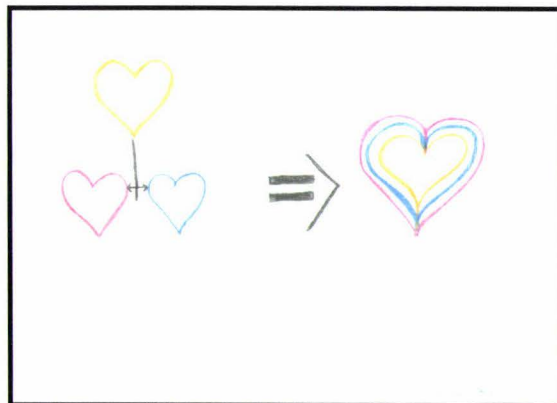


# S.A.C.R.E.D.

Is there a mystery in learning?



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S.A.C.R.E.D

## Is there a mystery in learning?

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree

of

Master of Education (Adult Education)

Massey University  
Palmerston North  
New Zealand

Margaret Wood  
2006

## ABSTRACT

Relationships are at the core of life for all human beings. Learning is also core to our development as people. So is there a connection between relationships and learning that needs to be acknowledged and understood in the learning experience for adult educators?

This study combined the use of Grounded Theory with Photo Elicitation Interviewing, and Interactive Drawing. The power of placing the camera in the hands of the participants allowed the subsequent interviews using grounded theory methodology to be driven by interviewees. The use of grounded theory allowed the emergence of potential connection between relationships and learning. The use of interactive drawing fostered the encouragement of spontaneous creative expression and self-motivated learning for the third interview which confirmed the emerging theory.

Angela, Justine, Coral, Gina and I<sup>1</sup> were the five participants of the study who came from diverse backgrounds of formal and informal learning. They participated in the process through telling their stories using photo elicitation and subsequent interviews where they made discoveries about the connection between relationships and learning.

Six theoretical categories emerged from the coding data. These were synergy, authenticity, connectedness, reflection, empowerment and discovery. These were grouped together under the acronym of **S.A.C.R.E.D.** Each letter indicates a group that emerged in the coding process which had properties that were innate in the learning process.

From this study there emerged a theory that there is a connection between relationship and learning. The depth of this relationship was mystical; it spoke of a communion that was S.A.C.R.E.D. in the adult learning process.

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<sup>1</sup> Participants gave permission for first name to be used in this thesis, except Angela which is a pseudonym.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For me personally the journey of this study has been full of discoveries, emerging ideas and creativity, challenge and transformation for me personally. This study determines learning and transformation do not occur in isolation, but rather in community.

I want to acknowledge the community of people who have journeyed with me, struggled with me and allowed the mystery to stay alive in the midst theoretical frameworks and the world of academia.

I have appreciated the research participants who willingly took photos, shared vulnerably and who risked sharing their soul to allow the theory to emerge. My thanks must go to Angela, Justine, Coral and Gina for giving of themselves and the heart they have had to walk through this journey with me. Thank you!

I have also appreciated the dynamic of relationship with my supervisor, Dr marg gilling from Massey University (Palmerston North). I want to thank you marg for making the time to help me bring clarity amidst the fog, and for not allowing me to “settle for less and miss the best”. I have appreciated the challenges that you have placed before me.

To Ian, my soul mate, husband and friend, you have laughed with me, agonised with me, challenged me, grappled with me amongst our wedding preparation, loved me amidst my frustration and weariness at all times of the day (including 2 a.m. when the mystery became clear) and kept the light bright in the darkness. I want to say thank you. I love you profoundly; “I am because we are, and we are because I am”. I began this as Margaret Waight and concluded this as Margaret Wood. I look forward to our life beyond this thesis!

Matthew and Anne-Maree– thank you for allowing me the space to follow my passion of study, to listen to my grappling and for loving me in ways that are truly you.

To my community – thank you! I would be less of a person without you.

I am thankful God kept us connected through the journey!



