The Heroine’s/Hero’s Journey—A Call for Transformation? Transformative Learning, Archetypal Patterns, and Embodied Knowing/Learning

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Abstract
This article explores the phenomena of personal transformation within the frame of a self-experiential workshop, named the Heroine/Hero’s Journey. The Heroine/Hero is the archetype who sets out on an adventurous journey, in pursuit of her or his call for transformation. Rebillot based on Campbell’s (1949) mythological work, The Hero with a Thousand Faces created an experiential approach in the form of a one-week workshop, which utilizes methods from theatre and Gestalt therapy. This phenomenologically oriented vignette research draws on interviews and co-experienced observations, which were conducted during the workshop in order to explore the participants’ experiences and the content of participants’ transformation. The embodied representation of personality patterns, conscious and unconscious and especially the confrontation of these patterns, created transformative experiences for the participants. The depth psychological understanding of

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transformative processes, highlighting the potential of embodied and archetypal ways of knowing, provides the theoretical frame for giving meaning to these experiences.

**Keywords**
transformative learning, personal transformation, self-experience, embodiment, depth psychology

**Follow Your Call—An Introduction to the Heroine/Hero’s Journey**

We all know the stories, myths and legends that begin with: “once upon a time there was a person that had an ok life but felt a desire and wish for change and adventure.” Or perhaps: the person is in the middle of a crisis and needs to change something. In both cases it is a call that asks us to follow, and if we do our Heroine/Hero’s Journey begins. These are the collective stories of change that we tell each other for inspiration, hope and initiation. In 2017, I participated in a Heroine/Hero’s Journey workshop and due to my transformative experiences, which were meaningful for the way I related (embodied and emotionally) to myself and other people, I decided to conduct research on the phenomena of personal transformation focusing on archetypical and embodied knowing/learning. Working in the field of peace education, I became aware of the tremendous forms of structural inequalities and different forms of violence that exist in our societies. I believe that transformations in how humans relate to each other, other living beings and the planet are crucial to build peaceful societies. By undertaking this research, I want to understand how educators can create spaces that encourage transformative experiences by using the Heroine/Hero’s Journey as an experimental frame.

In this article, I will first explain the Heroine/Hero’s Journey workshop and how it is structured. The journey is used as a frame to research personal transformation focusing on multiple ways of knowing/learning, especially archetypical and embodied knowing/learning. The transformative learning theory, and especially the depth psychological understanding of it, provides a frame to understand the embodied engagement with unconscious aspects the Heroine/Hero journey workshop focuses on. I will embed the journey within transformative learning theory, the body’s role in transformative learning and change process theory, describe the phenomenological methodological frame of the study to finally discuss and portray participants’ experiences and conclude the article.

The Heroine/Hero’s Journey is based on Campbell’s mythological work, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, originally published in 1949. In it, he analyzed various myths and stories from different times and places and discovered a universal theme or pattern, which he called a monomyth: the story of the Heroine/Hero. In his work,
myth is a guide for transformation, initiation and individuation that connects us with our own personal stories and something bigger, the collective and the numinous. Correspondingly, Jung (1989) describes collective symbols and myths as being the concentrated experiences of people and archetypes as the archaic patterns or symbols, which arise from the individual and collective unconscious and are present in everyday life, for example, in stories or myths. Even though archetypes follow a universal pattern, the experience can be individually unique. The Heroine/Hero’s archetypical journey is that of one who follows her/his call, often initiated by a crisis or desire and embarks on a journey filled with dangerous adventures and challenges, finally returning to the known environment as a gifted person. Gifted with new insights, inspirations, perspectives and potentials for the community (Rebillot & Kay, 2017). Inspired by mythologist Joseph Campbell and Gestalt therapist Fritz Perls, both of whom he met in Esalen, Paul Rebillot (a Gestalt therapist and theatre director), created an experiential approach called the Heroine/Hero’s Journey following his own experience of crisis and transformation. He formed a creative synthesis by merging elements from Gestalt practice, ritual theatre, psychodrama, group process, various forms of bodywork, mythology, dance and painting.

