'I can do it on my own': transformative learning perspectives on women's educational trajectories in the UAE.'

GRACE ALETHEA FAURE-BRYAN

Abstract

‘I can do it on my own’: transformative learning perspectives on women’s educational trajectories in the UAE.’

Educational opportunities for women in higher education have been, and continue to be, an important area of research. This study explores the lived experiences of a small group of female students and their personal educational trajectories over time, in the context of the changing face of the UAE. The country’s oil wealth has led to extensive changes and developments in its society, as evidenced by emerging philosophies and provision for its citizens; education being an area of investment. This study provides a deeper understanding of educational experiences and the process of personal change, freedom, and emancipation. Gender issues are explored on a macro level i.e., political, and societal, and on a micro-level i.e., personal, and individual, through lived experiences. Journeys of personal growth and change are explored, prior to, whilst and after educational experiences on a new diploma course. The theoretical framework of transformative learning is used to highlight changes triggered with and without disorienting dilemmas, whilst the participants were on their educational trajectories. Changing points of views, resulting in new perceptions are revealed and explored. Long may change continue for women of the UAE.

This longitudinal study follows the stories of five participants from two different cohorts of a new classroom assistant programme over a four-year period. The study employs an in-depth exploratory approach, using qualitative methodology. The emphasis is on personal knowledge construction and changing perspectives. The research approach focuses on the individual stories of their lived experiences, using narrative inquiry.

‘I CAN DO IT ON MY OWN’:TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING PERSPECTIVES ON WOMEN’S EDUCATIONAL TRAJECTORIES IN THE UAE.

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the degree of Doctor of Education.

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis which I submit for the degree of Doctor of Education at the University of Durham, is my own work. This is not the same as any work previously submitted for a degree at any other institution or university.

Statement of Copyright

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1 PRELUDE AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 THE CONTEXT: THE UAE

This study is set in a small emerging economy in the Middle East; the United Arab Emirates hereafter referred to as the UAE, is a small country located in the far south-east point of the Arabian Peninsula, bordering Oman to the east and Saudi Arabia to the west. What was once a desert land, with fishing and pearl diving as a source of income, is today a thriving metropolis of modernisation and globalisation, transformed by the discovery of oil in the mid-twentieth century (Davidson, 2009). The unification of the seven Emirates on December 2, 1971, saw the establishment of the country as it is known today. Historic traditions are evident alongside new and emerging perspectives, making it ripe for research.

Educational provision in the UAE has developed over the years, this will be discussed further in 2.1.4. Males and females today have access to educational opportunities at all levels; however, the story is not so simple. Women in the UAE were given access to education almost two decades later than their male counterparts, however they have surpassed men in their presence and performance in secondary and tertiary education (United Arab Emirates Ministry of Education, 2015) but stories of challenge and unequal expectations are still prevalent. Despite the increase in female educational opportunities and improved literacy rates, there appears to be limited opportunities for women to use their knowledge and skills in employment or innovative ways. The in-depth female story requires exploration and further understanding.

1.2 WOMEN IN THE MIDDLE EAST

My research is set in a changing political, economic, and cultural context, where shifts are evident and continuous. My participants' educational experiences are embedded in this context and cannot be separated. It is important to understand that, if the research was conducted in a different context i.e., political system or economic situation, the findings

would likely differ. I believe that the changing face of the UAE has played an important part in my participants' trajectories, and hence reference to these many changes are included in my work. Research on issues that affect women (including gender studies), have continued to increase globally; Cho et al. (2013); Schwab et al. (2017); Harding et al. (2013), to name a few. Studies focusing on female educational experiences in the Middle East are increasing, albeit at a slower rate. My research will add to the extant knowledge.

Quantitative studies about the progress of women are available, but they display limited understanding of personal lived experiences and tend to lack in-depth understanding of the female narrative. The objective of my study is the exploration of my participants educational trajectories, exploring the holistic experiences of a small group of women at the HEIME. The research draws on past and present experiences, and changes that occurred during and after their time at a higher education institution. Learning is complex and happens in different ways, and at different times, for learners – qualitative research allows for exploration into the multiplicity of experiences of the journey. Transformative learning theory, which I considered after collecting my data, (I knew little about it prior to this point, and had tentatively planned to use experiential learning to frame my study), seeks to understand learning experiences and the construction of new knowledge by examining, questioning, and revising perceptions based on previous experiences (Mezirow, 1981). Learning is dynamic and transformative (Hoggan & Cranton, 2015).

Transformative learning may be a starting point for exploring the learning experiences of individuals, but it does not hold all the answers. Transformative learning theory focuses on the individual's subjective learning experience, acknowledging past experiences and how they shape current perspectives (Mezirow, 1991). The process of learning is not linear – it has predictable elements, but at the same time it is unpredictable and unknown (Bloomer & Hodkinson, 2000). The theory identifies the stages and phases of the process of transformative learning, presenting it in a direct way to simplify what might be an intricate and unsystematic journey. Transformative learning recognises that change can be epochal and dramatic, resulting in a change to world views and ways of being, but it can also be

incremental and slow, occurring over a longer period (Mezirow, 1991, 2000). Learning happens differently, at various times and in diverse ways for individuals; it is individualistic and subjective and needs to be recognised as such. The process is changeable and erratic and, as recognised by transformative learning theory, it can result in change and transformation for individuals, but not necessarily for all (Mezirow, 1991, 2000).

1.3 MY STORY

I arrived in the United Arab Emirates (hereafter referred to as the UAE) at the end of 2001, after leaving the UK and putting my career on hold while my family settled in this new country. Approximately one year later, I returned to my teaching career. I am an educator and have been in the profession for some thirty years plus, having taught at various levels and in different contexts. My interest in teaching others to teach developed when I arrived in the UAE, after I was given the opportunity to work on the Bachelor of Education. The programme was relatively new when I started teaching in 2002 having been launched in 2000, in response to a recognition that UAE schools needed improving and Emirati women were to be a part of the vision (Clarke & Otaky, 2006). The students who enrolled on the degree were academic, enthusiastic, committed to becoming teachers and being part of the change in their country. It was an exciting time and a delight to work on the programme with such students. In 2013 the Classroom Assistant Diploma was launched, as the government education system widened its scope of course offerings and re-established diploma courses (there had been an increase in degree programmes and a decrease in diploma and certificate courses).

My interest in the women's stories stems from the fact that I am a woman from a marginalised community, and I have a story to tell, which is not always articulated to or listened to. I have lived through challenging situations, experienced limited educational opportunities, and lived under political systems that worked against me and my community. The stories of women from marginalised communities have been of interest to me, based on my own experience. Years later I found myself in the UAE, working with groups of women who were experiencing challenges in their educational experiences, during a time of positive changes in the society.

Developments in the UAE were evidenced in new educational, healthcare and employment provision and opportunities. Despite the range of changes and developments in society, some sectors in society seemed to be benefiting and progressing more slowly than other groups. My observations pointed to women from a particular sector of society, women who were not integrated into mainstream educational institutions, marginalised both in numeric terms i.e., the small numbers registered on diploma programmes, and their academic ability i.e., they did not meet the entry requirement to register on bachelor programmes; they too were from a marginalised group. My experience of working and living in a patriarchal society (in the UK, in the 1970's) where traditional and cultural norms differed from my own, gave me an insight into what it is to be different and not fit in to societal norms. Years later I would be in a country where I perceived the group of women I was working with, as different from their peers and with less of a voice. This I found intriguing, and I wanted to find out more about the women I was teaching, who were on the receiving end of the new opportunities but seemed to be facing challenges. Despite the cultural differences and the different context from my own experiences, I felt an affinity with the women who registered on the new classroom assistant programme. The concept of striving to succeed to pursue personal goals amidst challenge was familiar to me and piqued my research interest.

