University of
Southern
Queensland

A *TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH TO* STUDENT LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN AUSTRALIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

A Thesis submitted by

Rian Roux

BApplSc (Major in Education), MDiv

For the award of

Doctor of Philosophy

2022

ABSTRACT

Building on three interconnected fields of inquiry, the scholarship of engagement, student leadership development and transformative learning theory, this thesis addresses an extant gap in knowledge pertaining to how universities can implement ethically accountable and applicable methods of student leadership development in a time of accelerating change. This is achieved through the construction of an evidence-based conceptualisation of a transformative approach to student leadership development for Australian higher education. The research focused on a specific leadership education event, the National Student Leadership Forum (NSLF), and used purposive sampling to investigate the transformative experience of 20 former-student delegates at these events between 1998 to 2018. Through the process of theory building and theory testing, this study resulted in contributions to philosophical, theoretical, methodological, policy and practical knowledge for the consideration of Australian universities.

Keywords: Australia; authentic servant leaders; citizen scholars; deconstruction; higher education; reconstruction; scholarship of engagement; student leadership development; transformative learning; VUCA

CERTIFICATION OF THESIS

I Rian Roux declare that the PhD Thesis entitled A *Transformative Approach to Student Leadership Development in Australian Higher Education* is not more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references, and footnotes. The thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

Endorsed by:

Professor Marcus Harmes

Principal Supervisor

Professor Patrick Danaher

Associate Supervisor

Dr Catherine Arden

Associate Supervisor

Student and supervisors' signatures of endorsement are held at the University.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my wife, Sally. It is impossible to convey the extent of my gratitude to you, but let me try anyway. This project, significant as it was, did not stand alone. It was the capstone of years of academic studies, representing untold hours, early mornings, long nights, and precious weekends. For the past 15 years, you have not wavered once in your support, encouragement, and belief. Your levity and strength have seen me through times when I felt burdened and weak. You have been so selfless and generous and never kept a ledger of give and take. You have also gathered our children in support and rallied around me week in and week out - always cheering, always understanding, and always loving. There is no doubt that you have enabled this thesis to be completed, and I am thankful to you beyond words. I love you.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1   Chapter overview

This chapter introduces the background and relevance of the study (Section 1.2) and describes a particular extracurricular student leadership event - the Nation Student Leadership Forum (NSLF), in relation to the focus of the study and three interconnected fields of inquiry: the scholarship of engagement, student leadership development and transformative learning theory (Section 1.3). The Research Questions that guide this study are then outlined (Section 1.4) before the significance and scope of the thesis is presented (Section 1.5). My biographical situatedness at the commencement of the study is described in Section 1.6, and this is followed by an organisational overview of the thesis (Section 1.7). Finally, a chapter summary is presented in Section 1.9.

1.2   Background and relevance

Many aspects of the modern world can be characterised as volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) (Kinsinger & Walch, 2012). People face disruptions at every level, including societal, cultural, economic and environmental (Arvanitakis & Hornsby, 2016a). The pace of change is also accelerating (Harari, 2018), creating what can be described as "postnormal times" (Sardar, 2010, p. 435), where the very nature of change has changed and unexpected futures are more likely to occur (van der Laan & Yap, 2015). With rapid advancements in technology and the impact of socio-political and online movements, change is simultaneously experienced but variously interpreted by different cultures in a hyper-connected world. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought a range of issues to surface, testing

the ability of individuals, organisations and governments to navigate the VUCA environment and bringing notions of citizenship and leadership to the forefront (Harari, 2020).

The originality of this study relates to the expressed concern that populations in democracies such as Australia are experiencing growing levels of disillusionment with democratic institutions and democracy itself (Bergan & Harkavy, 2019; Heggart, Arvanitakis, et al., 2018). Although the concept of democracy can been defined and expressed in a variety ways, the fundamental idea pertains to a "government based on the consent of the governed" in contradistinction to dictatorship or oligarchy, which are based on "birth, wealth or simple power" (Fraser, 1996, pp. 139-143). The relationship between education and ideas of democracy has been a focus of debate since at least the time of Aristotle (384-322 B.C) and continues within the contemporary era, albeit with growing cynicism (p. 139-143).

In the early twentieth century, John Dewey emerged as a leading advocate for the role of education in democratic society, and his work greatly informed scholarship in these fields (p. 141). Rather than envisioning democracy simply as a governance model, he insisted that citizens ought to play an active role in "building up the common good and the common community" (p. 141). To this end, Dewey (1940) highlighted the importance of cultivating personal democratic character as the most powerful tool in addressing the various threats against democracy. Citizenship, he argued, is ultimately an expression of character, and deep-seated personal attitudes will either strengthen or undermine the conditions for healthy democracy, as one's personal way of life informs communal existence (p. 3). In this regard, Dewey proposes that education serves a critical function in society by facilitating a training of both character and citizenship (Hickman, 1996). Education can thereby be considered as both a "tool and outcome of democracy" (p. 151), just as democracy in itself is to be experienced both as "end and as means" (Dewey, 1940, p. 4).

Higher education institutions have a particularly important function in "developing and maintaining local communities that are sustainable politically, socially, environmental and economically" (Bergan et al., 2019, p. 2). Indeed, it has been argued that higher education institutions can uniquely address the needs of society through both scholarship and student leadership development (Einsiedal, 1998; Sprow, 2001; Stanton, 2012). Just as there may be declining faith in democracy itself, there is also declining trust in public institutions such as universities across western democracies, "where evidence-based arguments can run poor second to appeals to emotion and identity" (Wells & Grant, 2019, p. 45). Serious questions have been raised about the potential redundancy of universities who fail to adapt their approach to education in a time of such dramatic disruption (Arvanitakis & Hornsby, 2016b). Given the pressing concerns of issues such as climate change, students require an educational experience that extends beyond a narrow acquisition of knowledge, to a broader development of skills and proficiencies that enable them to navigate their world and lead effectively as active citizens within it (p. 11). A contextually relevant pedagogy of citizenship as well as accountable and applicable methods of student leadership development are therefore urgently required if universities are to succeed in preparing students for "democratic deliberation and participation" within this complex cultural moment (Bergan et al., 2019, p. 2).

University graduates will embark on employment in a world that faces multiple issues relating to the VUCA factors mentioned above, along with an increasing discourse of conflict centred on disagreement over values, beliefs and ideologies (McGregor, 2004). The word "toxic" entered common parlance in recent times, with the Oxford Dictionaries (2018) choosing it as the word of the year for 2018, as it reflected a cultural "ethos, mood or pre-occupation" in regard to a wide array of contexts, whether literal (e.g., environmental) or metaphorical (e.g., relationships). Furthermore, there is widespread concern about the phenomenon and societal impact of 'fake news' or 'alternative facts' across news platforms

and social media (Chapman & Greenhow, 2019; Strong, 2016; Tsipursky et al., 2018). This issue is highlighted by the fact that in 2016, the Oxford Dictionaries word of the year was "post-truth", which is defined as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" (Oxford Dictionaries, 2016). Recognising the dynamic interplay between what is deeply personal and what is broadly systemic is therefore critical to understanding and shaping the future (Senge et al., 2004). For this reason, the "largely unexplored" deeper dimensions of transformative change should become a critical component of leadership conceptualisation and practice, expanding the scope beyond the "what" and "how" of leadership to explicitly include the "who" of leadership (p. 5). In this regard, leadership can be considered as an "interface for individual and organisational transformation processes" (Arnold & Prescher, 2017, p. 286), in which personal values and beliefs inevitably play a critical role.

Drawing on Mezirow's (2012) theory of transformative learning, Arnold and Prescher argue that effective leadership into the future will be dependent upon the extent to which a leader is "able to engage transformative learning" (2017, p. 284). This kind of leadership pedagogy involves processes in which "inner images can be anticipated and deconstructed and new interpretations can be defined and tested" (p. 285). Nicolaides and McCallum (2013, p. 250) similarly conclude that transformative learning is "precisely the kind of learning needed" in the process of adaptive change that leadership in our contemporary era demands. Therefore, if Australian universities are to succeed in preparing graduates to engage proactively as leaders within an increasingly complex and fractious society, it will require a transformative approach to student leadership development.

Based on this background context, the focus of this study is to develop an evidence-based framework for the conceptualisation and practice of a transformative approach to

student leadership development for Australian higher education (universities). To this end, an extracurricular leadership education program (the National Student Leadership Forum [NSLF]) is investigated through the lens of three interconnected fields of inquiry: the scholarship of engagement; student leadership development; and transformative learning theory, with the philosophical underpinning of transformative learning theory, along with its processes and outcomes being critically assessed.

1.3   The National Student Leadership Forum (NSLF)

The NSLF was chosen as a case study in this research project because it intersects with the focus of this study and the scholarly fields of inquiry in several important ways. The NSLF is an extracurricular program that was designed specifically for student leadership development in the Australian context and consistently attracts a diverse group of over 200 participants from universities around Australia, as well as neighbouring countries such as Papua New Guinea, New Zealand, Philippines, Samoa, Fiji and Tonga, but brings these participants to Australia to engage with leadership mentors from Australian society. Further, the NSLF has been operating as an organisation since 1997 and has become one of the nation's preeminent leadership development initiatives, with archival documents revealing strong engagement and endorsement from a multi-party group of federal parliamentarians, community leaders across various sectors of Australian society, as well as former student-delegates from a broad representation of Australian universities (See Appendix A).

These factors make the NSLF more salient to this study than other leadership programs like the internationally focused University Scholars Leadership Symposium hosted in the United Nations, Malaysia (www.humanitarianaffairs.org/usls/) or the LeaderShape (www.leadershape.org) and Student Leadership Challenge (www.studentleadershipchallenge.com) events, which are offered predominantly to members

of North American institutions. Importantly, information about the NSLF outlined in archival documents also reveal significant resonance with the three scholarly fields that undergird this project: the scholarship of engagement, student leadership development and transformative learning theory (See Appendices A and B). These components are briefly outlined below, however, are explored in greater detail in Chapters 2 and 7.

Scholarship of Engagement

John Dewey's seminal work, *the Public and its Problems* (1927) has provided a foundation for a large body of scholarship to explore the relationship between higher education and society. Following much of the expressed concern of Dewey, Ernest Boyer (1996a) championed the scholarship of engagement mandate for higher education institutions, and he argued for the importance of connecting the rich resources of universities with the most pressing social, civic and ethical problems - making the university a staging ground for action.

The experiential context is an important element of the scholarship of engagement, as it allows for authentic real-world experiences that are "dynamic, evolving and co-constructed" (Rosaen et al., 2001, p. 10). The NSLF is hosted annually by large group of sitting parliamentarians at Parliament House in Canberra (see Figure 1 below as an example of the politicians involved), allowing for students to experience a range of activities that relate to development of civic literacy and skills that support "healthy democracy" (Barker, 2004, p. 132).

Figure 1: NSLF 2013 Brochure Material (see Appendix A)

Student Leadership Development

The field of student leadership development asserts that leadership can be learnt and taught (Brungardt, 1997). Leadership education thereby includes "each stage of growth that promotes, encourages, and assists in one's leadership education" (Grunwell, 2015, p. 83), and

this process may include how one thinks about leadership, leadership practice, skills, efficacy and personal leadership identity (Komives et al., 2005).

The NSLF is explicitly designed as a leadership development initiative; however, there are some policy limitations for involvement (See Appendix A). These include that participants cannot self-register, but must be nominated by either university or college heads, corporate or community leaders, or NSLF Alumni who believe in the student's leadership potential. Additionally, students must be between the ages of 18 and 26. Even though the event is advertised for 'students', it is not essential that participants have undertaken tertiary studies or have a proven track record of leadership. Rather, as is stated in the 2017 brochure, the organisers are seeking to gather the broadest possible cross-section of bright and motivated young adults from all walks of life (see Appendix A).

In alignment with literature on high quality student leadership development programs (see Section 2.3), the NSLF is an immersive four-day event that involves a range of experiential and service-learning initiatives, as well activities that allow for a diversity of views, personal narrative building, and reflection (Eich, 2008; Grunwell, 2015; Kiersch & Peters, 2017; Rosaen et al., 2001; Van Eekelen et al., 2006).

Transformative Learning Theory

The concept of transformative learning has its origins in the work of Jack Mezirow, who first addressed the learning phenomenon of "perspective transformation" (1978, p. 100). He was interested in the democratic function of higher education and built on the work of others such as John Dewey, Paulo Freire, Jurgen Habermas and Thomas Kuhn, Roger Gould, Harvey Siegal and Herbert Fingerette (Mezirow, 2018). Transformative learning can be conceived as "processes that result in significant and irreversible changes in the way a person experiences, conceptualizes, and interacts with the world" (Hoggan, 2016a, p. 71).

As indicated by these theoretical insights, the NSLF is designed to facilitate an exploration of deeply personal elements such as faith and values. The 2017 event brochure explains the vision of the event as such:

> *Becoming a good leader requires more than an impressive resume and a strong personality: there must be something in you that justifies the loyalty and commitment of those who follow. This speaks more to your character than it does to your abilities or achievements…*
>
> *The National Student Leadership Forum is an opportunity to discuss the significance of faith and values as foundations for effective leadership. We do not intend for this discussion to be overtly religious or sectarian and we value the participation of young people from a diversity of intellectual, cultural, and religious backgrounds. Each year we have young adults attend from many different backgrounds- Catholic, Jewish, Protestant, Muslim and Buddhist or no religious background at all. We have found that the more diverse the background, the richer our experience together. (2017 NSLF Brochure)*

Anecdotes from former student delegates held in archival documents (See Appendix A) reinforce that the experience of exploring these deeply personal matters at the NSLF was rich and rewarding. I can personally attest to a similar perception of the event, as I was personally invited to participate as a facilitator at the NSLF some years ago (see Section 1.6). This gave me first-hand experience of the learning potential the event affords. Also at a pragmatic level, this experience enabled me the opportunity to gain access to members of the leadership board, which was very helpful in arranging a research design (See Chapter 4).

Taken together, the above stated connections between the NSLF and the scholarly fields of inquiry made it a valuable case study to critically assess a transformative approach to student leadership development in Australian higher education.

1.4   Research Questions

Against this broader background, the three scholarly fields of inquiry, and the specific organisational information of the NSLF, this study was guided by the following three Research Questions:

Q1: Why, in retrospect, did some former student delegates perceive the NSLF experience as personally transformative?

Q2: What did these students' learning processes and outcomes of the NSLF experience reveal about contemporary transformative learning?

Q3: Regarding a context defined as VUCA, what are the implications of the findings to Q1 and Q2 for the conceptualisation and practice of the scholarship of engagement and student leadership development in Australian higher education?

1.5   Significance and scope of the study

The significance of this study relates to how universities can better serve their democratic function and address the pedagogical challenges associated with educating graduates to lead effectively as active citizens in the VUCA conditions of the contemporary era. Specifically, this study addresses an extant gap in knowledge pertaining to how universities can implement ethically accountable and applicable methods of student leadership development using a transformative approach (See Chapter 2).

Based on these gaps in knowledge, the focus of this study was to develop a framework for the conceptualisation and practice of a transformative approach to student leadership development that is both applicable to the contemporary era and ethically accountable. This goal involved developing a set of empirically grounded propositions about the transformative learning journey, including associated learning processes and outcomes. Further, propositions regarding the axiological, ontological, and epistemological dimensions of transformative

learning were developed in relation to student leadership development and the scholarship of engagement (See Section 7.4.2). These outcomes, along with the construction of practical guidelines and policy considerations for Australian universities (See Section 7.3.3) and the establishment of ethical and rigorous methods of researching transformative learning with former NSLF student delegates, amount to a unique and significant contribution to knowledge (see Section 7.4.2).

The scope of this study is limited in several ways. First, it is not attempting to generate a new universal theory of transformative learning, nor of the scholarship of engagement or student leadership development. Rather is seeks to establish a conceptual connection between these three fields of inquiry and build on recommendations in literature to address gaps in knowledge that relate specifically to the development of a transformative approach to student leadership development in Australian higher education (see Section 2.5). In doing so, the goal of the study is to lay the groundwork for further research.

Given the relevance of the NSLF to the focus and scope of the thesis and the complex and personal nature of the research questions, a retrospective case study was chosen as the method most suited to the task (see Section 4.2). Yin (2009, p. 18) described a case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident". Non-probability purposive sampling was employed to provide a "maximal chance" (Punch, 2009, p. 252) at gaining insight into the transformative experience of former student delegates who participated in the NSLF (see Section 4.3). An explanatory sequential design was also adopted (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007), in which quantitative data were collected before qualitative data in a two-phased mixed methods sequence (see Section 4.4).

Several methodological techniques were implemented to ensure the broader applicability of the research (see Section 4.5.1.3), however, given that purposive sampling was employed to investigate a particular phenomenon which was context bound to this specific case study, the findings of the transformative nature of student's experience with the NSLF are best considered as groundwork for future studies to build on (see Section 4.5.1.3). A range of possible opportunities for further research are outlined in Section 7.4.3, including, for instance, the employment of different research methodologies to ensure generalisability, or case studies that employ alternative sampling techniques or that focus specifically on curricular or co-curricular learning experiences.

1.6 The biographically situated researcher

About a year before commencing a proposal for this PhD research, I was invited to participate in the NSLF event in Canberra. This included a training day that was led by experienced facilitators, as well as by two NSLF board members, whom I knew from a pre-existing relationship. In September 2017, I spent four days with the Forum community, and it was an experience that left me wanting to learn more. How did other people experience this environment? What impact did it have on them? Have the pedagogical lessons learnt from twenty annual occurrences of this event been captured anywhere? And what are the implications of all this for scholars and facilitators of student leadership across the higher education institutions of Australia?

These questions led me to a consideration of conducting an in-depth study of the relevant scholarship areas, in particular, transformative learning theory, which resonated strongly with me. In retrospect, I believe I have experiences and learning journeys that were transformative in nature, and this thesis provided me an opportunity to explore the learning experiences of others, gain clarity around the theoretical dimensions of the theory, and even

reflect on my own learning experiences throughout the process. The goal was to ensure an appropriate critical distance with the subject matter throughout the study, and to this end, I employed a range of methods to mitigate against unhelpful personal bias (see Section 4.5.3).

As part of the process of writing this thesis, I also published a book chapter in the edited volume *Researchers at Risk* (Mulligan & Danaher, 2021). This work gave me a further opportunity to reflect deeply and critically upon my role as a researcher in this study. Through an autobiographical lens, I explored the emotional and psycho-social challenges associated with establishing and maintaining an appropriate degree of critical distance from the subject matter (Roux, 2021). I expressed that through a range of rich, difficult, and illuminating experiences, I had become personally and "deeply invested in the topic of transformative learning, for I believe it is of tremendous personal and social concern" (p. 75). Yet, I also concluded that the importance of the topic itself reinforced the need for me to maintain an open mind, to receive and engage with ideas that challenge the prevailing narratives of which I am a beneficiary, and to rely on critical friends, colleagues and research supervisors in order to check that my personal bias does not become a dogmatic lens leading me to "prematurely dismiss alternative points of view, however valid they may be" (p. 79).

1.7   Organisation of the thesis

This first chapter has presented the background and relevance of the thesis and introduced the focus of the study along with its three guiding Research Questions. The research significance, scope, design and limitations were also described before my biographical situatedness was outlined.

In Chapter 2, the landscape of relevant literature on the scholarship of engagement and student leadership development is mapped in relation to the contemporary VUCA context and the democratic function of universities. The concept of transformative learning is then briefly

explored, and pertinent gaps in knowledge are presented, both regarding the theory and its philosophical underpinning, as well as the way it relates to the conceptualisation and practice of student leadership development in Australian higher education. These issues are more briefly discussed in Chapter 2 and then Chapter 3 builds upon the literature review, critically addresses gaps in knowledges and integrates the three fields of inquiry into a conceptual framework for a transformative approach to student leadership development in Australian higher education. This organisational structure was chosen in order to pair the assessment of transformative learning literature and gaps in knowledge with relevant reconceptualisations, and to allow for a logically sequenced flow of ideas.

In Chapter 4, the research design of the study is outlined as a transparent chain of evidence for how the methodology was enacted. This includes an overview of the research participants, an analysis of the trustworthiness of the study, a description of the methods of data analysis employed, and a discussion on the limitations of the study. Chapters 5 and 6 present the findings for Research Questions 1 and 2 respectively. The first Research Question was designed to explore *why* students experienced the NSLF as personally transformative, while the second Research Question was designed in order to learn about the *way* in which learning occurred and *what* specific changes transpired.

Chapter 7 addresses the third research question. It is designed to explicate the implications of the findings to the focus of the project, which is to establish an evidence-based approach for the conceptualisation and practice of student leadership development for contemporary Australian higher education institutions. To this end, policy considerations and practical guidelines are presented for scholars and facilitators before the thesis is concluded with a revised description of my biographical situatedness, a summary of the contributions to knowledge, and a list of opportunities for further research.

1.8   Chapter summary

This introductory chapter overviewed the entire thesis. First, Section 1.1 described the background and relevance of the study. The volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) (Kinsinger & Walch, 2012) characteristics of the contemporary era were highlighted, along with the importance of both citizenship and leadership development in relation to Australian higher education institutions. This informed the focus of the study, which is to develop an evidence-based framework for the conceptualisation and practice of a transformative approach to student leadership development for Australian higher education.

It was explained that a specific leadership education program (the National Student Leadership Forum [NSLF]) (see Section 1.3) was investigated and that the study was guided by three Research Questions pertaining to the student experience, the transformative learning journey, and the implications of the findings to the conceptualisation and practice of the scholarship of engagement and student leadership development in Australian higher education (see Section 1.4). The significance and scope of the study was outlined in Section 1.5, with the aims and outcomes of the study being described in relation to the research methodology employed. My biographical situatedness at the commencement of the thesis was outlined Section 1.6, and finally the chapter was concluded by an overview of the organisation of the thesis in Section 1.7.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Chapter overview

This chapter maps the landscape of literature in regard to the three intersecting fields of enquiry: the scholarship of engagement, student leadership development and transformative learning theory. In consultation with a specialist research librarian at UniSQ, I constructed a search plan to find and review the relevant literature, especially seminal articles and recent publications. This process included becoming familiar with key databases such as *Sage Journals: Social Sciences and Humanities*; *Taylor & Francis Online*; and *ERIC: Institute of Education Sciences*. Using key search terms such as *scholarship of engagement*, *student leadership development* and *transformative learning*, I was able review and refine literature in numerous ways. In ERIC, for instance, literature could be filtered according to publication dates, theoretical descriptors such as *critical theory* or *adult education*, by prominent journals, leading scholars or most cited works which were highlighted based on search terms. Another approach was to browse journals based on discipline (social science and humanities) and subject (education) using *Sage* to find the most relevant material. To be kept up to date with recent publications through the duration of study, I set up alerts in key journals like *Journal of Transformative Education*, *Adult Learning* and *Adult Education Quarterly.* Further strategies that I employed to ensure I was aware of relevant literature was to read published literature reviews, scan reference lists and search key concepts in *Google Scholar*.

In Section 2.2 of this chapter, I begin the review with the Scholarship of Engagement and outline origins and the seminal publications that have shaped research in this area. Section 2.2.3 then focuses on the student-centred development of "citizen scholars" and the attribute of "ethical leadership" (Arvanitakis & Hornsby, 2016a, p. 18). Section 2.3 then overviews

relevant literature in student development, particular pertaining to "moral approaches to leadership" (Lemoine et al., 2019, p. 149), before focus is directed to an integrated model of "authentic servant leadership" or "leadership from the inside out" (Kiersch & Peters, 2017) in Section 2.3.1. The connection between the development of citizen scholars and authentic servant leaders is also presented in regard to transformative learning theory. Section 2.4 provides a brief overview of the origins and content of transformative learning theory before noting a range of concerns regarding ethical, philosophical, and theoretical components. Section 2.5 then provides a summary of the pertinent gaps in knowledge and outlines how the study would focus on addressing them through the conceptual framework (see Chapter 3) and research design (see Chapter 4). Finally, a summary of the chapter is provided in Section 2.4.

2.2   The scholarship of engagement

In the first decades of the 20th century, John Dewey (1927) advocated for the democratic function of higher education to address the needs of society. His work generated significant interest and provided a foundation for subsequent scholarship, yet by the end of the century, Ernest Boyer (1996b) was lamenting a lack of vitality and purpose in the North American higher education sector. He published what would become a seminal article entitled *The Scholarship of Engagement*, which served as a rallying call for higher education to take a more proactive role in responding to a changing society, not only in North America, but more broadly (Jones & Lee, 2017). Boyer argues that higher education needed a "larger sense of mission, a larger clarity of direction in the nations life as we move toward century twenty-one" (1996b, p. 27).

As we have now entered the third decade of the 21st century, James Nyland (2022), chair of *Engagement Australia*, argues that the challenge has become critically urgent in our "fast changing and uncertain world", and that now, more than ever, "we need universities which

exist for a social purpose where learning can transform lives in a world of uncertainty and instability" (p.1). Although clear definitions and systems for measuring and benchmarking "engagement" have been slower to develop in the Australian context, a study by Smith, Else and Crookes (2014) has noted how the role and place of 'engagement' within Australian university activities is an area of developing interest and concern. They denoted that this had coincided with an increase in the social and political imperative to improve university-community engagement (p. 837).

Progress has been made on this front, with multiple Australian universities participating in the endeavour of developing ways to conceptualise, support, and measure engaged scholarship within our broader communities (local, regional, state national and global) (Johnson, 2019; Wells & Grant, 2019). A Global University Engagement Summit was hosted in Melbourne in 2017 and momentum continued towards the development of a framework for the measurement of engaged scholarship, with a subgroup working from an agreed definition of engagement as "a holistic approach to working collaboratively with partners and communities to create mutually-beneficial outcomes for each other and the benefit of society" (Wells & Grant, 2019, p. 46). There is also a particular concern to ensure that a genuinely Australian approach to the scholarship of engagement is developed - one that recognises our unique history, addresses our singular opportunities and challenges, and respectfully integrates Indigenous voices and knowledge (Ewen, 2019; Nyland, 2019).

At its core, the scholarship of engagement, or engaged scholarship, is based upon the premise that significant advancements in knowledge occur most readily when people consciously work towards solving significant problems facing their society (Stanton, 2012). Universities in this view must take their place in the public square and commit to "the public good, to democracy and human rights, and to basing policies and decisions based on facts

established through study, research and critical reflection, as well as to challenging received wisdom based on new discoveries" (Harkavy & Bergan, 2019, p. 27).

The words "based on facts" and "critical reflection" (Harkavy & Bergan, 2019, p. 27). are of particular importance to engaged scholarship given the VUCA nature of the contemporary era, which by its nature can destabilise epistemological foundations. Indeed it is argued that if we accept that the recent Oxford Dictionaries words of the year "post-truth" (2016) and "toxic" (2018) (see Section 1.2) are terms of cultural significance, then "educators and researchers should pause and reflect" and reimagine university engagement in this cultural moment (Bell, 2019, p. 10). If the university is to maintain relevance in the "post-truth era" (p. 14), then it must contend with the fundamental issue as described by Rose and Barros (2017), which is the "fallen status of our collective search for truth, in its many forms. It is no longer a positive attribute to seek truth, determine biases, evaluate facts, or share knowledge" (p.1). In this VUCA era, emphasis is not placed on "coherence or rationality but on sensationalism, no matter the cost" (p.1). Latour (2004) argues that the academy itself set the pre-conditions for "an excessive distrust of good matters of fact" (p. 227). He stated that it was a certain form of critical spirit that moved us "away from facts", rather than "closer to them" (p. 231). Therefore, in order for the academy to become relevant again and renew its critical mind, a "realist attitude" should be cultivated (p.231). In an article titled *Educational Research: pursuit of truth or flight into fancy* Bridges (1999) also outlines how scholars have moved to distance themselves from claims of truth; however, in doing so, they have collapsed into epistemological incoherence. Bell (2017) subsequently argues for the need "to interrogate the foundations of our epistemology and the language we use to communicate and disseminate knowledge".

The concern of the scholarship of engagement, however, extends beyond the bounds of research and community partnership and involves issues of curriculum and student development (p. 20). Nyland (2019) underscores the need to simultaneously address critical issues through professional scholarship while also educating learners to "confront the difficult questions" and develop personal resilience as they face topics that might pose "a threat to their unchallenged selves and ideas" (p. 3). This is particularly relevant given the "toxic" (Dictionaries, 2018) and polarised cultural environment (Strong, 2016) that constantly exhibits discourses of conflict over values, beliefs and ideologies (McGregor, 2004). As a salient example of a VUCA era issue, toxicity is fuelled by social media algorithms that highlight both outrage and the outrageous, leading to a vast range of issues, including the dissemination of fake news and hate speech, the facilitation of echo chambers of similar views and opinions, and the lamentable, yet profitable, optimisation of content that leads to negative mental health outcomes for users, especially young women (Hao, 2021).

In the age of the internet, social media, and digital connectedness, the scholarship urgently needs to adjust if it is address the needs of both students and society (Arvanitakis & Hornsby, 2016a; Chapman & Greenhow, 2019). Nyland (2019) argues that the scholarship of engagement in this contemporary moment requires a critical and questioning curriculum that enables students to develop engaged thinking skills and capabilities that allow them to reclaim the 'real' through critical thinking that overcomes distortions and limitations in their experience of the world (p. 23). In this regard, he states that a "university must surely sponsor the recognition of rational and scientific enquiry as a basis of learning". This includes a necessity for institutions to support open mindedness and free inquiry by existing as a "place where all belief systems are open to scrutiny, dialogue, questioning and critical discourse" (p. 17).

In the context of higher education and the scholarship of engagement, Nyland describes critical thinking as a "rational and practical activity centred on decisions as to what one should do in complex situations" (p. 23). It involves the capacity to think about one's thinking (metacognition), about the "impact of ideas and understanding of 'self' and identity", and how these elements shape the world and our experience of it. Drawing upon Habermas's (1972) framework of instrumental, interpretive and critical learning, Nyland argues that the learning process and the activity of critical thinking is ultimately about "the things we need to think and to do to change and transform any given reality into an improved one" (p.23).

The idea that a central component of the democratic function of higher education is to develop students into graduates who can appropriately adapt to and lead within society and demonstrate critical thinking capacities has been regularly defended in literature (Astin, 2000; Oliver & Jorre de St Jorre, 2018; Sprow, 2011). Further, it has been demonstrated that if the mission of engaged scholarship is to succeed, then it will require high quality student leadership development initiatives as part of the student learning experience (Einsiedel, 1998; Stanton, 2012). To this end, Bell (2017) argues that within the Australian context, the scholarship of engagement will require innovations that ensure students are authentically part of the engagement process, and this will require acknowledgement of changing student-faculty dynamics. Rosaen and colleagues (2001) similarly describe the importance of the "engagement interface", in which students and educators share in a dynamic, evolving and co-constructed experience as "citizen scholars" within authentic civic contexts (p. 10). This interconnection between theory and praxis positions the learner as an active participant in addressing the needs of society and constitutes an essential pedagogical shift for achieving "successful scholarship of engagement" (p. 11).

The literature review thus far has explicated the need for Australian higher education institutions to respond to the pressing concerns associated with the VUCA era, such as the rise of a post-truth and toxic culture. This includes an imperative for researchers and educators to "pause and reflect" (Bell, 2019, p. 10) and to consider new pedagogical approaches to engage students in critical thinking that makes a positive impact to both themselves and the society they live in (Nyland, 2019). The notion of a citizen scholar has been proposed as a direct focus of the scholarship of engagement, whereby faculty and students are intentionally oriented in both research and education towards addressing the pressing needs of society (Rosaen et al., 2001). This review will now turn to the details of this focus and highlight issues of particular concern to the scholarship of engagement and student leadership development in Australian higher education.

2.2.1   *Focus: developing citizen scholars*

The notion of educating students as citizen scholars has been broadly advocated in both Australian (Kourtis & Arvanitakis, 2016; Miller et al., 2020; Nomikoudis & Starr, 2016) and international contexts (Areesophonpichet et al., 2020; Chapman & Greenhow, 2019; McIntosh, 2019; Murray, 2016; Rosaen et al., 2001). This review focuses on the conceptualisation proposed by Arvanitakis and Hornsby, editors of *Universities, the Citizen Scholar and the future of Higher Education* (Arvanitakis & Hornsby, 2016c). In alignment with the goals of the scholarship of engagement, the concept of a citizen scholar is predicated on the belief that the "central purpose of higher education is to improve the societies in which we live and foster citizens who can think outside of the box and innovate with the purpose of community betterment" (p. 11). Based upon this assumption, they propose that a citizen scholar is one "who cares not only about gaining information and generating knowledge but one that is rooted in the reality of their context, problem oriented and interested in applying their knowledge for the betterment of a society" (2016b, p. 1).

Importantly, the authors provide insight into some of their axiological assumptions, which give a degree of clarity to the moral and ethical purpose behind their pedagogical propositions. They include, for instance, the following quotation from Dr Martin Luther King Jr: "Life's most persistent and urgent question is: 'What are you doing for others?'" (as cited in Arvanitakis & Hornsby, 2016, p. 11). The scholars also draw on the work of Gramsci (1971) and Freire (1970) to outline their stance that the university experience ought to extend beyond the narrow transfer of content within disciplinary lines to the broader personal and social realities that shape the world around the students. Here they encourage pedagogical strategies that are both academic and experiential, actively integrate cultural pluralism, and support the development of wisdom, rather than mere accumulation of knowledge. In related publications, the rationale for this approach is explicated by way of depicting the need to return to "the very roots of the Western knowledge tradition and the Socratic ideal" (2016, p. 55) and to cultivate democratic citizenship through experiential learning in which students play an active role (Heggart, Flowers, et al., 2018).

Considering the "many changes" simultaneously occurring within contemporary society, Arvanitakis and Hornsby (2016a) argue that a "new set of graduate proficiencies" is required in "future-proofing higher education" so that it can still serve its civic function (p. 11). Figure 2 below depicts the desired proficiencies and attributes of a Citizen Scholar using a "chaos approach", which presents these elements in a non-ordered fashion and depicts how the concepts and categories are often "fuzzy and overlapping" (p.15).

Figure 2: Proficiencies and attributes of the Citizen Scholar (Arvanitakis & Hornsby, 2016a)
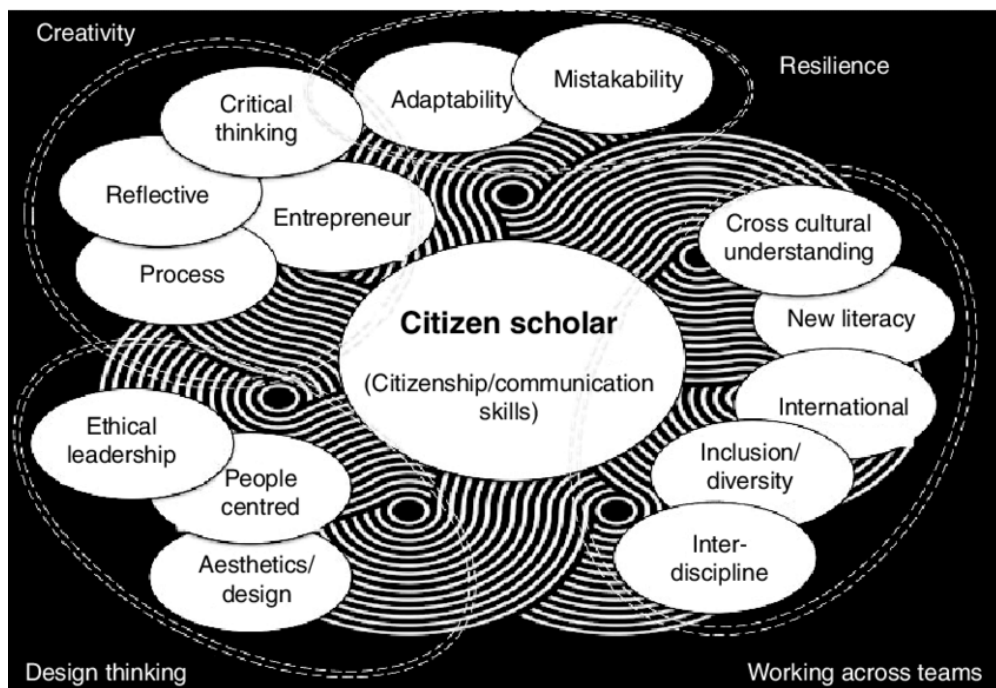
Although there are numerous proficiencies and attributes listed above that are relevant to student leadership development, this review will now concentrate specifically on the attribute of "ethical leadership", which is described as "building a frame of reference in which to reflect on moral and confronting challenges and understanding that leadership is a process, not a hierarchy" (p. 18). Arvanitakis and Hornsby emphasise that the attribute of ethical leadership is often developed through experiential means, as educators model for students how symbiotic and dynamic relationships can occur between different members of the university community, without the restrictions often related to hierarchical concepts of leadership (p. 18).

The processes and outcomes of the above-described student learning experience requires further investigation. This is especially important because notions of ethical leadership within educational literature are nuanced and involve theoretical and practical components that are not explicated by Arvanitakis and Hornsby. This review will now focus

on literature regarding student leadership development in higher education to outline theoretical frameworks and evidence-based approaches for developing ethical leadership qualities. The review will highlight literature that relates to the scholarship of engagement generally and the development of citizen scholars specifically.

2.3   Student leadership development

Student leadership development encompasses almost every form of growth or stage of development that promotes, encourages and assists in fulfilling one's leadership potential (Brungardt, 1996). It is based on the conviction that leadership can be learnt and taught (Brungardt, 1997). Elements of particular concern in this field include how one thinks about leadership, leadership practice, skills, efficacy and personal leadership identity (Komives et al., 2005). There are a range of formats in which student leadership development can occur, and these can be facilitated by university educators or external vendors and include initiatives within curriculum such as team projects, co-curricular initiatives such as multi-year programs, or extra-curricular initiatives and unique experiences such as studying abroad or leadership forums and retreats (Kiersch & Peters, 2017; Skalicky et al., 2020).

Since the 1990s, there has been increasing attention on the development of critical leadership outcomes in student graduates (Dugan & Komives, 2007). The consistent theme in student leadership development literature is the need for students to undergo not only skills development, but also personal development (Byrne et al., 2017; Nicolaides & McCallum, 2013; Sturm et al., 2017). Patricia King (1997) asserts that "helping students [to] develop the integrity and strength of character that prepares them for leadership may be one of the most challenging and important goals of higher education" (p. 87). Correspondingly, there is a need for students to develop skills of self-leadership, learning self-awareness and being proactive in the development of their character - that is, focusing on *who* one is, rather than simply *what* one does (Byrne et al., 2017). This aligns with the emphasis of the scholarship of engagement on

cultivating personal democratic character (Dewey, 1940) and the ability to become self-aware and overcome distortions and limitations in their experience of the world (Nyland, 2019). In regard to student leadership development with the higher education context, it has become apparent that institutions generally lack frameworks that focus on quality leadership as an outcome and utilise clear conceptual and pedagogical approaches (Skalicky et al., 2020).

Research by Eich (2008) found that high quality leadership programs effectively develop self-discovery through experiential engagement activities like service learning within their community. Further, the most effective programs were those that "actually practice the kind of inclusive, empowering, purposeful, ethical, and process-oriented leadership for positive change that they advocate" (p. 186). These findings align with the reflections of Arvanitakis and Hornsby (2016a) regarding Citizen Scholars and the importance of educator or facilitator role modelling (see Section 2.2.1),

The terms *ethical* or *moral* appear across multiple studies and leadership theories; however, the details of these notions are important, especially in relation to the philosophical foundations of the associated leadership theory and the findings of empirical studies. In reviewing the empirical literature on moral approaches to leadership, Lemoine and colleagues (2019) found that although the theories of ethical leadership (Brown et al., 2005), authentic leadership (Walumbwa et al., 2008) and servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977; Liden et al., 2014) have significant commonalities, overlapping in critical ways to encourage normative moral or ethical behaviour, they also have significant theoretical distinctions (see Figure 3 below). The implicationS of the key similarities and differences will be briefly discussed before proposing a suitable approach for the conceptual framework of this thesis (see Chapter 3).

Figure 4: Empirical Commonalities and Distinctions among Ethical, Authentic and Servant Leadership. (Lemoine et al., 2019, p. 156)
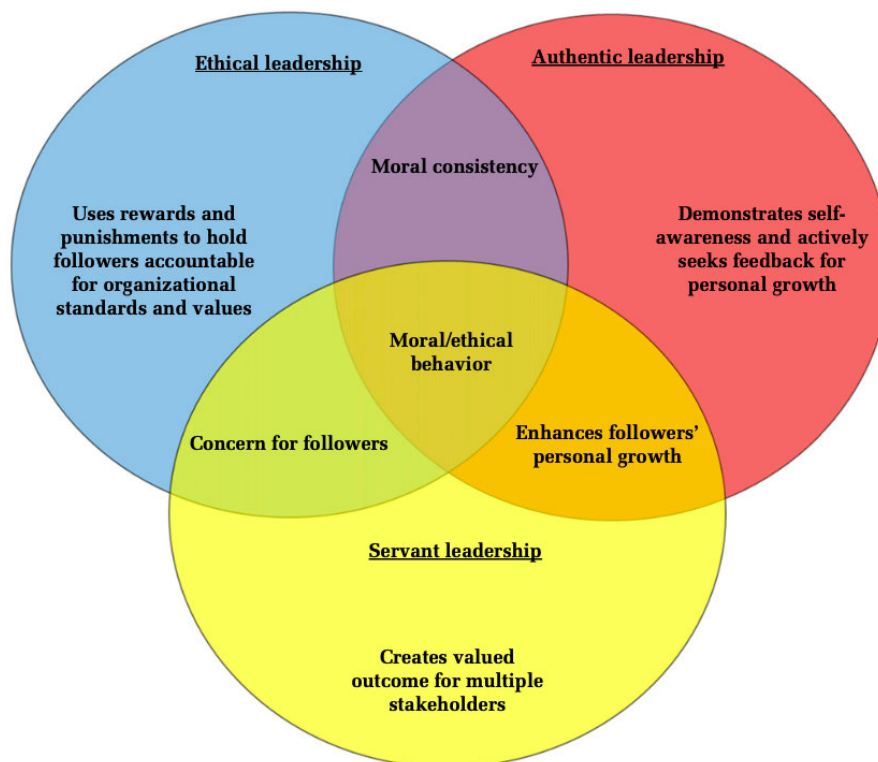
With increasing concern in scholarship for the moral nature of leaders (Lemoine et al., 2019), the three so called "moral approaches to leadership" (p 148) illustrated in Figure 3 above, have been advocated most frequently in leadership development. However, there is concern that although there is a convergence of common constructs, namely moral/ethical behaviour, the theoretical foundations, and moral underpinnings of the frameworks are not necessarily congruent (p. 149).

Significant areas of empirical commonalities in the three approaches include generic morality, behavioural integrity, and pro-social and coaching behaviours (p. 158). The concern, however, is in how similarly these constructs are operationalised and measured, because while they have distinct theoretical emphases, the generic composition of moral content obfuscates significant underlying differences (p.158). The details of what exactly constitutes

moral/ethical leadership behaviour is important, not least for the sake of institutional and social accountability, but also in regard to theoretical coherence.

In review of the extant theory, Lemoine and colleagues (2019) found that authentic leadership is based on the foundations of virtue ethics, in which most the effective competencies relate to a leader's self-awareness and moral self-concordance. In this approach, the leader makes their own free and independent moral judgements, and the extent of effectiveness relates to their capacity to be self-aware, maintain balanced processing and relational transparency along with an internalised moral perspective (p. 151). By definition, authentic leadership can be described as:

> A process that draws from both positive psychological capacities and a highly developed organizational context, which results in both greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviors on the part of leaders and associates, fostering positive self-development. (Luthans & Avolio, 2003, p. 243)

By contrast, Lemoine and colleagues (2019) found that ethical leadership is based on deontological foundations, in which the most effective competencies relate to the leaders' compliance with normative standards, through both emulation and enforcement. This approach thereby combines "a general consistent moral character with a focus on organisational or cultural norms, standards and rule compliance" (p. 151). By definition, ethical leadership can be described as:

> The demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making. (Brown et al., 2005, p. 120)

Finally, the review of literature by Lemoine and colleagues (2019) found that servant leadership is based on a consequentialist foundation in which the most effective competencies relate to the explicit function of the leader as a servant of others, where the focus is on the outcome, rather than the behaviour itself. Definitionally, the servant leader can be described as:

> servant first… the difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant – first to make sure that other people's highest- priority needs are being served… do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit or, at least, not be further deprived? (Greenleaf, 1977, pp. 13-14)

Although there are distinct theoretical and practical differences in each of the above described moral approaches to leadership, it is also important to note that the different perspectives can be complementary (Lemoine et al., 2019). Indeed, regardless of which theoretical framework was adopted, the review concluded that there were decidedly positive outcomes to adopting a moral approach to leadership (p. 177). This view aligns with Bonde and Firenze (2013), who argue that although theories of normative ethics are philosophically different, they are not mutually exclusive, and context is critical for comparing the strengths and weaknesses of each approach in a balanced manner. The task for this study, then, is to determine which theory, or complement of theories, would be most suited to support student leadership development in the VUCA era, especially in regard to ethical leadership qualities, which is an attribute of a citizen scholar.

Kiersch and Peters (2017) recently undertook a review of the research relating to student leadership development and proposed a set of "evidence-based recommendations for student leadership development programs meant to result in more ethical leadership

[behaviours] and decision-making post-graduation" (p. 148). They undertook a multidisciplinary approach using both student and employee samples and attempted to bridge the silos of leadership theories by integrating practices founded in experiential learning and authentic and servant leadership principles (p. 152). This review will now focus on the development of what Kiersch and Peters describe as "authentic servant leadership", or "leadership from the inside out" (p. 148).

2.3.1 Focus: developing authentic servant leaders

In alignment with the attributes advocated for citizen scholars (see Section 2.2.1), Kiersch and Peters (2017) argue that if student leadership development were more strongly linked with ethics, then "we can expect to see a positive ripple effect within communities" (p. 149). A further alignment exists on the focus of service, in which the student is oriented towards the good of others, as opposed to some alternative approaches in leadership education that have been criticised for promoting "inequality and greed", "overemphasising the role of formal power whilst underemphasising the role of ethics" and promoting a "leader centric perspective" (p. 148).

The authors recognise that authentic leadership and servant leadership are "separate and distinct, yet related constructs" (p. 149), and the purpose of the study was to answer the repeated call of researchers (e.g. Avolio, 2007; Brown & Treviño, 2006; Lord et al., 2001) to seek integration across theories that appropriately acknowledges areas of overlap. They argue that taken together, authentic and servant leadership provide a complementary framework of positive, ethical, trust-based, and pro-social leadership (p. 149). Further, because both frameworks are well supported in literature, there is a strong foundation of evidence-based practice to guide a connecting framework based on significant overlap in the facilitation of high-quality leadership development (p. 153). The table below illustrates how a combination of both authentic leadership (AL) and servant leadership (SL) models can result in a list of

competencies. The table is structured according to the theme of "leadership from the inside

out", with competencies depicted as either 'inward focused' or 'outward focused' (p. 157).

Table 1: Authentic and Servant Leadership Competency Model (Kiersch & Peters, 2017, p. 157)

Leadership Competencies	Definition/explanation
'Inward' Focused	
Self-awareness (AL)	Understanding one's own personal values, motives, feelings, and cognitions
Unbiased processing (AL)	Including all relevant knowledge and experience in decision-making without denying or distorting evidence
Humility (SL)	Knowing one's limitations; acceptance of mistakes made
Courage (SL)	Daring to take risks; challenging conventional models or wisdom
'Outward' Focused	
Authentic behavior (AL)/ Authenticity (SL)	Presenting one's authentic self; acting in accordance with personal values
Authentic relational orientation (AL)	Active process of self-disclosure and development of trust-based relationships
Empowerment (SL)	Enabling and encouraging others' development; believing in the value of each individual
Accountability (SL)	Setting clear expectations; having confidence in others; holding others accountable for controllable behavior and outcomes
Standing Back (SL)	Giving priority to others' interests; giving others support and credit
Interpersonal acceptance (SL)	Empathy; understanding where people come from
Stewardship (SL)	Focus on the common good above self-interest; acting as a role model

*Note: AL = Authentic Leadership; SL = Servant Leadership

Together with the above competency model, Kiersch and Peters also developed a set of

practical guidelines (see Table 2 below) based on empirical research for student leadership

development initiatives that cultivate leaders who "are ethical in behaviour and decision-

making, self-aware, honest, and driven to serve others" (p.160).

Table 2: Authentic and Servant Leadership Development Program Components (Kiersch & Peters, 2017, p. 157)

Leadership Competency Area	LD Program Components (ELT Facet*)	Target Competencies	Sources
'Inward' Focused			
	Guided self-reflection (RO)	Self-awareness Internalized moral perspective	Branson (2007) George (2003)
	Ethics training (RO)	Internalized moral perspective	
	Developing self-narratives, "*This I Believe*" exercise (RO)	Self-awareness Internalized moral perspective	Erikson (2009)
'Outward' Focused			
	Sharing and hearing self-narratives, "*This I Believe*" exercise (CE & RO)	Relational transparency/authenticity Interpersonal acceptance	Erikson (2009)
	Community service (AE)	Interpersonal acceptance Stewardship	Polleys (2002)
	Service-learning team projects (integrating community service with project management skill development) (CE, AE)	Empowerment Accountability Interpersonal acceptance Stewardship	Snell et al. (2015)
	Class lecture (including guest lectures from local leaders and leadership scholars, etc.) (AC)	Balanced Processing	
	360 Feedback (from peers, professors, coworkers, supervisors, etc.) (RO)	Humility Courage	Rosch & Caza (2012)

Concrete Experience (CE), Reflective Observation (RO), Abstract Conceptualization (AC), Active Experimentation (AE)

Based on the strong alignment between the leadership philosophy, vision and format of National Student Leadership Forum (NSLF) and the development of citizen scholars, and authentic servant leadership, the Forum was selected as valuable case study for research (see Section 1.3). The NSLF includes a range experiential learning activities that align with the development of authentic servant leaders and that correspond to the key competencies and guidelines recommended in the report outlined above, including guided self-reflection, developing, sharing and hearing self-narratives, service learning and lectures from active

leaders and critical dialogue with peers (2017, p. 156). This project aims to build on the literature and theoretical foundations outlined above by focusing specifically on the transformative nature of the NSLF learning experience. This is especially important given the factors associated with the VUCA era, as explain earlier, and the goals of scholarship of engagement.

