

Transformative Learning in Design: An Experiential Account in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Transformative learning is essential to most companies, owing to its characteristics of “personality and adaptability,” which are core features for future success in the industrial world. However, less is known about how design students embrace transformative learning. Therefore, the authors aimed to explore the dynamics of transformative learning in the meaning-making process of fashion design graduates in their work environment. A narrative research approach was adopted, and 31 participants were used. The data-gathering tool was an interview guide. The findings unveiled that the learning environment, the readiness of students to learn, the design challenge, fellow student collaborations, and lecturer coaching or mentorship are the pillars of transformative learning. The mentorship served as the foundation on which the students built their experiences for collaboration. Theoretical findings pointed to the shift from a learning activities survey to a learning activities narrative, which embraces the full spectrum of student experiences

KEYWORDS

design, experiential account, mentorship, Transformative learning

INTRODUCTION

This paper advances Piaget's (1952) assertion that the goal of education is not only to increase the amount of knowledge but also to create possibilities for a learner to discover, invent, or create new things. The relevance of doing new things is justified by Sundheim's (2013) statement that the prerequisite in hiring new employees for any business is not dependent exclusively on the candidate's knowledge. Therefore, to address changes in the design industry to match the educational system, we should provide students with new and different perceptions of the world, to render them adaptable to the workplace, in addition to the knowledge they gain. Thus, as design education evolves along with the industry, there are uncertainties in the role of future designers (Faerm, 2012; Brissaad et al., 2022). Most companies have shown that the future depends not only on cognitive capacity but personality and adaptability of employees when determining the smartest employees (Sundheim, 2013). These assertions have made educators create enabling environments by adopting transformative learning in their teaching, which helps to prepare design students as employable candidates.

Transformative learning occurs in two forms, which are transformation in perspective and transformation in action (Reushle, 2014, p. 15). The transformation in perspective and action occurs

when participants are involved in innovation programs, which build their confidence and their ability to try new things to improve their wellbeing and solve challenges in their workplaces and communities (Joyce et al., 2019, p. 110). The transformation happens by deriving meanings from experiences through reflection: critical reflection and critical self-reflection (Joyce et al., 2019, p. 115). In the reflection processes, the role of mentoring, such as support, creating a challenging atmosphere, and provision of vision, are critical to facilitating new talents, a sense of empowerment, and deeper understanding (Joyce et al., 2019, p. 115). From a holistic perspective, the discussions so far on transformative learning show that reflection and mentorship are integral in the learning process, as pointed out by researchers such as Meijer et al. (2017). Other researchers, such as Reushle (2014), also emphasized capacity building for educators (mentors) to influence the outcome of transformative learning. However, there are limited studies on how students embrace the entire transformative learning process from social or cultural perspectives (Joyce et al., 2019, p. 126). In other words, there is a knowledge gap in how students embrace the experience of transformative learning through a narrative approach, which plays a significant role in transformative learning processes. The main research question driving this study is: How do fashion design graduates make meaning (if at all) of their transformative learning experiences using a narrative approach during their studies and in the subsequent work environment?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Transformative learning offers a theory of learning that is uniquely adult, abstract, and grounded in human communication to understand and interpret the learning process (King, 2009; Mezirow, 1996). Transformative learning is formulated around an evolving process, thus, “learning is understood as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience in order to guide further action” (Mezirow, 1996, p. 162). Mezirow (2000) proposed that transformative learning is of a cognitive, rational nature that involves reasoning, critical reflection, and significant interaction. For Mezirow (2000), transformative learning is fundamentally an epistemic (cognitive) experience that allows for critical reflection, contextualization, perspective transformation, or a combination of all these (Mezirow, 1996). King (2009) offered a contemporary look at Mezirow’s (1996) transformative learning theory. King (2009) identified the need for a tool that could aid in the facilitation of perspective transformation in adult education. She revised the ten stages of transformative learning proposed by Mezirow (1996) and collapsed them into four identifiable stages presented in Figure 1. This study, thus, used King’s (2009) four stages as a lens to focus on the identification of the personal experiences that took place in the design classroom—a process that is much dependent on reflection. Within the four stages, as outlined by King (2009), the learners and educators play different roles to ensure that the stages yield the required results. Before discussing these roles, there is a need to look at transformative pedagogy and its relation to learning.

