Η Μετασχηματίζουσα μάθηση μέσα από την Αισθητική Εμπειρία και επιπλέον, η Μετασχηματίζουσα μάθηση ως Αισθητική Εμπειρία. Μια «συνάντηση» μεταξύ Mezirow και Αριστοτέλη.

Transformative Learning through the Aesthetic Experience and beyond, Transformative Learning as an Aesthetic Experience. A "meeting" between Mezirow and Aristoteles.

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Abstract: The present article attempts to contribute to the constructive dialogue that continues to develop around Mezirow's Transformation Theory (TT), approaching the transformative process, on the one hand through the aesthetic experience and on the other hand, as an aesthetic experience.

The subject is explored both theoretically and practically, based on the conclusions drawn from three doctoral theses. Logothetou, through the investigation of A. Kokkos' method ¨Transformative Learning through the Aesthetic Experience¨ (TLAE), highlights the emotional dimension of transformative learning. Karakou, using the method in practice, reveals how emerged emotions goes hand in hand with critical reflection. Papadopoulou, based on the perspective of the great Greek philosopher Aristotle, sheds light on in the way emotions emerge and function in an ancient Greek tragedy and, by extension in contact with any meaningful work of art.

Combining the conclusions of the three studies, we argue that the utilization of (TLAE) promotes critical reflection alongside the expression and management of emerging emotions, similar as -according to Aristotle- an ancient Greek tragedy. Accordingly, the transformative process can be seen as an aesthetic experience. We believe that this convergence of Mezirow's and Aristotle's ideas, gives TT an element of timelessness.

Keywords: critical reflection, emotions, meaningful art

Περίληψη: Το παρόν άρθρο επιχειρεί να συμβάλει στον εποικοδομητικό διάλογο που συνεχίζει να αναπτύσσεται γύρω από τη Θεωρία Μετασχηματισμού (ΘΜ) του Mezirow, προσεγγίζοντας τη μετασχηματιστική διαδικασία, αφενός μέσω της αισθητικής εμπειρίας και αφετέρου, ως αισθητική εμπειρία.

Το θέμα διερευνάται τόσο θεωρητικά όσο και πρακτικά, με βάση τα συμπεράσματα που προκύπτουν από τρεις διδακτορικές διατριβές. Η Λογοθέτου, μέσα από τη διερεύνηση της μεθόδου του Α. Κόκκου ¨Μετασχηματίζουσα Μάθηση μέσα από την Αισθητική Εμπειρία¨ (ΜΜΑΕ), αναδεικνύει τη συναισθηματική διάσταση της μετασχηματίζουσας μάθησης. Η Καρακού, χρησιμοποιώντας τη μέθοδο στην πράξη, αποκαλύπτει πώς τα αναδυόμενα συναισθήματα συμβαδίζουν με τον κριτικό στοχασμό. Η Παπαδοπούλου, βασισμένη στην οπτική του μεγάλου Έλληνα φιλοσόφου Αριστοτέλη, ρίχνει φως στον τρόπο με τον οποίο αναδύονται και λειτουργούν τα συναισθήματα σε μια αρχαία ελληνική τραγωδία και κατ' επέκταση σε επαφή με οποιοδήποτε ουσιαστικό έργο τέχνης.

Συνδυάζοντας τα συμπεράσματα των τριών μελετών, υποστηρίζουμε ότι η ΜΜΑΕ προάγει τον κριτικό στοχασμό παράλληλα με την έκφραση και τη διαχείριση αναδυόμενων συναισθημάτων, όπως -κατά τον Αριστοτέλη- μια αρχαία ελληνική τραγωδία. Κατά συνέπεια, η μετασχηματιστική διαδικασία μπορεί να θεωρηθεί ως μια αισθητική εμπειρία. Αυτή η σύγκλιση των ιδεών του Mezirow και Αριστοτέλη, θεωρούμε ότι προσδίδει στη ΘΜ ένα στοιχείο διαχρονικότητας.

