# LEARNING TO INHABIT THE KINGDOM:
imaginative approaches to transformational learning for discipleship & ministry

WORKSHOP REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

"Wouldn't it be a good idea to gather together people who like to think creatively and imaginatively about their teaching and learning and have some good examples that they are willing to share?"

This conversation, towards the end of a two-day *Developing Women in Leadership* course, was the seed that gave rise to the idea of this workshop. The seed was sown into the soil of a Durham University Common Awards Seedcorn Funding application and when the funding had been granted the work of preparing digging, watering, weeding, tending began.

We began by articulating what we were looking for, hoping that our vision would resonate with people who are involved in Christian education for discipleship and ministry in a variety of spheres:

> We are embarking on a project to gather and share creative ideas for enabling disciples and ministers of Christ to learn to inhabit the Kingdom in the 21st century. We want to hear about those moments of awe and wonder when deep, transformative learning has taken place and how you as teachers facilitated this.
>
> We are looking for people who share our convictions that:
>
> - transformative learning involves the whole person: mind, body, heart and spirit. When more traditional forms of teaching and learning are accompanied by seemingly unconventional and creative ideas, learning often has a deeper and more lasting impact and genuinely shapes and forms people into the likeness of Christ.
>
> - creating a culture of openness and sharing in our practices of teaching and learning invigorates and inspires our own practice and enriches the whole learning community.
>
> - a willingness to take risks and make ourselves more vulnerable as teachers creates a dynamic of mutual learning that is more conducive to deeper transformation of both teacher and learner as inhabitants of the Kingdom.
>
> We would love to hear from you! We are looking for ideas, however small or large, that you've found to be helpful in encouraging deeper learning: anything from a particular idea that you have put into practice for a specific topic, to a new take on running or organising a class, to a whole new approach to a subject area or to assessment that enhances learning.

We sowed our seed widely, using all the networks we could think of to contact individuals – in dioceses, colleges, courses and other organisations. Eventually we had positive responses from over 50 individuals representing over 30 learning contexts. Invitations to send us some of their creative teaching and learning ideas reaped a harvest of over 40 creative ideas from 28 individuals, many of whom expressed an interest in taking part in a workshop.

So the planning began. We wanted the workshop to be fun, to model imaginative practice and to offer a place and a space where, together, we could reflect a little more deeply and theologically about what it is that we are all aspiring to do when we're developing different ways of teaching and learning for Christian discipleship and ministry. We came up with the following aims, which we used to publicise the workshop:

A WORKSHOP for THEOLOGICAL EDUCATORS

LEARNING to INHABIT the KINGDOM
imaginative approaches to transformational learning for discipleship & ministry

What? Honing imaginative practice and pondering…

- What is the purpose of learning for discipleship & ministry?
- What are the hallmarks of transformational learning?
- How are theology, learning & imagination connected?
- What can imaginative & interactive approaches unlock?

When? 26 – 27 April 2016

Where? Billesley Manor, nr Stratford-upon-Avon

Nineteen participants signed up (see Appendix 1). In addition to devising a programme that we hoped would offer different 'ways in' to the issues we wanted to probe more deeply, we invited participants to do some preparation for the workshop. We asked them to bring all the materials they needed to demonstrate one creative teaching and learning idea, and we suggested they read at least some of the articles (see below) which we had chosen and disseminated as theological compost to encourage our discussions to take root.

The opening 'Marketplace' session required participants to collaborate in pairs so that they could take turns to shop and sell their wares. In the next session we used a selection of creative ideas that had been sent to us and encouraged participants to 'analyse' them in relation to transformational learning. We offered participants the opportunity to take a walk in pairs to reflect on what they saw to be the purpose of their vocation as theological educators. On the second day we ran a 'World Café' to enable participants to begin to dig deeper and articulate what we mean by transformation, what are some key theological themes and threshold concepts behind our teaching and learning. In the final session, we gave space for further questions and challenged participants to think about some concrete actions that they might take as a result of attending the workshop.

Each session concluded with an oasis of reflection, prayer and worship that connected with the discussions that had taken place – illustrating the possibilities of integrating worship with teaching and learning.

This record of the workshop is a distillation of the work that participants did. Unlike the 'proceedings' of a more traditional theological conference, we do not have papers that we can collate into the chapters of a book. Rather we have taken transcriptions of the raw material of the workshop and done some light touch tidying and weeding to produce an account that we hope the participants will recognise and that will inspire and stimulate readers who were not there.

Eeva John, Naomi Nixon and Nick Shepherd

Workshop pre-reading

David, F. Ford, *The Future of Christian Theology*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.
Chapter 4: *Desire Above All*, pp 68 – 83 .

David I. Smith and James K.A. Smith, eds., *Teaching and Christian Practices: Reshaping Faith and Learning*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011.
Introduction: *Practices, Faith and Pedagogy*, pp 1 – 23.

Perry Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education: A Practical Handbook for Integrative Learning*, Carlisle: Langham, 2014.
Chapter 4: *Multidimensional Learning in Theological Education*, pp 67 – 77.
Chapter 6: *Beyond Fragmentation in the Curriculum*, pp 93 – 106.

Adrienne Dengerink Chaplin, *From Vision to Touch: Returning Beauty to Lived Experience*, The Other Journal – An Intersection of Theology and Culture, June 2009
http://theotherjournal.com/2009/06/01/from-vision-to-touch-returning-beauty-to-lived-experience/

Jan Meyer and Ray Land, *Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge: Linkages to Ways of Thinking and Practising within the Disciplines*, Enhancing Teaching-Learning Environments in Undergraduate Courses, Occasional Report 4, May 2003.
http://www.etl.tla.ed.ac.uk/docs/ETLreport4.pdf   *

* *This article was accidentally missed out and circulated to participants after the workshop.*

THE LEARNING MARKETPLACE

1. How it worked

The purpose of this opening session was to give participants an opportunity to share some of their best ideas in teaching and learning, as well as to get to know each other and to set the scene for what we, the convenors, hoped would be a fun, stimulating and productive workshop.