The need for leadership conceptualisation and practice to understand the nature of profound change in people has been highlighted by leadership scholars (Senge et al., 2004). Senge and colleagues call for a recognition of the dynamic interplay between what is deeply personal and what is broadly systemic and a focus on the "largely unexplored" deeper dimensions of transformative change (p. 5). They argue that this requires a paradigmatic expansion of scope beyond the "what" and "how" of leadership in order to explicitly include the "who" of leadership (p. 5). Nicolaides and McCallum (2013, p. 250) similarly claim that transformative learning is precisely the kind of learning that is required in the contemporary era. Finally, Arnold and Prescher (2017, p. 284) state that effective leadership into the future will be dependent upon the extent to which a leader is "able to engage transformative learning". This review will now introduce the fundamental concepts of transformative learning theory, before outlining the relevant the gaps in knowledge and how these will be addressed in the conceptual framework and research design that follows.

2.4   Transformative learning theory

Transformative learning theory has its origins in the work of Jack Mezirow, who studied a learning phenomenon he first described as "perspective transformation" (1978, p. 100). In alignment with the scholarship of engagement, he was interested in the democratic function of higher education and drew upon the work of various scholars in the development of his theory. Among others, this included John Dewey's work on epistemic foundations (Dewey, 1960), Thomas Kuhn's (1962) conception of paradigm, Paulo Freire's (1970) conception of

conscientisation, and Habermas's (1981b) concepts of domains of learning and communicative action. Transformative Learning, according to Mezirow, can be defined as:

> the process by which we transform problematic frames of reference (mindsets, habits of mind, meaning perspectives) – sets of assumption and expectation – to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective and emotionally able to change. Such frames are better because they are more likely to generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. (Mezirow, 2018, p. 116)

For Mezirow, this transformative process serves an important educative role in democratic society. Building on the work of Habermas (1981a), he explained the importance of cultivating democratic character and the capacities of critical thinking and self-reflection. He states "transformative learning focuses on creating the foundation in insight and understanding essential for learning how to take effective social action in a democracy" (p. 120). The possibilities of associated transformative learning for fostering of civic-minded, democratic citizens has also been highlighted by others in the field (see, for instance: Akenson et al., 2022; Brookfield, 2012; Cranton, 2016; Victor & Cranton, 2013). Indeed, the orientation of research and educational initiatives towards addressing the problems of society, (Boyer, 1996a) as per the scholarship of engagement, is clear. Reflecting on the broader literature in this field and the injustices and suffering we face in the world, Hoggan (2020, p. 187) states that "underlying every scholarly piece on transformative education (in whatever form, using whatever theories or terminology) are premises about these injustices and sufferings and how a given educational effort is intended to address them".

There has however been criticism within the literature about the apparent assumption that personal transformation is fundamentally beneficial (Akenson et al., 2022). Indeed, it has been shown that the transformative learning experience does not always lead to personal

growth and self-development and can be highly sensitive, and even traumatic in nature (Cranton, 2016; Morrice, 2012; Smith & Kempster, 2019). As opposed to simply building on previous learning, transformative learning often involves processes of unlearning or deconstructing deeply held values and beliefs, and the impact of this can be disturbing and unsettling, and affect both the learner and their broader community (Dunn, 2011). These criticisms are important to consider, and ethical implications of transformative learning will be further discussed in Section 4.5.1.

In addition to the ethical criticisms mentioned above, there have also been objections to the coherence of the philosophical (Fuhr et al., 2017) and theoretical (Hoggan, 2016a; Howie & Bagnall, 2013; Newman, 2012) foundations of transformative learning. Despite these concerns, and the complaint that much of the research is "redundant with a deterministic emphasis while overlooking the need for more in-depth theoretical analysis" (Taylor & Cranton, 2013, p. 33), the theory has received widespread intrigue and adoption across various disciplines across higher education (Hodge, 2018; Nohl, 2014; Taylor, 2008).

Although a review of the literature reveals a strong overlap in themes, and a logical connection between the aims of scholarship of engagement, student leadership development and transformative learning theory, there are some elements, including the philosophical underpinning of transformative learning theory, along with its processes and outcomes that need to be critically assessed. As this thesis involves theory building and theory testing, the conceptual framework, which follows in Chapter 3, will also include significant components of literature review as it pertains to transformative learning theory.

2.5   Gaps in knowledge and focus of the study

This literature review has identified a range of interconnected concerns regarding student leadership development in Australian higher education. There is an expressed need for higher education to adapt its practices given the uncertain and rapidly changing conditions of

contemporary society (Nyland, 2022). Two issues of particular concern for the scholarship of engagement is the emergence of the "post-truth" and "toxic" phenomena (Bell, 2017). This thesis seeks to address the call for researchers and educators to "pause and reflect" and to rethink the imperatives and practice of engagement in this cultural moment (Bell, 2019, p. 10). Specifically, this study builds upon existing literature and focuses on the development of citizen scholars, which incorporates the attribute of ethical leadership.

Upon review of student leadership development literature and the attribute of ethical leadership, the praxis of authentic servant leadership is adopted for this thesis based on the integration between theorical foundations and evidence-based practice. Given the urgency expressed by scholars regarding the importance of focusing on the inner dimensions of personal change, and the relevance of such transformative change to leadership development in our VUCA era, transformative learning theory was chosen as the specific lens of inquiry for the study.

While there is a significant theoretical connection between the scholarship of engagement, student leadership development and transformative learning theory, there are also several gaps in knowledge. Regarding transformative learning, these include the need to critically assess the philosophical and theoretical components of the learning theory. The focus, of this study, however, is not to develop a general or universal educational philosophy or theory of transformative learning, but to address apparent inconsistencies in current literature as it pertains specifically to student leadership development in Australian higher education. The implications of these findings will then be applied to the interconnected fields of the scholarship of engagement and student leadership development in the contemporary VUCA era.

To my knowledge there is no empirical study published to date that directly addresses how Australian higher education institutions can implement accountable and applicable

methods of student leadership development using a transformative approach. Chapter 4, which follows, outlines the conceptual framework that builds on the theoretical foundations and addresses the gaps in knowledge described above. Chapter 5 then outlines how the research project was designed to test the theoretical propositions contained in the conceptual framework where appropriate, and to develop new one based upon empirical data obtained.

2.6 Chapter summary

This chapter overviewed relevant literature in the three interconnected fields of inquiry that undergird this study. First, in Section 2.2, the Scholarship of Engagement was introduced with reference to its origins and the seminal publications that have shaped research in this area. The core concept that was presented included the democratic function of higher education institutions to address the pressing concerns of society through research and education. Areas of positive progress as well as those of particular concern to the scholarship of engagement within the Australian context were then outlined. This included the need for uniquely Australian approaches to engagement alongside a call for researchers and educators to respond to issues pertaining to the post-truth and toxic cultural phenomena.

Second, a student-centred focus for engaged scholarship was presented in Section 2.2.1. The notion a citizen scholar was outlined as a student "who cares not only about gaining information and generating knowledge but one that is rooted in the reality of their context, problem oriented and interested in applying their knowledge for the betterment of a society (Arvanitakis & Hornsby, 2016b, p. 1). The areas of significant overlap with the scholarship of engagement were presented before a list of proficiencies, and attributes were presented. The review then concentrated specifically on the attribute of ethical leadership, before the relevant literature on student leadership development was overviewed in Section 2.3. The three major

so-called "moral approaches" to leadership (Lemoine et al., 2019, p. 149) were reviewed before specific focus was directed to an integrated model of "authentic servant leadership", or "leadership from the inside out" (Kiersch & Peters, 2017) in Section 2.3.1.

Finally, the intersection between student leadership development, the scholarship of engagement and transformative learning was presented. The value of such a learning experience was articulated regarding the development of democratic citizenship through higher education, alongside the role of transformative learning for effective leadership within the VUCA era. This was followed by a brief overview of the origins of the theory in Section 2.4 before it was noted that there was a range of concerns regarding ethical, philosophical and theoretical foundations of the theory within extant literature. This was followed with a summary of the pertinent gaps in knowledge and how the study would focus on addressing them through the conceptual framework (see Chapter 3) and research design (see Chapter 4) which follows.

CHAPTER 3: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

3.1   Chapter overview

This chapter outlines the conceptual framework that supports a transformative approach to student leadership development in Australian higher education. The framework addresses several gaps in knowledge as it pertains to the focus of this project and is predicated on the interconnected nature of the scholarship of engagement, student leadership and transformative learning theory. The literature provides a strong theoretical and evidence-based foundation for the development of Citizen Scholars and authentic servant leaders. The constituent parts of this framework that require further research are the philosophical foundations, learning process, and outcomes of transformative learning theory.

These respective issues are addressed in this chapter, with Section 3.2 assessing the philosophical foundations of transformative learning, before a reconceptualised set of foundations is proposed in order to support the facilitation of accountable and applicable pedagogical initiatives (Section 3.3). This is followed by a critical assessment of the prominent theoretical conceptions of transformative learning (Section 3.4), before a reconceptualisation of transformative learning theory is proposed for the purposes of supporting a transformative approach to student leadership development in Australian higher education (Section 3.5). This conceptual framework includes the development of theory for both why and how educators can facilitate transformative learning experiences for their students through a learning journey of deconstruction and reconstruction (see Figure 4 below). Finally, a summary of the chapter is provided in Section 3.6.

Figure 6: The three interconnected fields of inquiry and key focus areas that undergird this study.
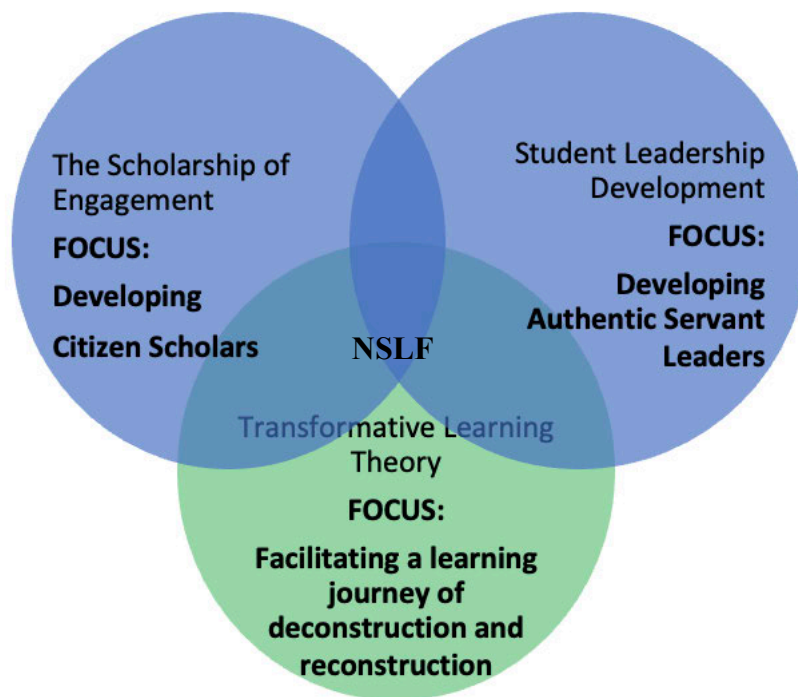
3.2 Assessing the philosophical foundations

Before proposing a revised set of philosophical foundations for transformative learning theory, I will briefly overview and critique some significant influences and assumptions that have shaped the development of this theory to date. These include Constructivism, Humanism and Social Critical Theory. Jack Mezirow has led the theoretical development of this field with "almost every article, journal, or book published on transformation and adult learning citing him" (Calleja, 2014, p. 118). For this reason, the critical assessment of extant literature is organised largely around the contributions of Mezirow, although as Hoggan (2016b) demonstrates, there was burgeoning of alternative perspectives to the theory after Mezirow invited scholars from various disciplines to contribute to the edited volume, *Learning as Transformation* (Mezirow, 2000).

3.2.1   Constructivism

Constructivism has been interpreted in a variety of ways; however, within the educational paradigm, it can be generally understood as a "claim that knowledge is not discovered and that the ideas [that] teachers teach do not correspond to an objective reality" (Murphy, 1997, p. 3). In extrapolation of assumptions that are based on ontological relativism (Niiniluoto, 1991), Cranton and Taylor (2012b) argue that if there are universal truths and constructs independent to our knowledge, it would be the goal of education to find those truths (p. 5). Mezirow (2012, p. 73) is clear on his philosophical position by stating "as there are no fixed truths or totally definitive knowledge, and because circumstances change, the human condition may best be understood as a continuous effort to negotiate contested meanings" (p. 73). Transformative learning, it has been argued, is therefore ultimately about examining, questioning, and revising our personal perceptions of the world (Cranton & Taylor, 2012b, p. 5).

The above stated constructivist premise that "there are no fixed truths" (Mezirow, 2012, p. 73) can be seen as potentially invalid, for the negative proposition itself is actually a truth claim about reality. This reveals an incoherence in the constructivist underpinnings of transformative learning theory, for if this denial is true, then logically it follows that the proposition itself is false (Robertson, 1996). This is because arguing that something *is not* the case, inherently involves asserting (the nature of which is truth affirming) that something else *is* actually the case (Bridges, 1999).

This issue of incoherence is compounded by Mezirow's (1996) assertion that "reflective learning becomes transformative whenever assumptions or premises are found to be distorting, inauthentic, or otherwise invalid" (p. 6). Cranton (2016) argued that within a constructivist worldview, the term [*distorted]* as expressed by Mezirow raises questions around value judgements, for "who ultimately has the privilege of deciding which

perspectives are so-called *distorted*?" (p. 22; emphasis in the original). To illustrate the point, Cranton begs the question; if a student believes their view of the world just fine, "can the educator imply that it is distorted?", or if a "whole community or culture accepts a view (e.g., polygamy is evil, war is necessary) does that mean the view is not distorted?" (p.22). In this regard, Cranton recognises the limitations of constructivism for transformative learning theory, because any particular socially constructed view struggles to condemn any other socially constructed view as "*distorted*" (p. 22; emphasis in the original). To this end, she explains that a realist ontology could indeed be helpful regarding the evaluation of a distorted/or otherwise viewpoint in relation to that world as it is (p. 22).

The terms realism and relativism require a very brief overview at this point. Although there are many forms of ontological realism, within Western philosophy, they can be conceived as a family of theories that collectively "insist upon the independence of certain entities from the mind or human activity" (Arrington, 1996). In this view, there are certain facts that cannot be denied without the fundamental distortion of things as they are, "regardless of the interests or constructs that shape one's theories" (p. 536). For example, human beings are mortal, water holds a certain chemical structure, and gravity affects physical objects (p. 536). Realism takes the fundamental attitude that there is more to reality than we have dreamt of or thought about in our philosophies (p. 530). Relativism (which is also varied) would generally depart from the absolute, objective and universal notions as depicted above, because basic epistemic or metatypical features are only ever relative to the cognitive resources of those who espouse them (Robertson, 1996). A contemporary and popular expression of this view includes the notion that "truth or reality is relative to conceptual schemes (also referred to as frameworks, paradigms, forms of life, worldviews, and perspectives)" (p. 541).

Although ontological constructivism entails relativism, which dispenses with the possibility of testing whether or not a proposition matches the facts (or objective reality) to which it refers and raises serious questions for the foundations of "democracy and the rule of law" (Bunge, 2001, p. 1). A more nuanced approach is "cognitive constructivism", which affirms the constructive nature of all propositions by means of mental cognition, while maintaining the possibility of certain mind-independent entities (p. 1).

Philosophical foundations for educational initiatives are critical in the post-truth era we live in, where alternative facts, fake news and conspiracy theories abound (Bell, 2017; Latour, 2004; Siegel, 2004; Strong, 2016; Tsipursky et al., 2018). Cranton's above-mentioned observations about the philosophical resources (and limitations) of constructivism in this regard are very important. The current global COVID-19 pandemic is a poignant example of the issues that can arise between seemingly irreconcilable differences in perspectives on personal decision-making. Perspectives on vaccines or government mandates are but two examples of many issues that have surfaced. In these tangible examples, what ultimately makes a particular perspective distorted/or otherwise? And what is the applicability of Australian university educational initiatives to this climate? How can universities be transparent and accountable to society in this regard?

The issues at play are beyond 'merely academic', and the questions regarding the democratic purposes of education in the contemporary era are not lost on Cranton (2016). Although she defends the constructivism that underpins Mezirow's transformative learning theory, she argues "we do not want to fall into the trap of saying that all opinions and beliefs are equally good and acceptable" (p. 22). Cranton therefore proposes that we should instead refer to "unquestioned or unexamined rather than…distorted habits of mind" (p. 23). This solution, however, does not solve the theoretical impasse regarding ontological relativism and the determination of supposedly 'good' or 'acceptable' beliefs. This is because if there can be

no correspondence of belief to objective reality (because there is no objective reality), and no objective truth (because truth claims are relative to conceptual schemes), then all beliefs, whether they are questioned or examined, are ultimately and equally relative, regardless of how persuasively they are constructed (Bunge, 2001). The contestation of ideas, which is fundamental to deliberative democracy, requires pedagogies of citizenship that involve learning processes that support a critical examination of why, precisely, something does or does not constitute a 'good' or 'acceptable' belief. As is stands currently, transformative learning theory requires stronger philosophical foundations to succeed as a vehicle for fostering the kind of thinking that is more "likely to generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action", as Mezirow desires (2018, p. 116).

A final point of critical reflection on the propositional content of Mezirow's statement above is required in this section on constructivism. His use of the words "more true" (p. 116) should be grounded explicitly upon epistemic foundations that support the qualification of such notions. Indeed, theories of truth are often neglected in educational paradigms and research in general (Bridges, 1999), and transformative learning is no exception. For this reason, I explicitly embed the *test of truth* in the transformative learning process, which is aligned with a revised set of philosophical foundations for transformative learning (see Section 3.3).

3.2.2   Humanism

The humanist psychologists Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers had a strong influence on adult education in general and on Mezirow's conceptualisation of transformative learning theory in particular (Cranton & Taylor, 2012b; Newman, 2014). Although there have been numerous interpretations of humanism over the centuries, the *Handbook of Transformative Learning* (Cranton & Taylor, 2012b) refers to the list of humanistic notions as described by Elias and Merriam (1994). These include, human nature is inherently good; individuals are

free and autonomous, and thus are free to make major personal choices; the human potential

for growth and development is virtually unlimited; self-concept plays an important role in

growth and development; individuals have an urge towards self-actualisation; reality is

defined by each person; and individuals have a responsibility to both themselves and others

(p. 6).

The humanistic assumptions outlined above provide some helpful foundations for the

progression of transformative learning theory; however, as with constructivism, there are

some inadequacies. The proposition that reality is defined by each person is inconsistent with

Mezirow's (2018, p. 117) formulation of transformative learning as a metacognitive

epistemology of evidential (instrumental) and dialogical (communicative) reasoning

(Habermas, 1981a; Mezirow, 2018). Within this framework, assertions are "validated by

empirically testing contested beliefs regarding the truth of an assertion – that something is as

it is purported to be" (evidential reasoning) (p. 115). The intent, qualifications, truthfulness,

and authenticity of assertions are also evaluated in order to arrive at best judgements

(dialogical reasoning) (p. 115). The notion that reality is defined by each person, as per this

conception humanist thought, is therefore consistent with the latter form of reasoning, but not

the former, which assumes an objective reality outside a person's subjective perception

(Bohman & Rehg, 2017; Ewert, 1991).

As is the case with constructivism, a more robust epistemology is required for

transformative learning to incorporate both evidential and dialogical reasoning (Habermas,

1981a; Mezirow, 2018). Further, clarification is required in relation to ontological foundations

in which the humanism described above grounds concepts of inherent human nature. Newman

(2014) for instance contends that the proposition that "individuals have an urge towards self-

actualisation" (Cranton & Taylor, 2012b, p. 6) is not ontologically coherent. Arguing along a

particular in line of existentialist reasoning, Newman (2014) suggests that humans are not

born with any particular nature, but construct it over time (p. 352). Citing Marx and Engels (1998), he argues that it is through our encounters with the material and social world that we develop our consciousness, and therefore our personal sense of self is formed in relation to these external dimensions. Humans therefore, bring nothing into life inherently, apart from a capacity to exist (p. 352).

The critique levelled by Newman against the humanist ontological foundations of transformative learning theory has a second implication that is axiological. Regarding the notion of human value, he contends that nothing and no one has any inherent value apart from what we choose to allocate (p. 353). Humans, in effect, through their personal encounters and continual expression of will, are the makers of meaning and arbiters of value (p. 353).

The so called "mutinous thoughts" of Newman (p. 345) against the philosophical foundation of humanism for transformative learning theory are valid in some ways, yet problematic in others. There exists, I believe, a logical consistency to Newman's existentialist convictions that render it difficult, if not impossible, to defend an inherent nature, let alone value or meaning of humanity without some form of teleological substructure. However, the ethical consequences of eliminating objective categories of human nature and value are high. On what alternative basis will the ethics of education be established? On what grounds will somebody be able to protest the treatment of certain students by their educators? Take for example the current situation in which members of the Uyghur ethnic minority are imprisoned in so called "re-education camps" until they adopt the specified state ideology of the Chinese Communist Party (SAR, 2020, p. 3).

As a pragmatic path forward, I propose an approach to human dignity that rests upon a reasonable consensus, not least for the sake of the vulnerable and disempowered, but also for the establishment of general principles and policies regarding the ethical praxis of transformative approaches to student leadership development initiatives in Australian higher

education. As a starting point for re-conceptualising the baseline ontological and axiological foundations of the theory, I appeal to a consensus of significant import: The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, which assumes the position that all people are inherently free and equal in dignity and status (Assembly, 1948). This consensus view provides the ontological grounding for policy considerations and practical guidelines to uphold such values in higher education, and to rectify, where possible, any apparent contraventions (this will be discussed further in 3.3.1). Fundamentally, these are matters of justice, and this leads us to the topic of critical social theory, which is the third philosophical assumption that has informed transformative learning theory to date.

3.2.3   Critical social theory

Originating in the Frankfurt School of Critical Social Theory, this educational approach has the goal of critiquing and changing society as a whole (Cranton & Taylor, 2012b). The application of this theory to transformative learning is primarily rooted in the work of Paulo Freire, who was concerned with developing what he described as an "ontological vocation" (1970, p. 12). Taylor (2017a) describes this concept as a theory of existence, which views people as subjects, not objects, who are constantly reflecting and acting on the transformation of their world, so it can become a more equitable place for all to live. Its goal is social transformation by "de-mythicising reality", where the oppressed develop a critical consciousness of their world (p. 20). In one of his final contributions to the field of transformative learning theory, Mezirow stated:

> transformation theory also contends that adult education must be dedicated to effective social change, to modifying oppressive practices, norms, institutions and socio-economic structures to allow everyone to participate more fully and freely in reflective discourse and to acquiring a critical disposition and reflective judgement (2018, p. 120)

While Mezirow had the orientation of an emancipationist (Howie & Bagnall, 2013) and drew upon the work of critical social theorists like Freire and Habermas, both of whom identified social change as a central goal of education, he ultimately believed that individual transformation preceded social transformation (Cranton, 2016). This stance contrasts with Brookfield (2012) who described a critical adult as "one who can discern how the ethic of capitalism and the logic of bureaucratic rationality push people into ways of living that perpetuate economic, racial, and gender oppression" (p. 134). A critical theory of adult learning, Brookfield contends, is therefore "clearly a theory of social and political learning" (p. 135). It evident that educational experience and pedagogical aims, as described by Brookfield, are in effect synonymous with students adopting a particular and ubiquitous socio-political persuasion, namely "democratic socialism" (p. 135).

When reviewing the literature in the field, it is evident that transformative learning theory struggles to define its relationship with politics. On one hand, Mezirow (2018) explains that the theory is not primarily political and includes the critique of all relevant assumptions and beliefs, including those of critical theory itself. On the other hand, certain scholars advocate that the lens of social critical theory necessarily positions certain kinds of political learning as the central feature of transformative experiences (Brookfield, 2012).

Considering the potential harms of educations (specifically the risk of indoctrination) (see also Siegel, 2004), Cranton (2016, p. 100) emphasises the need "that we teach the questioning of all systems to be sure not to move from one form or one-dimensional thinking to another form of one-dimensional thinking". There is a fine philosophical line to navigate in this educational terrain, and in this regard, Mezirow's own reflections are also particularly helpful. He cautioned (1991) that learning outcomes cannot be predetermined or specified, for the focus should not be on "*what*" a person says or does, but "*how*" they do so (as cited in Cranton & Hoggan, 2012, p. 523; emphasis in the original).

The democratic function of education also features in Mezirow's (2018) defence of critical thinking, which explicitly involves evaluating the precepts of critical social theory itself. In citing the work of Dana Villa's (2001) on Socrates and nature of citizenship, Mezirow (2018) argues that the components of critical self-reflection and individualism are essential standards of justice and civic obligation in a democracy (p. 120). The distribution or attainment of a particular kind of knowledge, and however tempting it may be to impart, does not fit within the remit of classical Socratic learning (the educational goals of a transformative approach to student leadership development are discussed in Section 3.3). Indeed, Socrates himself apparently modelled a more reserved pedagogy of mutual and open- ended critical inquiry and "was accustomed to say that he did not himself know anything, and that the only way in which he was wiser than other men was that he was conscious of his own ignorance, while they were not" (Guthrie, 1967, p. 74).

As is the case with constructivism and humanism as described above, the assumptions of social critical theory, though helpful is some ways, may not be the best primary paradigm to guide a transformative learning process (see Section 3.3). Social critical theory is beneficial in that it highlights critical and systemic issues facing the world, and therefore aligns with the scholarship of engagement and student leadership development. However, it is problematic as a primary educational paradigm precisely because it is seen by some scholars as primarily political. It is my contention that it behoves federally funded adult educators to be clear about their organisational imperatives in a pluralistic democracy and to determine exactly how their practice aligns with these goals and thereby serves the broader society.

3.3   Reconceptualising the philosophical foundations

To address the apparent inconsistencies in the philosophical underpinning of transformative learning theory as outlined above, I propose a shift in axiological, ontological and epistemological foundations in order to establish a conceptual framework that is

appropriate for a transformative approach to student leadership development in Australian higher education. These philosophical foundations apply equally to the research methodology employed throughout this thesis.

3.3.1   Axiology

Four interrelated personal beliefs and values provide the basis for this conceptual framework. The first is the belief that all people are inherently free and equal in dignity and status, as articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Assembly, 1948). This belief informs the value of inclusion, which insists that all people, without distinction of any kind, may participate in the peaceful discussion of ideas. Although it is recognised that ideal speech conditions are very difficult to establish (Habermas, 1981a), effort should be made towards informed discussion, allowing all voices to be equally heard, for no voices should be privileged nor oppressed (Mezirow, 2018). Indeed, there are several practical steps that can be employed across various contexts and group settings to increase the disposition towards democratic discussion, including but not limited to: generous hospitality, encouraged participation, expressed appreciation, and invited deliberation (Brookfield & Preskill, 1999).

The belief in the inherent dignity of all people not only provides a baseline ontology from which to construct ethical and transformative educational experiences with regard to student leadership development, but it also supports an inclusive and pluralistic approach to discourse, which is fundamental to democracy (Bohman, 1994). This approach to education can incorporate a variety of conceptions of democracy, including those of prominent critical social theorists like Habermas (1996), who defends the belief that public reason is not relegated to the sphere of the state, but rather the public domain of free and equal citizens. This point aligns with the notion of citizen scholars, because it positions the student within a participatory context while simultaneously supporting safe and effective discourse (Mezirow, 2003).

The second belief is that human beings are generally capable of voluntarily and rationally discussing ideas with free will and creative agency within social environments (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2013). These beliefs inform the value of discursive communication and the cultivation of personal reflexivity and autonomy (Giesinger, 2010). Again, the explicit inclusion of this assumption is important, for it is not universally excepted (see, for insance Dahlbeck, 2017; Kornblith, 1983), yet it underpins the social function of deliberation and acts of justice in society and validates the pluralism of competing arguments as a democratic safeguard against false consensus (Bohman, 1994). It also has implications for individual and social notions of epistemic responsibility, where a person or group hold a degree of praiseworthiness or blameworthiness for the justification of their beliefs (Corlett, 2008; McHugh & Davidson, 2020).

Although there are various conceptions of what exactly epistemic responsibility entails (Fernando, 2018), the basic premise is that there is a degree of moral responsibility to behave in epistemically responsible ways that are more likely to lead to truths about self, others and the world (McHugh & Davidson, 2020). This involves cultivating habits such as open mindedness, humility and self-reflection, while pursuing and disseminating accurate knowledge. This position is important, because ideas can have both great or grave consequences in society, especially when wielded by leaders of significant influence (Nau, 2011). This relates explicitly to the development of citizen scholars who can take ownership and accountability for the views they hold and can engage effectively in a "post-truth" (Dictionaries, 2016) and "toxic" (Dictionaries, 2018) era. It also relates explicitly to the development of authentic servant leaders, who possess qualities for ethical and pro-social behaviours. Finally, its aligns with transformative learning and Merizow's (2018) value judgment that certain frames of references "are better because they are more likely to generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action" (p. 116).

The third belief is that the classical Socratic method of learning is beneficial for fostering democratic citizenship (Villa, 2001). As with the second belief, this view supports the values of openness and intellectual humility. However, it also informs the view that transformative learning outcomes should not be predetermined according to any particular political, religious or corporate agenda. Dewey's concentration on cultivating democratic character aligns with the activities of Socrates who apparently "conducted dialogues not only to improve the soul and lives of his interlocutors, but as important, to test himself and to improve his own soul" (Sichel, 1996, p. 117). Further, intellectual humility was an essential starting point in the acquisition of knowledge for Socrates, who highlights the importance of such a learning disposition on the basis that nobody will seek knowledge on any subject if they are under the delusion that they already possess it (Guthrie, 1967).

Socrates apparently described the dialectic as the learning "journey" or "progress" (depending on translation) (Plato, Republic: 532a-b). Using the analogy of a person emerging from a cave, Socrates described the journey from seeing things merely as shadows from firelight, to appreciating things as they are in the light of the sun. He continues:

> this… is the very law which dialectics recites, the strain which it executes, of which, though it belongs to the intelligible, we may see an imitation in the progress of the faculty of vision, as we described its endeavor to look at living things themselves and the stars themselves and finally at the very sun. In like manner, when anyone by dialectics attempts through discourse of reason and apart from all perceptions of sense to find his way to the very essence of each thing and does not desist (Plato: Republic 532a).

In regard to an educational program designed for development of democratic citizenship, the Socratic ideal of rigorous dialogue has been heralded by some as precisely the kind of intellectual activity needed for effective personal and leadership formation that can

address the existential problems we face in contemporary society (Assiter, 2013; Kourtis & Arvanitakis, 2016; McClellan, 1996).

The fourth belief is that the development of critical thinking is a legitimate and indeed fundamental aim of education in general and of a transformative approach to student leadership development in particular. This underpins the pedagogical value of rigorous dialogue and debate. In line with Siegel (1988), upon whom Mezirow (2018) also draws, I consider critical thinking as more or less equivalent to the ideal of rationality. Siegal (1996) highlights that no other educational aim has received such widespread endorsement, with philosophers of education in the Western tradition (e.g., Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, John Locke, Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, Betrand Russel, John Dewey, R.S Peters and Israel Scheffler) who diverge on a great many things, finding general agreement on the centrality of reason and rationality to education. Although it should be mentioned that there are many approaches to conceptualising critical thinking, in alignment with the axiological assumptions outlined above, I adopt the conceptions proposed by Siegel (1988) where the defining characteristic of critical thinking is its focus on reasons and the power of reasons to warrant or justify beliefs, claims, and actions (p. 22). This conception of critical thinking also includes important dispositional and social dimensions (Bailin, 1996). First, it entails a principle of respect for individuals, emphasising the right of students to question and to seek reason and justification (p. 122). Second, critical thinking is integral to the development in self-sufficiency (p. 122). Third, critical thinking develops meta-competencies required in many rational traditions, and fourth, the development of critical thinking skills is integral to productive participation as citizens of democracy (p. 122). Finally, a critical thinker is hereby considered someone who is "appropriately moved by reason" (Siegel, 1988, p. 32). This view of critical thinking requires adequate epistemic foundations to undergird principles of reason

evaluation such as the nature of a warranted belief and the relationship between justification

and truth (Siegel, 1996). To these concerns I now turn.

3.3.2 *Ontology and epistemology*

Regarding the philosophical underpinning of transformative learning, the following

shifts in ontology and epistemology are proposed. The aim is not to develop a general or

universal educational philosophy or theory of transformative learning but to address apparent

inconsistencies in current literature as it relates specifically to student leadership development

in Australian higher education. In this regard, I am proposing a conceptual framework that is

designed for a particular educational initiative that has particular goals. The applicability of

this approach will therefore need to be carefully considered for other educational contexts and

endeavours.

The first shift major shift in philosophical foundations is ontological. As opposed to the

relativist ontology of constructivism, this thesis rests upon a realist ontology, which assumes

an objective nature to reality. With this position, it is supposed that objects have an

independent existence that is not dependent on individual cognition (Burrell & Morgan,

1979). This informs the second major shift, which is epistemological. Knowledge in this

conceptual framework and research design is approached through a post-positivist lens. With

this position, the idea of an objective or detached observer is rejected, and it is assumed that

knowledge can be understood only through particular frames of cognitive reference (Cohen et

al., 2013). This approach therefore supports the notion of cognitive constructivism (Bunge,

2001), as it assumes that knowledge of the world is conjectural, falsifiable, challengeable and

changing (Cohen et al., 2013, p. 27). In this view, notions of objective reality are tempered,

with the view that humans cannot fully apprehend external reality as it really is (Miller, 2000).

A central component of post-positivism is the idea that some beliefs about reality are

more plausible than others, and that the "world sets constraints on what can be accepted as

truth, even if human understanding requires this to be interpreted within a contemporaneously acceptable framework of meaning" (Madill, 2008, p. 7). It is important to note that I am not advancing any particular approach to realism such as Critical Realism (Bhaskar, 1975), Subtle (Hammersley, 1992) or Analytic Realism (Altheide & Johnson, 1994) for instance. Rather, in line with Howe's compatibilist approach to educational research (1988), I am advocating a general pragmatist approach to matters of ontology and epistemology that recognises the strengths and limitations of both realist (or single reality) and relativist (multiple realities) paradigms. Further, this approach provides a foundation for a mixed-methods research (Creswell, 2007) (see Chapter 4) and aligns with the work of Dewey (1941), who has greatly influenced both the scholarship of engagement and transformative learning theory (see Chapter 2).

These shifts in philosophical foundations are adopted to establish greater coherence, accountability and applicability to transformative learning theory. While a constructivist dimension is acknowledged and retained, learners are positioned as constantly moving towards a recognition of reality as it is, lest they settle for ideas that are distorted or uninformed at best or are delusional and destructive at worst. This shift resolves the above described (3.2.1) tension within constructivism (Cranton, 2016) and the use of the term "distorted" as applied by Mezirow (1996, p. 6). Intellectually speaking, this approach to knowledge construction is not a hard landing but a humble one. Convictions of reality in this view are not considered absolute truths but rather sets of highly fallible inferences that should be carefully considered and slowly adopted. This leads us to the fourth adaption to the transformative learning theory, which is both philosophical and procedural: the *test of truth*.

3.3.3   *The test of truth*

The *test of truth* is included in this conceptual framework because it addresses apparent inconsistencies in the literature regarding the warrants of new or revised beliefs.

Preconceptions regarding the nature of truth are implicit to assertions and discourse, although this is rarely acknowledged nor appropriately explicated in educational research (Bridges, 1999). This point relates explicitly to the justification of actions and is therefore a core element of accountability and applicability for leadership. This point can be illustrated regarding the aforementioned government mandates due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Australian Commonwealth Government encouraged, and in some cases mandated, that citizens receive a vaccine (Australian Government, 2022). This action is based upon the inference that vaccines are a good idea. The warrant for this course action is critical, not only for public accountability, but also for the ability to persuade hesitant citizens that the benefits of vaccinations vastly outweigh the risks, and thereby increasing the public rate of uptake.

The consequences of decisions made throughout the pandemic have been dramatic, and it has brought issues pertaining to decision making, leadership and citizenship to the forefront (Harari, 2020). Dewey (1910) expressed concern for how easily our inferences on important matters can be influenced and go astray. He argued:

> What is important, is that every inference shall be a tested inference; or (since often this is not possible) that we shall discriminate between beliefs that rest upon tested evidence and those that do not, and shall be accordingly on our guard as to the kind and degree of assent yielded (p. 27).

At this point, it is important to clarify a few terms. Technically speaking, the philosophical term *proposition* relates to the ideas or statements we believe or judge to be true (Ewing, 2012, p. 54). The *truth-value*, that is the truth or falsity of such propositions (Williamson, 2005), is not determined in reference to an independent entity or mental state, for propositions are not true in and of themselves, but only in relation to what they stand for (Ewing, 2012, p. 54). Propositions are therefore sometimes called the "primary bearers of truth or falsity, since sentences are derivatively true or false in virtue of expressing the

proposition that they do" (King, 2013). *Assertions* are then a speech-act by which a proposition is presented or claimed as true (Weiner, 2011). Truth consequently functions as the norm of assertion (Turri, 2013), and therefore the *test of truth* is embedded into this conceptual framework as a criterion or standard the warrants of ideas, beliefs, propositions or assertions in question can be appropriately assessed against (Bridges, 1999).

Transformative learning scholars draw significantly on the work of Dewey (1941) and Habermas (1996); however, it is important to note that there is significant divergence in their philosophical approaches to truth (Fuhr, 2017). For instance, Dewey (1941) applies a particular kind of pragmatist approach, whereas Habermas (1996) builds on the constructivist paradigm and employs a consensus theory for the sciences and Kantian deontological ethics to discursive justifications of moral norms (Bohman, 1994). Mezirow (2003, p. 58), who was influenced by both Dewey and Habermas, stated that the goal of transformative learning is to replace taken for granted or problematic frames of reference and to "generate beliefs and opinions that prove truer or justified to guide action" (p. 59). Exactly why a particular belief is actually more "true" (p. 59) than any other belief is not explicated; however, the concept seems synonymous with the notion of "justified" (p. 59) in accordance with instrumental (hypothetical-deductive) and communicative (analogical abductive) reasoning (p. 59). Ultimately though, Mezirow affirms the importance of consensus for the validation of a belief has been advocated by Habermas, explaining that this why our conclusions must always be held tentatively, for we may "encounter others with new evidence, arguments or perspectives" (p. 115).

Although these issues technically relate to the learning journey, and we will consider them more fully in the following theoretical sections, it is noteworthy here that the concept relates explicitly to the philosophical foundations of transformative learning. The difficulty in describing the rationale of truth-values is not peculiar to Mezirow. Indeed the charge has also

been laid against both Deweyan pragmatism (Russell, 1919) and the Habermasean consensus theory (Bohman, 1994). Yet, there is little agreement in literature around the internal validity of alternative approaches to truth, such as correspondence or coherence theory (McDermid, 1998). A central issue that repeatedly surfaces in literature is the problem of comparison and the view of truth as a monolithic concept. Before proposing a path forward, I will briefly summarise the dilemma.

Correspondence theories of truth are most often associated with metaphysical realism, whereas coherentist theories are most often associated with metaphysical relativism (Young, 2018). The basic premise of truth as correspondence is that a proposition 'P' is true if and only if 'P' corresponds with an actual state of affairs (Bridges, 1999, p. 601). Truth, therefore is independent of the fact that someone believes it, as it exists only in a relation to reality (Marian, 2020). For instance, the belief that there is a lion behind the bush is true only in so far as it corresponds to the fact that there actually is a lion behind the bush in reality.

The comparison problem relates to how a person can make an accurate proposition about something external to themselves such as a lion, when propositions by nature consist of culturally constructed language (Bridges, 1999, p. 610), which is not a copy, nor has it any resemblance to the actual lion to which is refers. How can anybody get outside of themselves to truly perceive reality? This problem is compounded when attempts are made to express the reality of abstract mathematics, logic, or morality (p. 610) for the words and symbols we use "are not in the least bit similar to the things that they represent" (Ewing, 2012, p. 55). Herein we run into the problem of circularity, as Bridges (1999, p. 602) explains: "a proposition is true if it corresponds to a fact - but what is a fact, if not a state of affairs represented by a true proposition". Thomas Kuhn (1970), upon whom Mezirow (2018) draws, was particularly dubious of the positivist approach to neutrality of observation language and argues for the "intimate and inevitable entanglement of scientific observation with scientific theory" (Kuhn,

1978, p. 267). By contrast to correspondence theory, the logic of coherence theory does not revolve around objective (or positivist) propositions regarding external reality but focuses instead on the way ideas fit together within a larger system.

The basic premise of truth as coherence is that a proposition 'P1…Pn' are true if and only if they represent an internally coherent, consistent and comprehensive set of mutually implicative and supportive propositions (Bridges, 1999, p. 603). But without any reference to external fact or objective reality, what is to stop a proposition from being 'true' in the sense that it is internally coherent with other held propositions in a conceptual scheme, yet it contradicts external evidence? Or what happens when two internally consistent (based on respective conceptual schemes), yet mutually incompatible views are presented? Without any correspondence to reality, each view will ultimately be 'true', yet contradictory in essence and therefore 'false' from each relative perspective (Howe, 1988). Herein lies the problem of circularity once again. In coherence theory, propositions are true because they cohere with a pre-existing set of interpretive propositions. New ideas are accepted only if they cohere with existing views, which render the worldview effectively unfalsifiable unless a person chooses to deconstruct and reconstruct their entire set of beliefs every time is it contradicted by a new idea. But why would a person accept a new idea and subsequently revise their worldview in the first place? And what quality would give a new idea its truth-value, especially if it is contradicted by previously held beliefs? Furthermore, although coherence theory provides a framework for internal justification, it presupposes a truth independent of the theory itself (Ewing, 2012), for what can underpin the notion of coherence apart from an appeal to the truthfulness of certain laws of logic (Bridges, 1999)?

Due to these inherent issues in determining truth, some scholars have moved towards a pragmatist conception of truth (Dewey, 1941; James, 1975; Schiller, 1966). There are important differences in their respective approaches to pragmatism; however, for the sake of

relevance to our educational context, I will focus briefly on John Dewey's contributions. He denies that coherence could guarantee truth (White, 1943) and states that he held a "correspondence theory of truth" (1941, p. 178). However, Dewey also rejects the positivist epistemic grounds upon which propositions can correspond to an event without assuming a "mysterious and unverifiable doctrine of pre-stablished harmony" (p. 178). Consequently, he argues that propositions about data are not cases of knowledge but a means of attaining it as the possible meaning of the data is established through a process of reasoning (p. 180). He draws on elements of both coherence and correspondence theory by stating that the consequences of experimental observations provide a test for the validity of hypothesis both old and new, as they are "checked by reference to observed materials" (p. 180). But for Dewey, the distinction between "true" and "false" ultimately lies in the relationship between propositions and relevant occurrences (p. 182).

Because truth, it seems, cannot be known objectively or absolutely, pragmatists like Dewey are content to shift the focus instead to observed consequences, that is whether or not something "works"(Ewing, 2012, p. 56). In this approach, 'P' is true if and only if it 'works' in practice (Bridges, 1999, p. 605). For instance, my belief that turning the knob on my oven will increase the temperature is true if the action has the desired effect (p. 605). This theory however encounters a range of objections. First, it conflates truth with functionality and thereby mistakenly reverses the logic, which is otherwise relatively sound (Ewing, 2012). For instance, while true beliefs in general work better than false beliefs (excepting, of course, false positives), it does not follow that the practical application is what makes them true (p. 56). Rather, a belief will generally work if it is first true, and the truth-value can consequently be determined by something other than pure functionality, namely its correspondence to reality (Bridges, 1999). Finally, it is also important to note the circularity with the notion of

"works", for the criteria for what "works" must be presupposed before anyone can determine whether a belief is "true" because it works (p. 605).

The final approach to truth that must be briefly examined relates to Jürgen Habermas (1996) whose work also influenced Mezirow (2018). The consensus theory of truth builds upon the constructivist dimension of pragmatism (Bridges, 1999). In this conception, 'P' is true if and only if there is agreement universally or among a relevant population (p. 606). In this regard, truth is effectively relegated to the notion of agreement, which some scholars contend is the best we can do given the nature of socially constructed beliefs (Guba, 1992). Although the practical application of this makes sense in social environments, the question of why certain beliefs are deemed more warranted than others still requires a logical appeal to either correspondence and or coherence. For instance, in a courtroom, the jury can find agreement based upon victim statements, but also in relation to the evidence presented (Bridges, 1999). In this manner, consensus is "always a secondary principle to an independent imperative which has to do with establishing the truth of the matter on a different set of criteria" (p. 606). Although the value of this approach to democratic function and social reasoning as applied by Habermas (1996) is evident (Bohman, 1994; Bridges, 1999), technically a consensus theory relies upon presuppositions of truth, specifically those grounded in coherence and correspondence theory.

With this background, we are able to suggest a *test of truth* that moves beyond monolithic concepts of truth and the problematic dualisms of positivism or interpretivism, correspondence or coherence and quantitative or qualitative data by employing a post-positivistic epistemological paradigm (Howe, 1988). If we shift from an either/or approach to a both/and approach, then we can logically ground the *test of truth* epistemically in both correspondence and coherence theories, and thereby diffuse the problems of comparison and circularity as described above. This approach has long been advocated by analytic

philosophers who hold that the truth of any inference "consists in its agreement with (or correspondence to) to reality *and* its coherent fit within a consistent set of beliefs" (Haynes, 1996, p. 189).

This paradigm sees the two theories not only as mutually compatible, but complementary, while also acting like an umbrella under which other methodologies can be utilised as warranted by context. For instance, a consensus theory can work well in the political arena, and a pragmatist theory is highly applicable in computer science (Bridges, 1999). However, ultimately the truthfulness of an assertion will extend beyond consensus or pragmatist approaches and propositions will be strengthened or weakened in relation to both its coherent and correspondent qualities.

Experimental studies in cognitive science have demonstrated that when it comes to the norm of assertion, people intuitively avoid making false assertions (that is assertions not based on fact), even when such assertions could be well justified by available evidence (Turri, 2013). In other words, when it comes to the *test of truth*, our natural inclination seems to appreciate the need for internal sense-making; however, our actions will ultimately be determined by what we believe to be the objective facts of external reality. This aligns with the realist ontology and post-positivist epistemology upon which the *test of truth* rests in this conceptual framework. Regarding the procedural function of the *test of truth*, learning should be continually anticipated as students encounter different perspectives, more coherent explanations or new corresponding evidence and should be ready to adjust their beliefs according to what is most warranted.

3.4   Assessing transformative learning theory

This section overviews the theoretical landscape of transformative learning and identifies inconsistencies and gaps in knowledge. This is followed by a proposal of a

reconceptualised approach to transformative learning theory that is appropriate for student leadership development in Australian higher education (see Section 3.5). These shifts are aligned with the above-mentioned philosophical adaptions and relate to the research design that follows.

A wide variety of alternative approaches to Mezirow's (1991) original theory were developed when he invited scholars from various disciplines to contribute to the edited volume, *Learning as Transformation* (Mezirow, 2000). In the quest to better articulate and further develop the concept of transformative learning, the theory was extended into unique directions (Taylor, 2008, p. 13). The various theoretical approaches have been categorised in a variety of ways (Baumgartner, 2012; Cranton, 2016; Taylor, 2007); however, for the sake of simplicity, this conceptual framework follows the vernacular as employed by Stuckey and colleagues (2013).

Based upon a review of the diverse theoretical perspectives in literature, Stuckey and colleagues include three dominant conceptions of transformative learning while also separating learning processes from learning outcomes (p. 213). The first perspective described by Stuckey and colleagues (2013, p. 213) is the cognitive-rational process (Mezirow, 1991). This view of the learning process is constructivist and universal and "emphasizes rationality, critical reflection, and ideal conditions for discourse". The second approach is described as an extra-rational process (Dirkx, 1998; Lawrence, 2012; Tisdell, 2000) that "emphasizes the emotive, imaginal, spiritual, and arts-based facets of learning, those that reach beyond rationality" (Stuckey et al., 2013, p. 213). The third formulation is the social critique perspective (Brookfield, 2000; Freire, 1970), and this view "emphasizes ideological critique, unveiling oppression, and social action in the context of transformative learning" (Stuckey et al., 2013, p. 213).

3.4.1 The cognitive-rational process

Transformative learning theory, in Mezirow's interpretation, is a metacognitive epistemology of evidential (instrumental) and dialogical (communicative) reasoning (Habermas, 1981b; Mezirow, 2018). Mezirow has been accused of being selective (Fleming, 2018), in that he does not emphasise, nor explicitly include Habermas's third domain, which is emancipatory learning. However, Mezirow's arguments equate transformative learning with emancipatory learning, because it impels the learner to "identify and challenges distorted frames of reference" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 87) as discovered through instrumental (evidential) and communicative (dialogical) reasoning.

Reasoning is conceptualised by Mezirow (2018) as the process of advancing and assessing belief, and this leads to the validation and reformulation of frames of reference and meaning structures. Frames of reference are described as the structures of culture and language through which we construe meaning by attributing coherence and significance to our experience (p. 116). In relation to student leadership development, it is important to note that everyone who is involved in the learning environment holds certain frames of reference. These can significantly shape our pre-conceptions and will generally determine the line of action we take, as we default to our cognitive, conative and affective dispositions, which may operate within or outside our awareness (p. 116). In effect, we have a strong tendency to reject ideas that fail to fit our pre-conceptions (p. 116), and since we are all located in the social world, our lines of action will often have social consequences - for better or worse.

The importance of the process of transformative learning to student leadership development becomes particularly evident at this point, for higher education institutions will graduate each new generation of leaders in vast a range critical social sectors and institutions (Astin, 2000). It is therefore imperative to consider the applicability of student leadership development and learning experiences to the current and future social context and determine

how the this process is thereby accountable to society. Mezirow argues that students can be supported in transforming problematic frames of reference "to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective and emotionally able to change" (p.116). He explains that the rationale for this transformation is that "such frames are better because they are more likely to generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action" (p. 116). The process of transformative learning within Mezirow's (2018) cognitive-rational conception involves the following elements:

- reflecting critically on the source, nature and consequences of relevant assumptions - our own and those of others;

- in instrumental learning, determining that something is true (is as it is purported to be) by using empirical research methods;

- in communicative learning, arriving at more justified beliefs by participating freely and fully in an informed continuing discourse;

- taking action on our transformed perspective - we make a decision and live what we have come to believe until we encounter new evidence, arguments or a perspective that renders this orientation problematic and requires reassessment;

- acquiring a disposition – - to become more critically reflective of our own assumptions and those of others, to seek validation of our transformative insights through more freely and fully participating in discourse and to follow through on our decision to act upon a transformed insight (pp. 117-118).