Λέξεις κλειδιά: κριτικός στοχασμός, συναισθήματα, σημαντικά έργα τέχνης

Introduction

The debate about transformative learning through aesthetic experience is not new. Several theorists propose art as an effective tool to promote the transformative process (Taylor, 2011; Cranton, 2002; Dirkx, 1998; Freire, 1970/1977), while Kokkos has already formulated ‘Transformative Learning through the Aesthetic Experience’ (TLAE), a method based on the utilization of aesthetic experience and founded on Mezirow's theoretical model (Kokkos, 2021). In this context, given that J. Mezirow's Transformation Theory is an open and continually evolving theory (Mezirow, 2000; Fleming, 2022; Nicolaides & Eschenbacher, 2022; Taylor & Cranton, 2012), this article aims to contribute to the constructive dialogue developing around it, by approaching the transformative process on the one hand through the aesthetic experience, and on the other hand as an aesthetic experience.

The article is structured as follows: initially, through Logothetou's thesis (Logothetou, 2024), we will focus on exploring TLAE and in particular, the mode through which triggers for emotional expression are given. Then, through Karakou's thesis (Karakou, 2024), which is based on TLAE, we will explore a transformative learning process through the aesthetic experience and how emerging emotions go hand in hand with critical reflection. Finaly, through

Papadopoulou's thesis (Papadopoulou, 2025), which based mainly on Aristotle's ideas, will highlight similarities between a transformative experience and an aesthetic experience.

Main topic

1. Logothetou's thesis

Logothetou's thesis (2024), investigates TLAE (Kokkos, 2021), which is developed in the field of Transformative Learning, as defined by J. Mezirow (1991). This method is notable for acting both as a theoretical cognitive model and as a practically implementable teaching framework. TLAE is internationally recognized as a teaching framework, having been implemented in Greece, Sweden, Denmark, Romania, Germany, Switzerland, and the USA and being taught at the university level and, under certain conditions, in schools. Finally, it has been the subject of numerous journal publications, books, graduate, and doctoral dissertations, as well as discussions in international conferences.

TLAE can be used as a teaching framework for any topic of study. It comprises seven key stages (Kokkos, 2021):

a. The educator recognizes that the students hold pre-existing biases (either preconceptions or cognitive habits). The educator and students must agree to critically examine these biases together.

b. The students express their pre-conceived beliefs about the topic in written form.

c. The educator formulates a strategy for transforming the students' preconceptions (points of view) or cognitive habits (habits of mind) and devises relevant critical questions.

d. The educator and students identify works of art (of any type) that are of high aesthetic value and are suitable prompts for examining the critical questions devised in the previous step.

e. The students systematically analyze the chosen art works. Once finished, they reconcile their observations and feelings from examining the art with the critical questions.

f. The students are prompted to consider their own biases and cognitive habits. They are tasked to write down their current ideas on the topic in question, compare them to their initial beliefs, as documented in step 2, and draw conclusions. The educator then assesses the students' progress.

g. Next steps are decided and implemented (e.g., subsequent meetings of the group, self-study assignments, etc.).

At the core of TLAE is the recognition that art and aesthetic experience are educationally valuable and can facilitate the development of critical thinking and, subsequently, cognitive transformation. Transformative processes that involve stimulating the participants' emotions

are also used in psychology/psychiatry, but their extent and treatment is different from the educational setting. The distinction between adult education and psychotherapy has been studied by many scholars including Mezirow (2009), Cranton (2002), Kegan (2000). Logothetou (2024) clarifies certain differences between these two disciplines, including that: the uncovering and analysis of emotions and life experiences in transformative learning should not cross the line into psychotherapy and also that the educator is not, and should not act as, a therapist. However, the educator can counsel students facing simple transitions in their lives, as part of the transformative process. This is precisely the value of TLAE, the method pertains to the educational use of art, not it's therapeutic use.

The final contribution is the further study of how emotions emerge through the aesthetic experience and connect to personal experiences. This process raises questions that lead the individual down a deeper, emotional, reflective path: What does the artwork mean to the learner, personally? What emotions does it give rise to, and what personal experiences do they associate it with? Can the learner insert themselves into the art? Which character in the story would they be, and why?

