



Transformative Learning: the Transformative Experience of a Leader

Apprendimento trasformativo: l'esperienza trasformativa del leader

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ABSTRACT

A transformative leader is a person who inspires others to follow his or her visionary position. Such a leader causes change in individuals and social systems. What follows is a narrative of a school leader whose inspiration and commitment brought about systemic change in the school he leads.

Un leader trasformativo è una persona che ispira gli altri a seguire la propria posizione visionaria. Tale leader provoca cambiamenti negli individui e nei sistemi sociali. Quello che segue è il racconto di un leader di scuola, l'ispirazione e l'impegno del quale ha portato cambiamenti sistemici nella scuola che conduce.

KEYWORDS

Transformative Learning, Transformative Leader, School, Change, Social Systems

Apprendimento Trasformativo, Leader Trasformativo, Scuola, Cambiamento, Sistemi Sociali, Let Me Learn (LML)

Introduction

A transformative leader is a person who inspires others to follow his or her visionary position. Such a leader causes change in individuals and social systems. What follows is a narrative of a school leader whose inspiration and commitment brought about systemic change in the school he leads. This narrative describes Mr Malt, Head of a school on the island of Malta, during his experience of a personal and professional transformation that both his teaching staff and he underwent as the result of a Professional Learning Programme. Through this Professional Learning Process the school community developed a shared language that led to an emancipatory pedagogy and a constant awareness of the learning Patterns of the individual children and adults within the school. This awareness and action led to improving learning for both teachers and children

The specific professional learning process discussed here is the Let Me Learn Professional Learning Process (LMLpLP)¹. The Let Me Learn Process is built on a robust meta-theory which describes how our brain processes stimuli and how through the brain-mind interface neuro-receptors and electro chemicals receive and code stimuli to make sense of the world. This meta-theory posits, that the brain's coding is translated into various symbols as they pass through four filters called Patterns. The Patterns are named Sequence (a Pattern that thrives on consistency and organization, needs time to categorize data and sequence events), Precision (a Pattern that thrives on accurate knowledge and feels safe when information is complete and extensive), Technical Reasoning (a Pattern that seeks personal relevance and practicality, is succinct in words and prefers to work away from the noise of different opinions) and Confluence (a Pattern that thrives on generating new ideas, using imagination to a high degree, seeks risk-taking opportunities and does not fear failure but see it as an opportunity to learn and grow) (Johnston, 2009; Kottkamp, 2015).

Each of the above Patterns functions simultaneously on the mental processes of cognition (thinking); conation (acting); affectation (feeling). The interplay of the Patterns, each operating through the three mental processes helps the individual to make sense of the world. Through an intentional metacognitive use of one's Patterns and their respective mental processes, the learning self can regulate and control his or her learning.

Thus, the professional learning process (LMLpLP), while allowing participants to understand their learning selves and others, offers a set of tools to help make sense of the world and act on it effectively.

Methodology Informing the Investigation

This study uses the narrative research approach. Through this approach, the study examines and develops understanding of how a school leader's actions are related to the context in which such actions occur, and how this interaction has

1 For a comprehensive description of the Let Me Learn Process read Johnston, C.A. (2009). *A Comprehensive Description of the Let Me Learn Process, an Advanced Learning System including Bibliography and Lexicon of Terms*. Pittsgrove NJ: Let Me Learn Inc.

brought about a transformative learning experience for both the individual and the whole school community.

Through the narrative approach, the study creates the space for the voice of the main actor to indicate and inform the themes the study presents. This research explores the contribution the Let Me Learn Professional Learning Programme that led Mr Malt, as Head of school, through his own personal transformative exploration and, as a result, the transformative journey he led the school through.

The arguments presented in this paper are discussed in relation to Mr Malt's emerging themes within the transformative learning stages identified by Jack Mezirow in his various publications on the transformative learning experience of adult learners. This study aims to enumerate salient features that characterise the experience. Through an integrative discussion of the literature, the identified themes are analysed within a wider context, thus offering a wider perspective on the learning experience.

Influencing Factors of an Educator's Transformative Learning Experience

This research is guided by Mezirow's theory of transformative learning. Mezirow's adult transformative learning theory is built on constructivist assumptions (Mezirow, 1991(a); Cranton & Taylor, 2012). A constructivist conceptualisation gives an educator the possibility of finding meaning within oneself, locating and validating acquired personal meanings "through human interaction and experience" (Mezirow, 1991 (b), p. xiv). This robust theory lays emphasis on the ways adult learners create meaning from the learning environment through a series of individual constructs. The research presented in this paper shows that individual constructs are strongly influenced by an individual's personal learning characteristics.