The journey starts with a person receiving a call; Rebillot and Kay (2017) call it an “internal call for transformation” (p. 41), thus Heroine/Hero does not mean an “archaic structure from a paternalistic period” (p. 45) but the aspect in ourselves that hears and follows its call or heart’s, soul desire. Often the first resistance comes immediately with the call: Should I really follow the call, leave my comfort zone? Every participant attending the workshop must hand in a written statement of their call or heart desire beforehand. What do I want to change in my life? What is calling me? Sometimes people feel lost, then their heart desire is to find meaning. Sometimes there is a challenging situation in work, relationships, or family and a desire to change the situation. On the first day of the workshop, every participant creates her/his home ground situation using guided, imaginary journeys and artistic work. The guided, imaginary journey uses a spoken text and background music to create an atmosphere in which the blindfolded participant can delve inside oneself and connect to their inner pictures and feelings. The home ground represents the current life situation in terms of four aspects of life: home, lifework, beloved, and self, this is the journey’s starting point.

The second day of the journey is the Heroine/Hero day, during which the participants experience their heroic self. The participants connect to their heroic self, again by using imaginary journeys, affirmation exercises and role plays. This is the aspect that says “Yes” to life and to change, it often consists of the qualities we admire. A big banquet is held in the evening which is attended by Heroines/Heroes in costumes or masks and every person reveals their biggest desire in front of the group. This evening is about owning your heroic qualities and making them visible to others in a playful way. The group will witness the heroic self. After the banquet, the Heroines/Heroes meet their spiritual guide, symbolized by a intuitively chosen card with an image, and with this card, they go out of doors to find their instrument of
power, which could be a stone, wood, just something natural. The participant is not only guided by the inner Heroine/Hero, but also by something bigger, like the inner wisdom of the self, the spiritual guide that is far bigger than the individual. This process can also be found in stories, for example, Cinderella received a ball gown from her fairy godmother and King Arthur received a sword from Merlin.

On the following day, the third day, the Demon of Resistance is awakened in themselves. This is the part which does not want us to change and does not want the Heroine/Hero to succeed. The Demon of Resistance is the voice that makes the Heroine/Hero question themselves with statements like, “you are making a fool of yourself” or “you will fail anyway.” On this day, the Demon of Resistance is manifest. All the internal voices, that sabotage us or make us feel small, can be voiced and expressed physically. The body is a very important aspect during the entire day because the Demon of Resistance is mostly unconscious or in the sub-conscious and thus can be felt as tensions or blockages in the body. Partner exercises will be used during the day to explore body armor (Rebillot & Kay, 2017).

After the first three days, a strong feeling of polarity exists, of two opposing forces within oneself: The Heroine/Hero with their heart’s desire and the part which wants to stop them. The fourth day is the confrontation day when the Heroine/Hero (expanding pole) meets the Demon of Resistance (contracting pole). An inner dialogue is acted out, blindfolded, between these two poles for 1.5 hours. This exercise is also called Gestalt drama, inspired by Moreno’s empty chair exercise in psychodrama. Gestalt is concerned with the integration of a person’s various different parts, especially also their suppressed parts, in order to foster self-actualization and the person’s potential (Perls, 1973).

Thus, the participants embody their Heroine/Hero and Demon of Resistance by alternating sides. The active blindfolded person enacts all roles: Heroine/Hero and Demon of Resistance and switches sides to represent a dialogue, which is not only verbal but also bodily and emotional. The work happens in triple: one person, called the active person, embodies her/his Heroine/Hero and Demon of Resistance, one person is the representative (only to represent not to act) and one person holds the space- is helper. If the facilitators notice that the dialogue has come to a long halt, they step in and encourage the participant to ask the other side questions, such as: “How do you feel if I tell you this?” These questions often lead to an emotional response from one side.

This exercise is followed by the transformation dance, which takes an hour and converts what has just been experienced into a dance. Again, the participant is blindfolded and alternates between the Heroine/Hero (melodic, light and joyful music) and Demon of Resistance (evocative drumming music). Initially, the evocative music changes significantly as the two sides change. In the middle, the rhythm becomes more and more similar. The qualities of the Heroine/Hero and those of the Demon of Resistance start to mix, just as the rhythms of the music mix. The fifth day is the day of the mysterious wonderland, where the Heroine/Hero can experience miraculous moments. Through guided imaginary journeys and breathwork, the
borders of conscious and unconsciousness are loosened. The breathwork and the evocative music (often film music e.g. composer Hans Zimmer) can strengthen the inner pictures and intensify the emotional and bodily sensations. The sixth day is the day of return, when the Heroine/Hero receives their unique gift in a guided imaginary journey and celebrates their newfound qualities and perspectives or sometimes it is not yet clear what the symbolic gift means for once life (Rebillot & Kay, 2017). In the next section, this journey is pictured in the frame of transformational learning theory.