2. Karakou's thesis

TLAE (Kokkos, 2021) -as described by Logothetou- was utilized, as a means of promoting critical reflection and emotional expression in Karakou's thesis (2024). This thesis is based on a tow year longitudinal study of a group of 10 students from a ¨Vocational Training Institute¨, exploring the interactional relationship of critical thinking and emotion, in the context of a transformational process.

During the research 27 meetings were held, in which participants had the opportunity to participate in a series of workshops designed based on the method TLAE. For this purpose, important works of art fulfilling the characteristics -which are described below by Papadopoulou- were used, and an attempt was made to provide answers to the questions raised by Logothetou. The ultimate goal was an attempt to transform the dysfunctional habit of mind (Mezirow, 2000) related to gender stereotypes. More specifically, seven mental points of view were approached critically, starting from the points of view that the group showed the least resistance to and progressing gradually to the most difficult ones (Kokkos, 2021).

The main methodological tools used were three. To determine the type and intensity of emerging emotions, the Geneva Emotion Wheel Rating 3.0 (GEW) (Scherer 2005) tool was utilized. Also, the Kember scale (Kember et al. 1999, 2008) was used to capture the degree of development of critical thinking. Finally, the degree of transformation of the points of view under consideration was examined, based on the tools offered by the TLAE, i.e. the comparison of the written evidence collected before and after the respective intervention for each dysfunctional point of view.

The research revealed the following:

• The development of critical thinking at high levels implies the emergence of strong emotions and vice versa the emerging emotions need critical thinking in order to be managed and advance the transformational process

• In the early stages of the process, critical thinking goes hand in hand with intense negative emotions, such as anger, indignation, sableness, anxiety, sadness

• Gradually, as levels of critical thinking increase, the intensity of negative emotions decreases, while at the same time more and more positive emotions such as joy, expiation, vindication, hope, forgiveness, relief and revival appear, of increasing intensity

• In the later stages of the process, developing critical thinking involves focusing on the positive

All the above are captured in diagram 1.

