

An Expanded Form of Research and Disciplined Inquiry

Education is meant to open many doors, leading to many rooms.

*Imagination thrives when sensual experience joins with reason, when
Illusions link to Reality, when intuition couples with intellect, when
the passions of the heart unite with those of the mind, when
knowledge gained in one discipline opens doors to all the rest.*

*The point of education must be to create whole people who, through
their wholeness, can focus the accumulated wisdom of human
experience into illuminated patches of splendor.*

~ Robert and Michèle Root-Bernstein
(1999, pp. 325, 326)

In 2001, Rosemarie Anderson, my colleague at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, and I prepared a new research course for our graduate psychology students. It was called Integral Research Skills, and it was intended to do two things: serve as a very accessible introduction to research, and acquaint students with research tools that are more fitting for studying transpersonal topics and that are above and beyond the familiar quantitative and qualitative research methods. It was accessible because it involved forms of knowing that are highly experiential and likely to be familiar to the students in the context of their everyday life and in their clinical and spiritual practices. The tools were more appropriate for transpersonal studies in that they involved more inclusive, holistic forms of knowing and were likely to tap aspects of themselves, their research participants, and the world at large that would not be as readily accessible to established research methods.

The contents of that course were informed by our recently published research book, *Transpersonal Research Methods for the Social Sciences: Honoring Human Experience* (Sage, 1998). In turn, the course inspired our second research book, *Transforming Self and Others Through Research: Transpersonal Research Methods and Skills for the Human Sciences and Humanities* (State University of New York Press, 2011).

The Integral Research Skills course introduced students to 10 research tools—*working with intentions, quieting and slowing, playing, focusing attention, auditory skills, visual skills* (including *imagery, visualization, imagination*), *kinesthetic skills, proprioceptive skills, direct knowing and intuition* (and *empathic identification*), and *accessing unconscious (chthonic) processes and materials*—and suggested ways of applying these tools to the three major phrases of research (planning a study and collecting data, analyzing and interpreting data, and communicating one's findings to one's reading or listening audience). The course also urged students to consider deeply how four major qualities or characteristics of functioning, of great transpersonal relevance—mindfulness, discernment, compassion, and appreciation of differences—could be accessed and used in transpersonal psychological research. Finally, students were asked to apply these various tools and skills to four possible application areas or contexts in which they worked or planned to work (individuals, dyads and small groups, larger groups and organizations, and global community and the more-than-human world at large).

The 10 integral research skills mentioned above are described in great detail in our *Transforming Self and Others Through Research: Transpersonal Research Methods and Skills for the Human Sciences and Humanities* research book. My purpose, in this present essay, is to mention still other research tools or skills, above and beyond those already indicated. Adding these to the more familiar tools used in any research project has the potential of greatly increasing the yield of any research endeavor. In addition to this, the use of these tools and skills can help the researcher expand one's understanding of oneself, achieve access to previously unrecognized capabilities and potentials, and favor transformative changes in the researcher and in others involved in the research project, including readers of eventual research reports.

Here, I present succinct descriptions of a dozen of these additional skills and tools and how they can be used in research projects as well as in our ongoing applied work, spiritual practices, and as possible aids in furthering our psychospiritual growth and development. The brief descriptions sometimes include names of writers. Representative treatments of the ideas of these writers can be found in the References section at the end of this essay.