When I started working at the higher education institution in the Middle East (hereafter referred to as the HEIME), the emphasis was on providing educational experiences for the Emirati student population, in order to equip them for employment as teachers. These students were committed in their pursuit of reforming the school system, which was traditional and antiquated at the time. This new cohort of students were either unable to meet the requirement for a bachelor course or were uninterested in pursuing a degree course. I wanted to know more about these new students - who wanted a qualification which would equip them to work in schools, but not as teachers.

1.4 THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND AIMS

Out of this interest arose the focus of my research, my main research question and sub questions:

- How can Emirati women's educational experiences be understood though the lens of transformative learning?
- What role do 'disorienting dilemmas' play in the lived experiences of women in the UAE?
- How do women's 'points of view' shift during their educational trajectories, during and after a foundation programme in the UAE?

The aim of this study is to explore and examine the lived experiences of a small group of Emirati students, enrolled on the (then) new Classroom Assistant Diploma and their trajectories, at the HEIME. Research about teacher education (Zimpher, 1989; Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005; White, 2007) is common, but fewer studies exist about the experiences of classroom assistants in the UAE, as it is a new role. The creation of a formalised, full-time course for the role of classroom assistant was new in the UAE, and I wanted to investigate the experiences of Emirati women who were interested in registering in this new field of study and possibly working in this field.

1.4.1 THE CONTRIBUTION OF THIS STUDY

My study will make significant and original contributions to this field:

- It will add to the understanding of women's educational experiences in a complex changing cultural context i.e., the UAE.
- It will add knowledge, in an area where limited knowledge presently exists, about the lived experiences of Emirati women on a classroom assistant course and their emancipatory journeys.

- It will add new insights into how transformative learning theory can frame research, identifying the shortcomings of contextual factors and their importance.

1.4.2 THE NATURE OF THE STUDY

This study is framed within an interpretivist paradigm, with a focus on human experiences as they are lived (Alase, 2017; Cohen et al., 2013; Creswell et al., 2007). The research design was adopted to explore the participants stories, highlighting personal experiences of the course and the outcome of it, through narrative interviews. Five participants were recruited; although the number is relatively small, it is consistent with the methodological approach of qualitative research, focusing on detail, 'thick description' and understanding of a phenomenon, rather that numbers and statistical data (Yilmaz, 2013). This collection of personal stories and their interpretation would be difficult to gain through other research methods. I used qualitative methods, specifically narrative inquiry, to understand, at a deeper level, an under-researched area of study in the UAE. The study is longitudinal and follows the participants over a four-year period. In collecting and presenting the data, my research allows the stories of a group of women to be told. Voice is given to their stories, shedding light on their experiences of the course and their personal journeys. My study specifically draws on transformative learning theory, focusing on disorienting dilemmas and changing points of view, as they help to frame and better understand the experiences of my participants.

1.5 OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS

The study is organised into nine chapters, each contributing to the overall exposition of the research questions:

Chapter one - introduces the prelude and background to the study, the context of the study, an overview of women and educational opportunities in the Middle East, my personal history is shared and the impact it has had on my personal philosophy. It introduces the research

questions and research aims, the nature of the study and my contribution to the field of research.

Chapter two – describes the context of the study, including the political and cultural background, and the recent changes in society and education that impact women. It explores the concept of new opportunities for women, presenting evidence in employment to counter this. I argue that a deeper insight of the research area requires a comprehensive (as comprehensive as possible) understanding of the context and factors which may affect the research findings.

Chapter three - presents transformative learning theory as the theoretical framework used to guide the study. The theory frames the study, providing direction when analysing the findings. A critique of the theory is also presented.

Chapter four – covers the methodological approach to the study, comprising ontological and epistemological beliefs and the methodological framework. I state my ontological, epistemological, and methodological position, stating how this impacted my approach to the research. This chapter includes the methods, contextual information about the HEIME and the course, research considerations for data collection and data analysis.

Chapter five presents a wider reflection on the participants lived experiences, providing an insight into the five participants, their backgrounds, family relationships and course choice. It also provides evidence of their experiences of the course and personal aspirations after completing it.

Chapter six – explores the findings and the first sub research question and an explorations of disorienting dilemmas acting as triggers for change. Transformative learning theory is used as the theoretical framework.

Chapter seven – explores the findings related to sub research question two, pertaining to changing points of view. Changing points of view with or without identifiable triggers, are identified and discussed.

Chapter eight - discusses the findings broadly, including themes which are relevant to both research questions, bringing together overlapping themes from the research questions. The discussion highlights the challenges and differences (from the original theory) in using the theoretical framework of transformative learning to identify changing perspectives.

Chapter nine - synthesises the work, makes recommendations for future research and identifies limitations of the research.

The next chapter will explore the literature pertaining to women in the UAE and the recent changes, transformative learning, and emancipatory education, as they support my research.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

As described in chapter one, the UAE has undergone change on a wide scale since the discovery of oil and the wealth produced. Development to the infrastructure, education, health care and governance, to name but a few areas (Davidson, 2009), all of which have impacted the citizens of the country and further afield e.g., trade relationships. Advancements have occurred and continue to occur. The new vision for the country requires people, and the mobilisation of an expert labour force. This section of the literature review focuses on defining the context of the UAE, and outlines developments in society, legislation, initiatives, traditions, practices, and customs specifically pertaining to women. This is the context in which my research takes place, which frames the educational experiences and trajectories of my participants. The history of the UAE is included as significant, as it positions the work in its wider context, helping with understanding the society today, with an emphasis on the development of educational and employment opportunities for women. The changing context of the UAE due to oil wealth has impacted many aspects of society: education, the economy, politics – just to name a few areas. These changes are prevalent throughout society, but my interest is in the impact these changes may have had on my participants' educational trajectories.

2.1.1 CONTEXTUAL SETTING: THE UAE TODAY

Historically, rulership and power were firmly established with the ruling clans, and some would argue that this is still the case. Ehteshami and Wright (2007) suggest that significant political changes have taken place in the region, albeit at different rates for different nations in the Gulf, all of which have changed the face of the Middle East. The political structure of the UAE operates on two levels – regional and federal: (i) The federal system of government includes: The Supreme Council i.e., the policy-making body which includes rulers from each of the seven Emirates. It manages common areas for all Emirates i.e., defence forces, labour policies, education, property regulation and national policies, all of which are centralised. (ii)

The regional system of governance is implemented alongside the federal system, devolving power in areas of local development i.e., economic, and social policy, local resources, and administration (Davidson, 2005). This division of responsibility may impact national policies and blur the lines of power and authority on a regional level. The Federal National Council, established in 1971, is an advisory parliamentary body which implemented the voting of members in 2006, a move which was seen by many as a shift towards democracy. These reforms in governance can be interpreted in different ways; as 'liberalising' i.e., an intermediate stage of enfranchisement of civil society, or an attempt to engage with democratic governance (Al-Mazroui, 2007, cited in Ehteshami & Wright, 2007). Mitterlehner (2011) stated that the system does not conform with the western understanding of democracy, with checks and balances. However, the UAE has developed its own organic model of governance, which may include some western notions of democracy but, more importantly I would argue, it has its own system of governance which works for the nation, its population, and the economy. Sharia law is the legislative basis of the state i.e., the religious law derived from Islam.

