**Perspective Transformation: The Union of the Head Space and the Heart Space**

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**Abstract:** This paper introduces a conceptual study that has emerged from my developing PhD study. The conceptual paper contends that for perspective transformation to be actualised, it requires an awareness of the union of the head space and the heart space. Central to the union is the unique nature of an individual’s meaning structures that selectively shape and delimit the ways of interpreting experiences (Mezirow, 2000). Unity is prone to fluctuations within the four steps of the transformative learning process – (a) a trigger or disorienting dilemma, (b) critical reflection, (c) discourse with another, and (d) action (Henderson, 2010). The paper will illuminate the inner awakening of our head space and our heart space as we participate in life. The inner workings of this conceptual study are then weaved back through my emerging PhD study by surfacing the transformative learning connection.

**Introduction**

The genesis of this paper is the application of the transformative learning process to my life journey as I immerse myself with my developing PhD study, leading me to awareness that I am living the experience of perspective transformation. Thus the paper is guided by Sells’ (2000, as cited in Dirkx, 2000) belief that what matters most in learning are those deep shifts in our being, the psyche or soul. This conceptual paper contends that for perspective transformation to be actualised, it requires an awareness of the union of the head space and the heart space. Firstly, the union is examined from the perspective of an individual’s meaning structures that selectively shape and delimit the ways of interpreting experiences (Mezirow, 2000). Secondly, the paper will conceptualise the fluctuations of the head space and the heart space within the four steps of the transformative learning process – (a) a trigger or disorienting dilemma, (b) critical reflection, (c) discourse with another, and (d) action (Henderson, 2010). Thirdly, the paper will illuminate the inner awakening and union of our head space and our heart space with an emphasis on our habits of mind as we participate in life. The inner workings of this conceptual study are then weaved back through my emerging PhD study by surfacing the transformative learning connection. The quest is to give life and meaning to the ways perspective transformation, as a continuous inner journey of head-heart union, forms the catalyst to learning mobility—the central theme of my PhD.

**The Head Space and the Heart Space**

Based on the rising consciousness of my lived experience of transformation, I contend that for perspective transformation to be actualised it requires an elevated state of consciousness in the union of the head space and the heart space. Dirkx (2000) clarifies that transformative learning leads not back to the life of the mind, as we might find with reflection and analysis, but to the soul. For the purposes of this paper, with reference to human nature and ways of transformative learning, the soul is equated with the heart space and the mind with the head space.
To fully invest in a view of perspective transformation that relies on critical reflection, reason, and rationality, and in recognition that unconscious aspects of our head and heart are almost continuously seeking expression within our lives, often in unconscious and disruptive ways (Dirkx, 2000), a closer look at human nature and our meaning structures is required. These meaning structures selectively shape and delimit perception, cognition, feelings and predispositions (Mezirow, 2000). Boyd (1991), Cranton (2000), Dirkx (2006) and others have used a Jungian approach to understand transformative learning theory. Jung’s writings emphasise the notion of duality and individuation (Shelburne, 1988). Jung reconciles the mind-body outlook not as a duality of mental and physical substances but as a manifestation of an underlying unity (Shelburne, 1988). Unity sits within Jung’s perspective of individuation, considered the psychological process of integrating the opposites, including the working dialogue between the ego consciousness and the powerful contents of the unconscious (Dirkx, 2000). Therefore the essence of individuation is the development of an inner discourse with ourselves, a way of becoming separate from the collective to give voice to our emerging authentic selves (Cranton, 2000). Individuation is the conduit between critical self-reflection, considered by Dirkx (1997) to understate the affective, emotional, spiritual, and transpersonal elements, and authentic transformative learning. It is at this unconscious layer of emotional work located in head space and heart space where transformative learning originates and lives (Cranton, 2000). The journey towards the union of the head space and the heart space can be fundamentally extra-rational and intensely personal. It may require us to descend into a kind of darkness while also accepting that the experience of authentic union asks for a commitment that it is a lifelong, constant process of finding one’s self (Cranton, 2000; King, 2005). This is what Dirkx (1997) calls “soulfulness.”

**Fluctuations of the Head Space and the Heart Space**

Perspective transformation is located within the continuum of the transformative learning process (Cranton, 2000). When seeking conscious, critical self-awareness of the union between the head space and the heart space recognition must be given to the fluctuations in human nature as we experience a trigger event, critical reflection, dialogue and action. Iyengar (2005) believes that we all have access to an inner space that transcends the challenges of duality (mobility and stability, right and wrong, good and bad, action and reaction, smart and dumb) and brings into harmony the head and the heart. When travelling inwards in the seeking of unity of the head space and the heart space, this action too may bring with it what I have termed a ‘meta duality’—a fluctuating, oscillating, pulling of opposing forces of the head and the heart serving only to de-stabilise unity. Meta duality occurs below the threshold of consciousness, described by Jung (1964) as absorbed subliminally without our conscious knowledge. Awareness of such happenings occurs only in a moment of intuition. Our consciousness is frail and prone to emotional turmoil. When we are triggered by a disorientating event, our consciousness becomes disrupted. If we are not tuned into our intuitive state of head and heart harmony below the surface of consciousness, our trigger event can too easily fragment our consciousness causing us to feel a “loss of soul” (Jung, 1964). I describe this as an intuitive sensing of being out-of-sync, or out-of-flow with Self. The head-heart union fragments all too easily under the onslaught of unchecked emotions (Jung, 1964).

