s transformational learning experiences?

2) What Christian education learning activities contributed to alumni’s worldview development?

3) How do alumni perceive their interactions with religious thought and worldview development subsequent to their graduating from a Christian high school?

The purposes of this study are to (a) relate the effects of the case study school’s Christian education program to alumni’s transformational learning experiences and to (b) explore how alumni’s experiences in the Christian education program have influenced their Christian worldview development. The specific research objectives include (a) to explore the level of engagement with matters of faith of Christian school alumni, (b) to identify factors of the Christian education program that influenced alumni’s decisions with regards to their tenants of faith, and (c) to explore the experiences of transformation and worldview development of Christian school alumni.

This chapter will look at the findings of the research data as the data relates to the case study’s research questions and the extant literature. Next, this discussion will consider the current state of the school. Finally, the chapter will conclude with the limitations of the study and questions for further consideration.
Discussion of the Findings

The main focus of this research study was to develop a base of knowledge about the school alumni’s transformative learning experiences within the Christian education program. The objective of this goal was accomplished. Both the quantitative and qualitative findings presented in this chapter contribute to a greater understanding for Christian school administrators and teachers of the effectiveness of Christian education programs, as well as giving a more complete perspective on respondents’ perceptions of their personal experiences and the impact of their Christian education following high school graduation.

Contributions of Christian Education Learning Activities on Transformative Learning Experiences

The first research question looked to provide information on what Christian education learning activities contributed to participants’ transformational learning experiences. Mezirow (1997) contended that the process of transformative learning involved encountering disorienting dilemmas, or disjunction, followed by the transformation of “frames of reference through critical reflection of assumptions, validating contested beliefs through discourse, taking action on one’s reflective insight, and critically assessing it” (p. 11). In Chapter 2, it was noted that the transformative learning process begins with a disorienting dilemma, followed by the three crucial actions including critical reflection, authentic discourse within a safe learning community, and perspective transformation (Cranton, 2002; Fleischer, 2006; Mezirow, 1990, 1997; Taylor, 2008).

Disorienting dilemmas. Transformative learning only occurs when new knowledge or experiences are introduced which do not fit comfortably into previous meaning perspectives (Kitchenham, 2008; Mezirow, 1990). Students must be introduced to new knowledge or
experiences that challenges their previously held meaning perspectives or transformation cannot occur (Taylor, 2008).

In the respondents’ perspective, there were few effective opportunities for disorienting dilemmas provided within the Bible education courses. Activities meant to provide those starting points, including book studies and Scripture memorization, were often viewed by the respondents as busy work and were, as such, disregarded. Many respondents found the learning activities within the class to instead reinforce their previously held beliefs rather than challenging their previously held frames of reference with new ideas or experiences. Of those disorienting dilemmas that the respondents revealed as contributing to their transformative learning experiences, the vast majority occurred in their personal lives or, if connected to school, outside of the Bible education classroom. The annual missions trip to Guatemala, as well as the annual spiritual leadership retreat, were often noted as being the context for many respondents’ disorienting dilemmas. Respondents also observed that a loss of relationship or a move significantly contributed to transformative change.

**Critical reflection.** Critical reflection is recognized as the second step in the transformative learning process. Although 70% of the survey respondents recalled being given time for critical reflection during Bible education class, few of the learning activities in the Bible education courses were noted as providing effective and authentic opportunities for critical reflection. Personal journals were cited most commonly as the forum for critical reflection, but even then, only 30% of respondents believed journalling allowed for personal critical reflection. Many interview respondents noted that they would have preferred to reflect in community, drawing off the ideas of their classmates. This is reflected in survey respondents’ responses which often focused on class discussions as being influential in their faith development. Very
few of the respondents, however, felt equipped to reflect critically on what they were learning, instead opting to rarely challenge commonly held ideas or perspectives. Many respondents believed that they would be judged for challenging commonly held beliefs and often instead chose to not engage in discussion with those, both staff and students, who believed differently. It appears to the researcher that the perceived judgement and resulting shame respondents felt led to their unwillingness to engage in authentic community and discourse. They did not feel as if their personal ideas or beliefs would be respected.

Respondents’ responses also indicated that they believed there was a certain set of beliefs that were considered acceptable by the school staff, and any thought that lay outside of this orthodoxy would not be assessed or validated. This lack of room for discussion, or the unwillingness of staff to acknowledge the breadth of Christian theology, was a regular point of contention that remained for respondents, often extending many years past graduation.

Critical reflection requires individuals to actively participate in assessing the efficacy of their past experiences, knowledge, opinions, ideas, or worldviews (Jarvis, 2008; Mezirow, 1997; Saines, 2009). The process of critical reflection, as modelled in the classroom, appears to not have been addressed with some respondents, often leaving them without the scaffolding necessary to engage thoughtfully in this complicated process. One respondent pointed out that “reflecting critically is messy, takes time, and it needs to be modeled.”

