

Experiences of Teaching Transformative Pedagogies for Peace-building Across Selected Institutions of Higher Learning in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this study was to report on a series of workshops that were held in three institutions of higher learning on resilience, peace-building and prevention of violence using transformative pedagogies (TP). This progressive approach to teaching and learning is known as an activist approach and it is a reaction to the traditional approach to teaching and learning which perceive teachers as the people who control the teaching and learning process. The study was a mixed method and was premised on transformative paradigm. Data was collected using evaluation survey from participants and reflection from facilitators on the feedback and experiences in the delivery of the workshops in the three institutions. The participants in the series of workshops were the lecturers, student teachers and members of students' representative council (SRC). The workshops aimed at equipping the participants with the skill to be peace-builders by articulating how the issues of peace and violence manifests and intersect in the South African contexts and beyond. Furthermore, the participants were expected to identify strategies for enhancing education for peacebuilding in their own contexts using transformative pedagogies. The results revealed and provided feedback not only on the effectiveness of the project but also assisted in illuminating the effectiveness of the use of transformative pedagogies in the classrooms and change learners and students to be peace ambassadors.

Keywords: competences, conflict transformation and conflict resolution, teachers as agents of change, transformative pedagogies

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1. Introduction

The issue about the culture of violence is still pervasive in all sectors and levels of society at global, regional and local levels. The Global Peace Index (GPI) revealed that the average level of global peacefulness deteriorated by 0.07 percent and is the ninth deterioration in peacefulness in the last thirteen years with 87 countries improving and 73 recording deterioration (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2021: 4). Furthermore, there is a rise of racism, xenophobia, and intolerance which takes the forms of physical, sexual and/or psychological experiences (United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), 2020). Exposure to violence in schools can lead to underachievement due to cognitive, emotional and social problems (World Health Organisation (WHO), 2019)). Education therefore is considered as one of the tools that can be used to address this scourge.

In an attempt to address violence in schools and universities, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO: Africa) took the initiative to develop a critical mass of teachers to be equipped with the skill on transformative pedagogy, resilience and

peacebuilding. This is in line with sustainable development goals (SDG) and it is an attempt to ensure quality education.

In order to address that wish, UNESCO embarked on the training of teachers, and lecturers across Africa in 2020. All twenty-six Universities in South Africa were invited to attend the Training of Trainer workshop by UNESCO and only three responded to the call. These were, Durban University of Technology, Nelson Mandela University and Sol Plaatje University. The training workshops had six sessions spread across 11 days, from 1 - 11 December 2020.

In 2021, the institutions which participated had further engagements with UNESCO and were asked to cascade the training as a pilot project to lecturers, student teachers and student leaders, commonly known as student representative council (SRC). This study reports on the journey that the master trainers of the participating institutions embarked on in the training of the participants of the workshops in the three universities on transformative pedagogy for peacebuilding, resilience and prevention of violence.

2. Transformative Pedagogy

Transformative pedagogy (TP) is an approach to teaching and learning that is regarded as radical pedagogy, it is grounded on the works of John Dewey and Paulo Friere (Betz,1992). The former argues for problem-solving centred education and child-centred learning, whilst the latter argues for the education that allows the oppressors to take control over their lives through critical reflection (Shyman, 2010). Farren (2016:192) argues that:

Transformative pedagogy understands participants as persons in collaborative inquiry that makes links between teaching, learning and making sense of the world. Therefore, the epistemological beliefs of teacher and pupils about knowledge are significant. "Transformative pedagogy" has social and ontological implications.

Therefore, Dewy & Freire (Betz, 1992) theories are aligned to transformative pedagogy, and are characterised by critical reflection, discovery of new knowledge which must result in meaningful action.

At the root of transformative pedagogy is the transformative learning theory which was originally developed specifically to address the learning involved in broad social change. As a social change paradigm, it is concerned with the effects of social change and what kind of individual change is demanded for social change to occur (Hoggan, 2016:59). It is also of the view that social structures need to change but profound change and learning need to take place at an individual level, transformative leaning is equally important to occur along with structural changes for meaningful impact in society. Transformative learning theory therefore assists in modifying shifts in ones thinking/ perspective or schemata. The shift may epochal or it may be slow or incremental (Mezorow, 1991). In arguing for the ideals of the democratic education to translate into experiential learning (MacKeracher in Taylor,Cranton &Associates, 2012), the teacher in the classroom has to be mindful of the key elements and follow certain guiding principles in an attempt to develop resilience for peace-building and prevention of violence. Through that engagement, students develop certain competences.