Mr Malt tends to avoid conventional approaches, is willing to take risks and tends to generate streams of ideas. He grants importance to hands-on tasks and pursues personal relevance in his endeavours. He finds bureaucratic procedures challenging. He relishes detail. This profile emerges strongly in the voice of the main actor, Mr Malt, and shows a determining effect on the transformative process experienced by both the actor and the community he leads.

According to Mezirow (1996), learning is to be understood as a "process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action" (p. 162). Mezirow emphasised the importance and centrality of experience, understanding one's frame of reference, the role of a disorienting dilemma (or trigger), the importance of critical reflection and in particular critical self-reflection, the role of rational discourse, and of dialogue in communicating with others (Calleja, 2014). For a more comprehensive discussion of Mezirow's contribution consult the paper entitled "Jack Mezirow's conceptualisation of Adult transformative Learning: A Review" (Calleja, 2014).

The Trigger

The trigger event or what Mezirow earlier termed as 'disorienting dilemma' is a realisation moment that causes a shift in values, beliefs, and identity, and perhaps causes a person to change personal ideas. To 'experience' a disorienting dilem-

ma is to live through some situations that cause one to rethink and perhaps alter one's thoughts and course of action. On the other hand, Torosyan (2007) noted that a trigger is not necessarily a dramatic predicament but can result from a realisation of certain realities surrounding the situation of the agent.

In Mr Malt's case, as a Head of school, two major triggers led him to make the first steps by contacting the Let Me Learn team, a team that builds its professional learning programme on a learning concept that enables users to achieve their goals based on an understanding of their learning selves. The first trigger arises from his socio-political ideology and his strong belief that as a school, he and faculty should act justly with all students. This brought him to the realisation that as a school, they have not always been responding adequately and coherently to the needs of all learners:

"...because as a school we are eternally engaged in the context of justice, and by justice I mean the need to realise that each child is different, each needing their own space and we need to find the means... to reach each and every child's aspirations."

From this realisation emerges a second dilemma which he, as an educator/leader faced – that is while on a conceptual level, everyone seems to accept that students are all different and a one size fits all curriculum does not serve the needs of all students, in practice and in the day-to-day life of the school,

"The way we act, we act as if we have 25 puppets that have all come out (from the same machine)"

Having seen the incongruence between his and the school's espoused beliefs and the prevalent theories-in-use guiding behaviours has led him to search for tools to consciously redirect his's actions towards bridging the gap between his espoused beliefs and the prevalent modes of his and the school's practice.

A Process of Self-Examination

Triggers tend to lead the agent to certain realisations of a reality that is often uncomfortable to face. This could lead the agent to self-examination and a realisation of limitations inherent in the path towards achieving coherence among one's beliefs and perceived gains and practice. This led Mr Malt to Mezirow's second stage – A process of self-examination.

Mr Malt came to realize that in education there are no quick fixes and that LML is not a magical wand but a process of self-discovery and a tool that together with other tools can reap the benefits of change:

"Probably, at a school level the expectations have changed. When we started, there could have been the expectation that with the LML training differentiation would be plain sailing and that everything would run smoothly."

Such realisation brought about change in expectations and a re-alignment of the initial expectations with the newly gained understanding.

"...at the end of it, those who started off with this idea were shocked until they started to realise that LML is not a recipe but a process of understanding".

Johnston (2008; 2015; Calleja, 2015), lists a series of verbs that lead to actions towards achieving metacognition, an activity where the learner comes back to the original realisations and reviews them in the light of new experiences, insights and understandings.

In the process of one's self-examination, a new realisation is unearthed and problematized. A culture of student labelling ingrained in the professional attitude to simplify and compartmentalize everything is scrutinized and reviewed. The learning Patterns referred to in the LML process that describe the interaction of one's internal process of operation and which we use to varying degrees to help us filter and thus allow or reject stimuli could lead to

"the tendency, particularly with the children, to say that I am like (one of the Patterns) then and sometimes it could have limited them from doing a task".

Thus, acting on unrealized assumptions lead to a culture of labelling, or the need to delineate everything and give it parameters so as to box it with a clear tag:

"I think I was always scared that the students would be put into pigeon-holes."

This self-evaluation and reconceptualization of the Process led Mr Malt to the next stage of Mezirow's process of transformation, to reflect critically on the assumptions first held by him and by the community which he led.