2.1.2 THE DISCOVERY OF OIL AND ITS IMPACT

The country's discovery of oil (or 'black gold' as it is known) in the early 1960's changed the face of the UAE. Abu Dhabi own approximately nine per cent of the world's oil and approximately five per cent of the planet's natural gas (Davidson, 2009). This impacted the development of the country and the infrastructure in a significant way. Prior to the discovery of oil, the country was a desert, populated by nomadic Bedouins, living in simple desert dwellings. The wealth helped to transform the country into a modern economy over the last thirty years (Bristol-Rhys, 2009). This discovery of crude oil and its commercial production led to economic expansion and new opportunities for its citizens. The development of the landscape is a testament to the development of the UAE in the past and today. The wealth of the society is evident; skyscrapers are emerging, modern malls replace local transactions for shopping and state of the art museums with world standing, such as the Louvre and Guggenheim, stand in what was effectively a desert fifty years ago (Davidson, 2009). The quest to transform the society over a short period with powerful sovereign wealth funds,

creating academic hubs, art galleries, theme parks, business hubs and environmental improvements, is advancing (Bristol-Rhys, 2009). The contrast between traditional norms and routines and modern emerging philosophies is evident in daily life. New initiatives to encourage employment of nationals (both women and men) in diverse areas are being rolled out (Forstenlechner, 2008). In addition to oil, the UAE also trades in fishing, petrochemicals, manufacturing, and construction materials. It has also developed industries in agriculture such as dates, vegetables, watermelons; poultry and fish, which have largely been developed for exporting (Heard-Bey, 2016). Although most of its wealth is based on a windfall income from oil (Heard-Bey, 2016), it has committed to diversifying its economic income.

Educational reforms are set amidst this, which some say mirror the wider changes, being rapid and radical. The country has also adopted a positive discrimination employment policy, known as 'Emiratisation', whereby a percentage of jobs in various sectors are ring fenced for the national population, which will be discussed in 2.8. Davidson (2007) argues that, despite the numerous changes, the attitudes, values, behaviour, and customs, which were formed under very different circumstances, continue to be essential for family life and interactions within society.

In the following section I will explore the historic development of educational provision in the UAE from the past to present day, highlighting progress and future educational goals.

2.1.3 A BRIEF HISTORY OF EDUCATION IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

The UAE is known as a relatively young country, educational provision in the past was disparate and simple. Formal education was not a priority – teaching and learning for life and living was the responsibility of family. With the rise of Islam between A.D. 622-661 (King, 2001), semi-formal religious schools were established, and many areas of life were governed by Islamic rule. Codes of conduct and expected behaviours were explicit (Holes, 2001). Teachings on religious theory and practice, superstitions, art, burial, pilgrimage, and family life were prescribed. Koranic schools were established mainly for boys (but occasionally for

girls separately) by a 'mutawwa,' i.e., a religious leader. Teaching focused on reading, as it was deemed important for students to be able to read the Koran. Writing was also part of the teaching (Holes, 2001; King 2001). Koranic schools were part of Emirati society for a long period, from the introduction of Islam until they were replaced by a more advanced schooling system in the twentieth century (King, 2001). As society developed, education based on occupational need was required, which will be discussed below.

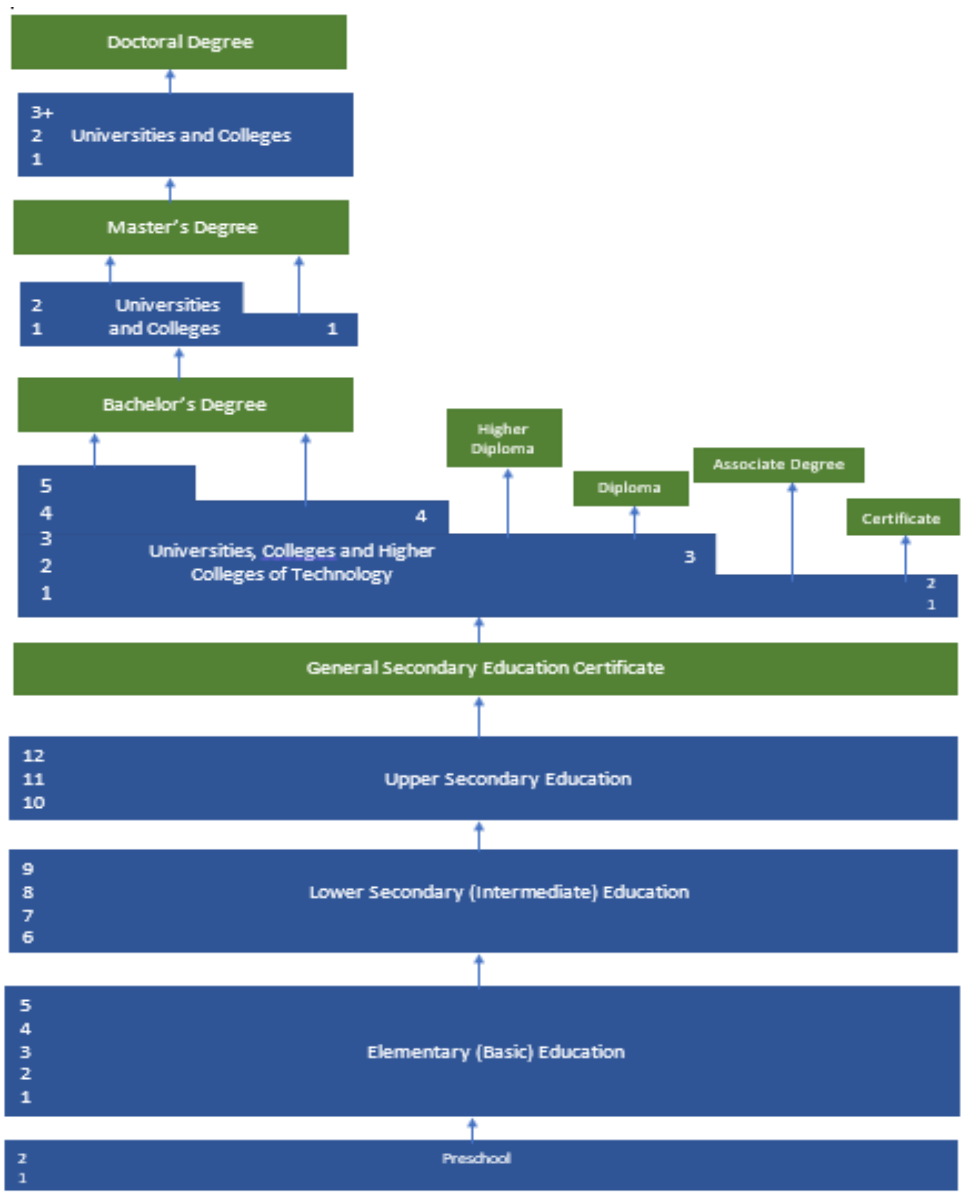
2.1.4 EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The educational system in the UAE has expanded and developed over the past fifty years. My participants have been beneficiaries of this expansion, women in the past did not have the same educational opportunities as today. In 1952 there were relatively few formal schools, but the building programme in the 1960's and 70's expanded the educational provision and more recently policies have focused on modernising this provision (Gallagher, 2019). This has involved an overhaul of the system where new pedagogies for teaching and learning have been introduced, replacing older traditions and old rote learning. Teachers from abroad have been recruited in large numbers to aid the process. The mission of equipping all nationals with the English language has changed the focus of education to biliteracy (Gallagher, 2011). New curricula have been developed, implemented, modified, and monitored as part of the development. Reform has taken place at all levels of the public education system KG through to 12, and more recently the further and higher education systems have also been reviewed (Gallagher, 2019). International and expatriate students from all over the world (including the Mena region) attend the plethora of tertiary non-governmental institutions (Kabir et al., 2016). Countless changes have taken place over a short period, with plans for continued growth. It could be argued that the focus should be on sustainable change that is appropriate and realistic for the population and the country.

