Yvonne Sliep

Teaching for transformation: the use of narrative metaphor to develop reflexive professionals

This article emphasises the importance of developing critical reflexivity in professionals. Higher education in South Africa is still shaped by socio-economic and political inequalities. This article suggests that transformative teaching practices can respond to the challenges resulting from such inequalities by making use of narrative metaphor. Narrative metaphor embraces the power of stories in teaching and learning through experience-based, constructivist pedagogy. Transformative teaching and learning connects new knowledge with lived experience, resulting in an on-going construction and reconstruction of personal, professional and contextual narratives. Knowledge is thereby co-constructed and participants become part of actively shaping the context in which they live, study and work.

Onderrig vir transformasie: gebruik van die narratiewe metafoor om nadenkende vakkundiges te ontwikkel

Die artikel lê klem op die belangrikheid om vakkundiges te ontwikkel wat krities nadenkend en reflekterend is. Die sosio-ekonomiese en politieke ongelykhede het tersiêre onderwys in Suid-Afrika gevorm. Dit kan aangespreek word deur transformatoriese onderwysstrategieë wat gebruik maak van die narratiewe metafoor en ervaringsgerigte konstruktivistiese pedagogie. Deur transformatiewe onderrig en leerprosesse word 'n brug gebou tussen nuwe kennis en leefervaring wat lei tot die konstruksie en dekonstruksie van persoonlike, professionele en kontekstuele narratiewe. Hierdie ervaring en bewuswording lei tot nuwe kennis en aktiewe deelname aan die vorming van die konteks waarin geleef, studeer en gewerk word.

Prof Y Sliep, School of Psychology, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Private Bag X7, Congella 4013; E-mail: sliepy@ukza.ac.za

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The newly merged Universities in South Africa are currently facing many challenges. The recent history of apartheid will continue to have ripple effects for a long time. On a structural level, the results of a system that resourced the education of white children ten times more than that of black children is still evident in our educational institutions. Adequate schooling that could result in entry into tertiary education is still not accessible to or affordable for the majority of the people in this country. Although South Africa is not poor, the majority of the people, in particular Black people, living in South-Africa are still living in female-headed households in rural areas (cf Terre Blanche 2006). Of specific importance for the Schools in Psychology in this context are the effects of high levels of structural violence, including social domination; political oppression and economic exploitation that result in on-going divisions and hostilities. Long-term exposure to violence has led to soaring levels of social crime including gender and family violence (cf Higson-Smith 2006). On a behavioural level South Africa is regarded as a high-risk society, in particular concerning alcohol, substance and sexual abuse, with the fastest transmission rate of HIV in the world (cf Govender & Petersen 2006, Naidoo *et al* 2006). All these factors lead to high levels of stress and impaired physical and mental health (cf Pillay 2006).

This complex scenario is aggravated by the fact that the universities have not been given adequate resources and support to address the challenges. Teachers therefore have to be creative when facilitating the production of appropriate knowledge and skills by means of transformative teaching practices that can result in application in the field. In a society where context is privileged above the more individualistic approaches of Western theories, teachers must pay more attention to the rich contribution of our indigenous knowledge systems. The voices of marginalised people who can help co-construct appropriate knowledge and work together with our graduates towards a more just society must be heard.

1. Educational premise

The education process described in this instance aims to develop reflexive professionals who can provide an appropriate service to individuals and communities and who will contribute to the shaping of a healthier society. We operate from the premise that we co-construct knowledge with our learners. We are interested in the way students have learnt from their lives, exploring the significance of such learning processes. Collectively, students construct and deconstruct social and educational worlds to contribute to a better, more nuanced understanding of learning, educational and societal processes.

Planned timelines, role-plays and imagery help not only to explore past experience and present positions but also to anticipate future scenarios. Any gaps in knowledge and skills that emerge from this exercise are taken into consideration in the overall curriculum or conceptualised as part of lifelong learning. Throughout this process learners develop a deeper understanding of their own learning processes and goals and how these can be matched with their working context. Learner stories collectively light up the landscape against which they are played out.

Working primarily at a postgraduate level, it is possible to do small-group teaching, where the tools of discovery, experience, reflection and theoretical interrogation lend themselves to the learning process. This allows for the incorporation of both the relational and the rational aspects which are acknowledged as important in our culturally diverse society, and is in keeping with a more holistic approach to teaching. In addition, small-group learning lends itself to the possibility of creating complex real-life dilemmas, where learners have to apply their knowledge in order to understand and negotiate the situation. Learners are encouraged to be open in their different viewpoints but to substantiate their views with both theoretical and practical examples. This usually results in lively debate, interrogations of existing theoretical frameworks, and the development of critical thought while remaining realistic in meeting the demands of everyday life.