Critical Reflection and Re-Evaluation of Assumptions

The self-examination of the agent's realization of a limited view of the complex reality and the unearthing of the latent theories guiding one's actions led to a critical re-evaluation of assumptions that guide one's actions.

Mr Malt underwent a process by which he problematized past intents. While he mulled over the benefits of the process, namely

"The possibility of us speaking the same language. Secondly, I also think that it made us aware of a number of contradictions..."

He also identified as a source of such contradictions the mind-sets originating from personal histories.

"Obviously, we all have our own histories, we were brought up in an educational system which was different to what we are trying to achieve now."

Such histories could lead the unassuming professional

"... to revert to particular ruts, and I think that there were a number of situations where these contradictions were evident."

The problematization of theories underlying actions that counter one's espoused beliefs, led this leader and colleagues to try to counteract this culture by conscious adoption of an alternative language – a language that can help educators to describe a need without resorting to negative/pejorative terms and descriptions of the learners, and makes them aware that choice of language reflects corollary action.

"We are now more careful when we start talking about the clever students and the less clever ones."

Thus, while he is aware "that there is still a language being used about students who want to learn and those who don't...", he can see that his teachers are now aware of it, and they are able to "problematize it."

Mr Malt mentions three aspects through which the school benefited from participation in the professional learning process, LMLP. First the awareness of the learning modalities among the professional community:

"I think LML was instrumental as a tool to first and foremost realise this sense of diversity even in the way we learn."

Secondly, the awareness of the diverse modes of teaching and how this pedagogical preference effects the teacher-learner relationship:

"... we as teachers realise why we prefer to teach in a certain way and why we may distinguish between the students in class."

Thirdly, the professional pedagogical response to diversity:

"... we try to find the pedagogical means to cater for this diversity".

These explicit realisations together are at least a partial recognition that differences in learning are the largest source of diversity in a school or classroom. The result of these realisations was that Mr Malt and the faculty developed a shared common language based on LMLP descriptions which the whole school community could use to communicate without discouraging anyone from learning:

"... it was also a means of having a common language; that is that we are choosing one model among many others. However, we found a model that we agree upon that is now ingrained."

This led to, the naissance of a community of professionals that could 'offer the required support' to those still being initiated in the new culture.

This Professional Learning Process was seen as a vehicle for transforming these espoused ideals of social justice and the valuing of 'difference' into a pedagogical praxis through which teachers respond effectively to the child's needs. In this respect, Mr Malt did not see the Process as the source of the social principles but it could sit comfortably within his paradigm because it shared the same principles:

"... I think that in my case, Let Me Learn fit in a paradigm that was already there, in the sense of diversity, or of social justice."

Let Me Learn was seen as a process that could help

"... continue to develop these concepts. ... helped me to continue working on these principles, even at practical level".

This questioning or problematization of past intents led this leader to a better understand of how such a process could be transferred into practice consistent with his beliefs:

“We were trying to create a sense of inclusion. We needed to better understand, and I think Let Me Learn fitted into what we were trying to achieve. There was the readiness to understand the sense of inclusion, what it means, and I think that Let Me Learn provided just this. It helped us make more sense of it, and without doubt, it definitely fits within the ethos”.

This learning experience is seen as a process that fits within an ethos of a school that deployed a number of initiatives that all aim to address the complex realities of a school that values diversity.

“I still believe that Let Me Learn on its own would be lacking as a tool, and I say that it is lacking because I think that there could be the danger of it being interpreted outside a context...”.

His intricate understanding of the complex transformative nature of the Process led him to value the need of such a process in alliance with other initiatives that the school took over the years:

“I think that it (the LML process) has to be stretched and combined with other tools.”

Here Mr Malt reflects on the larger picture, a complex reality that requires multiple strategies that work in cohesion for a common goal. Let Me Learn is seen as a key agent:

“a very important tool even to eventually interpret a sense of community that is the sense of diversity that we have amongst us”.

Such cohesion would continue to strengthen professional collaboration:

“... these differences are not only on an individual basis but also on how these influence the dynamics between us as a community”.

This will in turn enrich the profession with what Shulman (2004a, 505) called “the isolated and unvoiced wisdom” – a wisdom that emerges from experience fuelled by pedagogical discourse.

Such collaborative reflective praxis would yield a process of collective transformation:

“And even if a person hasn’t done it himself, and someone else has done the problematization of the task, it rings a bell. It falls on fertile soil as opposed to having no effect at all. Because they [faculty] have gone through the process.”