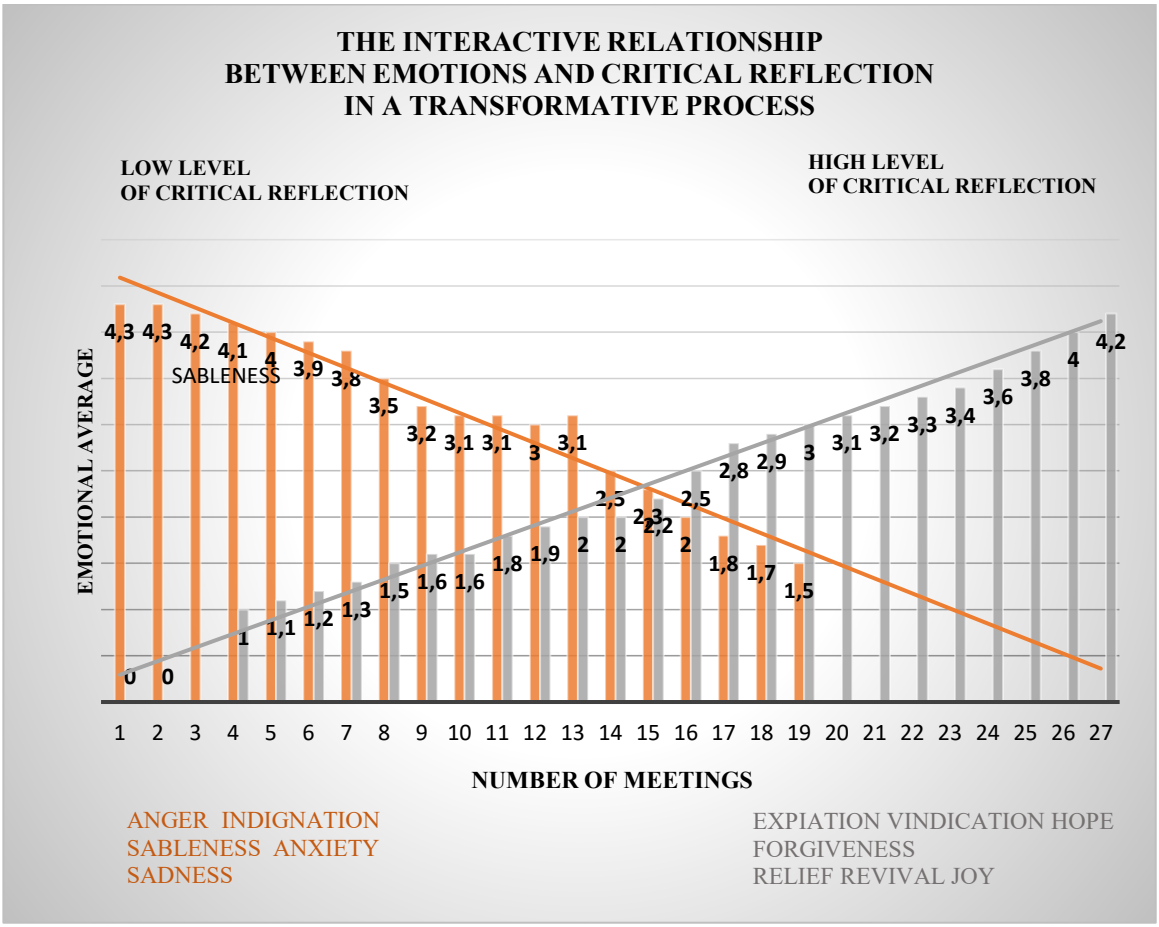

Diagram 1: The interactive relationship between emotions and critical reflection in a transformation process

It is of great interest - as we will see below - that emotions emerge and function in approximately the same way when watching a tragedy, that is, as Papadopoulou reveals to us (Papadopoulou, 2025), an aesthetic experience.

3. Papadopoulou's thesis

The theoretical framework of Papadopoulou's research (2025) approaches Aristotle's work. Scholars of Artistotle, such as Sykoutris (1991) and Mandilaras (1992/1995), claim that his work does not exclusively concern tragedy as an art form, but refers to all forms more broadly. Therefore, from the work of Aristotle, the following features can be drawn, that make a work of art meaningful and suitable to be used in the context of a transformative education: moral dimension˙ truth˙ holism˙ unconventionality˙ timelessness˙ universality˙ insight˙ comprehensible˙ content. It is worth noting that the above conclusions are enriched or repeated by later philosophers such as Dewey, 1934/1980; Greene, 1995; Nussbaum, 1990, 2010; et al. Finally, the aforementioned findings of the Philosophy of Aesthetic theory are confirmed and presumed by the science of Neuroaesthetics (Papadopoulou, 2024).

In this regard and considering the conclusions of Papadopoulou's (2024) bibliographic study combined, a meaningful work of art with the above characteristics evokes particularly strong emotions (Adorno, 2000; Marcuse, 1978/1998) in the receiver, promoting his critical reflection (Greene, 1995; Nussbaum, 2010) and prompting them to possibly reframe their wrong assumptions (Marcuse, 1978/1998). Toward this direction, Aristotle's work clarifies the way a tragedy works: the viewer, seeing the “suffering” of the heroes, makes critical connections with personal experience. Through this process, emotion is stimulated alongside critical reflection and, subsequently, “by mercy and fear”, catharsis occurs.

The example of Euripides' Electra

From the analysis of the emotions of the characters in the tragedy "Electra" by Euripides, it is established that initially they are basically negative. For example, Electra is filled with grief, mourning, and anger over the murder of her father, Agamemnon. Accordingly, Orestes carries with him the sense of injustice and the burdened legacy of revenge. As the plot develops, these feelings begin to escalate and become more intense, reaching a climax where the characters are at their limits. In particular, the emotional climax refers to the moment when Orestes and Electra plan the revenge of their mother, Clytemnestra, and her lover, Aegisthus. Then, through a series of events and revelations, the resolution of the tragedy begins: negative energies and emotions are gradually eliminated, and order is restored. Finally, positive emotions, such as relief from the fulfillment of justice, a sense of vindication, and the restoration of order (katharsis), begin to prevail toward the end of the play. From the emotion display in diagram 2, there is a gradual decrease in negative emotions (red line) and a gradual increase in positive emotions (green line) as they become more dominant.