Transformative Pedagogy and Phases

Transformative pedagogy is based on constructivist and critical activist pedagogy that positions students to examine their beliefs, values, and knowledge critically to develop a reflective mindset for appreciation of diverse views (Ukpokodu, 2010). Transformative pedagogy is, therefore, meant to expose students to see the world in a new way when new meanings are encountered through the awareness of habits of mind and points of view to develop alternative perspectives to define their worlds for a better understanding (Ukpokodu, 2010). Transformative pedagogy happens in a democratic and emancipatory space where there is an active engagement between teachers and students in a dialogical relationship as co-learners, which leads to transformative intellectualism on both sides (Ukpokodu, 2010).

The pillars or the theoretical underpinning of transformative pedagogy, which fosters transformative learning, are individual experiences (prior and in-class experiences), which constitute

the first facet for critical discursive evaluation of normative assumptions of the learner (Mezirow, 2000). A greater life experience on the side of students and teachers is critical for dialogic engagement and reflection (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009). The classroom experiences, on the other hand, are created by teachers to provoke meaning-making among students, which act as triggers for “disorienting dilemmas” and critical reflection for immersed and direct holistic experiences (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009, p. 9). The second facet of transformative pedagogy is critical reflection. In this phase, students or learners question critically held assumptions and beliefs held together by their prior experiences. The critical reflection is triggered by either questions posed by teachers or through a personal encounter with phenomena in class leading to conflicting thoughts, feelings, or actions (Mezirow, 2000). There are three types of critical reflections, which are content, process, and premise (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009). The content reflection covers perception, thought, emotions, and actions (Kreber, 2004). The reflection process is associated with how the perception is performed, and the premise is linked to the need for reflection (Kreber, 2004). These three types of reflections are performed sequentially but unconsciously during the meaning-making process.

The third facet is dialogue. Dialogue requires a reflection done through a discourse approach by bringing experience and reflection together through a relational process in personal and self-disclosing terms by learners (Carter, 2002). The fourth facet of transformative pedagogy looks at holistic orientation encounters by the learners through engagement with other ways of knowing, which is affective and relational, and happens through a see–feel–change order rather than an analyse–think–change order (Brown, 2006). The holistic orientation allows both the learner and teacher to become more aware of their feelings and their relationship to sense-making through expressive ways of knowing (Taylor, 2007). The fifth facet is the awareness context, which covers personal and socio-cultural factors that shape society (Mezirow, 2009). These factors in the awareness context help create a predisposition for change in learners since they will already be in a transitional mode of meaning-making (Lange, 2004). The last of the facets is the “authentic relationship” (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009), which is cardinal for transformative learning to happen. Authentic relationship is established through mutual utilitarian benefit, enshrined in love, embedded in memory and imaginative acquaintance, and acts as a holder for all the other facets to ensure a successful transformative learning experience (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009).

The Roles of Educators and Learners

The readiness for transformative learning is a significant factor in the learning process (Fullerton, 2010, p. 42). However, King (2005, p. 17) argued that though educators have a role in initiating learners into the readiness mode to set transformative learning in motion, it should be done with caution from an ethical perspective by respecting the rights, beliefs, values, and decisions of adult learners. King (2005, p. 17) advanced that educators must give room for adult learners to reject or embrace the transformation process without imposing on them their mentoring directives. Notwithstanding the warning from King (2005, p. 17), the way educators embrace transformative learning is driven by other factors, which could be within the power of the educators or not. One such factor is the design classroom, which offers a unique model of education, where it is commonly accepted that knowledge is produced and not disseminated, but Kolko (2012) argued that in a design classroom, the design lecturer is recast as a facilitator who helps students shift their frame of reference. This setting allows for a natural flow between educators and learners for effective collaboration (King, 2009).