For such transformation to continue developing, it needs to be sustained and supported. In a culture of prescriptive education system in which teachers are regulated with a highly prescriptive curriculum, it is not easy for a teacher to move outside the mould and make significant changes in his practice. Hence Mr Malt deems “...mentoring was a very good step in the right direction...” since progressive pedagogies require support from recognised authorities who not only pay lip service to the ideal but also have the ‘authority’ to defend such a stand:

“Now we didn’t stop at the level of implementing the process, but we also have a helping hand”.

The process led Mr Malt to a re-evaluation of assumptions he held about colleagues. His new understanding of the dynamics of learning led him to value what before he had misconceived as disinterest. Now he could understand that this teacher’s leading Pattern, Rechnical Reasoning, was the reason for her so-called ‘quietness’. A person leading with Technical Reasoning tends to be of few words, avoids long, detailed communication and prefers to keep to oneself.

“this person was very, very assertive I think, but quiet. This was the way I perceived her previously, when in fact, her quietness was not the quietness of a quiet person... but it was the quietness of a wall which was built at this point (in our relationship)...”

His new understanding of the dynamics of learning and how this impinges on intra- and interpersonal relationships led him to forge

“a good relationship... we still collaborate on a number of things”.

While Mr Malt sees all these positive signs, he is also aware that personal and organizational transformation is often characterised with moments of success accompanied with moments of struggle:

“There’s a lot to a situation, to an organization, at times you feel there are tangible improvements whereas at other times, you feel that there is the need for more, more...”

There is always something, according to Mr Malt, that makes one feel that one hasn’t achieved what he set out to achieve on the onset:

“I think there were things that improved. There are other things we still need to problematize, the issue and the way we tackle things”.

Such realization of limitations and awareness of the complexity of the transformative learning process would lead to the next level of sharing one’s understanding within and outside the professional community.

Dialogue

One of the identified assets of the Let Me Learn process indicated by Mr Malt is that it gives the community a common language. This language facilitates a dialogic process among the teachers and their mentor, between the school professional community and parents.

A common language allowed them to build a dialogic alliance within the community, thus sustaining growth in a safe and conducive environment.

“... there were other teachers (here he is referring to the trainers/mentors) who could work hand in hand with those working in class, with the foot soldiers. I think that this gave more credibility to the Process in itself. It broke the myth”.

Through such dialogic interactions, ‘foot soldiers’ can practice and focus their aim while ensuring equitable provision to all learners in full respect of their personalized connections with their learning selves.

Dialogue among teachers allows for a reconceptualization of the process of practice. Such dialogue needs to be built on respect and on trust.

“I think it is very important that the sense of dialogue is very open because if not it is very risky and there were situations when, given the benefit of hindsight, this happened”.

Here Mr Malt is emphasizing the importance of an open dialogue where everyone feels comfortable sharing without getting “on this uneasiness due to political correctness”. A dialogue among professionals should allow everyone to “express what is bothering you, or what is worrying you, or because you still cannot make sense of a certain mind-set...” This, according to Mr Malt should not hold anyone back from sharing. Dialogue thus should be non-judgemental:

“no one can say that you are being unfair, that you do not have social justice at heart”.

An open, non-judgemental dialogue among professionals should also include the wider community, in particular the parents:

“I think that once again there was the fact that we use a common language. In a sense, we stopped grumbling about certain clichés and the parents themselves could talk about more tangible things”.

Mr Malt noted that those parents who had the opportunity to be trained in the process made a difference. The school could communicate more effectively with these parents about their children’s learning needs:

“they could decipher the way they could relate to their children, even since we are trying to work with them in a certain way, they understand how we are trying to work with them. They can better understand the strategies that we are using by working with their children in a certain way”.

Parents were internalizing the language and in their communication with the school a language of possibility was being nurtured.

“I think in terms of talk, again, I mean dialogue, which we began to use among us, we could understand each other better”.

Such improvement in communication between the school and the parents led to a better relationship between parents and their children.

“I think there was also a change in the way that the parents were relating to their children”.

He could observe how communication between the school and the parents about the students was “...no longer talk about the lazy boy but about a child who has a lower Sequence”. This transformation from a discourse focused on limitations (stating of the problem) to a discourse characterized by solutions and possibilities was becoming very evident.

“So if there is this situation, there are strategies. What can we do about it? How can we help him to improve?”