**Transformative Processes—A Heroine/Hero’s Journey**

Transformative learning theory originates in Jack Mezirow’s (1978) work in the field of adult education. Mezirow described changes in our existing frames of reference which could be personal, psychological, social, cultural, linguistic or epistemic, as transformation. He viewed transformative processes as a natural part of adults’ living and learning processes which he “understood as the process of using prior interpretation to construct a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience as a guide to future action” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 5). He initially recognized this perspective transformation due to a study of women returning to postsecondary studies, through which he explained the transformation of adults meaning structures. Mezirow’s (1991) understanding of transformative learning is emancipatory and communicative and is based on critical reflection. Thus, it is a rather pragmatic and cognitive approach, which has evolved in various directions that highlight people’s emotional, intuitive, imaginary, symbolic, bodily, depth-psychological, spiritual and relational experiences (e.g., Dirkx, 1998; Formenti & West, 2018).

There are various approaches to transformation and the Heroine/Hero’s Journey is best described as self-discovery, individuation or soul work journey. Dirkx (1998), referring to Boyd and Myers (1988), describes the individuation process and soul work in transformative learning theory. “In soul work, development of self-knowledge and authenticity involves a conscious, imaginative engagement of the unconscious dimensions of the self” (Dirkx, 2006, p. 32). The embodied, symbolic and imaginary work using guided imaginary journeys, breathwork, dance, theatre and art, create various forms of knowing and perceiving, bringing together cognition, feeling, body and soul. Personal transformation as self-knowing involves straddling fragmented ways of knowing and includes work that also contains “finding the courage to engage with and learn from the other and otherness, not least in ourselves” (Formenti & West, 2018, p. viii). We can embody aspects of ourselves and the world e.g. through archetypes and thus make them conscious. This is a crucial part of the individuation process. “Individuation is an ongoing composition of opposites, in ways that are life enhancing. We are living dilemmas, always struggling, and our disorientation is to be worked on as a part of becoming the person we can be” (Formenti & West, 2018, p. 132). This process of transformation
is led by making the unconscious conscious, by becoming aware of the unknown and hidden aspects which are especially related to the body.

The Body’s Role in Transformative Learning

There has been limited attention to the role of the body in transformative learning. Merleau-Ponty’s (1968) philosophy of the body and his concept of pre-reflective perceiving and knowing is crucial to understand embodied learning and knowing. The living body, which is our sensing and feeling center, has a key role in making the unconscious conscious and realizing one’s own embodiment, embeddedness in the world. As Lawrence (2012) points out we are in this world as embodied beings and learning cannot happen without paying attention to the knowledge of our bodies. Freiler (2008) states that “embodiment and embodied learning generally refer to a broader, more holistic view of constructing knowledge that engages the body as a site of learning, usually in connection with other domains of knowing (for example, affective, symbolic, cultural, rational)” (p. 39). She considers experiences of guided imagery and visualization as a possibility to connect mental images and bodily sensations that can bring up new ways of knowing. The connection between embodied knowing and embodied learning arises through reflection of the bodily felt experiences.

Clark (2012) describes that embodied knowledge begins in the body and is not just a reflection on embodied experience. Embodied knowledge arises “by telling stories of the body rather than about the body” (p. 428). Jordi (2011) drawing on Gendlin’s focusing practice views reflection, as a way to “facilitate a learning dialogue between our implicit embodied experience and conceptual aspects of our consciousness” (p. 181). Focusing is one way to make implicit sensual experience more explicit. “The felt-sense always urges forward, demanding words or a thought or an action” (p. 192). This action is “more than just a representation of what was implicit—it is a forward movement, a ‘carrying forward’ through a ‘felt-shift’” (p. 192). This means that embodied knowledge “emerges through a sensitive internal listening and a dialogue between different aspects of experience” (p. 194).