Before new knowledge can be produced, students are confronted with a distorting dilemma or disrupted reality where they are faced with a self-examination period, which is related to affirming and connecting to the created challenge by the educators (King, 2009). During this time, students critically assess their assumptions on various levels, such as their belief systems and socio-cultural positions to overcome uncertainties (King, 2009). This self-examination further allows students to consider and explore their new views and knowledge, which occurs through back-and-forth deliberation in personal meaning-making and in-group reflection that creates ownership of the experience. Subsequently, students experiment with and affirm their new views, ultimately leading to a new perspective (King,

2009). At the experimental stage, they engage in “habits of mind” (Costa & Kallinick, n.d., p. 15). Habits of mind are defined as dispositions toward behaving intelligently when confronted with problems, the answers to which are not immediately known (Costa & Kallinick, n.d., p. 15). Habits of mind include tendencies to collect data through all the senses, to be aware of and reflect on the experience in a non-judgmental manner, to be flexible when solving a problem, to regulate emotion and be resilient after setbacks, and to attend to others with empathy and compassion (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Thus, habits of mind give birth to new experiences and new perspectives. This process creates a sense of ownership insofar as the individual feels empowered and in control of his or her learning and experiences, which in turn may lead to an experience of liberation in students. Dilworth (2010) described the liberating experience as the point when reflection drives to more profound levels of self, a place where it becomes possible to discard previous assumptions and behaviors. This stage is where learning occurs and becomes transformative (Dilworth, 2010).

During the transformation processes, educators are to initiate challenges and support, as stated earlier, but if the support is too much and the challenge too little, it will lead to stasis, while too much challenge and too little support will lead to retreat (Fullerton, 2010, p. 146). Thus, there should be a balance between the two (Fullerton, 2010, p. 146). This dynamism in the interplay between support and challenge is crucial for the success of transformative learning because it affects how learners embrace each stage in transformative learning. However, how learners embraced transformative learning has not been elaborated on, in academic literature, especially in the South African context. The next section deals with reflection, which is a significant component in transformative learning since that is what connects each stage to the other in transformative learning.

Reflection and Narrative

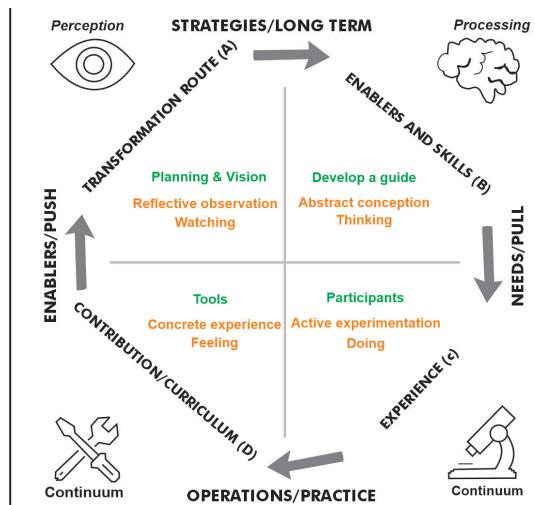
Boud et al. (1985, p. 3) depicted *reflection* as an “intellectual and affective [emotional] activity in which individuals engage to explore their experiences in order to obtain new understandings and appreciation.” The transformation in understanding may not happen entirely during students’ studies but may only come to fruition when they are confronted with more profound thought and insight during their work life. Schön (1987, p. 62) identified the ability to reflect on action as a process of continuous learning to be one of the significant characteristics of professional practice. He claimed that the (then) current model of professional teaching, which he called “technical rationality,” in which students are charged up with knowledge during training to discharge knowledge only when they enter the world of work and practice, has never been a complete account of how professionals think in action (Schön, 1987, p. 62). The capacity of participants to reflect on the action (after the fact) as well as in action (during the fact) was drawn on substantially as an educational construct and as a pillar of transformative learning. One of the methods through which reflection is taken further and “opened up” for more sense-making, is narrative.