Part of making the educational journey exciting and challenging is to encourage learners to situate real-life problems in their field of study into theoretical currents. This can be controversial but through dialogue leads to deeper understanding. This means exploring how the problem at hand intersects with current theoretical debates. Such inquiry either puts established ideas to the test or offers new insights.

Reflexivity is a meaningful practice that inevitably occurs on some level, as people deal with the mundane and extraordinary aspects of their lives. Reflexivity forms an important part of our theoretical foundation and is used to promote critical thinking and transformative learning (cf Brockbank & McGill 2000). **Self- and social questioning** enables people to understand how they are acted and, in turn, act within specific contexts and uncertainties (cf Chappel *et al* 2003). A surface level of reflexivity, namely reflection, operates when people process or deal with meaning and conceptualisations. A deeper level of reflexivity develops in a more active and conscious context. Gergen (1999) encourages us to place our premises into question and to suspend the "obvious", to listen to alternative framings of reality, and to deal with the comparative outcomes of multiple standpoints. The active and continuous consideration of how things potentially differ from the way they may appear leads to critical reflection. This process is often only possible by means of dialogue. This necessitates the facilitation of a process that embraces values of respect for difference, collaboration and connectedness (cf Brockbank & McGill 2000). Both learners and educators need to operate from a reflective mode.

2. Methodology

The narrative of this article evolved over a five-year period of paying close attention to the stories of our learners. New concepts emerged that had not originally formed part of the intended learning outcomes. They are now included in the course outline. Examples of these include different aspects of identity formation; the emerging importance of naming a particular work ethic, and developing an identity as a lifelong learner. These ideas crystallised mainly by analysing the

life stories and assignments of learners as well as the observations during experiential learning. Evaluations done throughout the year and analysis of individual interviews added further insight.
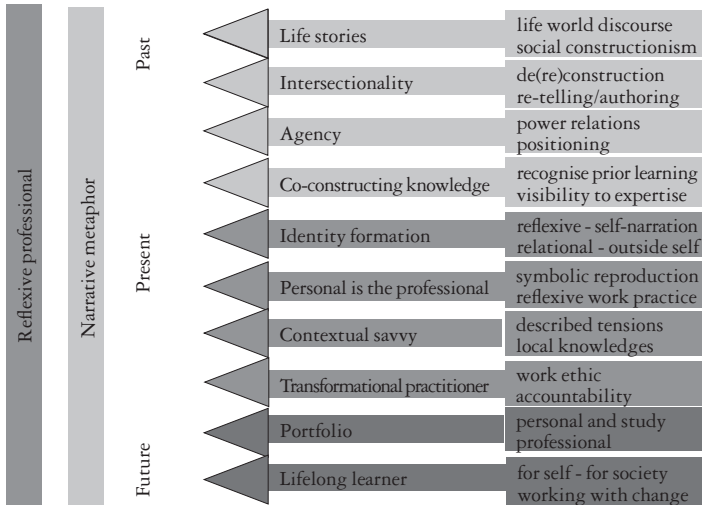
The examples drawn from the analysis of learners' stories illustrate how these narratives are framed by particular discursive practices. Attention to intersectionality reveals how discourses such as gender, race and class shape our reality in multidimensional ways that are unique to each individual. "Structural" and "political" intersectionality are examined to illustrate how systems and structures can perpetuate privilege for some, while restricting others, and how legal directives and government policies are reproduced from a dominant cultural perspective. These influences need to be understood as relational and fluid, depending on the context in which we find ourselves.

As a reflexive tool to facilitate learning, each student receives a coding report based on his/her own life stories. There are in total four opportunities to build on the life stories as students are introduced to more theory and dialogue. The coding is done on an ongoing basis and is returned to the students after each submission. This process has led to excellent discussions in the class. The emerging themes and patterns from the stories are presented and compared to those found in other groups. Learners respond to what has become visible and probe each other for deeper reflections. They are also encouraged to review their own stories in terms of the analysis, and add to the findings. The opportunity is used to demonstrate qualitative software programme analysis whereby a number of additional learning objectives can be met.

3.   Overview of interwoven activities

The challenge for the educator is to create, stimulate and weave together appropriate learning spaces and opportunities. The threads in this instance are the participants themselves, their histories (through life stories), experiences (critical learning incidences), lives (what they are presently confronted with) and aspirations (short- and long-term in work). The course aims to embed this weaving in sound theory, translate understanding into practical possibilities and build accountable work ethics in the process.