Tobin and Tisdell (2015), looking at the embodied learning of creative writers drawing on Merleau-Ponty and Gendlin describe the “relationship between the pre-reflective and the reflective as a spiraling process that moves back and forward where the pre-reflective is the bodily sensation” (p. 218). To move from unconscious embodied knowledge to conscious embodied learning requires reflection of experience and sensing of the pre-reflective knowledge of the body (p. 229).

In transformative learning theory this is especially relevant for the disorienting dilemmas which play a key role in Mezirow’s (1991) work. Dilemmas are experiences of psychological tension, both conscious and unconscious, which can create disorientation and the opportunity to engage with the struggle at a deeper level. As Lawrence (2012) describes, especially “tension is first experienced in the body as a stiff neck, queasy stomach, or tight jaw” (p. 7). Dilemmas cannot only be resolved
by reflective discourse but “always come with emotional and physical dimensions that beg to be resolved at least in part in embodied ways” (p. 8). If this is given there is a chance that something new can arise as described in the change process theory the Heroine/Hero’s Journey is based on.

**Change Process Theory**

The workshop is scripted according to Staemmler and Bock’s (1987) holistic change process; they observed their clients’ change processes during Gestalt therapy sessions. These phases, which are of course only a map and not the territory, can be described as interim transformative learning microprocesses, which Mälkki and Green (2014) view as theoretically lacking in the transformative learning discourse, since these are often the difficult moments.

The first phase in Staemmler and Bock’s (1987) change process theory, is *stag-nation*, which is accompanied by a feeling of dissatisfaction and a desire to change a certain situation. If the person is willing to take responsibility for the change process, they may experience two opposing poles: the *polarization* phase. This is the intensifying of the expansive and contractive poles within oneself; the desire to flourish and the doubt which holds one back. In the journey, it is the confrontation between the Heroine/Hero and the Demon of Resistance. Splitting a conflict into two sides and the accompanying dialogical play, creates feelings of chaos, emptiness, helplessness: the *diffusion* phase. In the midst of the chaos, something new can suddenly arise which is not really a solution in terms of content. The next phase is the *implosion/contraction* phase, the existential experience of creative indifference in which a new differentiation occurs. It can be a feeling of pain and senselessness. The last phase, the expansion phase, can feel like an explosion of new life, energy, fullness or a rebirth. Sometimes the experiences of tensions, nothingness and fullness can be overlapping, not linear or back and forth at the same time. At the end of the process, there is the feeling that the experiences have been integrated and new qualities and aspects have been discovered. In the next section, the methodological approach is described.

**Phenomenologically Oriented Vignette Research**

In order to explore the phenomena of personal transformation I participated in a six-day Heroine/Hero’s Journey workshop in Germany in 2018. The methodological lens of this research is the phenomenologically oriented vignette research (Peterlini, 2016; Schratz et al., 2013). To describe a phenomenon through the lens of vignette research is to show “how something emerges as something in perception, performance, action, analysis or imagination” (Schratz et al., 2013, p. 60). In order to be able to pinpoint these direct moments of co-experienced experiences, a sensual and embodied description of that which arises is required. “The purpose of the vignette is not to reconstruct what happened, but rather to recreate the experience” (pp. 63–64).
This draws on the participatory observation of Beekman (1987, p. 16) which states that the researcher’s experience is an essential part of the research process. That means that the participatory observation becomes a co-experienced experience that draws on the resonance and the affections between the researcher and the phenomenon (Peterlini, 2016, p. 23). The intertwining of the researcher with the phenomenon and his/her openness and receptiveness is a crucial aspect in vignette research. The approach of participatory observation also operates on the assumption that feelings of the participants affect me, the researcher. As described above, as embodied beings we are not separate from the world and others and we perceive the world through our bodies/embodied.

On the first day of the workshop, which had 14 participants (eight women/six men), I asked all the participants for their oral consent to me being part of the workshop as a researcher, explaining that I would capture moments during the workshop and conduct voluntary interviews after it, and that the data would be made public. All the names have been changed. Since this is a very intense and challenging process, ethical considerations have had a high priority. Straight after the workshop, on the sixth day, I conducted narrative oriented interviews (Schütze, 1983) in German, with seven women and two men aged 25 to 45, about their experiences during the previous days and transcribed the recordings. I asked the participants to talk about the last days and what was meaningful to them. The shortest interview took 25 minutes and the longest 55 minutes. The interviewees were selected according to their interest, which was good because they were eager to talk about their experiences. On the other hand, there is the danger that maybe only the participants who felt they could tell a lot about their journey wanted to do an interview and the participants who did not have a meaningful experience did not feel like talking about it. Six months after the workshop, I re-interviewed (personally and by skype) five participants, to get a richer picture of their experiences.

