A Transformative Edge:
Core Educator Competences

An important part of the EU-funded Project

"Building Capacity for Transformative Learning"

is the formulation of a

competence framework for transformative learning.

A „Competence framework" in the context of transformation

There are many frameworks describing the necessary competences of an educator. They cover many aspects of professional competence: not only knowledge but also skills, attitudes, aptitudes and dispositions; future reference to competences should be taken to encompass all these aspects (described in section 2).

A competence framework thus represents the personal capability needed by a professional practitioner in order to successfully perform their educational functions and tasks. This paper focuses on the competences required to guide learners through a process leading to transformation.

Other competence frameworks have a longer history and often a more specific context – for instance, for Education for Sustainable Development. In our open context of bringing a transformative edge to existing educational offerings, the key is to use existing frameworks as a starting point to enable each participant to identify and explore her or his own needs and potential.

Overview

This paper describes how the transformative learning competences framework (TLCF) was formulated, as well as comparing the TLCF with some other frameworks that have been put forward for teachers and facilitators engaged in learning processes related to personal and societal transformation and good citizenship.

References are noted separately, for inclusion in the Transformative Edge course book.

Content

1. Transformation as an educational outcome

Transformative learning is "an approach to teaching based on promoting change, where educators challenge learners to critically question and assess the integrity of their deeply held assumptions about how they relate to the world around them" (Mezirow & Taylor, 2010, p. xi).

To speak with Edmund O´Sullivan: "Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; 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 awarenesses; our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy"

The project's objective is to engage adult educators. Through the Teach the Educator curriculum which we develop they will acqui-re competences that enable them to teach in an even more innovative, inclusive and participative way, hence fostering transformative learning as described above. Their learners will achieve competences that are relevant for today's world, and gain high quality skills of relevance to society and to potential employers.

What are competences? And why are they important and useful?

'Competence' refers to a set of knowledge, skills, attitudes, aptitudes and dispositions that any professional practitioner should possess in order to successfully perform their functions and tasks.

In the sphere of education and learning, competences usually refer to those that students or learners should acquire or master at the end of a particular education or exercise. 'Competences' are therefore sometimes equated with 'education learning outcomes'.

The TL facilitators to whom this competence framework is addressed could also be viewed as 'students' or 'learners', since in a transformative setting all teachers are always also learners. Therefore, the competences discussed here could be considered the outcome of participating in an exercise meant to enhance their TL competence: to 'sharpen the transformative edge' of their professional competence.

Competence can also be seen as the standard against which the performance of a practitioner can be assessed. The qualified professional is the person with the competence that the peer group, or wider society, or the law have defined as the standard for evaluating professional competence.

The different elements that make up a competence are interconnected. Behaviour or performance is influenced, motivated and made possible by the way in which knowledge, skills, attitudes, aptitudes and dispositions interact. They have their effect in combination, not separately.

The competence elements or categories

Knowledge: Knowledge includes the cognitive knowledge and understanding of how the world (reality) is configured and functions, of the (scientific) processes and mechanisms that operate in this reality, and of the place, position and degrees of freedom that individuals, groups, organisations and society can have in this reality. This also includes cognitive and intellectual tools (e.g. critical thinking) for acquiring and developing the described knowledge and understanding.

Skills: Skills refer to the practical and manual, emotional and intellectual skills for managing, manipulating and modifying physical and social reality, from the simplest to the most complex conditions. They are related to day-to-day tasks and survival (e.g. writing with a pen, or self-discipline, or showing empathy), to professional performance (e.g. in education, engineering, agriculture or coding), to scientific analysis, and to meeting a variety of challenges (e.g. establishing trust, reducing CO_2 emissions or finding a cure for cancer).

Attitudes: Attitudes cover the social-psychological 'states' in which an individual or group finds itself or the 'orientations' of an individual or group. They refer to the manners, dispositions, feelings and position regarding a person, group, entity, condition, situation or task. An attitude can be held in a more or less conscious manner. Attitudes can influence behaviour and performance. They provide (part of) the argumentation for behaving in a certain way. But behaviour and performance can also shape attitudes: they become the justification for behaviour. 'Attitude' is often used to describe a 'tendency' or 'orientation', especially of the mind. Therefore, 'attitude' is often used as the equivalent of 'mindset' or even 'perspective'.