This process, Mezirow explains, often follows along a sequence of ten phases, which is initiated with a "disorienting dilemma" (Mezirow, 2018, p. 118). This catalysing experience instigates a genuine impulse for self-examination and the process from here revolves around the two major elements of transformative learning (p. 118). The first focuses on the above-

mentioned impetus for critical reflection, and the second entails the full and free

"participation in dialectical discourse to validate a best reflective judgement" (p. 118). This

second focus necessarily involves an understanding of knowledge itself, as one monitors the

"epistemic nature of problems and the truth-value of alternative solutions" (King & Kitchener,

1994, p. 12). It is important to note that although the transformative learning process

implicitly involves a critical reflection of knowledge and its limits and a discernment of the

truth-value of alternative solutions, this component of epistemic cognition (Kitchener, 1983)

is not explicitly incorporated into the theory, nor is it a coherent explication of relevant

theories of truth provided. It is for this reason that a *test of truth* is included in the proposed

learning process of this conceptual framework (see Section 3.5).

Mezirow described discourse as dialogue involving the assessment of beliefs, feelings

and values (2003, p. 59). He argues that "it is important to understand that the only

alternatives to critical-dialectical discourse for assessing and choosing among beliefs are the

appeal to tradition, an authority figure, or the use of force" (Mezirow, 2003, p. 60). This

discursive autonomy in higher education, Mezirow maintains, is a fundamental and moral

component that underlies democratic citizenship (p. 62). It is therefore a critical element of

the accountability of higher education to society, and it should be "both the goal and method

for adult educators" (Mezirow, 2012, p. 91). While conditions such as interpersonal equality,

cognitive capacities and personal health are ideal for discourse, and should be orchestrated

wherever possible, it is understood that it is rarely possible to perfectly establish such

environments (Cranton, 2016). Regardless of practical limitations, Mezirow (2009) argues

that the learning environment should reflect "democratic ideals such as self-respect, respect

for others, acceptance of the common good, and a willingness to be open and engage in

diversity" (p. 20).

The process of personal transformation, in Mezirow's understanding, can be epochal (sudden and frequently associated with crises) or cumulative (progressive sequence of insights) and usually occur subconsciously, where intuition substitutes critical reflection of assumptions (2018, p. 118). The role of the educator, therefore, is to assist learners to bring this process into awareness and to improve the learner's ability and inclination to engage in transformative learning (p. 118). Although the educator's task is to foster personal "consciousness raising" (seeing familiar things from a different point of view), there is no way that the educator (or anyone else) can ensure that transformative learning takes place (Cranton, 2016, p. 111). The learners must freely and genuinely decide to undergo the process of change themselves, otherwise education risks venturing into indoctrination, manipulation and coercion (p 105). This learning process is well aligned with the axiological foundations proposed in Section 3.3.1 above.

3.4.2   *The extra-rational process*

This view of transformative learning is seen as a process of individuation, a lifelong journey of coming to understand oneself through reflecting on the psychic structures (e.g., ego, shadow, personal or collective unconscious) that make up an individual's identity (Taylor, 2017b). Individuation, according to Jung (1971, p. 448) is the process by which individuals differentiate themselves from the general, collective society. Although Mezirow did acknowledge psychological meaning perspectives (Mezirow, 2012), this approach goes further into Jungian psychology and stresses the importance of personality types and the extra-rational nature of psychological processes, including intuition and imagination (Cranton, 2016, p. 76). These features are seen as transcending the rational discourse as advocated by Mezirow, giving power and deep meaning to the connection between the Self and the world, by nursing the soul and paying attention to the emotional and spiritual dimensions of life. Self in Jungian psychology refers to the totality of psychic structures (Cranton, 2016, p. 40). The

importance on personal context, relationships and stage of life are also highlighted (Dirkx, 1998) as particularly significant elements in the extra-rational conception of transformative learning.

This holistic framework attempts to avoid what is seen as "limited learning", which only values the narrow processes of critical self-reflection (p. 40). However, rather than directly opposing Mezirow's cognitive-rational approach, this conception seeks to extend beyond it (p.39) and stresses the way of *mythos* over the way of *logos* (Dirkx, 1997). This process thereby allows for learning through symbols, images, stories and myths (Cranton, 2016, p. 40), and it has been acknowledged by Mezirow (2018) that more work is required in exploring this domain of learning. A possible risk that I perceive in this process lies in the degree to which extra-rational propositions could be irrational in nature. In other words, the way of mythos can be helpful in expanding our paradigms of values and beliefs, so long as it does not essentially contradict the way of logos. This conceptual framework therefore integrates both kinds of learning processes; however, it also incorporates the *test of truth* as a check against the coherence and correspondent qualities of any particular proposition.

3.4.3   *The social critique process*

In relation to transformative learning theory, Brookfield (2012) advocates a position from critical theory (or social critical theory), arguing that in order to avoid a problematic focus on Self, scholars need to direct attention on the need for adults to learn to challenge dominant ideology, uncover power, and contest hegemony. In reference to the work of Antonio Gramsci (1971) and Max Horkheimer (1982), Brookfield (2012, p. 138) denotes that critical theory concerns itself with the kinds of learning required to establish democratic socialism, dismantle capitalism, and build "a qualitatively new form of society that is organised around collective, cooperative and interdependent values".

Although Mezirow clearly had social change as a starting point for his thinking about adult learning (Rose, 2015, p. 43as cited in Hoggan (2016a),) it has been contended that he failed to appropriately address oppressive social dimensions (Collard & Law, 1989) or issues of power (Hart, 1990) that hinder rational discourse in the first place. Brookfield (2003, pp. 223-224) argues that social disequilibrium is present in all relationships, and therefore social action must be a primary focus in establishing the structural changes required for individual transformative learning processes to occur. In this vein, it has been stated that critical reflection, as espoused by Mezirow, without appropriate prior social action is ultimately "a self-indulgent form of speculation that makes no real difference to anything" (Brookfield, 2000, p. 143).

Unlike Mezirow's conception of transformative learning, which proposes the critique of all relevant assumptions and beliefs, critical pedagogy (the application of the concepts of social critical theory to education) has been criticised for not turning the lens of ideology critique upon itself (Mezirow, 2018). For this reason, Burbules and Burk (1999, p. 55) have stated that "critical pedagogy crosses a threshold between teaching critically, and indoctrinating". Because the goal of appropriate social action is shared with those advocates of the social critique perspective, this process is also integrated into this conceptual framework. However, the *test of truth* is also incorporated to ensure that all propositions are critically assessed, including those that are based upon the convictions of critical social theory.

The *test of truth* within the learning process also highlights the important place of the individual meta-cognitive process of *reassessing reasons* (Mezirow, 2018 emphases in original) within social environments such as universities that exist within and across the breaches of cultural change. With reference to Siegel (1988), Mezirow (2018) explains that even as traditions evolve and different forces impress themselves upon our own embodied

rationality, rationality itself remains the same: "judgement and action in accord with reason" (p. 119). Social action, he therefore argues, could be appropriately taken only when warranted through reason, thus saving education from becoming the rationalisation or handmaiden of a vested interest, giving it the mere appearance of cause (p. 120). This aligns with the axiological shift towards the Socratic ideals of learning.

In addition to the major conceptions of transformative learning described above, there are also a few additional approaches that contribute interesting elements for consideration.

3.4.4   *The neurobiological conception*

This perspective is advocated by Janik and Daniel (2005) and asserts that neurobiological transformation occurs during periods of search and discovery. From this perspective, learning is seen as a volitional, curiosity-based, discovery driven, mentor-assisted process that is most effective at higher cognitive levels (Janik & Daniel, 2005, p. 144). It is also suggested that transformative learning requires discomfort prior to discovery, is based on experiences, and is relevant to students need and interests (Taylor, 2017b). The learning process, it is argued, is also strengthened by emotive, sensory, kinaesthetic experiences, which may differ depending on gender (Taylor, 2017b). Although this perspective provides interesting insights into neurological and physical pathways of learning, it does not directly challenge any of the major conceptions described above.

3.4.5   *The cultural-spiritual conception*

This conception of transformative learning is concerned with the "connections between individuals and social structures…and the notions of intersecting positionalities (class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation)" (Tisdell, 2005, p. 256). In this view, learners construct knowledge (narratives) in ways that are culturally relevant and spiritually grounded (Taylor,

2017b). The goal of this approach is to foster an inquiry-based narrative transformation through engaging storytelling on a personal and social level.

This process ideally involves cross cultural and spiritual awareness, and the teacher is seen as a collaborator, with a relational emphasis on sharing stories of experience and revising new stories in the process (Taylor, 2017b). It is noted that Mezirow did acknowledge the importance of such positional factors, and he argues that reflection upon them was a central component of critical self-reflection and dialectical discourse (Mezirow, 2018). As with the neurological conception, this approach provides a focus on certain emphases; however, it does not challenge the fundamental concepts of the major views described earlier.

3.4.6   *The race-centric conception*

This perspective of transformative learning theory places people of African descent, mostly often Black women, at the centre, where they are the subjects of the transformative experience (Taylor, 2017b). Advocates for this view include Williams (2003), who proposed a non-Eurocentric orientation of learning that focuses on race as the predominant unit of analysis. Williams (2003) has a particular focus on socio-political dimensions of learning, and stresses the importance of traditional rites of passages and rituals that "nurture the consciousness of every member of society into a greater connection with the Self, the Community, and the Universe" (p. 463). Sheared (1994, p. 36) likewise highlights the need to engage with historical contexts and to promote inclusion, empowerment and learning as a means of gaining equity across cultures. Mezirow (2018) acknowledges criticism of his cognitive-rational view of transformative learning as being ahistorical and therefore inappropriately "decontextualised" (p. 119). He argues that these factors are indeed very important and should be carefully considered; however, they must be rationally assessed through critical thinking by one who is appropriately moved by reason (p. 119). The emphases on personal and historical context that this view proffers are therefore important; however, it

does not directly challenge any of the fundamental notions of major conceptions outlined above.

3.4.7   *The planetary conception*

This approach to transformative learning takes in the totality of life's contexts beyond the individual, and addresses fundamental issues in the field of education as whole (Taylor, 2017b). Advocates of this view include O'Sullivan (2003), who does not see transformative learning as an individual process, but rather as a personal process that is carried out in "integrally webbed totalities" (p. 355). Along with colleagues from the Transformative Learning Centre at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, O'Sullivan described their broad ecological understanding as such:

> Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; and our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race and gender; our body awareness, our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy (O'Sullivan, 2002, p. 11).

Evaluating this perspective, Newman (2014) made a pragmatic critique against the descriptive breath included in this the conception of learning. He argued that it is simply too much and that "no form of learning can do all that" (p. 350). Mezirow (2018) reviews it on a more theoretical level and states that this view moves even further beyond the political purposes of critical pedagogy, although it shares the same limitations. He argues that their assumptions and categories of transformative learning are uncritically subsumed into the

purpose of adult education and do not allow for the rationality involved with critical reflection on epistemic assumptions and of discourse relating to alternative perspectives (p. 122). Although this view does offer an interesting perspective on the integrated nature of learning, it has significant limitations as a theoretical conception and does not directly challenge the major conceptions as described above.

It is evident that clear tensions exist between the specific elements of the learning processes outlined above, yet there are also possibilities for integrating various theoretical conceptions in ways that are both compatible and even complementary. At least that is the claim of the following approach.

3.4.8   *Towards an integrated approach*

In recognition of the fragmentation of transformative learning theory into a wide range of perspectives, Cranton and Taylor (2012a) advocate for a more integrated, inclusive and unified theory. They argue that although there is rich complexity in various perspectives, there is also a tendency to think in dualisms such as individual or group, and rational or extra-rational processes (p. 3). This movement towards a more holistic and integrative perspective was described by Gunnlaugson (2008) as the "second wave" (p. 125) of theory development in the field of transformative learning.

To develop an evaluation of an integrated perspective on transformative learning based upon theoretical foundations in the literature, Stuckey et al. (2013) developed the 'transformative learning survey' (www.transformativelearningsurvey.com). This validated research tool encompassed the three major perspectives of transformative learning as described above and may be used to illuminate which "learning processes lead to which kinds of outcomes" (p. 225). They noted that this survey could easily be used in conjunction with or elaborated upon in a mixed-methods research design using interviews or storytelling (p. 225).

The explanatory design used in the research methodology of this project is based in part upon this recommendation.

Regarding the learning process, the transformative learning survey integrates the cognitive-rational, extra-rational and social-critique perspectives (the major conceptions in literature). Although the learning processes may vary according to context and personalities, this survey operates on the assumption that the learning outcomes are sufficiently similar to qualify as transformative – that is, the learner is "developing a more inclusive, discriminating, and permeable worldview" (Stuckey, 2013, p. 213). Such transformation can be seen in learners acting differently, having deeper self-awareness, having more open perspectives, and experiencing a shift in worldview (p. 217).

Although there are some positives to the integrated approach, namely a movement away from the problematic dualisms that were evident in the previous conceptions outlined above, there are still a range of issues that need to be overcome to establish a coherent theory of transformative learning for student leadership development. Hoggan (2016a, p. 58) states that the theory "is used to refer to almost any kind of learning outcome and therefore has strayed from its theoretical foundations". Howie and Bagnall (2013) go even further and claim that transformative learning has such "a telling array of inadequacies as a theory of learning, in spite of which it has been widely accepted and adopted: an apparent anomaly that is explicable through seeing the theory as a conceptual metaphor" (p. 832).

In different ways, both Hoggan (2016a) and Howie and Bagnall (2013) built upon the critique of Newman (2012) who argued so-called *transformative learning* is actually just *good learning*, with the terms overlapping to effectively mean the same thing (emphases in the original). In *Calling Transformative Learning Into Question: Some Mutinous Thoughts*, Newman (2012) highlights a range of issues in relation to the use, or rather over-use, of the term transformation and expresses concern with the supposed verification of the phenomenon

in research literature. For each case of student transformation cited, Newman argues that the experiences could be more appropriately understood through the nine aspects of what he describes simply as *good learning*: instrumental, communicative, affective, interpretive, essential, critical, political, passionate, and moral (p. 51). Upon review of Newman's claims, Cranton and Kasl (2012, p. 395) agree with him on various points and state that researchers often mistake mobilisation for transformation, as they "point to changed behaviour as evidence of transformation", when the issues of concern lies more in the way person's new behaviour relates to changes in their consciousness (habits of mind).

In a subsequent critique, Newman (2014) also describes Mezirow's conception of transformative learning as a kind of confessional experience, in which the learner is "encouraged to go in search of her or his false assumptions, and then go through the cathartic experience of owning up to them" (p. 348). This, Newman argues, is opposed to Freire's process of conscientisation, which has the more laudable focus of mobilising the dispossessed and poor in a struggle against oppressive forces (p. 348).

Although Newman's concern for the vulnerable is shared in the axiology of this conceptual framework, I contend that the purpose of higher education in a deliberative democracy necessitates the discipline of reflexivity as it seeks to develop citizen scholars. As each educator and student is uniquely biographically situated (Neumann & Neumann, 2017), every person has the important, although difficult task of examining through both inward and outward lenses (Neumann & Neumann, 2015). It is my contention that the rigour and power of scholarship, in many ways, is based upon the transparency of the learning or research process, where ideas can be critically evaluated in terms of its rational warrant and potential impact *before* it is embraced and put into action.

In addition to Newman's (2012) concerns with personal critical reflection as highlighted above, he also takes issue with some of Mezirow's (2009) conditions for dialectical discourse.

In particular, he decries the notion that participants require "openness to alternative points of view and empathy and concern about how others think and feel" (p. 20). Newman (2012, p. 44) counters that "there are detestable people who do not deserve my empathy, and who are quickly identified as enemies of principles such as equity". As was stated in the introduction to this thesis, we inhabit a culture that increasingly exhibits relational toxicity and includes discourses of conflict centred on disagreement over values, beliefs and ideologies (McGregor, 2004). Newman's comment here are a case in point, and thereby serves to underscore the importance of the principles of transformative learning in the first place. His insistence upon the deplorable nature of certain fellow citizens and his refusal to be open minded to their perspectives (however flawed they may be) is precisely part of the social problem that transformative learning theory is seeking to address. It is for these reasons that the value of an open mind, intellectual humility and respect for all citizens was explicitly included in the axiological foundations that undergird transformative learning for student leadership development.

Perhaps Newman's most impassioned critique of the transformative learning theory, what he calls the "most troubling flaw" (2012, p. 48), is the pseudo-religious tone found in some of the literature. He contends that because religious belief and spirituality are dependent upon faith (not reason), they have no place in education because they cannot be taught or learnt (p. 348). Although this a highly problematic caricature of religious belief and spirituality in education (see, for instance Grimmit, 1996; McLaughlin, 1997) he does raise a fair criticism in highlighting the problem with *a priori* assumptions included in statements like these:

> Given that the Life-force is everywhere and the process of meaning-making is happening all the time, people's spirituality is always present (though usually unacknowledged) in the learning environment. (Tisdell, 2003, p. 31)

The fundamental problem with Newman's argument on these matters, however, lies not in his high value for reason, but in his failure to apply the same critical standards to his own statements. Even within his rebuttal of the spiritual and religious assumptions contained within the work of some scholars, he relies extensively on the tenets of his existentialist philosophy (2014) and thereby fails to pass the test of his own critique. For instance, he states "Life is an accidental and exciting opportunity to make meaning and the aim of good education is to help both learners and teachers take full advantage of that opportunity" (p. 535).

In addition to the explicit incorporation of an *a priori* assumption regarding the random nature of existence which lacks inherent meaning, his political ideology also appears recurrently at the forefront of his educational philosophy. He states, for instance, that "action is a generative force for learning". This view is predicated on Freire's (1970) use of the Marxian term *praxis,* which describes the process of action-reflection as learners construct themselves within the social and material world. The political motif that underlies Newman's educational philosophy cannot be clearer, as he criticises transformative learning theorists for suggesting that action should rather be an outcome of learning and consequently relegated to the end phase of the process (p. 352). As was noted earlier, this type of political learning has the outcomes predetermined, as action precedes reflection. Indeed, as with his earlier contentions, it seems that Newman was reinforcing rather than undermining these specific components of transformative learning theory.

Despite these apparent shortcomings in Newman's critique of transformative learning, he does raise a range of valid concerns about the verification of learning outcomes, the contradictory and slippery nature of terms and the overall coherence of the theory. These challenges have found support and been expanded upon by numerous scholars, including Howie and Bagnall (2013) as cited above. Perhaps, though, as some scholars have concluded,

there is another way to approach transformative learning - not simply as *good learning*, nor merely as a *conceptual metaphor*, but as rather as an *analytic metatheory*. I now turn to this conception before suggesting a path forward in Section 3.5.

3.4.9   *Transformative learning as an analytic metatheory*

In recognition of the theoretical inadequacies and a lack of clarity in describing learning outcomes, Hoggan (2016b) proposes that transformative learning should not be considered as a specific learning theory, but instead as a metatheory, an "overarching paradigm relative to a particular phenomenon or range of phenomen[a]" (p. 63). Hoggan cites Wallace (1992) in describing two types of metatheories in the social sciences: *Synthetic metatheory*, which sorts underlying theories into categories*;* and *Analytic metatheory*, which seeks to provide categorisations of components that are common among all the underlying theories (p. 63).

If we approach transformative learning theory through the lens of a metatheory, the work of scholars such as Taylor (2017) and Cranton (2016) in sorting different conceptualisations of transformative learning into categories can be seen within the functioning of a synthetic metatheory. The focus in these approaches is on highlighting the different learning processes and outcomes that might occur when a person is undergoing personal transformation.

In an analysis of the major conceptions of transformative learning as described by Taylor (1998), Hoggan (2016b) suggests that although a synthetic metatheory can be "useful in organising and making sense of the literature" (p. 63), the various approaches actually describe "markedly different phenomen[a] in terms of learning outcomes and the processes that lead to them" (p. 62). This calls into question the validity of the learning outcomes that Stuckey and colleagues contended were sufficiently similar in their integrated approach (Stuckey et al., 2013). For this reason, only the learning process is included the evaluation of

the results of the Transformative Learning Survey, which was adapted in the research design of this study (see Section 4.4).

Based upon the significant variance in learning outcomes found in the literature, Hoggan suggests a greater degree of discrimination in how terms are used and contends that transformative learning should be referred to as an analytic metatheory that includes a broad range of similar phenomena (p. 63). Hoggan then proposes a method for establishing a common language or typology for learning outcomes that can be associated with the phenomenon of transformative learning (pp. 63–64). Based upon the range of learning outcomes portrayed in the research literature, Hoggan developed the following definition: "*Transformative learning* refers to processes that result in significant and irreversible changes in the way a person experiences, conceptualizes, and interacts with the world" (p. 71; emphasis in the original). These changes can affect a person in relation to their worldview, epistemology, ontology, self, behaviour and capacity (p. 70). Further, Hoggan suggests the criteria of depth, breath and relative stability (p. 78) as limiting factors that qualify learning experiences as transformative, rather than simply "good learning" (Newman, 2012, p. 36).

Together with the integrated paradigm of learning processes (Stuckey et al., 2013), the conceptualisation of transformative learning as an analytic metatheory (Hoggan, 2016a) as described above offers us valuable foundations on which to pursue further research towards the advancement of a coherent and integrated theory of transformative learning as it relates to student leadership development. This study specifically addresses this gap in knowledge by developing and testing a conceptual framework that addresses issues of construct validity (see Section 4.5.1.1) that have been repeatedly raised that literature (Hoggan, 2016a; Howie & Bagnall, 2013; Newman, 2012; Snyder, 2008; Taylor & Snyder, 2012).

3.5   Reconceptualising transformative learning theory

The following conceptual framework builds upon the literature review, the connection between the three fields of inquiry (see Chapter 2), and the critical assessment of the philosophical underpinning of transformative learning theory, along with its processes and outcomes (see Sections 3.2 and 3.4). A heuristic of deconstruction and reconstruction was developed to summarise and simplify what can be a complicated journey of transformation that may involve a wide range of interconnected learning processes and outcomes.

The benefit of using a heuristic to explain the overarching learning journey is that it provides a helpful mental model that can summarise otherwise complex experiences or concepts. The inherent risk, however, of creating a mental model is that is can result in cognitive biases that may lead to systematic errors (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). The research design of this project (see Chapter 4) explains how such risks are acknowledged and mitigated in this study. Further, it should be mentioned that various other scholars within transformative learning and related fields have used the terms *deconstruction* and/or *reconstruction* to depict certain components of the learning journey (Albertson, 2014; Avelino & Grin, 2017; Banks, 1995; Erichsen, 2011; Greene, 1971; Kucukaydin & Cranton, 2012; Payne, 2002). Although the terms are often used with specific reference to a particular theoretical framework (e.g. critical discursive psychology; Albertson, 2014) or epistemological paradigm (e.g. post-structuralism; Charteris, 2014) they can also describe an observed learning experience more generally (Greene, 1971).

For the purposes of describing an overarching student learning journey, I am using these terms in an integrated manner, which entails that learners may undergo deconstruction and reconstruction in a variety of ways. I am also using these terms in a metaphorical sense, which entails that the learning process resembles something akin to the experience of *breaking things down* and then *rebuilding them.* If transformative learning is conceived of as

"processes that result in significant and irreversible changes in the way a person experiences, conceptualizes, and interacts with the world" (Hoggan, 2016a, p. 71), then *deconstruction* and *reconstruction* describe the overarching journey that may involve a wide range of learning processes and outcomes. The application of the terms is in relation to the learning journey of *breaking down* and *rebuilding* of the "way that a person experiences, conceptualises and interacts with the world", however that may have occurred. In this regard, the focus of a transformative approach to student leadership development is to facilitate a learning journey of deconstruction and reconstruction.

Figure 4 (see p. 40) depicts the interconnected nature of transformative learning theory, the scholarship of engagement and student leadership development. This conceptual framework is based upon literature within the scholarship of engagement (see Section 2.2), with particular focus on the development of citizen scholars. A key attribute of citizen scholars is ethical leadership, and to this end, the conceptual framework incorporates relevant literature on moral approaches to student leadership development (see Section 2.3), with a particular focus on authentic servant leadership. Finally, in alignment with these focus areas, a reconceptualised approach transformative learning is included, with the specific focus of facilitating a learning journey of deconstruction and reconstruction.

I will now summarise the main features of a reconceptualised approach to transformative learning which was developed to support the implementation of ethically accountable and applicable methods of student leadership development using a transformative approach (See Chapter 1). Figure 5 below depicts these features with the yellow text indicating how the extant gaps in knowledge were addressed through original contributions to philosophical and theoretical components to transformative learning theory.

Figure 7: A reconceptualisation of transformative learning theory for student leadership development in Australian higher education
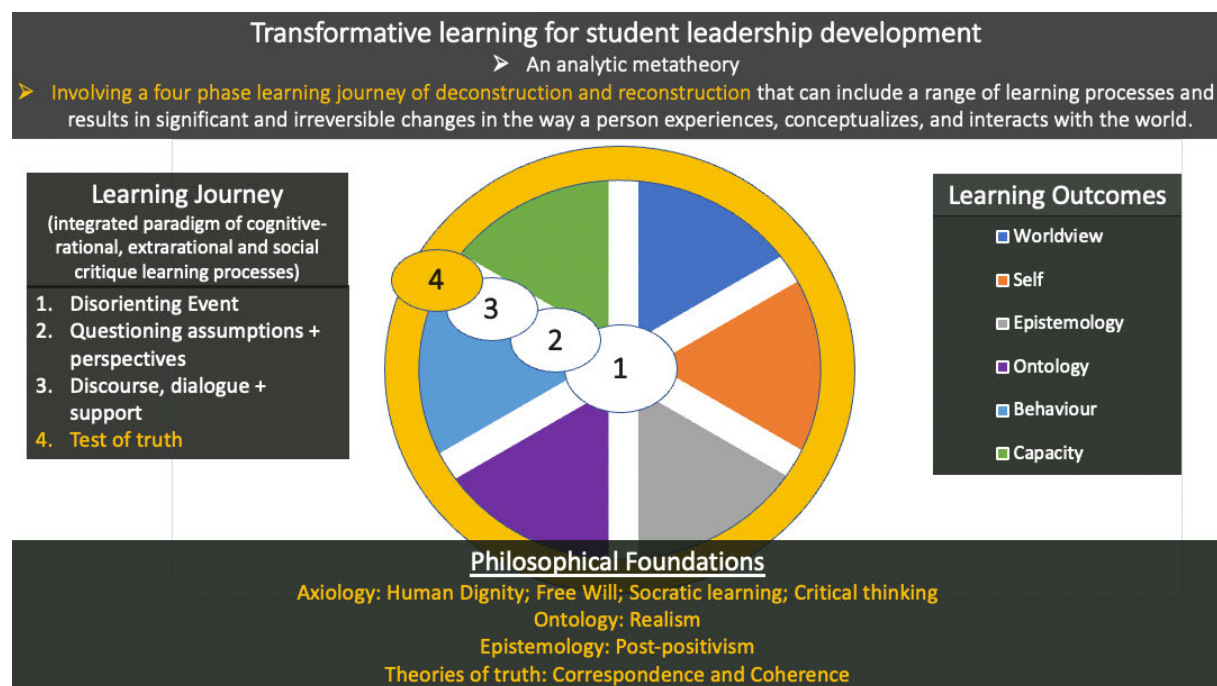
This above illustrated reconceptualisation of transformation learning is based upon a revised set of philosophical foundations. These were described in detail in Section 3.3 and are included in this framework as an attempt to resolve extant issues in the coherence of transformative learning theory, namely constructivism, humanism and critical social theory. They were also drafted in alignment with various fundamental principles of the scholarship of engagement and student leadership development. Finally, these philosophical foundations are designed to increase the applicability and accountability of student leadership development initiatives in the VUCA era in which we live.

The axiological foundation of this conceptual framework includes the following principles. First, a belief in the inherent dignity and related value of inclusion. Second, a belief in free will and creative agency that supports the value of discursive communication and the cultivation of personal reflexivity and autonomy. Third, a belief in the democratic benefits of Socratic approaches to learning, and the related value of openness and intellectual

humility. Fourth, a belief that critical thinking is a fundamental aim of education, and this informs the pedagogical value of rigorous dialogue and debate.

This conceptual framework rests upon a realist ontology, and post-positivist epistemology. Although there is an explicit shift from the relativist ontology of constructivism, this conceptual framework retains a constructivist dimension and assumes that knowledge can be understood only through particular frames of cognitive reference (Cohen et al., 2013). Using a pragmatic approach, this framework maintains that to some degree, reality can be both singular (these is an external reality) and multiple (people may view reality from different perspectives) (Creswell, 2007). A central feature of this framework is the inclusion of the *test of truth* in the learning journey. It is based on the premise that not all perspectives are equally warranted, and therefore new or revised beliefs need to be critically examined in regard to the epistemic qualities of both correspondence and coherence (theories of truth).

Regarding the theoretical dimensions of transformative learning, this conceptual framework builds the work of Stuckey and colleagues (2013) and adopts the integrated paradigm of learning processes that includes the cognitive-rational, extra-rational and social critique approaches. This experience can be described as a four-phase learning journey of deconstruction and reconstruction. In line with Hoggan's (2016b) conception of transformative learning as an analytic metatheory, these learning processes result in learning outcomes that can be defined as "significant and irreversible changes in the way a person experiences, conceptualizes, and interacts with the world" (p. 71).

Although the phases of learning in this conceptual framework are not strictly linear, and can recur as needed, the three phase model proposed by Cranton (2016) was also adopted. This approach simplifies the original ten phase model described by Mezirow (1991) and broadens it to include alternative perspectives, including the extra-rational and social-critique approaches mentioned above. The phases in the learning journey include; 1: Disorienting

event; 2: Questioning assumptions and perspectives; 3: Discourse, dialogue and support (Cranton, 2016, pp. 46-60); however, this conceptual framework makes a major adaption to this learning journey by including a fourth phase: *the test of truth*. This process involves an evaluation of both correspondent and coherent qualities (theories of truth) of new or revised beliefs. This phase is added to encourage the explicit testing of the warrants of beliefs as established through *instrumental* (evidential) and *communicative* (dialogical) reasoning (Habermas, 1981; Mezirow, 2018).

This conception of transformative learning suggests that learners should continually anticipate different perspectives, new corresponding evidence and more coherent explanations, and be ready to adjust their beliefs according to what is most warranted. Therefore, the four phases of transformative learning journey do not conclude at the *test of truth* definitively. Instead, the experiences of deconstruction and reconstruction recur as needed throughout a lifetime to develop ways of thinking that "are more likely to generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action" (Mezirow, 2018, p. 116).

The specific learning outcomes depicted in Figure 5 are based upon Hoggan's (2016b) review of the empirical studies within the field of transformative learning. Ultimately, though, the learning outcomes cannot be pre-determined (Mezirow, 1991) and will be dependent upon the learning context and various individual factors (Cranton & Hoggan, 2012). The role of the educator or facilitator is therefore to provide a safe environment and to bring the learning journey (including the *test of truth*) into awareness and help improve the learner's ability and inclination to engage in personal transformation (Mezirow, 2018, p. 118).

3.6   Chapter summary

With consideration to various issues pertaining to the VUCA era, the scholarship of engagement and student leadership development, this chapter critically assesses the philosophical and theoretical foundations of transformative learning theory and outlines a reconceptualised framework that focuses on the facilitation of a learning journey of deconstruction and reconstruction. In Section 3.2, the philosophical underpinning of constructivism, humanism and social critical theory were examined before a revised set of axiological, ontological and epistemological foundations were presented (see Section 3.3). This was followed by an evaluation of the various theorical conceptions of transformative learning found within the literature (see Section 3.4) before a reconceptualised approach was developed in Section 3.5. Building upon existing literature for the development of citizen scholars and authentic servant leaders, this approach to transformative learning was designed to support methods of student leadership development in higher education that are ethically accountable and applicable to the contemporary era. This conceptual framework will now be tested and expanded upon in the chapters that follow.

CHAPTER 4:   RESEARCH DESIGN

4.1   Chapter overview

The focus of this project is to address the gaps in knowledge that were highlighted in the literature review (see Chapter 2) and develop a framework for the conceptualisation and practice of a transformative approach to student leadership development in Australian higher education that is both applicable to the contemporary era and ethically accountable. Building upon literature in three interconnected fields of inquiry, the scholarship of engagement, student leadership development and transformative learning theory, this study evaluates the learning processes and outcomes of former student delegates at a national leadership education program (the National Student Leadership Forum [NSLF]). The research design was guided by the following Research Questions:

> Q1: Why, in retrospect, did some former student delegates perceive the NSLF experience as personally transformative?
>
> Q2: What did these students' learning processes and outcomes of the NSLF experience reveal about contemporary transformative learning?
>
> Q3: Regarding a context defined as VUCA, what are the implications of the findings to Q1 and Q2 for the conceptualisation and practice of the scholarship of engagement and student leadership development in Australian higher education?

This chapter begins with a description of the research paradigm (see Section 4.2.1), which subsequently informs the research methodology (see Section 4.2.2), and finally the research methods (see Section 4.2.3), which were adopted in the research design. These overarching components are then followed by detailed discussion about the research

participants, how access was gained (see Section 4.3), and the process of data analysis (see Section 4.4). Next, issues of trustworthiness (see Section 4.5), ethics (see Section 4.6), and the role of the researcher (see Section 4.7) are outlined before I conclude with the limitations of the study (see Section 4.8) and a summary of the chapter (see Section 4.9).

4.2 Research paradigm, methodology and methods

In alignment with the focus of the study and the philosophical foundations described in the conceptual framework, a pragmatist approach was chosen as the foundation for a mixed-methods retrospective case study using thematic analysis. These elements are now discussed in greater detail.

4.2.1 Research paradigm

For the purposes of this study, I am employing the paradigm of pragmatism, which seeks to establish the "best" approach for addressing a particular set of research questions (Creswell, 2007, pp. 43-44). In this approach, the Research Questions are of primary importance, more so than the philosophical worldview that may underlie certain methods employed (p. 44). For this reason, the research questions of this study were listed at the outset of this chapter, as they have guided the research design (Peel, 2020). A second feature of a pragmatist approach is that the decisions made about the use of quantitative and/or qualitative methods are also driven by the research questions in a manner that seeks to avoid the paradigm wars of positivism and interpretivism, and focuses instead on "what works" in order to address the specific focus of the study (Punch, 2009, p. 291).

This approach also aligns with the philosophical foundations outlined in the conceptual framework in the previous chapter (see Section 3.3.2). The research design rests upon a realist ontology that assumes an objective nature to reality and supposes that certain entities have an independent existence that is not dependent on individual cognition (Arrington, 1996; Burrel

& Morgan, 1979; Madill, 2008). However, this "single" reality is seen as compatible with the notion that to some extent, reality can also be "multiple", as people may perceive it in different ways (Creswell, 2007, p. 42). This stance informs a post-positivist epistemology, where the notion of objective or detached observer is rejected, and it is assumed that knowledge can be understood only through particular frames of cognitive reference (Cohen et al., 2013). In this view, the relationship between the researcher and notions of objective reality are tempered, and there can be no claims to "absolute truth" or "value-free inquiry" (Miller, 2000, p. 61).

The last point on the place of values in research is important to recognise, as it relates to the axiological foundations of this study. As was outlined in the conceptual framework (see Section 3.1.1), there are several personal beliefs and values relevant to this particular study. In aligngment with the pragmatist and mixed-methods approach of this design, I both acknowledged the potential biases that relate to my biographical situatedness (see Sections 1.6; 4.7; 7.4.1) and the role of my beliefs and values in theory building and testing, while also actively mitigating against possible issues that may arise from failing to keep a critical distance from the subject matter (Creswell, 2007).

4.2.2   Research methodology

This study employs the participant-selection variant of explanatory sequential design methodology as outlined by Creswell and Plano Clark (2007). This design was chosen for the following reasons. First, of the various mixed-methods approaches, this particular two-phase interactive (quantitative → qualitative) process is procedurally "straight forward" to implement and is suitable for a single researcher like myself, who did not have access to a research team for this project (p. 83). Second, this design is also flexible in that it allows for "emergent approaches" where the second (qualitative) phase can be adapted based on what

was learnt in the first (quantitative) phase (p. 72). This emergent feature was employed for this study, as the questions for the semi-structured interviews were adapted according to the survey data (see Section 4.4.1.1).

The participant-selection variant of explanatory sequential design was chosen because this methodology places priority on the second qualitative phase instead of the initial quantitative phase (p. 86), and thereby it most suited the research questions of the study. At the outset of the study, it was planned that participant selection for the second phase (semi-structured interviews) would be based on a diversity of student demographics and high quantitative scores from the surveys conducted in the first phase (see Section 4.4.1). The opportunity to discuss the survey results and the NSLF would was also extended to anyone who completed the survey. This component of the research design needed adapting, as it was difficult to recruit more than 20 eligible participants to complete the surveys based upon the purposive sampling technique that was employed (see Section 4.3). This meant that rather than being able to select candidates based on their quantitative results, the second phase included all the participants who completed the first phase and excluded none. Regardless of this adaption, the combination of the two phases yielded rich data for interpretation, so I do not believe the study was negatively impacted. Figure 6 below depicts this prototypical methodology.

Figure 8: Explanatory sequential design based on Creswell and Plano Clark (2007, p. 69)
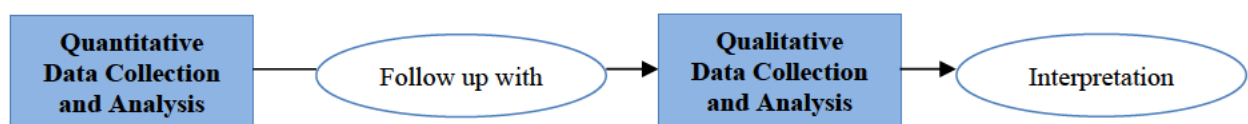
The research design employed a mixed-methods retrospective case study which was chosen in order to incorporate both quantitative and qualitative data in a complementary fashion (Howe, 1988). It is important to note that there is a pragmatic shift in epistemological emphases between the two phases of the study, with the first quantitative phase relying on post-positivist assumptions, while the second qualitative phase involves a constructivist dimension (Creswell, 2007). A case study was described by Yin (2009, p. 18) as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 18). Given the complex and personal nature of the research questions, a case study was chosen for this project because it was aptly suited to focus of the project and because it was a feasible approach to researching such a longstanding and influential event (see Section 4.3).

While there is a variety of approaches to conducting a case study, the goal is to obtain "as full an understanding" of a particular case as possible (Punch, 2009, p. 119). Of the various types of case studies available, a collective instrumental approach was chosen to address the limitation of generalisability (p. 121) (see Section 4.5.3). The "instrumental" (Stake, 1994, pp. 236-238) element of this case study refers to the fact that a particular event (the NSLF) was chosen in order to examine a specific phenomenon described as "transformative learning" along with its related concepts. The "collective" (pp. 236-238) element of this approach refers to the fact that the instrumental case (the NSLF) was extended to several instances to "learn more about the phenomenon, population or general condition" (Punch, 2009, p. 119). Hereby a small degree of representation may be achieved through the inclusion of participants at the same annual event across varied instances ranging between the years 1998 and 2018 (see Section 4.3).

Although the generalisation of findings was not the goal of this project, the broader applicability of the study is of particular importance. Therefore, the research design involved methods of analysis (see Section 4.4) that allowed for conceptualisation and the development of propositions that have potential to be applicable to other cases (p. 121). This method thus allowed for the suggestion of generalisability by "putting forward concepts or propositions for testing in further research" (p. 122). An additional value of this method related to the unique knowledge gained about student experience at the NSLF, particularly in relation to complex social behaviours that were relevant to educational research (p. 123). Yin (2009, p. 18) argues that a case study "benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis" (p. 18). In this manner, the research design was inextricably linked to the theory building of the conceptual framework, allowing theory testing through the various methods of data collection and analysis.

Quantitative data were acquired through the adaptation and use of Stuckey, Taylor and Cranton's Transformative Learning Survey (2013). The main purpose of using a survey was to elicit learner perceptions and provide indications of change that could be further explored though a semi-structured interview (Cranton & Hoggan, 2012). The reasons for using this pre-existent survey were multifold. First, it was a validated survey that was contiguous with the conceptual framework and the focus of this project, as it was designed to gain insight into learners' perceptions of personal change and obtain an indication of the types of learning processes that occurred. Second, it also included two open-ended questions that could be adapted, allowing students to describe their experience at the NSLF through qualitative means. Third, the creators of the survey recommend the use of the tool in a mixed-methods research design using interviews or storytelling (p. 225), which was well-suited to the research design of this study. Finally, I was able to obtain access to this survey at no financial cost by contacting one of the co-designers, Professor Edward Taylor from the Pennsylvania

State University in the United States. This connection proved to be hugely beneficial, as I was able to manage the adaption and administration of the tool with his support. The following images show the adaption of the survey for the purposes of this study. Figure 7 depicts how participants could select the NSLF group from a drop-down menu, while Figure 8 shows how the open-ended questions were written in alignment with the research questions and the conceptual framework and seek to gain insight into the student's learning processes (Question 1) and learning outcomes (Question 2).

Figure 9: Screenshot of the NSLF Leadership Forum group on the transformative learning survey hosted by Penn State University.

Figure 10: Screenshot of the two open-ended survey questions adapted for the purposes of the study

After administering the survey (see Section 4.4), qualitative data were acquired through semi-structured interviews with the same participants in order to explore more thoroughly the learners' experience and developmental progression over time, as well as the nature of the learning processes and outcomes (Drago-Severson, 2004). An advantage of using the semi-structured interview technique was that it allowed me to prepare questions in advance that related explicitly to the research questions of the study, while also allowing me to change direction or ask probing questions. The following example is from my interview with Setareki (note all names in this thesis are pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality), when I asked a follow up question: "you said that the sacred and secular divisions aren't as important anymore. Can you explain that a little bit more for me?" Note all names is this thesis are pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. The participants were given the option to choose their own pseudonym, and some of them did so, whilst others left it to me to decide on a name randomly afterwards.

Figure 12: Typology of learning process as listed by (Stuckey et al., 2013, p. 217)

Figure 11: Typology of learning outcomes as listed by Hoggan (2016b, p. 70)

Processes

- Cognitive/rational
  - ○ Critical reflection
  - ○ Action
  - ○ Experience
  - ○ Disorienting dilemma
  - ○ Discourse
- Beyond rational/extrarational
  - ○ Arts based
  - ○ Dialogue
  - ○ Emotional
  - ○ Imaginal
  - ○ Spiritual
  - ○ Soul work
- Social critique
  - ○ Ideology critique
  - ○ Unveiling oppression
  - ○ Empowerment
  - ○ Social action

Themes	Codes
Worldview	
	Assumptions, Beliefs, Values, Expectations
	Ways of interpreting experience
	More comprehensive or complex Worldview
	New awareness/New understandings
Self	
	Self-in-relation to others/World
	Identity/View of Self
	Empowerment/Responsibility
	Self-knowledge
	Personal narrative
	Meaning/purpose
	Personality
Epistemology	
	More discriminating
	Utilising extra-rational ways of Knowing
	More open
	Shift in thoughts and ways of thinking
	Autonomous
	More complex thinking
Ontology	
	Affective experience of life
	Ways of being
	Attributes
Behaviour	
	Actions consistent with new perspective
	Social action
	Behavior
	Professional practices
	Skills
Capacity	
	Cognitive development
	Consciousness
	Spiritually

A key component of the semi-structured interviews was the use of narrative as a means for learners to make sense of themselves and their experience through articulating their story (Cranton & Hoggan, 2012). A thematic analysis (see Section 4.4) was subsequently completed and evaluated against the typology of transformative learning processes depicted in the survey (Stuckey et al., 2013) (see Figure 9) and outcomes as depicted by Hoggan (2016b) (see Figure 10) above.

These data were then used to inform analysis for Research Question 1 by revealing why participants found the experience personally transformative (see Chapter 5), and for Research Question 2 by indicating the extent to which the learner's experience did or did not relate to the transformative learning processes and outcomes as described in the study's conceptual framework (see Chapter 6). Finally, a document analysis was conducted with relevant material provided by the NSLF board (see Appendix A, B and C). In combination with the quantitative data and qualitative data, this provided additional insight relevant to Research Question 3, which explored the implications of the findings to the student leadership development in Australian higher education (see Chapter 7).

4.3   Research participants and gaining access

Using non-probability purposive sampling (Punch, 2009), participants were chosen based on their own perception of the NSLF experience as personally transformative. The rationale for using non-probability purposive sampling was that the data were not necessarily intended to be representative of a population, but rather to provide a "maximal chance" (Punch, 2009, p. 252) at gaining insight into a specific kind of experience – namely, the transformative experience of former student delegates at the NSLF. In alignment with the conceptual framework that presented transformative learning as an analytic metatheory, the students were presented with a definition of a transformative learning as a process that resulted in "significant and irreversible

changes in the way a person experiences, conceptualizes, and interacts with the world"
(Hoggan, 2016a, p. 71). To this end, 20 former participants from a broad range of demographics
were sought across 20 years (1998-2018) of annual NSLF events in Canberra, Australia. These
numbers were chosen in order to strike a balance between the need for multiple and diverse
sources of information across the relevant years in focus and still maintaining a practical
feasibility in terms of resource management.

Access to research participants was contingent on support from the NSLF board, who
were pleased to assist the study through three phases, as arranged via email and phone
conversations. In the first phase, a member of the board (Jock Cameron) emailed an invitation
to participate in the study to the full database of former student delegates (see Appendix D).
This email was written by me as the principal researcher; however, Cameron also added his
own personal note of encouragement. A limitation of this approach was that many of the former
delegates no longer used the student email addresses that were listed on the database.
Regardless, the email to the full database was sent on 21 May 2021. The second phase included
a reminder email that was also sent to the entire database. This occurred six weeks later, on 5
July 2021. Also on this date, the board, through Jock Cameron, provided me with a shortlist of
300 former delegates who might be interested in participating and most of these included
updated email addresses. This list represented students from each of the 20 annual events and
could be utilised to contact former delegates (Phase 3) if I did not gain 20 participants through
Phases 1 and 2.

The email messages sent to the former delegates provided a rationale for the study (see
Appendix D), along with an attached participant information sheet (PiS) (see Appendix E).
The email invited the recipients to complete the survey if they regarded their NSLF
experience as personally transformative as per the definition provided. It also explained that a
further interview may be sought and arranged via an online platform at a suitable time for the

participant. Through a combination of the above phases, I was able to recruit 20 participants who were eligible based on the initial selection criteria and who completed both the survey and the semi-structured interview components of the research. The participants included 11 men and 9 women from a wide range of backgrounds, ethnicities, and worldviews.

4.4 Data Analysis

The data analysis phase of this project was based on the interactive model (see Figure 11 below) proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994), who advocated that once the data have been collected, the researcher commences three concurrent and interacting activities (Punch, 2009). This section is in accordance with the key components of this model: Data Collection (see Section 4.4.1); Data Reduction (see Section 4.4.2); Data Display (see Section 4.4.3); and Drawing and Verifying Conclusions (see Section 4.4.4). In alignment with the theory building and theory testing components of this study, the data analysis involved "a series of alternating inductive and deductive steps" that involved drawing and verifying conclusions in the form of propositions (p. 175). The scope of analysis was intentionally narrowed in relation to the three Research Questions, and these questions are addressed in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 respectively.

Figure 15: Components of Data Analysis: Interactive Model (Source: Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 12, as depicted in Punch, 2009, p. 174)
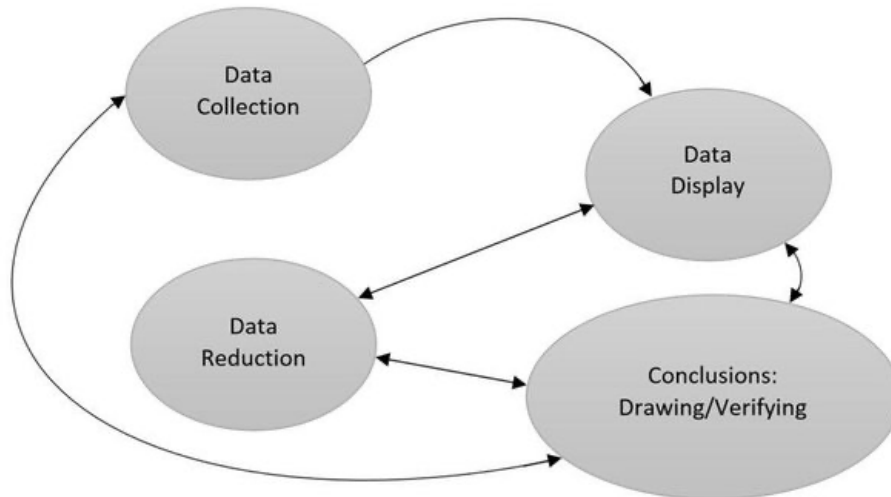
4.4.1   Data collection

The data for the project were collected, stored, and organised in a systematic manner as explained below. The student learning processes were captured using a mixed-methods approach of both quantitative data and qualitative data, and this was obtained through the use of a validated transformative learning survey (Stuckey et al., 2013) and a semi-structured interview. In my capacity as the interviewer, the use of survey data, open ended question, and accurate recording of the interviews all contribute to the quality of the qualitative data collected (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007)Twenty former student delegates participated in the study, and the data were collated, reduced and displayed in Microsoft Excel. This program was also used to facilitate the method of thematic analysis, as the data were organised according to a pre-specified coding schema of learning processes and outcomes (see Section 4.4.5). The use of memoing was also beneficial in developing codes in themes response to emerging themes.

Upon completion of the survey, the non-identified data from each of the 20 participants
were exported from the survey tool and emailed to me in a Microsoft Excel file (see Figures
12 and 13 below) by the Principal Investigator of the Transformative Learning project at the
Pennsylvania State University, Professor Edward Taylor. In alignment with the explanatory
sequential design of the project, the participants also emailed me their personal survey results
in PDF format prior to the semi-structured interviews (see Figure 13 below). These personal
results were made available to the participants via the online survey tool (see Appendix F for
full example).

Figure 16: Microsoft Excel file containing Quantitative data for learning processes exported
from the transformative learning survey

Figure 17: Example of PDF file containing personal participant survey results generated by the transformative learning survey online tool
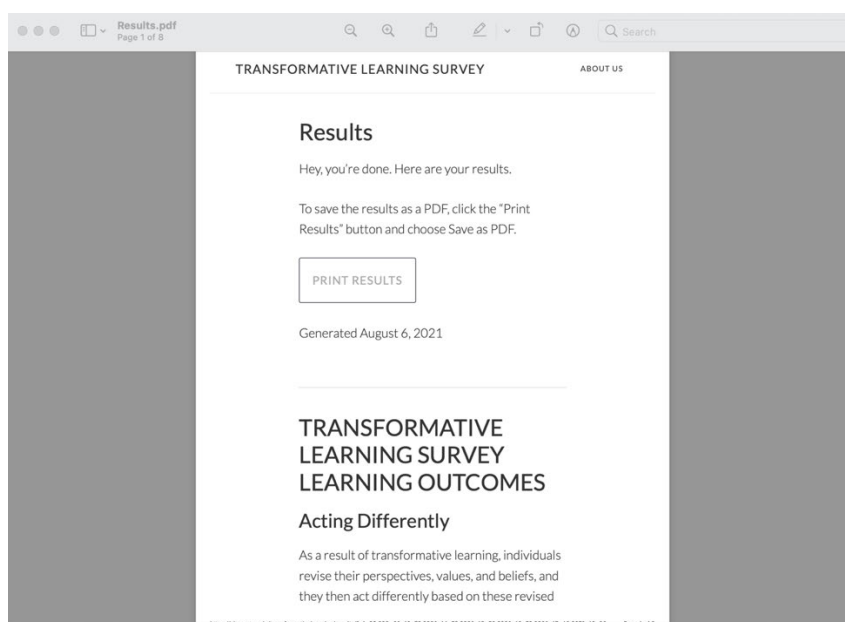
In alignment with the explanatory design of this study, the quantitative data were obtained as the first phase in a two phased mixed-methods sequence (discussed in Section 4.2.2). Each participant received a quantitative score for each particular learning processes according to the schema adopted for this study (Stuckey et al., 2013). The survey scores are indicated on scale of 0 as a minimum to 100 as a maximum. These figures indicate the degree to which participants relate their experience to these particular learning processes at the NSLF (e.g., cognitive-rational, extra-rational or social critique) (Stuckey et al., 2013).