Mr Malt reckoned that the improved communication described above went beyond those who have received training:

“Even other parents, though they are not aware of Let Me Learn as a process, but I think that this discourse of the fact that we are convinced that we are all different, they get this feeling and understand that children are all different”.

This growth of understanding goes to show that a community that develops a shared language will transmit a shared paradigm to the wider community. It also stresses the role of the leader in the development of a shared paradigm.

Exploration of Options

The alternative discourse, reflecting a new-shared paradigm, led this charismatic leader and his colleagues to reflect on how their actions have been influenced by the incumbent education system. This realisation led them to “ask questions and problematize the way the traditional educational system works”, leading them as a community to recognise the dominant culture and the discourse that purveys it

“(to) think on different tracks and with a certain effort... because if you are used to working and thinking in a certain way, it does take an effort to think differently”.

Planning a Course of Action

Once choices have been made, a course of action has to ensue. In a culture that questions the status quo and looks for an alternative praxis, the role of individuals within a critical mass needs to be guided by a solid leadership and inspired by a professional learning process that fits the paradigm that inspired the ‘new’ culture.

Mr Malt believed that as a leader, once a choice has been made on a particular process of learning, one should be “the first to attend”. This gave him the leverage to entice “the most receptive” allowing others the space to observe and reflect on their future participation. Thus Mr Malt believed that in planning for initiating others into the Process one “need(s) to strategize and not just send anyone for training”.

A planned course of action requires the appreciation of what individuals bring to a community, a personal history of involvement and “these [prior] conflicts need to be negotiated and reconciled at least in part if the individual is to achieve a coherent sense of self” (Handley et al., 2006, p. 643) - thus an appreciation of a paced growth.

“There has to be an element of patience. We have to wait because we cannot tackle everything at once”.

This will allow space for those that while

“theoretically, ... have already gone through this change in mentality, however, I think that we need to look at how we can put it into practice in a coherent and consistent way”.

This well planned course of action has achieved a noticeable change

“With certain people, more than others, this translated itself into practice. The way a lesson is done; how I react towards the children. I think it has improved”.

This observation on how the transformation through the Let Me Learn Process affected a number of teachers in their lesson planning and delivery, the relationship and the type and level of response to the students’ needs, has had a ripple effect on the entire staff:

Interviewer: “... Do you think that there was a ripple effect?...”

Mr Malt: “Definitely! Yes definitely... if you start off with people who have fertile ground and give fruit, that has a cascading effect, definitely, because obviously teachers related with each other”.

Acquisition of Knowledge and Skills

One of the major epiphanies in his transformation was his realisation of the power of the knowledge of one’s own learning dynamics. Such self-knowledge of one’s learning self has a powerful transformational agency within the community.

“I began to understand myself better. That is why the way I work has a logical meaning behind it. I think Let Me Learn gave me a model to make more sense of what I was doing and how I was acting”.

This self-discovery brought about a change in how Mr Malt viewed himself as a learner and on his personal and professional interpersonal relationships.

“It also gave more sense to my social life and relationships with others. Why do I feel more comfortable with certain members of staff and not with others? Why in certain situations, let’s say in particular meetings, I feel nervous and inhibited by some persons whereas with others I feel that my ideas can flourish and feel at ease? Once you look at the Patterns, you start to understand the reasons why...”

It gave him the possibility of positioning himself within the community and to

“... understand how I react, and so I can also understand how others react”.

During the interview he reflects on a specific difficult professional relationship with one particular member of his senior management team.

“Every time we had a meeting, I used to come up with a lot of ideas and she used to object to everything I said and kill my spirit...”.

On attending the Let Me Learn training:

“We both started to realise why I was frustrating her with what I was doing, and I started to feel literally strangled”.

This realisation and new understanding has developed into an enriched collaboration benefitting the whole community.

“Nowadays we came to a point where we try to achieve, in a sense, the best of both worlds. So when I start daydreaming too much, she helps me to round up my thoughts, which is good at times. At the same time, when she starts being too much of a wet blanket, I send her flying... For me it was clear how our relationship improved, literally, because of this”.

Another illustrative example was that of a teacher who

“was the type of person who was like a closed box... she used to act in that way because the way she used to work was completely different”.

By acquiring this knowledge of how different combinations of learning Patterns yield different strategies and demand different responses, Mr Malt can see a qualitative difference in attitude resulting from better communication based on respect of each other’s learning profiles.