Aptitude: A person's aptitude is their innate or acquired ability to do something, to undertake action and to make effective use of knowledge and skills. When 'aptitude' is equated with 'talent' it is seen as an innate characteristic or special fitness (e.g. an aptitude or special talent for mathematics). However, through experience and practice aptitude can also be acquired and learned. From a more general perspective, aptitude can denote a readiness or quickness in learning; which is usually seen as a sign of intelligence.

Disposition: Disposition is closely related to attitude, but it also overlaps with aptitude. It is the predominant or prevailing tendency of one's spirits. It is an individual's 'natural' mental state and emotional outlook or mood. Disposition can be seen as a state of mind regarding something or an inclination towards a certain form of action or behaviour (e.g. a disposition to do good; a disposition to take risks).

2. Nature and importance of competences

Competence, understood as a dynamic interrelated set of knowledge, skills, attitudes, aptitudes and dispositions, can be used for analysing and describing the complexity of an individual's behaviour or professional performance. If one wishes to understand how a certain behaviour or performance can be achieved, modified or improved, it is useful to know which elements of that future or existing behaviour may need strengthening or changing. Should the education of the individual be focused on imparting and expanding knowledge? Should it be focused on learning new skills or enhancing existing ones or unlearning old ones? Should learners reflect on and modify certain attitudes vis à vis themselves or others or certain situations, in order to become more effective? Should learners recognize and reflect on existing aptitudes and strengthen them? Should they reflect on and modify existing dispositions or develop alternative or more appropriate ones?

The answers to these questions can be formulated by the relevant educators. It may also be the case that the answers are found by the learners themselves as part of a learning process.

The thus identified competence elements and their strengths and weaknesses can be used to formulate the learning objectives and learning outcomes of a conscious educational or learning process. Exemplified in this project: formulating the TLCF, i.e. determining the competences of facilitators or teachers who are guiding learners through a process of transformation.

3. A survey of experienced practitioners

At the start of the project, research was carried out to identify the competences of practicing transformative educators.

The research team conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 practicing TL educators from different countries and backgrounds. Six TL competences were identified by them, summarized in Table 1. Each competence is described in three dimensions related to knowledge (what the TL facilitator knows or should know), skills (what each TL facilitator should be able to do) and attitudes (the motivation, perspective and disposition of each TL facilitator).

Additionally, the survey highlighted the dual nature of the challenge faced by the educator: the need to be on the same journey as the students/participants, in order to lead by example; and the need to create and hold a safe context for their journey.

Annexe A presents these findings in more detail.

Table 1. Summary description of the six TL competences and their dimensions

Competence	Archetype	What I know	What I can do	My attitude	Description
Self- know-ledge	The Sage	I know myself	I am able to change	I want to better myself	The quest for self-knowledge: - eagerness to learn - an array of skills and practices for self-exploration; - the fruits of such processes
Working with people	The Seis-mograph	I know about group dynamics and facilitated processes	I can manage groups	I am compass-ionate	Based on a solid grasp of group dynamics, this competence is cultivated over time by working with groups, designing effective experiences, and working through conflicts and discomfort.
Envisioning	The Visio-nary	We all know much more than we know that we know	I can bring out hidden hopes and fears	I accept that the student's vision may not be alig-ned with mine	The competence that supports learners by helping them become critically aware of their own hopes, fears and expectations; and to craft their insights into visions of desired futures, thus anchored in present reality plus future dreams.
Riding com-plexity	The Bud-dha	The world is complex	I can ride the waves of com-plexity	I am willing to work with the unknown	The educator's competence to shift from a problem focus to a dynamic focus on challenges and opportunities; and to enable learners to do the same. In this sphere of constant, complex change, we embark on an unpredictable journey
Flow	The Super-coach	People can change in a safe way - also through discom-fort	I can focus on the needs of others, in the moment	I want to serve	The educator's attitude of unconditional positive regard, championing the learner's growth, is balanced with "pushing" each learner to the growing edges of her/his comfort zone, if and when needed, in a flow of attention.
Pedagogy	The Expert	I have large theoretical knowledge	I can apply that knowledge	I am more than my tools	Theoretical knowledge as a foundation for transformative learning. Includes theories of change, learning and development. Incorporates many pedagogical tools, to be used flexibly.