The current state educational system in the UAE is presented below, which incorporates compulsory education, from elementary education – upper secondary education i.e., schooling from grade 1-12, ages 5-17. Education outside of these grades is not compulsory; it is provided by the government and private providers. Educational provision for early years

has increased over the past ten years (Dillon, 2019) under a government initiative, whilst post-secondary school education provision has also increased over the past thirty years. Figure 1 shows the current structure of educational provision in the UAE.

Figure 1: Educational Structure in the UAE



Note: From World Education News and Review. (2018, August 10). *Education system profiles: Education in the UAE.* https://wenr.wes.org/2018/08/education-in-the-united-arab-emirates

The UAE has focused on improving literacy for both men and women. In 2005 the literacy rate for the population 15-24 years of age was over 95 % for both sexes, in 2015 it had risen to over 98% for both sexes (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2017). This stands as evidence demonstrating the UAE government's commitment to education for all its citizens.

2.1.5 HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE UAE TODAY

Higher education institutions are relatively new to the UAE. The provision of higher education in the late twentieth century was for the academically able in the form of scholarships abroad; higher education at the time was not available in the UAE. During the period of oil discovery, the ruling Sheikh's mandate was the development of vocational skills and education for nationals, to equip the country for the then new oil industry (Heard-Bey, 2016). In the 1970's, the provision of higher education for all UAE nationals became a priority, with a focus on solidarity, national identity, and nation building (Burden-Leahy, 2009). The current priority is to ensure that quality education is delivered for all, which is inclusive and equitable and to promote long life learning (United Arab Emirates Ministry of Education, 2022). In the late 20th century (between 1976-1998), the three higher education institutions in the public sector were established, offering qualifications in English and Arabic. Historically, public tuition was free and limited to nationals, but more recently nominal costs have been introduced (thus begging the question about the government's commitment to education (bearing in mind its oil wealth). This has highlighted the changing nature of educational provision in the UAE. As enrolment increases in higher education, without a corresponding increase in financial support the revenue per head has declined. Fox and Al Shamisi (2014), suggest that, even if enrolment rates did not increase, the real value of 'static' revenue would drop over time, as purchasing power is declining due to rising inflation. Consequently, enrolment has increased, and inflation has led to a 'decrease' in actual federal funding per student. Historically campuses were gender based, but more recently co-educational classrooms (with parents'/guardian's permission have developed, particularly in specialized courses). An increase in enrolment in the tertiary sector has been impacted by the economy and inflation.

Alongside public higher education institutions for Emirati citizens, private universities have developed for both nationals and non-nationals (Bhayani, 2014).

Evidence suggests that high female participation levels in higher education, do not necessarily result in freedom from traditional hegemonic constraints, but reinforces division and privilege. Issues regarding the relationship between higher education and apparent freedoms for women in shaping political consciousness remains questionable (Findlow, 2013). Feminist tradition makes the connection between hegemony, emancipation, and higher education, suggesting that women want education to produce holistic freedom (Stromquist, 2006). However, collective liberation, opportunities to gain power to shape society, values, and political involvement, are not always evident in terms of the gains of higher education. State policies may promote women's participation in higher education, as part of what has been termed 'Arab state feminism,' which endorses women's participation as part of state building and human capital formation, particularly in post-independence periods (Hatem, 1995), but may not lead to deep rooted change in the society. Philipp (2013) suggested political strategies found in times of social change, revert to hegemonic control once stability is established.

Findlow's (2013) study in the UAE suggested that policies which are instituted to benefit women, may produce a variety of outcomes e.g., they may not always benefit women, or they may benefit some women and not others. Embedded within new educational opportunities for women in higher education in the Middle East, issues of limited course offerings, suitable employment after education, family obligations, traditional norms, and expectations of the role of women in society exist. Access to higher education in the Middle East serves as a mechanism for political and social control, available to sections of the female population or specific social groups (Moghadam, 2003) - see 2.2.4.

2.1.6 RESEARCH ON HIGHER EDUCATION, CURRICULUM AND CULTURE

With the increase in higher education provision in the UAE, research focusing on the practical side of teaching and learning has been conducted. Mahani's study (2018) focused on pedagogy and approaches to teaching at a women's college in the UAE, with the focus on culturally competent instructors. The work recognised the importance of students' cultural knowledge and prior experiences in their institutions (Ladson-Billings, 1994). With large number of expatriate teachers, the tensions between them and the native students was identified. Opportunities for students to connect with the content was problematic, as faculty were not familiar with the culture, history, language, or community, which was seen by students as their culture being presented as unimportant (Gay, 2002). The research recommended the need for culturally responsive teaching, by constructing student knowledge through personal involvement in the learning process, recognising and appreciating the cultural capital they bring into the classroom, (Gay, 2002).

Related to teaching, Alzeer (2019) explored female students in the UAE's engagement, decisions, and actions within the campus space, exercising control of them. Women made decisions linked to their identities, socio-cultural formation, past traditions, and culture, around using spaces within the campus to construct togetherness and community. This was demonstrated in sitting on floors in groups informally, despite the availability of desks, chairs, and sofas. The bond of attachment was significant beyond the physical space, providing social and moral support and influencing decisions. These practices highlighted women appropriating and constructing spaces for themselves, influenced by the interplay between forces of modernity and tradition (Alzeer, 2019). The decision by the women to exercise control in this environment, raised feminist questions about university spaces, as gendered areas created and contested, and used as havens by women (Quinn, 2003).

The research above highlights some of the facets of higher education and the experiences of the women in the studies. Research highlighting different dimensions of the educational experiences, reveal the complexities and the multi-faceted nature of higher education in the UAE, the academic, social and personal aspects of educational experiences. Developments in

society do not occur in isolation, and changing opportunities lead to changing experiences with predictable and unpredictable outcomes.

2.1.7 SUMMARY OF THE CONTEXT

UAE nationals have been provided for by their government, with all nationals being offered free education, healthcare and subsidised accommodation. The country has invested its oil wealth in many projects, including educational reform (Davidson, 2009). The age of retirement for nationals is sixty, with pensions and financial provision securely in place. The traditions of the early society cannot be separated from life in today's UAE. Ruling clans are still evident today in modern society in rulership and government positions, directing decision-making in society, just as in the past highlighting the division of roles and responsibilities. The climate of change apparent in services, employment and education is juxtaposed against traditional culture and norms. Traditional societal norms have shifted in the UAE in the 21st century, as women have been presented with many more educational and employment opportunities (Augsburg et al., 2009), but the outcomes are more nuanced.

This is the context in which my female participants are making choices regarding their education and future. Their stories and experiences are set amidst the changing context of the UAE, with findings that mirror continuity and consistency of traditional norms in education and employment. My study aims to shed light on the educational experiences of the women in higher education, who have engaged in new educational experiences.