Narrative is central to transformative learning because it makes the abstract concrete and serves as a vehicle for collaborative dialogue among students and educators (Szurmak & Thuna, 2013). It also serves as a powerful and dynamic learning tool, which people use to make sense of their world through reflection and diffraction (Szurmak & Thuna, 2013). Therefore, using narrative in a learning activity survey (used by an educator to measure whether learning has taken place) is framed as a learning activity narrative (LAN), adapted from the learning activity survey (LAN) of King (2009), which focussed largely on numerical data and percentages, not narrative data.

Theoretical Framework

The framework applied for testing the assumptions of transformative learning by fashion design participants was King’s transformative learning theory (2005), which is also reflected in Kolb’s learning cycle (2015) as captured in Figure 1. The theory has four outer parameters guiding the input in each quadrant, which in turn defines the research framework. The upper parameter shows the strategies and prevailing outlook, and the lower parameter the operational or practical implications.

Figure 1. Theoretical framework for the research (King, 2005; Kolb, 2015)



Therefore, the upper parameter of the diagram represents the long-term plans and visions, and the lower, the strategies and operations for success. In the same diagram, the left section represents the enablers or ‘push’ factors essential for success, while the right section shows the needs or “pull” factors for success as well.

Each quadrant represents a different focus. Quadrant A identified the need for a concept and plan for the research. It is fitting to say that this section focused on identifying the research questions, identifying appropriate research theory, defining the methodologies used, and identifying the role players in this research. Quadrant B focused on the enabling factors identified within the research process by categorizing the compelling factors on the future of fashion design education. In Quadrant C, the focus was on the owners of the knowledge, that is, the 31 contributors to the research, determining and analyzing their experiences as fashion design graduates and the realization of their experiences in work life. Quadrant D focused on the implementation of research tools. These tools identified transformative learning by investigating factors such as subject matter, teaching and learning styles, and work processes.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research approach was influenced mostly by the work of Plowright (2011) and Punch and Oancea (2014). Plowright suggested advancing from mixed methods to an integrated approach for a deep understanding of a phenomenon. The methodological approach to the research discards the traditional dichotomy between qualitative and quantitative, based on the theory of Plowright, whose work goes beyond the mainstream mixed-methods approach to research. The primary philosophy of mixed methods research is that of pragmatism. *Mixed-methods research* is an approach to knowledge (theory and practice) that attempts to study multiple viewpoints, perspectives, positions, and standpoints where the perspectives of narrative (qualitative) and numeric (quantitative) research are always included. Patton (2015) described this method as a three-windows approach, as depicted in Figure 2. An investigation that may flow from an inductive approach where the researcher establishes what the important questions and variables are, followed by a deductive hypothesis testing or outcome measure that is aimed at confirming or exploring the findings, and finally back again to an inductive analysis to look at unanticipated or unmeasured factors.

This approach led to the research design construct used in the study. The primary research decision followed the path illustrated in Figure 3 that presents an outline of the research design.

Figure 2. Classic mixed-methods inquiry (Patton, 2015, p. 65)

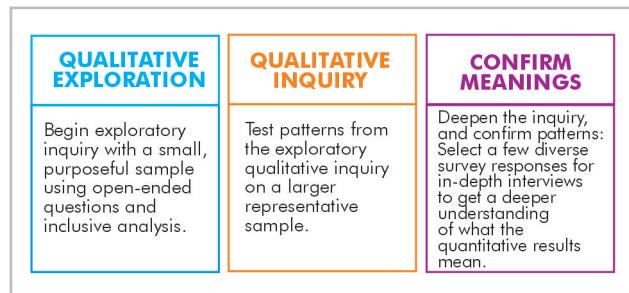


Figure 3. Research design



The narrative approach was selected because the researchers used an inductive approach that is purposefully centered on [in-depth] describing, explaining, and interpreting collected data (Williams, 2011, p. 67). An integrated approach allowed for the opportunity to engage in the narrative storytelling responses of the participants, as they reflected on transformative learning experiences. In addition, the narrative approach aided in exploring experiential accounts of graduates, complex and intricate accounts of individuals based on their different experiences resulting from a unique understanding of reality. The data was gathered through an interview guide from 31 participants. The interviews allowed for the opportunity to engage in narrative storytelling responses of the participants, which facilitated a better understanding of the participants' experiential accounts. The unit of analysis was the transformative learning experiences occurring in educational contexts in group projects, oral discussions, class activities, industry visits or internships, and personal reflection.