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT		iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS		iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS		v
LIST OF TABLES		vii
LIST OF FIGURES		viii
Chapter One	INTRODUCTION	1
	Rationale for this study	2
	Research Context	2
	Research Aims	2
	Outline of Thesis	3
Chapter Two	MY PHILOSOPHY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING AND THE BACKGROUND LITERATURE	5
	Philosophy of Literature	5
	Philosophising of Teaching and Learning	7
	Relationships in Learning – bell hooks	9
	bell hooks challenge to my practice of teaching and learning	15
Chapter Three	METHODOLOGY	18
	Research Approach	18
	Photo Elicitation Interviewing	19
	Grounded Theory	21
	Grounded Theory: Glaser, Strauss or Charmaz?	22
	Interactive Drawing	24
Chapter Four	METHOD	26
	Research Focus	26
	Participants	26
	Ethical Considerations	28
	Research Design	30
	Data Gathering Tools	30
	Data Gathering Process	32
	The Method of Data Analysis	33
	Strengths and Weaknesses of the Study	39
Chapter Five	FINDINGS	41
	1. Synergy	42
	2. Authenticity	56
	3. Connectedness	70
	4. Reflection	84
	5. Empowerment	94
	6. Discovery	110

Chapter Six	DISCUSSION	123
	1. Synergy	123
	2. Authenticity	127
	3. Connectedness	131
	4. Reflection	134
	5. Empowerment	140
	6. Discovery	144
Chapter Seven	S.A.C.R.E.D.	148
	Findings	148
	Discussion	153
Chapter Eight	CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	158
	Acronym: S.A.C.R.E.D.	159
	S.A.C.R.E.D. the mystery of learning in relation to hooks	161
	Recommendations	162
	Concluding Comments	162
Reference List		164
Appendix List		176
A	Information Sheet to Participants	177
B	Consent Form	179
C	Ethics Committee Approval	180
D	Photo Elicitation Interview Questions	181
E	Participants Visual Images of Relationship	182
F	Participants Visual Images of Learning	187
G	Coding Chart of Relationship	192
H	Coding Chart of Learning	193
I	Coding Chart of Visual Images	194
J	Participants Interactive Drawing Synergy	195
K	Participants Interactive Drawing Authenticity	196
L	Participants Interactive Drawing Connectedness	197
M	Participants Interactive Drawing Reflection	198
N	Participants Interactive Drawing Empowerment	199
O	Participants Interactive Drawing Discovery	200
P	Participants Interactive Drawing S.A.C.R.E.D.	201

## LIST OF TABLES

1. Grounded Theory Design	24
2. Data collected during interview one on relationship	35
3. Comparison of Gina's data with Angela's data collected during the second interview	36
4. Coding chart of photos	38
5. Descriptive words for Synergy in Relationship	42
6. Descriptive words for the Synergy in Learning	43
7. Descriptive Words for Authenticity in Relationship	56
8. Descriptive Words for Authenticity in Learning	57
9. Descriptive Words for Connectedness in Relationship	70
10. Descriptive Words for Connectedness in Learning	71
11. Descriptive Words for Reflection in Relationship	84
12. Descriptive Words for Reflection in Learning	85
13. Descriptive Words for Empowerment in Relationship	94
14. Descriptive Words for Empowerment in Learning	95
15. Descriptive Words for Discovery in Relationship	110
16. Descriptive Words for Discovery in Learning	111
17. Links between findings and literature - synergy	124
18. Links between findings and literature - authenticity	128
19. Links between findings and literature – connectedness	132
20. Links between findings and literature – reflection	135
21. Links between findings and literature - empowerment	141
22. Links between findings and literature – discovery	145



## LIST OF FIGURES

1. Consultation – A Research Process	5
2. Philosophy of Teaching and Learning	7
3. Research Design	30
4. Grounded Theory	33
5. Spiral of Learning	126
6. Authenticity Unlocks Synergy	130
7. Jarvis Model of Adult Learning	137
8. Holistic Model of Learning	139
9. The Person-in-the-World	154

## Chapter One

### INTRODUCTION

Are relationships at the core of life for all human beings? Is learning at the heart of our development as people? I have a deep curiosity as to whether there is a connection between relationships and learning that needs to be acknowledged and understood in the learning experience for adult educators.

Research in the area of relationships has developed over the past 20 years with major works considering theories in this field (Giddens, 1991; hooks, 2002; Jamieson, 2002; Mashek & Aron, 2004; Reis & Shaver, 1988). These authors believe that connectedness is a core dynamic of relationships. However there is varied discussion over the meaning of the words related to relationships.

The field of adult learning and teaching has been extensively researched and models adopted which have provided foundations for those in the adult education field today (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; Boud & Walker, 1992; Brockett & Merriam, 1997; Brookfield, 1987; Fenwick, 2000; Fox, 1983; Jarvis, 2001; Knowles, 1972; Kolb, 1984,1998; Miettinen, 2000; Mulligan, 1993; Pratt, 1998; Ramsden, 1992; Rogers, 1996; Vince, 1998; Wlodkowski, 1999). These theorists and practitioners have focussed on frameworks, models and applications to enable effective teaching and learning. One example is Kolb's model of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984).