Each participant was given 300 units of a little-known currency, the Welbey, to spend on the teaching and learning wares available in the market. In light of this, each participant decided a price for their teaching and learning idea(s) in the hope of selling as many as possible. Working in pairs meant that each had to take a turn to sell the other's wares persuasively. The 'product' that had gained the highest amount of currency was declared the winner.

2. Examples of the 'produce' available at the market

Here we offer a sample of the wares that participants brought to the marketplace.

A good number of the teaching and learning wares were subject-specific and related to the teaching of Bible and/or hermeneutics.

This "Old Testament Challenge" game uses play to discover the timeline of the Old Testament in an introductory, overview module.

The participant gave a full description of the game and how to make one. A link will be available on the online virtual platform.
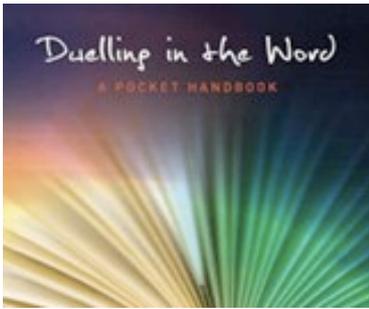
Another participant brought a book that offers members of the congregation the opportunity to experience and adopt the habit of deep listening to God, one another and neighbour by 'living into' a Bible passage and allowing it to shape the group's imagination and vision for mission through the church.
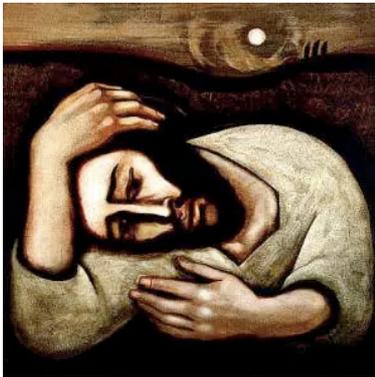
This approach to teaching a module on the Psalms incorporated an activity for small groups: each group was invited to write a brief lament psalm using some of the poetic forms and lament elements that had been introduced earlier in the module. The results were collected and good examples shared with the class at the beginning of the next session.

An assessment option was for the student to write their own brief lament psalm, together with a commentary that compared its features to others in the Psalter

For the first session of an *Introduction to the Bible* module for lay ministry training, students are given a 10-question quiz used for the recruitment of airline pilots which illustrates some pit falls related to understanding written communication. It is a 'fun' way for students to think about some of the issues around communicating in writing.

Students are given the equivalent of the *Radio Times* and a task (shown in the image left) as a means of introducing them to the concept of genre. This raises students' awareness of the presuppositions and expectations they bring to biblical texts with an immediacy that helps them understand the crucial role of genre in the task of biblical interpretation.

Other contributions offered processes of learning that could be adapted to a range of contexts and subjects.

One approach makes use of de Bono's six thinking hats to encourage students to think about and practise 'thinking' by separating thinking into six clear functions and roles. This is useful for the study of biblical texts, discussing case studies and thinking about prayer.
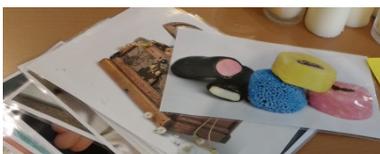
Another approach involves offering students a number of different images with the possibility of making associations between the images and particular concepts.

A number of participants brought information about resources for theological education for discipleship and ministry in different contexts and in different modes.

Trove describes itself as a 'one stop shop' for digital discipleship resources from and for a variety of contexts.

Unlock offers free digital resources to help people from 'non-book' urban cultures to engage with the Bible.

Subscribers to **Roots** can access learning resources for discipleship. A sample about 'Spirituality Styles' was on display at the workshop.

Finally, some participants brought specific examples of resources or modules which embodied transformational learning.
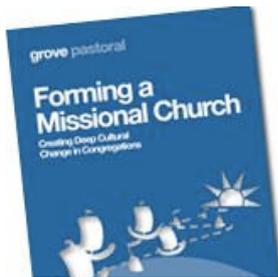
With a focus on transforming the culture of congregations, this booklet introduces six 'faithful disruptive missional practices'.

In a module entitled, 'The Common Good: Christian Theologies in Dialogue with Islam', learners engage with the Tradition, with Muslims and with Scriptural Reasoning.

WHAT ARE THE HALLMARKS OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEARNING?

In this session we examined a number of teaching and learning ideas from the perspectives of three questions that we hoped would unearth some of the hallmarks of transformational learning.

- • How is learning made accessible?
- • How is the imagination of learners engaged?
- • What makes learning transformative?

Approximately a dozen 'creative learning ideas' that had been offered by colleagues as part of the initial information-gathering phase of the project were displayed around the conference room. In small groups participants familiarised themselves with the ideas and reflected on the three questions – supplying tentative answers and sticking them around the creative idea for others to see.
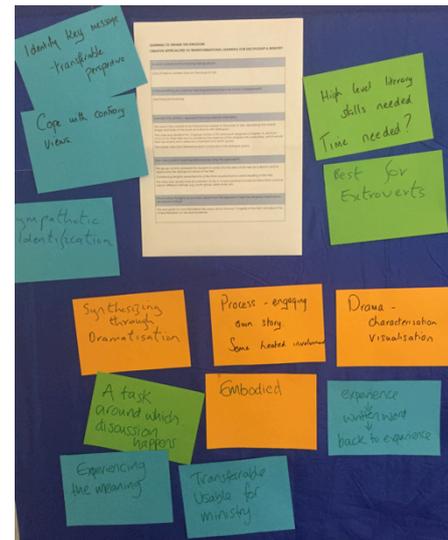
Each group then gathered the responses for one of the questions and began to group them according to emerging themes. These themes are described below.