These data allowed for a more targeted in-depth investigation in the semi-structured interview (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007, p. 72). The following extracts illustrate how this occurred, with the first example coming from the interview with Harry:

> *Rian: I noticed in your survey, you had a big score for discourse and just dialogue*
> *and you were right up there on that score… you sound like a lot of your learning*
> *happened - just in discussion - connecting with other people…*

Harry: Yeah, I mean, I don't think it's like a recipe or a rule book for it. I think it's like, aaah, like it wasn't the same process for each one

The following extract is from the interview with Lachy, and it similarly demonstrates the way in which the quantitative data informed the questions.

Rian: *I notice in your survey, you had quite a large section there for… "against oppression", where this was clearly a meaningful experience for you, an impactful element here of the idea of oppression and I wonder… what did it look like, for you, then, to reflect on this idea of oppression and forgiveness?*

Lachy: *Probably the personal reflections were more impactful parts of that experience, I mean listening to that talk and then thinking about what it meant to forgive…*

This final example is from the interview with Bobby, and it depicts how various quantitative indicators were explored in relation to each other.

Rian: I did notice that in your survey you had a 100 percent for shifting sort of worldview and sort of like some of those really the cognitive elements. But then you had a really sort of like a low area for those beyond rational bits like Arts based or like poetry, but a really high one in that emotional category, too. And I was struck by that, I thought, oh, wow, she's got a really strong emotional impact and a really strong cognitive worldview type impact here. And I was really keen to hear how those two are related to each other?

Bobby: OK, yeah, it was. I saw the importance of carrying, letting my emotions run in real time with fact-based world events and life events in my world.

Most of the qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews, although a small component was also collected via the open-ended survey questions (see Figure 14 below) that were obtained as part of the exported survey files.

Figure 18: Microsoft Excel file containing qualitative data from the open-ended questions exported from the transformative learning survey

The semi-structured interviews were conducted using the online video-conferencing platform Zoom, using a secure university account. The semi-structured interviews were structured to foreground the student experience and learning journey and to focus on issues relating to the three Research Questions and propositions contained in the conceptual framework (see Appendix I). The video recordings of these interviews were stored via Panopto, a secure video platform administered by UniSQ. The automated captions of these interviews, along with a back-up copy of the recordings, the survey data, and participants' consent forms were organised in individual folders stored behind a password-protected computer and backed up on the UniSQ administered cloud-based system 'OneDrive'. This system is secured through two-factor authentication; however, as a further point of security, the data were also backed-up on two separate and dedicated hard drives.

As noted above, the Panopto software in which the interview videos were stored includes an automated caption function. For each interview, this file was downloaded and converted into a Word document (see Figure 15). The quality of the automated captioning was inconsistent, and manual transcription was still required to correct mistakes. A selection of a corrected interview transcripts is included in Appendix G. The completed interview transcriptions were emailed to the respective participants, and they were given an opportunity to review and suggest changes. Only one participant made a small number of grammatical changes. These files were organised in folders dedicated to each participant and saved in the secure manner discussed above.

Figure 19: Example of a downloaded (not yet corrected) Panopto caption file converted to a Microsoft Word document.
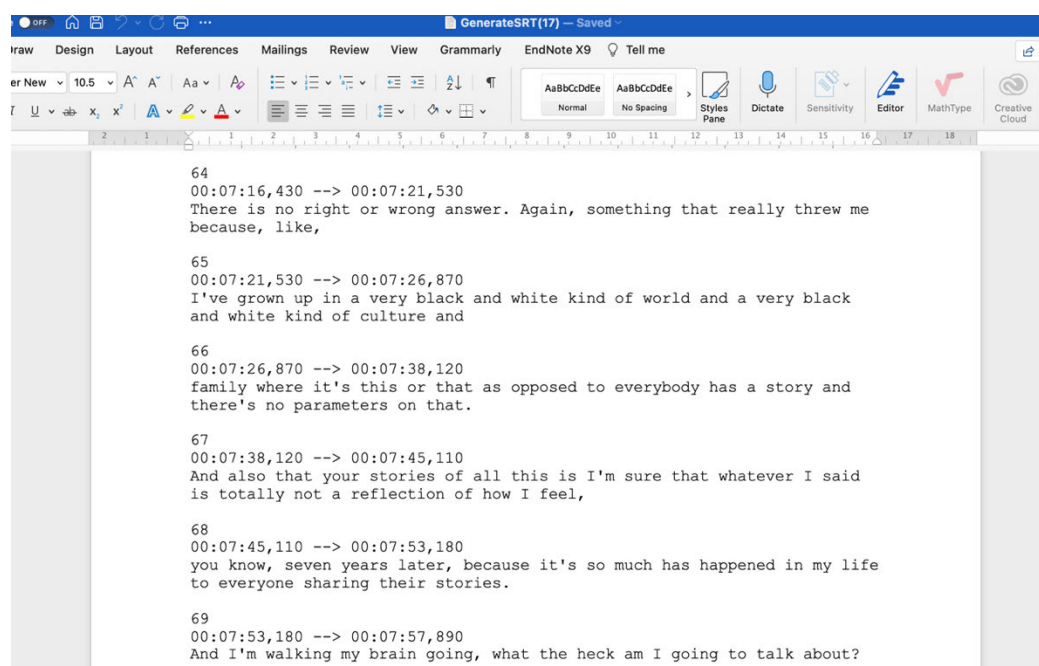
4.4.2   Data reduction

Data were continually being reduced through the interactive process of analysis. At first, it occurred as the data were segmented and organised (Punch, 2009), then the data were reduced as part of the process of coding and memoing as pertinent themes arose (p. 174). Finally, as the key concepts and propositions of the study were refined, the relevant data were organised around critical information while maintaining the original context (i.e., the personal narrative) (p. 174). Therefore, although conceptual data reduction is logically prior to data display and the drawing and verification of conclusions, in practice, this step often occurred in a concurrent and interactive manner. Microsoft Excel spreadsheets proved to be a good tool for this, as editing was simple, and each draft could be saved for record keeping and to regain access at a later date.

4.4.3   Data display

In order to organise, compress and assemble (Punch, 2009) the data in a visual and flexible manner, I created a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet capable of displaying pertinent quantitative and qualitative data for each of the 20 participants in separated tabs (see Figure 16 below). Microsoft Excel also facilitated an iterative display of data (p. 175), allowing me to edit and colour code the data continually as I reduced those data (See Section 4.4.2) and to trial and refine it as part of the thematic analysis process (see Section 4.4.5).

Figure 20: Example of visual data display in Excel for individual participants
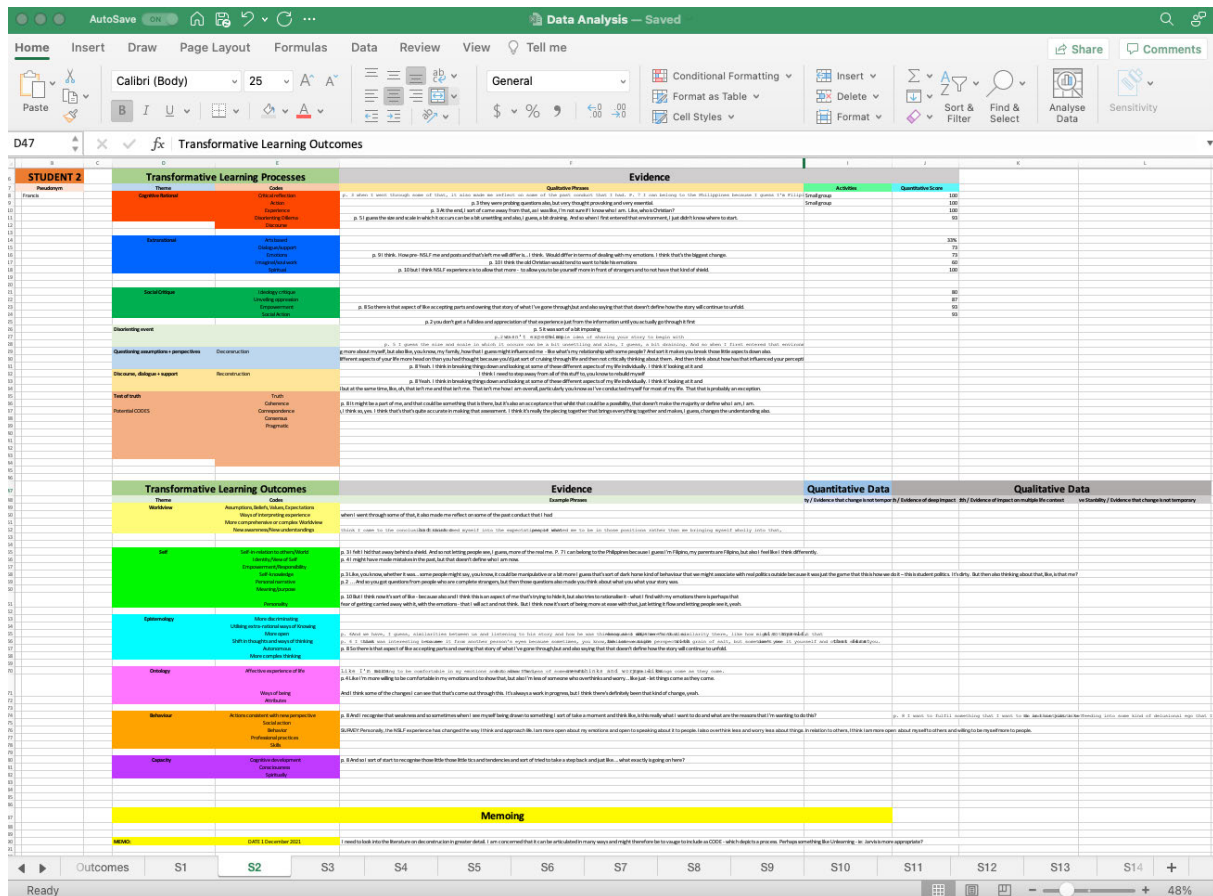
Visualising the data was helpful in two ways. The first was that it allowed me to view
the quantitative scores and compare these markers against qualitative evidence gathered for
each of the participants (see Figure 16 above).

Figure 21: Collated and tabulated quantitative data exported from transformative learning survey

Second, when all the participant quantitative data for learning processes were collated and tabulated (see Figure 17 above) it enabled the generation of line charts (see Figures 18, 19 and 20 below) for further visualisation of trends across the NSLF group as a whole. Visualising the data in this way helped to clarify which learning processes were consistently higher or lower than others for students at this event. It also helped to demonstrate the wide variety of learning processes in which participants were engaged, giving strong support to the integrated paradigm of learning processes that were adopted in the conceptual framework of this thesis (see Section 3.5). This is further discussed in Section 6.4.1 Testing the conceptual framework.

Figure 22: Line chart of participant scores of cognitive-rational learning processes
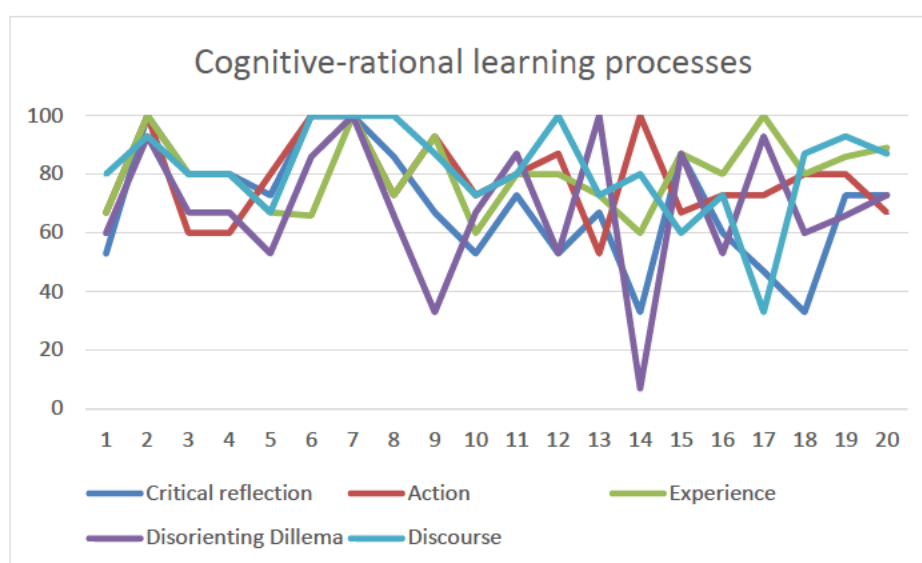
Figure 23: Line chart of participant scores of extra-rational learning processes
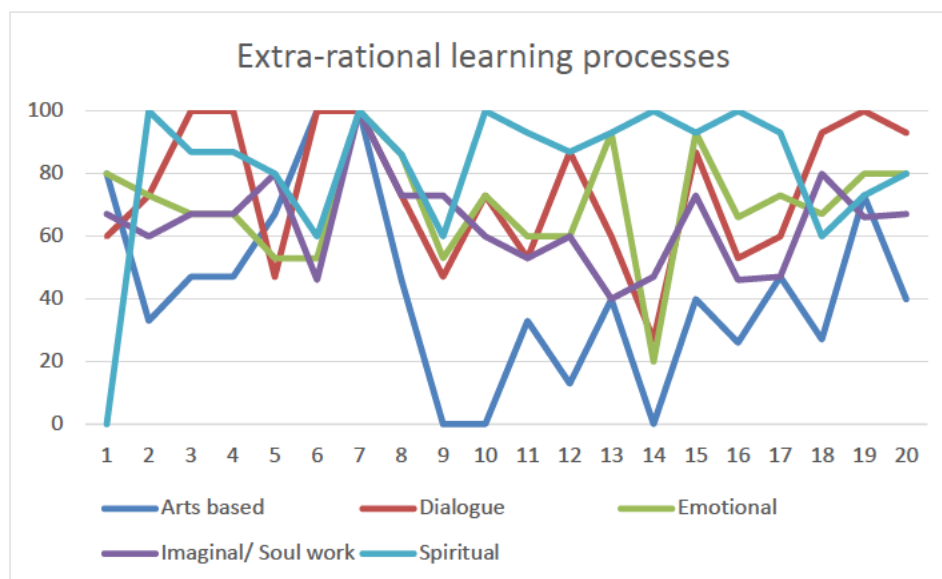
Figure 24: Line chart of participant scores of social critique learning processes
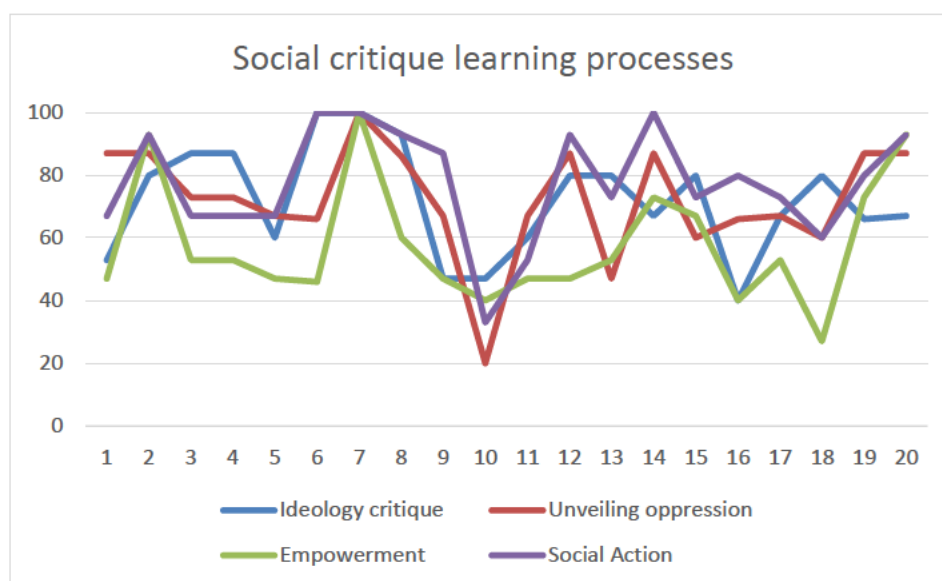
4.4.4   Drawing and verifying conclusions

The process of drawing and verifying collusions is logically the final step in the analysis

process, although it may also occur concurrently and interactively with data reduction and

display (Punch, 2009). The coding and memoing activities were central to the method of thematic analysis (discussed below) and the process of drawing (involving inductive and abductive reasoning) and verifying (involving deductive reasoning) of conclusions. The scope of thematic analysis was intentionally narrowed in relation to the three research questions, which were designed to build upon each other, and thereby sequentially inform the analysis process (Peel, 2020). The three research questions outlined at the outset of the chapter are addressed through thematic analysis in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 respectively.

4.4.5 *Thematic analysis*

In alignment with the primary focus on the qualitative phase of the sequential explanatory design, the method of thematic analysis was chosen because it as a widely used the approach in educational research to classify data into units of analysis (Duran et al., 2006; Peel, 2020). Braun and Clarke (2006) describe thematic analysis as a "flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide rich and detailed, yet complex account of data" (p. 5). A critical component of the researcher's role in thematic analysis is therefore to foreground the participants' experience and to create "rich descriptions that emanate from the data extracts, using the participants own words to support their interpretations" (Peel, 2020, p. 4). The activities of coding and memoing were critical to the employment of this method.

4.4.5.1 *Coding*

According to Clarke and Braun (2017), codes are unpinned by a central organising concept and act like building blocks for identifying patterns of meaning in the data. In the early stages of the analysis these codes, which are effectively names, tags or labels, were "descriptive" in nature - with "little or no inference beyond the piece of data itself" (Punch, 2009, p. 176). As patterns began to emerge and I became more familiar with the data, the codes became more "inferential" in nature, as they became representative of my

interpretation of the data. In alignment with the conceptual framework, I began with a prespecified coding schema (Punch, 2009) based on the processes of transformative learning as depicted by Stuckey and colleagues (2013) and matched words, phrases or even larger segments of qualitative data to corresponding themes and subcodes. Figure 21 below illustrates how this was achieved.

Figure 25: Qualitative phrases were matched with prespecified coding schema for learning processes learning outcomes based upon the work of Stuckey and Colleagues (2013).

Codes were also developed to test the ideas of the conceptual framework. Figure 22 below demonstrates how the theme The *test of truth,* along with its subcodes such as *correspondence* and *coherence* were included in the learning phases in order to be tested against the data.

Figure 26: Example of codes corresponding to the conceptual framework being tested against the data

Similarly, I also started the analysis of transformative learning outcomes by utilising a pre-existing schema described by Hoggan (2016b). As patterns became evident throughout the iterative process of reducing and refining the data, the schema was adjusted accordingly (see Figure 23 below). An example of a new code that was developed inductively as part of

this process was *healing* (see Section 6.4), which was categorised under the pre-existing

learning outcome theme *Self*.

Figure 27: Initial coding schema for learning outcomes based on the work of Hoggan (2016b)

In addition to the above-described adaption to an existing coding schema, I also

developed entirely new themes and subcodes as part of the analysis of the student

experience. The first was *Environmental Factors* with the subcodes *physical setting* and

cultural setting. The second was *Personal Factors* with the subcodes *desire* and *courage*

(see Section 5.1).

4.4.5.2   Memoing

A second activity that was critical to the thematic analysis was memoing. Throughout

the various stages of coding, I documented my reflections and ideas in the form of memos

(Punch, 2009). For instance, while matching the qualitative data to existing codes, I made the

following observation about a component of the learning process that I had temporarily coded

as *deconstruction:*

Personal memo regarding participant 11 (12/02/22): *A big part of George's learning experience was the intense emotions of sharing his story. The powerful part of this however came as he realised his own story was not completely unique. This was a revelation to him - almost like an exposure to a new reality and truth which would guide him. Everyone has issues, not just him. Everyone has a messy story. This is a fact - and therefore his feelings about himself needed to alter accordingly. He could be more confident and doesn't need to have such a low view of himself.*

This memo also demonstrates an important part of the analysis process, which was a shift from purely descriptive content to conceptual or inferential content (Punch, 2009). This step is a critical component of induction, for it helps to "move the analysis towards developing propositions" (p. 180). Analogical abduction is a slightly different form of reasoning that is advocated by Mezirow (2003) as fundamental to the communicative learning that undergirds transformative learning theory. In the context of my semi-structured interviews, analogical abductive reasoning is about making tentative best judgements or inferences based upon an assessment of the available information (p. 59). Memoing facilitated "reasoning from concrete instances to abstract conceptualization" (p. 59).

A second example of how memoing was central to the thematic analysis can be seen in my personal reflections on the interview data. The following two memos relate to the *test of truth* (which I had incorporated into my conceptual framework) and depicts the deductive steps involved in the analysis process (Punch, 2009). This corresponded to Mezirow's (2003, p. 59) instrumental learning (which is hypothetical-deductive) and centres around "assessing truth claims – that something is as it is purported to be" (p. 59).

Personal memo regarding participant 5 (13/11/21): *He seems to be using a pragmatist approach to truth – it's true or good because it WORKS. Not what I expected. But very interesting.*

Personal memo regarding participant 7 (27/11/21): *He seems to be using a consensus approach to truth - checking with others and because everyone agrees - it must be true...Unexpected, but very interesting. He also has elements of Correspondence though.*

An important part of thematic analysis was creating tables that depicted how certain codes emerged from the data with example words, phrases or sentences presented so that "the connotations associated with the codes were made clear" (Peel, 2020, p. 9) (see Sections 5.1, 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4). Figure 24 below provides an example of how these connotations were explicitly listed as part of the process of drawing and verifying conclusions.

Figure 28 Screenshot of Table 1 which lists relevant themes, subcodes and associated words, phrases and sentences

Theme	Codes	Example words/phrases/sentences
Transformative Journey	Deconstruction	"break down", "unpack", "unlearn", "explore", "understand", "awareness", "realisation", "recognise", "take a step back", "take some time", "reflect", "journey of trying to deconstruct self and really find authenticity and genuineness", "Lies", "façades", "empty air", "mystery", "veil had been lifted", "seeing for the first time", "woke up", "naïve to the fact", "narrow-minded"
	Reconstruction	"rebuild", "rediscover", "relearn", "find", "truth", "authenticity", "genuineness", "deal", "own", sharpen up", "clarity", "make a choice", "changed my perspective", "grow", comprehend", "a better way", "shed the baggage", "cemented"

4.4.5.3   Representing the findings

The final component of the thematic analysis was developing propositions and representing the interpretations that were formed by the data and informed by the literature in a contextualised manner (Peel, 2020). This included three chapters (see Chapters 5, 6 and 7) that specifically addressed each research question and provided interview extracts, tables and figures to support the propositions made. Finally, the data analysis was extended as the implication of the findings were applied to the focus of study and to possibilities of further research.

4.5   Trustworthiness

As the method of case study is a form of empirical social research, it is critical that the quality of the research design is explicated in alignment with philosophical assumptions and logical tests and that relevant research tactics are implemented (Peel, 2020; Yin, 2009). This study employed four specific tests that are common among many social science methods, including construct validity; internal validity; external validity; and reliability (p. 40).

4.5.1   Construct validity

Construct validity refers to the identification of "correct operational measures for the concepts being discussed" (Yin, 2009, p. 40). Yin (2009) argues that there have been general objections to the method of case studies because of subjective judgements that may be used in data collection. Specifically, the objection of construct validity has been raised about case studies of transformative learning (Newman, 2012). This criticism is often based on the contention that vague concepts have been used to explain data (Hoggan, 2016a; Snyder, 2008). In this manner, the use of slippery terms like "transformative learning" can lead to research that is "self-referential and recursive" (Howie & Bagnall, 2013, p. 826).

In order to meet the test of construct validity (Yin, 2009), the following steps were employed in developing the research design. The research questions and methods used were chosen against clearly defined concepts and operational measures to obtain multiple sources of evidence and establish convergent lines of inquiry. These elements were then clearly reported for peer review (through discussion with the three supervisors) in a transparent chain of evidence (developing documentation) (Yin, 2009).

The concepts adopted for this study were informed by a literature review of transformative learning, with the specific vernacular of learning processes (Stuckey et al., 2013) and outcomes (Hoggan, 2016b) of transformative learning being employed. The operational measures that matched this pre-specified typology of concepts were also carefully defined. Importantly, these were also based on a review of relevant literature and included two additional parameters of measurement regarding learning outcomes: *significance* and *irreversibility* (p. 77). Critically, these two measures served to delimit the phenomenon of transformative learning by employing an explicit criterion to measure the extent of the learning experience regarding *depth*, *breadth* and *relative stability* (p. 78).

The operational measures advocated by Hoggan (2016b) were useful for informing both data collection and thematic analysis. For instance, the words "significant and irreversible" were incorporated in the definition of transformative learning that was emailed to the students (see Appendix D). Using purposive sampling, students were then invited to complete the survey only if they perceived their experience in such terms. The related criteria of depth, breadth and relative stability also informed the questions in the semi-structured interviews and the subsequent data analysis. The evaluation of "depth", for instance, related to evidence of significant impact, while "breadth" related to evidence of impact across multiple life contexts (p. 78). Finally, irreversibility was measured by evidence of "relative stability" as indicated by change that was not temporary but permanent in nature (p. 78). The interviews

in particular provided a good opportunity to explore these elements of the learner experience in greater detail, and by incorporating the evaluation criteria in the data analysis spreadsheet, the process gained a further check and balance for the evaluation of learning outcomes (see Figure 25 below).

Figure 29: Evaluation criteria integrated into the data analysis spreadsheet

4.5.2   *Internal validity*

Internal validity is particularly important for an explanatory design study such as this one, because it involves testing causal relationships and the legitimacy of inferences made (Yin, 2009). For instance, if an investigator attempts "to explain how and why event x led to event y", then the design logic must be structured in such a manner to neutralise the threat of "some third factor – z -", obscuring the causal relationship and resulting in false conclusions (p. 42). This issue can be compounded by the researcher's limited knowledge regarding the original events and their broader contexts, whether personal or environmental. For example, although the study may include interviews and documentary evidence, is the researcher aware of or have they carefully considered "rival possibilities" (p. 43)?

To meet the test of internal validity (Yin, 2009), these issues were anticipated in the research design. Firstly, rival explanations were addressed both in the conceptual framework

(see Chapter 4) and in the findings chapters (see Chapters 5, 6 and 7). Secondly, through the methods of coding and memoing (described in Sections 4.4.5.1 and 4.4.5.2), the tactic of "pattern matching" (p. 136) was employed to compare empirically-derived patterns with predicted ones. The convergence or divergence of data was then explored in an iterative process of "explanation-building" (p. 144) in which theory testing and theory building occurred and arguments against the plausibility of rival explanations were developed. Finally, problems with internal validity were mitigated by the fact that the entire chain of evidence and the process of data collection and analysis were transparent and available to inspection by experienced third parties (the three supervisors) (p. 144).

4.5.3   *External validity*

Issues pertaining to the generalisability of the project findings beyond the immediate context of the case study have long been a barrier to establishing external validity (Yin, 2009). The main concern is whether findings in a specific context may or may not relate to other contexts. These issues were briefly discussed in Section 4.2.3; however, because of the concern for broader applicability of the study, it is worth expanding on a few points here. It has been suggested that single case research designs (SCRDs), with particular concern for those that focus on transformative learning, require replications in order to establish generalisability (Roessger et al., 2017). Replication logic holds that external validity can be defended and that a case can be made for a general phenomenon when a study and its theoretical framework are repeated a number of times and when its findings are sufficiently replicated (Yin, 2009).

To address the test of external validity, a specific approach to research design was adopted (Yin, 2009). I chose a collective instrumental approach (Section 4.2.3) with the instrumental dimension being the NSLF event, which occasioned transformative learning, and the collective dimension being the multiple instances in which the event took place between

1998 and 2018. Although this feature does support a small degree of generalisability, it should, however, be reiterated that the generalisation of findings was not the goal of this project. Instead, the applicability of the study to future research was the main concern, as the intention was to lay the groundwork so that further investigations can test the replicability of the concepts and propositions with larger participation numbers and across various other social contexts. This limitation is discussed further in Section 4.8.

4.5.4   *Reliability*

The final test of validity, according to Yin (2009), relates to the issue of reliability. Due to the fact that this is a mixed-methods study, there is some concern to minimise errors and bias in the study, treat data with consistency, and demonstrate the dependability of the research (Punch, 2009). However, because case studies are "context specific and situationally time bounded, the emphasis of trustworthiness is not on showing that the findings can be duplicated" (Peel, 2020), but on ensuring logically sound and transparent practices. Several tactics were implemented toward to this end

The first tactic involved thorough documentation and detailed operational steps based on proven case study methodologies (Yin, 2009, p. 45). The second involved making these steps transparently available to experienced third party researchers, thereby conducting the research as if an auditor were looking over my shoulder (p. 45). This was certainly the case in this study, for my supervisors had access (ethics approved) to relevant data files, regularly received progress reports and thesis chapter drafts, and remained actively engaged throughout the process by providing feedback on issues of theory, research design and the interpretation of data.

4.6　　　　Research ethics

Research is a powerful medium of discovery and innovation and a key contributor to improving productivity and wellbeing in Australia (Council, 2019). However, it also has the potential to negatively impact research participants (Neumann & Neumann, 2017). Care must therefore be taken to ensure research practices are ethical, and this research was conducted in strict accordance with ethically approved processes and in a manner that was sensitive to the wellbeing of all participants (University of Southern Queensland Human Ethics Approval Number: H20REA243) (see Appendix J).

At the commencement of each phase of the study, informed consent to participate was sought, and the requirements of the research were declared to all participants (see Appendix E and H). The risk was deemed low by the ethics committee because all participants were over the age of 18, specific high-risk cohorts were not targeted, and the subject matter was professionally oriented. The participants were also clearly advised that their engagement was purely voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time.

It has been demonstrated that experiences of transformative learning can be highly sensitive in nature, as these events do not always lead to personal growth and self-development (Smith & Kempster, 2019). Indeed, it has been argued that there can be a dark side to the process of transformative learning, leading to traumatic outcomes that are far from positive or benign (Morrice, 2012). Dunn (2011) has explained that the process of unlearning what we thought we knew to be true and important can be very disturbing and unsettling. Cranton (2016) highlights that learners may grieve the loss of assumptions and beliefs, because these deeply personal matter have long informed their lives. Departure from these may leave some people isolated from community and some friendships or family life could be disrupted. In a separate publication (Roux, 2021), I explored some of these risks associated with transformative learning from an autobiographical standpoint. It became clear to me that

sensitivity, care and respect are essential not only in pedagogies that attempt to foster transformative experiences, but also in discussing such experiences with research participants.

Even though this was a retrospective case study that did not directly facilitate transformative learning experiences, the principles of CHE interviewing (Connectivity, Humanness and Empathy) (Brown & Danaher, 2019) were employed to support the wellbeing of participants as they recounted these experiences. Further to this, in the event that participants demonstrated personal distress in the process of the interviews, I was prepared to refer them to relevant counsellors or psychologists who could provide further support. This was not necessary at any point throughout this study. The examples below illustrate how sensitive issues were treated respectfully and with gratitude:

Rian (in interview with Paul): *That's an incredibly in-depth reflection of your own experience. I'm so, so thankful for that. One thing you mentioned in the middle of that method or process that you take yourself through – you said…*

Rian: Awesome, awesome. Can I go one little bit deeper again, if that is okay with you?

Jack: *(smiling) Sure!*

Rian: *Incredible. Well, thank you so much for that overview. That's - really, I mean, that's really special and very personal and I thank you for that, and I'm so glad you felt comfortable to be yourself. What a gift.*

Ali: *I know it's amazing how one thing can really change your view and perspective and, yeah, it changes everything.*

Rian: *Okay, can I ask you a bit more about that changing of perspective? You said…*

4.7 The role of the researcher

Like any researcher, I have been shaped by my life's experiences and to some degree, this informs how I interpret and express my research findings (Neumann & Neumann, 2015). In this manner, I do not exist independently from the participants in my study, because I will inevitably bring my own theoretical, ethical and ideological knowledge to the task (Kemmis, 1980). An important part of my role as researcher therefore included recognising and reflecting on my own biographical situatedness (Neumann & Neumann, 2017). As I prepared for, conducted, and reported on this research, I included explicit activities that fostered self-awareness (incomplete as it may be) (Neumann & Neumann, 2015). These reflexive elements were incorporated into the research design through the method of memoing, but also through the transparent management and interpretation of the data with the three supervisors.

In addition to the abovementioned tactics employed to acknowledge and mitigate any unhelpful personal bias in this study, I also published a book chapter (Roux, 2021) in the edited volume *Researchers at Risk* (Mulligan & Danaher, 2021). Writing this chapter gave me a further opportunity to reflect deeply and critically upon my role as a researcher in this study. Through an autobiographical lens, I explored the emotional and psycho-social challenges associated with establishing and maintaining an appropriate degree of critical distance from the subject matter. I expressed that, through a range of rich, difficult, and illuminating experiences, I had become personally and "deeply invested in the topic of transformative learning, for I believe it is of tremendous personal and social concern" (p. 75). Yet, I also concluded that the importance of the topic itself reinforced the need for me to maintain an

open mind and to receive and engage with ideas that challenged the prevailing narratives of which I have been a beneficiary. Critical friends, colleagues and research supervisors were important in this regard, as they were in a strategic position to check that my personal bias did not become a dogmatic lens, leading me to "prematurely dismiss alternative points of view, however valid they may be" (p. 79).

A further component that is important to the role of the researcher is reciprocity (Trainor & Bouchard, 2013). Conceptualisations of reciprocity can be diverse, ranging from the exchange of goods (e.g., financial incentives) to more comprehensive approaches that might involve social or emotional benefits of the research – participant relationships (pp. 989-990). In the case of this study, the intangible benefits of sharing personal narratives were sought in alignment with the view of LeCompte and Preissle (1993, p. 112) that "attentiveness, empathy, and the documentation of individual or group life ways are often far more compelling rewards than goods or services exchanged" (p. 112).

In the Participant Survey Information sheet (PiS) (see Appendix E) that was emailed to participants, the expected benefits outlined included "the opportunity to reflect meaningfully about a significant event in their life, and the opportunity to contribute their knowledge and experience for others to learn from". It was also stated that participation would "help in the development of principles and guidelines for student leadership initiatives in higher education that are ethically accountable and practically applicable to the rapidly changing world in which we live". The following interview extracts illustrated how enthusiastically many of the former student delegates of the NSLF forum embraced the opportunity to participate in the study for those very reasons, and how positively they reflected on the chance to share their personal stories.

Rian: *Amazing, amazing. Hey Maximus, thank you, I really, really appreciate it.*

Maximus*: I'm just glad to do anything I can do to support this, because obviously it was huge for me…*

Rian: *I love it, Priya, that's been amazing. Thank you. I really, really appreciate that.*

Priya: *I hope it was actually something useful. I said all I've done.*

Rian: *Wow, that's awesome. That's it for me in terms of the questions, Okay, really, really helpful.*

Aadya: *Oh, I'm so glad.*

Rian: *Amazing. Ali, that's all the questions I have for you. But I have so appreciated your time and your story and what you're doing. Who you are. I'm very inspired. Thank you so much.*

Ali: *Thank you so much for doing this. You know, not many people want to hear the boring stories that we have, and sometimes it might not be of value to others. And those who understand the value are the ones [who] actually, you know, will bring a lot of influence, especially yourself, when you're one of them doing this and learning multicultural stor[ies]. And then, when you kind of talk about it and support the institutions and to change their approaches towards making it a lot safer environment for so many people to be themselves, then actually will make a heck of a lot better. So it will resonate with so many people, and hopefully they will all support you and come up to bring changes of these small steps.*

Rian: *Thank you so much for sharing such a raw and personal story with me. I really, really appreciate that.*

Bobby: *No worries at all. So, it's really good and I always find it cathartic remembering.*

4.8   The research limitations

The research design of this study had several limitations that are important to discuss. The first limitation was related to the method of the retrospective case study and the complexity of personal testimony. Studies that focus on the phenomenon of transformative learning, like this one, have the particular challenge of seeking to understand profound learning experiences (Roessger et al., 2017). In these scenarios, the "lived experience [of it] is almost certainly more nuanced in the moment than when recalled from the relative comfort and security of one's post-transformation self" (p. 207). By design, retrospective interviews therefore have the potential to be unreliable and inaccurate, because the learner's experience is assessed from two chronologically divergent perspectives: the experiencing self and the remembering self (Kahneman, 2011; Kahneman & Riis, 2005, as cited in Roessger et al, 2017). It is important to note that, when the so-called "remembering self" (Roessger et al., 2017) retrospectively constructs a memory, it is often qualified with layers of meaning, value and intensity (p. 207).

This limitation can be compounded when researchers seek to evaluate "the effect of a particular pedagogical intervention for occasioning transformative learning" (p. 207). In relation to explanatory design studies that test causal relationships, it is particularly important to understand the broader context, plausible variables or "some third factor" that could impact

on the legitimacy of inferences made (Yin, 2009, p. 42). Given the multifaceted and complex nature of transformative learning experiences, it can become exceedingly difficult for researchers to claim certain causes and effects with confidence (Roessger et al., 2017).

There has been the suggestion of using real-time data collection apps to understand the impact of pedagogical interventions more effectively by gathering data from participants and allowing them to report as both the experiencing self and the remembering self (Roessger et al., 2017). This solution would be very interesting to pursue in further studies of the student experience at the NSLF; however, owing to resource barriers, it was unachievable in this study. It should be mentioned that the qualifications to personal memories described above (meaning, value and intensity) can also be seen from a positive perspective, for participants may not have been able to process their experience effectively in the moment, nor comprehend how it might impact on them in the long term. Indeed, this was evident in the following interview extracts.

> *Rian: So, just from your memory, what was that 1999 experience like for you at the forum as a student?*
>
> *Paul: So I think - I mean it was definitely a transforming experience for me. I probably could not have put my finger on it at the time as to why it was transforming. And it's probably taken me about a good 10 years to unpack why it was transforming really - and how it subsequently changed me. But…really, the reason it was transforming was because it was the first time that anyone had asked me to try and tell a coherent story of how I got to be who I am, right?*
>
> *---*
>
> *Bobby:* So, in my head, it kind of felt like this deep mystery, I can say that now in retrospect, I'm putting words to what I probably wouldn't have been able to put words to, but it was something untouched and untapped.

Furthermore, there is a certain value to the construct validity of the research when hindsight is afforded – namely, the capacity to observe the depth, breadth and relative stability of the impact of the learning activity as described in Section 4.5.1. Finally, regarding the consideration of context and possibility of unknown variables in the evaluation of causal relationships, there were some benefits to using an explanatory sequential design. The first was that the survey data collected in the first phase could be expanded upon in the interview setting, thus creating an opportunity for the participants to give more detailed and/or more nuanced descriptions of their experience. Secondly, the semi-structured nature of the interview allowed me the opportunity to seek clarification about the learners' experience, thereby mitigating the risk of misinterpretation or of drawing false conclusions. The following interview extracts provide examples of such interactions.

Rian: *No, that's wonderful… I mean I think in terms of the increase in importance there, I mean, was that a change in perspective for you? Sort of like, beforehand you wouldn't have necessarily put forgiveness as such a high - maybe - personal value or important thing in life. But maybe afterwards, you could say, "You know what? I actually maybe changed my perspective here; I think that forgiveness is something which I need to learn to do". Is that what you're saying to me?*

Lachy*: I think that's right. Um, again, I would say that it… I think you're… I think you're right in saying it's a shift in perspective; it's not an instant shift in behaviour or practice… that happens over time; it's a slow process and there are, you know, steps backward, as well as forward. But, yeah, I think I harboured resentment without a keen interest in forgiveness before that event. Yes.*

Rian: *Right. Thanks for telling me that, mate. If you don't mind, can I just ask another question on that just to see if I can understand it a little bit more?*

Lachy: *Yes, sure.*

Rian*: So when this new sort of understanding or "perspective", let's call it, about forgiveness, at which point, do you think you felt comfortable with a new way of looking at it, and what made you feel comfortable?*

Fabio*: So, I think that fundamentally the thing that hit me the most was, yeah, that self-awareness piece from the growth of hearing other people's stories plus being able to share my own.*

Rian: *Amazing. I wonder in terms of the self-awareness element of that, I mean, was there anything, in particular, that you became aware of in terms of your own values or perspectives, or was there anything that was challenged in your own sort of sense of values or perspectives that you were sort of having to rethink a little bit?*

Fabio*: Yeah, I think, um, I think the forum crystallised for me…*

Nicole: *And so I think I realised that I wasn't, you know, because I used to think of myself as like a really bad person, because I was experiencing all these bad emotions, they were experiences, they were emotions I was told were bad, and I think that… it's really hard, it's really hard to answer.*

Rian: *Can I tell you what I'm hearing; maybe that'll help?*

Nicole: *Yeah, go for it.*

Rian*: Okay, so there were parts of you that, like you said, you were volatile and angry at times, and there was emotion[s] that you thought were bad for whatever reasons. And then you're in an environment where people started to say positive things about you and affirming your nature.*

Nicole: *Yeah.*

Rian: *And affirming maybe even some of those emotions. And now you started to think maybe these ideas of myself are actually not true ideas of me, and I can let them go. Is that what you're telling me?*

Nicole: *Yes, that's what I'm telling you. And I think you've helped me understand myself. So I think what happened was...I – for the first time, I felt like the pain that I was going through was being acknowledged, and my pain was separate to who I was. And people could say that there was me and there were all these circumstances that were creating all these experiences of pain which were bringing up really strong emotions for me. And I felt seen, I think that's the thing, I felt seen by my facilitator's and my group, and we were so different, but I felt seen by them.*

The issue of generalisability was already discussed in Section 4.5.3 on external validity; however, it is worth expanding upon this limitation more here with reference to the method of non-probability purposive sampling that was employed. This technique was useful for strengthening construct validity (see Section 4.5.1) and for establishing a "maximal chance for any relationship to be observed" (Punch, 2009, p. 252). However, because the random selection of participants using probability sampling was not selected, representative data about the broader higher education student population could not be ensured (p. 251). This limitation was acknowledged; however, given the fact that the study was bound by its focus and research questions, and because of the limited resources available, it seemed that purposive sampling was the best suited and most feasible option for this project. To address this limitation, several other techniques were implemented to ensure the broader applicability of the study was maintained and that helpful groundwork was developed for future studies to build on (see Section 4.5.3).

4.9   Chapter summary

Chapter 4 presents the focus and research questions that guided this study and explores in depth the research paradigm, methodology and methods that were employed to meet these goals (see Section 4.2). The research participants were also described (see Section 4.3) before the data analysis process was outlined, with data collection, data reduction, data display, drawing of conclusions, coding and memoing being detailed, and various examples from the study provided (see Section 4.4). Issues of trustworthiness were also explored, with special attention being drawn to the construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability of the research (see Section 4.5). This chapter also addressed the various ethical considerations that were incorporated into the design, with particular focus on the sensitive nature of experiences that can sometimes be associated with transformative learning (see Section 4.6). This was followed by a discussion on the role of the researcher and the various ways in which unintended consequences of personal bias were mitigated in this study (see Section 4.7). Finally, the research limitations were outlined, with particular focus on retrospective case studies, personal testimony, and purposive sampling (See Section 4.8).

CHAPTER 5: THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

5.1   Chapter overview

Using the research method of thematic analysis (described in Section 4.4.5) this chapter explores the research data in order to draw and verify conclusions (Punch, 2009). The scope of this analysis was strictly limited to the focus of the project, which was to develop a framework for the conceptualisation and practice of a transformative approach to student leadership development in Australian higher education that is both applicable to the contemporary era and ethically accountable.

This chapter explores the findings relating to Research Question 1: Why, in retrospect, did some former student delegates perceive the NSLF experience as personally transformative? The purpose of Research Question 1 was to explore in detail what the contributing factors were that enabled this kind of learning phenomenon. This section therefore drew on critical information that related to participant perceptions of the personally transformative experience, including both quantitative and qualitative data. Identified and selected on the basis of purposive sampling, former student delegates of the NSLF participated in this study based on their own perception that the event had the following explicit learning impact on their lives: "significant and irreversible changes in the way a person experiences, conceptualizes, and interacts with the world" (Hoggan, 2016a, p. 71).

In alignment with the explanatory design of this study (see Section 4.2.2), this chapter focused on the "dialectical nature of experience and context" (Taylor & Cranton, 2013, p. 37) in order to explore what has been described as a relational view of transformative learning (Holdo, 2022). A critical part of the analysis of the learning phenomenon, therefore, involves investigating various ways in which "parts of the learning experience are linked" (p. 7).

Through paying special attention to these *relationships,* we can gain insight into the social and organisational contexts in which, and through which, the learning occurred. This explanatory exercise also gives us the ability to practise what is described as "meta-reflection" (p. 12), whereby the "conditions that shape experiences of reflective learning" can themselves become the object of reflection. The implications of these findings will be explored in terms of its relevance to student leadership development in Australian higher education in Chapter 7.

There was a range of experiential factors that emerged from participant reflections in both the surveys and the interviews. These were coded separately to the learning processes and outcomes (see Chapter 6); however, they were inextricably connected because the learning either occurred or was initiated within the contemporaneous experiential context. As part of the data analysis, the student experience was divided into two themes: *Environmental factors* (see Section 5.2) and *Personal factors* (see Section 5.3). Each of these themes contained subcodes that depict commonalities in participant reflections. For the environmental factors, these included *the physical setting* (see Section 5.2.1) and the *cultural setting* (see Section 5.2.2). For the personal factors, these included *desire* (see Section 5.3.1) and *courage* (see Section 5.3.2). Finally, a summary (see Section 5.4) of the main points is provided at the end of the chapter.

Table 3: Overview of the thematic components for Chapter 5: The Student Experience

Theme	Codes	Example words/phrases/sentences
Environmental Factors	The Physical Setting	"the size and scale" (Francis" "the size of it initially was something that blew me away, it's just massive" (Ali) "really fancy", (Priya)

		"very formal", (Aadya)
		"suits", "impressive people", "brilliant leaders"
	The Cultural Setting; *Leadership; Safety; Love and Acceptance*	"safety", "leaders", "facilitators", "love", "acceptance", "seen", "known", "not-judged", "respect", "decency", "vulnerability", "support", "listening", "stories", "personal", "emotional", "trust"
		"It gave me a sense of - it gave me a taste of a way of living that I didn't know in some regards" (Liam)
		"This is a group of people who are going to listen to you and you're here to support each other" (Sofia)
		"I felt so – really loved" (Bobby)
Personal Factors	Desire	"I have to", "I need to"
		"if there's a possibility that I can be different, I'd be absolutely mad not to give it a shot" (Nicole)
		"it awakened at appetite in me" (Bobby)
		"ok, I now know that there is like a journey I need to go on" (Nicole)
		"I'm not going to wait around" (Paul)
	Courage	"I had to"
		"dark side of stuff to understand the light side of it" (Nicole)

		"I had to relearn all of that, you know; that was painful." (Paul)
		"it is a tough process. And, you know, you don't make fire without rubbing two sticks together, like you need friction" (Harry)
		"difficult conversations"
		"let's face it" (Ali)

5.2   Environmental factors

5.2.1   The physical setting

Throughout the interviews, it became apparent that the physical setting of "the forum", as it was colloquially referred to by most participants, made an immediate impact on the students. Over the past 20 years, the NSLF has been hosted within the grand five-star Hyatt Hotel in the nation's capital, Canberra. As participants recalled their experience of arriving at the forum, the grandeur and size of the building, and the fact that students came in hundreds from different countries in the region dressed in formal attire or cultural garments, made a significant impression.

Participants used a range of words to describe the perception of the physical environment, both in terms of arriving, but also regarding how it surpassed their expectations. Francis said:

> Francis: *You don't get a full idea and appreciation of that experience just from the information, until you actually go through it first. Because as a delegate first you see all these people, you know, you see us all dressed up in suits… But also, I guess the size and scale.*

Ali's reflections shared a similar sentiment of surprise at the size of the venue and the event, and how he had not anticipated the impact of that. He stated, "But when we actually went the size of it initially was something that blowed me away, it's just massive". As part of recapping his initial impressions, he also highlighted the presence of political leaders at the event. He said that this is when "I had the impression that this is another level". Harry also recalled thinking as he walked through the "great hall" that he was surrounded by "brilliant leaders". Priya described her own bewilderment in the following way, "And I was like, oh, my gosh, Barack Obama stayed here, probably more famous people than him. But I was pretty… like… wow, this is really fancy". Veronique described how she "needed to literally buy shoes for the occasion. I don't have any like smart shoes". Aadya said "yea… it looks very formal" and Beth recalled how "it was much fancier than any student stuff that I was doing".

There were a range of words and phrases used by participants in describing their arrival that depicted the beginning of an learning experience similar to what may be conceptualised as a disorientating dilemma (Mezirow, 1991) or a dislocation (Greene, 1971). Throughout the interviews, it became apparent that the grand physical setting of the hotel in conjunction with a great mass of formally dressed and seemingly impressive people made an instant impact on many of the delegates. They described an uncomfortable and unfamiliar feeling, with phrases like "It can be a bit unsettling" (Francis) or "It was daunting" (Fabio) or "That was overwhelming" (Jack). The atmosphere also resulted in some students feeling "out of place" (Sofia), or "like a pretender" (Harry). Some students critically questioned themselves, asking "Am I supposed to be here?" (Aadya) and am I "good enough" (Jack), while another stated, "At the beginning I was like, 'Oh, maybe I kind of like have to fake it until I make it'" (Veronique).

Although the above stated emotions were strong, they did not necessarily have a negative impact. One of the participants described arriving at the forum as kind of "fun, almost like [a] fairy tale sort of thing that was happening. Yeah. Yeah. It felt a little surreal, I guess" (Beth). Another said, "It was daunting, but also kind of cool that I was invited to this thing that I didn't feel like I really belonged at" (Fabio). One participant recalled, "I was like, 'What the heck? This is amazing!'" (Priya). Although the impact of the physical setting did not appear on a single participant survey, when discussing the experience in greater detail, most of the participants reflected at length about their impressions at arrival. Significantly, when asked to describe which experiences promoted significant reflection or discussion at the NSLF, all of the participants referred to subsequent interactions or activities.