The process of critical reflection is an important factor in worldview and faith development. Fowler (1981) identified seven stages of selfhood and faith development:

Most students in high school will be at the third stage of synthetic-conventional faith; however, many are developmentally ready to transition to the fourth stage of individuative-reflective faith. Fowler noted the importance of critical reflection in the fourth stage as it is here that individuals begin reflecting on their own assumptions regarding their faith, theology, and the authority structures associated with their faith tradition. The disorienting dilemmas that often occur in the fourth stage of faith development, when critically reflected on, lead to an individual determining his or her personal beliefs, displaying greater maturity, and developing a sense of personal ownership towards his or her faith (Fowler, 1981).

Opportunities for critical reflection were more commonly seen by respondents as occurring outside of the classroom context, usually during chapel services, missions trips, or on the student leadership retreat. The extra time that respondents were provided for critical reflection outside of the classroom and in more casual surroundings could be a contributing factor as to why these times were remembered by the respondents. Many people need time to process new information or experiences and to reassess their previously held meaning perspectives. Bible education classes were only one hour long, often including the introduction of a topic and discussion within that short period of time. It could be that respondents would have engaged in critical reflection regarding Bible education content if they had been allowed extended times to process. All of these outside classroom contexts, as well, were far removed from the academic aspect that is still an integral part of Bible education courses. The researcher believes that the respondents may have been more willing to engage in critical reflection in those settings because they did not have to worry about being graded on their responses, leading to a more authentic individual engagement with new ideas or experiences.
**Authentic discourse.** Providing opportunities for authentic discourse within a safe learning community is also an important part of the transformative learning process. When students engage in authentic discourse, they are able to process new knowledge and experiences while developing their meaning perspectives. Almost half of the survey respondents did not believe they had sufficient opportunities provided to engage in authentic discourse. Of note was that these were primarily times of discourse and debate with fellow students; respondents rarely had opportunities for authentic discourse with staff within the Christian education program. When opportunities for discourse with staff did occur, some respondents cited a lack of transparency on behalf of the staff as a deterrent to their being willing to be vulnerable in response. One respondent even wondered if teachers might not have been able to voice their personal opinions and beliefs because those opinions and beliefs might not have perfectly aligned with the conventional theology of the school, possibly ending in the termination of their employment.

An integral part of providing opportunities for authentic discourse is the creation of a safe learning community. When students feel valued and connected, they are better able to delve into the process of validating their contested beliefs. It is notable that 50% of the survey participants did not feel safe voicing differing opinions on spiritual matters while at the case study school. Although students may have been offered some opportunities for discourse, the authenticity of student engagement might have been superficial if students did not feel safe to voice their thoughts and opinions. Without the safety provided by a learning environment that prioritizes the transformation process, many participants were unable to engage in authentic discourse. Some respondents remembered being unwilling to share their personal struggles with some staff, fearing discipline or expulsion if they were to reveal their thoughts, actions, or doubts. This lack
of authenticity may have been exasperated by the fear of judgement many respondents felt they would endure if their struggles came to light.

Those respondents who did experience transformation were usually those who had strong relationships with at least one staff member. They described feeling safe to go to that teacher, being willing to speak about their struggles, and finding help through that relationship. Those who were able to engage in authentic discourse within the safe community provided by those relationships were much more likely to emerge from processing a disorienting dilemma still adhering to their Christian worldview and faith. Those staff that encouraged critical thinking, who asked questions rather than supplying trite answers, and who were willing to be vulnerable about their own faith and life struggles were seen as more approachable and trustworthy than those staff that did not. Opportunities for authentic discourse were also noted by many respondents as occurring outside of the classroom, usually during extra-curricular activities where respondents and staff spent a significant amount of time together, encouraging the development of deeper relationships. It appears to the researcher that the depth of relationship is directly connected to respondents’ willingness to be open and vulnerable, sharing personal crisis and dilemmas with staff, which often led to the staff providing guidance and assistance which influenced respondents’ transformative learning experiences.

**Perspective transformation.** The transformative learning process culminates in perspective transformation. Perspective transformation is the “process of becoming critically aware of how and why our presuppositions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; of reformulating these assumptions to permit a more inclusive, discriminating, permeable, and integrative perspective, and of making decisions or otherwise acting upon these new understandings (Mezirow, 1990, p. 14). Of all of the Bible
education course activities, the Creed writing assignment was the most likely to lead to perspective transformation for respondents. Through the writing of that assignment, respondents were challenged to determine their beliefs on many core Christian tenants of faith and to articulate why they believed as they did. Many noted that this was often the first time they could remember having to justify and explain their beliefs to another person. This assignment was seen by all respondents who were required to write one as pivotal. Other respondents who were not required to write a Creed, as different teachers have different requirements, voiced their disappointment at not having to write one, as well as their regret over not having had experienced the interview where students are required to discuss their viewpoints with the teacher.