“I remember that I realised this when I did the ...this blessed LCI (Learning Connections Inventory, an instrument measuring Pattern strength) and I saw her efforts and that made a very big difference. The moment I started working with this person, I tackled the person in a different way, and it made a whole difference”.

His newly acquired knowledge gave him the possibility of rising above personality stereotypes and understanding what made this educator special. With adaptations on his part, he managed to unleash a myriad of talents in others that benefitted the whole school community.

“Once we found a way of working, this person, who is very creative, musical etc...she literally exploded the best out of her...”

As part of the acquisition of knowledge, Mr Malt felt that the acquisition of the language of Patterns has helped improve communication. Such improvement in communication by which:

“they’re making sense of it (referring to the task) and then it obviously makes sense to me”.

Thus, members of the community would have acquired the knowledge that in turn could developed into better communication of one’s needs, and an improved response to a particular situation created by others. This, according to Mr Malt, was made possible by internalizing the language of Patterns and subsequently referring to each other’s learning Patterns, seeing them as individual strengths which when referred to in groups/teams, become collective strengths.

“Even the way people act, for example, sometimes you have a situation in which a task was not done in a logical or sequential way... and it starts freak-

ing them out. They themselves make sense out of it. 'Since I am a Sequential person, do me a favour, and tell me how I should go about it'".

This new understanding and the skill to use Let Me Learn categories and descriptions in one's interpretations and evaluations of the actions of others, has led Mr Malt to "start noticing certain Patterns" and start recognising certain characteristics of Patterns:

"the fact that you can understand others through observing the things they do, and knowing how you act, you can react in a better way, and you can make leeway where necessary".

Such understanding helps him modify his response to the learning Pattern profile of the person with whom he is interacting. This ability to take control of one's 'natural' way of reacting, behaving, and responding to certain situations by considering other perspectives, is a crucial skill that indicates growth.

Mr Malt perceives that through gaining understanding of themselves and others as learners, students have developed a "sense of humanity in the way they perceive each other and also the different situations they go through..." This reference to transference of knowledge, moulded in a value system to the young learners attending the school has affected:

"the way that they perceive each other in class, for example, children with special needs, those that are different from them; I think they make sense of it".

This process is "a gradual process," but once nurtured generates a mutual sense of solidarity:

"This sense of solidarity with others, and others can show solidarity with us".

Yet another aspect highlighted by Mr Malt was his experience of the change in the way he approached teaching:

"I had to look at what I am doing now as opposed to what I used to do before; it is different".

This change is a result of an intentional process that yielded a critical approach to professional practice.

"[S]o the processing of why I am doing certain things has changed, and changed for the better".

He referenced experiences that made him more aware of certain pedagogical responses in the teaching context:

"For example, before I start a lesson, I classify certain points. This is something I never used to do before. I used to start the lesson straight away".

The result is that he is "more aware why certain students respond in a certain way more than before, and I can make sense of it".

Such awareness helped him better understand the dynamics of learning and

how insights into learner's processing guides his professional choices and actions.

"Whereas before you could try something out in your own way, without finding a way out, now I can better understand why a certain person works in a certain way and what I can do to try for us to better understand each other".

His acquisition of such understandings and the intentional choices that guide action have helped him, as a leader, to understand and offer better support to other teachers, "...who are facing some difficulties themselves, and I can try to discuss with them ways of bridging the gap".

Trying New Roles

Once one acquires solid and useful knowledge, experimentation often follows. This next stage starts with recognition that one now possesses potential tools for fulfilling beliefs/theories held dear. Mr Malt, through learning about his and his colleagues' processing learning Patterns, could better understand the Learning Support Assistants under his direct care. He could start to appreciate why different individuals had different ways of assisting students.

"I had told the learning assistants to do the LCI [Learning Connection Inventory] and it was very revealing. It was very revealing as you begin to understand why certain persons work in a certain way".

This led Mr Malt to explore different ways of strengthening professional collaboration with what Shulman (2004a, 505) calls the otherwise "isolated and unvoiced wisdom". Mr Malt saw staff potential begging to be unlocked in his staff and recognised LML as "... a very important tool even to eventually interpret a sense of community that is the sense of diversity that we have among us". This potential within our learning differences, once harnessed and directed can "... influence the dynamics between us as a community".

He also saw this potential for community evolving among the students and leading to a community of learners – a crucial ingredient for learning (Ligorio, 1994; Crawford, Krajcik & Marx, 1999).