I wrote vignettes as differentiated and concentrated descriptions of participants’ scenes that I perceived, and anecdotes from the interviews with the participants, in order to capture meaningful moments and reflections. I translated my written vignettes and broad descriptions of the conducted interviews from German into English. Based on my own previous experiences I had the assumption that the journey might have transformative potential for the participants. I used a field-note diary to reflect on my assumptions and feelings during the journey to minimize my (researcher) bias. I analyzed the interviews and the vignettes pointing to the phenomena of personal transformation and summarized themes and structures that contained transformative potential creating dense narratives of affective and poignant experiential moments to re-create my experience of the participants’ experiences. Creating the vignettes during the workshop and reading the interviews after the workshop, I chose passages that seemed/felt important to re-create the experience in the reader (Schratz et al., 2013, p. 63). During the interview process, the bodily impressions were captured by taking notes. Therefore, not only the workshop but also the interview process became a co-experienced experience. Moreover, crucial to choosing
meaningful passages was listening to the interviews, the voice/tone, breaks, breath, and emotions such as excitement or irritation of the interviewee. The interview passages are displayed as in-text citations with quotation marks and the vignettes are indented without quotation marks.

Transformative Experiences During the Journey

In this section, I will describe the transformative experiences and the content of the participants’ transformation, which structures are shifted and the processes that had the greatest impact on bringing about those structural shifts. When reading the participants’ words in the transcribed interviews and the co-experienced vignettes, some meaningful aspects on the phenomena of personal transformation can be pinpointed.

First, all the participants mentioned the focus on being in the here and now as an embodied being, expressing oneself freely e.g. during the morning circles, the partner and group exercises as a meaningful experience. The opportunity to express one’s feelings freely, whether anger, fear, sadness, joy, confusion or vulnerability, without feeling judged or evaluated, had a transformative effect of itself according to various participants. Helena described: “Showing feelings and experiencing that everyone understood me, that’s why I could open up so well in the group (she lifts her shoulders). It’s important to talk about what bothers you and then I am allowed to show myself fully and I start feeling comfortable to show myself fully (she smiles). That’s it.” The constant invitation to feel (with) the body and perceive one’s own sensations, created a new body feeling. Through this focus on the body, one became more conscious of new sensations and also tensions. Moreover, of how exhausting it can be to tense or suppress parts of oneself, bodily, emotionally or psychologically. Thus, the participants described becoming more aware of suppressed emotions such as anger, fear or sadness, which they could also feel as for example tension in their stomach, throat or shoulders. Klara explained: “I am speechless and enthusiastic about what happened in the journey without having to rummage around in my childhood but only through bodily sensations like my pressure in the chest (she pauses and looks up). To really only work with the body sensation in the moment. This has changed my perception on my sensations.” The strong focus on the body and the feelings and the constant questions, “How does it feel?” and “What sensations do you feel in your body?” was described as meaningful by the participants. Being/feeling alive, clarity and power, were words that the participants used a lot to describe their feeling after the journey. The participants also described the perceived aliveness and authenticity of the facilitators as essential for their processes. Especially Eva who had the explicit wish to live more authentic described the facilitators as having a “genuine and loving interest in me.”

The journey focuses strongly on self-perception, introspection and an exploration of inner pictures, while at the same time, being in a group and in the presence of and in contact with, other people. Being together with a group of 14 people for six days,
from morning until evening, was described as being both a pleasure and a challenge at the same time. Maria explained: “I never thought I could actually be in a big group for six days 24/7” (she pauses, presses her lips and smiles). I am really proud I could manage to do this and at the same time also being true to my needs.” What is strongly encouraged during the morning circles is to say whatever needs to be said, regardless of whether it is a conflict that needs to be addressed or admiration for someone. Being recognized by the group, feeling seen and heard was essential for embodying different qualities. Kerstin described that it was important for her to be witnessed on the throne as Heroine. A potential benefit of the journey is the opportunity to show oneself in different roles. Kerstin realized during her performance as Heroine on the throne, that it was alright to embody a Heroine even though she did not yet believe in or feel, her Heroine self. Yet the experience of embodying the Heroine had already changed her perception of herself. Being in the spotlight was clearly outside her comfort zone but she wanted to try it. She said in the interview that afterwards she had realized how often she limited herself through lack of self-belief. This means that even though she might not feel like a Heroine at a given moment, if she embodies or performs the role, she comes closer to the desired qualities of herself. “The Heroine day was very special for me (she pauses and breathes in). I dressed myself in a normal way so I would not stand out too much (she looks down). I was really shocked when the facilitators announced that we have to sit on a throne. But when I was up there it wasn’t that bad (she smiles). I actually enjoyed the attention (she smiles more). I suddenly felt like my imagined Heroine and I enjoyed it that people could see me like this.”