Although the Creed was seen by some as a vehicle for perspective transformation, it is worth noting that only 57% of respondents believed that they experienced a time at the school where they became more committed to God, faith, or religious tradition. A common Christian belief is that commitment to God leads to the transformation of the mind (Romans 12:2), and to a desire to become more like Jesus Christ. This type of transformation is called profound transformation and leads to changes in long-held meaning perceptions (Jarvis, 2008; Kitchenham, 2008; Mezirow, 1990). Very few respondents recalled experiencing profound transformation as a result of the Bible course education learning activities. It is troubling that 69% of respondents actually had turning points where they became less committed to religious tradition, faith, or God during their time at the school. Many of these turning points were connected to respondents’ negative experiences while processing their disorienting dilemmas, or from negative experiences with school rules, beliefs, or theology.
It is important to note that it is difficult to evaluate a person’s perspective transformation. Perspective transformation is nuanced and complex. It also happens differently for different people, rarely following a set time frame. Perspective transformation can only be encouraged and supported by a teacher (Foster, 2003). Although the Bible education teachers did their best to assess to what extent students were undergoing perspective transformation, their ability to assess this change was reliant on the willingness of the students to engage in the transformative learning process and on the students’ ability to articulate their transformation if it was occurring. Teaching students to understand the transformative learning process, their role in it, and how to articulate their learning experiences will help teachers more accurately understand those students who are experiencing perspective transformation.

**Contributions of Christian Education Activities to Worldview Development**

The second research question looked to provide information on what Christian education learning activities contributed to respondents’ worldview development. Esqueda (2014) contended that worldview consists mainly of belief systems, while others argued that a worldview is made up of information, knowledge, and beliefs about the surrounding world (Schultz & Swezey, 2013; van der Kooij, de Ruyter, & Meidema, 2013). Teachers need to be aware, however, that worldview development is dependent upon understanding “the set of assumptions and presuppositions through which [students] interpret the world. It is the framework through which [students] see the world, the lens through which [they] view the concepts of meaning, significance, purpose, and reality” (Foote, 2012, p. 33). Understanding worldview also includes being cognizant of “the practices and processes of [worldview] formation” (Smith, as cited in Thomson, 2012, p. 180). Drawing from these explanations of what a worldview is, it is important to consider two aspects of worldview formation when
addressing the research question of the contribution of the Christian education learning activities to participants’ worldview development. These two aspects are (1) the assumptions and presuppositions which were present at the case study school, and (2) the practices and processes of worldview formation which were present at the case study school.

Assumptions and presuppositions of worldview development. There were two varied sets of assumptions and presuppositions that were at play at the case study school. The school administration and staff had its own set of assumptions and presuppositions, but so too did the students. Most of the assumptions and presuppositions of the case study school administration and staff regarding worldview were based upon a conservative Christian theology and tradition. The assumption made by the staff, and by many of the parents that sent their children to the case study school, was that this conservative Christian theology and tradition would form the foundation from which all class content would be taught. Parents were required to read the school’s Statement of Faith and to sign a document, stating that they were in agreement with the Statement of Faith. There seemed to be varied understanding on the part of the school staff that students might not adhere to this strict conservative Christian worldview and that students were often applying post-modern principles (Kanitz, 2005) to their evaluation of the Christian worldview being presented to them. Respondents often referred back to the Christian worldview, which was influenced by conservative Christian theology, as being a point of contention for them. They pointed out issues with high school science classes where only creationism, not evolution, was taught, leading to respondents entering university without the knowledge needed to participate or debate within upper level science classes. Issues regarding the school’s teaching of sexual education and discussions regarding sexual activity were also noted by many respondents as leaving them without sufficient knowledge or understanding.
Respondents also remembered feeling hampered in their ability to articulate their Christian theology or beliefs if those beliefs did not strictly adhere to the conservative Christian assumptions and presuppositions that they recognized as motivating what was taught at the school. There was also an inordinate amount of pressure placed upon respondents to adhere to the Christian worldview as presented by the school or to risk censure.

The assumptions and presuppositions that constitute the school’s worldview also influenced the Christian education learning activities. The process of worldview formation is dynamic (Baumann, 2011) and the discipleship of the student through the process must take priority with the understanding that worldview formation is different for every person and extends to more than the dissemination of a certain prioritized knowledge. Only one Bible education course learning activity seemed to address this vital aspect of worldview formation—mentorship. Respondents appreciated the mentorship assignment, but identified the short length of the mentorship relationship to be a deterrent to the discipleship process, and by extension, the respondents’ worldview formation. Other learning activities were seen as affirming the school’s worldview rather than introducing respondents to various Christian worldviews. Book studies were often seen as a prime example of this. Only certain books which aligned with the school’s worldview were considered acceptable, and those who tried to suggest books outside of the prescribed orthodoxy were refused.