The following diagram illustrates the activities undertaken to develop reflexive professionals by means of narrative metaphor.

		Activity	Concept
Reflexive professional	**Narrative metaphor**	**Past**	
		Life stories	life world discourse / social constructionism
		Intersectionality	de(re)construction / re-telling/authoring
		Agency	power relations / positioning
		Co-constructing knowledge	recognise prior learning / visibility to expertise
	Present	Identity formation	reflexive - self-narration / relational - outside self
		Personal is the professional	symbolic reproduction / reflexive work practice
		Contextual savvy	described tensions / local knowledges
		Transformational practitioner	work ethic / accountability
	Future	Portfolio	personal and study / professional
		Lifelong learner	for self - for society / working with change

4. Learning activities

The learning activities involve biographical work, experiential learning, working with drama techniques and submission of written work. All the activities are aimed at making the learners part of a collaborative enquiry – much like action research – to deepen their understanding of the learning process. The learning activities are directed at creating a shift from "tacit knowledge", which is often semiconscious and unarticulated or fragmented and difficult to transfer to other contexts, to "explicit knowledge" which is more generalised, accessible to others and applicable to different settings.

4.1 Life stories

Educational biographies enable learners to understand what they have learnt through experience and to guide future learning (cf

Dominicé 2000). In transformative teaching the narrative metaphor acknowledges the power of personal stories in an academic setting. Learning from this framework takes place by means of experience-based, constructivist pedagogy. Learners connect new knowledge with lived experience. Through this process learners develop a deeper understanding of their own learning processes and learning goals. By **conveying personal journeys, different values, cultures and experiences** become visible in a respectful and safe environment. Tying this experience up in a clear theoretical framework leads to deeper understanding and insight both reflexively and intellectually. The narrative also provides a map to show where agency is played out.

As educators we also story subject matter and know from experience that, if a connection can be made between the lives and contexts of students, this results in a more meaningful learning environment where learning and application are integrated. Narrative as social construction takes place within a specific historical time and context and provides an entry into constructing knowledge and understanding. Having access to the personal life stories of learners creates possibilities for rendering visible how personal discourses are linked with professional lives and work practice. **The reflexive professional** would have the skill to help learners understand how they are positioned by particular discourses, and how, in turn, they resist or position themselves more actively within the context in which the action is taking place. An entry point in this instance could be to be alerted to language usage, as language is the agent that produces the discourses on people "stories" and meaning. Use of words such as "us" and "them" that indicate "othering" will be an example of needing to deconstruct what is meant.

On the first day of the course learners share prepared life stories with the group. They are asked to use the tree of life metaphor and are given some broad guidelines on how to respond to this task. Through the year the tree is revisited several times and learners can add anything they have become aware of and can choose what they want to share with the group. Their life stories are analysed to demonstrate how certain themes emerge and how these themes get richer

over time. In terms of discourse, both the distal and the proximate contexts are deconstructed by means of critical discourse analyses.

What learners refer to in their biographies is diverse and multilayered. Some examples illustrate the different perspectives:

• Gender

> The concept of boy children being more important than girl children was very clear in my family. By the time my parents had had six children two were boys and four were girls. For my mother six children were enough but my father wanted more children so she carried on trying for more boys. Finally she had ten children but still only two boys. My father used this excuse to engage in polygamy and my mother had no choice but to accept. My mother used her experience to encourage me strongly to develop my own career and not always have to be at the mercy of men's decision in the patriarchal society we live in.

• Race

> It just made me aware of how the political structures of the past had restricted individuals. It was also in matric when I started questioning my granny about her mother. It was a sensitive topic for her. Her mother left her and her sister when they were young because she had a white partner. She never ever went back to them. My granny doesn't even know when her mother passed away. She still cries when she talks about her past. My granny's experience developed me as a person. She had a tough childhood but she rose above her circumstances. She married my grandpa and had five children and most of us grandchildren are studying. It's up to an individual to make life better then their past.

• Privilege

> Nevertheless, being white and in the Apartheid era meant that my parents were able to achieve middle class status and we could afford to live in a nice area and choose which local school to go to. I think that this is important because being middle class set up the range of choices I will have throughout my life. For instance being white and middle-class afforded me the opportunity to go to university, and although Apartheid was over by this time, the ramifications of the past meant that I got this opportunity while others did not.