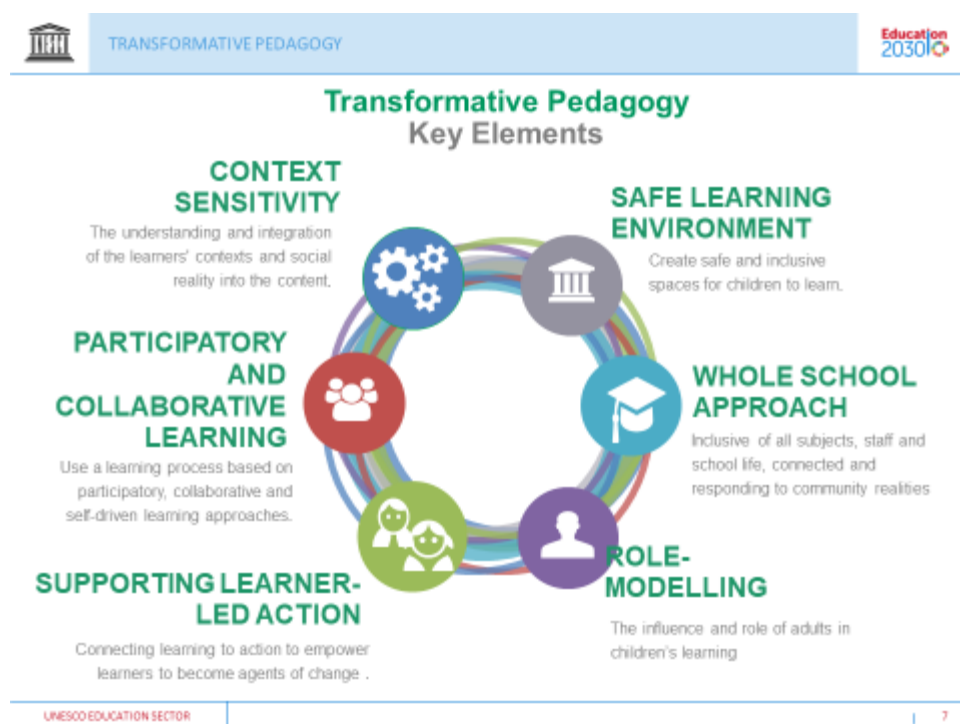


Figure 1. Key elements in transformative pedagogy

3. Approaches and Key elements in Transformative pedagogy

“Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.” (Paulo Freire, 1970)

It is important that the environment where teaching and learning takes place is a safe-environment which allows for effective engagement to take place. The teacher needs to create a safe space for meaningful and collaborative learning to take place. This can be done successfully if the teacher is knowledgeable about the learners and students' experiences (UNESCO, 2017).

Teaching and learning should not be limited to the four walls of the classroom but it must culminate in changing society and creating peace and resilience in their communities. Furthermore, teaching and learning should also be aligned to whole- school- approach.

Transformative pedagogy supports learner- led- actions and it encourages learners to be active in the teaching and learning context and they work collaboratively with other learners in the classroom and as a result they become agents of change.

It is important that the teacher as the facilitator of teaching and learning becomes sensitive to the teaching and learning environment which can have a potential of violence if it is not managed well by the teacher and can work against peace. The teacher need to be a role model for whom learners can emulate his behaviour. Furthermore, he also needs to be context sensitive so that effective teaching and learning may take place.



Figure 2. Competences needed for Peace- building (Adapted from Arigatou International, 2008)

3.1. Competences for transformative pedagogy

Certain competences (see diagram above) are developed in the learners as they engage on the task in the teaching and learning context. This innovative approach to teaching and learning transforms both the teacher and the learner. Learners are encouraged to be reflective and think critically in the teaching and learning context.

Transformative pedagogy does not provide students and learners with knowledge but they are encouraged to be knowledge producers as they engage on the task. They are encouraged not to limit their thinking on local issues but they are exposed to global and regional issues. They therefore think outside the box. They develop empathy because they are exposed to diversity as they are encouraged to promote peace and social justice. Students develop an understanding of conflict as they engage on the task and they are propelled to take action in an attempt becoming ambassadors of peace. There is room for innovative ideas to be generated in the engagement between the teacher and the learner.