Interpreting the survey results

These results should be regarded as a snapshot: a picture, at a given moment, of questions at the forefront of the minds of experienced practitioners. As such, they form a core framework for the continued work of the project team. They are however not exhaustive. For instance, they take no account of competences that those interviewed have come to take for granted but that may be equally important.

It should be noted that the six competences described in the framework are not exclusive to TL practitioners. They can and do give inspiration, direction and guidance for the behaviour and performance of any professional educator. More on this below.

4. General and specific competences

The definition of 'competences' and how they are used in educational or learning practice, as presented above, is generic. 'Competence' is used in many different situations and contexts of learning. It is used in defining what competences students should have after completing the last year of secondary school, what medical doctors should have after having passed their medical exams, or what psychotherapists should have in order to open their practice. In each of these three examples, the desired competence or competence elements must be specified in relation to the specific professional domain.

Specific to the TLFC is that its six competences are situated in the domain of transformative learning: the set of generic competence elements, as presented above, needs to be further specified with respect to the two main aspects of transformative learning, namely transformation and learning. The learning-related competences are to a large extent similar or equivalent to the competences that any teacher, instructor, coach or facilitator should display, irrespec-

tive of their professional domain. The transformation-related competences are specific to the job and performance of the coach or facilitator working with the personal (private) and professional (work-related) 'transformation' of their clients or participants, and their contexts. The 'transformation-related competences' influence and circumscribe the 'teaching and facilitation competences' and vice-versa.

This project is not the first attempt at defining specific transformative learning-related competences. In the last 50 years or more, many others including Mezirow who coined the term 'transformative learning' have formulated lists of competences that should be acquired by those working in the domains of personal transformation, social transformation, behaviour change, and sustainability (which by definition requires a lot of transformation, both individually and structurally).

Some of them have focused almost exclusively on the competence related to transformation or sustainability. Other authors have specified the connection between

general teaching and pedagogical competences or skills on the one hand, and transformation-related skills on the other.

A transformative learning educator is more than a teacher, in that s/he is helping learners/students to acquire or enhance the competence to be transformed/to transform. The competences of this educator are to a large extent the same as for any good teacher/instructor. They have, however, the added element of seeing the learners as persons willing and capable of transformative change.

This kind of learning is about enhancing the agency of the learner as person and as citizen, overcoming the constraints of their being in the world and meeting the challenges of that same world, within the context of their current position/conditions.

5. Contributions from other frameworks

Other frameworks, to be addressed in more detail in the Transformative Edge course book, tend to cluster around five main areas of competence:

- Personal and intrapersonal
- Interpersonal
- Professional/pedagogical
- Domain/content
- Disposition or orientation

They fit well with the survey outcomes described in Annexe A, adding a level of concretion and detail. As an overall framework, the field of Education for Sustainable Development offers useful insights. For instance,

Wals & Lenglet: Dimensions of sustainability competence and associated sustain'abilities'. They can be used for comparison by substituting TL or indeed active citizenship for sustainability.

Competence	Examples of sustain'abilities'
Dynamics and content sustainability	Sustainability literacy Systems thinking Adopting an integral view
Critical dimension of sustainability	Questioning hegemony and routines Analysing normativity Disruptiveness, transgression
Change and innovation dimension of sustainability	Leadership and entrepreneurship Unlocking creativity, utilising diversity Appreciating chaos and complexity Adaptation, resilience Empowerment and collective change
Existential and normative dimension of sustainability	Connecting with people, places and other species Passion, values and meaning making Moral positioning, considering ethics

References:

Mezirow, J., Taylor, E.W., & Associates (Eds.). (2010). Transformative learning in practice: Insights from community, work-place, and higher education. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Annexe A
The Transformative Learning Competence Framework identified through the practitioner survey

We identified six clusters of TL key competences, in two dimensions and three contexts:

Table 2. The competences in a dynamic relation

Personal dimension	Professional dimension	Context
1. Self-knowledge I pursue a course of deepening self-knowledge and support my participants to do the same.	**2. Working with people** I create and maintain empathic relations and support my participants to do the same.	People skills
3. Envisioning I craft visions of the society in which I dream of living, and support my participants to do the same.	**4. Riding complexity** I live with uncertainty, surfing the waves of complexity in pursuit of visions, and support my participants to do the same.	A society in transition
5. Flow I understand that timing (kairos) is a vital aspect of change and know when to disrupt and when to go with the flow. I encourage my participants to do the same.	**6. Pedagogy** I learn all that I can about effective, learner-centred education and encourage my participants to do the same.	Education

Each competence is described below in three essential dimensions:

- What I know: things learned over time
- What I can do: things learned with practice
- My attitude: posture towards this

We have also created illustrative stories to give an idea of how a TL educator thinks and acts from the perspective of each competence.