• Transition

> In the new democratic South Africa I think that people my age (about 20-25) are in a way the 'in-betweeners', at least for the white race group. This is because although I did get a taste of the previous

political system, it all changed when I was still quite young and consequently I have been living in the democratic South Africa for longer than the Apartheid system. Therefore, I have experienced the 'privileges' Apartheid afforded whites, but I am also bound to experience the 'restrictions' of such a history, especially in relation to my job options. However, I still believe that we are luckier than our parents were, because the Apartheid regime was not propagated into all aspects of our lives and we had the freedom to grow up among all the different cultures in SA.

4.2 Intersectionality

Through discursive framing, reflections on revised and retold life stories help to translate diverse experiences so that they become meaningful for the participants involved. The study is situated within a strong social constructivist epistemology of narrative analysis. It focuses on three related psychosocial aspects: discourse, subjectivity and power. Intersectionality is an important notion in understanding how people view themselves in terms of where they are positioned physically, in their bodies, families or institutions and/or where they are located through discourse, for example political, historical, economic, and kinship-based factors. "Structural" and "political" intersectionality are examined to illustrate how systems and structures can perpetuate privilege for some, while restricting others, as well as how legal directives and government policies are reproduced from a dominant cultural perspective.

- The intersection of power and privilege

> I was born in Runyinya, a small town in the North Western part of Uganda. I have 3 brothers and we are nine sisters. My father was in the line of kings of Busongora but kingdoms were abolished at the dawn of independence in 1962. I must mention that my heritage has helped me to be articulate, confident, and to weigh my options and take the right decision so as not to shame my family. When I was 6 years old, my father was arrested and imprisoned on charges of treason just because the government in power was suspicious of everyone who had connections with the guerilla war fighters. With my father in prison, our land and other property were grabbed and my mother could not press any charges because the country was in a state of anarchy.

- Transition in institutions

> It was from this experience that I begun to realize that your sociali-
> zation really impacts on the way you see life, but what's important
> was what you make out of it. I believe that was also the reason why
> I chose to go to the university which had mixed races. For the first
> time in my life I was in a class with people from other races. I had
> to learn and adapt in a new environment and to the new medium
> of instruction and appreciate it. Not that it is always easy, but it
> really depends on how you look at it and react to it. I had to believe
> in myself and be proud of myself. Perhaps the environment and the
> time also allowed it, because this was post 1994 and people were
> beginning to be aware of their rights and very sensitive to acts of
> oppression and racism. However, I personally believe that racism
> is far from over. There is still a long way to go, but I believe it all
> lies in the socialization of the next generation.

4.3 Agency

Narrative helps to explore issues of relational power. **Examining dis-
courses** allows us to understand how the social world we live in is
organised. Social structures and webs of power relations are present
in any given context. In our work we privilege Foucault's (1980) un-
derstanding of power as multiple and productive, operating within
specific discursive structures. According to this view, power can be not
only repressive and negative, but also positive and productive. Power
is considered in terms of how it is negotiated between people; how it
circulates and creates individuals who both experience and exercise
power. From a social constructivist point of view we can illustrate
how systems and structures can perpetuate privilege for some, while
restricting others (cf Gergen 1985, 1991 & 1999, Fernandes 2003).

Part of the learning journey is for learners to understand how
they are positioned by these discourses and how they, in turn, re-
sist or position themselves more actively. This experiential learn-
ing journey results in the development of critical thinking and the
ability to not only critique the *status quo*. Positioning theory helps
us to challenge the way we are positioned by society and play an ac-
tive role in how we ascribe, resist or change the complex discursive
practices in which we are embedded and to which we contribute (cf
Foucault 1994):

- Applying agency within systems and institutions

    When I was doing matric, I never told my parents that I applied to go to University because of all the beliefs they had. In my application I also applied for financial aid because I knew they could not afford paying the fees. I wanted to break the belief that one should accept that they are poor and could not go further with their education. I was striving for success. Fortunately, all my applications were a success and I only disclosed the news later. Both my parents were surprised but felt very proud. The whole experience built my self-esteem and taught me independence. I had to move and stay on my own for the first time in my life. However, I still appreciate support from my parents, lover and from other people where necessary.

- Applying agency within cultural and social constructs

    When I reflect back at my life I see that I climbed over so many hurdles without loosing my true identity, culture or religion. I sometimes feel that I deviated from my family's chosen path for me as I am the first person to be married to a non-Comorian and non-Muslim person. This is not really a matter of great importance to me as I do not usually look at relationships the same way that some of my family members and other people do. Having the blessing of my grand parents who brought me up and passed on to me the values and norms I carry within me to this day, is the only thing that keeps me going and helps me to become more and more aware of who I am.