With conscious participation in inner dialogue to bolster authentic perspective transformation (Cranton, 2000), I share in the ideology that a good head and a good heart are always a formidable combination (Mandela, 1995). However, when seeking the quest for union of the head space and the heart space without conscious participation, we are much more subject to compulsions, obsessions,
and complexes, which may be the darker, more unconscious manifestation of the individuation or transformation process (Dirkx, 2000). This draws to the foreground the practice of mindful perspective transformation to mediate self-awareness of the different selves operating in our psyche (Cranton, 2000; Dirkx, 2000). When navigating the groundwork of perspective transformation through the four steps of the transformative learning process, with an emphasis on critical self-reflection, union is also conceived by Cranton (2000) as the intersection of individuation—the process of differentiation, and the collectively held frames of reference a person adopts through socialisation in our community and culture. An elevated state of consciousness allows a person to find one’s own voice within the collective of humanity, critically reflect and question habits of mind and tap into our soul. This is referred to by Sharp (1995, as cited in Cranton, 2000, p. 189) as the “fidelity to the law of one’s own being” and experiencing free, full participation in the discourse to move to a more authentic fusion of the head space and heart space (Cranton, 2000).

However, in recognition that perspective transformation is a continuum (Cranton, 2000), and acknowledging that forces of individuation operate unconsciously within our lives propelling us along a journey and certain types of actions (Dirkx, 2000), a lack of parallel between our inner dialogue and our outer ego-dominated consciousness may leave us feeling out-of-sync with our selves. This lack of harmony, integration, flow, wholeness can cause disorientation and bring us full circle in the transformative learning process. Iyengar (2005) clarifies that there is no difference in our souls. Difference comes from our meaning structures that we wear around our souls. Our inner struggles, tremors and troubles are a function of our mind (Iyengar, 2005). This cycles us along the transformative learning continuum with a more powerful rationale for consciousness-raising which manifests as the process of developing self-knowledge and self-awareness to question one’s construction of meaning (Cranton, 2000). Awakening the sense of Self exposes the deep structural shifts in thoughts, feelings and actions. It is this heightening of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our ways of being and knowing in the world which is the essence of transformative learning (O’Sullivan, Morrell, & O’Connor, 2002).

### Awakening of the Head Space and the Heart Space

Our meaning perspective is framed by our structure of assumptions screened through our senses to shape our perceptions, cognition, feelings and disposition to form our overall world-view. This frame of reference for meaning making is known as a habit of mind (Mezirow, 2000). As we experience the world around us, our habit of mind acts as a perceptual filter to interpret the meaning of the experience (Cranton, 2000). This screening process helps us make sense of our experiences, set personal rules, make judgements, and express points of view as we participate in society (Mezirow, 2000). The challenge with this line of action is that meaning schemes commonly operate outside of awareness due to our most guarded beliefs about ourselves and our world. Our habit of mind is inferred and hardcoded into our dualistic sense of self (we are smart or dumb, good or bad, winner or loser) from repetitive affective experiences outside our awareness (Mezirow, 2000). The way we make sense of our experiences is automated in duality. This masks the potential for our head and heart to engage in internal dialogue to raise awareness of the experience of knowing, feeling, acting and doing, surfaced through intuitive intelligence. Basically we get caught in the story of duality—an unchallenged habit of mind numbing receptivity to our intuitive intelligence—limiting our desire to reach full potential.

Awakening of the head space and the heart space in the negotiation of human wholeness and the expression of our full potential, starts with being an active participant in transforming one’s own
(and other’s) frames of reference. It goes beyond being critically reflective of our assumptions, awareness of our context and effort to hunt taken-for-granted beliefs (Brookfield, 1995; Mezirow, 2000). Full development of human potential for transformative learning can only be glimpsed and gained by awakening our head space and heart space, guided through the deeper lens of soulfulness, bringing in the unconscious process of intuition (Dirkx, 1997, 2006). Iyengar (2005) believes that if we can understand how our mind and heart works in union we can become receptive to everything. We can experience a quietness of the mind so that intuitive intelligence can function usefully in the external world. The inner space of intuitive intelligence soothes duality – the seed of conflict, and harmonises the head space and the heart space to encompass the soul.