4. Methodology

4.1. Paradigm

The study employed the transformative paradigm. Creswell (2014: 9) cites Mertens (2010) which argues that “a transformative worldview holds that research inquiry needs to be intertwined with politics and political change agenda to confront social oppression”. This selected paradigm is relevant for this paper because the study aimed at empowering participants through workshops conducted in three selected universities in South Africa on Transformative pedagogies for peacebuilding, resilience and prevention of violence. Therefore, the workshops conducted had intended goals of transforming forms of violence that might be in existence in different universities and society where participants would play a pivotal role in redressing them. Forms of violence include direct violence, structural violence, and cultural violence (Gultang, 1969). In the context of South Africa, teachers are expected to lead in redressing deep-seated structural inequities and to overcome a long legacy of colonial oppression, segregation, and apartheid (Sayed et al, 2018: 246). The purpose of transformative paradigm is to dismantle myths, illusions and empower people to act to transform society (Wagner, Kawulich, and Garner, 2012: 57). The participants in this study were expected to be the agents of peacebuilding

in their workplaces and society in general. This resonates with transformative paradigm. A research conducted using transformative paradigm contains an action agenda for reform that may change lives of participants in the institutions in which individuals work or live, and the researcher's life (Creswell, 2014: 9; Creswell and Creswell, 2018: 57). Researchers presented a Transformative pedagogy workshop for peacebuilding in selected universities in South Africa. The ability of participants to make meaning of the contents of the workshop was uncovered through evaluative form that participants completed after each session.

4.2. Research approach

A mixed methods research approach with its convergence parallel design was used for this study. The quantitative research approach was also used to collect data from large scale participants because it offers validity of results through the use of statistics. Kerlinger (1979: 64) argues that quantitative research "is a set of interrelated constructs (variables), definitions, and propositions that represents a systemic view of phenomena by specifying relations among variables, with the purpose of explaining natural phenomena." An evaluative survey questionnaire was used for all the participants to complete after every workshop that facilitators conducted. Qualitative data was collected from the reflections made by the facilitators of the workshops. Convergence parallel design was deemed appropriate for this study because it allows both quantitative and qualitative data to be collected simultaneously, analyse them separately and integrate the results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

4.3. Sampling and participation

The study made use of a purposive sampling. The three research sites and participants were sampled because they were appropriate to the objectives of the workshop. They were the Durban University of Technology, Nelson Mandela University and Sol Plaatje University. These three institutions were sampled because they were the only universities in South Africa that participated in the Training of Trainees workshop on Transformative Pedagogy for peacebuilding, resilience and prevention of violence by UNESCO in December 2020. This was part of the rollout plan of Transformative Peacebuilding in South Africa. Participants comprised of academic staff members, SRC members and education students. Academic staff were selected because they are central in implementing transformative pedagogy in universities. SRC members were selected because they are student leaders, therefore understanding peacebuilding techniques would benefit their constituency and respective universities at large in fostering peace. Student teachers were sampled because they are prospective educators and therefore needed to be empowered in transformative pedagogy for peacebuilding. All facilitators reflected on what transpired in all the workshops convened.

4.4. Data collection

We use a survey questionnaire to collect data from the participants. All participants were requested to complete an evaluation survey questionnaire. The survey comprised of the series of closed questions. The evaluation survey was used as a basis of shaping and improving the peacebuilding initiative in South African universities. A qualitative data was collected from reflection that was done by facilitators.

4.5. Data analysis

Data collected was analysed through descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics allows a researcher to describe and summarise the information that has been gathered and can be done graphically and numerically (O' Leary, 2014; Creswell, 2014, Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It includes central tendency, measures of variability, graphical representation of data and

determining correlation (Wagner, Kawulich, and Garner, 2012: 77). The data gathered was described, summarised, and displayed by means of graphs. Thematic analysis was used to analyse reflections from facilitators of the workshops. Kiger & Varpio (2020: 2) point out that “Thematic analysis is an appropriate and powerful method to use when seeking to understand a set of experiences, thoughts, or behaviours across a data set”. They further argue that it is less suited for examining unique meanings or experiences from a single person.

5. Results

Table 1.

Participants' evaluation

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Appropriateness of the workshop	22=66%	9=27%			1=3%
The workshop stimulated learning about peacebuilding	25=75%	6=18%			1=3%
The facilitators were well prepared	26=79%	6=18%			1=3
Objectives of the workshop were met	21=64%	11=33%			1=3%
I will be able to apply what I learned from this workshop	20= 60%	11=33%			1=3%

Participants that submitted the evaluation forms were thirty-three. The above table represents the views of participants. On the appropriateness of the workshop 66% strongly agreed that the workshop was appropriate, 27% agreed and 3% strongly disagreed. More participants strongly agreed (75%) and agreed (18%) that workshop stimulated learning about peacebuilding and one participant strongly disagreed (3%). Most participants are of the view that the facilitators were well prepared, 79% strongly agreed, 18 % agreed and 3 % strongly disagreed. The majority of participants show that the objectives of the workshop were met, 64% strongly agreed and 33% agreed, while 3% strongly disagree. About 60% of participants and 33% respectively strongly agreed and agreed that they will be able to use the information they learned from the workshop in their work environments, yet 3% strongly disagreed with that.