**Practices and processes of worldview development.** Knowing assumptions and presuppositions that comprise a worldview is important, but understanding the practices and processes of worldview formation is equally important. There seems to be a lack of awareness and uniformity among staff of what a Christian worldview is, as well as confusion surrounding the process of instructing students in worldview formation. There also seems to be a significant
focus among the staff on the dissemination of Christian theology and worldview through classroom activities. Focusing on the complexities of worldview development as occurring in all aspects of life does not seem to have warranted as much attention as it is harder to regulate. Meidema (2014) contended that it is imperative for Christian worldview education to include teaching and learning from worldviews, not just teaching about worldviews. Although there are examples of teachers trying to include this within their teaching practices, this is an area that could benefit from further consideration in the future.

Very few of the Bible education courses learning activities were geared towards students developing a greater understanding of how their worldviews are developed. Many focused instead on respondents internalizing the dominant worldview and then demonstrating their ability to master the working out of this worldview. Some respondents recalled that, when writing their Creed, they defaulted to writing worldview dependent answers that they knew would fall within the school's prescribed worldview rather than push boundaries, even if they were experiencing doubts about the tenant of faith they were describing. If the purpose of Christian education is to help develop a Christian worldview, the Bible education courses must focus on not only instilling timeless values, ideas, and concepts, but also help to “cultivate the concrete person” (Henschel, as cited in Thomson, 2012, p. 193).

**Importance of teachers in worldview development.** Roebben (2015) and Esquada (2014) both pointed out the importance of Christian teachers in the process of Christian worldview formation for their students. Baumann (2011) believed that worldview formation is a “process that requires an active and supportive community engaged in progressively developing and implementing a biblical worldview” (p. 34). Although many of the respondents believed that their school community was one of love and acceptance, many did not consider the Bible
education courses, or their learning activities, to have had a significant impact on their Christian worldview development. The majority of respondents did not feel safe within the school community to express fears and doubts, limiting their ability to connect with staff and other students. Issues surrounding conformity to school standards and the resulting guilt and negativity respondents still feel, as well as conflict surrounding the reconciliation of different theology and worldviews, has had a lasting impact on respondents’ views of their school experiences. In spite of the majority of respondents believing they were cared for by staff and accepted as part of the school community, there is some concern that some respondents are not proud to have graduated from the case study school. This could indicate that those respondents no longer adhere to the school’s worldview and consequently do not want to be connected to the school.

There is no question that the staff at the case study school desired to facilitate the development of the students’ Christian worldview. What discussion has occurred amongst the staff of what constitutes a Christian worldview and best practices on how to actually teach and foster a Christian worldview, however, seems to have not been communicated to students. Students need to be included in this discussion, but it is difficult as there continues to be “ever-expansive vertical shifts in perspective (Fleischer, 2006, p. 158). This dichotomy of how the teachers believe a Christian worldview is best taught and how students believe it is best learned has led to frustration on the part of both groups.

A discussion of respondents’ Christian worldview formation is incomplete without considering the impact their families had on the process. Of the respondents, 89% stated that their families often talked about God, the Bible, or other religious topics during their adolescence. Families who attend the school attend a number of different Christian
denominations and churches, all of which subscribe to particular Christian worldviews. There are differences between many of these Christian worldviews, although the core tenants of the Christian faith remain the same. Although Christian teachers are important in the formation of a Christian worldview for students, the family is even more important. The role of the father in particular, has the most impact on whether the student will retain his or her faith in the long term (Penner et al, 2011). The school must consider the various worldviews being taught within the students’ homes, as well as the role of the family, as they determine the best practices and methods for facilitating Christian worldview formation.

**Respondents’ Perceptions of Worldview and Religion after Graduation**

The third research question sought to provide information on how respondents perceive their interactions with religious thought and worldview development subsequent to their graduating from a Christian high school. Although roughly half of the respondents believed that they left school prepared to have a vibrant spiritual life, half did not. Mirroring those numbers, 56% of respondents determined that the instruction they received at the school was informative and useful after high school while 42% of respondents believed that their Bible education courses were not informative or useful after high school. For a school whose mission is to provide a Christ-centered education that equips students to pursue a life of Godly character for service to the Lord Jesus Christ and others, it is concerning that only half of the respondents felt prepared to do so. There seems to be a disparity between what knowledge and skills the staff believes equips students and what the respondents actually require following graduation.

It is important to note that, although many respondents characterized their time at the school as not having a significant impact on their spiritual life after graduation, 80% currently identify as religious and believe that their spirituality provides a sense of fulfillment. The
majority also state that their religious faith is important in shaping how they live as adults. It is evident that, for those who did not believe the Christian education program to be influential, other factors in these respondents’ lives have influenced their Christian worldview development.