2.2 WOMEN AND NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Historically, the role of women raised in traditional Arabic society was as mothers and wives, where formal education was not deemed necessary. Variations existed within this cultural norm depending on economic development, the size and growth of the population and influences from other countries (King & Hill, 1997). Over the past fifty years, laws and initiatives have been implemented in line with the national agenda to enhance educational

provision for men and women. The current vision for the country described by the United Arab Emirates Government Portal (2022) is for 'innovative education'. In its quest for modernisation and change, the UAE government has committed to the participation of women in building the nation, through education and employment (Gallant & Pounder, 2008). However, there are tensions between attempts to modernise society and at the same time maintain traditional Arabic standards for women (Sharabi, 1991).

2.2.1 EMIRATI WOMEN AND EDUCATION

Women in the UAE have made significant progress in the educational arena, as discussed in 2.1.4. The adult literacy rate for women over the age of 15 in the UAE, has risen to over 95% in 2019 (World Bank, 2022). Women are flourishing in the educational field – in secondary education, girls are outperforming boys across many subjects. In the field of higher education, women account for two thirds of government university graduates (Abdulla & Ridge, 2011). The populations of many higher education institutions in the UAE, are first generation students of mothers who did not have a formal education and adhered to the tradition role of having and caring for children (Fox & Al Shamisi, 2014).

Crabtree (2007) however, purported that academic study for women is not always pursued for the love of learning or for a career path. Discussions suggested that education for some was an identifier for the next stage of life i.e., adult life. Higher education was viewed as a credential on the marriage market for some families, as opposed to for education, or gaining higher qualifications and employment (Bakr, 2012, as cited in Lindsey, 2012). Higher education has been recognised as an 'attractive' incentive when families look for suitors in a culture of arranged marriages, but it can be a threat for some men when women have better qualifications than them (Hijab, 1988). While many parents in the UAE support their daughters' education, there are those who are sceptical and concerned about the traditional roles and responsibilities of a wife. When Emirati women marry (normally late teens to mid-twenties) marriage and children tend to become the priority, and education becomes a less important focus. Moghadam and Roudi-Fahimi (2005) found that married women tended to

give birth within two years of marriage, which impacted their education and possible employment. There is evidence of tensions between the new opportunities available for women and cultural norms.

2.2.2 EMIRATI WOMEN AND EMPLOYMENT

The issue of wider participation of women in the UAE workplace and increased opportunities for them, gained traction at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty first century, with government heads encouraging women to play a role in the modernisation of the country. This was accompanied by legislation on equal pay for equal work for men and women, and benefits for working women - including maternity leave (Pounder & Gallant, 2008). Hijab (1988) suggests that there are three critical factors that affect paid employment, which need to be present at private and national level: (i) supportive legislation; (ii) education and skills required by the employment market to work; (iii) the endorsement by the country for women to join the workforce. These three factors have been the focus of governments, demonstrated through policies and implemented in the workplace. The attitudes of working women are evolving, the process of integrating women into society is ongoing, and opportunities and provision for the integration of women in workplace requires planning and time (Hijab 1988).

The workforce in 2004 was predominantly expatriate; this population made up ninety-one per cent of the workforce (Al Rostamani, 2004); attempts have been made to address this and to increase the percentage of Emariti women in the workforce. As part of this drive, the nationalisation programme known as Emiratisation was introduced to ring fence jobs for both men and women nationals, with an emphasis on getting women to work (Gallant & Pounder, 2008). With the changes during this period, the country's total labour force of women rose from approximately thirty per cent in 1990 to more than fifty per cent in 2016 (World Bank, 2022). However, more recent statistics, show that the employment of women has decreased over the past five years (World Bank, 2022).

In 1987, the then ruler of the UAE stated that women have the right to work in all spheres, emphasising that there were no obstacles before them (Al-Nahyan, 1987). This vision has been established and built on over the years, and today women are employed in a range of industries from local government jobs through to private companies, including working for themselves. Women are employed in offices, education, health care, banking, and similar roles, but are also involved in new and emerging fields. The new (at the time of writing) Expo 2020 Dubai project, had approximately fifty per cent of its workforce as women (Nag, 2019), in a range of positions such as Chief Pavilions and Exhibitions Officer, Deputy Chief Technology Officer, Vice-President, International Participants and President of the Expo Schools Programme, to name but a few opportunities. Feelings of pride in taking leading roles in this mega project were expressed, dispelling misconceptions about the role of women in the region and the leadership's belief in their capabilities (Nag, 2019). Ainane et al's. (2019) research found women working in the oil industry, despite harsh working conditions, challenging work schedules, living arrangements and family obligations. Attitudes towards women in the UAE, (from both men and women) employed in the oil industry, were found to be positive in this study. However, beliefs that occupations in gas and oil are more suited to men than women still prevail, as evident in this Al Khoori and Abbas' (2011) work.

Research on women employed as faculty in academia in higher education, in the Middle East (and other parts of the world), revealed another finding. Ensour et al. (2017) found women in larger numbers at lower-ranking faculty positions in academia, than their male counterparts in the Middle East. Additional research found female academics experienced a lack of workplace support pertaining to childcare provision, vocational training, and informal networking (Zulu, 2013). Hence women's employment in higher education in the Middle East has been, described as stratified both horizontally and vertically (Mazawi, 1999). Horizontally, because women tend to be employed in institutions (often institutions for women) in gendered positions or fields of study, and vertically because women's mobility and social opportunities are impeded in a male dominated society.

At the same time women are involved in national and local politics; they are a part of the consultative parliamentary body called the National Council and make up twenty-seven per cent of the current cabinet with ministerial roles (United Arab Emirates Gender Balance Council, 2020). Women are presented with opportunities to be involved in the UAE workforce. Even though employment is not the focus of my research, it contextualises the new opportunities available for women in the changing context of the UAE.

2.2.3 ATTITUDES ABOUT THE ROLE OF WOMEN AND CAREER CHOICES

Closely associated with Emirati women working, is the attitude of both men and women about the role of women in society (Alibeli, 2015). Chafetz (1990) argued that the perception of women in society is the sum product of the structure of gender inequality in that society. Associated with this is the gendered division of labour which impacts gender inequality. According to this perspective, the less the workforce participation of women the greater the gender inequality in the society. Conversely the greater the workforce participation of women, particularly in high-paying jobs, the lower the level of gender inequality (Chafetz, 1990). Today women in the UAE are employed in a range of roles, yet data shows many being employed in the government sector, in administrative roles or unemployed (Smith, 2020), see 2.2.2. According to Allan (2011) these roles link to behaviours exhibiting powerlessness, which are then used to reinforce negative stereotypes of women and work. This may be interpreted as women voluntarily endorsing gender roles in society, displaying attitudes and actions that confirm existing gender stereotypes and inequality. Gender inequality in the region has been attributed to Islamic tradition and Koranic teachings (Inglehart et al., 2003). Others blame oil-generated wealth, which despite promoting new opportunities, perpetuate the division of labour (Ross, 2008).

More traditional societies tended to show more traditional attitudes toward women e.g., Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Conversely relatively liberal societies e.g., Jordan, Lebanon and the UAE tended to demonstrate more tolerance. However, women's attitudes were more positive than their male counterparts. Gender segregated occupations such as teaching and nursing, can be seen positively in some respects, as it allows women to occupy their own spaces in the

world of work (Al-Ali et al., 2000), such roles have also been presented as suitable for Emirati women.