Additional Skill Number 1: Working with Assumptions

Identifying, recognizing, articulating, and working with assumptions can be revealing and useful. Creative research and practice can be enhanced through such work with our assumptions—especially assumptions that usually are hidden, unrecognized. Consider assumptions that might supplement the ones you already have. Consider contrary assumptions—turn typical assumptions 180 degrees (stand them on their heads): Where might this lead? How might those reversed assumptions impact our research, our practices, our worldview? Having identified assumptions, what do we do with these? Do we then forget about them? Do we attempt to keep them out of our work? Do we “bracket” them (set them aside), not to get rid of them, but to remain aware of them throughout an investigation—being mindful of our assumptions or biases, at each and every stage of a study, in order to help us discern whether or not the processes and outcomes of each stage are being influenced by these assumptions or biases? Do we use them as lenses for studying our topics? Can we track if and how our assumptions change, during the course of an investigation? How can we evaluate which assumptions are useful and which not? We can become aware of hidden assumptions by noticing and exploring our judgments and opinions, and by inquiring *why* we hold such judgments and opinions—asking ourselves this question, over and over, in order to uncover ever-deeper layers of their underlying presuppositions or assumptions. Sharing and witnessing our views, in a witnessing, nonjudgmental manner—as in Bohmian dialog—may allow assumptions to surface and be examined, later.

Additional Skill Number 2: Balancing Different Qualities

Holding or working with what seem to be opposite findings, knowledge, assumptions, or stances in special ways can sometimes favor breakthroughs in understanding and an expansion of consciousness. These opposites are sometimes known as contraries (William Blake) or complements (from Taoistic traditions and, from there, into quantum physics). A typical Western tendency is to treat these contraries in an either/or fashion, in service to the Aristotelian notion of the *excluded middle*, according to which something cannot be other than A or not-A. It is possible, however, to balance seemingly incompatible qualities in a both/and manner that does

not reject one at the expense of the other. It is possible to hold or balance these contraries in paradox or in synergy, appreciating both, simultaneously, and allowing a third thing or something larger (which contains both) to emerge. Such balancing of complements can occur with respect to the following pairs: theory and practice, idiographic and nomothetic aims of knowing, quantitative and qualitative approaches, objective and subjective aspects, depth and breadth, experience and conceptualization, and information and transformation. Balancing and a special holding of the tension of “opposites” can be practiced with respect to any seemingly disparate modes of knowing, being, or doing; and to extremes or contraries of any type. Related to balancing is the framing of conflict in terms of *creative tension* (Senge).

Additional Skill Number 3: Accessing Nonordinary States of Consciousness

Different states of consciousness can involve different ways of knowing, working with knowledge, and expressing knowing than those that are readily available in our ordinary state of consciousness. These different states are most often called *altered states of consciousness* or *nonordinary states of consciousness*. The ways of knowing, being, and doing occurring in various states may or may not transfer readily to other states; those that do not transfer readily are called *state dependent* processes. Learnings and memories acquired in one state may be forgotten or relatively unavailable in very dissimilar states. Therefore, one can best partake of a variety of forms of knowing, being, and doing by entering a great variety of states of consciousness. Some of these states include: spontaneous nocturnal dreams, incubated dreams, lucid dreams, hypnagogic and hypnopompic states, reverie, various shamanic states, entering into imaginal realms, various meditative and contemplative states, mystical and unitive states, and conditions of consciousness without an object (Robert Forman calls these *pure consciousness events*). Transitions from state to state may occur spontaneously or may be deliberately induced.

Additional Skill Number 4: Nonordinary and Transcendent Experiences (NOTES)

Exceptional human experiences (EHEs) is a term coined by Rhea White as a general rubric for a class of spontaneously occurring, unusual experiences that previously had been treated separately by investigators and practitioners in different disciplines and subdisciplines. Such experiences have tended to be ignored or de-emphasized in many areas of Western culture because of their anomalous nature. Indeed, many of these experiences may remain merely anomalous—and, hence, devalued—if they are treated as curious, transient experiences or flukes of functioning to be explained away. Alternatively, if these experiences are attended to more fully, honored, treasured, encouraged, and worked with—deeply and intensively—they can help bring about transformative changes in the experiencer. As this process develops, the experiences cease being merely anomalous or exceptional and become fully exceptional *human* experiences that reveal and can help us manifest our true human potentials. The changes that can result from working with these experiences can be both extensive and profound. They can help us evolve in our awareness, our worldview, our sense of the meaning of life, and our appreciation of our very nature, and they can do this through fostering less identification (dissociation) with our “skin encapsulated ego” (Watts) and greater identification (association) with the “All-Self”—White’s (1997, p. 89) shorthand term for our oneness with all things—and through encouraging a shift in

the narratives we use to describe ourselves and our world. These experiences can also serve us in our research enterprises—allowing us to know in ways that otherwise may not be possible.