- Resisting positioning within religious constructs

    Life in a secondary school was very restrictive in that we stayed in school behind high gates and all we did was study, pray and follow routine. The school was being run by catholic nuns mainly from Ireland and France. One of the things I did not like was being forced to go for mass (prayers in a catholic chapel) everyday morning and evening when I was not catholic. I instigated passive resistance to forced prayers and prepared a long paper about freedom of Worship which I read on assembly! According to some staff, this was unheard of. The school system simply had no room for student voice. I was suspended for a week and my father was so angry, that he took me back to school and I was given six strokes of the cane, but I was satisfied that I had championed something I believed in!

4.4 Co-constructing knowledge

A social constructionist perspective emphasises a communal basis of knowledge. Gergen (1985) alerts us that knowledge is not something people possess, but rather something people do together.

We embrace this not only by means of the life stories discussed earlier in the article but by means of other more official forms such as recognition of prior learning. **The learners admitted in our postgraduate programmes are often mature adults at various stages of their career** development. In some instances it is possible to admit learners in the course based on their experience and not on their academic results. More important is the recognition of prior learning during the course. We emphasise that we co-produce knowledge together with what is available to us in this particular time and context. By doing so we encourage the notion that as educators we are not necessarily the experts on every topic offered in the course. We often experience that someone may have developed an expertise required in the course during their career development before they entered the course. To render this expertise more visible we encourage learners to formulate individual learning objectives. These may be based on skills they have already obtained or on specific knowledge they may want to obtain beyond the scope of the core curriculum. Evidence for the objective together with timelines are negotiated with the course coordinator. An example of this is, for instance, a learner with experience in fundraising skills. Part of the evidence could be successful funding applications. Where it is appropriate, students can be asked to give input to the group in their area of expertise. What is important about this is not only the flexibility that the course provides, but the authentic acknowledgement of expertise among peers and the possibility of providing witnesses regarding a telling of this expertise. This elicits confidence and efficacy with ripples in other areas of knowledge.

4.5 Identity formation

It has become increasingly clear in the literature that identity plays an important role in educational programmes (cf Chappell *et al* 2003). Social discourse with its discursive frameworks opens up

the possibility to explore how people shape their identity within particular constraints and possibilities. In the pedagogical practices described in this instance we use narrative to illustrate how discursive power constructs particular identities, in this case a particular professional identity, as a transformational health promoter.

Identity was not a construct that was built into the course from the onset. It became evident over time that identity was important on both an individual and group level. The first masters group for this course consisted of ten learners who had undergone an in-depth selection process as part of the course entry requirements. At the onset of the course they called themselves the "Big Ten", equating this to the "Big Five" that has become a trade name for South African wildlife. It was a metaphor they returned to many times during the year. In this particular group all the learners had also worked as professionals in their field. As mature learners many had already started a family of their own. Their greatest tension was being in multiple roles as learners, workers, partners and parents. Throughout the year they dealt with the identity of a "working learner". The group support and shared experience was enabling while the learners were doing their course work, but once they were left to do their research dissertation in greater isolation, the work became much more difficult.

The following year the learners were, on average, much younger than previously, with strong academic results but little work experience. For this group both a sense of personal and professional identity was an outcome of the critical reflection. They depended on honest feedback from their peers on both positive and negative qualities and on gaining deeper insight into their own behaviour and abilities. Practical skills and exposure to projects in the field formed an important part of developing a work identity. This was further enhanced by developing a work portfolio embracing past, present and desired future experience. The portfolio section will be covered in more detail later in this article.

- On a personal level

Jasmin defines herself as having a "sharp tongue and a quick temper". She says:

> If it had not been for this exercise I would not have realized how judgmental; self-righteous and perfectionistic I can be and how this stood in the way of my own development. If I had taken these qualities into my workplace in the future I would definitely had burn out within a few years. Now I can laugh at myself when it comes out and I won't let it dominate me. I was only able to do this because my weaknesses were balanced out with my positive qualities.

• On a professional level

> On a professional level I have come to realize that I have not yet made a positive, direct contribution to the community. This has encouraged me to seek opportunities that will expose me to community work where I can get to speak the language of the people and experience some of the things that are challenging and have an input in the development of such communities, particularly on the side of sexual and reproductive health of women. I have nothing wrong against men, I just feel that women (and children) are more vulnerable and marginalized in our communities.