Although a significant number of respondents identify as religious and state that religious faith is important to them as adults, it is noteworthy that many of these do not adhere to common Christian faith practices. 77% of respondents say they actively try to strengthen their relationship with God; however, only 64% regularly practice common spiritual disciplines such as praying and reading the Bible. Only 70% regularly attend weekly church services and only 42% are involved in church small discipleship groups. Of respondents, 75% use the Bible to help them determine their morality of right and wrong. There appears to be a difference in how some respondents define Christianity and spirituality, and subsequently in their self-identification as Christians, and how traditional Christian faith communities define a faithful follower of Christ. Some respondents identify themselves as Christians, however, they do not adhere to commonly held Christian beliefs and practices. This trend seems to be indicative of a larger paradigm shift occurring in Christian culture in general (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 2007), and warrants further consideration by the school staff and administration for implications on the Christian education program.

For many respondents who described their spiritual beliefs as changing after high school, many described what are actually shifts in worldview. Many described themselves as becoming more open-minded and inclusive, often citing personal encounters with people from other religious and Christian faith traditions as being the instigators of this worldview change. Some respondents have left their Christian faith and turned to atheism or pluralism, recounting experiences where they began to believe that God does not exist or that other religions might be
true. Many of these respondents expressed their current beliefs with open hostility towards the school and staff. This hostility, however, often seemed to be marked by hurt and disillusionment. When pressed about their experiences, respondents often shared about specific encounters with school staff where respondents felt shamed or wounded, rather than embraced and included within authentic community. The lack of connection between staff and respondents, usually coming at a point in time where the respondent was experiencing a disorienting dilemma, often led to the breakdown of relationship and the participant becoming less committed to faith and spirituality.

**Current School Happenings**

These findings show that there is a large disparity between what the school administration and staff believed was being taught through the Christian education program and what respondents learned. There was, however, a notable divergence between the experiences of respondents who graduated before 2009 and those who graduated after 2009. Changes in staffing, a switch to a more academic format for the Bible education courses, the development of a more gracious discipline policy, and a significant growth in school population leading to a greater diversity among staff and students, may have contributed to a different Christian education program experience for those later graduates. Unfortunately, the nature of the data does not allow for a conclusive determination of the reasons behind the varied experiences of the respondents.

It is also worth mentioning that there have also been significant changes throughout the years in how certain classes are taught. Changes in staff have brought about new ideas and teaching methods. Evolution and creation are now taught in science, with the focus on critical evaluation and further understanding. There is also a more inclusive discussion occurring about
human sexuality and relationships. That being said, these and other areas need to continue to be addressed as culture and young people develop in the rapidly changing world.

**Study Limitations**

This study has been primarily concerned with developing a greater understanding of the influence of the case study school’s Christian education program and the respondents’ transformative learning experiences and Christian worldview development. There are a great number of questions and further ponderings that were raised over the course of this study that are worth considering; however, they fall outside of the scope of the study.

The findings of this research are limited to this case study and should not be considered as generalizable to other Christian schools. In other words, the findings are derived from the respondents who volunteered their own personal experiences and perspectives. Those respondents are able to provide a snapshot in time of their experiences with the Christian education program, but it is important to note that other alumni could have very different experiences and did not hear about the study, or might not have been comfortable sharing their experiences with the researcher.

This case study addresses only the influence of the case study school’s Christian education program, and to a smaller extent, school staff, had on respondents’ transformative learning experiences and Christian worldview development. There are many other factors that influence a person’s faith development including family, environment, socio-economic factors, and many others. These factors were not assessed in this study.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Building on research considering the faith retention of Christian young adults already conducted by Barna (2006), Penner (2011), and Cardus (2012), this case study looks to further the body of research on the Christian worldview development of Christian young adults. The case study also looks to extend the body of research regarding transformative learning theory, Christian worldview development, and Christian education. The researcher looked to investigate the connections between participants’ transformative learning experiences within a Christian school’s Christian education program and their Christian worldview development. Although this study draws from the data provided by alumni of a specific school, the themes and analysis could be applied to other Christian schools with a Christian education focus.

The aim of this chapter is to present the conclusions drawn from the data collected through the electronic online surveys and the semi-structured interviews, and then make recommendations for further research.

Major Conclusions from the Research

To fulfill the stated purposes of this case study, three research questions were formulated that focused on the connections between the school’s Christian education program and respondents’ Christian worldview development. An extensive literature review was conducted that considered the interplay between transformative learning theory, Christian worldview development, and Christian education. The parallel research design included an electronic survey and a semi-structured in-person interview.