Initially, White identified 5 major classes of EHEs, which she called *mystical/unitive*, *psychic*, *encounter*, *unusual death-related*, and *exceptional normal* experiences, and she identified and categorized approximately 100 categories of these experiences among the five major classes; more recently, the classes have expanded to 9, and the categories have expanded to approximately 200.

Experiences similar to EHEs have been described previously and under a rich variety of names. Perhaps the most frequently used names for such experiences are *supernatural* or *paranormal*. The 18th century scientist-turned-mystic, Emanuel Swedenborg described experiences similar to EHEs when he coined the term *remains*, which Swedenborg scholar Wilson Van Dusen paraphrased as “our inner memory of everything sacred . . . [our] personal treasure of spiritual understanding . . . [our] sacred personal collection of little realizations of heaven” William James referred to similar exceptional experiences as *white crows*, reminding us that “if you wish to upset the law that all crows are black, you must not seek to show that no crows are; it is enough if you prove one single crow to be white.” Journalist Charles Fort used an equally picturesque phrase, *damned facts*, to describe similar recalcitrant exceptions and embarrassments to the received science of his day. Other names for these and similar experiences have included *peak experiences* (Maslow), *Minerva experiences* (Otto), *transpersonal experiences* (Grof), *extraordinary phenomena* (Masters), *transcendental experiences* (Neher), *extraordinary experiences* (Helminiak), *praeternatural experiences* (Nelson), *wondrous events* (McClenon), and *high holy moments* (Van Dusen). Often—and, we believe, unfortunately, because the term suggests that these are not normal or natural—these are called *anomalous experiences* (e.g., Cardena, Lynn, & Krippner; Reed; Zusne & Jones). Here, we prefer to call these *nonordinary and transcendent experiences (NOTEs)*—nonordinary because of their relative rarity and unfamiliarity, and transcendent because they go beyond our conventional understanding of ourselves and of the world and because, under special circumstances, such experiences can trigger transformative changes in us, and working with such experiences can allow us to transcend what we were before these experiences visited us.

Additional Skill Number 5: Novel Interview Techniques

Conventional interviewing techniques may be extended and expanded to provide increased knowledge and understanding. Interviewing may be augmented by psychodrama and reliving techniques, as in Nancy Drew’s re-enactment interviewing procedure (no, not *that* Nancy Drew!). Interviews can be carried out with either the interviewer or the interviewee or both in various states of consciousness; various induction techniques and rituals might be used for such purposes. One might even attempt to use direct knowing techniques in order to interview inarticulate interviewees. Interviews might be done remotely, using tape recorders or online procedures. Various ways of asking for information and various ways of collecting information—other than conventional linear prose—might be used. For example, one might ask questions via subtle suggestions, rather than via very explicit means. An interview might respond using stories, poetry, movement, artwork. One might provide answers and ask the interviewee to

supply appropriate questions for those answers—as a novel way of approaching the construction of meanings and interpretations.

Additional Skill Number 6: Contributions of Art

Artwork can be used in each of the major phases of any research project—in collecting data, in working with or interpreting data, and in expressing one’s findings. The artwork can be done by the research participants, by the investigator, or by both (either together or separately). Artwork provides a nonverbal, more “right hemispheric” mode of acquiring, working with, and expressing knowledge, and serves as a useful complement to the usual verbal, “left-hemispheric” modes of research. Artwork can allow forms of creative expression that would not be possible, otherwise. See the writings of Arnheim and McNiff.