6. Views of the facilitators

6.1. Success of transformative pedagogies for the peacebuilding: Collaborative work

Facilitators had a view that their collective work worked well, and the objectives of the workshops were attained. They thought that:

“We identified different competences amongst ourselves during the planning sessions. We thereafter allocated different responsibilities based on different expertise that each person possessed. We met on Teams for feedback after our planning workshop. A thorough introspective, honest and frank reflection was a pillar of our success. Each participant demonstrated professional and ethical conduct in the workshop. While the facilitators came from different institutions with different backgrounds, we managed to be tolerant of our diversity. We formed a formidable collaborative team”.

6.2. Facilitation of workshops

Facilitators indicated that all workshops were convened virtually in adherence to the COVID 19 regulations. Facilitators indicated that:

We managed to get different categories of participants such as academics, SRC members and pre-service teachers that the workshop was intended for. The workshops were designed in such a way that it was participant's-centred. In all the workshops convened, there was a fair, to a good participation of participants. We were all convinced that the workshops conducted were a success.

6.3. Workshops Challenges

Facilitators highlighted the following challenges that they encountered during the workshops:

- The facilitators thought the timing of the workshop posed a challenge as they had to juggle between the workshops and normal university duties.
- It was difficult in some instances to get colleagues in the different institutions to buy into the idea of the workshop and attend. The attendance record also indicated that some of the colleagues who accepted to attend ended up not attending.
- Facilitators reflected on logistical challenges with provision of data packages to participants prior to the workshop. Data packages were limited to 33 participants for each university.
- The effect of covid-19 pandemic and restrictions on large gatherings. The workshop would have attracted more participants and allowed for more engagement if it was face to face.
- Due to budget constraints, the facilitators had to reduce the workshop content to 3 hours per group. This was not an easy task as the Training of Trainers workshop that the facilitators attended with UNESCO was over six days.
- Lack of collaboration from the Department of Basic Education (DBE) & Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) officials who were initially part of the Training of Trainers (ToT) workshop.
- Some participants did not complete the evaluation form.

7. Discussion

7.1. The success of the workshop

Both facilitators and participants shared the same sentiment that the workshop met its aims which were:

1. To articulate how the issues of peace and violence manifests and intersect in the South African contexts and beyond.
2. To identify strategies for enhancing education for peacebuilding in their own contexts using transformative pedagogies

The participants pointed out that the peacebuilding workshop was appropriate and relevant to their contexts. There is a clear indication that the second aims of the workshops were met because participants indicated that they will be able to apply the knowledge that they learned from the workshop in their own environments.

7.2. Facilitation process

Workshops were conducted virtually because of Covid-19. In all three institutions in South Africa, the workshops were successful in terms of organisation. Facilitators unanimously agreed that the workshops were a success. Their sentiment had been confirmed by the participants from all universities where workshops were conducted. Participants indicated that facilitators were well prepared for the workshops.

Taking action after our discussion in the planning workshop translate to the transformative pedagogy narrative which speaks to key elements such as participatory and collaborative learning approaches. The fact that we were a diverse group coming from different contexts and cultures. Furthermore, the key elements are characterised by learner-led actions, as learners in the ToT, we took it upon ourselves to present the paper at the 3rd World Conference so that we can share our experiences with community of practice in our profession.

It is important to note that the process of facilitating transformative pedagogy for peacebuilding was an experience that changed both the teacher and the learner (Kroth & Carton, 2014). The most meaningful of which was when learners take action and become agents of change in their communities as part of conflict transformation and conflict resolution. We as facilitators look forward to a time when students perform in an authentic context that reflect the way the knowledge will be used in real life context (Harrington, 2014).

8. Conclusion

The experience of learning at regional level (UNESCO- Africa) to our country (South Africa) and the culmination of workshops in our institutions were experiences that were transformative on their own. The facilitators from UNESCO modelled best practices which we emulated and practised in our institutions. We are hopeful that going forward the formation of peace- clubs will be a success since we had a substantial number of responses that were positive. As facilitators of the workshops we believe that this intervention had a positive contribution on the sustainable development goals (SDG 4) which speaks to quality education.

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