What was also vividly described by the participants, were the inner pictures, sensations and feelings experienced during the guided imaginary journeys, which sometimes had a clear meaning and sometimes not. Helena was not sure whether a job offer was right for her and during one journey, she had clear images of the sky that looked the same as it had on the way to the job interview one week previously. For her, this was a clear symbol that she wanted to try out the job.

On the third day, Helena describes her experience and interpretation of her imaginary journey in the morning circle. (In this journey, the participants receive a miracle, something that is missing in their life). “It was so beautiful; there was a green hilly landscape and a clear blue sky, like the windows computer background picture.” Her eyes become big. “So beautiful!” She makes a break and breaths. “I know now that the job offer is right, because this was exactly the sky I saw on the way to the job interview last week.” She smiles gently.

Patrick was astounded by meeting his inner Hero, as he described in the morning circle.

Patrick speaks fast and with an excited voice in the morning circle: “When I saw my Hero, it felt so real and weird at the same time. He looked like my grandfather, an old
teacher from my High-School and like Caption Jack Sparrow.” He smiles. “I could feel his wisdom, power and at the same time his weirdness.” He looks proud.

Eva had a sad feeling during her imaginative journey. She experienced a dark place while imagining her family situation: “My miracle journey was ok but suddenly in the room of the beloved ones, (she pauses) my family (she looks down) it was just dark and black (her eyes look sad). I did not see anyone (she covers her mouth with her hands). It made me feel very sad.”

**Confrontation Heroine/ Hero and Demon of Resistance**

What the participants described in the interviews as being an intense and transformative moment, was the confrontation between the Heroine/Hero and Demon of Resistance. This is the moment in the journey when the inner conflict, the disorienting dilemma and the polarization are most intense on the cognitive, bodily and emotional levels. The participants emphasized that the transformative potential of the confrontation was the embodied and emotional part of it. If the same process had only happened cognitively, it would not have been the same. I want to emphasize that the Demon of Resistance is not something bad or something to overcome, but rather another aspect of ourselves.

Karin described the Heroine as her need to express herself freely and the Demon of Resistance as the tightness in her throat in moments when she lost her voice or did not say anything from the beginning.

Klara stands upright on the Heroine’s side; her two hands and arms move from bottom to top, she speaks in a loud and clear voice: “My wish is to express my needs. Towards my husband, my friends, my work colleagues and everyone.” She takes a short break and breathes. “I will not be trampled on anymore.” She puts her hands on her hips. “From now on, I’ll say what I think!” Her face becomes tight. “No matter what the others think.” She changes hesitantly to the demon side, starts to smile and raises her eyebrows; she speaks in a darker, quieter and more accentuated voice. “You don’t really think you’ll do that. I can only laugh.” She laughs scornfully. “Cute how ridiculous you make yourself. Do you think anyone cares about your needs?”

She realized during the confrontation and dialogue exercise that the tightness was an inner protection, both against exposing herself to ridicule and looking vulnerable in front of others. Suddenly, the uncomfortable experience of feeling the tightness in her throat changed to being somehow positively protective. She described it as a new way of seeing/experiencing the situation. She found the dialogue exhausting because the Heroine insisted that the protection was unnecessary, whereas the Demon of Resistance wanted to keep it. She experienced a sudden change in the dialogue, as the Demon started to protect her back and put her hands on her back instead of tightening her throat. This experience gave her a feeling of new power and protection at the same time. “Somehow all these dialogues with the demon and the Heroine
where about fear and the demon wanted to protect me (she breaths strongly). The
demon makes it tight, so I do not say things that embarrass me or make me too
vulnerable somehow. So, he makes it tight to protect me (she stops abruptly and
looks up). This unpleasant experience suddenly got a new turn. They came closer
and closer and found another form of protection. A protection that strengthens my
back.”