In addition to the six competences, two 'anchor points' were identified. They are not „competences" strictly speaking but they are nevertheless important dimensions. They are, so to speak, the bottom and the top of the educator's pyramid: its base, and its highest dimension or aspiration

The base of the pyramid

At the root of it all there are the spiritual, emotional and material needs that keep us afloat. How do we stay motivated and energized? How will we prevent burnout? How can we make a living out of this? How do we deal with failures, discouragement, lack of community support? Without this base we would not be able to apply our competences in the real world.

The highest dimension / aspirational plane

Up there in the clouds are the highest aspirations for spiritual development, and the awareness that we are working on a profound consciousness shift. This aspiration guides the direction of our work.

1. Self-Knowledge

Archetype:	The Sage
What I know:	I know myself
What I do:	I am able to change
My attitude:	I am open to new paths to self-knowledge

By this competence, we have identified a cluster around the quest for self-knowledge. This is manifested in the triad of i) an overall posture, which is an attitude of eagerness to learn and wanting to better oneself; ii) an array of particular skills and practices for such self-exploration, and iii) harvesting the fruits of such processes.

Illustrative story:

Deep down, I am moved by the quest for inner truth and self-knowledge. I am always committed to the search, I am evolving, discovering, and always a learner. I do it for my own sake, but also to offer depth to my students: only by embodying our evolution can we show them the way to their own.

I use various pathways for this exploration. I am reflective, see myself as a learner, I speak from the heart, I explore myself with patience and curiosity, I keep an awareness of my own attitudes and intentions, and routinely challenge my assumptions. I use critical thinking, reflections, techniques for mental and emotional hygiene. As a result, I „know myself" more, but I am aware the journey is always in progress. You can try and describe me as a Sage, but I would smile at your description.

2. Working with People

Archetype:	The Seismograph
What I know:	I know about group dynamics and facilitated processes
What I do:	I can manage groups
My attitude:	I am compassionate

Based on a solid knowledge of group dynamics, the skill which is cultivated over time is around working with groups, designing effective group work experiences (for instance as a facilitator), working through conflicts and discomfort, and in general creating containers: contexts in which students feel safe enough to express their needs and contribute their own wisdom.

Illustrative story:

I am an expert in navigating groups, where they are at, guiding them in a safe way. I am tuned like a seismograph to what is happening and am also versed in process design skills and tools. Thus I can design with the right amount of structure, I can help students work with difficult emotions and with conflict within a safe space, and can manage different people and different situations even when things get a bit „heated". All these skills and tools help in creating containers where the students learn and go through discomfort without too much frustration and without harm.

3. Envisioning

Archetype: The visionary

What I know: We all know much more than we know that we know

What I do: I can bring out hidden hopes and fears

My attitude: I accept that the student's vision may not be aligned with mine

This is the competence that supports students through a paradigm shift by helping them to become critically aware of their own hopes, fears and expectations; and to craft their new insights into visions of desired futures. In this way their moments of insight become anchored in both present reality and future dreams, enabling students to chart a course towards a better future.

Sub-competences are

a. Futures/foresight skills - the ability to elicit and critically assess tacit assumptions about the future (hopes, fears, expectations); to access any relevant research/factual material against which to evaluate those assumptions; and to elicit deeply-held values on which to build a vision of desired futures.

b. Charting the territory - the ability to support students to create successively more detailed maps of the terrain: their desired futures, and the space between now and then; and to create stories about the journey (‚just enough').

c. Setting out on the journey - crafting invitations to students to experiment, individually and collectively, and to set their own priorities and boundaries.