1. How is learning made accessible?

Little or no learning takes place if the learner is not able to access and engage with the learning process. For learning to be transformative, however, there needs to be an even higher level of accessibility: the learner's presence is not enough. We explored what are the conditions we can create or pedagogical methods we can employ in order to make transformational learning possible.

Unsurprisingly participants drew attention to the significance of the person of the teacher, in particular their relationships with the learners and the way they modelled being transformed by learning themselves. In addition, their presence, leadership, facilitation and coaching skills were identified, as were more bodily aspects such as their movement around the classroom and their position and posture in relation to the students.

Learners experience transformation when given opportunities to engage with spirituality and worship as part of their learning. – not simply learning about these things but experiencing them within the learning. Such integration encourages learners and teachers to be open to the work of the Holy Spirit in the classroom.

The communal nature of learning was an important theme. This might involve learners engaging together in a task around which discussion takes place. Carefully facilitated group work enables knowledge to emerge from the group and different viewpoints to be aired and heard. A particularly powerful experience is when the whole group learns together as a result of their corporate reflection and discussion. In order to be effective, learning together needs to be democratic and participatory, enabling everyone to take an active role in the class.

Accessibility is often enhanced by judicious use of material resources. Participants noted that often the most effective resources were ordinary everyday things used in different ways, enabling learners to make unexpected connections with life.

Learners' own stories can be a powerful factor in transformational learning. Bringing not only their own knowledge and ignorance but seeing the learning as a part of their own journey and connecting it with their own history can help them make the necessary leaps to new understanding.

Physical, embodied learning was an important theme that cropped up on numerous occasions during the workshop. The art of crafting teaching and learning that is appropriately and meaningfully multisensory and kinaesthetic was seen as an important aspiration. Examples include visual and auditory input, singing, making things, and engaging in physical movement, such as 'sculpting' using the body or acting.

Last but not least, participants emphasised the need to design teaching and learning that is accessible by different 'learning personalities'. Elements that might need to be included in a rounded teaching and learning session are likely to include active learning, signposting to practical application, enabling learning by exploring, reflective learning and offering space for both extrovert and introvert personality types.

Making learning truly accessible – so as to be transformative as well – is challenging. Preparation (and execution) takes time and learners need 'space to assimilate and 'dwell' with the learning individually as well as together. A specific and creative challenge is that of working with students with weaker educational backgrounds or aptitude for traditional 'book learning'. Although this was mentioned and agreed to be important in relation to learning for discipleship and ministry there wasn't the capacity to explore this in any depth.

Accessible learning that TAKES ROOT…	is physical and embodied	involves worship	How is learning made accessible? … to what kind of learners? How is the imagination of the learners engaged? How is this learning transformative? … and why?
is modelled by the teacher	is participatory	engages with learners' own stories	is communal

2. How is the imagination of the learners engaged?

In the first section we found what might serve as reminders of good practice, important for effective learning of all kinds, but perhaps not enough to guarantee transformation. Simply creating conditions where learning can take place is not enough for learning to be transformational. We need also to engage the imagination, or perhaps the soul. A first step that might be self-evident is to be overt in inviting learners their imagination in the classroom and then to create opportunities for students to do so.

A particularly vital task of imagination is to personalise learning by learning to exercise empathy. This requires imaginative inhabitation of situations, ideas and viewpoints other than one's own. It may involve experiencing a story by inhabiting a particular role in it, perhaps through drama or role-play that engages body and emotions as well as cognition. Having to use one's own words can help learners to 'inhabit' a concept, an argument or a new perspective. This bodily and affective identification is an important step in acquiring empathy and a new openness to learning from others, including an understanding of different perspectives that transforms behaviour and attitude.

The phrase 'transposition of media' was coined to describe a learning activity that involves expressing learning in a different medium from the one in which it is traditionally taught or articulated. This might be through the use of visual images – juxtaposing modern images and an ancient text, for example – connecting the unfamiliar with the familiar or the abstract with the concrete. It might involve transferring scripture into drama or doctrine into pictures, allowing images, symbol and metaphors to give space to the imagination and depth to meaning. A crucial factor that makes this kind of learning transformative is that it is not the analysis the teacher had implicitly provided but the space given for the learner to make their own connections.

The key was not simply the idea or technique itself but the opportunity and space to explore and develop ideas and understanding. Participants noted that a vital role for learning that engages the imagination is to 'open up things previously closed' within the learner. Imagination enables learners to cross boundaries, explore and synthesise their learning, opening up new possibilities.

We know a learner has engaged their imagination when they have embarked on a new avenue of thinking, whether that is simply something they never thought of before or whether it is really taking to heart an alternative point of view. We see it when a learner changes role in a discussion, explores a new idea, shifts in understanding or creates new ideas or applications.