In accordance with the first purpose of this case study, the data suggests that the Christian education program has had little effect on respondents’ transformational learning experiences. Various factors including the lack of disorienting dilemmas provided within the classroom
context, limited time available for critical reflection and authentic discourse, as well as the
difficulty for teachers to assess perspective transformation all play a part.

The second purpose of the study looked to determine how respondents’ experiences in
the Christian education program influenced their Christian worldview. Although some
respondents noted that they have maintained some spiritual practices such as journaling and
Bible reading they learned during Bible education courses, the data suggests that the Bible
education courses wielded little influence over the respondents’ Christian worldview
development. Relationships with staff, event-based activities such as missions trips and
leadership retreats, and other outside influences were more significant in encouraging
respondents’ long-term faith retention.

The research objectives looked to narrow the scope of study to consider specific aspects
of respondents’ faith journeys. The first research objective sought to provide information on the
level of engagement respondents have with matters of faith. The data collected shows that there
is a high level of engagement with matters of faith by a significant majority of respondents, but
that there is a wide spectrum of what respondents believe engagement to be.

The second research objective focused on determining factors of the Christian education
program that influenced respondents’ decisions with regards to their tenants of faith. The Creed
writing assignment had the most significant influence on respondents’ faith decisions and it is
recommended that this assignment be continued and the writing of it to constitute a significant
portion of the class. Class discussions were also highly influential in respondents’ decision
making process. Other factors of the Christian education program were not considered
influential by the respondents and may need to be reassessed for validity and usefulness.
The third research objective looked to explore the experiences of transformation and worldview development of the respondents. In this research, the data is more varied as each respondent’s experience was different. Transformative learning experiences usually took place outside of the classroom, often occurring during the Guatemala mission trip, the annual leadership retreat, or during chapel services. Relationships with staff, especially when respondents encountered disorienting dilemmas, also factored heavily into respondents’ transformative learning experiences. Assessing the worldview development of respondents is difficult due to most respondents not being aware of their own worldview development. The data does, however, reveal a dissonance between the assumptions and presuppositions that constitute the school’s worldview and the assumptions and presuppositions that the respondents’ worldviews included. There also seems to be a lack of awareness on behalf of staff of the practices and processes of worldview development which influenced the respondents’ experiences of worldview development.

**Recommendations Based on the Findings**

Based on the information gathered in the literature review and the data collected through the research process, the researcher makes the following recommendations:

1. Christian school staff should engage in a discussion of what worldview formation actually is and collectively develop an inclusive worldview statement that encompasses the breadth of Christian worldview that is present at the school. A Statement of Faith is not a worldview statement. All stakeholders need to be aware of their own worldviews and be involved in the discussion and in the statement creation. Teachers should then draw from this worldview statement when developing the Christian education program.
2. Christian schools should develop a discipleship pathway that determines the focus and process of discipleship. For schools that have decided upon a mandate of being a discipleship school, there must be a common understanding among administration, staff, and students of what discipleship is and what the role of each stakeholder is. Effective discipleship cannot happen without proper planning, training, and process. Staff members need to understand the purpose and process of discipleship and to see themselves as co-sojourners and co-learners with students on the same spiritual journey. There also needs to be a developed path of progression, recognizing that each student will be at a unique spot on the path, and a determined trajectory that each student is continuing on. The discipleship pathway must take into account the importance of disorienting dilemmas, critical reflection, authentic discourse in safe community, and perspective transformation.

3. All Christian education teachers should thoughtfully incorporate more and varied opportunities for disorienting dilemmas in Christian education programs through the inclusion of a broader Christian orthodoxy and shared learning experiences. Teachers should develop an environment of challenge and openness, focusing on providing a safe community where authentic discourse can flourish.

4. All school stakeholders should work collectively to cultivate a school environment conducive to inquiry, critical insight, and questioning. Students should be encouraged to bring forth their questions and doubts, knowing that they will be supported in their search for further understanding. There also needs to be
a better understanding on behalf of the students and staff of the breadth of Christian thought regarding many controversial issues.

5. Teachers must first engage in the transformative learning process themselves and then model and engage in the process with students. This process, and the vocabulary associated with it, needs to be incorporated into the classroom vernacular to help determine the school culture. Teachers need to prioritize the transformative learning process, regularly setting aside time for critical reflection and authentic discourse among staff and students.

6. There must be increased transparency, and the resulting vulnerability, on behalf of staff members. Respondents noted that those teachers who were real about their personal struggles, who recognized their own personal shortcomings and sin issues, were the staff whom respondents turned to in times of crisis. Without staff modeling this transparency, it is unrealistic to believe that the students will be transparent and vulnerable with staff in times of need.