4.6 Personal is the professional

Throughout the work on this course, close tracking was done to show how the personal emerges in professional choices and actions. This often occurs by what learners are explicit in sharing, such as in the following example:

> Matilda: Through her life story we learn that her experience of nearly becoming blind has directly influenced her choice of studying health psychology. She becomes intrigued by how individual willpower can lead to overcoming odds and decides to do her research study on people that have experience with having fully recovered from paralysis. It is only when she participates in a mock exercise competing for a prestigious award that she realises she has to motivate how this kind of study could benefit the country at this particular point and time. Understanding how people cope with extreme adversity becomes a way for her to understand how managing other health issues, like living with HIV/AID, can be informed. Developing herself as a researcher also addresses the dilemma of being a white woman.

At other times the effect of the personal on the professional becomes evident through omissions. Some omissions of specific issues are built in intentionally and the participants are conscious in choosing not to share parts of their life stories. These silences are respected

and fit within the framework of having different stories for different audiences and purposes. At other times, however, the omissions are not deliberate and the learner may not realise the impact that a particular aspect of his/her life may have on his/her work. This point can best be illustrated by means of an example.

Part of the methodology followed to make the impact of our lives on our work more visible, is the analysis of our life stories. Learners continuously rework their life stories after exercises have been conducted. The first sharing of a life story is followed by theoretical inputs on social constructivist discourse and deconstruction. Exercises followed by dialogue follow each of these. The re-workings are done in different font colours so that it is possible to track how reflections enriched the telling of the stories. The bimonthly coding reports provided after submission make the overall changes as well as every individual's own contribution more visible. The coding reports for each learner show how many times a particular theme was mentioned and reflected on. In one learner's story there was no mention of culture at all. Later, culture was mentioned only to explain why it was not important and how the learner was raised to rise above cultural and racial differences to reach his dream. In this student's work, he is in charge of antiretroviral (ARV) treatment in the province. This is an important topic in the course and he was asked to give input about his area of expertise to the group. During the presentation he was challenged about the lack of attention paid to the importance of culture in enhancing treatment adherence. It resulted in a very interesting debate among the learners where his oversight of the role of culture in his programme could directly be traced back to his own personal story. The collegial way in which the issue was addressed made the group feel that they had collectively contributed to a better understanding of the programme. Another learner, in charge of a refugee centre in central Durban, then invited him to visit the centre in his professional capacity, to address the fact that the refugees were not eligible for ARVs because they were in the country illegally. The intersection between politics and culture as well as the personal and professional was highlighted as a real and lived experience for the group.

If such clear opportunities do not arise in the class they can be simulated by the use of exercises. In one such exercise the learners are required to do an associative exercise regarding a given scenario. When sharing their readings of the story with each other they are always surprised as to how much of their own positioning is revealed. For purposes of the exercise we call this: "becoming aware of your frame of reference".

One of the reflections after this exercise:

> Wow! What started out as being a rather simple task has ended in a soul-searching expedition of merit! This assignment has caused me to find the link between those cobwebbed shelved past experiences that seemed of little consequence to my recent behaviour and thought patterns. I guess that there is place for Mr. Freud in Health Promotion after all!

4.7 Contextual savvy

Grappling to identify the kinds of reflexivity we want to stimulate within this teaching context has led to interesting reflections of our own. It is clear that we also have an agenda. We aim to stimulate our learners to have a deep and flexible understanding of their work context. A concept that seems to describe this is the need to develop contextual savvy. The word *savvy* originates from Spanish and adapted in pidgin English means *you know*. The word *context* is derived from Latin and means *to weave together* – referring to circumstances that contribute to the whole picture. DeLany (1999) refers to contextual savvy as the ability to read and understand the political, cultural and social cues that surround you and the ability to respond in such a manner that you can successfully obtain your objectives and adapt your approach according to changing circumstances and people. This approach corresponds with the isiZulu word for knowledge, *ulwazi*, which includes wisdom and understanding.

We aim to be consistent in linking theoretical input to the contexts in which the work is going to take place. To facilitate this process learners participate in situation analysis and practical projects throughout the course. We also seek evidence of contextual savvy within the narrative and more personal work that is submitted.

Example of a reflection on the work setting that speaks of reflexive thinking regarding context:

> Personally I feel that giving people handouts, like grants, while helpful in the short-term, it creates dependency and powerlessness in the long-term. HIV/AIDS is a bigger social problem than a health sector problem. The way I see it, the disability grant does not solve the bigger problems facing communities today. If people had the courage to get tested early, those who are positive would be put on prophylactic treatment and treated for opportunistic infections early while they are still manageable and would be able to continue working. I would put more focus on early voluntary counselling and testing, skills development opportunities, resources for self employment and adult literacy trainings which I believe will address issues of unemployment, poverty, and even stigma by getting the right information circulating in communities about HIV. This is of course not an overnight exercise but the important thing is to begin concientizing communities about the root causes of their problems, empower them to identify priority issues and to come with possible solutions using resources that are readily available to them. In the long run the government will by no means be able to put all the people who are HIV positive who do not yet know their status on a disability grant while struggling to put those who qualify currently. For me, critical consciousness, community mobilization and community empowerment are the key to finding some solutions to the problems that my people face.