Engaging the IMAGINATION enables learners to …	make unexpected connections	exercise empathy	be open to new possibilities and to cross boundaries
	by transposing media	by inhabiting a role or perspective	
	by using symbols, images and metaphors	by personalising understanding	by letting the learners do the learning
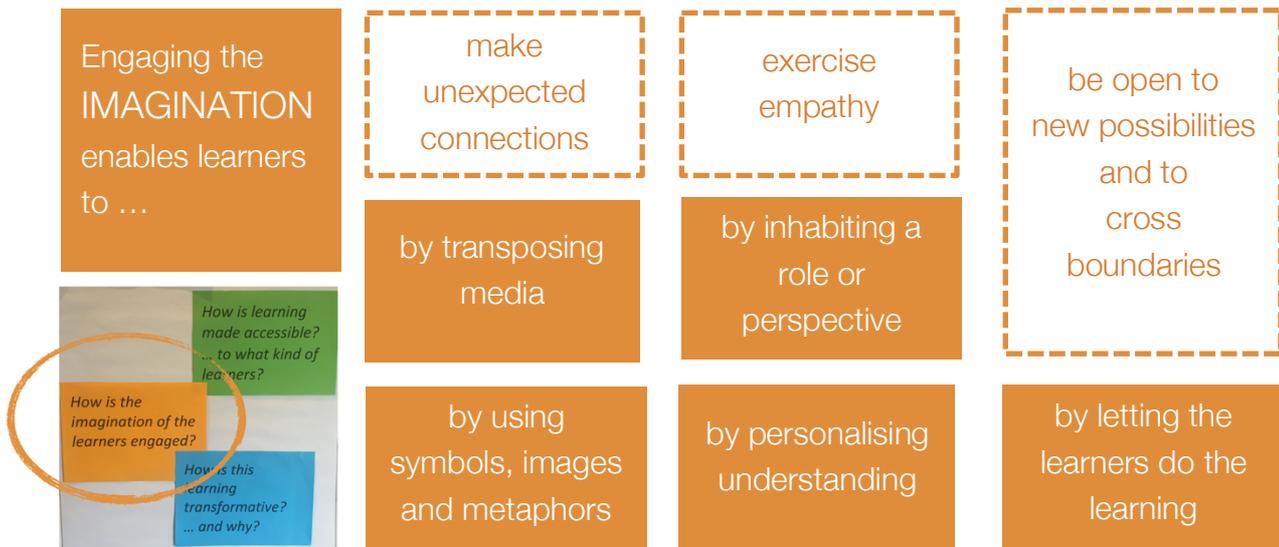
3. What makes learning transformative and why?

Participants agreed that true and lasting transformation into Christ-likeness can only take place by means of the Holy Spirit. Transformative learning therefore involves creating a culture and context that opens learners up to the work of the Holy Spirit. This, in turn, means that the 'classroom' needs to be a safe space in which to take risks and to be wrong, encouraging a vulnerability (for both learners and teacher) that is character forming.
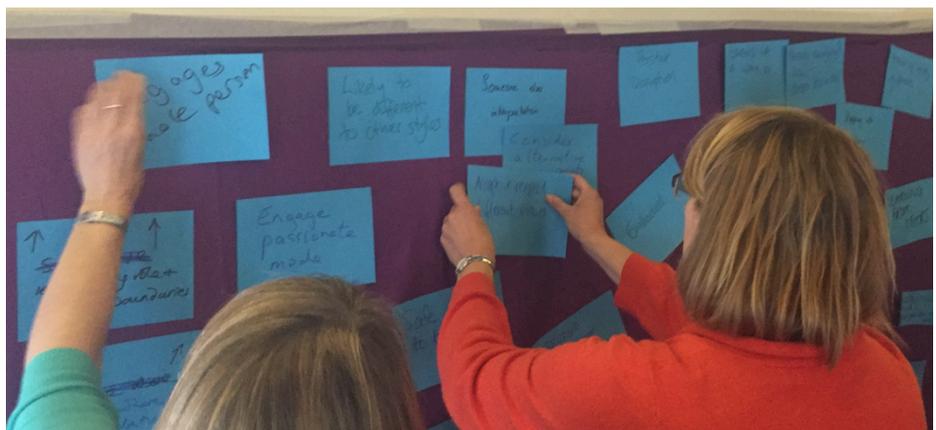
Some of the themes of the previous section were re-visited and re-articulated here, such as the significance of creating opportunities for learners to wrestle with different (often contrary) perspectives. This kind of teaching and learning that constantly confronts learners with the views and interpretations of others is hard and even painful – but is transformative only if learners are willing to see the Holy Spirit at work through both positive and negative experiences. Whether the learner might reflect that the learning was enjoyable or difficult or both, for it to be truly transformational, it will have been demanding. The demand may often take the shape of having to work together with others and experiencing the reality of honest encounters.

On a more pragmatic note, learning and gaining confidence in ministerial skills can be very transformative and needs to be recognised and affirmed as such by both teacher and learner.

If learning has been transformational we will see learners bringing their whole selves to the learning experience: spirit, personality, affections and intellect. Phrases that were used to describe this 'deep learning' included: the affective effect of music, sympathetic

identification, experiencing the meaning, stepping into the story, engaging the passionate mode, embodying ideas, experiencing real encounters. Through engagement in these kinds of learning students grow in discipleship and ministry with depth and in passion.

| Learning that CREATES SPACE for & a CULTURE of… | taking risks | expressing vulnerability | affirmation leading to confidence | |
| being transformed by the Holy Spirit by … | readiness to wrestle | engaging with learners' whole selves | making mistakes & failing | accepting pain and difficulty |

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF LEARNING FOR DISCIPLESHIP AND MINISTRY?

The final session of the first day of the workshop offered participants an extended reflective time to ponder their own calling as theological educators and to re-connect with what it is that motivates us all to pursue excellence in our vocations.

Participants were invited to take an hour-long walk in pairs, taking turns to actively listen to one another's reflections and, if they wished, to complete the second half of the walk in silence.

At the end of this time, everyone gathered in prayer and worship. This included capturing some of their reflections in words or pictures on a paper leaf in which were embedded parsley seeds. Individuals were invited to hang their leaves on a tree as a form of prayer.