In evaluating the transcript data, repeated phrases and certain descriptive words seemed to indicate that the physical setting may have influenced the students' disposition towards learning, rather than the explicit learning journey itself. In other words, the impact of the arrival at the NSLF had a helpfully disorientating effect, creating a sense of vulnerability and critical self-awareness. This point is elaborated upon in Section 5.2.2, which is where I analyse how students began to reflect on what they were learning in this environment.

The immersive nature of the forum was also evident. Jack reflected on the way the multiple sessions and activities intentionally worked together to help break down "barriers" and "build relationships". Priya described an experience of reflecting with her roommate on what she was learning into the early hours of the morning. She said "I was like telling her how like my mind was being blown into a million pieces right now". Lachy similarly reflected on the full schedule and how it built a strong sense of community among the small group he was assigned to:

> Lachy: *It was a really busy three and a half – four days, I mean they were large days, you know packed full of plans and activities… and just sort of traveling to*

and from particular places as well, so I remember being exhausted in a good way.

It was really nice, there was a sense of community among the team that I was

assigned to, so I found that really, really nice.

It was evident that the cultural setting of the forum was crucial in fostering this disposition towards learning and shaping a positive and affirming experience for the student delegates. Although not unanimously, most of the participants said the small group setting was the most impactful part of the NSLF experience. Students were allocated to small groups of six or seven other delegates with two or three trained facilitators (in most cases these were former student delegates). These groups met around scattered settings within the Hyatt complex, and locations that naturally had a degree of privacy and comfortable seating were preferred. The facilitators welcomed and created a pleasant atmosphere with beverages such as coffee, tea, beer or wine and any snacks that could be shared among the group. I will now explore this important and very particular culture in this setting.

5.2.2   The cultural setting

A recurring experiential theme in the survey and interview data related to the profound impact of the NSLF culture, and how being immersed in that environment for four days had a lasting impact on them. In this context, I am using the term "cultural setting" in relation to organisational norms, such as "the shared way of being, thinking and acting in a collective or coordinated people with reciprocal expectation" (Serpa, 2020, p. 53). The students repeatedly described the role and behaviour of the leaders in creating a powerful culture, how they found themselves freely expressing their vulnerabilities and emotions, and how they explored their own personal narratives and questioned their mostly deeply held values and beliefs. Although there were some examples of how these kinds of experiences occurred across various activities over the course of the forum, the most repeated example in the data was with respect to the small group sessions.

Reflecting on the NSLF as whole, one participant said, "but the most important time was the small group for me. The other stuff was just a bit of a bonus. For my small group, that was my zone, and that's where I learnt the most about myself" (Nicole). Another participant similarly stated:

> Paul: *But I would pin it down to that - that particular experience. I mean, yes, it was amazing staying in a five-star hotel, but so what? Yes, it was amazing, you know, hearing from different speakers. They were great. But, you know, click on the web these days - there's a million great speakers out there. They're not transformative. Listening to their stories doesn't change your life.*

The first of these small group sessions occurred on the same night as the students' arrival at the NSLF. It seems likely that the strategic timeliness of this activity had the effect of harnessing the prior disorienting sense of vulnerability and introspection by making space for these feelings and ideas to be sensitively explored. One student reflected on these "personal" and "in-depth" discussions with "complete strangers":

> Sofia: *I remember feeling a lot more at ease after my assistant small group facilitator shared her personal story. And again, that was a little intimidating at first because I thought, "Wow, we're complete strangers to you and, you're just, you're just talking about, like, really in-depth things". But I think after that point, like, I think everyone has something that they could relate to, either, you know, you've had difficulty with something or you persevered through something...*
>
> *I think after that evening, I felt a lot more at ease and was able to kind of tell myself, you know, "This is a group of people who are going to listen to you and you're here to support each other".*

Another participant recalled the experience of that "first catch up":

Priya: *It was like so high level, so quickly and so deep, so fast. And I was just like, "Oh, wow, we're going to this place like right now in our first catch up, like people are in tears. We're emotional". Whoa, like it was full on!*

The following participant referred to the "magic" that happened in that small groups:

Aadya: *The rest of it, I think the rest of the program starts to make sense once you start to kind of see the magic happening in a small group, really. So that's really for me where the impact was made.*

There were several cultural elements that need to be isolated and analysed in order to understand why the students engaged in these small group sessions so quickly in such a raw and transparent fashion with complete strangers who often held very different perspectives on life. These observations were especially significant given the aforementioned "toxic" (Dictionaries, 2018) cultural phenomenon (see Sections 1.2 and 2.2), which exhibits a kind of unhealthy or poisonous atmosphere, whether relationally, politically, environmentally, or across culture more broadly. McGregor (2004) similarly described a polarised cultural setting that exhibits a prevalence of discourses of conflict centred on disagreement over values, beliefs and ideologies. However, for these NSLF student delegates the experience was so striking and counter-cultural, that some students explained it the following ways: "It completely floored me" (Harry); "I felt really touched" (Bobby); "I'm getting goosebumps just even thinking about it" (Jack); "That was the biggest or best thing that I've ever done" (Ali); and "That was a completely new experience for me. So, hugely transformative" (Paul). Also, both Edward and Lachy depicted how they became less politically polarised, from the right and left sides of politics respectively.

A central component of this cultural setting seems to be the way diversity was celebrated. Bobby, for instance recalls the impression it left upon her in the following way; "I guess I felt like I had never seen faith being openly discussed in a secular environment, people

with all different faiths and all different values, I've never seen that discussed in such an open way with such freedom". Sofia also recalled the unique way in which the NSLF fostered a positive sense of cultural diversity through story-telling.

> *Sofia: There was a Jewish [sic] and a Hindu, a Christian and a Catholic and like, you put all these people together who might otherwise, you know, at a university or in a social group argue about why their beliefs are, like, make them who they are. But, in that context, you're listening to how those values have impacted [on] that person and actually - that's brought out the positive. Even if you personally don't agree with maybe how they got there, that's out of the question at that point. Because you're going, what you value positively shaped who you are, and the fact that you get to enjoy those qualities and attributes together is more important than the things that you might otherwise disagree with or argue about.*

The intentionality behind this experience by the organisers and facilitators was confirmed by archival documentation retrieved from the NSLF board that outlines strict guidelines for leading small group sessions (see Appendix C). The following participant also observed these guidelines in practice by explaining that it "was set up in a way that they're deliberately not coming at people with judgement; they're coming at you with the desire to know you for who you are" (Liam). Paul explained that "the facilitators are making sure that - to not be giving advice on what to do or how to fix it, but to just be like, 'Wow, man, that's really hard' or 'That's really good'. You know, 'That's a great part of your story' or etc., etc." Bobby recalled "going to the forum experience, I really didn't hold back. And that's credit to the facilitators I had". This kind of culture had an immediate impact on participants, enabling them to open themselves up in raw and transparent ways. One said:

> Jack*: I remember it well enough that it kind of brings back some emotion. It was a pretty emotional experience… It allowed me to voice the things I've been through*

in life, the things I've experienced, the things I've seen, and to deal with emotions

amongst a group of strangers.

Another participant also described how it was "really important for me", and how she "just cried a whole lot" in this "safe space" (Nicole):

> *Nicole: I know a lot of the people, they were sort of finding that like [a] safe*
>
> *space, something that was really important for me. I don't remember what I*
>
> *said when I shared my story, but I remember I just cried a whole lot. (Nicole)*

Based on the above personal reflections of that small group activity, it can be concluded that if the extravagant and culturally diverse arrival at the Hyatt were the metaphorical entrée to experiences of dislocation (Greene, 1971) or a disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 1991) , then this small group experience was the main meal where students began to explore their own personal narratives in a truly meaningful way. It was clearly emotionally overwhelming, and it took students to a threshold of something unknown (Berger, 2004). How this culture was fostered and why it impacted on students so positively is now explored.

5.2.2.1   *The demonstration of authentic servant leadership*

The first point that emerged from the data was that the cultural setting of the small groups was intentionally fostered by the leadership. The group facilitators modelled the way they wanted students to engage. They were not telling them what to do, but rather showing them an authentic way of being and inviting the students to try it for themselves. Liam's reflection was illustrative of this point, as he stated, "It gave me a sense of - it gave me a taste of a way of living that I didn't know in some regards".

An important observation about the leadership tone of the facilitators occurred in multiple interviews. For these participants, the humility of the facilitators was striking, particularly on the first night immediately after such a formal arrival in a setting as

ostentatious as the Hyatt. The model of servant leadership upon which the Forum was based, had an instant demonstration on this occasion, and this behaviour was well-aligned with the premise of authentic servant leadership as discussed in the conceptual framework of this study (see Chapter 3). One of the assistant facilitators would set an example and vulnerably share their own story in an attempt to help others to feel comfortable to do the same. The following participant recalled the "potent culture" of that first evening, explaining that is "still astounds me" and that the actions of the facilitator "completely disarmed me" (Harry):

> *Harry: But when the assistant small group facilitator shared…it was an incredibly vulnerable narrative that she gave - that she shared in such a humble way and kind of it just completely disarmed me….And it was this weird thing - to sort of come in there - especially that group that night off the buzz of the first day…*
>
> *Yeah, and in that then, seeing that happen in other delegates over the course of the four days was um yeah, which is this, like, wild affirmation of just how potent that culture is, like I said this in the survey, but it still astounds me and it astounds me every year - that's why I keep going back, was because you can get someone, a total stranger to sharing their deepest, realest self purely by not asking them questions or not, you know. But setting a tone of vulnerability and then just asking someone to tell you about themselves.*

5.2.2.2   The creation of a safe environment

The second point that emerged from the surveys and interviews was that the students felt safe in the environment. The following reflections demonstrate the perception that the safety of the environment was purposefully established by the small group leaders who had a carefully considered methodology. The onus was clearly on the leaders to communicate expectations and role model appropriate behaviour to the group. One participant said, "The

facilitators are ensuring that the environment in which those stories are told is a safe one" (Paul). Another participant was similarly direct in describing the role of the facilitators as being "to care for people":

> Aardya: *I think what is really fantastic about how the forum works, and I think this is kind of part of maybe the board, the committee and the people who are, who've really formed a community, they've built a culture around really picking facilitators who have that understanding and how to model it.*
>
> *So, as a delegate, I had no idea, but obviously I was put in a place with people who really do know how to care for people and how to steer conversations in the right way.*

Another participant echoed a similar sentiment referring to a "trust circle" and how it was the role of the leaders to "create that environment" (Jack):

> Jack*: But I think the idea behind this small group is you create a trust circle - an environment - and a lot of credit to the leaders in that group because it's up to the leaders to create that environment for people to want to share. And once you do share, once one person shares, it softens it up even further and invites more sharing and more interaction.*

Another participant also described how the leaders "kind of opened the whole place up in a really safe way. We keep everything that we talk about within our group and that this is about, you know, there is no right or wrong answer" (Priya).

5.2.2.3   The power of love and acceptance

There was a third element of the cultural setting that was connected to the broader notion of safety, but that was more specific. Several students were amazed to experience genuine feelings of love and acceptance in the group. This element was particularly relevant

to the development of authentic servant leadership qualities, which are explored later in Chapter 7. However, in this section it is worth exploring in some detail how this particular dimension of NSLF was experienced by the students.

Jack's reflections were especially insightful regarding how he experienced love and acceptance in the small group. He explained in vivid detail how this experience was unique for him, and how, as a person, he had the distinct feeling of not just being politely tolerated in the presence of others, but rather being actively embraced. This was powerful for him because he had previously felt that he had to hide much of his identity out of fear of rejection. For him there was shame and stigma associated with his story, and therefore he had always kept it to himself. However, this particular group culture had an immediate and profound impact, allowing him to share freely and in so doing to feel his sense of personal value and confidence increase. Here were his specific words:

> Jack: *When you do eventually tell your story, it just feels like so much weight off your shoulders… Again, getting goosebumps just telling you that, like it's taking me back. And then realising the reaction of others, the respect and decency, amongst others, not to look at you any worse than they did in that group. And seeing that after, that session, you know, our bond just grew stronger and stronger, plus the support, and, from the facilitators…*

Jack explained that listening to other people tell their stories also made him realise that everyone had vulnerabilities, and that nobody's life was perfect and shiny. This helped him to realise his own value in a greater way. He stated "I'm not all that, you know, damaged relative to everyone else. Everyone's got a story. And so, my story doesn't make me any less valuable than anyone else. And that's pretty, that's pretty, huge".

When prompted to recall this experience in further detail, Jack continued to express how he felt the genuine desire of the group to get to know him as a person, and then how they accepted him just as he was in the moment:

> Jack: *I mean, you look at the reaction of others, you look at how people look at you when you're talking… And you can tell that they genuinely appreciate the story. They genuinely appreciate your presence there. Not judging you for who you are and therefore I shouldn't be judging myself on who I think I am. I think you realise that you're being too harsh on yourself.*

The learning process and outcomes of this account were explored further in Chapter 6; however, it is important to note the impact of the environmental context here while the narrative context is clear. Jack continued his reflections by explaining that the learning outcome was a greatly improved self-confidence even while he was still sitting in the small group. When asked when it dawned on him that this was occurring, he used repeated phrases to emphasise the tremendous emotional heights and depths of the experience:

> Jack: *Immediately! Yeah. I mean, you're feeling it as you're going through it. I mean, you're feeling it....We're talking, you know, the deepest possible emotions, you know. I'm pretty sure I shed a tear or two or three. So you know, it's almost like dealing with traumatic moments in your life.*

In a variety of ways, the theme of love and acceptance occurred repeatedly when participants reflected on the small group experience. Bobby for instance used physical verbs such as it "struck me" to explain what this was like for her:

> Bobby: *The other thing that really struck me was seeing the calibre of just high functioning adults, I guess. People that are, I guess, on paper they've got jobs, they've got families, they're kind of running life's race, but they've taken out time*

to be with someone like me. That was a real powerful. Aaaah… I felt so - really

loved by all the facilitators.

Bobby's use of the words "with someone like me" depicted how unexpected, precious and personal this felt to her. In the interview, she then paused, tried to find words, exhaled and then exclaimed "I felt so – really loved". She then continued to explain why she felt this way:

Bobby: *That was probably a first one of the indicators for me, realising how important someone's story is…and having the time and purpose to articulate that in a small group setting in a safe place kind of setting. That whole that experience was, Yeah, I'd say absolutely change the direction of my life. Yeah.*

After hearing these points, I felt it was important to learn more about the reasons why participants experienced love and acceptance so tangibly. Many students seemed to associate the experience with the notion of being truly *seen* without being *judged*. As the following participant reflected, the effect of this was liberating in that it allowed her to be truly authentic in the moment. She used repeated phrases for emphases to explain why she felt so free:

Nicole: *And I felt seen, I think that's the thing, I felt seen by my facilitators and my group, and we were so different, but I felt seen by them. And I didn't have to bring an academic performance after that because I've been seen by people for who I was. So it didn't actually matter.*

The following statements revealed a very similar experience for a different participant:

Liam: *For me, one of the biggest things is that…I felt heard and seen in ways I hadn't ever previously, and that just, it's almost like it, it was inspiring….It was like to me that was liberating and even whereas in, not all the time, but a lot of the time, and just in every day in the interactions in my life I didn't have that same level of being seen and known.*

When asked to explain what it was about the group setting that made him feel "seen and known", Liam stated, "It's like it's captured…everything that's given in what you've said…everything that I'm trying to give is being received". He further qualified what he meant by this by stating, "who I was, was being seen", and that was "incredibly validating". The following participant described a similar experience with words of elation. In the interview, he was emotional and joyous even as he recalled the experience of being welcomed and allowed to express himself just as he was. He was emphatic as he tried to describe something akin to wonderment:

> Ali: *That something like - in today's world you can't talk about it to your neighbours, let alone to someone else with…you know, people and with these young bright minds, which I was like, "Oh, my God, they're not going to judge me on this!"…*
>
> *And this was a pivotal point where I was trying to strengthen my inner belief, and it validated a lot of that. And it gave me that strength that - be yourself… I can be myself! I can have my name! I can have my accent! I can act like myself!…*
>
> *And it was really crucial to get that perception that they gave me and the sort of understanding and support and said, "You know what, I don't view the world the way you have been viewed at" - openly, gracefully and be more welcoming.*
>
> *It's amazing how one thing can really change your perspective and, yeah, it changes everything.*

Another former student delegate explained why the experience was so powerful to him. He described how the known quantity of love in this setting was radically different from the uncertainties associated with his prior experiences. This made a huge difference to him,

because the act of self-expression that was previously scary was now somehow safe and comfortable:

> Fabio: *It's really powerful, because….it also allows you to share parts of yourself that you have never been able to share before and never felt comfortable sharing before, and to know the outcome of sharing a story - is still that you're going to be loved is a pretty phenomenal thing - rather than in other environments being able to share your story and not knowing what the outcome might be. It's quite scary.*

The final extract that I include here expanded on the range of ways that the notions of love and acceptance was experienced. The participant used descriptive phrases like "cared for", "receive compassion and empathy" and to "be known and accepted for who I am" (Paul). The experiential impact of this was "healing" and "relieved" him of "loneliness". I include the statement in full below in order to maintain the connection between ideas and to draw attention to fact that the narrative seemed to be summarised in his reflection that "the people at the forum are very accepting and loving":

> Paul: *Firstly, to tell my story was transformative - simply because I had never done it before. I had never been asked to put all the threads together before… Then, to be cared for, receive compassion and empathy for my experiences was healing. To hear others with similar stories was encouraging and relieved me of some loneliness. Um, to just be known and accepted for who I am. That was a completely new experience for me. So, hugely transformative. You know, the people at the forum are very accepting and loving.*

As stated earlier, this cultural setting facilitated an environment of meaningful personal reflection, and together with the physical setting it was catalytic in allowing the subsequent transformative learning process to occur. Edward described how the culture had a powerful effect on him, as a "young Liberal". He reflects that "I was quite polarised" and the

experience "changed my perspective". He explained how this enabled him to see people differently, and how he became "much less sure of everything" and how he started to recognise how others in his small group "weren't just single issue monolithic type people", but that they had "multiple facets, with multiple capacities and loves and fears and everything". Lachy described a similar experience, although he identified with the left of politics.

> Lachy: *For me, it was a learning curve in learning to love and accept people who had very different political beliefs and backgrounds to me. I fall on the left, and struggle to identify with those who are on the right - but NSLF helped push me toward acceptance*

The use of the words "love and accept" is important here because it is clear that part of the impact of the forum involved Lachy learning how to enact this kind of culture himself, in particular toward those with whom he had previously struggled to identify.

5.2.3   Overview of findings

Thus far, this chapter has addressed the various ways in which former student delegates perceived the NSLF experience as personally transformative, as per research question 1. The first theme that emerged from the data was *environmental factors,* and this included two sub-codes; *the physical setting* (see Section 5.2.1*)* and *the cultural setting* (see Section 5.2.2). Even though the physical setting was never mentioned in the surveys, this aspect of the participant's personal narratives was explored in more detail throughout the interviews. It became apparent that arriving at the luxurious Hyatt hotel in the nation's capital had a helpfully disorienting effect that influenced students' disposition towards learning. Multiple students attested to feelings of vulnerability and a heightened sense of critical self-awareness, and students were given opportunities to explore such thoughts and emotions in supportive ways. It was also

apparent that the immersive nature of the schedule over four days enabled a range of meaningful personal interactions with a diverse group of leaders, facilitators and fellow student delegates, and these experiences, together with the cultural setting had a lasting impact on the participants.

The culture of the NSLF at large received positive reflections; however, the small group setting particularly had a lasting impact on students' lives. Multiple testimonies made it clear that this environment had three distinct elements that shaped the experience for the students. First, they witnessed a clear and humble demonstration of authentic servant leadership. This connected to the broader teachings of the Forum and allowed participants to experience it first-hand. Second, the students experienced a carefully constructed and safe environment in which they could hear the personal stories of other people and share their own. Experiencing the culture of this environment was remarkable for many delegates because they found it to be a genuine place of love and acceptance. Specifically, the perception of feeling known without being judged was critical to their open and intimate engagement within the setting.

A rival possibility to this conclusion is that these factors were important and meaningful to the students, but that no causal relationships can be ascertained because of the multiple variables at play within an immersive four-day event and the multiple individual factors at play. Although it is true that all the variables cannot be accounted for, and many personal factors remain unknown, the personal testimony of participants themselves is a valuable, and indeed primary source of insight into the transformative nature of their learning experience. In this regard, the evidence outlined above illustrates that the cumulative effect of these environmental factors was nothing short of "life changing" (Aadya) and "hugely transformative" (Paul) for many students. One said, "It was the biggest or best thing that I've ever done" (Ali), another said, "It absolutely changed the direction of my life" (Bobby), while another similarly exclaimed, "If I hadn't been to that first forum…I'd be in a completely different position now, I couldn't even predict" (Sofia). Although it is clear that the

environmental factors played a significant role in shaping the delegates' experience, there were also personal factors that impacted the way students engaged in the NSLF experience. To this personal dimension, I now turn.

5.3   Personal factors

Throughout the interviews, there were certain repeated themes in personal characteristics that emerged, and it became apparent that although participants underwent a positive experience, it was not necessarily easy for them. Indeed, on numerous occasions, they used striking descriptive words to explain how they persisted through challenging learning processes in order to attain the outcomes that they achieved (see Chapter 6). The fact that they actively pursued these learning processes was reflective of an intense learning disposition that I coded as *desire*. And the fact that they endured throughout such a difficult process to attain certain outcomes was testament to a personal attribute that I have coded as *courage*.

5.3.1   *Desire*

The NSLF was designed to present students with experiences that helped them to reflect on their own stories, faith and values (see Appendix A). It was also set up in a way to allow students to hear other people's stories and to meet influential leaders from multiple social spheres who held a range of perspectives on faith and values. Transformative learning experiences can be unsettling for individuals as they begin to unlearn what they thought they knew to be true and important (Dunn, 2011). In this way, the experience of transformative learning is not as straightforward as simply building upon previous learning (Morrice, 2012), and the data obtained in this study suggest that it requires a certain kind of learning disposition.

In the surveys and interviews, participants described feelings associated with a sense of disjuncture with phrases like, "I was reflecting on a relative incapacity of my own" (Lachy), "I didn't realise how conflicted my whole outlook was" (Harry), "In my head, it kind of felt

like this deep mystery" (Bobby), or "I was starting to realise, like, 'Hey, this isn't actually how I feel about it. These aren't my thoughts that I'm saying; these are someone else's thoughts'" (Beth). The following participant described how he was reconsidering why he valued doing certain things: "Like am I just wasting my time? I was like, 'I'm not sure anymore'" (Francis). Nicole explained how her "mind sort of shifted, like my inner world kind of shifted and I was like, 'Ok, I now know that there is like a journey I need to go on'". The word "shifted" when combined with the word "need" conveyed a disjuncture and a degree of oughtness or intensity in her desire to resolve it. The following extract also depicted the internal dialogue of a former student delegate experiencing doubts about his own perspective on life:

> Paul: *I'm like, wow, 'You're really different to me. You've actually got a different experience of life. You aren't afraid of the things I'm afraid of. You're not jumping at the shadows that I'm jumping at – you're robust in a discussion that I would be compliant in.*

In the interview, this participant explained how he continued to process these feelings, and how it dawned on him why other people experienced life so differently from him. The urgent sense of his desire to unlearn certain beliefs was evident. With reference to a personal history of domestic violence he experienced as a child, he described how his "data" (that is the information, or lived experiences that he was drawing from for knowledge) was untrustworthy:

> Paul: *This processes of saying - my data set for what I believe is bad - I got a bad data set. You know, actually, if I look at my data set, I've got a data set of men in authority that is dominated by this one character, my dad, who is actually a bad example of men in authority, he's not the norm, right? He's actually a terrible example.*

So my experience of men in authority is warped. I have a very biased sample, and what I need to actually do is give up, get rid of, throw away the experience that I have. I'm not going to wait around for justice. I'm not going to wait around for it to be put right. I'm going to say, "Actually, that's a bad – it's a bad set of data. And fathers are not like that".

Paul used words like "warped", "terrible", "bad" and "biased" to explain why he felt that he needed to change the way that he viewed men in authority. His urgency to unlearn certain beliefs was clear through phrases like "I'm not going to wait around for justice". Fabio also reflected on a sense of "cognitive dissonance" that he experienced at the forum. Using physical verbs to convey the striking nature of event, he described being "hit across the face" as he learnt about his own "values gap"—that is the difference between one's purported values and one's actual behaviour. Like many of the other participants, Fabio explained how this cognitive disjuncture led him into an earnest desire to engage in a process of personal change. He explained how he had to "really wrestle with it". Bobby said, "it awakened an appetite in me". Beth recalled thinking, "I have to take a step back…this is not how I want to do it… it was kind of, yeah, like a veil had been lifted sort of thing and I was seeing for the first time". Francis described his processing as follows: "Oh, I think I need to step away from all this stuff to, you know, to rebuild myself". Nicole also explained feeling a similar sense of urgency after the forum experience:

Nicole: And I think I ended up coming away from forum being like, "If there's a possibility that I can be different, I'd be absolutely mad not to give it a shot". It was kind of like, I, I knew I needed, like, a lot of healing in my life.

Nicole continued to explain how this intense disposition drove her to seek answers to her questions, as well as healing in certain areas of her life. She used repetitive phrases for emphasis as she explained how her desire fuelled her:

Nicole: *I've explored everything. I've kind of gone to the far end of things, like I've explored everything. Now I know what it looks like. I'm ready to just like literally get rid of all of this stuff that's happened. So I like had to push and push and push… I wanted to know the truth. I wanted to know the truth. Yeah.*

5.3.2 Courage

The learning processes involved in the student experiences are explored more fully in the next chapter. However, it is important to note at this point that for the students to engage genuinely in the process of critical self-reflection, many of them had to draw upon a tremendous amount of courage. Nicole described moving overseas to explore alternative avenues of spirituality, even placing herself in the "dark side of stuff to understand the light side of it". Paul described undertaking a 10-year journey because "I had to relearn all of that, you know; that was painful." Bobby explains the process as such, "Well, yeah, it's like four of those were really intense, intense years – not necessarily enjoyable, but really healthy. Yeah, it was fantastic. Forever grateful for those years".

Harry candidly explained what it felt like to have a revelation of this own desperate confusion regarding his personal identity. The use of the word "naked" illustrated just how exposed and vulnerable he felt. He also explained that it felt like a "sledgehammer in my gut, like I just felt like, 'Whoa, what just happened?'". He continued "And then I was like, oh, man, I have no freaking clue who I am. And I have no clue, like my convictions don't have any kind of substantive of depth to them".

Harry explained that after he had processed this experience, he realised that the "only authentic part of me, that I actually felt like, 'Yeah, that's genuinely me'" was the part of him that was "confused, kind of unprocessed, traumatised self", and that this was "pretty, like gutting". Using vivid imagery, Harry explained:

> Harry: *It was like lifting a kind of hatch and just seeing like an absolutely mess of wires and being like, 'I don't know what's connected to what, and I don't know what this does at all. Like what is this good for?*

Again, in Harry's story, a critical next step in the learning process involved drawing on the attribute of courage to respond proactively to what he had just learnt about himself. He stated, "That kind of took me back to square one, and then set me on a bit of a new direction". When asked what this looked like for him, he explained, "You know, they say the first step is acceptance, like actually recognising this is me and that's flawed and that's very broken", and the challenge involved "hearing some really hard truths". Harry then took action and decided to move in with some other like-minded men "who were all kind of on the same journey of trying to, like, deconstruct self and really find authenticity and genuineness". He explained the difficulties of the transformative journey in the following way: "It is a tough process. And, you know, you don't make fire without rubbing two sticks together, like you need friction. You need someone to get into you – like up into a grill. You need places of uncomfortability".

Another participant, Beth, also explained how at the forum she felt like, "Whoa, my mind is blown. I don't even know who I am." She continued, "It is like, 'What is happening?'... it was a lot to take in!". Beth however continued to press into an uncomfortable process of learning why she felt as she did, and she then committed herself to dealing with things head on. She stated, "So [that] really pushed me to have some difficult conversations with each of my parents on kind of things that have happened… I think that's hugely made my relationships."

For Ali, the experience of seeing things from a different perspective was life changing, but not without significant challenges. He explained that his migrant community had ingrained perspectives that he felt were life-inhibiting, and he wanted to break the cycle and

take a fresh direction. Reflecting on what the NSLF had done for him in this regard, he exclaimed:

> Ali: *There was (sic) no barriers there…as if I travelled to another time zone where everything - I was reborn type thing - where I could just be myself. I enjoyed myself. I honestly - the way I interacted was…genuine. It is not anything to become politically correct or anything like that.*

Ali continued to explain how this sense of authenticity made him feel strongly about how to proceed with his life:

> Ali: *And that was, let's say, that catalysed that emotion, the strong feeling for me. Oh, yes! Now I'm going that direction for sure…*
>
> *So all our elders within the life experiences that they had – they formed this belief that just stay [in] our culture the way we act and make a family, you know, feed the family, live a life of dignity and try to not get in trouble. You know, that's it. That's basically fear of losing your reputation, fear of trying something and failing.*

This particular migrant community culture was so strong that Ali felt the only way for him to navigate the expectations of his family was to keep his emerging ideas and direction for life to himself. Reflecting on a particular project he became involved with, he stated, "I had no confidence in facing them". He "feared that this would break, you know, disaster and everything would become like hell". Ali, however, drew on a deep courage and persisted in pursuing new ways of thinking and being, saying to himself, "Let's face it!". Ali told the story of how his project actually made a great impact, and that was why, "Luckily for me, the community gracefully accepted that".

It was evident from the storyline of each of the participants highlighted above that they had both a deep desire to explore personal change and the courage to persist through the crucibles that the process necessarily entailed. These elements formed a repeated theme in the interviews, and it raised interesting implications for a transformative approach to student leadership development initiatives. What might have happened if these students had not displayed these personal attributes? Were they essential to the journey? Was it possible to develop these attributes intentionally as part of the learning experience?

The first two questions will ultimately require further studies based upon a research design that specifically focuses on these personal issues; however, a few tentative conclusions can be drawn from this study, given that it was conducted with purposive sampling. The benefit of this kind of sampling in this scenario was that each of the participants believed that they had undergone a transformative learning experience as a result of the NSLF experience. The interviews gave me no reason to believe otherwise. Therefore, the clear and repeated presence of these personal factors supported the proposition that the personal factors of *desire* and *courage* are essential components of transformative learning for these participants. I am unaware of any literature about transformative learning or student leadership development that actively details or contradicts this finding.

The third question revolved around whether these personal factors were necessarily inherent to the student delegate or if they could be developed somehow as part of the NSLF program or physical and culture settings. Again, this question would ultimately require a more intentional research design; however, there was a range of indicators in the data to suggest that these personal factors could be influenced to some extent by the environment.

On the topic of *desire*, Jarvis's (2006) book, *Toward a comprehensive theory of human learning*, is relevant. He contends that when a person's biographical repertoire is insufficient to make sense of their experience, a distinct motivation to learn and to re-establish personal

harmony develops. Indeed, it is argued by Jarvis that the impulse to overcome this "sense of disjuncture" is the greatest motivation for learning one can experience (p. 78). So, logically, if a learning environment can be intentionally designed for students to experience a "sense of disjuncture" (p. 78), then it is plausible that a *desire* for learning could be realised. Indeed, this was precisely what was being described by the participants, who explained how the physical and cultural setting of the NSLF impacted them.

The issue of *courage* is perhaps more difficult to correlate with the NSLF experience itself, because many of the participants' courageous actions occurred after the event. There were, however, several lines of evidence to indicate that the students found key moments in the forum experience itself to be *encouraging*. Joan, for instance, explained how she was incredibly influenced by a couple who were guest speakers and who presented on their life as foster carers:

> Joan: *But then, like seeing this, like the way they were talking about it, I don't know why I was like bawling - I was crying so much and I it was so like, "Oh, my gosh, this is something I really like". I always thought about doing it. But then like listening to them talk about, I was like, "Oh, my gosh, I really, really want to do this"... I still don't know why I was so, like I was crying so much it was amazing.*

During the interview with Joan, I continued to explore why this particular session was so powerful for her, and she proceeded to give specific examples of the courageous actions of the couple, and how it involved them persisting even though it was "really hard" and how it included "sacrifice" for long periods of time:

> Joan: *I think it was like the gravity of the sacrifice - because they already had…four or five kids, they already had a big family. And then they were still doing this consistently for decades….Like, even though it was like really hard -*

and also hard on the other kids, they still did it because they knew that these kids needed help.

Joan explained that hearing this was "the most powerful thing… like it didn't stop this couple!". She then continued to describe in detail how she wanted to follow their example and do something similar with her life. A recurring theme that occurred in the interviews was that the former student delegates were inspired to model what they had witnessed in others. Veronique, for instance, said, "The amount of honesty that was shown… I feel like it allowed me to just completely be myself". Ali described explicitly how his mindset shifted from one of fear into one of action as result of his experience at the NSLF. He stated:

> Ali: *So I know it's going to be a harsh journey. I know you're going to face some criticism, but I had validation. I had a strong support at the critical point at NSLF – where people said – "You know, you can just be yourself".*
>
> *So I stopped acting like I'm not going to…"Oh, my God. Oh, my God". So I believe that whatever way this goes I've done my thing in the right mind and in all [good]conscience… So this is all good for me.*

Whereas previously Ali had been very concerned about the inevitable criticism that he would face, now he felt validated and in the right frame of mind to follow through with what he wanted to do. Celia also described how the small group setting caused her "inner world to shift", and how she then began a journey that took her to a foreign country and into the "far end of things".

5.3.3   Overview of findings

Throughout the process of data analysis, it became evident that, in addition to the theme of environmental factors (see Section 5.2), there also emerged a theme relating to personal factors. This theme involved two significant elements that contributed to the transformative

nature of the NSLF experience. These were coded as *desire* (see Section 5.3.1) and *courage* (see Section 5.3.2), and they were explicitly related to student learning processes, which are further explored in the following chapter. Through inductive reasoning, the lines of evidence were analysed, and it appears likely that although these were inherently personal factors, the program and the physical and cultural environment of the NSLF positively contributed to cultivating an intense desire for learning and the courage to persist through what may have been a challenging journey for some students.

A rival possibility to this conclusion is that the student delegates possessed these personal qualities already, and that the NSLF experience activated their expression in a focused manner. Ultimately, a different research design would be needed to address this question; however, the data outlined above provide several lines of evidence to link the development of the qualities (at least in a contributing sense) in causal fashion to the student experience itself.

A second possibility is that the retrospective nature of these interviews resulted in personal reflections that were layered with meaning, value, and intensity that may not have been present in the event itself (Roessger et al., 2017). Again, a different research design would be required to fully address this objection; however, the data above give several instances in which a significant meaning, emotion and intensity were associated contemporaneously with the actual experiences. The implication of this is important, because it reveals that the learning environment can be established in such a way as to positively foster a powerful personal disposition towards transformative learning, and that it can inspire the courage required to persist along that journey, which may be challenging at times.

5.4   Chapter summary

This chapter addresses the findings that relate to Research Question 1: Why, in retrospect, did some former student delegates perceive the NSLF experience as personally transformative? Using the method of thematic analysis, several emergent themes and subcodes were discussed. The first was *environmental factors,* which included two subcodes: *the physical setting* (see Section 5.2.1*)* and *the cultural setting* (see Section 5.2.2). This was followed by a discussion about the second theme, *personal factors*, which also included two subcodes, *desire* (see Section 5.3.1) and *courage* (see Section 5.3.2). Rival possibilities the conclusions drawn were also discussed (see Sections 5.2.3 and 5.3.3), while the implication of these findings to a transformative approach to student leadership development in Australian higher education are outlined in Chapter 7.

CHAPTER 6: THE TRANSFORMATIVE JOURNEY

6.1   Chapter overview

This chapter builds on the findings of the previous chapter on *why* students experienced the forum as personally transformative and shifts the focus to explore the *way* in which is the learning occurred, and *what* specific changes transpired as a result. This chapter therefore addresses Research Question 2; What did these students' learning processes and outcomes of the NSLF experience reveal about contemporary transformative learning?

The research design of this study was based around a conception of transformative learning as a analytic metatheory, which is a "overarching paradigm relative to a particular phenomenon or range of phenomen[a]" (Hoggan, 2016a, p. 63). In order to establish construct validity through use of clear concepts and operational measures (see Section 4.5.1.1), this study adopted the position that transformative learning specifically "refers to processes that result in significant and irreversible changes in the way a person experiences, conceptualizes, and interacts with the world" (p.71).

Section 6.2 explores how the overarching transformative journey consists of four distinct phases concluding with the *test of truth*, and how the experience can be described using the heuristic *deconstruction* and *reconstruction*. The transformative learning processes involved are then explored in Section 6.3, while the various learning outcomes associated with the student experience at the NSLF are outlined in Section 6.4. The findings for each of the sections are then analysed in relation to the conceptual framework of this study and the implications to transformative learning theory, and finally, a summary of the main points is provided in Section 6.5.

6.2   The transformative journey

From the previous chapter, it is clear that students perceived the NSLF experience as personally transformative for a range of reasons. These included environmental factors (see Section 5.2) such as the physical and cultural settings, and personal factors (see Section 5.3) such as desire and courage. It was also evident that personal transformation did not occur instantaneously (although there were certainly powerful moments in time), but rather that a learning journey was embarked on as students began integrating new capacities and perspectives into their daily lives. Some changes became evident shortly after the NSLF, while others took years to be realised. It has been proposed in literature that a general progression of phases to such transformation exists. Mezirow (2018, p. 118) for instance observed ten phases commencing with a "disorienting dilemma" and concluding with "a reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective". Cranton (2016) simplified these ten phases into three broad phases that are based on an integrated paradigm of learning processes. This three-phrase model consists of 1. Disorienting event; 2. Questioning assumptions and perspectives; 3. Discourse, dialogue and support (pp. 46-60).

The conceptual framework of this thesis adopted Cranton's three-phase model, although an additional phase was added, 4: The *test of truth*. Furthermore, a heuristic for this student experience was also developed to encapsulate a distinctive and important element to the phases of transformation for student leadership development. This heuristic is *deconstruction* and *reconstruction,* and it was developed to summarise and simplify what can be a complicated journey of transformation, which may involve a wide range of interconnected learning processes and outcomes. These adaptions to transformative learning theory were tested against the data.

Table 4: Overview of the thematic components of the transformative journey

Theme	Codes	Example words/phrases/sentences
Transformative Journey	Deconstruction	"break down", "unpack", "unlearn", "explore", "understand", "awareness", "realisation", "recognise", "take a step back", "take some time", "reflect", "journey of trying to deconstruct self and really find authenticity and genuineness", "Lies", "façades", "empty air", "mystery", "veil had been lifted", "seeing for the first time", "woke up", "naïve to the fact", "narrow-minded"
	Reconstruction	"rebuild", "rediscover", "relearn", "find", "truth", "authenticity", "genuineness", "deal", "own", sharpen up", "clarity", "make a choice", "changed my perspective", "grow", comprehend", "a better way", "shed the baggage", "cemented"
Phase 1	Disorienting Dilemma	"it can be a bit unsettling" (Francis) "it was daunting" (Fabio) "that was overwhelming" (Jack). "out of place" (Sofia), "like a pretender" (Harry). "Am I supposed to be here?" (Aadya), "good enough?" (Jack), "fake it until I make it'" (Veronique).

Phase 2	Questioning assumptions and perspectives	"own", sharpen up", "grow", comprehend", "realise", "reflecting", "cognitive dissonance" (Fabio)
		"I'm not sure any more' (Francis"
		"everything I thought I knew was true is no longer true" (Priya)
Phase 3	Discourse, dialogue and support	"safe", "supportive", "environment" "talking" discussing", "sharing", "story", "listening", "care", "decency", "respect", "compassion", "empathy", "trust circle"
		"Wow, we're complete strangers to you and, you're just, you're just talking about, like, really in-depth things" (Sofia),
Phase 4	The test (of truth)	"I can't really justify it until I've researched all aspects" (Joan)
		"then I know that what I'm thinking is the right thing to me" (Joan)
		"I want to make sure that it's a decision that I'm making because that's what I believe is valuable. And not just like because someone said I should" (Sofia)
		"How do I get to that answer... It's like, for me, the process of decerning the truth from the lies" (Harry)
	Correspondence	"actually", "fact", "in actual fact", "reality", "data", "experience"

	Coherence	"coherent", "tension", "contradictory", "principles", "what's connected to what" (Harry)
	Pragmatist	"it gets the job done" (Serateki) "it's unproductive (Lachy) "much better for everybody" (Lachy) "things are far more efficient and far better"(Liam) "I can't do it without him" (Nicole)
	Consensus	"I was continuously talking to her to get feedback if I was right or wrong", "these people would immediately stop me" (Ali)

6.2.1   Testing the conceptual framework

Although the terms deconstruction and reconstruction are highly complex and can mean different things depending on philosophical and theoretical paradigms or environmental contexts (see Section 3.5), the conceptual framework of this study adopts an integrated and metaphorical understanding of the notions in a way that has direct application to the observed phenomenon of transformative learning and student leadership development. If transformative learning is conceived of as "processes that results in significant and irreversible changes in the way a person experiences, conceptualizes, and interacts with the world" (Hoggan, 2016a, p. 71), then the application of terms *deconstruction* and *reconstruction* relate to the learning journey of *breaking down* and *rebuilding* the "way that a person experiences, conceptualises and interacts with the world" (p. 71), however that may have occurred.

Codes: Deconstruction and Reconstruction

Although these experiences were coded separately as part of the data analysis (see Table 2), I present them together here to demonstrate how deconstruction necessarily precedes reconstruction, and how the learning journey may progress and recur over many years as new information and self-awareness emerges. The following interview extracts also demonstrate the diversity of learning processes involved and the wide range of vocabulary participants employed to describe this deconstructive and reconstructive experience.

Francis explained how telling his story helped him to "to see it from another person's eyes". He continues:

> Francis*: I guess breaking those down was difficult, particularly as you confront those different aspects of your life more head on than you had thought because you'd just sort of cruising through life and then not critically thinking about them. And then think about how has influenced your perception about how the world is and how you interact with it… breaking things down and looking at some of these different aspects of my life individually… trying to learn some lessons from that.*

Francis also described how he how he felt he needed to "step away" and "rebuild myself". When asked what this experience involved, he explained that he had to "assess" how these lessons applied to him going forward, and he realised that his previous mistakes did not represent him accurately, as they "do not represent the majority or define who I am", and that "the story will continue to unfold". The core ideas of deconstruction and reconstruction are evident in Francis's reflections on the transformative experience; this is made especially clear

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through his use of descriptive phrases *breaking things down*, *stepping away*, *assessing* and *rebuilding*.

Paul described how the forum had helped by giving him a "method of unlearning things, of unpacking things, of exploring things that I didn't have before. And that's probably the biggest impact." When asked to explain this impact in more detail, he gave an example within his marriage of unpacking his behaviour in order to learn new and authentic ways of being. He stated, "so I had to relearn all of that, you know, that was painful. That was that was 10 years of re-learning all that". Paul used the terminology of *unlearning* and *relearning* to describe this experience and how he engaged in processes of *unpacking*, *exploring* and adopting *new and authentic ways of being*. Although the vocabulary employed is different to Francis's above, the sentiment is essentially the same.

Harry explicitly referred to his experiences as a "journey of trying to deconstruct self and really find authenticity and genuineness". Even though he did not use the term *reconstruction*, from his narrative, it seems clear that this experience consisted of embracing "truth" in order to move beyond "lies", "facades" and "empty air". Similar to Paul above, the term *authenticity* is employed as an end state to the learning journey. Both men used this expression as a way of describing how they *recognised* and *moved away* from "lies" (Harry) or "bad data" (Paul) and towards *finding* new perspectives, ways of being and *truth*.

Jack explained how he "realised the value of knowing who you are. And you can't do that without thinking through that". He explained how this experience was also "a moment of dealing with the things I went through". The first part of the process seems to revolve around *self-awareness* and *understanding*, and the second part of the process seemed to revolve around *dealing* with issues in order to "overcome sort of situations and become a better person". The general pattern of breaking things down in order to understand them and then building things up in a more healthy way is once again evident in this narrative.

Bobby described the learning journey of discovering what made her into the person she was as something similar to investigating a "deep mystery", "something untouched and untapped". It "was incredibly powerful because it kind of pierced light into those dark places". She explains how she realised that when it came to her beliefs, she had been "riding on the coattails" of her mother. She then realised that she needed to discover if she "really did have a faith" and how she needed "sharpening up" when he came to understanding what she valued and why. She described how she needed to "step away" and "make a choice for my own self". Throughout this journey of change, she explains how she *explored* things, learnt to *understand* and began to *own* her wrongs, forgive herself and others, and how she *found clarity* in her beliefs. The movement from "deep mystery" to "clarity" involved the familiar pattern of deconstructing why things were as they were, assessing the validity of beliefs, and then reconstructing her views based on her own critical reflections and the confidence she attained in the process.

Edward described how his small group experience made him realise that the "world is much more complex" and that "I was quite polarised in one way". He described how he began to see "nuance" and that others as not "just single-issue, monolithic type people", but that they had "multiple different capacities and loves and fears". He stated that the impact of this realisation "really changed my perspective on the world" and he "became much less sure of everything" because he could now see "how much I had to learn". This commenced a shift in him, as he began a journey to "grow… and comprehend things in a better way". Again, the language is subtle; however, the phases of breaking down unwarranted beliefs and rebuilding them with *better* more informed beliefs is evident.

Nicole explained how the "forum really helped break down literally parts of who I was". It was through conversations that explored her personal story that she was able to deconstruct the different components that made her the way she was. The benefit of enduring

this difficult activity in her mind was that she "could actually, kind of shed off the baggage I was carrying". When asked how she was able to shed the baggage, she described how it was like she "woke up and started the process", which was a long and relentless pursuit of a single goal: "I wanted to know the truth. I wanted to know the truth". The descriptive words *break down* is juxtaposed with the adoption of new understandings that were based on discoveries of *truth*. Although she did not use the word *build up*, the juxtaposition makes it clear that her transformative journey involved both deconstructive and reconstructive elements.

Vidya reflected on the realisation that prior to the forum, she existed in a "naïve bubble" and was "oblivious to the fact". She described how meeting people from different cultural, religious and family backgrounds had a "more profound impact than meeting the Prime Minister". When asked why this was the case, she explained it in terms of contrast to the deficits of her previous "naïve" perspective. This demonstrates that she was able to establish the inadequacies of her previous views, while constructing a revised set of perspectives that recognised that "it didn't matter who you were, where you came from, everyone had something". By embracing a way of being based on a deeper appreciation for people and their own unique stories, she became "kinder to myself and think more forgiving".

Beth reflected that when she came to the Forum, "my assumptions and reactions to things were based upon my family". The experience made her reflect on her life and upbringing, and about "what I truly value, when I sit down and think about". She began "recognising…so many different layers" and could see that she was "hanging on to these different awful things that have happened". She explained how she had to "take a step back" and consider exactly "how I want to do it… going forward". For Beth, this was like a "veil had been lifted" and that she was "seeing for the first time". This began a process of "knowing myself again", and it was like finding "someone I had lost". By employing descriptive concepts like *unveiling, seeing,* and *stepping back,* she depicts activities associated

with deconstruction by re-assessing her "deep core beliefs and values". This part of her transformative journey is clearly contrasted to a reconstructive period, which was described with concepts like *finding* and *knowing* and *moving forward*.

A final illustration of deconstruction and reconstruction can be seen in the reflections of Priya. She explained how meeting people and hearing stories from a variety of faith and cultural backgrounds made her realise that she had existed in a very "narrow minded" world. By the second day of the NSLF, she recalls telling her roommate that her "mind was being blown into a million pieces right now. Everything I thought I knew was true is no longer true". She described going home after the Forum and journaling a lot to process and express her feelings. She began to change things in her life in "incremental" ways because some issues took a "couple of years… to really be cemented in the way I thought". Although the words deconstruction and reconstruction are not explicit in Priya's reflection, her employment of strong phrases, such as *my mind was being blown,* to describe her realisation of her own limited perspectives and false beliefs is indicative of this phenomenon. The pattern of the learner requiring time and space to *process* their discoveries is once again repeated in Priya's story, and it is only after this period that she begins *cementing* new or revised perspectives and implementing changes accordingly.

6.2.2   *Phase 1: Disorienting dilemma*

This phase is described by Mezirow (2018) and Cranton (2016) as the first phase in the learning journey. The student experience outlined in the previous chapter (see Section 5.2), as well as a critical review of the learning process in Section 6.3.1.1, provides multiple lines of evidence in support of the inclusion of this phase in the student learning journey. In this case study, disorientation was associated mostly with the student delegates' arrival at the NSLF and environmental factors such as the physical setting, although it also extended to the cultural setting for some former delegates (see Section 5.2.2).

The fact that a large number of former student delegates (though not all) explained their experience in ways that align with existing literature on disorientation gives strong support for this distinctive phase as presented in the conceptual framework. Some participants described an uncomfortable and unfamiliar feeling, with words like "unsettling" (Francis), "daunting (Fabio), and "overwhelming" (Jack). Others used phrases like "out of place" (Sofia) or "like a pretender" (Harry) to describe their feelings at arrival. Others reflected on how they critically questioned themselves in this setting, asking "am I supposed to be here?" (Aadya) or am I "good enough" to be here (Jack)*,* while another stated, "at the beginning I was like, 'Oh, maybe I kind of like have to fake it until I make it'" (Veronique).

6.2.3   *Phase 2: Questioning assumptions and perspectives*

This second phase is presented by Cranton (2016) as part of an integrated paradigm of transformative learning that can involve a range of different learning processes as advocated for in literature (see Section 3.5). This case study provides supporting evidence for this integrated approach to learning, as the student experience represented multiple different ways for students to begin questioning their assumptions and perspectives (see Section 5.2.2). For most students, this phase commenced after the initial disorientation of arrival, and occurred in the small group setting.

Some of these experiences are also discussed in the exploration of the codes *deconstruction* and *reconstruction* in Section 6.2.1 above. The critical component of this phase however is that participants undergo critical self-reflection after the initial phase of disorientation, in which their assumptions and perspectives or values and beliefs are assessed. Participants reflecting on this experience used words and phrases like "my mind was being blown into a million pieces… everything I thought I knew was true is no longer true" (Priya), "I didn't realise how conflicted my whole outlook was" (Harry), "Like am I just wasting my time? I was like, 'I'm not sure anymore'" (Francis), or "I was starting to realise, like, 'hey,

this isn't actually how I feel about it. These aren't my thoughts that I'm saying; these are someone else's thoughts'" (Beth). The various learning processes that may be involved in this phase are explored in Section 6.3, and although a linear progress or clear distinction between phases 2 and 3 was not obvious, the logical progression of these phases is not contradicted by any data in this case study.