Selection of the Participants

This study was aimed at the cohort of students who graduated in fashion design at the bachelor's in 2009–2014. The qualification under study was being phased out at the university, and the feedback of this study helped shape the focus areas and curriculum content for the replacement qualification. Therefore, the graduates of the phased-out qualification of the last six years were identified as the

sample selection. The design program was small; as such, there were 66 graduates listed as possible participants. Of the 66 graduates, only 47 could be tracked to participate in the study, with 31 replies.

The gathered data through the interviews were transcribed verbatim to ensure the validity and authenticity of the message. Regarding analysis, we adhered to the path of Patton (2015), based on his assertion that the qualitative analyst seeks to understand the interrelationships among the dimensions that emerge from the data, without making prior assumptions or specifying hypotheses about the linear or correlative relationships among variables. The gathered data were reduced into themes, which were developed from the narrations that were given by the participants.

RESULTS

In using Plowright's (2011) philosophy of mixed-methods research, the findings are presented in two parts, which are the underpinning quantitative responses and the interpretative narrative and qualitative contributions. The study sought to find out the experiential account of fashion students over four years of their university education from a transformative learning perspective. At the same time, a demographic picture of the study participants was built: gender, age group, marital status, and ethnic group. The presentation of data has been categorized into two sets. The first set presents the demographics of participants, followed by narrations on how the participants experienced transformative learning.

Demographic Information

Tables 1 to 4 indicate that most of the participants were females (83.9%), and the majority fall in the age group of 25–29 years of age (67.7%). Marital status was reported as 71% *single*, 22.6% *partnered*, and 6.5% *married*. The last table confirms that most of the responses came from white graduates (48.4%), with 9.7% from black graduates and 38.7% from other people of color.

The demographic results concur with the study of Gwon and Jeong (2018) reporting on the concept of impressionability among adolescents and young adults. They agree that exposure to the environment, participation in activities, and interpersonal factors have an influence on thought processes. As such, of significance were the realization of new attitudes and behaviors and the modification of existing attitudes and behaviors.

Table 1. Participants by gender

Gender	Number	Percentage
Male	5	16.1
Female	26	83.9
Total	<i>N</i> = 31	100

Table 2. Participants by age group

Age group	Number	Percentage
21–29 years	21	67.7
21–24 years	6	19.4
Older than 35 years	4	12.9
Total	<i>N</i> = 31	100

Table 3. Distribution by marital status

Marital status	Number	Percentage
Single	22	71.0
Partnered	7	22.6
Married	2	6.5
Total	N = 31	100

Table 4. Distribution by ethnic group

Ethnic group	Number	Percentage
White	15	48.4
Black	3	9.7
Asian	0	0
Other people of colour	12	38.7
Total	N = 31	100

Experiencing Transformative Learning

The results of the research indicated that participant experiences of transformative learning happened through preparedness to learn, the learning environment, the challenge given, fellow student support, and lecturer guidance, which in turn led to the interconnectedness of experiences through collaborations to build knowledge and divergent thinking abilities for solving problems narrative approaches. The next sections throw light on how the participants experienced transformative learning through the elements mentioned early vis-a-vis narrative approaches.