WHAT IS BEHIND THE PRACTICE?

On the second day of the workshop we wanted to create a space for participants to think about the theological and pedagogical backdrop to transformational learning. Using a 'World Café' approach, participants split into four groups and spent some time around each of four tables discussing the answers to the questions on each table. Everyone was invited to write, draw, doodle their thoughts. The four questions were:

1. What are key theological themes for transformational learning?

2. What are signs / evidence of transformation?

3. What threshold concepts can we begin to articulate?

4. What challenges are emerging?

1. Key theological themes

When participants were invited to reflect theologically on what makes learning transformative a number of theological themes emerged that connected with the hallmarks of transformative processes of teaching and learning as well as with the signs that transformation has taken place.
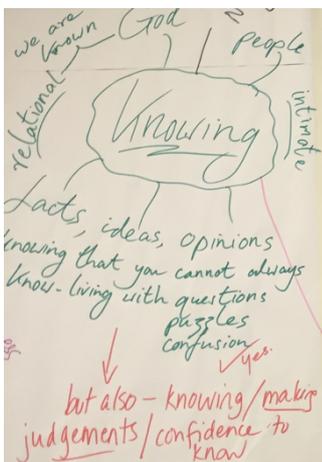
Learning that transforms people conceives of knowledge as relationship: it takes place in a context of knowing and being known – by God and by others. This is congruent with the observation of the power of learning in community, in which both teacher and learners participate in a dynamic of giving and receiving, allowing themselves to be known by each other and by God. Such learning invites both teacher and learner to vulnerability and intimacy, which, if accepted, results in memorable and transformational learning.

When teaching embodies, models and reminds learners of their identity as beloved children of the God who is both creator and redeemer, then many of the desirable outcomes of transformational learning emerge within the learning community: the confidence to explore and ask questions; the ability to trust God despite uncertainty and unanswered questions; the freedom to take risks and make mistakes; a desire for, and openness to, changed understanding and behaviour.

Trajectories of transformation offer theologically rich metaphors that resonate with learners' experience of 'deep' learning. Brueggeman's movement from orientation to disorientation and new orientation is a helpful backdrop within which learning takes place, as is the movement from an experience of God's presence, to his absence and his presence in absence. There is an eschatological hue to learning as learners and teachers alike are 'changed from glory into glory' and as they experience 'not seeing', 'distorted seeing' and 'seeing clearly' – sometimes in a sudden illumination, and, at other times, as a slow, almost imperceptible process.

Wisdom was identified as an important way of describing the goal of theological education, but one which only the Holy Spirit can bring about through her life-giving,

sustaining and sanctifying activity in the learner. The need to create a fruitful 'space' for this was a recurring theme of the workshop.

Finally, the holistic nature of learning – involving mind, body, heart and spirit – is encapsulated in a theology of sacramentality, discovering God's presence in the learning community, in embodied and affective learning, as well as through cognition and spiritual disciplines.

| THEOLOGICAL THEMES | eschatological trajectory | knowledge as relationship | identity in God | sacramentality |
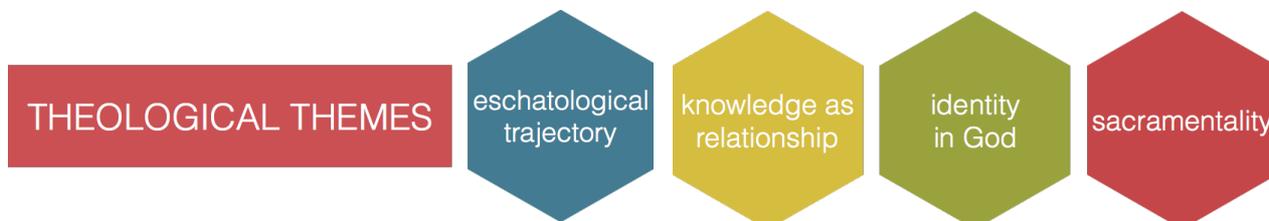
2. Signs or evidence of transformation

A key aspect of facilitating transformational learning is being able to identify when, or if, this has taken place. There are a variety of ways in which educators assess that learning has taken place. The place of formal assessment in theological and ministerial training was frequently criticised in the workshop as being 'inadequate' or 'inappropriate' for the outcomes that participants felt were required – such as those identified in the 'Hallmarks' activities. Identifying signs or evidence of transformation is important to give texture to these forms of assessment, especially if additional reports on formation are required. This data could also help to steer the development of alternative forms of assessment that might be possible to house within HE programme outcomes, thus beginning to address the anxiety that the requirement to focus on 'formal' assessment takes our eyes off 'deeper' transformation.
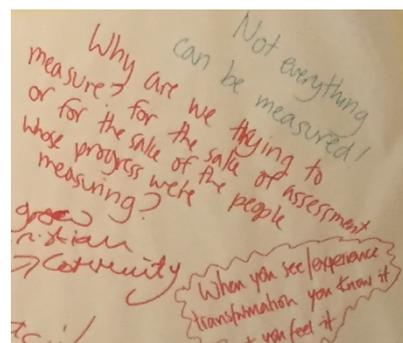
A key observable sign of transformational learning is a perception of an increased openness in learners. This openness was expressed as a capacity to embrace change – to demonstrate that reflective learning has led to changes in behaviours or practice. This behavioural openness is accompanied by signs of increased conceptual openness and is seen in a more tolerant or enquiring interest in other traditions, an ability to sit with questions about one's own beliefs and to manage ambiguity or ambivalence.

Another set of signs of transformation centre around observable change – specific aspects of transformation of self. The sense that 'something happens' captured this broad area. Markers for identifying change in a sense of self include greater **confidence**; enhanced **capacity**; deeper **curiosity** and increased **concern**.