"So if you identify where the strengths are and place children in these groups of different strengths you are also instilling in the children a sense of community that 'nobody is as strong as all of us'. I think that it would eliminate the idea that as individuals we should have all the strengths, rather we need each other's strengths to be complete".

This realization has also brought about

"... a big difference (in) the way knowledge was organized. ... I think that apart from taking more notice of the overt messages, which means that the curriculum is not just acted out with Math, Physics, and Chemistry but also acted out and, probably even more so, with the hidden messages we give out all the time, and that is something that we are trying to look at in a more consistent way".

This awareness of the underlying, often concealed, messages passed on by the school's developing ways of becoming community brought about the intentional exploration of new ways of experiencing the curriculum.

“Even on a curricular level, for example, certain subjects we decided to include and the reason behind it... although some subjects can be adapted to favour certain learning Patterns rather than others, on the other hand, you have certain subjects in which it is easier to provide for certain Patterns...”

This re-thinking brought about the creation of new subjects, which could create “... an educational space where we try to give more possibility to non-formal education”. He believed that this would “have an effect on the rest of the curriculum”, and “cater for the different needs of our pupils’ make-up”.

In his thinking, Mr Malt also explored the idea of branching out to the larger school community – those who though not directly involved in the teaching, could also have an impact on the learning community:

“One of the things that would be good to do eventually would be to give the possibility to the non-teaching staff to be exposed to the LML process”.

The inclusion of non-teaching staff is not commonly referenced in the literature but could have positive potential. An effective ethos must be shared by all those involved – every aspect of the school life has a contribution to make in the application of such ethos. It will also improve the communicative dynamic of the whole community and result in a calmer, more relaxed school environment.

Another attempt is to explore ways of integrating different strategies and processes to improve the learning community. Mr Malt believes that a process of change makes use of many agents. He emphasises that the ‘tool’ should not be an aim in itself but the aim should be for learners to become better learners. In this respect, he explored the possibility of an alliance between cooperative learning and LML.

“I think that cooperative learning, combined with Let Me Learn can give good results, because you can build different groups, which are heterogeneous and which build on each other’s strengths. So if you identify where the strengths are and place children in groups of different strengths, you are also instilling in the children a sense of community...”

This realisation is compelling Mr Malt to explore what and how different methods and strategies can be used together with LML to better serve the learners. Such exploratory reflection on the process of collective transformation may lead to the transformation of the context of learning. This reflection on the process is crucial in bringing true transformation in himself as a person and as an educator responsible for other educators and the children attending his school.

Any attempt at change would obviously present new challenges and perhaps pockets of opposition.

“Obviously, in every situation, you always have pockets of persons who are working hard and truly believe in it. Probably, you also have other pockets who need to be pushed, because there are certain difficulties when put in to practice”.

The skilful leader will handle these challenges and oppositions in a reassur-

ing manner and work towards achieving consensus. At the same time, he is aware that the process of organizational transformation is a winding process with to-and-fro moves and requires a strategy that leaves space for everyone to move at their own pace and does not stall the process of transformation of the entire community.

Building Competence

While very much aware of the challenges that such a decision brings, Mr Malt's determination to move the LML Process forward has contributed to the acquisition of competence in performing new roles and in building new professional relationships. He has succeeded in reintegrating the Process into the life of the school, while becoming more competent in integrating the Process into his understanding of himself as a person and as a professional.

He feels that the LML Process, though not always openly visible, has reached a good level of saturation in the life of the school.

"Salt gives the taste but does not necessarily show. Yet you can notice the taste, and I think that for a not small number of people, it has made a difference..."

In his role as a leader, he feels that he can better understand what is needed and how he can continue to find new ways of integrating the Process into the daily life of the school and make the Process more visible.

"Now we have to make sure that we continue adding salt that shows more. This saltiness means that we make the Process as visible as possible".

This visibility should materialize or continue to show in a renewed discourse.

"... it would also be important that we continue renewing this discourse..."

Competence in understanding and leading others must start by understanding oneself both on a personal level and professionally.

"... you cannot look at others and their diversity and not make your own personal analysis".

Mr Malt reflects on how the LML Process has made him better understand himself as an individual and thus understand why he does what he does in the way he does it.

"... I started to make sense of the way I work. I began to understand myself better that is the way I work has a logical meaning behind it".

He feels that the Process has given him "... a model to make more sense of what I was doing and how I was acting". This awareness of self as a learner has contributed to his understanding of self and the role he plays in the larger context.