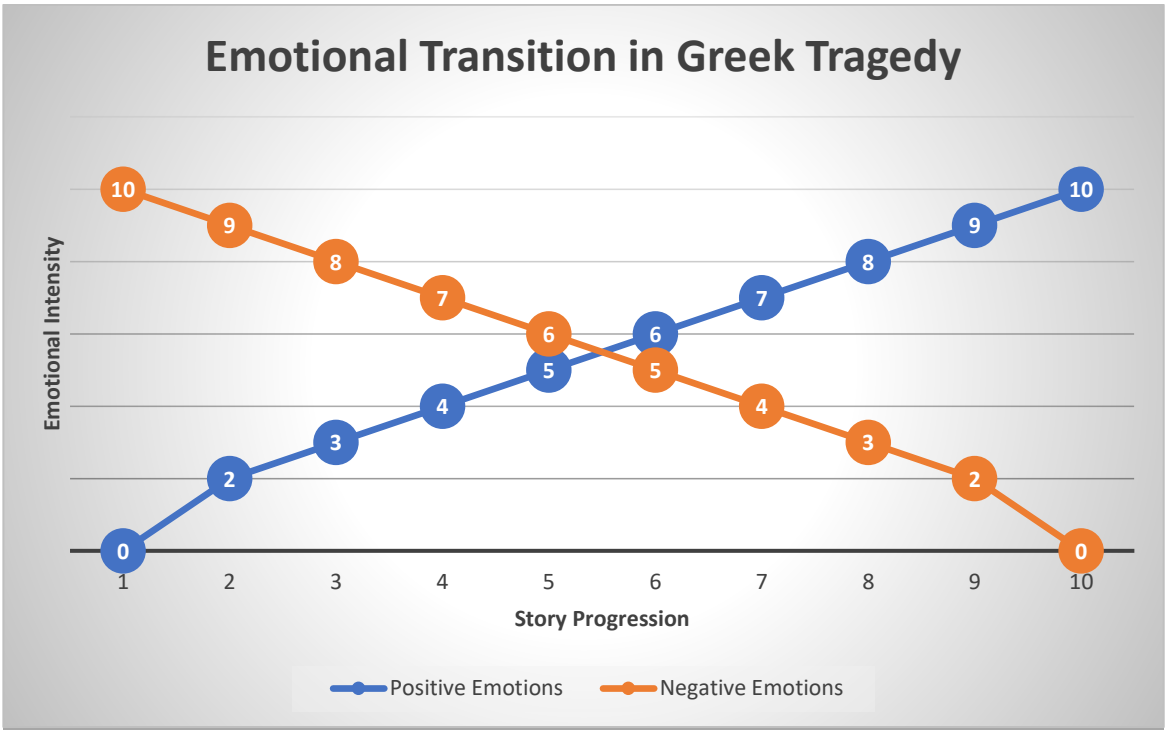

Diagram 2: Emotional transition in Greek tragedy

Discussion

Combining the conclusions of the three studies we argue that:

- The utilization of works of art that meet the criteria mentioned above, in the context of TLAE, promotes critical reflection within in the transformative process, alongside the expression and management of emerging emotions.
- The interactional relationship of critical thinking and emotion, in the context of a transformational process triggered through TLAE, is similar as in an ancient Greek tragedy. As observed, it resembles the way tragedy works in terms of the interplay of critical thinking and emotions, and by extension the way the dialogue with an important work of art affects the individual. As levels of critical thinking increase, self-awareness also increases and subsequently, negative emotions decrease, and the person focuses on the positive. From this point of view, the transformative process itself works as an aesthetic experience. Dewey himself (1934/1980), argued that aesthetic experience is not only that related to art, but any holistic, integrated experience.
- The identification of points of convergence of Transformation Theory with the Greek philosopher's ideas could be an element of timelessness, given that the philosophical work of Aristotle is the cornerstone of all later philosophy, as it contains essential truths (Kalfas, 2015).

All of the above is vividly captured in the example of Euripides' tragedy Electra. The

tumultuous life of the tragic heroine leads the spectator to identify with her, as a result of which he himself deeply experiences the qualitative aesthetic experience in question.

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