Confidence is observable in the way in which views are expressed and communicated. However, it is a confidence in a sense of self – expressed as 'blossoming' – rather than in a mastery of subject knowledge. This kind of confidence is 'undefended' in respect to personal challenge and awareness of power. Transformation is evidenced by a growing **capacity** to seek 'deeper understanding' by integrating sources of knowing – intellectual, emotional and social. It is also marked by a more deliberate attempt to engage in self-reflection and critical evaluation of practice. Transformation is seen in an enlivened **curiosity** that increasingly sees learning as essential rather than functional: a means to an end – from 'box ticking to learning that sticks'. This influences the way in which deeper

readings of context and closer listening in pastoral dynamics is attended to. Lastly increased **concern** is a marker of transformational learning demonstrated in a new or re-ignited passion for the practice of ministry and for personal spiritual connection.

Some used the description of virtues to capture these markers – delight, wisdom, curiosity, passion, hope, expectancy and desire. Others built on this strand of thinking by making connections with the fruit of the spirit (Galatians 6). Still others noted David Ford's idea about being 'massively agnostic' about what is actually going on in people's lives, minds and hearts.

Markers of change are also observable in how interactions with others are enhanced. This is vitreous learning in that the changes described above are linked to desirable changes within Christian community. Comments identified that change is seen in the way that 'others are emancipated through the learner' and in how their presence in a community leads to more clearly identifiable 'learning, caring and growing'. Change in self and change in social context are key markers for transformation in theological and ministerial learning and a 'theological-ethical' framing of what is seen to be beneficial is identifiable in how these changes are read as being positive.

Openness and change might be construed as markers to identify *outcomes* of transformational learning. There were however strong indications that the *process* of such transformation is also observable, and that this is often seen as being a more difficult place for learners to be. Here transformational learning is experienced and felt as 'Loss and crisis' – even for some a sense of bereavement. 'Pain' is experienced as learners enter a 'cycle of destabilisation then reconstruction'. There are 'tears and smiles' as individuals experience being changed while acknowledging the difficulty of the process.

Finally markers of transformational learning are also those that identify the acquisition and use of new skills. These include functional skills and reflective skills. In functional skills those that are required for ministry were seen as signs – to be able to preach, lead worship, express learning in prayer and worship. However, these were also accompanied by an ability to reflect theologically on practice and experientially on theology and an ability to draw on personal story of self and others. These reflective skills are important signs of transformational learning because they link the internal and external aspects of change discussed above. They are the means by which as individuals change can be mediated and monitored.

Participants wrestled with some of the premises of this exercise. Transformation is often invisible – at least at first – in the way that roots start growing before shoots appear. Also, individuals have very different starting points when it comes to spiritual formation. Finally, some commented that we did not have enough opportunity to reflect on or articulate what 'imaginative, inhabited wisdom' looks like.

SIGNS OF TRANSFORMATION

reflective & functional skills

open to pain of change

relating to others

concern

confidence

curiosity

capacity

virtues, fruit of the Spirit

liberating others
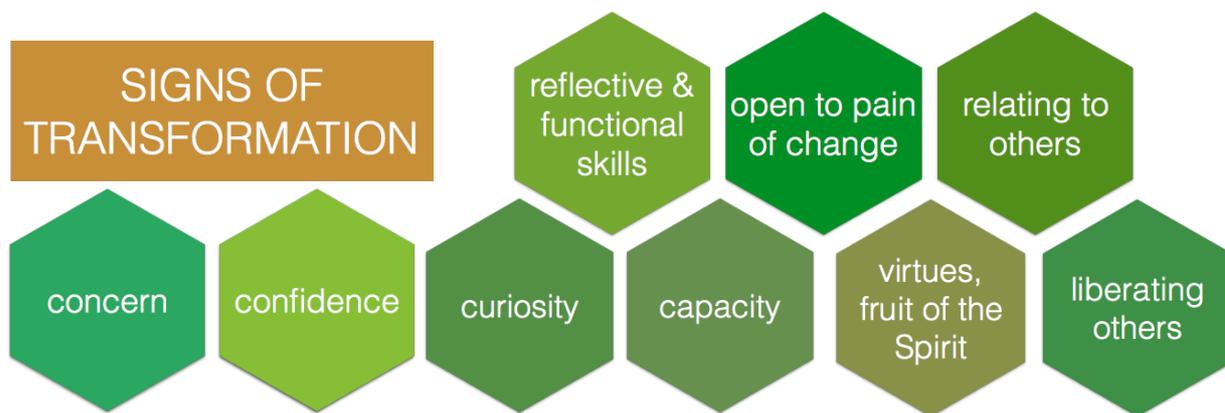
3. Threshold concepts

The aim of this table was to identify and explore participants' understanding of the threshold concepts considered to be useful in formation for discipleship and ministry. The identification of threshold concepts has become a helpful methodology in the design and review of Higher Education strategies. A paper covering this topic was to have been circulated to participants in advance. Unfortunately this was not included in the batch of pre-reading and participants had to make do with simple explanation of the concept to guide their discussions. This description was:

'Threshold Concepts' may be considered to be "akin to passing through a portal" or "conceptual gateway" that opens up "previously inaccessible way[s] of thinking about something" (see Meyer and Land). They are:

- Transformative: Once understood, a threshold concept changes the way in which the student views the discipline

- Troublesome: Threshold concepts are likely to be troublesome for the student. Perkins [Perkins, D. (1999). 'The many faces of constructivism', *Educational Leadership*, 57 (3)] has suggested that knowledge can be troublesome e.g. when it is counter-intuitive, alien or seemingly incoherent.

- Irreversible: Given their transformative potential, threshold concepts are also likely to be irreversible, i.e. they are difficult to unlearn.