2.2.4 NEW ENTREPRENEURIAL OPPORTUNITIES, WORK AND THE FEMALE EXPERIENCE

Thompson-Whiteside, et.al. (2020) researched female entrepreneurs in the UAE and found women's engagement in entrepreneurial activity had increased from 0.2 to 1.4 per cent between 2006 and 2016. These new opportunities again appear positive, but the reality suggests something different. Limited employment opportunities may account for this increase, motivating women to start their own businesses and become entrepreneurs. However, these stories also reveal challenges and informal restrictions affecting their success. Attempts for independent economic activity are juxtaposed against social expectations and can invoke unfavourable attitudes towards women pursuing it (Zeidan & Bahrami, 2011). Menon (2003, as cited in Gallant & Pounder, 2008) suggests that the concept of working women is espoused, but not personalised to men's own wives and female family members. Working wives can bring into question the norm in society of men as providers for their families, and their inability to provide for them. The belief that men of particular social standing can provide high standards of living for the family, endorses the male role as the breadwinner and his wife as a non-working woman. Bibbo (2002) proposes that there is a need among Emirati men and women in the community to change perceptions of gender roles. Changes in perception would benefit both genders and society, allowing men and women to contribute both to the development of society and their personal development too.

Additionally, family pressure, emphasised by both religious and cultural responsibilities, requires women to fulfil their obligations at home, whether they are working or not (Gallant & Pounder, 2008). Concerns have been expressed that demands outside the home e.g., education or employment, will impact the quality of family life. Some women felt that they needed to compromise too much of their family life to engage in other activities, and that balance was an issue (Nazzah, 2004). According to Arabic tradition, women should not put their careers ahead of the family (Hijab, 1988). Cultural traditions suggest that women are

ultimately responsible for this area of life and embedded in this is the role and responsibility as mothers, wives, and homemakers (Goby & Erogul, 2011; Tlaiss, 2013). It has been argued that the new economic standing of the UAE has narrowed the gap of strict segregation of duties for men and women; however, women are still seen (as in many societies) as being responsible for the family and the home (Gallant & Pounder, 2008).

Economic competition on a global level on one hand, has impacted some of the constraints of religious, political, and cultural traditionalism and local beliefs regarding higher education availability and roles for women, but simultaneously traditional roles for women are still espoused e.g., the importance of the family and motherhood (Findlow, 2007).

2.2.5 EMPLOYED WOMEN'S VISIBILITY AND STATUS

However, the notable statistics of employment tell another story. Whilst the figures seem positive, embedded in them is another story of disproportionate unemployment for women in other sectors of society. High profile positions, such as involvement in politics, have been linked to foreign policy, focusing the intention on raising the status of the UAE and international prominence (Carvalho Pinto, 2019). This has been done by accentuating the leadership of the UAE within the Arab ranking (while not referencing the less favourable global ranking), and ascribing value to Emirati gender equality. Carvalho Pinto (2019) suggests that the narrative of the UAE overstates the positive features of the professional achievements of a small group of females in politics, while overlooking the other story. Through advertising and literature, the UAE calls attention to the success of this small group of Emirati women who are engaged in unconventional or high-profile decision-making positions, which induces a perception of societal progress and accomplishment. Differentiation in politics between nominated and elected bodies, and parliaments and consultative bodies reveals female participation in politics on a partial level. This is just one area in UAE policy where the country seeks to achieve regional and global visibility (Carvelho Pinto, 2019).

The focus on female success also serves to disassociate the UAE from other Arab countries and the 'homogenous Arab standards' of women's rights, which are not conveyed favourably. It has been argued that the UAE, despite not faring well in international indexes of women's rights, is able to use the limited data selectively to present status policies positively. Status is important in the relationship between countries; it contributes to the relationship in terms of what nation gets what, when and under what conditions; it is an important factor on the foreign policy stage (Wohlforth et al., 2017). It is an important source of 'soft' power that aids foreign policy objectives and endorses the government's domestic legitimacy. The UAE has chosen the progress of women as the vehicle to do this. It could be suggested that, in the current climate, women's rights would be an area of interest for all nations. The women highlighted in this signalling strategy are from a heterogenous group of intellectuals; highly qualified, with public profiles, from particular families, occupying high decision-making positions and employed in areas of work where traditionally males dominate. Women from the royal family, or high-profile families, who have been 'awarded' government portfolios in the political arena are evidence of this (Caravelho Pinto, 2019). Women involved in these positions make up a small sector of society. There is another sector of Emariti women who have a different narrative, whose stories my research explores.

2.2.6 OBSCURING REALITY IN EMPLOYMENT

Female labour force participation rate as discussed in 2.2.2 has decreased for women, and one possible reason attributed to this is that Emirati women prefer to work in the government sector, in specific positions, which have been saturated (Badam, 2018). There have been initiatives to encourage nationals to look wider for opportunities in the private sector. The statistics of female unemployment are common across many Arab societies and can be explained with reference to cultural norms and economic circumstances. In the Arab world (including the UAE), women's roles are defined with reference to the public and private sphere. For women who work in the UAE, the challenges identified showed that women in their careers face, unfavourable policies, work and family conflicts, and lack of support, causing them to navigate their careers through a sub-text of deep rooted social and cultural values (Marmenout & Lirio, 2014). This is not exclusive to the UAE but found globally, in and

out of the workplace (Miller et al., 2017). Female employment is not seen as essential or desirable (by some families) and the outlook may vary with the socio-economic status of the family. Often it is seen as complementary to the household's budget – at worse as a distraction from family responsibility (Marmenout & Lirio, 2014). On closer analysis, the opportunities which appear to exist for women reveal something different.

2.3 FACTORS AFFECTING WOMEN'S CHOICES IN THE UAE: PATRIARCHY

The Emirati family was and remains patriarchal (Al Obeidli, 2020). My participants were part of a patriarchal society where males hold primary power in roles of political leadership, authority, and control of property (Hunnicutt, 2009). The term patriarchy is socio-political, based on a mode of economic organisation with a specific value system and forms of discourse and practice where the males are dominant (Barakat, 1985). Some go as far as to say that 'it is a system of social structures and practices in which men oppress, exploit and control women' (Walby, 1996, p. 21). Lerner (1986) deems it to be the demonstration and internalisation of male dominance, where men dominate women in the public and private domains of society. It is a pervasive and powerful system, found not just in the UAE but in both traditional and modern societies (Habiba et al., 2016). Patriarchy is a system of practices, reinforced through different social structures e.g., family, community, and politics, and at different levels of society they portray gender roles in specific ways. Patriarchy is taught and transmitted through socialisation (Johnson, 2005). This is evident where males hold responsibility for the family, exerting authority and power within the family structure, which is then transmitted to the next generation. Patriarchy as defined above is manifest in the public and private domain. Sharabi (1991) in his work focused on patriarchal culture in the public domain, in the Arab world. According to him, patriarchy has evolved into neo-patriarchy, where societies change but continue to be authoritarian. This debate highlights that patriarchy is not defunct or a static phenomenon; it moves, transforms, and is modified over time through different mediums and in different contexts (Habiba et al., 2016). In this modified version of patriarchy, where patriarchy is still evident even though its form may have changed according to the circumstances, the society remains patriarchal. With the changes in UAE society: the influx of oil wealth, the movement of sectors of the population from rural to

urban areas for employment, increased educational and employment opportunities for women, society appears to have changed but, according to Sharabi (1988), the structure of the society has not changed fundamentally, what exists is 'neopatriarchy'. Women in the UAE have been and continue to be governed by patriarchal structures.