Additional Skill Number 7: Contributions of Poetry

Poetry can play useful roles in research in terms of its sometimes powerful effects upon the listener or reader and its ability to carry meanings effectively and efficiently. Because of its use of concrete and, sometimes, universal imagery, poetry may allow transmissions and resonances of knowledge and experience in ways that are more direct and complete than would be possible through the use of discursive prose. Poetry may express or trigger emotional and bodily aspects of knowing more easily than can linear, rational prose (which speaks, usually, more to the intellect and cognition). As many have noted, poetry is an exceptionally effective vehicle for expressing imagination and the imaginal. Hints on how poetry might be relevant to both the content of transpersonal topics and research praxis can be found in the writings of Barfield, Bickman, Bodkin, Burnshaw, Cardinal, Durr, Frye, and Richardson.

Additional Skill Number 8: Mimesis and Participation

Mimesis is a form of knowing epitomized by the mode of education in pre-Homeric Greece. It is an active, emotional identification, by the audience, with the experiences of a speaker or chorus. It is imitation through participation in the experience of another. One loses one’s own identity and surrenders to the spell of a dramatic performance. It is a merging with the experience being portrayed by an actor, facilitated by emotional and bodily involvement. The process resembles sympathetic resonance; it also is akin to empathic identification and direct knowing. *Mimesis* has much in common with *participation* (see Barfield). The interested reader may learn more about *mimesis* in the writings of Barfield, Berman, Finley, Havelock, and Simon.

Additional Skill Number 9: Ritual

Active participation in rituals may provide a unique form of knowing. Rituals may provide experiential inputs absent from knowing forms that do not allow for such direct confrontations. The concrete and multisensory components of a ritual could trigger associations, expectations, vicarious learning, and other knowledge components, particularly those involving sensory, bodily, and emotional aspects. A frequently occurring ritual—one of rites of passage, transition, liminality—may be especially useful for the acquisition of new forms of knowing, being, and expression in that, by allowing older, constraining structures to fall away, it makes way for

creative new forms and organizations. For important treatments of ritual and liminality, see the works of Deslauriers, McMahon, Schwartz-Salant & Stein, Turner, and van Gennep.

Additional Skill Number 10: Service

Arthur Deikman maintains that service can be understood as a matter of epistemology. It is a way of knowing our connection, at a deep level, with a reality larger than our separate, skin-encapsulated egos. Service is a form of spirituality that enables us to experience our connectedness with others.

Additional Skill Number 11: Standardized Assessments of Transpersonal Constructs

It is possible to use standardized assessments in transpersonal research projects. In three thorough and excellent review articles, Douglas MacDonald and his coauthors review a large number of standardized, paper and pencil instruments that can be used for measuring spiritual and transpersonal constructs. Peter Reynolds and his associates have developed a rich and exciting new assessment technique—the *projective differential*—in which rapid presentations of images are used to allow participants to provide holistic, intuitive assessments of a variety of topics. Protocols have been developed for use of the projective differential which include both verbal and nonverbal modes of responding, and which tap not only intellectual/analytical processes, but intuitive, emotional, creative, and relational (small group) aspects, as well. The projective differential can be used to assess qualities of objects, events, and persons, and it also can be used to assess similarities and differences, identification, alienation, coherence or congruence, and change and transformation.

Additional Skill Number 12: Using the Content and Methods of Parapsychological Inquiry

Parapsychology, *psychical research*, and *psi research* are names for the discipline that carefully studies the evidence for ways of knowing and influencing the world that extend beyond the reaches of our recognized senses and motor systems. *Psi* is a shorthand term for all of these processes. Some manifestations of psi include *telepathy*, *clairvoyance*, *precognition*, *psychokinesis* (*telekinesis*), and *remote or direct healing*. These processes can be studied in their spontaneous forms and also as they occur in deliberate laboratory experiments.

Because forms of knowing and influence of a more conventional, but sometimes very subtle sort, may be confused for the direct, pure forms of psychic knowing or influence, researchers in this area must be very carefully prepared so that they can recognize these contaminants or processes that can masquerade as or be confused with psi. Some of these contaminants, confounds, or artifacts include subtle sensory cues, subtle rational inferences, chance coincidences, and so on. Special awareness of these possible confounds must be acquired before one can do competent work in this area, and special designs have been developed in order to deal adequately with such confounds. One of the most important methodological contributions of psi research is its identification of both conventional and psi-mediated *experimenter effects*, the existence of which makes one reluctant to trust the results of even the most carefully designed experiments in the natural, biomedical, social, and human sciences.