- Integrative: Threshold concepts, once learned, are likely to bring together different aspects of the subject that previously did not appear, to the student, to be related.

Threshold concepts can be categorised into meta-concepts – aspects of transformative learning that are developed and built over time leading to changes in orientation and approach – and subject-concepts, aspects of conceptual understanding that are transformative in particular disciplines or areas of practice.

The group's work focused on meta-concepts, identifying…

… the realisation that Christian learning is knowledge, skills and character. This transforms the relationship that the learner has with theological education as a process of formation. In addition to knowledge and skills, learners who have crossed this threshold have a deep appreciation of how developing 'holy habits' enhances transformative learning. These habits include prayer, devotional reading of Scripture, hospitality, missional action, announcing the kingdom, dwelling in the world and spiritual discernment.

… the realisation that Christian learning is wider than theological discourse and that theological discourse is a frame of interpretation. This transforms the relationship that the learner has with the scope of objective theological study and the territory where theology is relevant (in an open and positive way): 'the world is the locus of theology – not just the classroom.'
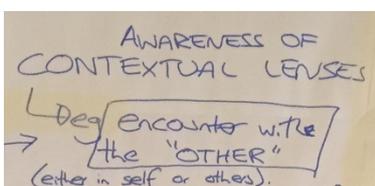
… the realisation that Christian learning is deeply contextual – both in application and interpretation. This transforms the relationship that the learner has with the practice of theological study and theological reflection. This includes a greater acceptance of experiential learning through ministry and mission.

… the realisation that Christian learning is affective and effected emotionally – that it changes the way we feel and the way we feel has an impact on our understanding. This transforms the relationship that the learner has to the subject of theology, recognising and accepting that the learner herself is often the subject of learning. Learning may involve addressing our emotional response to 'life crises' and encourages the development of resilience.

… the realisation that Christian learning is relational, impacting on our relationship with ourselves, others and power. Transformational learning involves overcoming the 'buffered self', the fear of 'the other'. Learners have crossed this threshold when they are willing to engage with disrupted power dynamics among learners as well as between learners and teachers.

Subject-specific threshold concepts were less explored. This was partly related to a lack of time to engage in a range of subjects, as well as the fact that participants had not been able to engage with the pre-reading about threshold concepts. The focus was on biblical studies.

A threshold concept in biblical studies is the concept of hermeneutics and interpretation of Scripture. Learners' approach to the text and context of Scripture is transformed when they understand their part in the ongoing story of the people of God – knowing where they've come from and where they're going, impacting how they 'write' their bit of the story now.

An overarching suggestion was to introduce relevant threshold concepts at the beginning of teaching – and then help students to understand its significance.

THRESHOLD CONCEPTS in CHRISTIAN LEARNING …

| character & holy habits | the world as the locus of theology | contextual | relational | affective |

4. Challenges and problems

No one thought that providing opportunities for transformational learning was easy. What follows is an initial list of what was felt to be challenging about implementation.

Capacity issues are perhaps the most obvious. Having enough time to design learning opportunities in creative and thoughtful ways that enable transformation is difficult for those who already have the gifts and inclination to do so. Finding the time, resources and professional competence and skills to assist colleagues with the complex process of pedagogical design is even more demanding. The wider work of training and equipping theological educators to facilitate transformational learning is not only time consuming but potentially energy consuming as well: new approaches disrupt power dynamics and may disturb teachers' confidence in 'tried and tested' methods.

There are pedagogical challenges too. These include:

- ensuring teaching and learning is attentive to a diversity of learning and thinking styles, including the challenges of making learning accessible to 'non-book' learners;
- integrating creative and experiential teaching with 'academic content';
- balancing the time to cover content with more formational, creative approaches, especially in a validated framework and in a part time training context.

It is notable that the need for space and time was repeatedly found to be vital. The pressures on time in many of our programmes can drive out the very depth of learning which we are called upon to provide. This is something we might intuitively know but which this workshop led us to be able to see and articulate more clearly.

Relational challenges abound. First and foremost, if transformational learning is demanding and costly for learners, there need to be relationships which can "hold' the pain of transformation. Educators face the challenge of seeing themselves as co-learners with their students, forming relationships that encourage a culture of openness and vulnerability.

A major challenge – and a recurring theme in the workshop – was how to dispel the myth that creative, experiential and participative approaches are 'lightweight'. Participants commented on the difficulty of persuading colleagues – and students – of the value of these approaches. Both teachers and learners may be hampered by preconceived notions about pedagogy and what counts as 'learning' in theological education for discipleship and ministry.

Collaboration was another theme in a number of dimensions: how do we encourage theological educators to see teaching and learning as a shared process, where the division between teacher and learner is blurred – without undermining the confidence of educators? In institutions where there is more than one 'department' how do we encourage staff collaboration that enables continuity across subjects? How do we foster a culture of collaboration across institutions, dioceses and denominations that subverts the sector's competitive instincts?

Vulnerability is crucial to the processes and experience of transformation, and yet it cannot be mandated. Therefore a more painstaking process of encouragement is required: encouraging church members to recognise the need to learn, grow and be transformed – requiring vulnerability and a desire to learn; enabling teachers (often clergy) to be open and vulnerable enough to want to learn, receive feedback, be transformed.

Perhaps the greatest systemic challenge is that of evidencing transformation: if we can develop ways of discerning transformation within and among learners, how can we change our systems to take account of that rather than more conventional methods of assessment?

To push this even further we wanted to ask does the need for formal assessment limit the creativity of our approach to teaching and learning? Do we in fact have a systemic challenge which prevents us from embracing transformational learning as our aim?