Some research has been undertaken to understand the dynamic relationship between the teacher and student (Pratt, 1998, 2003). Other research has been undertaken to discover the "inner workings" of the student that prevent or enhance the learning (Mulligan, 1992, 1993). Noddings (2002, 2003) has written on the significance of caring but with a focus on children's learning. Gilligan (1982) Belenky (1986) and Hayes (2001) address the issues of women in learning and relationships.

Relationships have many strands and textures that need to be discovered and grappled with in order to empower individuals in their journey of self and in relationship to learning.

## **Rationale for Study**

This research seeks to discover if there is any connection between relationships and learning, and, if this exists, to begin to understand the phenomena of this connection.

In this research I chose to work solely with women. For four reasons, firstly as a feminist researcher it is my passion to empower women and therefore critical that I understand our learning and relational ways of being one with another. Secondly much of my background thinking on this topic has been from bell hooks, a feminist scholar who desperately believes that we as women need to discover deep connection with other women in order that we may respond to our own selves, and to the world that we live in far more effectively (hooks, 2002,). Thirdly, I work for a Private Training Establishment whose students are over 80% women. Fourthly, the scale of this study was limited in size and therefore it would clearly be consistent with who I am, how it has shaped me, to have studied and worked with women on this project.

## **Research Context**

The context for this study was based upon women who live within driving distance of the Waikato. All participants were between the age of 30-50 years of age, with some experience of informal and formal learning. With the limitations of the study I placed a boundary on my research to only include females within a certain age bracket. This choice was made because with the size of this project I took a small sampling and with this reality did not want the research skewed by adding another gender and a wider age range to the mix. I think this project in the future could be extended to include a much broader base of people to further explore the findings.

## **Research Aims**

Throughout my study in adult teaching and learning I have been constantly shaping my own personal philosophy of learning and teaching. In 2004 I began to grow a model (Waight, 2004)<sup>2</sup> which discussed my theory to date, but since this time I have lived with persistent grumblings in my gut that this model was not yet complete, but a continual work in progress. I had no idea what shape it would have to take. I had no inkling as to the path this search would take. I had some measure of certainty that it was related to the relationship between the learners, but had nothing concrete to measure this by. Hence my study was founded in my search for a strengthened philosophy of teaching and learning and then the uncharted journey began.

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<sup>2</sup> I married on the 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2006 and am now known as Margaret Wood.



## **Outline of the Thesis**

This thesis is divided into eight chapters. The first chapter presents an introduction to the research and presents a rationale for the research. It provides insight to the context in which the research is set and the aims that shaped this research.

The role of literature is discussed in chapter two only as it relates primarily to one author. This chapter outlines my philosophising of teaching and learning and the literature base of bell hooks that this research emerged from.

Chapter Three examines and discusses the wider literature, research approach and methodology that provided the framework for this research. This chapter discusses the choice of the interpretive approach and introduces photo elicitation interviewing, grounded theory and interactive drawing as three methods used in this research.

Chapter Four gives further insight into the design of the research. This chapter introduces the participants, the data gathering processes, and how the process of emerging theory was undertaken.

Chapter Five presents the connections made between relationships and learning based upon the participant's photo record which led to the emerging theory of S.A.C.R.E.D. This chapter is concerned with the participant's interviews which led to the emergence of S.A.C.R.E.D. The meanings made by the participants of their visual images are clearly presented to confirm the emergence of the properties and categories of the emergent theoretical acronym.

Chapter Six integrates the findings with the insight of literature and the literature is woven into the emerging theory through a process of constant comparison. This provides a perspective of literature which further strengthens the emergent theory.

Chapter Seven introduces S.A.C.R.E.D and the mystery discovered and experienced by the participants. The participant's data gives visual meaning to S.A.C.R.E.D. The second part of this chapter combines the findings of the participants with the literature.

Chapter Eight concludes the thesis and provides an overview of the study. The initial questions posed in this research are responded to, the impact of this research upon my personal philosophy

of teaching is addressed and bell hooks' work is appraised in the light of the emergent theory of S.A.C.R.E.D. The intrinsic strengths and weaknesses of this study are presented with these providing a platform to the recommendations for future research.