Those intending to pursue psi research should consult the special resources necessary to inform one about the challenges, as well as the delights, of working in this area. Because this research area is rather specialized, a simple listing of useful resources is provided in the References section of this essay. See, especially, the writings of Braud; Broughton; Cardena, Lynn, & Krippner; Doore; Edge, Morris, Palmer, & Rush; Josephson & Rubik; Kelly, Kelly, Crabtree, Gould, Grosso, & Greyson; Kurtz; Myers; Radin; Roll; Schlitz & Braud; Tart; and Wolman.

Psi research is relevant to transpersonal studies because the psi processes represent special, alternative forms of knowing and doing. Intention and attention play extremely important roles in psi. Psychic knowing is related to the processes of direct knowing and knowing through being/becoming that are treated in transpersonal and spiritual studies. Psi research and its findings are of special interest to transpersonal studies because of their strong suggestion of the profound interconnectedness of all things.

Another branch of psychical research deals with evidence that is suggestive of the possible survival of individual personality after bodily death. This branch could be called survival research or afterlife (or afterdeath) research. The evidence and conclusions with respect to this area are quite controversial and are subject to several alternative interpretations. The phenomena of interest to this branch of inquiry include: apparitions of the dead, hauntings, some poltergeist occurrences, mediumistic communications, mediumistic physical phenomena, some out-of-body experiences, some near-death experiences, and reports suggestive of past lives and reincarnation. Research in these areas not only addresses the reality status of these possible indicators of discarnate survival but also necessitates a careful reexamination of who and what we are even while we are living. If something survives, what might that something be, and in which ways might that something exist within us or as part of us—and, hence, be a crucial facet of our identity, nature, and being—as we carry on, in this life, as living, conscious entities? If there is something more than our body and brain that might survive the death of the body and of the brain, then that More is a part of our present being that deserves serious attention in our considerations of our nature and potentials, as human beings.

Lagniappe

There is a word that is used throughout the Gulf Coast states, but chiefly in Louisiana. The word is *lagniappe* (pronounced *LAN-yap*). It is used to refer to a small gift of a bit extra, given to a customer by a merchant. It is akin to a “baker’s dozen,” which involves a 13th goodie, rather than the 12 that are paid for. The term *lagniappe* is common in New Orleans, Lafayette, New Iberia, and other regions influenced by French Cajuns and French Creoles. It is said that the term can be traced further back to the Spanish *la ñapa* (something that is added) and to the Quechua (of the central Andes of South America) *yapay* (to increase or add). *Lagniappe* is essentially something thrown in, *gratis*, for good measure.

I mention the above because, in addition to the dozen skills and tools just described, I would like to offer a 13th—for *lagniappe*. This 13th really is not a single tool or skill, but rather a set of 13 of these. So, here we have a double 13. These extras are the 13 thinking tools described by Robert and Michele Root-Bernstein in their excellent book, *Sparks of Genius: The Thirteen Thinking Tools of the World’s Most Creative People* (Houghton Mifflin, 1999). This book provided one of

the inspirations for the Integral Research Skills course that Rosemarie Anderson and I created back in 2001. Both of us had read the book, independently, over the summer, and each of us thought that this should be required reading for our graduate psychology students. The Root-Bernsteins demonstrate convincingly the power of a relatively small number of “thinking tools” commonly used by creative individuals in many different areas of science, mathematics, the humanities, and the arts, and they present ways in which all of us can identify and learn to better use these tools. The 13 tools they present are processes of *observing, imaging, abstracting, recognizing patterns, forming patterns, analogizing, body thinking, empathizing, dimensional thinking, modeling, playing, transforming, and synthesizing*.