Finally participants commented on the need for 'us' – a self-selected group of educators – to recognise and value the range of pedagogical approaches embodied in our colleagues. We recognised that we had much to learn from colleagues who were not like us. We need to acknowledge our own strengths and weaknesses and embrace both reflective thinkers and those who think in a different way. We need to remind ourselves of the need to be attentive to the movement of the Holy Spirit in our teaching and learning.

CHALLENGES

relationships: costliness

relationships: teachers as co-learners

myths about creativity

collaboration in the face of competition

systemic constraints

space & time

WHAT NEXT?

The convenors recapped the process and resources that had made this workshop possible, and committed ourselves to

- writing a report of the workshop and to share it with workshop participants and among colleagues more widely;

- giving a presentation about the research and the workshop at the Common Awards staff conference in July 2016;

- creating an online platform that will enable a virtual community of theological educators to share resources and continue the conversations.

The final session of the workshop was designed to encourage participants to think about what action they might take as a result of our deliberations together. They did this in two ways.

First, in groups of three, participants were given a notional £2,000 with which to carry out a project. To help with planning in a short timeframe, each group was offered a project template with the following sections:

- Title
- Aim and desired outcome
- Activities
- Resources
- Budget

The groups were given a few minutes in which to present their project. Thumbnail sketches are shown below.

"University Challenged"

Give a community project £2,000 to recruit, train, observe and offer feedback to a group of people in ministerial training. Focus will be on facilitation and contextual learning.

Staff development for theological educators

Hold a regional event that exposes new and experienced theological educators to current thinking about transformational learning.

Dramatisation as transformational learning

Hold a workshop about the theology and practice of dramatisation in transformational learning. Provide resource materials and involve a member of the acting community.

NEXUS – Pathways into conversation

Create an online, interactive meeting place for people interested in transformative theological education.

Explore church leaders' implicit and explicit "rules of life" in relation to Christian pedagogy

Carry out qualitative research with individual clergy and lay leaders and draw out relation to Christian pedagogy.

Thinking theologically about pedagogy and assessment

Hold a workshop for stakeholders about the theological underpinning of pedagogy and assessment. Write up and create a digital resource to continue the conversation.

Second, participants wrote a note to themselves about a specific action that they will individually undertake. These were placed in self-addressed envelopes that were collected and posted to the participants some weeks after the workshop.

EVALUATION

Participants were sent a short questionnaire electronically a few weeks after the workshop. Initial analysis of feedback using text analysis on *SurveyMonkey* highlighted the following feedback about the sessions (font size indicates importance):

Sharing Ideas: The Market Place

Seeing Range Creative
Time to look Variety of Ideas

Hallmarks of Transformational Learning

Teaching Sticky wall
Ideas Thinking

The Purpose of Learning: Walk and Talk

Passion Hearing Story
Chance to explore

Behind the Practice: The 'World Café'

Opportunity to Think
Issues Ideas

What else did you appreciate?

Conversations Context
Networking

Across the sessions the primary benefit was the opportunity to discuss and explore ideas and practice with others. All bar one of the participants said that the workshop had given them new insights (56%) or reminded them of important insights that they already knew (37%). This was linked to a sense that these could be put into practice with 70% of participants saying they had identifiable actions.

There were weaknesses identified in the clarity of purpose and some of the processes used in the workshop. Several participants felt that the workshop was too 'light' on theory – though one of these comments highlighted that the reading sent out in advance attended to this. A vagueness of the aims, however, was felt by more than half of the participants. In hindsight this could have been addressed with a clearer affirmation of the purpose of the workshop as a starting point for conversation and collaboration on the topic of transformational learning, not a symposium about work that has already been undertaken. This was the stated aim, but perhaps understated.

Several participants identified discomfort with the 'market place' and the 'creative but chaotic' approach in some of the sessions. Setting expectations again is highlighted. However, as organisers this emphasises part of the point of what we were attempting to model in some sessions. They were meant to be uncomfortable in that they presented challenging and 'real play' situations to work through. They were meant to be creative in attempting to engage different learning styles and address issues from a variety of vantage points.

The lack of time to see through issues into further detail or explore the theory further was also noted. It would have been beneficial to construct a little more time around this specific aspect.

CONCLUSIONS

In this workshop we sought to create a context in which ideas could be shared, celebrated and developed further. We also hoped to begin to articulate and wrestle with the pedagogy and theology that validates, develops or challenges colleagues' intuitive convictions about teaching and learning. As the first of its kind within this sector in the UK, this was a 'taster' workshop and a springboard for deeper, more defined work. However, there was a clear sense that the participants had strong intuitions about the kinds of teaching and learning practices that are likely to bring about transformation among their students.

Two challenges were expressed at various moments in the workshop. The first was the challenge for the church and her theological educator community to continue to forge a culture of openness and collaboration, thereby subverting the seemingly intrinsic competitive culture among theological education institutions. The second was to consider how the frameworks within which theological education – especially in HE institutions – may be hampering efforts towards designing and implementing teaching and learning that is truly formational, integrated and integrating of the various paradigms of learning that all too easily become separated and even polarised.

We sensed a strong and unifying desire to see Spirit-induced transformation into Christ-likeness in and among our students, and we were encouraged by the fact that some themes emerged that provide pointers for further work. On a pragmatic note, the outcomes of the workshop will offer our colleagues and us not only some ideas to try out

but also some hallmarks that we can use as prompts for introducing and designing new elements into our practice of teaching and learning in theological education.

We hope that by means of the new virtual community, colleagues will continue this work and these conversations, drawing others in to this fellowship of people who care deeply about theological education for discipleship and ministry that is first and foremost about all of us learning to inhabit the kingdom.

Eeva John, Naomi Nixon and Nick Shepherd

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