6.2.4   *Phase 3: Discourse, dialogue and support*

The third Phase in Cranton's (2016) model is also based on the integration of various approaches in literature (see Section 3.5). This case study provides multiple examples of how former student-delegates engaged in discourse, dialogue and support, and how such activities occurred most frequently in the small group settings (see Section 5.2.2). Examples in the participant descriptions of this experience included "the facilitators are ensuring that the environment in which those stories are told is a safe one" (Paul), "Wow, we're complete strangers to you and, you're just, you're just talking about, like, really in-depth things" (Sofia), and "once you do share, once one person shares, it softens it up even further and invites more sharing and more interaction" (Jack). This Phase in the transformative learning journey is also represented by multiple learning processes described in Section 6.3; however, it should be re-iterated that a linear progression of Phases 2 and 3 was not particular apparent, nor was it contradicted by participant data.

6.2.5   *Phase 4: The test of truth*

The first three Phases of transformative learning revolve around learning processes that are well established in literature and are discussed in Section 6.3. The fourth Phase, The *test of truth*, however, is a distinct additional Phase that was developed in the conceptual framework and tested against the experience of the former student-delegates at the NSLF. The data obtained in the study provides a clear verification that students naturally included a *test*

of truth as part of the transformative learning journey. This was indicated by a range of ways in which student tested the truth-value of the new ways of thinking and being before ultimately accepting or rejecting them.

The theme *The test of truth* (see Table 2) included the general code *The test*, which was created prior to analysing the data in order to test this component of the conceptual framework against the collected data. The goal was to see whether participants would make implicit or explicit reference to a phase of testing their ideas and ways of being against the notion of truth. More specific codes were also developed to explore how students approached this test in relation to the notions or theories of truth found in literature (see Section 3.3.3), *Correspondence, Coherence, Pragmatist* and *Consensus*. It should be noted that some participants used multiple ways of testing the truth-value of ideas and ways of being, and therefore their data matched multiple of the above stated codes.

Code: The test of truth

This code involves a phase of actively testing ideas or ways of being against notions of truth. The focus in this first section is not necessarily on the nature or notion truth in that assessment, but on the fact that a critical evaluation of some variety is happening in the first place. The interview extract below indicates how Joan approached ideas that conflicted with her own.

> Joan: *I mean, it depends on the subject. Like, there's things that I think are open to interpretation, but some things are either yes or no. It's either like in my mind, it's like, OK, I know you're wrong, but that's fine. There's things that are more - like who do you vote for in the government like that is totally up to personal opinion.*
>
> *The more I talk about it with other people, the more I understand the actual subject matter… So I need to know, like all sides, like all opinions, to then solidify*

my own opinion. Like I might have an idea, but it's like, oh, I can't really justify it until I've researched all aspects. And then when I've spoken to other people and gathered their opinions and either agree or disagree, that helps shapes… helps solidify my own because I'm like, OK, I really don't agree with what you're saying, then I know that what I'm thinking is the right thing to me.

In this interview, Joan explained how she evaluates the validity her own arguments as well as counterarguments to test that her thinking is "right". The use of categorical language such as "right" thinking is indicative of her evaluation of the truth-value of certain propositions. Some issues she contends have room for personal interpretation, while others are "yes or no" issues. The test in this case is a phase of submitting her ideas to the processes of research and ensuring that she understands the fundamental issues at hand, as well as various other views on the matter. Once she has undergone this exercise, she then feels she can "solidify" her opinion in a justified manner. Sofia shared a similar learning phase in her interview:

Sofia: *I think sometimes it just comes down to what I think is negotiable or not negotiable… if someone told me oh you should just cut everyone out and not speak to anyone about it, then I would go, well, no, I don't agree that that's what you should do… Just because someone tells me something is a good idea, like, I can actually still, like, stop and reconsider… I want to make sure that it's a decision that I'm making because that's what I believe is valuable. And not just like because someone said I should...*

If a new idea is presented, like, I'll make sure I take the time to kind of think over it and figure out an opinion. I think I feel overwhelmed if there's, like, too much of that. Like if someone keeps, like, pushing an idea and I go, I haven't had time to kind of think about where I stand on it or like do the research myself.

Sofia described a phase of working through ideas until she felt comfortable adopting them as her own or otherwise rejecting them. She explained that some ideas were non-negotiable because she was already convinced that they were untenable. This test, or phase of ensuring the value of beliefs requires time for careful reflection, to "think over it", and to "figure out an opinion" and if necessary to "do the research myself". These statements are a clear indication that Sofia is concerned that her convictions are rational and based on evidence. Although she did not refer to the word *truth,* the value of certain propositions is clearly implied by their inherent relation to research and critical thought, the use of the descriptor "good" and her emphasis of ensuring that "what I believe is valuable".

The following interview with Nicole depicts a similar learning phase of assessing the truth-value of an alternative perspective. When she struggled to find words to explain this, I repeated what I heard from her to check I was interpreting her correctly. Her response is telling:

> Nicole: *And so, I think I realised that I wasn't, you know, because I used to think of myself as like a really bad person, because I was experiencing all these bad emotions, they were experiences, they were emotions I was told were bad and I think that... It's really hard, it's really hard to answer.*

> Rian: *Can I tell you what I'm hearing, maybe that'll help?*

> Nicole: *Yeah, go for it.*

> Rian: *Ok, so there were parts of you that, like you said, you were volatile and angry at times and there was emotions that you thought were bad for whatever reasons. And then you're in an environment where people started to say positive things about you and affirming your nature.*

> Nicole: *Yeah.*

Rian: *And affirming maybe even some of those emotions. And now you're starting to think maybe these ideas of myself are actually not true ideas of me, and I can let them go. Is that what you're telling me?*

Nicole: *Yes, that's what I'm telling you. And I think you've helped me understand myself.*

This conversation with Nicole was revealing because it showed the natural way she tested her ideas against truth. When she was presented with an alternate perspective, she became convinced that it actually made more sense of how things are. When she recognised the validity of that view, it allowed her to "let go" of her previous ideas about herself, precisely because she now believed they were "not true ideas" and therefore they no longer passed the test. The following interview with Harry revealed a similar learning phase, although he incorporated the word *truth* explicitly.

Harry: *Like I had the answer written down on the page. But then and I just thought, OK, I got the answer. And then when I thought about it, I was like, oh, I never actually did any of the working. How do I get to that answer… It's like, for me, the process of discerning the truth from the lies.*

In this interview, Harry explained how a fundamental part of the NSLF experience for him was testing his ideas by examining them critically and how this phase explicitly involved "discerning the truth from the lies". The following conversation with Bobby is another example of a participant explicitly referring to the notion of truth as part of their learning journey.

Bobby: *The NSLF experience awakened a hunger for truth in my own life of my past and present experiences. What did I think of that? How has that shaped me,*

what did I learn or observe in it? It was not an overnight change but I learnt to love questions.

Bobby described how the experience "awakened a hunger for truth". That phrase is important because truth is positioned as an end goal of a learning journey. Examining what she thought about certain things or exploring how and why certain things shaped her were valuable precisely because they led to her discovering something true. This was a powerful part of the experience for her because it activated a love of learning and set her on a personal journey of actively asking questions and seeking truth. The specific nature or notion of truth are now be explored in greater detail.

Code: Correspondence

This code is based on the correspondence theory of truth (see Section 3.3.3), which holds that a proposition 'P' is true if and only if 'P' corresponds with an actual state of affairs (Bridges, 1999, p. 601). The *test of truth* on this theory therefore consists of critically evaluating the degree to which an idea corresponds with reality. When a person is convinced that an idea satisfactorily matches external reality, then the test is passed and the new or revised idea is adopted. It should be noted that this view is well aligned with a realist ontology, and therefore the following interview extracts provide a significant degree of evidence in support of the validity of the philosophical dimensions of the conceptual framework of this thesis.

Paul provided a detailed explanation of how he processed his beliefs in relation to lived experiences, and how data are based on practical reality:

> Paul: *But what we believe about ourselves, and about other people, comes from our experience and how we interpret that experience and hold onto them. So*

inside our brain somewhere, we've amassed this huge database of experiences and our feelings are the short circuit of that, right.

For me, I've experienced fathers in this way - men in authority in this way, so I then relate to men in authority like this, right... So you can tell me all you like, theoretically, that this is a great man and he's wonderful and he's not going to hurt you. But I will respond to that man with scepticism, cynicism, deception, because my experience tells me that that is what men in authority are like. And there's no short circuiting that. You know, the theory doesn't win over the practical reality - practical reality and experience - always trumps.

So first, I have to be honest about what I believe and how I got there, right...and then the second thing... is to change what you believe, you have to forgive, right. And forgiveness is this processes of saying - my data set for what I believe is bad - I got a bad data set. You know, actually, if I look at my data set, I've got a data set of men in authority that is dominated by this one character, my dad, who's actually a bad example of men in authority, he's not the norm, right?... and what I need to actually do is give up, get rid of, throw away the experience that I have. I'm not going to wait around for justice. I'm not going to wait around for it to be put right. I'm going to say, actually, that's a bad it's a bad set of data. And fathers are not like that, right.

In this interview, Paul unpacked his internal thought processes with insight. He explained how the first stage of adopting a new belief was to acknowledge how you gained the initial belief in the first place. This goal of critical self-reflection is to understand what "database of experiences" have informed that perspective, and then as a second phase, to test that belief against a more reliable data set with a bigger sample size. He describes how his single example (his father) is inadequate because it is not representative of "the norm", and

therefore it is "biased" and "warped". As a result, the ideas associated with this "terrible example", don't pass the *test of truth* because "actually…fathers are not like that". Paul thereby concluded that he needed to "give up", "get rid of" and "throw away" that experience as a reference point for his life.

In the following interview extract, Maximus described why he changed his perspective on certain issues throughout the NSLF experience:

> Maximus: *And so there was a massive shift for me in terms of, say, what politicians do. So I always kind of viewed politicians as individuals, who had their own ideas, their own agenda, and they would try and drag the population with them. In actual fact, I now say the politicians are reactionary - because - and so almost like this idea that you want to get voted into government is actually a good thing, because if you don't give a crap about getting elected next time, that means you don't care about people who are voting for you…*

> *It's like I didn't get it. I didn't get it at the Forum - when Jock was like, "No, you're like the [shepherd] not dragging them along". You know, it's weird because normally you think of leadership at the front, but in actual fact, your leadership is at the back and your job is just trying to help bring these people together. That's your job. And that's a very different thing.*

In this interview, Maximus explained how his ideas of leadership shifted because of the cogency of the ideas he was presented with and because of the politicians he interacted with throughout the event. Initially, he found it difficult to reconcile his previous convictions with the notion of Servant Leadership and the idea of leading for others, not yourself. His use of the words "actually" and "in actual fact" are indicative of his conviction that his new perspective corresponds better than his old perspective with the actual state of affairs. In this

regard, his old views did not pass the *test of truth*, and therefore he adopted a new view of what it means to be a leader. Ali explained a similar realisation:

> Ali: *Like I, you know, I wanted to do this, but you know how our culture is… I never dared to step out of that boundary. And this is something that I learnt in, ah, you know, within this forum… is the cultural barrier becomes so great it becomes like a Mexican wall, you know. So it's physically in your mind. But actually there's nothing*

Ali explained how at the forum he realised that due to his cultural background he had erected a barrier in his mind that limited what he could do. But then he realised that this barrier was purely psychological, and that "actually" there was "nothing" and therefore he should act according to reality. Fabio also experienced a shift in perspective when his purported values were put to the test. He explains:

> Fabio: *And that's really a message that came from the forum that stuck with me and hit me across the face then and it's like we can have a pretty good list of values that we have on a piece of paper that we can rattle off to people. But what if your day-to-day behaviours and actions actually represent your values, and what does that mean to you as a human? If nobody else was watching, what would your values actually be?*

> Rian: *Yeah, ok. And do you think as time went on, you became quite comfortable with the distinction between your own ideals and values? At which point did you sort of say, you know what, this is a really good concept, ideas and values, and I'm going to appropriate this in my own sort of way of being?*

> Fabio*: I think from the minute I left forum, really. In terms of having the language to crystallise it… And I tried to put people in my life who'd hold me accountable when I wasn't living out of my values.*

In this interview, Fabio explained how he became aware of the discrepancy between his values and actions. He explained how he realised that many of his propositions relating to his values were in effect false, because they did not "actually" correspond to his actions. In adopting this *action-oriented* conception of values, it meant that he could no longer claim certain values as his own, because truthfully, they were actually his *ideals*. In order to close this gap between purported values and actual actions, he sought accountability from people in his life. The *test of truth* in this narrative represents a phase in Fabio's learning journey in which his perception of reality would ultimately determine whether he revised his beliefs about what he actually values. Priya similarly explains how her perspective changed when confronted with a different reality:

> Priya: *I was actually really shocked because I was like, oh, I thought these people* (politicians*) just kind of standing in their lanes and didn't want friends and didn't talk to each other because that's what the media tells you. The media tells you that they're always bickering and fighting. But, actually, they had this really shared value and actually outside of suits and outside of Parliament House, they were just normal people who were dads who felt inspired to help people.*

Priya reflects on her realisation that the narrative of parliamentarians that she previously believed based upon media coverage did not "actually" reflect the politicians she met face to face at the Forum. This "shocked" her because what she previously thought to be true did not match reality. Multiple other participants described how they ended up feeling comfortable adopting new beliefs because of the way these new ideas mapped onto their experience of actual reality. Nicole, for instance, stated "it was the most powerful experience. It's just like

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pure joy. And I felt light, I felt so energised. I can't describe the feeling, but I knew that I'd made a really powerful change… I was like having these actual experiences of spirituality". The experience Nicole is referring here occurred a number of years after the Forum; however, the event was a catalyst for the process of spiritual exploration. The key point of reflection she makes was that she the change in herself came in direct correspondence to an actual experience, not simply an idea or philosophy.

Cumulatively these extracts support the finding of experimental studies in cognitive science, in that people have a natural inclination to make assertions in alignment with their convictions regarding the objective facts of external reality (Turri, 2013). The evidence suggests that even when participants' views could be internally justified, they seemed to intuitively test their beliefs against, and default to, reality as they now perceived it, even when it was difficult to do so. This aligns with the conceptual framework (see Section 3.3.3) of this study, which positions the *test of truth* regarding the correspondence theory as a distinct and integral phase of the transformative learning journey.

Code: Coherence

This code is based on the coherence theory of truth (see Section 3.3.3), which holds that a proposition 'P1…Pn' are true if and only if they represent an internally coherent, consistent and comprehensive set of "mutually implicative and supportive propositions" (p. 603) (Young, 2018). The *test of truth* on this theory therefore consists of critically evaluating the degree to which an idea coheres with a person's pre-existing set of ideas. When a person is able to make sense of an idea and is satisfied that it is not inherently contradictory but has explanatory power, then the test is passed and the new or revised idea is adopted. In the following extract, Lachy described this phase of sense-making and how he ended up adopting a new perspective on the role of forgiveness:

> Lachy*: Yeah in terms of criteria, and I mean there is a tension between forgiveness and justice. I am someone who believes quite stringently in principles of egalitarianism, equality of opportunity, but also you know, justice… I think, those principles matter there, and so, when those things come into tension. Um, there is a deliberate sense that tension exists.*
>
> *Part of the strange world we live in requires having a capacity to accept these contradictory positions or realities or principles and the tensions between them and being able to live with those.*

The interview with Lachy revealed his internal processing as he sought to address the tension between two ideas that implicate each other in ways that are not easy to reconcile. He maintained that the principles of egalitarianism, equality and justice must stand; however, he also concluded that in "the strange world" we live in, somehow we have to allow for forgiveness and learn to live with the tension. In this way, Lachy is able to reconcile, to his own satisfaction, both ideas into a coherent worldview. This was not necessarily because they are well aligned, but because our messy circumstances necessitated both. When asked why he now believed that it was so important to incorporate forgiveness into his life and worldview, he provided an explanation that appealed to pragmatic notions of truth. This is explored in the next code: *Pragmatist.* It is revealing to note that although a coherence approach was central to this phase of learning, ultimately the inclusion of a new idea, was based upon its pragmatic value, not its coherence value.

The interview extracts below demonstrated that the test of coherence was important for the participants in relation to ideas relating to their personal narratives and sense of identity. Francis reflected:

> Francis: *And as I was starting think about that more, because part of the questions, they were probing questions also, but very thought provoking and very*

essential. At the end, I sort of came away from that, as I was like, I'm not sure if I know who I am. Like, 'who is [Francis]'?

I came to the conclusion I think I had transformed myself into the expectations of what people wanted me to be in those positions rather than me bringing myself wholly into that, like making it mine… that a lot of the emotions that I had – I felt I hid that away behind a shield. And so not letting people see, I guess, more of the real me… And then, as part of going through that change, actually saying, well, no, sure I might have made mistakes in the past, but that doesn't define who I am now. And I guess through that… you know I talk with my sister and she says she says to me she can notice that there's a change in me after going to NSLF. Like I'm more willing to be comfortable in my emotions and to show that.

In this interview, Francis described how he developed a new perspective of himself. The phase involved critical self-reflection and recognising incongruencies in the way he understood and expressed himself. The test of coherence involved evaluating a range of factors that contributed to why this had happened, reconciling with them, and reforming his sense identity and self-expression accordingly. This resulted in a more integrated and authentic self-expression – one that lets people see the "real me". Fabio described a similar phase of realising that his current view of values was not coherent and therefore needed changing.

Fabio: *So, all of your actions or behaviours should flow from your values. Now, if your values are flowing, if what you think your values are, are not aligned with who you actually are, then, [or your actions], behaviours flowing from a source that's not coherent with who you are, that's going to lead to distress ultimately and probably just burnout.*

In this interview, Fabio explicitly used the word coherent to explain the validity of his newly adopted idea. For him, the *test of truth* for a personal value was in the coherence between an action and its internal source. Importantly, Fabio also relied upon the corresponding evidence of personal action, and the pragmatic value of avoiding burnout to justify this view. The following extract from the interview with Harry depicts the critical role of testing and establishing coherence as part of his learning journey. These also relate to the phases of deconstruction and reconstruction outlined in Section 6.2.1.

> Harry: *So, it's just, like, lifting up the kind of the hatch and just seeing like an absolute mess of wires and being, like, I don't know what's connected to what and I don't know what this does at all, Like, what is this good for. It was pretty devastating in a sense.*
>
> *And at the time and I was, like, I have no capacity to deal with that, but then having someone help you kind of deal with that process and move you through the stages of kind of understanding these narratives…*
>
> *It's like. For me, the process of decerning the truth from the lies with the things that were truth and the things that had authenticity and had power like positive power in my life with the things where I clearly could see it describes you, that's how I got there. Like that's the working of that. Like that's why I'm that way because of X, Y and Z.*
>
> *Yeah, and I think the kind of revelation, part of that, the part where it really like kind of snaps, where it like ok, this is where I can see an area of my life where there's a lot of lies, a lot of narratives that an untruth is where I was the loudest in my reactions,*

In this candid interview, Harry explained the painful experience of realising that his beliefs and values did not pass the test of coherence. It was like a "mess of wires", and he had no idea "what's connected to what" or even "what is this good for". He explained that the transformation occurred as he began to explore these internal elements to understand them. He described this phase as a process of "discerning the truth from the lies". Specifically, the truths were the elements of him that had "authenticity" and that he could establish legitimate connections to them: "because of X, Y and Z". The falsehoods, he concludes, had a strong reaction in him, because those components of his life contained "a lot of lies". A critical part of Harry's experience was the task of establishing coherence to his beliefs and values. He states that he went on a "journey of trying to, like deconstruct self and really find authenticity and genuineness".

During my interview with Edward, he explained how he came to adopt the Servant Leadership approach as it was presented at the Forum. For him, the idea needed to pass two criteria. The first was that it needed to fit in with his internal schema of meaning, and the second was that it needed to work when tested in the real world. The first criterion represents coherence, and the second represents elements of both the pragmatic and correspondence conceptions of truth. He reflected on how he was processing these ideas at the time:

> Edward: *And I've never been a fan of religion and I'm still not. But the idea of Servant Leadership when it was first just - well put, not forced on me, but just well-articulated and then offered to me like on a plate as something that I could do with quite clearly. And I quite readily accepted that it was a thing that I could model my life around that would give purpose and meaning and joy and a structure to my life because I was just a kid from the suburbs who didn't really have any reason or meaning or, like, I think the French would call it a raison d'etre – to like exist. I had no mega narrative.*

And I thought at the time, I remember clearly thinking at a time, maybe this will be like a fad, like a diet, like I'm only drinking watermelon and eating cantaloupe or something, you know... I thought to myself why don't I give it a go? And if it really is something that is at the core of the teachings of Jesus, and it's something that I was told at my church when I went back to my church the Holy Spirit would participate in and drive and empower. Then I thought, well, it'll stick or it won't. Yeah, like now its 22 years later, it's more a part of my life now than it was then.

Edward explains how the idea of Servant Leadership immediately resonated with him because it filled a void in his worldview, and it gave him a model of life that had meaning and purpose. It fit with his internal desires and the teaching of the church he had started attending; therefore, it made sense to "give it a go". So, it passed the test of coherence, but he still wanted to submit it to a test of experience and see whether it worked as he thought it might in the real world. Edward's *test of truth* is another example of participants employing multiple approaches to truth in order to feel comfortable adopting a new idea or way of being.

Several other participants used similar words and phrases associated with the coherence theory of truth to describe how they adopted a new perspective. Nicole for instance said "it was the first time I was able to go, okay… I've had these experiences happen in my life and that's caused me to feel this way, and that's why I'm having these responses. It makes sense". Beth reflected "I can kind of step back and be like, OK, I appreciate why you're reacting this way. It's not how I want to react. And I don't think it's healthy that you react that way. But I understand the things you've gone through and why you're doing this." In both of the above cases, it wasn't until Beth and Nicole were able to comprehend the coherence of their own, or another person's view that they were willing to settle their own mind on the issue at hand.

Code: Pragmatist

This code is based on the pragmatic theory of truth (see Section 3.3.3), which holds that a proposition 'P' is true if and only if it 'works' in practice (Bridges, 1999, p. 605). The *test of truth* on this theory therefore consists of critically evaluating the degree to which an idea had pragmatic value. When a person is able ascertain that an idea will be net positive in application, then the test is passed, and the new or revised idea is adopted. As was stated in the conceptual framework, this approach ultimately relies on a correspondence theory of truth (Dewey, 1941); however, the emphases clearly rest on the pragmatic outcomes associated with a particular proposition. Several participants used words and phrases that depicted a *test of truth* through a pragmatic approach. As alluded to in the earlier section, Lachy's interview revealed that he ultimately adopted the role of forgiveness in his life for pragmatic reasons. Reflecting on the story of forgiveness shared by one of the guest speakers, he stated:

> Lachy: *I think there's a sense in which he saw unforgiveness as unproductive. And the act of forgiving enabled him to move forward and do these incredible things in the world for the good of other people, as well as himself – it has to be said. It's so much better for everybody… That seemed to be part of the story that I found quite inspiring.*

The use of the descriptive word "unproductive" in direct association with the word "unforgiveness" is striking. This pragmatic emphasis within Lachy's decision making is further highlighted through phrases like "forgiving enabled him to move forward", and "it's so much better for everybody". In combination with his ability to make sense of it in terms of coherence with his other values and beliefs, Lachy actively adopted the role of forgiveness in his life and states "I have tried to work harder since that Forum to be more effective at forgiving".

As was stated earlier, Fabio also appealed to the pragmatic impact of mental health to justify the alignment of values and actions, stating "that's going to lead to distress ultimately

and probably just burnout". Edward similarly said in relation to Servant Leadership that he "thought it might be useful in a number of ways" and that he would "give it a go". Setareki also became convicted to adopt the model of Servant Leadership for pragmatic reasons. When asked why he believed it was a good thing to adopt this principle, he stated "basically, because it gets the job done, as opposed to merely being authoritative".

In the interview with Priya, she described how she realised that a "bunch of things [always] that I thought, like, wasn't actually working". When her previous ways of thinking didn't pass this pragmatic test, she became open to other ideas. She said, "that's why I decided to shift and I started to be ok with changing my belief system or my values". Nicole similarly reflected on a shift in her belief system, which occurred some years after her experience at the forum:

> Nicole: *And it actually felt for the first time it felt like, oh, ok, I've kind of got grounds to do this. Like, I actually understand why I'm doing it now, because I've just got all of this junk in my life that I actually need to get out of my system and I can't do that without him (Jesus).*

Nicole's use of the phrases "grounds to do this", and "I actually understand why" in direct association with her "need" to get the junk out of her life and her dependence on Jesus to do so, is indicative of a pragmatic element to the decision-making phase of her learning journey. Liam also appealed to the pragmatic component of personal authenticity in the workplace when he said "things are far more efficient and far better and far more a-livening for everyone. When you when you're all in sync… when your voice isn't filtered". Beth similarly reflected on the pragmatic value of authenticity and transparency by stating "I think it's hugely made my relationships".

Based on the survey and interview data, it is clear that the pragmatic approach to truth was a key component to testing the value of certain ideas and ways of being for many of the

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participants. Although it was often connected to both the coherence and correspondence approaches, the notion of something being worth adopting because *it works* has a distinct presence in the data.

Code: Consensus

This code is based on the consensus approach to the truth (see Section 3.3.3) which is associated with philosophical pragmatism (Bridges, 1999). This view holds that a proposition 'P' is true if and only if there is agreement that 'p' universally or among a relevant population (Bridges, 1999, p. 605). The *test of truth* on this theory therefore consists of critically evaluating the degree to which relevant people are agreeable to the idea or way of being. When a person is able ascertain that most relevant people consent to the notion, then the test is passed and the new or revised idea is adopted. It should be noted that these ideas ultimately still require a logical appeal to either correspondence or coherence (see Section 3.3.3); however, it is clear from the interviews that some students adopted this approach as part of a distinct learning phase. Ali for instance stated the following when asked why he felt comfortable to adopt a particular new perspective:

> Ali: *And I was feeling comfortable. Everything was vibing. And I was like, this must be right…So and I was continuously talking to her* (new friend*) to get feedback if I was right or wrong. But I knew from the way I talk to people within the NSLF and the way I kind of should, who I was and how I behaved in those scenarios, I was like, this must be right. Because if anything was wrong, these people would immediately stop me and say no, because there was no barriers there.*

Ali's use of the phrase "this must be right" in direction association with the words "I was talking to her" and "these people would immediately stop me" is indicative of a consensus approach in which relevant people are agreeable to this new perspective. Ali was

the only participant out of 20 who demonstrated the *test of truth* through this kind of approach; however, his reflections were also highlighted earlier as part of the correspondence code, when he reflected on a mental barrier that was not actually existent in reality. This again reinforces the way that participants naturally used multiple approaches to truth in order to test the validity of new or revised ideas of ways of being.

6.2.6   Overview of findings

The heuristic *deconstruction* and *reconstruction* forms an important theoretical component of a transformative approach to student leadership development. The risks associated with the use of heuristics such as this (namely cognitive bias that can lead to systematic errors) (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974) are mitigated to some degree by the empirical support that is provided in the student experiences outlined above. The benefit of including this heuristic is that it provides a helpful mental model that can summarise what can be a complicated learning journey. Given that this heuristic has some precedent in transformative learning and student leadership literature and that the thematic analysis of this study further grounds it in evidence, I tentatively propose that is sound, subject to further research.

A possible rival explanation for this conclusion is a common and limited vocabulary to describe a learning experience. In this way, participants may have used words associated with *deconstruction* and *reconstruction*; however, these concepts are sufficiently broad enough to accommodate multiple words and phrases in a kind of *catch all* category. Although I believe there is a certain amount of warrant to that rival explanation, the discussion in Section 6.2.1 also explicated the broader personal narrative context in which those words had authentic and relevant meaning. It was also the case that students used multiple words to convey the learning journey, and these words were considered in association with each other as part of the thematic analysis. This mitigates against the possible issue of a limited vocabulary.

Furthermore, given that the heuristic is explicitly described as being integrated and metaphorical in application, the objection of slippery terms or vague constructs is somewhat muted, as the heuristic is not intended to represent any one specific conception of learning in detail.

The *test of truth* was developed as a distinctive fourth phase in the student learning journey and represents an important component for a transformative approach to student leadership development, as outlined in the conceptual framework (see Section 3.3.3). This was manifestly evident through converging lines of evidence, and when these data is considered collectively, it provides empirical support for the idea that a critical and natural phase in the transformative learning journey involves an explicit *test of truth*. The *test of truth* may involve a range of different cognitive methods which can work synergistically and are not mutually exclusive. This reinforces the validity of the conceptual framework by demonstrating that learners will naturally undergo a *test of truth* of some variety, and that these methods relate to existing theories of truth, particularly Correspondence and Coherence. With these components of the conceptual framework now verified, I now turn to the specific learning processes students engaged with during their NSLF experience.

6.3   Transformative learning processes

Learning processes refer to ways in which people undergo significant personal change. Mezirow (2018) proposed that such transformations could be epochal (occurring suddenly) or cumulative (occurred in a progressive sequence). The below discussion presents evidence for students experiencing the phenomenon of both epochal and cumulative learning processes. Transformative learning scholars have also presented a range of perspectives on ways in which such learning processes might occur, including cognitive-rational, imaginative, intuitive, spiritual or relating to personal individuation or social change (Cranton & Taylor,

2012a). The below discussion demonstrates that at the NSLF, students engaged in each of

these processes; however, some were more prevalent than others.

Table 5: Overview of the thematic components of the transformative learning processes

Theme	Codes	Example words/phrases/sentences
Cognitive-rational processes	Critical Reflection	"The way the belief system is formed is out of fear. OK, is nothing else. There's no logic behind it. There's no literature behind it or education is behind it". (Ali)
	Action	"I think the provocative nature of the service-based element of the forum was something that really stuck with me the whole way through" (Fabio)
	Experience	"I remember like sitting there and making assumptions about a couple of the people I was chatting with, and then you hear they're story you're like, whoa, OK" (Beth)
	Disorienting Dilemma	"I didn't even know that stuff was bubbling away inside, I didn't realise how conflicted my whole outlook was… like my own idea of myself" (Harry)
	Discourse	"And into a group of people where that definitely was a good conversation and so that helped me exercise the muscle of talking on that subject and talking from matters of the heart that previously I had not touched on, really" (Bobby)
Extra-rational processes	Arts-based	"I think that's what I realised in that – we went to the War Memorial – I saw my own name on the bloody, on the wall – on the wall of remembrance – and I had a good cry over that" (Maximus)

	Dialogue/support	"I'm sure it's really bringing your vulnerabilities to the table and knowing that it's safe and it's received, you know" (Aadya)
	Emotions	"I'm getting goosebumps just even thinking about it because I remember it well enough that it kind of brings back some emotion. It was a pretty emotional experience" (Jack)
	Imaginal/soul work	"I think it was just an inner thing for me, it was like an intuition thing" (Nicole)
	Spiritual	"I think if you could plot on a graph my internal understanding of how much I know, it peaked at about one second before I knocked on that door of the prayer room at the Hyatt" (Edward)
Social critique	Ideology critique	"Prior to actually realising that I could create my thoughts and beliefs and that can be based on different things. I'm wondering, OK, does my Christian faith give me a book of rules, like a book of values that I then follow? Do I think outside of that? Is there space for me to question those things at that particular stage in my life?" (Priya)
	Unveiling Oppression	"They're like, 'oh, this is not culturally appropriate'. We got singers. We got actors. We got real artists in so many ways. And we got so many, especially girls and women, they're deprived of their freedom" (Ali)
	Empowerment	"And if I hadn't been in a situation where I even felt like I could think outside of the way that I was thinking or ask questions, I probably would have never been able to say those things because growing up in an environment where there's no room for error

		or questions, why would you question something?" (Priya)
	Social Action	"I think it was at a time, where we decided, let's try and see if we can actually have any power – for good, for changing things" (Edward)

6.3.1 Testing the conceptual framework

The data revealed a range of interesting findings. Although the students all completed the same activities at the forum, each of the cognitive-rational, extra-rational and social critique learning processes were represented within the surveys and interviews. This indicates that people engaged in similar experiences in a variety of ways. It was also evident in the semi-structured interviews that individual differences and personal stories were critical in shaping the transformative journey. This aligns with notions of adult learning that extend beyond cognitive processes and includes embodied elements such as "emotions, spirituality, relational learning, arts-based learning and storytelling" (Cranton & Taylor, 2012a, p. 4). The following lines of evidence depict how each of the learning processes encapsulated in the integrated paradigm of the conceptual framework were represented in the data.

Extracts from the surveys and interviews were matched to each of the codes that exist under the umbrella theme of certain learning processes (e.g., Cognitive-rational); however, only single examples are provided for the following reasons. First, the purpose of this section is solely to demonstrate the breadth of participant experiences regarding learning processes, not to provide analysis of how or what in particular the students were learning or how these processes explicitly related to certain learning outcomes. Second, there is limited value in providing more examples in order to establish representation, due the fact that participants described multiple learning processes and that there are porous lines of differentiation within

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categories in this coding schema. Third, it has already been established in existing literature that individuals may undergo transformative learning through a combination of learning processes listed below (Stuckey et al., 2013).

6.3.1.1 Theme: Cognitive-rational processes

Below are extracts from interviews that were matched to each of the codes that exist under the umbrella theme of cognitive rational processes. Although only one line of evidence is presented here, there are convergent lines in the data set as other students' experiences reflected similarities in learning processes.

Code: Critical reflection

> Ali: *So we lived in a very minority amongst other minorities, and we've been through a persecution - fear of so many things were happening…going wrong in our community. The way the belief system is formed is out of fear. OK, is nothing else. There's no logic behind it. There's no literature behind it or education is behind it.*

In this interview, Ali demonstrated how he had critically evaluated his own background. The experience made him realise how much fear had influenced his cultural upbringing, and how he became convinced that the belief system was not rational in any way.

Code: Action

> Fabio: *I think the provocative nature of the service-based element of the forum was something that really stuck with me the whole way through. I think service has been something of my mum's told me from a really young age without ever really calling it that. And it's been something ever since Forum that fascinated me and that I've loved.*

In this interview, Fabio explained his engagement in action-oriented activities and how he discovered how these also fascinated him cognitively.

Code: Experience

> Beth: *I remember like sitting there and making assumptions about a couple of the people I was chatting with, and then you hear they're story you're like, whoa, OK, OK, that's why you react that way. That's why you like act, yeah, and maybe hold off or are a little standoffish or whatever. Yeah, I think that was kind of the initial sort of thing that really started to make a difference.*

In this interview, Beth explained how her assumptions were tested through a particular experience. It was by interacting with someone and hearing their story that she was able to expand her understanding of why they acted in a particular way.

Code: Disorienting Dilemma

> Harry: *I remember, like, feeling like someone just taking like a sledgehammer in my gut, like, I just felt like WHOA what just happened… I didn't even know that stuff was bubbling away inside, I didn't realise how conflicted my whole outlook was… like my own idea of myself. And then I was like, oh, man, I have no freaking clue who I am. And I have no clue, like my convictions don't have any kind of substantive depth to them, like I felt very, the expression I think I used at time was, I felt really, like naked.*

In this interview, Harry explained the shock of realising that he had been unaware of the turmoil and contradictions within him. He explained the feeling like a "sledgehammer in my gut" and coming to this self-realisation made him feel "naked", unsure of who he was or what he valued.

Code: Discourse

Bobby: *And so, I guess I stepped into… away from an environment where previously had friendships where that wasn't on the cards to be talking about. And into a group of people where that definitely was a good conversation and so that helped me exercise the muscle of talking on that subject and talking from matters of the heart that previously had not touched on, really.*

So, I was definitely used to talking about matters of the head, but not about the heart. It was a slow process at the start because I found that very awkward to talk about emotional things.

In this interview, Bobby explained the role of discourse in her own learning experience. She described "exercising the muscle of talking" on subjects that were hitherto unexamined. This process, she explains, was "awkward" at first and therefore it was a slow process.

6.3.1.2   Theme: extra-rational processes

The extracts from interviews below were matched to codes that exist under the umbrella theme of extra-rational processes. Although only one line of evidence is presented here, there are convergent lines in the data set as other student experiences depicted similarities in learning processes.

Code: Arts-based

Maximus: *I think that's what I realised in that – we went to the War Memorial [a large museum and memorial in Canberra] – I saw my own name on the bloody, on the wall – on the wall of remembrance – and I had a good cry over that.*

In the survey, Maximus had a maximum score of 100 for the Arts-based learning process. In the interview, it was revealed that this was because of the experience associated with being at the National War Memorial. Seeing his own name among those who had given their lives in sacrifice to the nation was a powerful moment for him.

Code: Dialogue/Support

> Aadya: *Yeah, it gave me a bit of permission to share and be myself, to share a bit of me, I think for me personally, I feel like I've had a very heavy story and something that needs to be kept wrapped up for most of my life. And that was the really interesting way to just get with a group of strangers, really, and to say, well, we're building a relationship on basically, essentially my truth… I'm sure it's really bringing your vulnerabilities to the table and knowing that it's safe and it's received, you know.*

In this interview, Aadya expressed how she found the safe and supportive environment conducive to sharing her own story, which she had previously "wrapped up" because it was a "very heavy story".

Code: Emotions

> Jack: *But the small group is what was the biggest takeaway for me, because that's where you're asked to open up as a person to open up on your experiences and get to know who you are and what makes you click and what drives you and what you've been through, basically, to tell your story. I'm getting goosebumps just even thinking about it because I remember it well enough that it kind of brings back some emotion. It was a pretty emotional experience…*

In this interview, Jack described how powerful his emotions were during the small group activity. It was a raw experience because it was incredibly personal to him. It involved discussions of who he was, what drives him, and what he had been through in his life.

Code: Imaginal/Soul work

Nicole: *I think it was just an inner thing for me, it was like an intuition thing. I think I honestly think that my time at forum really helped break down literally parts of who I was – so that I could actually, kind of, shed off some of the baggage I was carrying.*

In this interview, Nicole explained the way that the experiences allowed her to examine part of her inner being. She described the learning process as a "intuition thing", which consisted of breaking down parts of who she was and shedding some of the "baggage" that she was carrying.

Code: Spiritual

Edward: *I think if you could plot on a graph my internal understanding of how much I know, it peaked at about one second before I knocked on that door of the prayer room at the Hyatt.*

I think I am learning more ever since that moment, but how much I have to learn and how much more I have to grow and how much more I can comprehend things in a better way. The understanding of that in my own personal life is growing, which means there's a bigger gulf of things I realise I don't know.

In this interview, Edward explained how the experience of receiving prayer initiated in him a profound sense of intellectual humility and process to seeking out greater understanding.

6.3.1.3   *Theme: social critique processes*

The interview extracts included below were matched to the codes that exist under the umbrella theme of social critique processes. Although only one line of evidence is presented here, there are convergent lines in the data set as other student experiences depicted similarities in learning processes.

Code: Ideology critique

> Priya: *Prior to actually realising that I could create my thoughts and beliefs and that can be based on different things. I'm wondering, OK, does my Christian faith give me a book of rules, like a book of values that I then follow? Do I think outside of that? Is there space for me to question those things at that particular stage in my life? I didn't feel like there was. I didn't feel like there was people that I could question things with, right? So, how do I create this?*

In this interview, Priya explained how she underwent a process of realising that she could and indeed should question the ways of thinking in which she had been raised. She wanted to challenge existing views and create her own "thoughts and beliefs" based on different things.

Code: Unveiling Oppression

> Ali: *But I wanted to test the different side of it. That never happened in our community. They have so much talent, we have so much talent within our community that they never came out. They're like, oh, this is not culturally appropriate. We got singers. We got actors. We got real artists in so many ways. And we got so many, especially girls and women, they're deprived of their freedom*

In this interview, Ali demonstrates his growing awareness of the plight of members of his community who do not have the same freedoms they deserve. He stated that he "wanted to test the other side of it" to make it different for them.

Code: Empowerment

Priya: *And if I hadn't been in a situation where I even felt like I could think outside of the way that I was thinking or ask questions, I probably would have never been able to say those things because growing up in an environment where there's no room for error or questions, why would you question something?*

There's been no space for the freedom of thought, right? And then [it's] suddenly something gets unlocked in you.

In this interview, Priya explained how something was "unlocked" in her. It was in the process of being empowered to ask questions and to explore new ways of thinking that she underwent a shift that she says she might never have undergone if it weren't for that situation.

Code: Social Action

Edward: *When I went back home after the forum, I realised that there was an opportunity to actually do something and we actually started like a group inside my individual political party… I think it was at a time, where we decided, let's try and see if we can actually have any power – for good, for changing things… Why don't we just focus for, like, make it our sort of thing for this sort of next term to actually do something good?*

In this interview, Edward explains how he explored some the ideas of Servant Leadership that were presented at the NSLF. He didn't necessarily know if they were good, but he wanted to start the processes of exploring a new way to do leadership. He was learning, as he was doing.

6.3.2   Overview of findings

The above described learning processes provide strong support for an integrated paradigm of learning processes for transformative learning as proposed by Cranton and Taylor (2012b) and as adopted in the conceptual framework of this study. The data make it

clear that students may undergo learning though a variety of different kinds of processes, even when they are participating in a very similar activity or event. These explicitly include the cognitive-rational, extra-rational and social critique processes as outlined in existing literature.

6.4   Transformative learning outcomes

In accordance with a conceptualisation of transformative learning as a analytic metatheory, *learning outcomes* refer to "significant and irreversible changes in the way a person experiences, conceptualizes, and interacts with the world" (Hoggan, 2016a, p. 71). The operational measures discussed in Section 4.5.1 delimited the characterisation of transformative learning to criterion-based measures of adequate depth, breadth and relative stability (p. 87).

The thematic analysis involved organising the data according to a pre-specified coding schema of learning outcomes (see Section 4.4.5.1). The typology employed was developed by Hoggan (2016b) after reviewing the various outcomes depicted in transformative learning literature. Hoggan and colleagues organised the data into 28 different codes according to the umbrella themes: *worldview*, *epistemology*, *ontology*, *self*, *behaviour* and *capacity* (p. 70). Although the data were analysed according to the specific subcodes depicted in Section 4.4.5.1, the evaluation in this section will focus on the broader themes within which these subcodes were organised. The reason for this approach is fourfold.

First, the goal of this section is to test validity of the conceptual framework against the data, not to provide an exhaustive analysis of each participants learning outcomes. Second, given that students engaged in various and interconnected learning processes, it would be counterproductive to try and depict a precise connection between each of the 14 subcodes of learning processes and the 28 subcodes of learning outcomes. Although such an analysis

could yield interesting results, it was beyond the scope of this study. Third, although the semi-structured interviews provided a great opportunity to explore these components in some detail, due to limited interviewing time, not all outcome codes or operational measures could be fully investigated for each of the participants. Fourth, given that this case study focused on a single kind of learning event, it would be expected that certain codes would be represented much more frequently than others. This does not detract from the value of the typological framework, but rather demonstrates its flexibility to a variety of learning contexts and reinforces its applicability to this conception of student leadership development in Australian higher education. For these reasons, these codes were explored more generally as part of the umbrella outcome themes depicted in Table 4 below.

Finally, it should be noted that as part of the memoing process of data analysis, a pattern was detected that is not explicitly identified in Hoggan's schema of learning outcomes. This recurring outcome is most suitable to the theme *Self,* and the subcode that was created to describe the phenomenon was *healing*. This will be discussed further in the following section.

Table 6: Overview of the thematic components of the transformative learning outcomes

Theme	Codes	Example words/phrases/sentences
Worldview	Assumptions, Beliefs, Values, Expectations; Ways of interpreting experience; More comprehensive or complex Worldview; and New awareness/New understandings	"framework" "perspective", "paradigm", "worldview", "purpose", "meaning", "structure", "aware", "think differently" (Priya) "reprioritised everything" (Veronique)
Epistemology	More discriminating, Utilising extra-rational ways of knowing, More open, Shift in thoughts and ways of thinking, Autonomous, More complex thinking	"started to learn" (Serateki) "changed [your – our] philosophy" (Serateki) "more able to listen to their thoughts and their beliefs and ideas, and also

		like process it and change my mind as well" (Veronique) "changed what I thought about our leaders, it changed what I thought about working with people" (Priya) "a method of unlearning things, of unpacking things, of exploring things that I didn't have before" (Paul)
Ontology	Affective experience of life, Ways of being, and Attributes	"I started an exploration into my identity - who I was, how I came to be that way" (Paul) "became a lot stronger" (Ali)
Self	Self in Relation, Empowerment-responsibility, Identity-view of self, Self-knowledge, Personal narrative, Meaning and purpose, Personality, Healing	"authentic", "more open", "vulnerable", "joy" "compassion for myself" (Paul) "self-appreciation" (Paul)
Behaviour	Actions consistent with new perspective, Social Action, Professional practices, and Skills	"ability", "engagement", "replicate", "adopted", "working", "effective", "able to do" "provide it for other people" (Ali) "kind of what I'm doing" (Maximus) "the catalyst for action" (Fabio) "living out my values" (Fabio)
Capacity	Cognitive development, Consciousness and Spirituality	"realisation", "revelation", "freedom" "made me into a different person" (Edward) "comprehend things in a better way" (Edward)

		"awakened an appetite" (Bobby)
		"steered the trajectory of my life" (Bobby)
		"saw changes in myself" (Nicole)
		"a knowing that transforms you" (Liam)

6.4.1   *Testing the conceptual framework*

The data revealed that in most cases the pre-specified themes and subcodes were entirely adequate for capturing the learning outcomes of the former student delegates at the NSLF. The emerging themes clearly match with one or more of the codes in pre-existing schema, and although there was a broad spread of data across various themes, changes in *Worldview*, *Self*, and *Epistemology* were the outcomes most frequently described. The student survey and interview extracts included below illustrate this wide variety of outcomes and reinforces the notion that students can be impacted by the same learning environment in vastly different ways. Although more examples could have been provided, I have included only a few for each umbrella theme to illustrate the validity of this component of the conceptual framework. In each of the below cases, I have also provided a very brief outline of the former student-delegates' personal narrative context to indicate how individual factors such as life experience and personality played a significant role in the learning outcomes attained. (Smith & Kempster, 2019)

6.4.1.1   *Theme: Worldview*

In the thematic analysis, I looked for patterns in words, phrases and concepts that depicted a significant shift in worldview of the participant Hoggan (2016b, p. 69) states that

this theme is similar to the concepts of "schema" or "paradigm", and it refers to changes in the way a person understands the "world and how it works". The subcodes to describe these changes are interrelated; however, they also depict certain emphases that are helpful. These are: *assumptions, beliefs, values, expectations; ways of interpreting experience; more comprehensive or complex worldview;* and *new awareness/new understandings* (p. 69).

This following interview with Veronique provides a good example of how participation at the NSLF resulted in multiple learning outcomes. The extract was chosen because it depicts elements of her broader narrative and demonstrates how they shifted her in sense of values. Indeed, she described that impact of the event by telling me that she kept her badge from the forum to remind her of what she learnt, and to help her focus when the starts to stress and "spiral out".

> Veronique: *So, that's one of the other things I kind of got out of… It was like my priorities. So, like, for example, I was very stressed to not be able to get into medical school, but I was like with my priorities will always be like my relationship with my family and my close friends. So, it's like I may really want to do something for myself, but they will always, always be my priority. So, it kind of reprioritised everything.*

She described how her experience "reprioritised everything" and helped her reassess the value of certain things, specifically relationships, over other endeavours in her life. She described how "nerve wracking" things were before the forum, as she felt she needed to strive so hard for her goals and how it caused her to be "scared". Veronique explained how the forum "made me calmer and it helped me to put things back in perspective". It is also clear that the experience impacted other domains of her life at the same time. For instance, she described learning outcomes that relate to *Self* when she said: "I'm probably more comfortable and confident with myself" and "I feel like I can engage better with other

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people". The impact however also relates to shifts in *Epistemology,* as she described how she became more open, how she feels "more able to listen to their (that is other people) thoughts and their beliefs and ideas, and also like process it and change my mind as well".

Beth described how the forum experience changed the way she engages with others, by giving her a new "framework" for interpreting experiences, and thereby helping her to "dig deeper" rather than just having "superficial conversations". Through a new understanding of the complexity of the world and people's lives, she is now "seeking first to understand what's going on before coming to some sort of conclusion". The interconnection between the themes of *worldview* and *epistemology* is again evident in these statements. She also described the impact of the forum in terms that relate to the *Ontology,* as she described gaining a "new perceptive that was more accepting and humanising of people".

Priya's reflection on how the forum changed her revolved largely around how she gained a more comprehensive and complex worldview. She explained:

> Priya: *When I'm from a very narrow-minded world where you're just attending Christian camps, when you're just attending Christian conferences, when you're just with the same people that think the same way. It's huge, like it changed what I thought about our leaders, it changed what I thought about working with people…*
>
> *It's actually totally because - and I made such good friends, because we shared those experiences together, even though we might politically or spiritually think completely different.*

The learning impact on Priya was profound and relates to the theme *Behaviour*. She explained how she went home and tried to implement what she learnt at the forum with her friends and family. She said: "I wanted to be able to encourage those around me to think differently about situations and not be so narrow minded". She also explained that she realised

the best way for her to do this was to model the methodology she learnt at the forum and that was simply to "ask questions" and to "listen". Edward's reflections also demonstrate how learning outcomes occurred in and across various themes, including *Worldview, Behaviour, Ontology and Self*. He described how learning about Servant Leadership was like a shift in "worldview". He realised that he could "model my life around" it, how it "would give purpose and meaning and joy and a structure to my life". The overlap here between the overarching schema or framework for doing life and the associated affective ontological dimensions of joy and meaning and purpose shows how various outcomes can be inextricably linked and occur simultaneously.

6.4.1.2   Theme: Epistemology

This theme encompasses the ways in which participants "adopted new ways of knowing" (Hoggan, 2016b, p. 73). In Hoggan's schema, this theme is predominantly used in reference to the way a person "constructs and evaluates knowledge" in their daily lives, rather than how they might explicitly define it (p.73). The subcodes for this theme are: *More discriminating*, *utilising extra-rational ways of knowing*, *more open*, *shift in thoughts and ways of thinking*, *autonomous*, *more complex thinking* (p. 73).

Paul described the impact of the NSLF in terms of the way he shifted in his thoughts and ways of thinking. With specific reference to what he learnt within the small groups, he explained the impact in the following way:

> Paul: *This learning that started at the forum inside that small group, and then was expanded upon. It bears its fruit in its time. You know, that when it comes to a future learning situation, I have a method of unlearning things, of unpacking things, of exploring things that I didn't have before. And that's probably the biggest impact.*

In the interview Paul reflected on how this enabled him to reconsider what he believed to be true in a range of aspects, including his views about his father and about himself. In a statement that illustrates a new depth of complex thinking and which also relates to the theme *Self,* he explained, "I think probably the biggest thing that changed, you know directly as a result of the forum - was I started an exploration into my identity - who I was, how I came to be that way". He said that this gave him "compassion for myself", and along with "self-appreciation".