Patriarchy in the private domain i.e., in homes and local communities, impacts the public domain i.e., wider society and vice versa. Emirati women wanting to study and work in the UAE, with the support of government directives and incentives, are influenced by traditions and family expectations (Gallant & Pounder, 2008). The role of family, traditional societal values and strongly held beliefs, impact decision making for women, in their education and career choices and employment decisions also. There are specific professions which are regarded as unsuitable for Emirati women e.g., sales, front office hotel work, and male dominated environments e.g., motor mechanic. Patriarchal values influence female career choices, and decisions will often be the result of careful negotiations with family (Howe-Walsh et al., 2020). Some women are encouraged to pursue careers (preceded by their studies) that are perceived to be more suitable for women. In these cases, Emirati women 'choose' to work in female dominated sectors such as teaching, the civil service, and the police force (behind the scenes), deemed as culturally appropriate and acceptable (Rutledge et al., 2014). Limitations on career choices may affect the relatively low levels of female participation in the labour force, as they would possibly prefer to be employed in different sectors, so make the decision not to work (Gallant & Pounder, 2008). Itani et al., (2011) assert that female employment outside the home is still unusual for many. For families or men in the family, that accept women working outside the home, working in an environment with other men may be problematic. Exposure to men may be seen as harmful to the women's reputation. For this reason, efforts to keep men and women separate may impact work opportunities, leading to difficulties in women fulfilling job responsibilities (Thompson-Whiteside et al., 2020).

2.3.1 THE IMPACT OF HIGHER EDUCATION: SELF-AUTONOMY AND DECISION MAKING

Improved higher education opportunities for women in the region, has to some extent impacted personal development, self-autonomy, and independence (El-Halawany, 2009). The

study in Egypt found evidence to suggest that self-autonomy, both in working outside the home and within the home, was an outcome of higher educational experiences. Women in the study listed the positive effects of education as self-autonomy, empowerment and gender equality pertaining to decision-making at home. There was evidence to show that educated women were able to make decisions generally, more readily and were also able to make decision about future spouses (Morgan et.al., 2002). Eighty-four per cent of employed graduates, and fifty-two per cent of women working at home said higher education had made a difference for them as women, even with gender stereotypes found within the culture (Morgan et.al., 2002).

Additionally, Findlow (2013)'s work in the UAE highlighted that woman were not choosing to study for employment or financial reasons, but for keeping their 'options open' and as an opportunity for self- discovery. The findings also revealed that women wanted an education and were not willing to allow men to hamper their aspirations. The link with feminist thinking and subverting traditional practices, was evident here. In a similar vein Tyrer and Ahmad's work (2006) set in the UK, explored how Muslim women through their participation in university, challenged dominant stereotypes found in literature and institutions. The evidence revealed ways in which female Muslim students centred their own agency and resisted institutionalised discourses that worked against them. Women demonstrated strength and determination to challenge institutional norms.

2.4 SUMMARY: EDUCATION AND EMIRATI WOMEN

This is the context in which my female participants are making choices regarding their education and future. Their stories and experiences are set amidst the changing context of the UAE, with findings that mirror continuity and consistency of traditional norms in education and employment. The discussion highlights research conducted regarding women in education and employment (often the two areas are linked, but the findings are distinct even though there are overlaps), however the detail of lived experiences of women on their educational trajectories is missing.

My position as a critical feminist, interested in the female lived experiences, in a society which prioritizes the male perspective, guided me to explore different realities and stories of gender issues and challenges. Experiences of the women embedded in a patriarchal society are explored, helping to better understand their realities and whilst on their educational trajectories. Believing in equality for all is to be celebrated, and as a woman, championing the cause of other women is my personal commitment. A common assertion is that access to education for girls and women addresses issues of inequality and injustice, but the matter is not so simple (Carvalho & Evans, 2022). Social justice for women is a complex concept that refers to notions of power and degrees within it (Zuhur, 2014). Like Read and Oselin (2014) I believe that education of itself does not equalize gender power dynamics but tends to reproduce patriarchal gender relations. However, the deeper impact of changing laws and policies, may be evident on a personal level; equality is not a given.

Women today are attending colleges and universities and graduating with a range of qualifications. They are choosing to have careers alongside marriage and families. However, these changes vary between communities and families. Traditions, culture, and religion are important in the UAE and contribute to the tension between societal norms and individual freedoms. Women make choices about careers and work; whether to work, where to work and the focus they will give to work. Sandberg (2013) asserts that fear is at the root of many of the choices women make: of making the wrong choices, of being over ambitious, of not being liked, of disrespecting family traditions, of being judged, of failure and the ultimate fear is fear of being a bad wife, mother, or daughter. This fear is not simply linked to career choices, but to choices from childhood upwards, embedded in cultural norms. I suggest that some Emirati women may not engage in their preferred programmes of study or pursue careers for themselves, as they are fearful, unable or unwilling to challenge the status quo in society, but there are some women who will, publicly or personally.

In the UAE values are changing and traditional values and strongly held beliefs, which impacted Emirati women's participation in the labour force, are shifting. New opportunities have been presented but have not been accessible for all. Female literacy rates have improved, women participate in large numbers in higher education; however, as discussed, this does not necessarily translate into employment or other opportunities. Despite the policies of the government and initiatives to encourage women to work, Emirati women are not participating in the workforce in large numbers or using their educational qualifications visibly. As discussed, there are several barriers to obtaining and sustaining employment. Patriarchy at both levels, in the public and private domains, impact women's experiences and choices. New laws and government directives may lead to changes in the public domain and women may be encouraged to participate in education and employment, but the choices may be restricted due to cultural expectations. Educational opportunities are available, which may or may not be linked to employment. I would argue more importantly, the opportunity for women to be immersed in settings which develop thinking and questioning taken for granted assumptions, leading to change and transformative learning and then to personal emancipation, is a positive aspect of the new opportunities presented.

The other story of women educated at different levels e.g., diploma level and in different ways e.g., vocational education, needs to be told, alongside highly successful Emirati women. Research which uncovers the experiences and trajectories of women from diverse backgrounds, with different abilities, needs to be brought into the public domain. I believe education is not simply about work and equipping individuals for the workforce, which will be discussed in the following section, but more about participation in society and producing thinking women.

2.5 VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

2.5.1 INTRODUCTION

An ongoing global discussion has concerned the need to equip sectors of the workforce with practical skills for economic growth through targeted training. Vocational education aims to

equip individuals with the necessary skills for industry (Henderson & Willis, 2000). Traditionally it has been associated with practical, hands-on occupations such as plumbing, carpentry, childcare and so on, but it also includes teaching, nursing, engineering, and other professions. A broader definition of vocational education identifies it as the development of practical skills, behaviours, comprehension, and knowledge needed for specific jobs (Majumdar, 2011). This emphasis on employment and providing personnel for specific sectors of the market intentionally, is seen as problematic for some (Anderson, 2006, as cited in McGrath, 2007). Vocational education can be organised and implemented in several ways; the provision is varied. It may take place as: part of compulsory schooling, classroom-based instruction with placements in the workplace, workplace-based learning with minimal classroom-based learning, part of higher education institutions, specialist vocational colleges and training in the field (Billett, 2013). The concept of learning occurring in a formal setting is frequently associated with higher order learning. This will be explored in the following section, which examines vocational vs academic education. Vocational education provides a different way of learning for different types of learners, with an emphasis on skill acquisition leading to expected employment. However, unexpected outcomes not necessarily linked to employment are evident in my research, with an emphasis on wider learning e.g., questioning beliefs and formulating new, personal ones independently. I will explore vocational education in the next section, as the classroom assistant course was categorized in this way.