**Indications for Further Research**

This study has highlighted a number of areas that could be pursued further by others interested in transformative learning theory, Christian worldview development, and Christian education. The data from the electronic surveys and the in-person interviews prove that Christian education programs, as they are currently taught, are often not an effective avenue for transformative learning. There is an urgent need to address this problem and to further consider how Christian education programs could be better designed to encourage transformative learning and Christian worldview development. Further research could also be taken regarding the role of shame, vulnerability, transformative learning experiences, and Christian worldview
development. This seemed to be a recurring theme which bears further consideration. This case study also recognizes the need for further study into transformative learning experiences and Christian education. This research, which has implications reaching beyond the case study school, can serve as a starting point for other Christian schools as they analyze the impact of their Christian education programs on their alumni’s Christian worldview development.
References


Appendix A- Transformative Learning Survey

Description of the Research

Invitation to Participate: You have been invited to participate in this study because you are a graduate of

Purpose of the Study: The purposes of this research study are to (1) relate the effects of Christian School’s Bible education program to alumni’s transformational learning experiences and to (2) explore how alumni’s experiences in the Bible education program have influenced their long-term faith retention. The results of this survey may be used to inform future planning of transformative learning experiences at the school and to increase awareness of transformative learning experiences and worldview development of alumni after graduation.

The principal investigator of this study is Jennifer Kramer, a graduate student at Brandon University. This study is conducted under the direction of Dr. Karen Rempel, Faculty of Education Graduate Studies, Brandon University.

Procedures: I would like you to rate your experiences/beliefs about worldview development and perspective transformation while enrolled at. Most questions are answerable using a 4-point scale. Participants will also be able to add extra information to some questions. I expect the survey would take between 15-30 minutes to complete depending on the amount of information the participant chooses to include.

Possible Discomforts and Risks: There is minimal risk to this study, and no more than encountered in daily life. By consenting to complete the survey, you have not waived any rights to legal recourse in the event of research-related harm. There is the small possibility that some data might contribute to the identification of specific participants. The data will never be presented in such a way that the participant can be identified. All care will be given to minimize the possibility of this happening, but the possibility does exist.

Potential Benefits: This study will seek to explain the relationship between transformative learning and alumni faith retention. This study will extend the body of research regarding transformative learning theory, worldview development, and Christian education. This study will provide administrators, staff, and students with information regarding the interplay between transformative learning, worldview development, and long-term faith retention. This study could potentially result in changes to the Bible education program to better facilitate transformational learning experiences and worldview development.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation is voluntary, and you may decide not to participate without prejudice or penalty, at any point during the survey.

Confidentiality: This is an anonymous survey free from any information that can identify you. The information will be kept confidential amongst the researcher and her thesis committee. All on-line
survey data will be kept for six months on the password protected, online survey license held by Jennifer Kramer. She will destroy all data and raw data after the research paper is completed.

Commercialization: The findings from this study will not be commercialized.

Dissemination of Research: The results of this study will be published in a thesis.

Contact Questions/Person: Jennifer Kramer, at
Consent to Participate

I have read the above description of this research and I understand it. I have been informed of the risks and benefits involved, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. Furthermore, I have been assured that any future questions I may have will be answered by the principal investigator of the research study.

By consenting to participate in this survey, I am aware that I have not waived any of my legal rights to which I would otherwise be entitled.

If you have questions that require clarification about the ethics application, please contact the Chair of the Brandon University Research Ethics Committee at If you wish to speak with the Principal Investigator, please contact Jennifer Kramer at

1. Please select yes to participate in this study, or no to exit.
   
   ☐ Yes, I agree to participate in this survey.

   ☐ No, I do not wish to participate in this survey.
Information about the Research Study

As students graduate from high school and move on into the next stages of life, how they experience the religion of their youth often changes. This questionnaire is about your experience as an [student in regards to faith, transformative learning experiences, and worldview development]. The questionnaire only takes a short time to complete. If you are willing to be personally interviewed by the researcher, please contact [contact information] with your contact information and the researcher will contact you. Thank you for being a part of this research study.

2. Sex:
   ○ Male
   ○ Female

3. What is your age?
   ○ Below 21
   ○ 21-24
   ○ 25-29
   ○ 30-35

4. Marital Status:
   ○ Single
   ○ Married
   ○ Partner
   ○ Divorced/Separated
   ○ Other (please specify)


5. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- High School Diploma
- Associates Degree
- Bachelors Degree
- Masters Degree
- Doctorate Degree
- Other (please specify)