Of these 13 tools, four already had been treated, as skills, in our Integral Research Skills course. These were *observing* (which we had treated as *focusing attention*), *body thinking, empathizing, and playing*. This leaves nine tools that can be added to our research skills toolbox. These are presented, in various groupings, below.

Essentializing (Simplifying, Abstracting)

In essentializing, one seeks the essential core or heart of the topic of inquiry or some simple quality or process common to the various instances of what is studied. How might phenomena be simplified, yet still retain the essential features that distinguish them from other phenomena? How might one distill the essence of what is studied, and present that essence in a concise manner that, nonetheless, accurately and adequately portrays the topic of inquiry? Essentializing also has an important place in developing and focusing research topics, questions, or hypotheses, so that these address the heart of the issue being explored.

Recognizing and Forming Patterns (Analogizing)

What are the common patterns present in a variety of instances of what is studied? Is there some descriptive pattern or interrelationship of qualities or features that can be identified and reported? Is there some underlying or overarching process of which the studied phenomena may be manifested instances? How do essential features of an object of inquiry relate to other phenomena? How might similes, metaphors, symbols, archetypes, and myths reveal patterns that might otherwise be missed? How can the elements of what is studied be combined in unexpected ways for further one’s knowledge and understanding? Can laws, structures, and rhythms be identified, which could increase understanding and appreciation of the topic of inquiry? Shifting one’s viewpoint or perspective can allow one to discern new aspects or patterns in what is being studied.

Dimensional Thinking, Modeling, Transforming

These three skills have in common an enlarging, reducing, or changing of the ordinary qualities of some object, concept, or topic. Extensions or expansion to other modes, dimensions, or realms can enlarge our appreciation of any object of inquiry, can free us from obscuring preconceptions, and can provide intimations of other realities or ways of being. Reducing a topic’s dimensions can help us get our conceptual hands around it. A complex phenomenon can be studied by modeling it, by scaling it down, or even by developing a conceptual model or theory to aid its

appreciation and apprehension. Knowing how much an object or concept can be altered or transformed, yet still retain its initial identity, can aid our understanding of a phenomenon's essential nature and necessary conditions, informing us about its range and possible limits. Imagining alterations in the characteristics of an object of inquiry can facilitate new viewpoints and perspectives and can foster new insights into the nature of what is being explored. These skills can be used both for learning and for testing our ideas.

Synthesizing

In synthesizing, one combines as many ways of knowing, interpreting, and expressing as possible. One integrates the various research skills into a coherent whole. One way of synthesizing is to address a research topic or object of inquiry in as holistic and intuitive a manner as possible. One confronts the whole of what one is studying with the whole of oneself, as an investigator. *Synesthesia* (union of feeling; combining of sensations) and *synosia* (union of knowing) combine and integrate multiple modes of perceiving and knowing.

This concludes my offering of this set of new research tools that can be added to anyone's methodological toolbox, but especially the more spacious toolbox of the transpersonal researcher.

But let me offer one more bit of *lagniappe*. I mentioned that *Sparks of Genius* is a book that should be required reading—particularly for persons interested in transpersonal psychology. Another book that I think should be required reading is a thin (83-page) novel written in 1884: *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions*. The book was written by an English clergyman, educator, and Shakespearian scholar, Edwin A. Abbott, who originally used the pseudonym A. Square in publishing this book. The book is a curious and satisfying mix of science fiction, math fiction, and satirical treatment of hierarchical Victorian society and class distinctions. I recommend this book because its treatment of the various dimensions and what can be known and not known (revealed and concealed) within each can readily be extended—by analogy, allegory, and anagogy—to useful considerations of the *More* that is of great importance in transpersonal studies. The book was republished in 1992 as a Dover Thrift Edition, and it is one of the few, if not the only, paperback book that is available, new, for only \$2.00 (and, a bit before that, for only \$1.00). This reminds me of that earlier time in which paperback (“pocket”) books were available, new, for 25 cents and 35 cents.

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