Serateki explained how he had a shift in the way that he evaluated the ideas of sacred and secular spaces. He said that he "started to learn that my relationship with God, sorry if I'm sounding too religious, but my relationship with God that I have on Saturday, Sunday must reflect on how I do my business on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday." He explained that this way of thinking was radically different to how he grew up, and "it just changed your – our philosophy". To further emphasise the significance of this shift for him, he explained that he is now at a place where "I value Monday to Friday more than I value Saturday to Sunday". These outcomes also explicitly relate to the theme *Worldview* in that they describe a meaningful change in beliefs and values.

6.4.1.3   Theme: Ontology

This theme refers to "changes in the way a person exists in the world" (Hoggan, 2016b, p. 74). Within Hoggan's schema, *Ontology* focuses on changes to "deeply established mental and emotional inclinations that affect the overall quality and tone of one's existence" (p. 74). The subcodes for this theme are: *affective experience of life*, *ways of being*, and *attributes* (p. 74).

Ali described how the forum was validating for him. He said he felt "I can be myself" and "this was really crucial to get that perception". He explained how the experience impacted his life after the forum as such:

> Ali: *And everything kind of flowed a lot better because I was mentally [a lot giving that a] strong feeling that I could be doing a lot of positive aspect of things that I have. So I continued on focussing on the positive aspects and things dramatically, or I could say, you know, drastically change for me*

The interview with Ali revealed his shift to certain mental and emotional inclinations that were associated with his identity within a particular refugee community. All three of the subcodes for the theme of *Ontology* were encapsulated in his description of the learning outcomes. That things "flowed a lot better" depicts a change in his affective experience of life. His associated positive emotions with his this new mentality set a new tone and quality to his sense of existence. His personal attributes were also impacted, for he explained how he "became a lot stronger" and "took on changes like starting my own business". These *drastic changes* clearly shaped his life with regards to the outcome theme *Behaviour* as well:

> Ali: *So that really motivated me to go on and do projects that inspire people, and that's what I'm on that pathway that every day I get up, it is not just for myself, it's for that victimised, terrorised minds - conservative community that we have… so I try to help them out in one way or another, even if I can influence one person.*

When discussing examples of some of the projects he is involved with, Ali demonstrated just how deep his commitment to this new way of being in the world had become. He cited multiple contexts of his life including study, cultural settings, intimate relationships and professional practices. Jack also described a similar outcome, as he experienced what "feels like so much weight off your shoulders". For him, his affective experience of life shifted when people at the forum treated him with striking "respect and

decency", even as he shared the parts of his story that he felt ashamed about. This results in new ways of being brought upon through "realising that you're not so damaged relative to everyone else and it really improves your confidence level". This, he said, was reflected in his success in business leadership and its "what got me to what to where I am now, as a person in terms of my confidence".

6.4.1.4   Theme: Self

This theme focuses on the range of ways that the participants depicted a change that affected "their sense of self" (Hoggan, 2016b, p. 71). The subcodes that relate to this theme are *self in relation*, *empowerment-responsibility*, *identity-view of self*, *self-knowledge*, *personal narrative*, *meaning and purpose*, and *personality* (p. 71).

 Harry described how the forum allowed him to take a fresh look at his personal narrative. This experience was deeply uncomfortable because he felt like he was like "seeing" himself for the first time and finding an "absolute mess". He said: "I didn't realise how conflicted my whole outlook was…like my own idea of myself". His learning processes were described in detail in Section 6.3, and at this point we can explore how his learning outcomes are related to a range of themes, with *Self* being preeminent. He stated:

> Harry: *The change isn't so much that I've kind of finished the process. It's more that there's no longer a perception of completely F'd - and skewed perception - excuse my French - and that those things make me less valuable as a person, less powerful, less impactful… the whole journey…was really at its heart, just trying to convince me that I'd rather be small, but authentic than big and made up of a lot of crap.*

Harry described how he learnt about his sense of identity and how this was formed, particularly in relation to his brother and father, as well as the broader faith community in

which he was raised. The forum catalysed a journey of critical reflection and self-awareness, and he stated that he went from a situation where "there was no heart…there was no genuine kind of conviction behind what I said" to a more authentic situation where he feels like he can now "acknowledge my own vulnerability" and "my way of engaging is pleasing - to everything". The process resulted in him knowing how *valuable*, *powerful* and *impactful* he is as a person.

Harry's learning outcomes are also related to *Ontology* and *Epistemology* in that they relate to Harry's way of being in the world and the way in which he is increasingly capable of engaging in complex thinking about his own life and behaviour as well as those around him. He explained how he has gained a new way of "seeing conflict and seeing disagreement". Whereas previous he would have been simply concerned with "contests of ideas or theories or something like that", he now sees it as a "battle…a war to understand the heart". These extra-rational components to his epistemology are a critical element in his new-found dedication to "discerning the truth from the lies".

Behaviour is another theme that emerged as Harry described how he had changed as person. He reflected upon an occasion when he was invited to return to the forum and give the opening address to a new cohort of delegates. He said performing this act allowed him to:

> Harry: *Reflect on how deeply and radically I had changed in the intervening years as a result of the new language of vulnerability and intrapersonal engagement I had learned. It also revealed to me how the experience of the Forum had given me an ability to replicate that culture almost instantly among new delegates*

The word "ability" here speaks to his personal sense of empowerment, and when this is coupled with the words "intrapersonal engagement", it is clear that the result of this empowerment is a newfound capacity or behaviour in the world. Indeed, Harry specifies what he means by giving an example of his ability to "replicate" the forum culture for other people.

Edward also reflected on the Servant Leadership culture that he was exposed to at the forum, and how "I saw it, I adopted it as soon as I could". One on the main reasons for this, he explained, was because it was thing "I could model my life around that would give purpose and meaning and joy and a structure to my life". The implications of the development of these leadership attributes will be explored further in Chapter 7.

Bobby reflected on the way in which learning about her personal narrative had a profound impact on her sense of *Self*. She explained:

> Bobby: *Simply by voicing the reality of significant life events was life changing for me. They had always been floating around in my head, never quite pinned down and consequently these events seemed to be dark and mysterious, even to me, until I spoke them out. I felt liberated and felt clarity in my mind as to how, yes, I had actually been shaped by these stories and experiences. It felt like I now owned the stories rather than them owning me.*

The words "clarity" and "liberated" in this reflection are set as learning outcomes against a personal narrative that seemed "dark and mysterious". These outcomes consist of a personal narrative that is now "owned" by Bobby, as she understands herself more fully and feels empowered as result of the "heaviness" that "was weighing me down" being lifted. Nicole described a similar impact of "shedding off the baggage I as carrying". For her, this outcome was described as "healing". I included *healing* as a subcode to this learning outcome theme because the sentiment was repeated in various interviews, with some participants like Nicole explicitly labelling it. Indeed, Nicole described "healing" as the general "theme" of her "journey". She explained how this journey began in the "safe space" of the forum small groups:

> Nicole: *I don't remember what I said when I shared my story, but I remember I just cried a whole lot of. I remember, it was just I think it was the first sort of, the*

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first time I really started to get in touch with myself and realised that there was a

lot going on

From this initial experience of "getting in touch with myself" she described a process that led to the outcome of "actually understanding myself". This, self-awareness however wasn't easy, because it revealed elements of her personality that needed changing. Nicole reflects on how she decided that "if there's a possibility that I can be different, I'd be absolutely mad not to give it a shot". She explains how she experienced this drive for change further by equating *healing* with the *transformation* she was seeking.

Nicole: *I was kind of, like, I want to see, I kind of, want to see what healing I can*

get and what, like, transformation I can have, because, like, I can't I just...., I'm

not content just keeping things the way that they are.

The interview with Nicole also highlighted the sensitive nature of personal stories and self-development. As a result of this *healing journey,* she explained that "I see myself as a person of worth now". She also said that it took her a "really long time to see that, and understand and actually believe it". Paul similarly described how he had to "heal those wounds of the past" by "believing something new" and "being authentic and being real". The *Ontological* connection with healing is also evident in the way that Paul relates it with his way of being in the world.

6.4.1.5   Theme: Behaviour

This theme of learning outcomes refers to a "change in behaviour" (Hoggan, 2016b, p. 75). Hoggan specifies that this outcome is a major focus of transformative learning literature, with the subcodes to this theme including *actions consistent with new perspective*, *social action*, *professional practices*, and *skills* (p. 75). I have included a few illustrations of personal behavioural change, followed by few examples of leadership behaviour change in

order to demonstrate the inextricable connection between personal development and leadership development.

Lachy explained how prior the forum, he was not "effective" at communicating his values. It also described how he had shifted his perspective on forgiveness and how he had implemented the practice in his life, "working harder since that forum to be more effective at forgiving" and how he now tries to make a "conscious decision to just say okay I'm going to let that go". This behaviour is clearly consistent with his new perspective, and he explained how he attempts to integrate it within multiple life contexts including "family relationships…friends or colleagues".

Francis described how "NSLF has changed the way in which I think and approach life. I am more open about my emotions and open to speaking about it to people". This specific example of behavioural change (the way he communicates with others) is connected to a range of other outcomes such *Epistemology* (the way he thinks) and *Self* (the way he relates). Fabio similarly reflected on how the lessons about relationships, transparency and authenticity shaped his behaviour after the forum. He described it as "the catalyst for action" and proceeded to give examples in both professional and personal contexts, and how he put "people in my life who'd hold me accountable when I wasn't living out my values". Edward also explained how his behaviour as a member of various groups was shaped by the forum experience in a dramatic way:

> Edward: C*oming out of the forum, I realise that people have unofficial power and have different ways of doing things like teaching a homeless person how to cook pancakes and then serving them to business people as they go to work or come home from work is actually not something you need, like an official decree from the prime minister to be able to do. Now that happened years later but, what we decided to do was just try and see if we had any power.*

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The use of the words "doing things", "able to do" and "just try" in connection with the idea of "unofficial power" are indicative of behavioural activities and demonstrate learning outcomes that impacted his leadership capacity. Maximus similarly described how the idea of Servant Leadership presented at the forum was a "shift for me, it is very strange" in his line of political work. He explained how he became entirely convinced by it and now "that's kind of what I'm doing". Setareki likewise cited how the practices he learnt at the forum inform his leadership style. He said: "I can tell you, we've done conferences after that in Fiji, we've done camps and everything" and the NSLF "model of leadership… was the model to follow…it still amazes me". Ali's reflections also indicated a similar behavioural theme. He stated:

> Ali: *I always reflect on is NSLF. That leadership. Like that leadership I made so many other leadership Forum. I mean, I created that space for so many other youth through my organisation. I said, if I can get that experience and it influences a lot of my decisions in life, why I cannot provide it for other people? A mini version of that?*

Ali draws a clear connection between his own leadership behaviour and the experience he had at the forum. His rationale is simple "if I can get that experience… why I cannot provide it for other people". The implication of these learning outcomes to the development of authentic Servant Leaders will be explored in Chapter 7.

6.4.1.6   Theme: Capacity

This theme encompasses the range of "developmental outcomes whereby learners experience systematic, qualitative changes in their abilities that allow for greater complexity in the way they see, interpret and function in the world" (Hoggan, 2016b, p. 76). Within Hoggan's typology of transformative learning outcomes, the theme *Capacity* has the following subcodes: *Cognitive development*, *Consciousness* and *Spirituality* (p. 76).

The interview with Edward revealed how the forum experience impacted him in ways that he did not expect. Describing the much younger pre-forum version of himself as a "egotistical and self-focused… intolerable… caricature of a young liberal", he says that the combination of events at the NSLF "made me into a different person". The outcomes of these learning processes, he explained, involved him realising "how much more I have to learn, and how much more I have to grow and I much more I can comprehend things in a better way". This *growth* in intellectual humility he credits as giving him the capacity to seek out new perspectives with an open mind.

Bobby described how the forum increased her capacities in the following ways:

> Bobby: *I saw the importance of carrying, letting my emotions run in real time with fact-based world events and life events in my world. So, I guess witnessing that in others around me at the forum and how I guess because I was exploring a bit with faith, but I've never seen faith become so relevant as it was at the forum.*

Bobby describes how these events "steered the trajectory of my life" because it "awakened an appetite for just learning more about people… and awakened and helped me to connect my head to my heart". Initially she said it was an "awkward" and "slow process" learning how to talk about "emotional things", but the forum was almost like a safe place to practice. Similarly, Nicole described how as a result of the conversations at the forum, she "saw changes in myself… it was very subtle shift… my inner word kind of shifted and I was like OK, there is a journey I need to go on". She said it was "like I woke up". In both Bobby and Nicole's reflections, the use of the words *awaken* and *woke up* depict a critical capacity to think differently or to engage with the world in a new way.

Liam reflected on how the forum impacted him in terms of awareness or consciousness

> Liam: *It gave me a sense of - It gave me a taste of a way of living that I didn't know in some regards and so having that, I could then fight for that and grow that for myself and, um, with those who are close to me.*

When asked to explain why this way of living was so appealing to him and why he felt like he now wanted to "fight for and grow that" (*Behaviour*), he employed phrases that also relate to *Self* and *Ontology* by stating that "it's simply how we're made. Yeah, we are meant to do this together". He described it as "very empowering" and how it lifted "a blanket of despair", "shows you a different way" and helped him to see "possibility". In contrasting his new way of thinking about life and interacting with others with the "blanket of despair" he felt prior to the forum, it is evident that the experience had an overall positive developmental impact. He continued to expand on what a difference the experience made to his life:

> *It changes you because it provides you a freedom… it's a knowing that transforms you - and you can't from those kind of paradigm shifts or transformative events or just realisations or revelations, you just… you can't go back. They're beautiful, and you can't get back from them, so your imparted with a freedom that I felt anyway, like I was more-free and that's kind of a cool thing because it's something that you can't fake.*

Liam's reflections are a valuable example of the "significant and irreversible" (Hoggan, 2016a, p. 71) nature of the transformative learning phenomenon. By employing phrases like "you can't go back" or "you can't get back from" he is describing the life-altering impact that the forum experience had on him. His depiction of the changes, ranging from "paradigm shift" (*Worldview*) to "I was more-free" *(Ontology)* to "it's a knowing that transforms you" (*Capacity*), to "something you can't fake" (*Self*), is another example of the interrelated and multidimension nature of learning incomes presented in this case study.

6.4.2   Overview of findings

The above-described learning outcomes give strong support to the validity of the conceptual framework which presents transformative learning as an analytic metatheory that includes a wide range of learning outcomes. The thematic analysis makes it clear that just as participants described how they engaged in multiple learning processes (Section 6.3), so too did they describe attaining multiple learning outcomes. Some of these outcomes were also inextricably linked to each other and occurred simultaneously.

Because of this evidence, it would be difficult to determine if learning processes may have resulted in any particular learning outcomes. Although it might be feasible to ascertain such linear connections under a different research design, this case study has revealed a multidimensional nature to both learning processes and outcomes. These data reinforce the validity of the integrated paradigm of transformative learning that allowed for individual and contextual differences in learning that result in "significant and irreversible changes in the way a person experiences, conceptualizes, and interacts with the world" (Hoggan, 2016a, p. 71).

6.5   Chapter summary

Chapter 6 has described what the students' learning processes and outcomes of the NSLF experience revealed about contemporary transformative learning. In Section 6.2, the *Transformative Journey* was described using the heuristic; *deconstruction and reconstruction.* This journey includes four phases; 1: *Disorienting Dilemma, 2:* Questioning assumptions and perspectives, 3: Discourse, dialogue and support, 4: The *test of truth*. Both the heuristic of *deconstruction and reconstruction* and the addition of the fourth phase, The *test of truth,* are incremental contributions to knowledge based upon the empirical evidence of this case study.

Section 6.3 tests and verifies the integrated paradigm of learning processes for transformative learning (Cranton & Taylor, 2012b). It was evident that students underwent learning though a variety of different kinds of processes, even when participating in a very similar activity or event. These explicitly included the cognitive-rational, extra-rational and social critique processes as adopted in the conceptual framework of this study.

Section 6.4 evaluates the validity of the conceptual framework in relation to the conceptualisation of transformative learning as an analytic metatheory that "refers to processes that result in significant and irreversible changes in the way a person experiences, conceptualizes, and interacts with the world" (Hoggan, 2016b, p. 71). The thematic analysis makes it clear that just as participants described how they engaged in multiple learning processes (Section 6.3), so too did they describe attaining multiple learning outcomes. The themes and codes of Hoggan's (2016b) typological schema was adequate in accounting for all of the learning outcomes present in the data apart from one. A recurring theme in the data was an outcome that was coded as *healing*; however, it was suitable to the theme *Self* which was pre-existent within the schema. Cumulatively, the data of learning outcomes provide strong support to the validity of the conceptual framework and typology of learning outcomes. The following chapter explores the implications of these findings in relation to scholarship of engagement and student leadership development in Australian higher education.

CHAPTER 7: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Chapter overview

This chapter serves two main purposes. First, I revisit the focus of the study and review the overall development of the thesis to this end (see Section 7.2). Second, I provide an overview and synthesis of the research findings of the study by providing an in-depth analysis of the implications for the conceptualisation and practice of the scholarship of engagement and student leadership development in Australian higher education (See Section 7.3). Third, I conclude the thesis by outlining the contributions to knowledge (see Section 7.4.1), presenting opportunities for further research based upon the findings and limitations of the study (See Section 7.4.2), and revisiting my biographical situatedness (see Section 7.4.3). Finally, a summary of the chapter is provided (see Section 7.5).

7.2 Revisiting the focus of the study

In Chapter 1, the focus of this study was presented in light of a context defined as Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous (VUCA) (Kinsinger & Walch, 2012). With rapid changes occurring simultaneously across cultural, societal, economic and environmental aspects of society (Arvanitakis & Hornsby, 2016a), the integral role of higher education institutions in addressing the needs of the Australia through both scholarship and student leadership development was presented (Einsiedal, 1998; Sprow, 2001; Stanton, 2012). Specifically, a case for the urgent integration of contextually applicable and ethically accountable pedagogies of citizenship and associated methods of student leadership development was put forth. With this background in mind, the focus of the study was to develop a transformative approach to student leadership development in Australian higher

education based upon empirical research. To this end, the national student leadership forum (NSLF) was selected as case study to be evaluated through the lens of three interconnected fields of inquiry: the scholarship of engagement, student leadership development, and transformative learning theory.

In Chapter 2, the literature on the scholarship of engagement was reviewed (see Section 2.2), and universities were positioned as a staging ground for action in a democratic society, systematically geared towards addressing the most pressing social, civic and ethical problems in our time (Boyer, 1996a). Further, it was outlined how the mission of engaged scholarship requires high quality student leadership development (Einsiedel, 1998; Stanton, 2012).

The notion of a citizen scholar was also presented as student-centred component of engaged scholarship (see Section 2.1), as the students are "engaged not only in the process of learning but also in their society" (Arvanitakis & Hornsby, 2016a, p. 14). In this regard, a citizen scholar is "a student who cares not only about gaining information and generating knowledge but one that is rooted in the reality of their context, problem oriented and interested in applying their knowledge for the betterment of a society" (Arvanitakis & Hornsby, 2016b). Given the "many changes" that are occurring across society, Arvanitakis and Hornsby argue that a "new set of graduate proficiencies" is required in "future-proofing higher education" so that it can still serve its civic function (p. 11). These interrelated proficiencies include the attributes of "ethical leadership", "cross cultural understanding or cultural humility", "inclusivity", "critical thinking" and "reflexivity", which are especially relevant to the findings of the NSLF case study. Although many of these attributes are important, the literature review focused specifically on ethical leadership because of the intersection with literature on student leadership development.

Following an overview of research regarding student leadership development (see Section 2.3), the model of authentic servant leadership was presented as an evidence-based

approach for developing the citizen scholar attribute of ethical leadership as well as a range of other qualities that are applicable to the VUCA context of contemporary society. It was also argued that transformative learning was "precisely the kind of learning needed" given the demands of the era (Nicolaides & McCallum, 2013, p. 250) and the goals of engaged scholarship and student leadership development. The concept of transformative learning was then briefly explored (see Section 2.4), with gaps in knowledge presented, both regarding the theory and its philosophical underpinning, as well as the way that in which theory relates to the conceptualisation and practice of the scholarship of engagement and student leadership development.

In Chapter 3, a conceptual framework was outlined that built on literature in the three interconnected fields of inquiry, was aligned with the focus the study, and specifically addressed extant gaps in knowledge. As a result, a transformative approach to student leadership development in Australian higher education was presented. In Chapter 4, the research design of the study was outlined as a transparent chain of evidence for how the methodology was enacted, and how the theory that was built in the conceptual framework was tested. Three Research Questions guided the methodology and the findings to Questions 1 and 2 were presented in Chapters 5 and 6 respectively. The first Research Question was designed in order explore *why* students experienced the NSLF as personally transformative, while the second was designed in order learn about the *way* in which learning occurred and *what* specific changes transpired.

The third research question was designed to explicitly outline the implications of the findings in relation to the focus of the project, which is to establish an evidence-based approach for the conceptualisation and practice of a transformative approach to student leadership development in contemporary Australian higher education institutions. To these matters, I now turn.

7.3 Implications of the study

Research Question 3 states: Regarding a context defined as VUCA, what are the implications of the findings to Q1 and Q2 for the conceptualisation and practice of the scholarship of engagement and student leadership development in Australian higher education? The findings were synthesised and applied to each respective field of inquiry and discussed in relation to the propositions of the conceptual framework (see Chapter 3), before practical guidelines and policy considerations are outlined.

7.3.1 *The implications of the findings for research question #1*

In Chapter 5, environmental factors such as the physical and cultural settings of the NSLF were outlined as part of the thematic analysis, along with the personal factors of *desire* and *courage,* which were evident in student reflections. The findings illustrated how these components profoundly impacted the way in which students experienced the forum and why it was ultimately transformative.

The physical setting

One of the elements that students repeatedly commented on was the ability to interact with active leaders across various spheres of society. That the NSLF effectively used a physical setting (see Section 5.2.1) to create a context for engagement, provides an empirical example of what Rosaen, Foster-Fishman and Fear (2001) conceptually termed the "engagement interface" (p. 10). By hosting aspects of the Forum within Parliament House, the organisers established an authentic context of engagement that allowed for a "dynamic, evolving and co-constructed" experience (p. 10). Participants could both witness the enactment of democratic processes, but also personally, or even critically, engage with it by interacting with various parliamentarians and other civic leaders. The physical setting thereby facilitated experiences that enabled the development of civic literacy and civic

skills, which Barker (2004) describes as essential for the practice of the scholarship of engagement because it undergirds "healthy democracy" (p. 132). The findings thereby also provide a working example of an educational event for higher education that proactively addresses decreasing levels of civic engagement and social capital in Australia (Heggart, Arvanitakis, et al., 2018) and contributes to student leadership development. This is because of the concomitance between the notion the "engagement interface" (Rosaen et al., 2001) and elements of experiential learning such as concrete experiences, (Kolb, 1984), which is a key practice of quality student leadership development, specifically authentic servant leaders (Kiersch & Peters, 2017).

A second implication of the physical setting was the way in which it helped to create a disorienting effect for students that led, in turn, to critical self-awareness and the examination of personal values and beliefs. The NSLF case study thereby provides an empirical example of developing engaged scholars by providing students (who originate from a range of nationalities) an "opportunity to examine their own values and attitudes critically" through giving them exposure to an entirely new context (Areesophonpichet et al., 2020, p. 73). Again, an overlap is evident with "guided self-flection", which is a key component for the development of students as authentic servant leaders (Kiersch & Peters, 2017, p. 162). Although the experience of self-reflection was challenging for some students, the cultural setting of the event was intentionally structured to foster a safe and encouraging environment to process what may be personally confronting subject matter (see Section 5.2). Certainly, the immersive nature of the program and how students transitioned through a range of activities together also made a difference in breaking down barriers and establishing a sense of community (see Section 6.2.1). This aligns with research by Grunwell (2015), which highlights the benefits of extended and immersive programs in fostering leadership qualities.

The cultural setting

A very significant element of the findings of Research Question 1 was the way in which the cultural setting impacted how students experienced the NSLF. It was evident that students only engaged in deeply personal dialogue over matters of values and beliefs because they felt safe to do so (see Section 5.2.2.2). Given that transformative experiences can be highly sensitive and may include negative or traumatic elements (Dunn, 2011; Morrice, 2012; Smith & Kempster, 2019), the findings of this case study provide a valuable example of how to develop citizen scholars and authentic servant leaders in an ethical manner by fostering safe environments for students. It was evident that organisational leadership was critical to this kind of learning environment (see Section 5.2.2.1), and that the training of small group facilitators was an important feature in the establishment of accountability through a team-based approach. Archival documents retrieved from the NSLF Board provided examples of clear guidelines and principles (see Appendix C) used for leadership training, and these, along with existing literature and the findings outlined in Chapters 5 and 6, have informed the development of policy considerations and practical guidelines as outlined in Section 7.2.3.

A specific inter-personal experience of safety for many participants involved the feeling of being loved and accepted (see Section 5.2.2.3). This included student delegates feeling like the group really wanted them there and that they were interested in getting to know them as an individual person. It should also be underscored that the core reason that many participants felt tangibly loved and accepted was because they felt truly seen without being judged. Because of this, these students felt like they could engage on issues they perceived as socially taboo, but nonetheless important to them, such as moral failings, personal upbringing and trauma or specific religious beliefs and cultural values. The setting also contributed to growing empathy and understanding of others, and two participants explicitly commented on how they became less politically polarised as a result (Edward and Lachy). These findings

align with axiological propositions of the conceptual framework and have a range of implications for the scholarship of engagement and student leadership development.

First, if the scholarship of engagement is to succeed in intersecting with democracy and ameliorating cynicism (see Section 1.2) by bridging "academic knowledge" with "community knowledge" through facilitating "meaningful and inclusive platforms" (Rwiza & El Bouhali, 2018, p. 59), then all people within said democracy, without any distinction, will need to feel safe to contribute honestly in such settings. This finding is critical to both scholars and practitioners who wish to address issues associated with a "toxic" culture (Bell, 2019; Dictionaries, 2018) (see Section 1.2 and 2.2), in which an implacable discourse of conflict over values, beliefs and ideologies seems to persist (McGregor, 2004). Ultimately, from the perspective of the learner, there is a major difference between being politely tolerated and being actively loved and accepted. The former may allow a brave person the freedom share their views, while the latter welcomes anybody to be authentically themselves and to engage vulnerably in meaningful and peaceful discussion.

Second, if conceptualisations of student leadership development are to include outward focused competencies of authentic servant leadership such as *authenticity* and *authentic relational orientation* (see Section 2.2), then any environment of practice will require an experience of such trust-based relationships and the reinforcement of the value and role of each individual. The findings indicate that notions of trust and personal value were repeated themes in participant reflections (see Section 6.2); however, it was also clear that this kind of cultural setting was not accidental but actively fostered through role-modelling.

The findings indicate that if culture of safety is to be created, and if love and acceptance are to be expressed as active verbs by leaders and facilitators in group environments, then those qualities will need to be actively selected for, or developed as part of, facilitator training. The findings therefore establish a critical link between the conceptualisation of the

development of authentic servant leaders and the practice of it by leaders and facilitators. Given that safety, love and acceptance are relatively subjective terms, the archival documents of the NSLF (see Appendix C) provide an example of what explicit activities and actions this could encompass within a large educational setting. Based upon the findings of this case study, these have been included in extrapolated form in the policy considerations and practical guidelines and below (see Section 7.2.3).

A further implication of the finding of the importance of role modelling applies to Socratic dialogue, which is relevant to both the democratic skills inherent to citizen scholars and the outward focused competencies of authentic servant leaders such as *empowerment* and *interpersonal acceptance* (see Section 2.3.1). That the cultural setting had such a significant influence on the transformative learning experience indicates that students may need to experience an example Socratic dialogue enacted by facilitators, even as they are invited to participate themselves (see Section 5.2.2.1). The implication of this finding to the conceptualisation and practice of the scholarship of engagement and student leadership development is that such civic skills and leadership competencies are more readily *caught* than *taught.* This finding aligns with the view that the democratic mission of higher education relies on institutional culture, because "institutions cannot credibly teach democracy without practicing it" (Harkavy & Bergan, 2019, p. 28).

This also aligns with the axiological virtues associated with Socratic dialogue, which were presented within the conceptual framework of intellectual humility and open mindedness. The implication of this is straight-forward but challenging for leaders, educators and scholars who wish to facilitate transformative learning with the goal of developing citizen scholars or authentic servant leaders. It necessarily entails that specific learning outcomes regarding values or beliefs or perspectives on political, religious or corporate knowledge cannot be pre-determined or controlled. Indeed, the learning implications extend beyond the

student to the facilitator themselves, for if they are to role model intellectual humility and reflexivity, then they too need to be open minded and actively seeking to learn from the perspectives from others, and perhaps in so doing, even change their own mind about that they most value or believe.

Desire and courage

Chapter 5 outlines how the personal factors of *desire* and *courage* were evident in student reflections (see Section 5.3). The implications for this regarding the conceptualisation and practice of engaged scholarship and student leadership are as follows. The inward focused competencies outlined for the development of authentic servant leaders by Kiersch and Peters (2017) explicitly includes *courage,* which includes "daring to take risks" and "challenging conventional models or wisdom" (p. 156). Similarly, the scholarship of engagement entails that students develop in regard to "civic responsibility", and this will require bearing a degree of social responsibility through being willing to be informed about and take action on certain societal problems (Chapman & Greenhow, 2019; Colby et al., 2000). Given that both the willingness (desire) to learn or be informed (Jarvis, 2006; Van Eekelen et al., 2006) and take social action (Holst, 2010) are dispositional qualities, the development of such personal attributes may require learning that is transformative in nature.

The findings of this case study indicate that certain personal dispositions such as *desire* and *courage* were indeed essential for transformative learning to transpire at the NSLF, but also that such dispositions could be intentionally fostered. The implication for this is that both scholars and facilitators of the scholarship of engagement and student leadership development need to be aware of the critical way in which a combination of physical and cultural settings may influence these personal factors, and how they in-turn may influence the success or otherwise of planned learning experiences. The elements are summarised Section 5.4 and include the disorientation created by the physical and cultural settings, the impact of story-

telling, inspirational role-modelling, critical self-reflection and a strong sense of support and encouragement.

7.3.2 *The implications of the findings for research question #2*

In Chapter 6, the way in which the student transformative learning journey occurred was explored. This included an assessment of the overarching learning journey, as well as the specific learning processes and outcomes. The findings of this study verified the model outlined in the conceptual framework, which described the student experience as a journey of deconstruction and reconstruction that involves four phases and concludes with an explicit *test of truth* (see Section 6.2). The implication of these findings to the scholarship of engagement and student leadership development are as follows.

The learning journey

First, from a conceptual perspective, the findings regarding the journey of deconstruction and reconstruction (see Section 6.2) provide an evidence based paradigm for developing certain "skills and proficiencies" required of citizen scholars, without sacrificing the place of "facts" or "truth" (Arvanitakis & Hornsby, 2016a, p. 11). By explicitly including a fourth phase, the *test of truth*, scholars, educators and facilitators of transformative learning can balance the necessity for effective educational initiatives that are applicable to the needs of society, yet maintain accountability to it by encouraging the *test of truth* as a grounding for warranted belief or justifiable action (see Sections 3.2.3 and 3.4). In this regard, the role of the educator or facilitator in the learning environment is to bring the learning journey (including the *test of truth*) into awareness and help foster the learner's disposition and ability to engage in personal transformation.

Second, from a practical perspective, this finding has implications for the development of authentic servant leaders because the *test of truth* inherently includes the employment of

the inward competency of self-awareness, which is described as "understanding one's own personal values, motives, feelings and cognitions" (Kiersch & Peters, 2017, p. 154). The inward directed skills associated with such activities involve critical thinking (Nyland, 2019) (see Sections 2.2 and 6.2.5) and therefore have relevance beyond the context of the NSLF because it can be considered a "meta-competency" which may be transferable to a range of other cognitive settings (Bridges, 1999).

Further implications for the conceptualisation and practice of the scholarship of engagement and student leadership development relate to how the *test of truth* explicitly subverts and counteracts and the "post-truth" phenomenon, which permeates across contemporary society (Bell, 2017; Dictionaries, 2016), undermines deliberative democracy and increases cultural polarisation (Strong, 2016). A recent study in the United States found that attempts to correct misconceptions through "exposure to accurate information" was not enough to counteract "adherence to alternative facts", and that attempts to correct such misinformation may actually be counterproductive and strengthen such convictions (Nyhan & Reifler, 2019). This scenario lends itself particularly well to educational initiatives that involves transformative learning, because such learning experiences do not simply building upon previous learning, but involves shifting core assumptions and beliefs as part of the process (Morrice, 2012). That the *test of truth* comes as an end phase to a journey of deconstruction and reconstruction presents some hope that "information deficits", "ignorance" or a "total disregard for reality" (Strong, 2016, pp. 137-138) would not dissuade learners from embracing new perspectives that are ultimately grounded in the principles of correspondence and coherence (see Section 6.2.5).

Given that graduates will find themselves in this complex "post-truth" era, where "objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" (Oxford Dictionaries, 2016, p. 1), this finding provides a final implication for

the scholarship of engagement. As an important part of the engagement, function of "citizen scholars" may involve contributing to "knowledge and public discourse", and the imperative of graduates to communicate "evidence-based" solutions in a time of "fake news" and "alternative facts" is clear (Chapman & Greenhow, 2019). The inclusion of the *test of truth* in the transformative learning journey therefore provides a timely conceptual emphases and practical focus for scholars, facilitators and students alike.

Learning processes and outcomes

The research data provided strong support for both the integrated paradigm of learning processes as proposed by Cranton and Taylor (2012b), along with the learning outcomes associated with transformative learning when reconceptualised as an analytic metatheory (Hoggan, 2016a). The implications of these findings support the broader applicability of the theory of transformative learning as developed in the conceptual framework of this thesis for the following reasons.

First, as there is significant intersection between transformative learning theory, the scholarship of engagement and student leadership development, the findings may be relevant to range of educational initiatives across multiple discipline areas. Second, the findings from the survey and interview data demonstrate that students may engage in learning activities through a variety of different kinds of learning processes. These explicitly include the cognitive-rational, extra-rational and social critique processes as outlined in existing literature, although some students may engage more actively in certain processes than others (see Section 6.3). By implication, this opens the door for a variety of different disciplines to explore options for engaged scholarship and student leadership development, because transformative learning is not limited to one specific kind of learning process only. This is important because of the fluid and unpredictable nature of the *engagement interface* (Rosaen et al., 2001) or *experiential learning* (Kolb, 1984) where the environment can evolve to take

many different forms. The findings are also encouraging for the possibilities of co-creating the transformative learning experience (Rosaen et al., 2001, p. 10), as students can contribute in shaping the learning environment by bringing their own prior knowledge, skills and personal narratives to bare.

Third, findings regarding the learning outcomes of student-delegates and the NSLF reinforce the broad applicability of transformative learning to the scholarship of engagement because it demonstrated the breadth of possible learning outcomes. The survey and interview data are illustrative of the fact that participants showed changes ranging from Worldview to Epistemology, Ontology, Self, Behaviour and Capacity (see Section 6.4). As with the learning processes, some students demonstrated change more in some areas than others. The implication is therefore that the NSLF is a valued example of how students can be effectively educated beyond the bounds of discipline specific knowledge (Arvanitakis & Hornsby, 2016a) in ways that are relevant to the proficiencies and attributes of citizen scholars and the competencies of authentic servant leaders. For instance, changes in capacity may include growth in cognitive capacities, while changes in Self may include developments in the ways students relate to others. The former is particularly relevant to the competencies of *authentic relational orientation*, *empowerment*, *standing back*, and *interpersonal acceptance* (Kiersch & Peters, 2017, p. 156), while the latter is particularly relevant to *critical thinking* and behaviours associated with *ethical leadership* (Arvanitakis & Hornsby, 2016a, p. 18).

Finally, I propose that in combination to the empirical verification of the abovementioned theoretical components, the shifts in ontological, axiological and epistemological foundations of transformative learning as proposed in the conceptual framework (see Section 3.2) provide additional coherence to the theory, and thereby increases its applicability to both engaged scholarship and student leadership development in Australian higher education.

7.3.3   Policy considerations and practical guidelines

The following policy considerations are designed for administrators, scholars and facilitators in higher education who wish to develop initiatives that are based on a transformative approach to student leadership development in Australian higher education. These considerations draw on empirical evidence as outlined in the literature review, relevant propositions from the conceptual framework, as well as the findings and implications of the study.

Table 7: Policy considerations for employing a transformative approach to student leadership development in Australian higher education

Policy Considerations	Brief Justification	Support
Plan for Diversity	- Diversity in in both facilitator and participant groups is important for gaining multiple perspectives, developing cross cultural understanding, empathy, and challenging assumptions. - Diversity also actively respects and incorporates different ways of being and learning and reflects democratic values.	Literature (Areesophonpichet et al., 2020; Astin, 2000; Barker, 2004; Chapman & Greenhow, 2019; Chickering & Gamson, 1999; Eich, 2008; Grunwell, 2015; Harrison & Williams-Cumberbatch, 2022; Kiersch & Peters, 2017) Conceptual Framework Section 3.2.1 Findings and implications Sections 5.2.2; 8.3.1
Plan for Safety and Supportive Relationships	- The importance of experienced, trained and committed facilitators is very important in creating safe, accountable and supported environments.	Literature (Cranton, 2016; Eich, 2008; Grunwell, 2015; Morrice, 2012) Conceptual Framework Section 3.2.1 Findings and implications Sections 6.2; 8.3.1

Plan for Socratic Dialogue and Reflection	- Socratic dialogue in the safe setting of small groups can help to foster critical thinking skills and open mindedness, along with interpersonal and communication skills - Reflections help students to debrief and make meaning of their experiences and to process feelings	Literature (Eich, 2008; Grunwell, 2015; Harrison & Williams-Cumberbatch, 2022; Kiersch & Peters, 2017; Mezirow, 2018) Conceptual Framework Section 3.2.1 Findings and implications Section 7.2; 8.3.2
Plan for Immersion	- Sharing a range of experiences with others over multiple days provides good opportunities for students to break down barriers, establish a sense of community and group identity.	Literature (Eich, 2008; Grunwell, 2015) Conceptual Framework Section 3.1 Findings and implications Sections 6.2.1; 8.3.1
Plan for Experiential Learning	- When students learn through doing, it allows them to gain experiences outside of their comfort zone and helps grow confidence and self-efficacy.	Literature (Cranton, 2016; Eich, 2008; Kiersch & Peters, 2017; Kolb, 1984; Rosaen et al., 2001) Conceptual Framework Section 3.1 Findings and implications Sections 6.2.1; 8.3.1
Plan for Community Engagement	- By creating an engagement interface, students can gain both awareness and skills that relate to authentic community contexts	Literature (Eich, 2008; Kiersch & Peters, 2017; Rosaen et al., 2001; Van Eekelen et al., 2006) Conceptual Framework Section 3.1 Findings and implications Sections 7.3; 8.3.1
Plan for High-Quality Role-Modelling	- Including guest speakers and experienced facilitators who are active in community leadership is helpful for	Literature (Eich, 2008; Grunwell, 2015) Conceptual Framework Section 3.1

	providing students with real-time contextualised examples.	Findings and implications Section 6.2.2; 8.3.1

Practical Guidelines

Given that the context for leadership education initiatives will vary greatly depending on range of factors, such as the physical setting and the size of the event, the following practical guidelines are generic and designed specifically for scholars and facilitators in small group settings which may be relevant in a variety of contexts. This focus on small group activity is supported by research on high quality leadership development programs in higher education by Eich (2008). A second reason for this focus is because the small group setting proved to be a critical part of the cultural setting that determined why the former student-delegates founds their experience at the NSLF to be personally transformative (see Section 6.2.2). These recommendations are either distilled or extrapolated from various iterations of the NSLF small group facilitator training materials (see Appendix C). The following extract from the 2014 NSLF Facilitator's Training Manual provides an overview of the key principles at play:

> *Principles behind the small group: Socrates once said that learning is a matter of asking the right questions, not simply giving the right answers. Socrates developed a system of asking students questions to get to core truths. This is what is now known as the "Socratic dialogue". He avoided presenting his own conclusions but instead, sought to immerse learners in exploration and inquiry.*
>
> *Socrates believed that there are few sustainable right or wrong answers; there are simply better questions, and the better the question, the more people will participate in engaged thinking. Socratic dialogue demands that cherished*

assumptions be challenged, that long-held beliefs be explored. As SGFs (small

group facilitators), we can all learn from the principles of the Socratic dialogue…

Most leaders lecture; most teachers preach. True dialogue seeks to minimise the

leader/teacher talk and maximise the learner search. So remember, our purpose is

not to teach these students, but rather to love them by taking a genuine interest in

their lives. We must be slow to speak and quick to listen (emphases in original).

There will be a time to talk and a time to be quiet… Our purpose in talking is to

ask questions that get the students to start talking. Once they begin to talk, our

role is to be quiet and listen.

In order to support the broader applicability of this study beyond the context of the

NSLF, the following guidelines combines the roles of the Small Group Facilitator and

Assistant Small Group Facilitator as they enable Socratic Dialogue. The original NSLF

training material provided distinct guidelines for each role (see Appendix C).

Table 8: Practical guidelines for small group facilitators employing a transformative approach
to student leadership development in Australian higher education

Activity	Practical Guidelines
Personal Preparation	- Prepare for diversity – a mixture of personalities and backgrounds. - Reflect on how you can set the tone through leadership, love and enthusiasm, and manage personal frustration, insecurity or tensions.
Group Set-up	- Prepare to work together as a team; Small Group Facilitator (AGF) and Assistant Small Group Facilitator (ASMF) – who is usually a returning student. - Reflect on personality mix and how to complement one another and keep the culture of the group positive and safe.
Breaking the ice	Prepare for the 'icebreaker' session, which is when the group first gets together.

	• Reflect on a fun way to get to know each other and create a safe group environment.
Setting expectations	• Prepare to clearly lay out what makes a safe environment. The value and dignity of each person; the importance of respect and kindness; the power of listening and seeking understanding. • Reflect on ways to communicate expectations and possible group rules such as no phones, or no disparaging personal comments etc.
Setting the tone	• Prepare to share your own story with authenticity and vulnerability. • Reflect on what has shaped you as a person, and why you value and believe certain things and what this means for your leadership.
Asking Questions	• Prepare to ask many open-ended questions and to genuinely seek understanding. • Reflect on ways to keep the dialogue going; for example by asking specific follow-up questions to help the speaker to unpack the details of their view or narrative.
Active Listening	• Prepare to listen carefully and actively set an example that conveys interest and respect. • Reflect on the impact of good body language such as arms unfolded or a friendly face, and consider ways to show empathy, gratitude, understanding and interest; e.g. "that must have been really difficult for you" or "thank you for sharing that", "I see" and "can you tell us more about that?"
Showing Respect	• Prepare to ensure that everyone is included and that their value as a person is affirmed. • Reflect on ways that you can resist giving advice or making someone else's story about you.
Believing in yourself	• Prepare yourself for a wonderful time! Your life and example is valuable and if you are in a relaxed spirit the students will respond in kind. • Reflect on the fact that group dynamics and tensions are sometimes difficult, but that your job is to love, and love never fails.

7.4   Concluding the study

The focus of the study was to develop a transformative approach to student leadership development in Australian higher education that was based upon empirical research, applicable to the contemporary era and ethically accountable. Three research questions guided the research design to this end, and a range of important findings have emerged that constitute incremental contributions to knowledge.

7.4.1   Contributions to knowledge

Given that this thesis built upon existing research in the fields of the scholarship of engagement, student leadership development and transformative learning theory (see Chapter 2), it is important to highlight the ways in which this thesis interacted with literature in a way that generated a "fresh contribution to knowledge" (Barrie et al., 2018). This section will outline the significant contributions to philosophical, theoretical, policy and practical knowledge.

7.4.1.1   Contribution to philosophical knowledge

Based upon a review of the literature, it became apparent that there was a need to examine the philosophical coherence of transformative learning theory, as this aspect was mostly neglected in extant scholarship (Fuhr et al., 2017). The philosophical underpinning of Constructivism (see Section 3.2.1), Humanism (see Section 3.2.2) and Critical social theory (see Section 3.2.2) upon which the current conceptualisations of transformative theory rest were subsequently assessed. In light of a range issues with the coherence of the above-mentioned philosophical views, a revised set of axiological, ontological and epistemological foundations were developed for a transformative approach to student leadership development in Australian higher education (see Section 3.3). They were also drafted in alignment with

various fundamental principles of the scholarship of engagement and student leadership development in order to support the applicability and accountability of educational initiatives.

7.4.1.2   Contribution to theoretical knowledge

In light of a range of objections in literature regarding ethical (Akenson et al., 2022; Dunn, 2011; Morrice, 2012; Smith & Kempster, 2019) and theoretical (Hoggan, 2016a; Howie & Bagnall, 2013; Newman, 2012) components of transformative learning theory (see Section 3.4), a reconceptualisation of the theory was developed to address these concerns (see Section 3.5). In alignment with the revised philosophical foundations, this approach also explicitly addressed issues of applicability regarding the contemporary VUCA era, such as the phenomenon of a "post-truth" and "toxic" culture (Bell, 2017, 2019). Further, in alignment with the above-mentioned philosophical foundations, this incremental contribution to theoretical knowledge is empirically grounded (see Chapter 6) and geared to support student-centred, ethical practices that foster the development of citizen scholars and authentic servant leaders.

7.4.1.3   Contribution to methodological knowledge

This study established ethical and rigorous methods of researching about transformative learning in the context of Australian higher education with former student-delegates of the NSLF (see Chapter 4). Using a pragmatist approach, a mixed-methods retrospective case study was employed using explanatory sequential design and thematic analysis. This approach received human ethics approval at the University of Southern Queensland (Number: H20REA243) and constitutes a significant contribution to knowledge, as it provides a foundation for further research.

7.4.1.4   Contribution to policy knowledge

A set of policy considerations were developed (see Section 7.3.3) by building upon empirical evidence, as outlined in the literature review (see Chapter 2), developing relevant propositions as part of the conceptual framework (see Chapter 3), conducting a thematic analysis of the NSLF case study data (see Chapters 5 and 6), and exploring the implications of these to the conceptualisation of the scholarship or engagement and student leadership development (see Section 7.3). This contribution to policy knowledge was created specifically for administrators, scholars and facilitators who wish to develop initiatives that are based on a transformative approach to student leadership development in Australian higher education. These policy considerations could also be utilised alongside the *framework for developing and supporting student leadership in higher education,* which was recently developed (Skalicky et al., 2020).

7.4.1.5   Contribution to practical knowledge

Although significant research about high quality student leadership programs exists (see Section 2.3), it was also apparent in the literature review that attention needed to be diverted to establishing new practices that appropriately address the demands of the contemporary era. Building upon the intersection between the goals and methods of the developing citizen scholars and authentic servant leaders, this thesis contributed significant practical knowledge to facilitating a learning journey of deconstruction and reconstruction (see Sections 2.4). Based upon findings of the student experience (see Chapter 5) and the transformative learning journey (see Chapter 6), and a distillation and extrapolation of the NSLF facilitator training material (see Appendix C), a set of practical guidelines was developed. This contribution to knowledge specifically supports the broader applicability of this study beyond the context of

the NSLF, as it provides preparation and reflection content for those who wish to employ a transformative approach to student leadership development.

7.4.2   Opportunities for further research

Based on the inherent limitations of this retrospective case study which was context bound (see Section 4.8), the findings relating to the transformative nature of student's experience with the NSLF are best considered as groundwork for future studies to build on (see also Section 4.5.1.3). Different research methodologies might be able to ensure generalisability, especially if a different sampling strategies (such as critical case; confirming and discomfirming cases; or random purposeful) were employed (Punch, 2009) and a larger sample size was obtained. A further opportunity would be to build upon this research by employing a similar methodology but shifting the focus to learning environments that exist within higher education curricular or co-curricular contexts. Adaptions could also be made to the data collection and analysis phase by employing real-time sampling techniques through apps or other technical devices (Roessger et al., 2017), rather than relying on retrospective interview data.

Finally, there were specific questions that emerged from the data analysis relating to the development of the personal dispositions of *desire* and *courage* (see Section 5.3). Although there were several lines of evidence to suggest that these qualities could be fostered strategically as part of the learning experience, a research design that focused specifically on these aspects may yield even more substantive results.

7.4.3   Revisiting my biographical situatedness

I began this PhD with a background in secondary teaching and various community and business leadership roles and an interest in the democratic functions of higher education. My academic studies and experiences in travelling the world and learning about different cultures

and worldviews also gave me some appreciation of the challenges and opportunities associated with learning associated with values and beliefs. As explained in Section 1.6, my experience at the NSLF as a facilitator piqued my interest in the role that higher education can play in serving society by developing students to make a positive impact. This has been the personal driver for me throughout this project. I wanted to contribute to knowledge by doing meaningful and exemplary research that made an actual difference to the way that we conceptualise and practice leadership initiatives within the complex context of the modern world (Bensimon et al., 2004).

The process of conducting this research has been hugely formative for me. It facilitated a "shift in focus from doing to thinking" (Loughran, 2016, p. 260), and thereby extended the opportunity to broaden my understanding of the theoretical landscape in a range of intersecting areas, and to learn from the experience of scholars, leadership development facilitators and former-student delegates in a rich and intentional manner. The experience of conducting the interviews was particularly special for me. Listening to 20 personal reflections on journeys of challenge and triumph was humbling and inspiring and having the rare opportunity to ask carefully considered questions and to seek understanding was an honour. I resonate with Berger (2004), who employs the phrase "dancing on the threshold of meaning", to explain the experience of traversing the precarious edge of our knowledge. In this "liminal space" (p. 338), we reach the limits of our understandings, and thereafter begin to stretch beyond them. In this way I have experienced both affect and value of the love of learning (Hinchliffe, 2006), and hope that it generates some wisdom, both for myself and others.

7.5   Chapter Summary

This final chapter overviewed the progression of chapters in the thesis and discussed how the focus of the study was achieved (see Section 7.2). The was followed by an evaluation

of the implications of the study as per Research Question 3 (see Section 7.3). This involved an exploration of how the findings related to the scholarship of engagement and student leadership development and also included the development of policy considerations and practical guidelines for the employment of a transformative approach to student leadership development in Australian higher education (see Section 7.3.3).

This was followed by a set of concluding sections. First the contributions to knowledge were outlined (see Section 7.4.1), and this included philosophical, theoretical, methodological, policy and practical knowledge. Second, some opportunities for further research were presented based upon the inherent limitations of the research design and the specific findings of data analysis (see Section 7.4.2). Finally, a reflection on my biographical situation was provided (see Section 7.5)(Stuckey et al., 2013).