Illustrative story:
I listen deeply to the learners to hear the values and intentions behind their words, and I teach them to listen to themselves and each other in the same way. I demonstrate respect for their inner knowledge and wisdom, enabling them to give greater expression to their needs, values and dreams. I help them to map their insights as a basis for crafting visions of desirable futures that are both aspirational and rooted in reality. I encourage them to use their map as a way of generating stories and of charting possible paths to a desired future.

4. Riding Complexity

Archetype: The Buddha

What I know: The world is complex

What I do: I can ride the waves of complexity

My attitude: I am willing to work with the unknown.

This competence is about recognizing complexity both cognitively through some theoretical frames and also in an embodied way, for instance by the way the practitioner "rides the waves" of uncertainty and resists the temptation to compartmentalize and sub-optimize. Interviewees pointed to the skill of working with the unknown.

Illustrative story:
Conceptually, I learned that the world is complex and uncertain, and so is TL. But on a deeper level, I understand the need to ride the waves, embrace ambiguity and paradox, and show our students how we do that ourselves first.

In practice, this takes many forms. Knowing about complexity helps,

but we must do it too: holding paradoxes, being open to the unexpected, going beyond black and white thinking, being comfortable with not knowing. We are helped by tools such as constellations, creativity, systems thinking, and by letting go of past beliefs and dogmas when needed.

5. Flow

Archetype:	The Super-coach
What I know:	People can change in a safe way - also through discomfort, when the timing is right
What I do:	I can assess when others need safety and when they need a challenge
My attitude:	I want to serve, including challenging when appropriate

„Be confident and humble at the same time"

This flow stems from the educators' attitudes of unconditional positive regard, championing the students' growth, but in a gentle, accepting way that radiates warmth and keeps an empathic view of the student. This includes expanding and extending into "pushing" each student to the growing edges of her/his comfort zone, just the right amount, at just the right time: kairos. The competence is centred around knowing how to do it in effective (and not destructive) ways that help the learner in their own journey.

Illustrative story, acceptance:
I want everybody to be well while they grow, and I put myself at service for what is needed. I listen, I believe in them, I offer compassion and humble serving of their needs. I try to see the light in them, so I suspend my judgment and assumptions. I show up as honest and vulnerable, and I never want to force my truth upon them. This is reflected my behaviour: I let everything happen, I radiate warmth, I listen for discomfort, I use deep listening, and I step back from active leadership in the group when appropriate. Most importantly I focus on their needs and see opportunities in their growth.

Illustrative story, pushing:
No mud, no lotus. We learn when we are pushed and challenged too. Within acceptable conditions and appropriate settings, I know that it is good to push our participants. Note that this is not the careless „push them over a cliff" - far from it. It takes skills from our side to

judge where the students are, if and when they can take a challenge, recognize that the experience may be uncomfortable but the container is still safe (teachers, fellow participants, etc), and how far they can go today: timing is crucial. We acknowledge and honour their discomfort, create space for them and us to respect their choices, and help them make sense of what happened and how to integrate any new insights and behaviours.

6. Pedagogy

Archetype: The Expert

What I know: Extensive theoretical knowledge

What I do: I can apply that knowledge

My attitude: I am more than my tools

The competence identified here encompasses theoretical knowledge that can serve as a foundation for transformative learning. It includes (but is not limited to) theories of how people learn, theories of "transformation" and development (Mezirow, Kegan, etc). It also incorporates an array of pedagogy tools such as classroom design, tools for sense-making, coaching approaches, and so on. Respondents reminded us that the tools need to be used with caution, avoiding the temptation to believe there is "one right way", and aware of the need to adapt to novel scenarios and be flexible.

I have a vast array of pedagogical knowledge to serve my students while being aware that we need more than theories to cultivate transformation. My knowledge of how students learn and transform is grounded in theories like adult development (which informs the journey) and complexity science, and I have a large repertoire of tools for teaching and learning: how students make sense, take responsibility for their learning, how they debrief and bridge what they learned to a novel context, etc. These tools, used flexibly, inform how I design classrooms, mix pedagogy style (eg when to teach and when to dialogue, how to set up a classroom environment, when to invite in the arts, and nature, etc.). I am aware that transformation cannot be forced and is ultimately their responsibility, but these processes can help a lot if used wisely.