The first phase we will tackle is the readiness to learn. Narratives on readiness were so crucial on the side of the students because it positioned them mentally to reflect on their emotional strengths, prior knowledge acquired, and how relevant they were to their current situations. Also, their self-actualization surfaced through their narrations, which enabled them to open up to new experiences needed to transition them through all the phases of transformative learning for results to be obtained. These are some of the typical comments shared by some of the participants on the need to narrate their mental preparedness:

I realised that my future would depend on what I put in and that it was only my responsibility to do well. I believe that being at university put me in a position where I was old enough to make decisions and form opinions like an adult. (Participant 3)

In my first year in Fashion, I . . . realised that I have to change the way I think of my project and go beyond that trying to do more and improve my skills, when I engaged in a chat with my lecturer. (Participant 4)

The comments shared by Participants 3 and 4 show that student preparedness was related to mental readiness, which became visible to them only when they narrated them. This, therefore, implies that reflecting and describing mental readiness is a core element when learners are guided into a transformative learning space. Moreover, from the comments, mental readiness was self-induced by

the learners, which created a sense of responsibility on the side of the learners. Readiness thus serves as a platform on which all the other elements are anchored.

The second phase is the learning environment. The learning environment encapsulated a series of activities in different settings. The activities consisted of classroom group projects, internships, industrial visits, group discussions, lecturer students' interactions, personal reflections, reading of assignments, and self-evaluation in class. The following comments shared by some of the participants shed light on how the learning environment contributed to the transformative learning experiences:

Verbally discussing concerns and class/group projects have been the two experiences that taught me essential workplace skills that I had not adequately developed before group projects and class activities. (Participant 3)

Internships and industry visits were integral in immersing me in the culture of the fashion industry. It was also beneficial to discuss concerns about assessments and other factors within the industry with my classmates, many of whom are now emerging designers and making incredible headway in the industry. This allowed me to experience their thought processes. (Participant 7)

The internship I had during my 3rd year prepared me for the working environment. Doing two fashion shows showcasing my work helped me develop confidence in my work and helped me to be independent to create garments. (Participant 9)

These comments speak to the fact that the multiple activities and settings forming the learning environment helped students to experience different out-of-class scenarios and in-class scenarios that propelled them in the narratives process to shape their creative and critical thinking abilities needed by companies in the working world. The narratives connected experiences from different spaces using reflective and diffractive narrative conversations for a deeper understanding of the experiences' relevance to them.

The third, fourth, and fifth phases, which are the design challenge, fellow student collaborations, and lecturer guidance, will be discussed together due to their relatedness during a transformative learning process. The assignment given by the lecturers was difficult due to the deadlines given and the nature of the design solutions required to solve the problem, according to some of the comments given by the participants. However, they managed to meet the deadlines set with the designed solutions as they engaged in narrating their challenges in the search for solutions with their peers and lecturers. The solutions to the design challenge and deadlines emerged through narrative conversations, which connected past experiences to skills gained, which in turn created the potential for numerous solutions.

In the case of fellow student collaboration, they embraced the understanding of tolerance of different peoples' views and the need for cross-pollination of ideas through creative conversations with scenarios that made them achieve a collective design solution, based on different perspectives that were expressed. These are comments shared by some of the participants, which throw more light on fellow student's collaboration and experiences gained from the transformative learning under the auspices of their lecturers:

During my studies, I learnt that teamwork is very important, also that everybody in the group works towards one goal and that no matter how small one's role is within the team/group, your role is of the same importance as the next. (Participant 12)

The environment and circumstances regarding the given task force a person out of their comfort zone and to experience new things. You push yourself to creative limits, and I think that opens your mind up. I also learned to think for myself and not be spoon-fed with thoughts and ideas by others. I loved learning and seeing different traditions and cultures from other students (which I never experienced before) and became more open-minded. (Participant 1)

My classmates' support and collaboration with the challenge from the lecturers and the lecturer's support helped to initiate me very well into the transformative learning mode. (Participant 5)

Socially I gained methods of working with different people in a group or one on one. This helped me to understand you never get to work with whom you want to but have to adapt to your surroundings and the requirement. (Participant 4)

The lecturers' guidance was characterized by promoting responsibility on the side of students' self-confidence, self-discipline, professionalism, and motivation toward success using creative narrative scenarios. These scenarios promoted design agencies that unveiled different perspectives woven into one fabric. The guidance by the lecturers was, therefore, driven by narratives that showed openness and responsiveness and gave birth to divergent thinking skills needed in the industry today. From the findings, the five phases (the learning environment, the readiness of students to learn, the design challenge, fellow student collaborations, and lecturer guidance) are mutually inclusive since the narrative discourses flow from one transformative facet into the other through deeper reflections entangled in experiences within the boundaries of knowing and becoming. The narrative approach, therefore, served as the incentive for bringing out the "intrinsic selves," which thinking alone cannot define and interrogate.