6. How many years were you a student at ?

7. 1. Thinking about your educational experiences at , please rate the following statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. My high school was a close knit community</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<td>b. My high school teachers really cared about students</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. I am proud to have graduated from</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<td>d. I learned a lot in my Bible classes while at</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>e. The staff handled matters of spiritual and religious matters well</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>f. I was prepared to have a vibrant religious or spiritual life</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>g. Religion plays an important role in my day-to-day life</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>h. I currently identify as non-religious</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>i. I had a turning point at where I became more committed to religious</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>tradition, faith, or God</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>NIA</td>
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<tr>
<td>j.</td>
<td>I had a turning point at which I became less committed to religious tradition, faith, or God</td>
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<td>k.</td>
<td>I have doubts as to whether my religious beliefs are true</td>
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<td>l.</td>
<td>My spirituality gives me a feeling of fulfillment</td>
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<td>m.</td>
<td>I try to strengthen my relationship with God</td>
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<tr>
<td>n.</td>
<td>I experience a deep communion with God</td>
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<td>o.</td>
<td>God, or the Bible, help me decide what is right or wrong</td>
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<tr>
<td>p.</td>
<td>There is no other way to salvation but through belief in Jesus Christ</td>
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<tr>
<td>q.</td>
<td>Religious faith was important in shaping how I lived as a teenager</td>
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<td>r.</td>
<td>Religious faith is important in shaping how I live as an adult</td>
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<td>s.</td>
<td>My family often talked about God, the Bible, or other religious/spiritual things when I was a teenager</td>
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<td>t.</td>
<td>I regularly practice spiritual disciplines such as praying and Bible reading</td>
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<td>u.</td>
<td>I normally attend church services</td>
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<td>v.</td>
<td>I attend a small group dedicated to spiritual support, discipleship, or prayer</td>
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<td>w.</td>
<td>My religious beliefs are similar to what they were in high school</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<td>x.</td>
<td>I believe that my time at...</td>
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<td>y.</td>
<td>The instruction I received...</td>
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<td>z.</td>
<td>I felt safe to voice opinions...</td>
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<td>aa.</td>
<td>There were opportunities to...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>bb.</td>
<td>There were opportunities to engage...</td>
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<tr>
<td>cc.</td>
<td>I believe that I was accepted...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dd.</td>
<td>My time at...</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

8. While you were a student at..., did you experience a time when you realised that your spiritual values, opinions, or expectations changed? If yes, briefly describe what happened.

9. Which of the following influenced this change? (Check all that apply)

- [ ] Was it a person that influenced the change? If Yes, was it...
- [ ] Another student's support
- [ ] Your classmates' support
- [ ] A homeroom teacher's support
- [ ] A teacher's support
- [ ] A challenge from a teacher
Another staff member's support

Was it part of a class assignment that influenced the change? If Yes, was it...

Class/group Projects

Personal Journals

Term Paper/Essays/Creed

Mentorship

Personal Reflection

Assigned Readings

Class Discussions

Expressing your concerns/questions

Book Studies

Class Activity/Exercise

Memory Verses

Christian Service

Was it a significant change in your life that influenced the change? If yes, was it...

Conversion

A Move

Loss of a Relationship

Sickness of a Loved One

Death of a Loved One

Parents' Divorce/Separation

Personal Sickness

New Church/Pastor

Other (please specify)
10. What of the following was a valuable part of your experience at classes, in developing your spiritual beliefs? (Check all that apply)

- Class/Group Projects
- Class Discussions
- Term Paper/Essay/Creed
- Class Activity/Exercise
- Christian Service
- Personal Reflection
- Assigned Bible Readings
- Writing about your Concerns/Questions
- Personal Journals
- Mentorship
- Book Studies
- Memory Verses
- Chapels
- Grow Group/Devotions Times
- DvRC Retreat
- Guatemala Missions Trip
- Other (please specify)

11. Describe an experience during your time at where you encountered new spiritual/Biblical information or a new spiritual experience. This should be an event that impacted your spiritual journey.
   a. Describe the event. What did it happen? Who was involved? Where did it happen?
   b. In what ways did this event change your life?

12. Are your spiritual beliefs the same as they were in high school? If not, what changed and what triggered this change?
13. If you would be willing to participate in an interview with the researcher to share further about your transformative learning experiences at , please contact at the Development Office at . The researcher will contact you to schedule a time and location. Interviews will take 30-60 minutes to complete. Your participation would be greatly appreciated.
Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Thinking back over your high school education, did you experience a time when you realized that your values, beliefs, or expectations had been challenged or changed?

2. Briefly describe that experience and what might have triggered it.
   
   Question Prompts:
   
   Which of the following influenced this change?
   
   a. Was it a person who influenced this change?
   b. Was it part of a class assignment that influenced the change?
   c. Was it a significant change in your life that influenced the change?
   d. Perhaps it was something else that influenced the change. If so, please describe.

3. What could have been done differently in the Bible classes, or in other Bible related areas, that would have helped facilitate change? What specific activities?

4. Do you believe that the teaching you received in Bible education helped you grow in your faith since graduation? Why or why not?

5. Recalling your time in Bible education classes, do you believe you were given sufficient time to engage in:

   a. Critical reflection?
   b. Respectful discourse between students and staff?
   c. Authentic community?

6. Describe your present religious affiliation and church activity NOW?