"... I think strategically, it helps you also in the fact that I understand how I work".

It helped him become aware of those Patterns he tends to avoid, but are necessary for him to use in performing his tasks as head of school and communicating more effectively with those who lead with Patterns he does not prefer.

“... if I am not a Sequential person, neither avoid, nor use first, and once I was conscious about it, the fact that I became aware of it encouraged me to work harder at it”.

This made him more proficient with strategies for forging, intensifying or tethering his Patterns in ways to accomplish goals.

“So today I can say that the level of Sequence that I need is a bit more acceptable to those around me. I think it has helped me refine it to take certain steps towards addressing certain situations”.

“It has also helped me to understand why sometimes I come up with a lot of ideas, as opposed to other people who are working with me. When someone would like to try out something, and I start shooting ideas left, right and centre, whereas the others can understand me, I put myself into check so as not to simply shoot out ideas, but I also try to organize them. So if the other person has Patterns which are different to mine, we can bridge.”

This competence in taking the reins of his own learning, has helped him put more intention into his actions and improve communication with his colleagues.

Reintegration Into One's Life

The ultimate outcome in organizational, school-wide terms of Mr Malt's personal transformative learning journey through engaging with, experiencing, embracing, and finally modelling the Let Me Learn Process in his leadership role was evident to all when the language of the Process became an integral part of the school's professional discourse.

“The professional attitude that we have taken is to find means of how to articulate this discourse...”

Thus the school's language evolved into a language of inclusivity both at the level of the teaching community and at the level of the direct beneficiaries, namely the students.

“LML has helped us continue to develop this discourse of diversity and community”.

“...as a tool for children to better understand themselves”.

The evolution of the language, within the school, from one characterised by limitations, to a discourse characterised by solutions and possibilities, has helped the school community to talk about relevant educational issues by “... engaging that kind of discourse, ... that helps us think outside the box”.

Yet another indication of a transformed community is when the community becomes a beacon to others from outside the immediate learning community. When others outside the immediate community noticed the change evidenced in the community's praxis.

“This year we spoke to a parent of a student in Form 1 who told us that he wanted his son to attend this school because he had heard that we use Let Me Learn in this school”.

A transformed community is a community that brings about changes evident to others. The transformed school acts as a catalyst for change and an example for others to emulate.

“... we could offer a system that was different from other church schools... This has placed us in a very unique situation”.

“I think that we contributed to those forums in which we were present... I think that the discourse that we could communicate about the advantages of operating in a context of diversity has come across. It has come across so well that now even the church schools have decided to change towards this system”.

Thus the integration of the process into the reality of the school has turned the school into a model school.

“It wasn’t something which was being preached about from a pulpit, but it was something which was being acted out everyday”.

This manifestation served as a “common denominator” within the community of the school, senior management team, teachers and students, and the parents.

Conclusion

Transformative learning is not a static project but a process of continuous change brought about after moments of ‘discomfort’ or trigger events. While Mezirow seem to suggest a linear model (Baumgartner, 2012; Coffman, quoted in Taylor, 1997), this narrative suggests a more interactive and spiral model in which an actor of change goes through moments of ‘creative professional discomforts’ which through discernment of one’s practice may result in a change of direction.

Mr Malt speaks of the continuous questioning that characterises the school community – this causes ‘perturbance’ – a “collaborative process of people coming together to answer the question, “What’s next?”... disruptions (that) are perceived and then either ignored or responded to by communities of shared practice” (Beabout, 2012, p. 17).

This perturbation within the community of practice allows the community to sustain and promote a personalized ethos built on values the community upholds. Mr Malt, as a major actor in this process of personal and organisational transformation views, LML as a key contributor in the externalisation of an ideology of practice and a leading force to one’s actions within the community’s routines.

Perhaps the most salient and practical contribution of the Let Me Learn Process to the transformation of both individuals and school community was its absolute, unrelenting focus on learning—Mr Malt’s learning, teachers’ learning, every individual child’s learning, and eventually even parent’s learning. Coupled with unrelenting focus was LML’s specific and shared lexicon, easily mastered by the youngest of learners, yet the tool that makes naming and seeing the specifics

and differences of learning in each learner possible. With this new source of insight and practicality the Process made the transformation from the articulation of an ideology of 'justice' to its earnest praxis possible.

The role of the transformed leader moves from one of leading to one of facilitation of change and transformation of the community. As a transformed individual, he makes sure that the new perspective has been reintegrated into one's life and the life of the community in which such transformation took place.

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