DISCUSSION

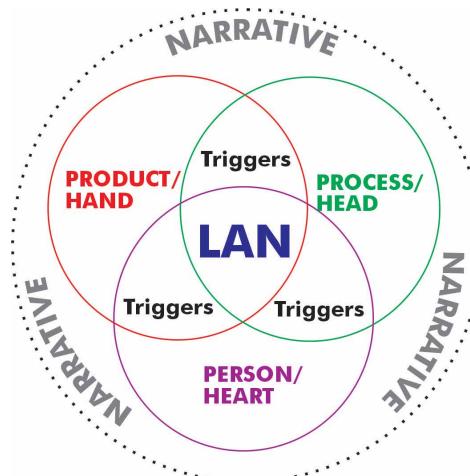
Based on the findings, transformative learning is anchored in how a lecturer engages in narrative discourse with students. Most transformative learning experiences skewed favorably toward lecturer mentorship. This came about because of the respectful sharing of student narratives, their in-depth revelations, or to trigger lively co-construction of the narrations for deep engagement in students' thinking, feeling, and doing, which are central to transformative learning. The comments from the participants highlighted the critical influence of the design–studio lecturer, which contests the perception that design students are mostly self-directed in their studies. Thus, the value of the lecturers lies mostly in their mentorship role, which is supported by seminal authors such as Chickering (1969), Vaillant (1977), Levinson et al. (1978), and Kram (1988). More recently, Straus et al. (2013) reaffirmed the importance of mentorship as a means that guarantees a positive relationship that leads to student success (Jenkinson & Benson, 2017; Blieszner, 2020). This positive result signifies a strong emphasis on trusting relationships between lecturers and students and creates an enabling discursive space for a shared experience. Additional comments from the participants show that in transformative learning, the lecturer plays an added role, which is to identify vulnerable students and develop individual competencies through introducing positive adjustment and transformation, which happens through deliberate inquiry into the narrations by the students to enable the lecturer to know which student beliefs, values, and experiences need modification for transformative learning to happen. The lecturers' mentorship through co-reconstructed narrations created positive and confident students who are goal-directed and driven to succeed (Diseth & Samdal, 2015).

The other experiential accounts shared by participants dived deeper into the mentorship qualities, particularly the responsiveness and openness of lecturers. These qualities allowed a safe space for students and permitted experiencing and engagement with the four phases (King, 2009) of transformative learning. The endorsing responses from participants were summarised in keywords such as *valuable influence, new experiences, self-challenging task, and change for the better*. Transformative learning, as expressed by the majority of the participants, translated as the ability to transform learning experiences—through active lecturer mentorship—into professional experiences of collaboration, interconnection, and flexibility in thinking and doing. What connects the four platforms is reflection. Reflection, therefore, reiterates Mezirow's (1996, p. 162) transformative learning concept as an evolving process where learning is understood as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new meaning of one's experience to guide further actions. Therefore, in transformative learning, since the outcomes are co-constructed, lecturers must handle students

professionally without imposing their preferences and belief systems on learners since they serve as the facilitators of the entire transformative learning process.

Regarding future fashion curricula development, it became clear that transformative learning theory has expanded our understanding of the meaning-making process during student learning through the narrative data feedback process. We became particularly aware of the fact that it is not only what graduates know but rather *how* they know, which contributes to a new perspective and new knowledge. The research findings confirmed that meaning-making through transformative learning experiences might well contribute to a relevant and responsive fashion design curriculum in the future. This came by way of insight into the importance of relationships, feelings, and context in the new knowledge that transpired from the data, as captured in Figure 4. Thus, based on Figure 4. the key, therefore, is in the narrative that is the fundamental underpinning to individualized learning. Thus, the narrative approach makes learning relevant to the time and place, serving as a trigger or enabler for transitioning from thinking (process or head) through feeling (person or heart) to doing (product or hand) that is based on questioning, which challenges self-entrenched positions, to new perspectives.