The contextual savvy displayed above is directly linked to becoming a transformational health promoter, a role discussed in the next section.

4.8 Transformational health promotor

What is understood to be a critical transformative health promoter is a concept that is generated among the learners during the course. The learners are encouraged to explore the linguistic roots of the term and to deal with the qualities and abilities as well as finding indicators involved in be(com)ing a transformational health promoter:

> We began by deconstructing the word transformation as it seemed to be central to the concept of a transformative health promoter. The prefix "trans" was highlighted for its connotation of being across time. The root of the word transformation, formation, underlined for us the creation of form structure and function. We agreed that it was important to include elements of the old or previous structure function or form. We felt that an element of

> the past was implied as change is characterised by movement from one state/idea/role to the next or new. Our concept was mindful of time as fundamental. We agreed that change was inevitable and unavoidable. Transformation is endless. We then jumped to the concept of learning spurred on by the quote by Illich and thoughts that the phrase: "Learning is the process of becoming a lifelong learner" was pertinent. As transformation is intrinsic to this process, the definition of a transformative health promoter needed to include the health promoter's sense of self, self concept, self identity and the systems and structures that's/he works with and within, the ideas and concepts, value, enabling behaviour. All of the above needed to happen within an atmosphere of dynamic constructive change.

Many other aspects added to this group's understanding of what a transformational health promoter is. Every participant also applied his/her own understanding of what a transformational health promoter is to his/her own working context. In subsequent discussions it became obvious that the whole notion of power had been absent throughout the exercises which the learners did in trying to define and describe a transformational health promoter. This realisation resulted after a great deal of additional theoretical input on empowerment in the context of health promotion had been covered. Once it was named we were all really surprised that a concept that had been so visible throughout the work became absent at the first point of application. One of the learners wondered whether this had not happened because understanding how power operates rationally is still very different to being alert to the seductive, sly and subversive ways in which it operates in real life. He talked about how we all get recruited into operations of power without even realising it. He realised this when, in the exercise where he had to describe his aspired work practice, he had proceeded to generate a module for health promotion in the college in which he is teaching. Although he had included negotiations with all powers-that-be, he had failed to include the voices of the students who were going to follow the course and the communities they were going to serve. His insight and honest reflection was inspiring for everyone and they went back to the drawing board with new enthusiasm. Many examples were generated on how easy it is to be inclusive of those voices that have power over the more marginalised.

In the group subsequent to this, although power was viewed as an important construct in transformational practices, they felt that the role of accountability and responsibility had been omitted from the equation. It became increasingly clear that what was in fact being generated was a particular kind of work ethic. It was named and embraced by the participants as something to which they were going to very consciously try and stay close, despite the work pressures that may come their way.

An interest in developing a strong work ethic emerged in the work. A work ethic that would contribute towards the development of a more fair, just and compassionate society.

4.9 Portfolio

Portfolio writing is increasingly regarded as an important pedagogy in universities globally (cf Chappell *et al* 2003). A conceptual framework for a personal, study and professional portfolio is provided for the learners to enable them to observe their progress throughout the year. Many of our learners are mature and experienced in their field and the portfolio opens up possibilities to recognise prior learning. It simultaneously encourages the learners to participate in the generation of both group and individual learning contracts to best meet their needs within the constraints of their institution. For younger masters students the portfolio has become an important tool towards developing a professional identity based on individual vision, strengths and abilities. More recently, the portfolio was used as an incentive for the learners to theorise the work in which they are either engaged or intend to engage. Ultimately, it serves as a living document that embraces lifelong learning.

Students are given guidelines on how to create their portfolios. A distinction is made between the personal, study and work portfolio as well as a section for supporting evidence of work completed and referred to in the work portfolio. A framework for the technical presentation of the portfolios is also provided.

It is beyond the scope of this article to explain how the portfolio is structured. It suffices to say that it serves as a tool to draw together

all the modules taught in this specific degree. It has enabled lecturers to synchronise their teaching, and provides a platform to review the overall outcome of our masters in Health Promotion.