The transformation dance afterwards made her remember past situations in which
she had not been able to speak. She told herself to stay in the situation and not to hide
or flee. During the dance, she was able to experience this new opportunity, which
gave her a feeling of power. She speaks fast: “The next day I felt much more
vulnerable and I was expecting beautiful feelings such as love and joy, due to my
opening throat and chest but suddenly I felt so much anger (she breathes out loudly).
Then I realized that being vulnerable means that all feelings might be felt more
intensely. I had never been that angry and I realized that I had not felt my unfulfilled
needs this strongly before. I was not aware before that I had such a strong need to
express myself.”

Patrick was surprised about his confrontation. He, as the Hero, suddenly realized
a strong need for bodily contact/touch, which the Demon of Resistance did not want
him asking for. When the Hero told how much he needed it, the Demon somehow
became softer. In the middle of the process, he suddenly hugged the other side, the
Demon, and was happy about it afterwards.

Patrick stands huddled up on the side of the Hero. He speaks softly, “I want to come
closer to you and feel you.” The demon laughs. “What kind of a man are you? You are
the weakest hero I have ever seen.” The demon turns away. He walks to the side of the
Hero. The Hero walks closer to the demon. “I know that you think that. But it is not
true. And I know you need comfort to.” Patrick walks to the side of the demon and turns
around facing the Hero. His face looks somehow softer.

Eva realized during the first day of the journey that her need was to live more
authentically. She came to the journey because she was not happy with her living
situation. From the moment she met her Demon of Resistance, she preferred this
aspect of herself because she felt stronger and more successful. During her confron-
tation, the Heroine was crying a lot and she explained that previously she had not
liked this vulnerable, sensitive and in her words, “weaker side of herself.” Thus, for
her, the challenge was to accept the Heroine and not the Demon of Resistance. What
happened during the confrontation was a mixing of these two parts and it suddenly
felt much more coherent to her.

Samuel came to the journey because for the last year he had no longer been able
to feel joy. His wish was to feel joy.

Samuel stands on the side of the Hero. He speaks desperately and loudly: “Give me
back my joy! You took it away from me!” He moves to the side of the demon and
stamps with his feet. “The joy belongs to me!”
During his dialogue, the Demon of Resistance talked and moved in a very scary way. He told the Hero that the joy belonged to him and that the Hero would never get it back again. After some time, the Hero realized that the Demon of Resistance symbolized the sadness that he did not want to have. The Hero started to fight the Demon of Resistance, the sadness, with his fists. In the middle of the process something changed, and the Hero realized that the sadness also belonged to him. The Demon of Resistance wanted to be recognized, otherwise he would not be able to give him the feeling of joy.

Concluding Discussion

What guides this concluding section: How does this research contribute to the discourse on transformative learning and what is its actual benefit for further theory development? First, I will start with the challenges and limitations of the journey. The participants went into the experience with an intention, as they came in with prior reflection on the questions, “What do I want to change in my life? What is calling me?” This means that the participants already came with a strong urge for change and their motivation was high, which in other settings might not always be given. One participant left the journey during the first days because he did not like the methods. Another challenge is the integration of the experience and newfound aspects within the daily life of the participants, which can require professional support. During the journey participants were invited to focus their attention on their bodies. The conscious engagement with pre-reflective embodied knowledge and its integration takes time. A one-week workshop can only cover a small part of this larger process.

As the participants described and drawing on my co-experience, the most significant moments of the journey were the moments when dilemma was embodied and felt. This were also the moments that were still remembered six months after the journey. The confrontation, the moment in the journey when the inner conflict, the disorienting dilemma and the polarization are most intense on the cognitive, bodily and emotional levels, was described as being a transformative experience. Yet especially in this phase, the participants often needed guidance which was usually an invitation to focus on their body and emotions. It was difficult for the participants to describe exactly what caused their change of perspective during the confrontation, but it was described as being an understanding and acceptance of both sides, the Heroine/Hero and the Demon of Resistance. From my co-experienced observations, I could see that sometimes only connecting these two aspects changed the situation. Therefore, I would argue, expressed dilemmas and the awareness of unconscious parts or patterns of oneself are driving forces of personal transformation, if given an opportunity to engage with them not only rationally but also embodied and emotionally. It was important for the participants to have the possibility to embody certain aspects like e.g. the qualities of the heroic self. One person explained that
by embodying and feeling a certain quality, she realized that the admired qualities of
the Heroine/Hero are within her/himself.