Unless our mind space and heart space are opened, receptive and acting in union, empowering us to be active participants in the learning dilemma, our hard-coded meaning schemes can become emotionally charged and strongly defended, narrowing or negating any potential for personal growth (Mezirow, 2000). We become reactive rather than responsive when faced with a trigger or disorientating dilemma, a core element in the transformative learning process. Challenging our assumptions is highly personal as it asks us to look inward at the fabric of our being, our personal identity, our soul. It is instinctively resisted for fear of what we might discover, blocking the ability for human consciousness to achieve a reasonable degree of continuity (Brookfield, 1995; Jung, 1964). It makes us vulnerable and liable to fragmentation. For Iyengar “freedom implies not being battered by dualities” (2005, p. xiv). Awakening of the head space and the heart space gives us inner peace from duality and leads us back to unity. Receptivity quietens fragmentation. By drawing our sense of perception inwards, we are able to experience the control to quieten the mind. This ability to still the mind is essential, not only for the inward journey but also so that our intuitive selves can function usefully in the external world. We are thus in a state of mindful transformative learning.

The Transformative Learning Connection

The greater significance of this conceptual study, which links back to my PhD work, is that of adult learner and adult educator (the authors) immersed in literature, discourse and application of transformative learning theory within the 21st century phenomenon of learning mobility. A review of this emerging body of literature indicates that the fundamental questions still exist—how do people learn and what do people do with the learning? (Garrison, 2011; Hart, 2014; Phillips, McNaught, & Kennedy, 2011; Sharples, Josie, & Vavoula, 2007; Stodd, 2013; Traxler, 2009). When considering the ways higher education teachers learn about working and living in a mobile society to transform their professional practice, the unity of the head space and the heart space is inhibited by the unconscious layer of emotional work such as fear, anger, guilt, shame, vulnerability, failure and frustration (Cochrane & Narayan, 2013; Palmer, 2007; Schuck, Aubusson, Kearney, & Burden, 2013). Brown (2010) refers to this state as the dark emotions. In the context of my PhD study this layer of emotional work hinders the educator’s intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, confidence, resilience, identity, and autonomy to engage and transform their learning mobility professional practices (Kenny, Park, Van Neste-Kenny, & Burton, 2010; MacCallum & Jeffrey, 2013; Martin, 2006; Oliver & Dempster, 2003; Stanton & Ophoff, 2013). Educators are drawn into duality as the ego consciousness attends to the powerful contents of the unconscious. Such dualistic tensions pull us away from head-heart unity, limiting the possibility for inner discourse to give voice to our emerging Self—the home of transformative learning.
**Future Directions**

For the purposes of my PhD study, I am calling the human desire for deeper, inner transformative learning connection ‘the third space’—a metaphor for non-dualistic thinking (Rohr, 2011), spirituality (Palmer, 2007), and ‘involution’—the profound transformative journey that awaits the seeker of truth (Iyengar, 2005). The inner quest for truth is continually antagonised by duality. In seeking the balance of duality, I am bringing together the concepts of ‘paradox’ and ‘threshold.’ Niels Bohr, the Noble Prize winning physicist, defines the concept of paradox as thinking the world together rather than splitting the world to either-or (Palmer, 1998). The truth is a paradoxical joining of apparent opposites, and if we want to know the truth, we must learn to embrace those opposites, and think of the inner world as one (Palmer, 1998). Like Jung’s individuation—the integration of opposites, the constant process of living and being in the third space of the profound transformative journey is in the discernment of the head space and the heart space as one. When considering the human capacity to absorb the inner disturbances associated with transformative learning (King, 2005), and the continuous cycles of self-awareness in harmonising opposites, cracks can appear in our habit of mind. Walker and Salt (2006) refer to such cracks as a threshold; a crossing point. When we cross a threshold we begin to behave in a different way (Walker & Salt, 2006). A threshold carries us into the third space of inner transformation as our meaning schemes experience deep structural shifts in the basic premise of thoughts, feelings and actions. O’Sullivan et al. (2002) refer to such shifts in consciousness as dramatically and permanently altering our ways of being in the world. When wrapped in a lens of self-reflection, Iyengar (2005) believes comfort is found in the discomfort of asking ourselves “who am I becoming.”

When applying the ideology of paradox thresholds to the ways educators learn about working and living in a mobile society to transform their professional practice, the research, literature and early-phase data collection is surfacing the paradox threshold constructs of: duality-unity; reactive-responsive; deceptive-receptive; resistance-resilience; invisibility-identity; ambiguity-agility; and disruptive-transformative. This conceptual paper suggests that paradox thresholds enable a subtle discernment of the head space, the heart space and the third space—the ability to reconcile and transcend duality to experience union and the continuous, connected inward journey of mindful and soulful transformation.

**References**