4.10   Lifelong learner

Throughout this work, attention is paid to developing an identity as a lifelong learner. Accepting that we will always be confronted by change on both a personal and work level necessitates not only flexibility but also a pro-active position of anticipating and preparing for the challenges resulting from changing environments. The learning that takes place on the course is only a small part of the learning that will take place throughout their life time.

• Example on a personal level

> Born in 1974, I consider myself to have grown up in the 1980s in a time when life was very different in South Africa in terms of political structure and ease of living as a white South African, as it is today. This is an important point that I would like to make since it meant that many aspects that had formed that part of my life as a child and teenager changed as if I was from a generation that was neither here nor there. For example during school years a person will learn their countries anthem, now the anthem has changed but it has never been introduced into my life and I do not know it- as many of my social peers.

• Example on a work level

> These days, given among other things, the technology, globalisation and the current position of women has opened up numerous life options for people my age. However, it is important not to forget that coupled with such 'privileges' are also other pressures, such as expectations to succeed, to be financially independent and at the same time to still have a family and raise children.

Working with future timelines has effectively promoted thinking about anticipated learning needs. Learners are asked to draw up two-, five- and ten- career paths. Part of the exercise is to find advertsisements for positions which they would like to occupy. A motivational letter is generated for an ideal position on one of these time lines. This identifies learning needs that must still need be developed in order to realise the identified position, are identified. Finally, students are asked to fill in an actual Fulbright scholarship

form and to write a personal statement on why they should be award-
ed the scholarship. The statement combines both their individual
and professional needs as well as forcing them to demonstrate why
South Africa would presently benefit from someone with this par-
ticular knowledge and skills. The learners are given the opportunity
to present their application to their peers as well as an expert panel.
Peers are not allowed to give the same weighting to two people and
have to motivate their assessment. The outcome is averaged and
detailed feedback is given. The exercise combines all the learning
activities practised throughout the course and becomes part of the
portfolio. Feedback on what they learnt – in particular from their
peers, who gave very open and honest feedback – has been very posi-
tive. It has also proved useful for actual scholarship applications as
well as for entering the job market.

5.   Discussion

This discussion will focus mainly on the facilitation process and the
challenges involved, from an educator's perspective. This article fo-
cused on what and why certain theories and activities were chosen to
stimulate critical and reflexive thinking. It does not however, fully
encapsulate the light, energy, spirit and enthusiasm involved in this
kind of learning journey. We teach our masters students according
to a block system. The first day is used to reconnect and lends itself
to more creative exercises. After a trusting relationship has been
established learners are open to experiment with different learning
activities such as drawing and dramatisation. For example, learners
acted out the problem of "accountability" as a real story that had
played itself out in a classroom setting. Although the scenarios are
usually serious, a space is created for people to laugh at themselves
and to develop a different relationship with the relevant concept.
When part of this work was presented at an international confer-
ence in Europe earlier this year, a poignant question was: "Why are
the learners not at each other's throats all the time, considering the
vast differences amongst them?" There are a number of answers to
this question. It addresses the South African context that people
are generally open to diversity and developing a capacity to bridge

differences. This is the case where people have a common goal as, for instance, in this case where the learners are working towards obtaining a Master's degree in health promotion. The learners, more than the educators, are showing us a way forward through their openness and acceptance to each other. It is the role of the educator to show the differences between them, as a place to explore and understand and not merely tolerate or accept. The experiential and creative exercises described provide important opportunities to embody learning about serious issues in playful ways. One of the learners invited the group for a team-building exercise in a professional setting "boot camp" where he was working. After an afternoon of negotiating an obstacle course, where we only managed because of the physical and psychological support we gained from one another, a very different atmosphere prevailed in the class. Potential tensions are not avoided but are elicited within a supportive and structured environment that is both containing and facilitative.

This does not mean that everything is easy and clear. Power is omnipresent – even if it seems invisible. In the first two years of the course learners were so surprised and delighted with the completely different teaching approaches that they found it difficult to be critical of the facilitators. A better balance was achieved when the learners became more critical of the facilitators.

6.   Conclusion

There is no "one correct way" of developing critical thinking. This article illustrated the use of narrative metaphor as one way of achieving this goal. The processes described ask commitment and rigour from the educator – it is a labour-intensive but rewarding journey. It asks for knowledge and skill that need to be cultivated with educators. I agree with Brookfield (2005) that as critical thinkers we will continue to create and recreate our personal and professional lives. Knowing this, we have to accept that we live and learn with positive uncertainty and that this may not always be a comfortable position to be in. It is, however, a position that enhances flexibility and the ability to move forward during times of rapid change.

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