At the same time, the secure und trustworthy frame the facilitators, and the group
provided was crucial. As mentioned by Freiler (2008), connection and relatedness
among people is essential for approaching the body in learning. The guided ima-
ginary journey helped the participants to connect their mental images with bodily
sensations and therefore to experience unconscious contents that they were not
aware of before. In the group circle, the participants often articulated their experi-
ences through pictures and feelings, followed by reflection. Embodied learning
means to make the felt sense, the pre-reflective knowledge more conscious through
cognitive formulations (Jordi, 2011; Tobin & Tisdell, 2015). We can create spaces
for becoming more conscious to the role of the body in what we do and encourage a
dialogue between bodily experience and cognitive reflections, thus embodied know-
ing becomes conscious learning (Jordi, 2011, p. 194; Tobin & Tisdell, 2015, p. 227).
The journey provides a space where people can become more conscious of their
bodily sensations and are able to experience a back-and-forth between embodied
experiencing and conscious reflection.

As educators/facilitators, we must give space for sensual perception and reflec-
tion (Peterlini, 2020). What seems crucial to me is the question: How can we create
learning experiences that touch various ways of knowing such as embodied,
archetypical, imaginative or intuitive forms of knowing to create deeper forms of
self-knowledge? A relational self-knowledge that leads to agency, reflectivity and
empathy for oneself, the community and the world. From my experience of the
journey and the interviews, personal transformation leads to deeper and more honest
relationships that encourages empathic acts. Inviting feelings, body consciousness
and soul in the learning spaces or the classroom can happen through one’s own
embodiment, presence and vulnerability. There is the possibility to ask learners how
they feel about a certain situation or how they imagine another person might feel.
This needs to be adapted to the educational setting and the learners. There are power
imbalances and inequalities within the classroom, which might not allow an expres-
sive and open space. Still, there is the possibility to invite feelings through imagina-
tions or exercises that put oneself in the shoes of someone else.

For actualizing this, it also needs the willingness to be an authentic and touchable
facilitator or teacher. This means that as facilitators of transformative processes, we
also have to undergo transformative processes and consciously engage with dilemma
and ourselves. As argued above, referring to Dirkx (1998), without the conscious
engagement of our unconscious, we are less aware of our compulsions, obsessions
and complexes but also of our needs and potentials. As the participants described,
they not only realized complexes through their engagement with the Demon of
Resistance but also their needs and new qualities within themselves, such as being
vulnerable and powerful at the same time. Recognizing these qualities and patterns,
we have a broader perspective not only of ourselves but also of others and the
collective. We develop a greater capacity of ambiguity and therefore we can allow
various perspectives in ourselves and others. Not only as participants but even more so if we want to facilitate personal transformative processes, we need the willingness to also look at our own dark, messy and unconscious aspects. This leads to an empathic engagement with our surroundings.

I would argue to foster embodied learning and knowing in higher education in a class not specifically designed for that purpose because the engagement of mind and body is crucial for learning. Learning as reflective practice should include various dimensions of human consciousness. Also, in other settings we can try to not only engage with minds but also consider experiences of whole persons by addressing the whole person in thought and feeling. We can design classes or workshops in ways that encourage the engagement with various aspects of oneself/others. Some methods of the workshop such as imaginary journeys, stories, metaphors, images or artistic work can be integrated to connect to inner fantasies, archetypes and feelings in various settings. In addition, role-plays to embody different characters are meaningful to develop deeper self-knowledge. Creating awareness of various perspectives in the classroom or within stories can create dilemma situations that are useful to connect to the world and inner dilemmas. Acting out roles with different motivations or needs allows for a change of perspective. Theatre work like the Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal, 1979) provides the opportunity for embodied experiences to transform oppressive situations by trying out new perspectives and actions and reflecting on the situation. An interesting follow up research would be on the relationship between imaginal and embodied ways of knowing, intuition and empathy.

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**Note**

1. All names of participants are changed.

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