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Example Brochure Material of the NSLF

VISION

The National Student Leadership Forum is a four-day symposium held each year in Canberra to prepare young adults for leadership in all walks of life. Since its inception in 1997, the Forum has become one of Australia's preeminent leadership development initiatives. It is hosted by a multi-party group of Federal Parliamentarians who share a commitment to inspire and equip the next generation of Australian leaders.

"That's why our faith and values are so important: they are the inner resources that we draw from to become the right kind of leader and to keep our original vision alive."

Becoming a good leader requires more than an impressive resume and a strong personality: there must be something in you that justifies the loyalty and commitment of those who follow. This speaks more to your character than it does to your abilities or achievements.

As Members of Parliament, we have found just how challenging it is to be a good leader. It is easy to begin with great idealism but to become disillusioned and cynical in the face of adversities and disappointments. That's why our faith and values are so important: they are the inner resources that we draw from to become the right kind of leader and to keep our original vision alive. Our faith and values shape our sense of purpose and act as a defence against our own self-centredness and the cynicism this tends to produce in followers.

Jesus of Nazareth introduced the concept of servant leadership when he said to his followers that, unlike the leaders of the day who "lorded it over" the people, "it will not be so with you. Instead the greatest among you must be the servant of all." We have adopted this idea of servant leadership as the broad theme of the Forum. Being a servant leader cuts across the grain of personal pride and ego and none of us find it easy. In political life we often feel that we fail as much as we succeed! Nonetheless, it is so important to come back to these "first principles".

The National Student Leadership Forum is an opportunity to discuss the significance of faith and values as foundations for effective leadership. We do not intend for this discussion to be overtly religious or sectarian and we value the participation of young people from a diversity of intellectual, cultural, and religious backgrounds. Each year we have young adults attend from many different backgrounds- Catholic, Jewish, Protestant, Muslim and Buddhist or no religious background at all. We have found that more diverse the background, the richer our experience together.

FORMAT

The Forum is designed as a four-day program held at the end of a sitting week in Canberra. While the specific program varies from year to year, it generally includes a day spent in Parliament House, Keynote addresses from the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition, Keynote addresses by inspiring community and business leaders, seminar groups run by MP's and small group discussions, a local community service project, a sport and recreation afternoon, and an end of Forum dance night!

One dimension of the Forum program that is always significant is the time spent in small groups. Small Groups are often challenging and require people to be willing to participate and learn to communicate with others who may think differently.

NOMINATIONS

Each year about 225 young adults between 18 & 26 have an opportunity to participate in the Forum. As our future leaders, their view of leadership is of crucial importance to our nation and region. From year to year we do our best to ensure a broad representation of young adults from all around Australia and neighbouring nations- PNG, New Zealand, Solomon Islands, Samoa, Fiji and Tonga.

Our policy has always been that every young person who attends the Forum has been nominated by an adult who believes they have leadership potential. Nominees need not necessarily have undertaken tertiary studies or have a proven leadership track record. We are seeking to bring together the broadest possible cross-section of bright, motivated, young adults.

Nominators may be the Parliamentary Hosts, University and College heads, corporate or community leaders of varying descriptions and also Forum Alumni. We encourage nominators to make an investment in the lives of their nominees by supporting them financially. We understand, however, that this is not always possible and we don't want financial capacity to constrain the right candidates from attending. Accordingly, we have established a fund to provide full and part scholarships to assist young people with financial difficulties.

WHO WE ARE

The National Student Leadership Forum on faith & values is the initiative of Members and Senators of the Federal Parliament, supported by business and community leaders. A small secretariat operates from Sydney to help with the administrative arrangements.

All financial requirements are met through the participant's fees or donations from nominators, companies and individuals around Australia. The Forum receives no government funding.

PAST ATTENDEES HAVE SAID…

Having the freedom to explore my beliefs and values and create a support network of people based on genuine care makes me believe that I can contribute to the world and restores my hope in myself and others."

Marc Orchard QLD

"While I have always believed that one person can make a difference, I never believed it would be me – but hearing all the different speakers has inspired me to follow my vision and integrate my faith into what I strive to do in my life."

Melinda Protani QLD

"A fantastic experience on so many levels- from listening to the PM and the Opposition Leader share personal insights to small group discussions where one person's story can make a huge impact, I believe the Forum was empowering on a multitude of levels. I appreciate both the grand scale and the intimacy of the conference."

Ellie Harvey, NSW

"I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve."

Albert Schweitzer, Doctor and Nobel Prize Recipient

CONTACT

National Student Leadership Forum
PO Box 413,
Killara NSW 2071
Australia

Phone +61 (2) 9499 9300

Twitter @NSLFAustralia
www.facebook.com/nslfaustralia

www.nslf.org.au

What Some of the Young People Said

"The weekend was unbelievable. The amount that I have personally gained is priceless."
~Michelle Gazal, NSW

"I cannot encapsulate in words how fantastic the Forum has been – spirit building, inspirational and eye-opening"
~Emma Murphy, SA

"I can't speak highly enough of the whole experience. It was a very powerful experience and one which has had a profound and lasting impact on me. I really felt that I was 'thinking outside the circle' and putting these more challenging aspects of life into perspective"
~Tim James, NSW

"It was a conference that encouraged high ideals and sought to balance out cynicism with realism."
~Brenton Prosser, SA

"The Forum has confronted my values and in particular my view of faith. It has touched a part of my core being that I had ignored for many years. I will carry with me a confidence to be open to whatever is thrown my way and to reach out to others in my desire to make a difference"
~Stephanie McGregor, VIC

"I didn't quite know what to expect when I arrived at the forum and never dreamed that I would be so profoundly moved by the experience. Truly inspirational."
~Samantha Merrit, WA

"A great event that brings a positive outlook to life and a hopeful future for our country."
~Kylie Clarke, VIC

"The Forum was the most challenging and truly inspirational experience of my life. I now have my life firmly directed by the vision of leadership based on love...to be a positive example for and indeed live for others."
~Stuart Bade, QLD

The Organisation

The National Student Leadership Forum on faith & values is the initiative of political, business and community leaders who have a common desire to help develop our young people.

A group of Members and Senators of the Federal Parliament are the hosts of the Forum. They are representative of all major Parties and have come together in a non-partisan spirit.

A small secretariat of volunteers operates from Sydney to help with the Forum administration.

All resources have been provided either by the participants or through the donations of concerned individuals from across the country. The Forum receives no government funding.

For More Information

Please address inquiries regarding the Forum to:

National Student Leadership Forum

PO Box 413
Killara NSW 2071
Australia

Phone: (61-2) **9499 9300**
Fax: (61-2) 9499 9444
Email: nslf@bigpond.net.au

The fifth

National Student Leadership Forum
on
faith & values

30th August –
2nd September
2001

Canberra

National Student Leadership Forum
on faith & values

Purpose

In 1997 the first National Student Leadership Forum on faith & values was initiated by a group of Members and Senators of the Federal Parliament, who share a concern for our youth.

The purpose of the Forum is **to inspire young people to a life of leadership based on a commitment to serve others.**

We affirm the central importance of helping others as the foundation of meaningful lives and healthy communities. This is easy to forget in a culture that is so often preoccupied with self.

We believe our young adults (18-26) are important because they are in the process of determining the personal goals on which they will build their lives. They have begun to develop a thinking, critical approach to life, yet they are still idealistic. They will one day be our leaders, so their view of leadership is of critical importance to our nation and our region.

We feel concerned about the growing gulf between young people, politicians and leadership generally. In an attempt to address this, we are inviting our future leaders to come to Canberra so that we can talk frankly and get to know one another as real people. We hope to learn as much from them as they may learn from us.

The National Student Leadership Forum on faith & values is not about politics: it is about living lives that make a difference in whatever field we are involved. Accordingly, we are working with business and community leaders to present a relevant and diverse program that any young person would enjoy.

Theme

At the Forum we will consider:

- Why faith and values are important foundations to effective leadership.
- The qualities of an effective leader, eg: courage, humility, vision, love, integrity and perseverance.
- The importance of developing inner strength and personal character.

We hope to hear from young people about their views on leadership and what they hope to accomplish with their lives.

We will share from our own experience what our dreams are, who has inspired us to seek to make a difference and some of the discouragements we have faced.

We will also discuss the lives of servant leaders in history, like Jesus of Nazareth and Mahatma Gandhi.

Format

At the Forum the young people will be addressed by political, community and business leaders and will also have opportunities to share with them in more informal settings.

The Forum will be conducted over a three-day weekend, held in the Hyatt Hotel Canberra, the city's premier hotel. The weekend will be made up of a number of elements including:

- A day spent in our national parliament
- Addresses by politicians from all major parties

- Keynote speeches by Australian leaders from different walks of life
- Seminar groups, where there will be an opportunity to discuss issues with political, business and community leaders
- Small group discussions, to help build closer relationships with 6 - 8 others
- A community service project in the greater Canberra area
- A sport and recreation afternoon.

Outcomes

Our hope is that this gathering will be challenging and perhaps even life changing for those who participate. As a result of the Forum, we expect that:

- Young people will return to their studies, places of work and communities, challenged by new ideas about leadership
- They will make a commitment to a life of leadership motivated by a desire to serve others
- They will form friendships with peers from around the country who share a desire to develop leadership character
- They will have a deeper appreciation for our leaders through an awareness of the opportunities and difficulties they face
- Our participating national leaders will return to their professional and personal lives more aware of the next generation's concerns and inspired by their hopes and dreams.

1999 Program of Events

Thursday 2nd September

11.00 - 1.20	Check in - Registration
12.00 - 12.45	Small group leaders meeting
1.00 - 1.20	Buses to Parliament House
2.00 - 2.25	Question Time - *Parliament House*
2.25 - 2.35	Move to *Theatrette*
2.35 - 4.15	Welcome - *Theatrette* The Hon Dr David Kemp MP
4.15 - 4.30	Move to *Main Committee Room*
4.30 - 5.30	Welcome by the Prime Minister & Leader of the Opposition
5.30	Small groups get together & go to Member's offices
5.45 - 6.45	Meet with Host Members
6.45	Move to the *Great Hall*
7.00	Dinner in *Great Hall* - Keynote Address
	Deputy Prime Minister The Hon John Anderson MP
9.30 - 9.50	Bus to Hotel
10.00 - 11.00	Small group discussion
	Dress code for the whole of Thursday - coat & tie

Friday 3rd September

7.00 - 7.30	Small group leaders meeting
7.15 - 7.40	Buses to Breakfast at Parliament House
7.45 - 9.45	Breakfast - Speaker Ms Louise Mackie
9.45 - 10.40	Small group discussion at tables
10.45 - 11.35	Seminars
11.45 - 12.35	Seminars
12.35 - 12.55	Buses to Hotel
12.55 - 1.05	Change into sports clothes & meet outside the back of Hotel
1.05 - 5.00	Lunch & Volleyball tournament in Commonwealth Park
6.30 - 7.30	Small group discussion
7.30	Dinner - Speaker Ms Julie Fewster
	Dress code smart casual for morning & dinner

Saturday 4th September

7.15 - 7.45	Small group leaders meeting
7.45 - 9.45	Breakfast - Speaker Mr Tim Pickles
9.45 - 11.05	Small group discussion at tables
11.10 - 12.00	Seminars
12.10 - 1.00	Seminars
1.00 - 1.30 Hotel	Change into work clothes, pick up lunch & meet outside the
1.30	Buses depart for work projects
2.00 - 5.00	Community service projects
6.30 - 11.00	Bus departs for Dinner at *Yarralumla Woolshed*
11.00 - 11.40	*Bus departs for Hotel*
	Dress code for morning - casual; evening - bush-dance attire

Sunday 5th September

8.00 - 9.00	Pack and vacate rooms
9.00 - 10.30	Breakfast - Conclusion
10.30 - 11.00	Small group wrap-up
	Dress code casual

2003 Program of Events

Thursday 21st August

10.30 - 1.00	Registration
2.00 - 2.30	Question Time - *Parliament House*
2.40 - 4.10	Welcome - *Theatrette*
4.30 - 5.30	Welcome by the Prime Minister & Leader of the Opposition
5.45 - 6.45	Small groups meet with Host Members
7.00 - 8.50	Dinner in *Great Hall* - Keynote Address: Governor-General
8.50 – 9.45	Small group discussion at tables

Friday 22nd August

8.00 - 9.30	Breakfast – Keynote Address: *"The Servant Leader"*
9.45 - 10.35	Seminars
10.45 - 11.35	Seminars
12.00 – 1.00	Small group discussion
1.30 – 2.15	Lunch in park
2.15 - 5.00	Volleyball tournament
6.30 - 8.30	Dinner – Keynote Address: Jo Cornish
8.30 – 10.00	Small group discussion

Saturday 23rd August

8.00 - 9.30	Breakfast – Keynote Address: David Bussau
9.45 – 10.45	Small group discussion
11.00 - 11.50	Seminars
12.00 - 12.50	Seminars
1.30 – 2.30	Lunch at community service sites
2.30 – 4.30	Community service projects
5.00 – 6.30	*Optional* small group discussion
6.30 - 10.30	Bush Dance

Sunday 24th August

8.00 – 9.00	Check out of rooms
9.00 - 10.30	Breakfast and small group wrap up
10.30 – 11.00	Conclusion

National Student Leadership Forum
on faith & values

2013 Program of Events

Thursday 30th May   (Dress Code – Lounge Suit / Business Attire)

10:30 – 12:15	Student Registration (Hyatt Hotel)
12:15 – 12:45	Small Group Formation (Lobby - Hyatt Hotel)
12:45 – 1:00	An Introduction to the Forum: *Mrs Karen Stephen*
1:00 – 2:00	Buses to Parliament House & Security
2:00 – 2:45	Question Time (House of Representatives)
2:45 – 2:55	Move to Parliamentary Theatrette
2:55 – 3:05	Welcome From the Hosts: *Senator Claire Moore & Mr Scott Morrison MP*
3:05 – 3:45	An Introduction to Leadership, Faith & Values: *Stu Bade & Tim Watkinson*
3:45 – 4:00	Executive Session: *The Leader of the Opposition*
4:00 – 4:30	Executive Session: *The Prime Minister*
4:30 – 4:40	Refreshment Break
4:40 – 5:00	Mateship: *The Hon Mr Jason Clare MP & Mr Scott Morrison MP*
5:15 – 6:15	Small Groups meet with Host Members (Parliamentary Offices)
6:30 – 8:30	Welcome Dinner- Great Hall- Keynote Address: *Major General Sitiveni Rabuka*
8:40 – 9:10	Buses Back to Hyatt Hotel and room check in
9:30 – 10:15	Small Group Time

Friday 31st May   (Dress Code – Smart Casual with comfortable walking shoes / sports gear in afternoon)

7:30 – 8:40	Breakfast (Hyatt Hotel)- Forum Reflections: *Past delegates*
8:40 – 9:00	Buses to War Memorial
9:15 – 9:25	Welcome to the War Memorial (Reflective Pool)
9:25 – 9:45	Servant Leadership Talk: *Mr Stuart Robert MP*
9:45 – 10:00	The Lone Piper and Poppy Laying Ceremony
10:00 – 10:15	Walk down Anzac Parade to Lake Burley Griffin
10:25 – 10:40	Buses from Lake to Parliament House (Morning Tea on Bus)
11:00 – 11:20	Servant Leadership (Theatrette): *Mr Jock Cameron*
11:20 – 12:10	Leadership Panel: *Sen Claire Moore, Rabbi Zalman Kastel, Ms Lael Kassem*
12:10 – 12:20	Exit Parliament House and Congregate on Front Lawn
12:20 – 1:25	Small Group Lunches (Lawn in Front of Parliament House)
2:00 – 4:00	Forum Sports Fest (Lennox Park, Behind the Hotel)
5:45 – 6:30	Pre-Dinner Small Group Time
6:30 – 8:30	Dinner (Ballroom, Hyatt) – Keynote Address: *Bec Heinrich & Bek Donders*
8:30 – 10:00	Small Group Discussion

Saturday 1st June   (Dress Code – Outdoor Work Clothes: Raglan T-Shirts / Bush Dance Outfit in the evening)

8:00 – 9:30	Breakfast (Ballroom Hyatt Hotel) – Keynote Address: *Ms Audette Exel*
9:30 – 10:15	Small Group Discussion (In and Around Hyatt)
10:25 – 11:15	Community Seminars 1 (Various Locations in Hyatt Hotel)
11:25 – 12:15	Community Seminars 2 (Various Locations in Hyatt Hotel)
12:30 – 12:45	Transport to Community Service Project (Rivett)
12:45 – 1:20	Lunch (Rivett Neighbourhood Oval- Bangalay Crescent)
1:20 – 1:30	Address: *Ms Gai Brodtmann MP*
1:45 – 4:00	Community Service Projects
4:15 – 5:30	Optional Small Group Time (Venue TBD by Facilitators)
7:00 – 10:30	Bush Dance (Yarralumla Woolshed)

Sunday 2nd June   (Dress Code – Casual)

8:00 – 9:00	Check out of Rooms
9:00 – 10:15	Breakfast and Concluding Message (Ballroom, Hyatt Hotel)
10:15 – 11:00	Small Group Wrap Up (In and Around Hyatt)
11:00 - 11:30	Conclusion– Student Responses

2018 Program of Events

Thursday 23 August *(Dress Code: lounge suit/business attire)*

10:30 – 12:00	Student Registration (Hyatt Hotel)
12:00 – 12:30	Small Group Formation (Lobby – Hyatt Hotel)
12:30 – 1:55	Buses to Parliament House & Security
2:00 – 2:30	Question Time (House of Representatives and Senate)
2:35 – 2:45	Move to Parliamentary Theatrette
2:45 – 2:55	An Introduction to the Forum
2:55 – 3:35	An Introduction to Leadership, Faith & Values: *Dr Stuart Bade*
3:40 – 4.00	Welcome from the Hosts: *The Hon Scott Morrison MP and The Hon Jason Clare MP*
4:00 – 4:30	Executive Session with the Prime Minister: *The Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP*
4:30 – 5:00	Executive Session with the Leader of the Opposition: *The Hon Bill Shorten MP*
5:00 – 6:00	Small Groups meet with Host Members (Parliamentary Offices)
6:00 – 6:25	Welcome Drinks – Marble Foyer
6:25 – 7:00	Buses Back to Hyatt Hotel
7:15 – 9:00	Welcome Dinner (Ballroom Hyatt) – Keynote Address: *The Hon. Peter Costello*
9:00 – 9:30	Room key pickup and luggage move
9:30 – 10:15	Small Group Time

Friday 24 August *(Dress Code: smart casual with comfortable walking shoes, then sports gear in the afternoon)*

7:30 – 8:30	Breakfast (Hyatt Hotel)
8:30 – 9:00	Buses to War Memorial
9:10 – 9:20	Welcome to the War Memorial (Reflective Pool): *Ms Josie Dunham, The Hon Dr Brendan Nelson AO*
9:20 – 9:40	Servant Leadership Talk – *Mr Luke Gosling OAM MP*
9:40 – 9:55	The Lone Piper and Poppy Laying Ceremony
9:55 – 10:10	Walk down Anzac Parade to Lake Burley Griffin
10:00 – 10:30	Buses from Lake to Parliament House (Morning Tea on Bus)
11:10 – 12:10	Leadership Panel
12:10 – 12:30	Servant Leadership (Theatrette): *Mr Jock Cameron*
12:30 – 12:40	Exit Parliament House and Congregate on Front Lawn
12:40 – 1:40	Small Group Lunches (APH Front Lawn)
2:30 – 4:30	Forum Sports Fest (Lennox Park, behind Hyatt Hotel)
5:45 – 6:30	Pre-Dinner Small Group Time
6:30 – 8:30	Dinner (Ballroom, Hyatt) – Keynote Address: *Mrs Carolyn and Mr David Stedman*
8:30 – 10:00	Small Group Discussion

Saturday 25 August *(Dress Code: outdoor work clothes, then Barn Dance outfit in the evening)*

8:00 – 9:30	Breakfast (Hyatt Hotel) – Keynote Address: *Dr Munjed Al Munderis*
9:30 – 10:15	Small Group Discussion (In and Around Hyatt)
10:25 – 11:15	Community Seminars 1 (Various Locations in Hyatt Hotel)
11:25 – 12:15	Community Seminars 2 (Various Locations in Hyatt Hotel)
12:20 – 1:25	Lunch (Hyatt – Lennox Park)
1:25 – 1.45	Transport to Rivett
1:45 – 4:00	Community Service Projects
4:15 – 5:30	Optional Small Group Time (Venue TBD by Facilitators)
6:35 – 7:00	Buses to Woolshed
7:00 – 10:30	Barn Dance (Yarralumla Woolshed)

Sunday 26 August *(Dress Code: casual)*

8:00 – 9:00	Check out of Rooms
9:00 – 10:15	Breakfast and Concluding Message (Ballroom, Hyatt Hotel):
10:15 – 11:00	Small Group Wrap Up (In and Around Hyatt)
11:00 – 11:30	Conclusion – Student Responses

National Student Leadership Forum

ON FAITH AND VALUES

2014 Facilitator's Training Manual

The 16th

National Student Leadership Forum

on faith and values

Thursday 4th September– Sunday 7th September 2014

Table of Contents

During your time as a Facilitator, you will experience times of frustration, insecurity and tension about the message. Fear not, this is all normal and to be expected! It is OK to have these times of difficulty; all you need to provide is a safe environment for the students to freely explore the ideas presented.

Principles behind the small group

Socrates once said that learning is a matter of **asking the right questions**, not simply giving the right answers. Socrates developed a system of asking students questions to get to core truths. This is what is now known as the "Socratic dialogue". He avoided presenting his own conclusions but instead, sought to immerse learners in exploration and inquiry.

Socrates believed that there are few sustainable right or wrong answers; there are simply better questions, and the better the question, the more people will participate in engaged thinking. Socratic dialogue demands that cherished assumptions be challenged, that long-held beliefs be explored.

As SGFs, we can all learn from the principles of the Socratic dialogue. We are there to ask the questions to help stimulate learning on leadership based on faith and values. Whilst this may sound quite simple, we often find it easier just to give the answer! Most leaders lecture; most teachers preach. True dialogue seeks to minimise the leader/teacher talk and maximise the learner search. So remember, our purpose is not to teach these students, but rather to **love them by taking a genuine interest in their lives**. We must be **slow to speak and quick to listen**. There will be a time to talk and a time to be quiet. We want to pray as St. Francis did, "Lord, grant that I seek to understand and not to be understood." Our purpose in talking is to ask questions that get the students to start talking. **Once they begin to talk, our role is to be quiet and listen.**

Role of Small Group Facilitator and Assistant Small Group Facilitator

The SGF and ASGF are key roles at the Forum. The roles, although slightly different, are complimentary and will contribute to the experience of the student. Your **example**, **leadership**, **love** and **enthusiasm** will be an incredible influence to the students.

Whilst it is the role of the SGF to guide their groups over the 4 days and to facilitate discussion and participation, it is the ASGF's role to help "get the ball rolling" and to help create a positive team spirit within the group. The roles are summarised below:

Small Group Facilitator	Assistant Small Group Facilitator
Before the Forum….. • Get to know your co-facilitator and assistant small group facilitator • Read up on the vision and other materials • Attend all the training sessions • Think about how the vision of the Forum has influenced you • Share calling each student beforehand	• Get to know your 2 small group facilitators • Read up on the vision and other materials • Attend all the training sessions • Think about how the vision of the Forum has influenced you • Share calling each student beforehand
During the Forum…. • Be a servant leader • Look out/ care for students at registration • Ensure your groups move to sessions on time • Facilitation of small group time incl. Personal sharing / vulnerability / asking questions / drawing people out • Build relationships with the students in your group • Tell your story –how your faith informs your approach to leadership • Be a mentor to your ASGF • Express enthusiasm for post-Forum activities *Love…..enthusiasm…..openness*	• Be a servant leader • Look out/ care for students at registration • Help the students to connect and feel comfortable • Help to build a team spirit within your group • Build relationships with the students in your group • Tell your story –how your faith informs your approach to leadership • Lead by example! Initiate discussions on a personal level • Support group facilitators • Express enthusiasm for post-Forum activities *Love…..enthusiasm…..openness*
After the Forum….. • Encourage post-Forum follow up participation and activities • Support ASGF in post-Forum follow up • Try to maintain and build on relationships • Encourage Alumni group participation	• Try to maintain and build on relationships • Help to keep the group connected via email etc. • Initiate a post-Forum get-together • Encourage Alumni group participation

Overview of weekend

1. **Introduction of key ideas** and key questions in Session 1- Thursday
2. **Visit MP's office** - You will spend about an hour with a politician in their office, which is a great time to get to know them. It is important that you keep directing the conversation in the right direction. We want the students to see why these people became leaders and how their own faith and values effected and effects their decisions and choices. The hope is that this time will also give the MP a chance to reflect on their own life.

   The MP hosting your small group will hopefully join you at dinner on Thursday night.

3. **Meals** - Most meals will be spent with your small group. They are a time for fun and continued discovery of one another. There will be a guest speaker at each meal.

4. **Small Group Sessions** – You will receive a detailed session timetable for the 4 days. There will be around 6 specific times to meet in your small groups all up.

   There is a brief "icebreaker" type session during registration which is more to introduce the group to you and one another, and provide some "friends" for them to hang out with during the Thursday afternoon. The first group time on Thursday night is an important one as it sets the tone for the following sessions. Your ASGF will be primed to share their own personal story recounting a meaningful time of their life. Encourage the students to share a part of themselves in this time.   (Ideas for facilitating this will be provided at training)

   In the subsequent group times you should keep building on the key ideas that are being spoken about. Your guidance is very important. Listen to what the students are really saying. Try not to react to things that you don't agree with, rather try to keep exploring ideas. **We are not here to judge but to listen and care for the students.**

5. **Organised Recreational Activity** –This is a really fun time for your group! It is an integral part of the weekend as it builds a real sense of camaraderie. It is up to the SGF and ASGF to encourage a spirit of fun and light-hearted competition. Every so often there is a person who does not want to join in. Try to encourage them in the best way you can.

Dealing with difficult situations

From time to time you may come across a student who is bored, negative or dominant! Do not panic! This is quite normal and there are little techniques for dealing with them which are summarised below. These are meant as a guide only – no doubt you will have your own little techniques to draw on!

The negative participant:

- Talk to the student at the break - find out the source of their negativity. It's ok for them to have their views, but you don't want that to adversely affect everyone else for 4 days.

- Don't focus on the negativity but do take their thoughts and opinions seriously. Ask something like this: "That's interesting, I've never thought of it like that, what do others think about that?" or "How did you come to that view?"

- Try to personalise it, so you are talking less theory and more about peoples lives.

The dominant participant:

- Direct your questions, and eye contact, towards other participants.

- Encourage participation by others - ask them what they think.

- Ask if they mind if you talk about "that" over the break if it's not relevant to the group.

The side-conversation participant:

- Make eye contact with the student.

- Ask them a question directly.

- Refer to the "ground rules" if any.

The bored participant:

- Talk to the student at the break - find out why they are bored.

- Have the ASGF take them under their wing.

- Use an interactive exercise to get the students more involved.

Appendix D: Email Distributed to Database of Former Student-Delegates of the NSLF

Transformative Learning Research Project

○ **Jock Cameron**
Cc: ✓ Rian Roux

Friday, 21 May 2021 at 10:26 am

📄 Survey Information S...
137.7 KB

Download All · Preview All

Dear NSLF Alumni

I hope this email finds you well and continuing the journey to become inspiring servant leaders!

I'm writing to ask whether you'd be willing to help one of our NSLF community members, **Rian Roux**, who is undertaking a PhD research project looking into the factors that produce **transformative learning experiences**. Having been involved in the Forum as a facilitator, Rian is convinced that historic approaches to academic learning could learn some important lessons from our experiential approach at NSLF.

Rian is hoping you would take his **15 minute on-line survey** and, if interested, agree to a Zoom interview. Details are attached in Rian's email below.

We'd be grateful if you could help with this!

Warmly

Jock Cameron

PS: For those of you interested in **future NSLF plans**, stay tuned, I'll be writing to you shortly with some good news in that regard!

Dear former NSLF participant,

My name is Rian Roux. I am undertaking a PhD research project at the University of Southern Queensland (Ethics approval number: H20REA243). I have also been involved with the NSLF in the past (as a small group facilitator), and this experience had a lasting impact on me. I have since decided to pursue further research and learn more about the experience of others.

My research topic is: Student leadership development in Australasian Higher Education: a transformative approach

The Board of the NSLF have been kind enough to agree for this project to focus on the 'Forum', which has been hosted annually in Canberra over the past twenty years. I am interested in learning about your experience at the NSLF, and about the personal impact it has had on your life.

Your personal story is incredibly valuable. The aim of the project is to understand, with greater clarity, the learning processes and outcomes that may be associated with personally transformative experiences. For the purposes of this project, a personally transformative process is one that results in significant and irreversible changes in the way a person experiences, conceptualizes, and interacts with the world.

If you feel that this describes the impact of the NSLF experience on your life, then please consider completing this anonymous 15-20 minute SURVEY.

- Once you have read the consent page (and if you consent), click "next"
- From the dropdown menu, choose "NSLF – Leadership Forum"

Attached you will find a Survey Information Sheet with more detail about this project. This survey has been adapted (with permission) from a project at the Pennsylvania State University, specifically for former student delegates of the NSLF.

Finally, if you are interested in discussing this transformative experience in greater detail, I would welcome the opportunity to meet you. In order to arrange this, please email me directly [redacted] and I will set up a short 30-45 minute interview with you to discuss your personal story and survey results. This will take place via Zoom or another videoconferencing software that suits you. I would so appreciate your time!

Your participation in this project will help in the development of principles and guidelines for student leadership initiatives in Higher Education that are ethically accountable and practically applicable to the rapidly changing world in which we live.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Rian Roux
PhD Candidate
University of Southern Queensland | Y229

University of Southern Queensland

Participant Information for USQ Research Project
Survey

Project Details

Title of Project:	**Student leadership development in Australasian Higher Education: a transformative approach**
Human Research Ethics Approval Number:	H20REA243

Research Team Contact Details

Principal Investigator

Mr Rian Roux
Email:
Telephone:

Co-investigators

Professor Patrick Danaher
Email:
Telephone:

Dr Catherine Arden
Email:
Telephone:

Associate Professor Marcus Harmes
Email:
Telephone:

Description

This project is being undertaken as part of a Doctor of Philosophy program.

The purpose of this project is to explore the impact of the National Student Leadership Forum at a personal level.

Given the complexities and uncertainties that are being experienced across the modern world, this study aims to understand more clearly how universities can serve society by educating students in a time of immense disruption. Although this question can be approached from a variety of angles, the focus of this project is on developing an evidence-based approach to the place, theory, practice and impact of student leadership development for contemporary Australasian higher education institutions. Fundamental to this exercise is the cultivation of character and the empowering process of personal transformation. But how can universities foster these types of learning experiences in a way that is both ethically accountable and applicable to different people from different walks of life? This is where we need your help!

The research team requests your assistance because you have participated in one of the leading Leadership Education programs across Australasia. Furthermore, if you are considering completing the survey, we assume that you believe the experience was indeed *personally transformative*. We would love to hear your story and learn from your experience.

Page **1** of **3**

Participation

Your participation will involve completion of an online survey that will take approximately 15-20 minutes of your time. This survey has been developed by researchers from Pennsylvania State University, and adapted by the Principal Researcher of this project, Rian Roux.

The survey will ask a range of questions relating to your experience at the NSLF. These will include particular activities or conversations that impacted you, and what difference this has made in your life.

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. If you do not wish to take part, you are not obliged to do so. Your decision whether or not to take part, will in no way impact on your current or future relationship with the University of Southern Queensland.

Expected Benefits

The benefit to participants in this study is the opportunity to reflect in a meaningfully about a significant event in their life, and the opportunity to contribute their knowledge and experience for others to learn from.

Your participation in this project will help in the development of principles and guidelines for student leadership initiatives in Higher Education that are ethically accountable and practically applicable to the rapidly changing world in which we live.

Risks

In participating in the survey, there are some minimal risks involved. The reality is that transformative experiences are not always positive in nature. Sometimes thinking about the sorts of issues raised in the survey can create some uncomfortable or distressing feelings. If you need to talk to someone about this immediately, please contact a counselling service such as *Beyond Blue* on **1300 22 4636.** You may also wish to consider consulting your General Practitioner (GP) for additional support.

Privacy and Confidentiality

All comments and responses will be treated confidentially unless required by law.

- The names of individual persons are not required in any of the responses.
- Anonymised data from this survey will be included in the thesis and related presentations, publications and reports.
- The anonymous survey will be emailed to the Principal Investigator (Rian Roux), University of Southern Queensland, by Edward Taylor and Heather Stuckey, the Principal Investigators in their project at Pennsylvania State University. These data, contained in an Excel file, will be stored on a password-protected computer and backed up on two separate and dedicated hard drives.
- The results of the adapted (with permission) Transformative Learning Survey are automatically generated for you to view. The results can also be emailed to you if you so choose.
- Any data collected as a part of this project will be stored securely as per University of Southern Queensland's Research Data Management policy.

Consent to Participate

Completion and return of the Pennsylvania State University survey imply that you have read the information within the survey and consent to participate in this project.

Questions or Further Information about the Project

Please refer to the Research Team Contact Details at the top of the form to have any questions answered or to request further information about this project.

Concerns or Complaints Regarding the Conduct of the Project

If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project, you may contact the University of Southern Queensland Manager of Research Integrity and Ethics on +61 7 4631 1839 or email researchintegrity@usq.edu.au. The Manager of Research Integrity and Ethics is not connected with the research project and can facilitate a resolution to your concern in an unbiased manner.

Thank you for taking the time to help with this research project. Please keep this sheet for your information.

Appendix F: Example of Participant Survey Results PDF

TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING SURVEY   ABOUT US

Results

Hey, you're done. Here are your results.

To save the results as a PDF, click the "Print Results" button and choose Save as PDF.

PRINT RESULTS

Generated September 1, 2021

TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING SURVEY LEARNING OUTCOMES

Acting Differently

As a result of transformative learning, individuals revise their perspectives, values, and beliefs, and they then act differently based on these revised perspectives. Acting differently might be reflected in acting differently in relationships and how people go about their everyday life.

87%

As a result of critical reflection, introspection, imagining alternatives, relational learning, and spiritual experiences, individuals increase their awareness of who they are. This means that they develop their understanding of their values, beliefs, and assumptions, both at a personal level and in their relation to others.

87%

Openness

One outcome of transformative learning is becoming more open to considering and understanding others' perspectives, values, and beliefs.

80%

Shift in Worldview

Transformative learning is often described as a deep shift in perspectives. This can take place in relation to a person's world view (philosophy, religious beliefs, political views).

93%

LEARNING PROCESS

283

Beyond Rational: Arts-Based

TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING SURVEY   ABOUT US

experiences with the arts (viewing or creating),
including music, poetry, fiction, painting, sculpture,
and theatre. These experiences can both stimulate
and support transformative learning.

40%

Beyond Rational: Dialogue/Support

Individuals often describe the importance of
dialogue with others and support from others as an
important influence on the process of
transformative learning. This support can come
from family, friends, colleagues, fellow students,
and others; the dialogue often helps people to
further reflect on their experiences.

93%

Beyond Rational: Emotions

For some individuals, emotions play an important
role in the process of transformative learning;
those emotions can be joy and happiness, or they
can be anger and painful responses to events.

80%

284

Beyond Rational: Imaginal/Soul

The process of transformative learning can be
intuitive, imaginative, and involving "soul work." For
some people, these processes are central to
transformation; that is, transformation involves
becoming aware of images, dreams, and bringing
the unconscious into consciousness.

67%

Beyond Rational: Spiritual

Transformative learning can occur through
spiritual experiences. This can be a process of
transformative learning related to religious ideals,
but more recently, spirituality is separated from
relation and focuses more on soulful and intuitive
personal experiences.

80%

Cognitive: Action

As part of the process of making cognitive rational
shifts in perspectives, individuals take actions that
reflect their changing points of view.

67%

Cognitive: Critical Reflection

285

Critical reflection and critical self-reflection is

beliefs through a reflective process. This can involve content reflection (what happened?), process reflection (how did it get to be this way?) and premise reflection (why is this important?)

⊃ 73%

Cognitive: Disorienting Dilemma

When individuals encounter an experience that is discrepant with their usual way of seeing the world, this can be seen as a disorienting dilemma. A disorienting dilemma has the potential to initiate a transformative learning experience.

⊃ 73%

Cognitive: Discourse

Discourse is a form of dialogue in which participants are fully informed, free from coercion, and able to weigh evidence. Discourse with colleagues, peers, fellow students, and others can be a central component of the transformative learning process.

⊃ 87%

Cognitive: Experience

cultures are represented and oppressed in the

cultures.

87%

Social Critique: Ideology Critique

Within the social critique aspect of the transformative learning, individuals become conscious of the differences in advantages people have in life and work toward challenging these perspectives.

67%

Heather L. Stuckey, D.Ed

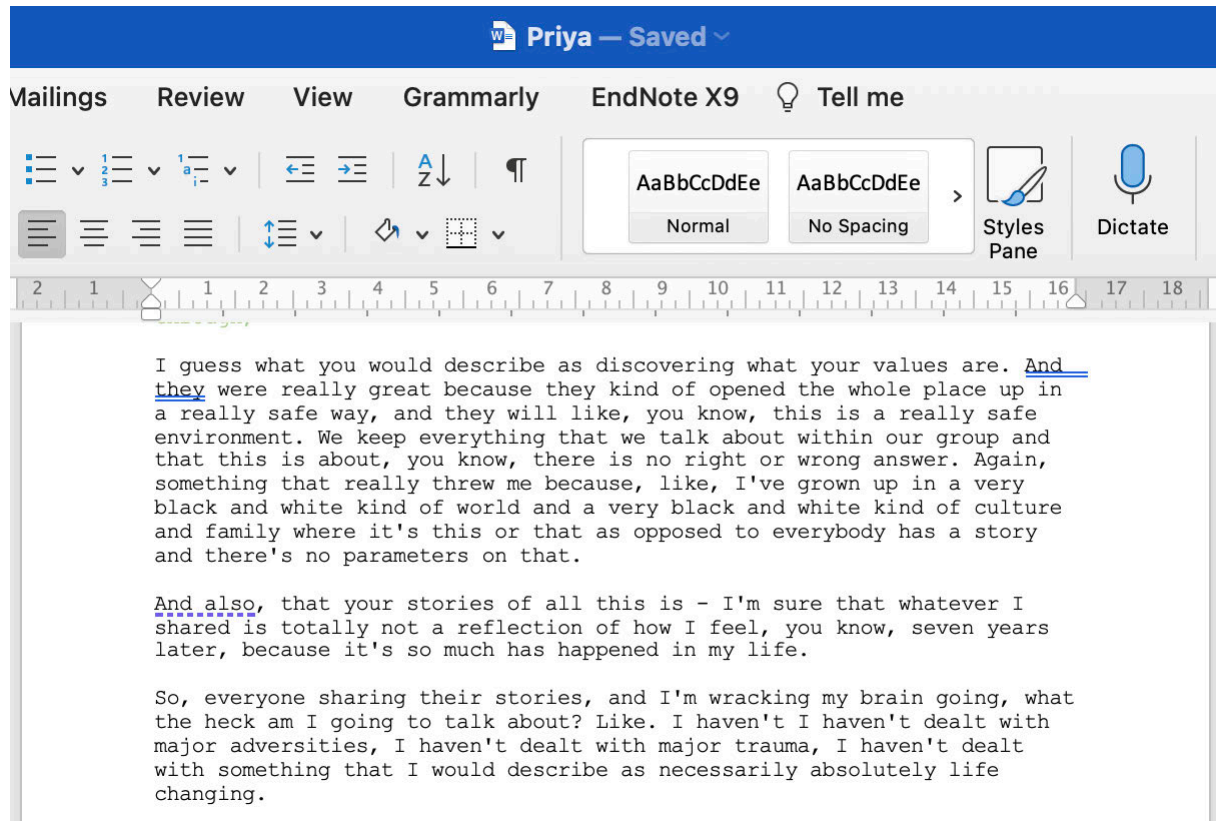Penn State University — College of Medicine

Edward W. Taylor, Ed.D.

Penn State University — Harrisburg

Appendix G: Selection of a Corrected Interview Transcript

I guess what you would describe as discovering what your values are. And they were really great because they kind of opened the whole place up in a really safe way, and they will like, you know, this is a really safe environment. We keep everything that we talk about within our group and that this is about, you know, there is no right or wrong answer. Again, something that really threw me because, like, I've grown up in a very black and white kind of world and a very black and white kind of culture and family where it's this or that as opposed to everybody has a story and there's no parameters on that.

And also, that your stories of all this is - I'm sure that whatever I shared is totally not a reflection of how I feel, you know, seven years later, because it's so much has happened in my life.

So, everyone sharing their stories, and I'm wracking my brain going, what the heck am I going to talk about? Like. I haven't I haven't dealt with major adversities, I haven't dealt with major trauma, I haven't dealt with something that I would describe as necessarily absolutely life changing.

Appendix H: Participant Interview Consent Form

University of Southern Queensland

Consent Form for USQ Research Project Interview

Project Details

Title of Project: **Student leadership development in Australasian Higher Education: a transformative approach**

Human Research Ethics Approval Number: H20REA243

Research Team Contact Details

Principal Investigator
Mr Rian Roux
Email:
Telephone

Co-investigators
Professor Patrick Danaher
Email:
Telephone:

Dr Catherine Arden
Email:
Telephone:

Associate Professor Marcus Harmes
Email:
Telephone:

Statement of Consent

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

- Have read and understood the information document regarding this project. ☐Yes / ☐No

- Have had any questions answered to your satisfaction. ☐Yes / ☐No

- Understand that if you have any additional questions you can contact the research team. ☐Yes / ☐No

- Are over 18 years of age. ☐Yes / ☐No

- Understand that any data collected may be used in an anonymised form in the thesis and in reports, publications and presentations arising from this study. ☐Yes / ☐No

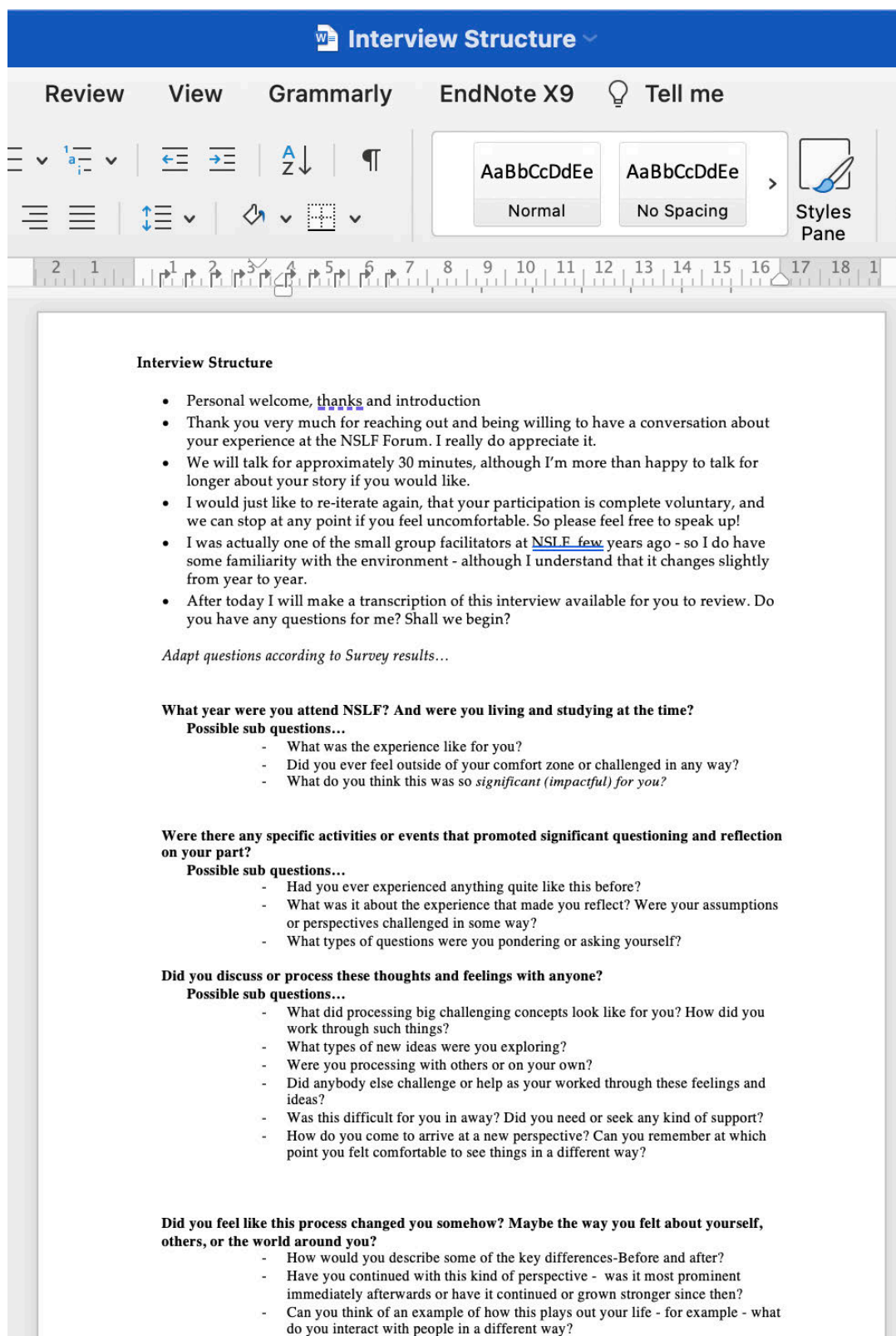- Agree to participate in the project. ☐Yes / ☐No

Participant Name	
Participant Signature	
Date	

Please return this sheet to a Research Team member prior to undertaking the interview.
Page **1** of **1**

Appendix I: Outline for Semi-Structured Interviews (Including Evaluation Criterion)

Interview Structure

- Personal welcome, thanks and introduction
- Thank you very much for reaching out and being willing to have a conversation about your experience at the NSLF Forum. I really do appreciate it.
- We will talk for approximately 30 minutes, although I'm more than happy to talk for longer about your story if you would like.
- I would just like to re-iterate again, that your participation is complete voluntary, and we can stop at any point if you feel uncomfortable. So please feel free to speak up!
- I was actually one of the small group facilitators at NSLF few years ago - so I do have some familiarity with the environment - although I understand that it changes slightly from year to year.
- After today I will make a transcription of this interview available for you to review. Do you have any questions for me? Shall we begin?

Adapt questions according to Survey results...

What year were you attend NSLF? And were you living and studying at the time?
Possible sub questions...
- What was the experience like for you?
- Did you ever feel outside of your comfort zone or challenged in any way?
- What do you think this was so *significant (impactful) for you?*

Were there any specific activities or events that promoted significant questioning and reflection on your part?
Possible sub questions...
- Had you ever experienced anything quite like this before?
- What was it about the experience that made you reflect? Were your assumptions or perspectives challenged in some way?
- What types of questions were you pondering or asking yourself?

Did you discuss or process these thoughts and feelings with anyone?
Possible sub questions...
- What did processing big challenging concepts look like for you? How did you work through such things?
- What types of new ideas were you exploring?
- Were you processing with others or on your own?
- Did anybody else challenge or help as your worked through these feelings and ideas?
- Was this difficult for you in away? Did you need or seek any kind of support?
- How do you come to arrive at a new perspective? Can you remember at which point you felt comfortable to see things in a different way?

Did you feel like this process changed you somehow? Maybe the way you felt about yourself, others, or the world around you?
- How would you describe some of the key differences-Before and after?
- Have you continued with this kind of perspective - was it most prominent immediately afterwards or have it continued or grown stronger since then?
- Can you think of an example of how this plays out your life - for example - what do you interact with people in a different way?

- Do you think what you learnt about yourself, and leadership has spilt into other areas of your life? For instance, study or work?

Is there anything you would do differently if you had your time over, or would you have any advice for other students going through a transformative experience?

Transformative Learning Outcome	Depth / Evidence of deep Impact	Breadth / Evidence of impact on multiple life contexts	Relative Stability / Evidence that Change is not Temporary
Worldview: • Assumptions, beliefs, attitudes, expectations • Ways of interpreting experience • More comprehensive or complex Worldview • New awareness / new understandings			
Self: • Self in relation • Empowerment / responsibility • Identity / view of self • Self-knowledge • Personal narratives • Meaning / purpose • Personality change			
Epistemology: • More discriminating • Utilizing extra-rational ways of knowing • More open			
Ontology: • Affective experience of life • Ways of being • Attributes			
Capacity: • Cognitive development • Consciousness • Spirituality			
Behaviour: • Actions consistent with new perspective • Social action • Professional practices • Skills			

Appendix J: Human Research Ethics Approval

Subject: [RIMS] USQ HRE Application - H20REA243 - Expedited review outcome -Approved
Date: Monday, 9 November 2020 at 2:03:48 pm Australian Eastern Standard Time
From: human.Ethics@usq.edu.au
To: Rian Roux
CC: Patrick Danaher

Dear Rian

I am pleased to confirm your Human Research Ethics (HRE) application has now been reviewed by the University's Expedited Review process. As your research proposal has been deemed to meet the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007), ethical approval is granted as follows:

USQ HREC ID: H20REA243
Project title: Student leadership development in Australasian Higher Education: a transformative approach
Approval date: 09/11/2020
Expiry date: 09/11/2023
USQ HREC status: Approved

The standard conditions of this approval are:

a) responsibly conduct the project strictly in accordance with the proposal submitted and granted ethics approval, including any amendments made to the proposal;.

(b) advise the University (email:ResearchIntegrity@usq.edu.au) immediately of any complaint pertaining to the conduct of the research or any other issues in relation to the project which may warrant review of the ethical approval of the project;

(c) promptly report any adverse events or unexpected outcomes to the University (email: ResearchIntegrity@usq.edu.au) and take prompt action to deal with any unexpected risks;

(d) make submission for any amendments to the project and obtain approval prior to implementing such changes;

(e) provide a progress 'milestone report' when requested and at least for every year of approval.

(f) provide a final 'milestone report' when the project is complete;

(g) promptly advise the University if the project has been discontinued, using a final 'milestone report'.

The additional conditionals of approval for this project are:

(a) Nil.

Please note that failure to comply with the conditions of this approval or requirements of the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, 2018, and the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, 2007 may result in withdrawal of approval for the project.
Congratulations on your ethical approval! Wishing you all the best for success!

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to make contact with an Ethics Officer.

Kind regards

Human Research Ethics

University of Southern Queensland
Toowoomba – Queensland – 4350 – Australia
Phone: (07) 4631 2690
Email: human.ethics@usq.edu.au