Figure 4. Learning activity narrative points to narration as a key in design learning activities



In discussing the theoretical framework used in the research, we identified relevant links with the reviewed literature from the theory transformative learning theories of King (2005) and Kolb (2015). Further correlations with the four steps in discovering transformative learning in the work of King were identified. The theoretical framework has further been explained in Table 5 to show how it is linked with the entire research as its theoretical contribution, which can be adopted by other researchers.

CONCLUSION

This study proposes a new framework for exploring transformative learning towards emancipated work readiness. The study also contributes to the research on transformative learning by adding to understanding beyond the classroom and extending the research to qualified graduates in the workplace. The contributions of the research are related to the theory and the research process of transformative learning and the contribution to the development of design curricula in the future. The new framework proposes a focus on student development by concentrating on the *praxis* referred to as *product or hand*, on the *technical*, referred to as the *process or head*, and on the *emancipatory relating* to the

Table 5. Theoretical framework alignment to the transformative learning experience

Transformation route (A)	Enablers and skills (B)	Experience (C)	Contribution to curriculum (D)
Lecturer guidance through planning and developing lecture content that supports transformative learning through narrative scenarios to question worldviews that lead to shifts in values and identity	Readiness to learn	Positioned them mentally to tackle any task they were given with zeal and creativity.	The narrative approach used for teaching to necessitate the enablers should be integrated in the design curriculum engage students in both reflective and refractive exercises for a shift in values and identities that makes students transit into being and becoming.
	The learning environment	Meaning-making based on interactions with different spaces for the acquisition of confidence, knowledge, and skills through emersion and empathy for self-actualization.	
	The challenge given	Resilience was developed to tackle difficult tasks	
	Fellow students support	Developed tolerance and a collective approach to creating design solutions.	
	Lecturer guidance	Openness and responsiveness through collaborations with lecturers birth divergent thinking skills needed in the industry today by students.	

person or heart (now called the *three Ps*). The key to relevant education, which made a difference in the transformative experiences of graduates and that had an impact on their education, does not only lie within the scope of the three Ps. The focus on the three Ps has to be contextualized within the narrative aspects of the data. The interface of the three Ps can be reflected on and diffracted towards new knowledge through the narrative that had to be adapted to make educational outcomes relevant to the individual by extension and to society at large.

The study was retrospective in nature, and thus, the reflective process of personal experiences is subjective. The result could therefore be biased; idealization and advocacy for a preferred memory of the experience may have been operational (Zatzman, 2006). Furthermore, the small sample size does not allow for generalizability to a larger group. In addition, it would be noteworthy to examine if the format of the study, which was online following the learning activity survey (LAS) model, would have yielded different results if it had been conducted face-to-face from the start.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From a pedagogic perspective, since student readiness is a factor that enshrines them in the transformative learning space, the lecturers should get the learners psychologically ready for the program they chose. Lecturers are tagged as pivotal in the transformative learning experiences and should be oriented regularly to take full control of their position as facilitators to enable students to experience transformation in their learning.

The collaborative experience shared by the participants makes it clear that collaboration should be encouraged by lectures. In the case of the design challenge, the educators must manage challenge and support in a balanced way to avoid spoon-feeding but rather render support that will let the student have a full experience of transformative learning. Future curricula should be constructed with a focus on student narrative that reflects their interaction with the environment while studying, with people, and with knowledge gained.

In the aspect of the limitations of the study, there has been significant development about a decolonized curriculum in higher education since 2015; this research did not address the theme specifically. We do not disregard, by any means, the importance of decolonized education in the South African context, but we chose to focus on work readiness, an aspect that goes hand in hand with some constructs of decolonized education, namely personal empowerment, emancipation, and economic equity (Gay, 1995) among others.

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