2.6 STATUS: VOCATIONAL AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Billett (2020) highlights the perceived low standing of vocational education compared with other educational sectors, in both developed and developing countries. The consequences of this are profound, shaping government, industry, community views, engagement, and participation (Billett, 2020). Vocational education has historically been presented as inferior to higher education programmes (Bird, 1997). The relationship between occupations and vocational and academic education is still prominent, academic qualifications being promoted as more desirable than their counterpart in the USA (Wonacott, 2000). Additionally, Haybi-Barak and Shoshana (2020) go further in the distinction between academic and formal education, drawing out the difference between vocational and technological education.

Technological education represents modern and emerging forms of work that are high status, in contrast to vocational education that is associated with practical skills and awarded lower status. This dichotomy of academic and vocational education is a misnomer, as all forms of education prepare students for the world of work in some way (Tanner & Tanner, 1980). Billett (2013) presents the similarity between them: they both lead to occupations which require specific content knowledge. Decision makers added to the debate by defining the 'standing' of occupations, and their preparation (Billett, 2020).

A common belief is that students on vocational programmes are unable to study at degree level, or are potential dropouts, or students with special needs (Stone, 1993). In some parts of the world, post-secondary vocational courses are not considered as attractive as their academic counterpart. Aakong (2020, as cited in Billett, 2020) suggests that this current generation of young people differ from the previous generations regarding selecting areas of employment, as material considerations and a desire for self-realisation underpin their educational selection. Differentiation in educational provision is recognised as necessary, however the status awarded to the different provision varies. In some parts of the world differentiation in provision of educational offerings with equal status is viewed positively (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008), as opposed to a hierarchical model, where vocational education sits at the bottom. Attempts have been made recently to recognise and present the academic and vocational pathways in the UAE as different but equally necessary, in the Qualifications Framework (QFEmirates in Higher Education, 2019).

2.6.1 VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN THE UAE – HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

As discussed in chapter one, the UAE is committed to the development of education. The Ministry of Education has the responsibility for overseeing educational provision, including schools, colleges, universities, and vocational programmes, and has worked with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in developing secondary, technical, and higher education (Wilkins, 2001). Since the establishment of the first university in the 1970's and the growth of higher education institutions, the provision of adult education has expanded. However, by the mid-1980's it was clear that graduates were not equipped

with the type of skills and knowledge demanded by industry. Vocational schools were then established by the British in the 1960s because of this (Hamdan, 2013).

Over the past two decades the Abu Dhabi government has set up a number of initiatives, promoting and providing a range of vocational opportunities for the development of skills for the workplace (Al Hammadi & Mohiuddin, 2017). Opportunities for vocational education and training are offered through various routes and institutions, such as: 1) Abu Dhabi vocational education and Training Institute (ADVETI); 2) Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT); 3) Abu Dhabi Polytechnic (AD Poly); 4) The National Institute for vocational education (NIVE), to name but a few institutions. However, smaller numbers were enrolling in these programmes as there were disparities in salaries between graduates from academic programmes and those from vocational programmes. Attempts have been made to redress the balance through the recent national strategy promoting vocational course and employment (Al Hammadi & Mohiuddin, 2015). My research was conducted in an academic institution, with participants who were registered on a new vocational course. Despite the focus of the programme being an entry point for work, the course offered opportunities beyond work, and provided the participants with experiences allowing them to question and explore assumptions and expectations pertaining to themselves, the world of work and their futures. Assumptions that they would qualify and automatically be employed in newly created positions, were questioned by some of my participants. Evidence of decisions which were not expected, such as not working as a classroom assistant or in a related field, but other areas, revealed that the learning that took place that went deeper than job roles; personal emancipation and changing beliefs were notable outcomes

In the next section I will discuss the provision of the classroom assistant programme, a vocational course designed for women at the HIEME.

2.6.2 WOMEN, VOCATIONAL EDUCATION, AND THE CLASSROOM ASSISTANT PROGRAMME

As discussed in 2.2.1., women in the UAE are engaged in further and higher education in large numbers. This increased steadily over the years (Al Hammadi & Mohiuddin, 2017), the adult literacy rate among women of fifty years and over is comparable and better than many developed and developing countries (Sumaya et al., 2014). However, the numbers enrolled on vocational programmes is much smaller, for reasons discussed earlier.

The classroom assistant programme was designed to meet a specific gap in the market, regarding learners in school with special educational needs. Consistent with the expansion of educational provision in the country, the UAE implemented a federal law in 2006 stating that educational opportunities were to be made available for children with learning challenges. The focus was that students with mild to moderate learning challenges be integrated into mainstream government schools with the learning support they required. For this initiative to be successful, classroom assistants would be required to support teachers with this additional responsibility, including working directly with learners with special needs. This inclusion strategy required trained classroom assistants to be effective. Emirati women would be educated and trained for this role (Gaad, 2015). The plan to employ Emirati women to meet this need was deemed ambitious in a society where many service jobs were traditionally done by non-nationals. Historically, expatriate workers were employed to care for children and those with special educational needs, both at home and school, without specific training. This sector of the expatriate workforce (referred to as migrant workers, due to their level of education), was employed in homes fulfilling a range of responsibilities (Sönmez et al., 2011). The government's decision to transfer educational learning support to national women was innovative. Some sectors of the population saw it as a contributory role in the educational future of the nation, others as an inappropriate role (as assistants) for national women (Gaad, 2015).

The role of the classroom assistant in the UAE is relatively new. In other parts of the world the role is established, and is an integral part of the education process, enhancing educational provision. The debate in the UK has gone as far to suggest that the roles and responsibility of

the classroom assistant could supersede that of the classroom teacher, (Balshaw, 2006). In Finland it was found that there were several different tasks and responsibilities expected of the classroom assistant, depending on what section of the school they were placed in i.e., with younger or older learners. The role involved working directly with learners, offering support and reinforcing taught content (Takala, 2007).

The classroom assistant programme, launched in the HIEME in September 2013, added a new dimension to the Education department, which previously consisted of preservice Emirati teachers. This new offering gave students who were not working at bachelor level (who would otherwise not have had access to the HIEME), the opportunity to continue their studies and gain a vocational qualification, and a pathway to further education. The programme was created and accredited by an examining board in Scotland. Its mission was 'to produce graduates with skills to work as entry-level classroom assistants in an educational environment' (Higher Colleges of Technology, 2016). It provided a range of courses, some general education e.g., English, Personal and Professional Development, and other more vocational courses specific to working with young learners – see 10.2. Like many vocational courses it provided work experience and classroom-based learning, with increasingly longer placements; this model of vocational education has been debated for some time, i.e., a combination of theoretical knowledge and practical skills where learners are given the opportunity to implement the theoretical knowledge they have acquired in the workplace (Wilkins, 2001). However, the focus of skill acquisition required for the job, though in line with the functionality of vocational education, did not pay attention to the process of change, based on the experience.

2.7 ENGLISH - THE MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION AT THE HIEME

The language of instruction at the HIEME was English, and the classroom assistant course was taught in English. This focus on English linguistic competency, combined with the development of educational skills, is an area of debate which challenges some learners (Gallagher, 2011).

At the time of my research, English was the medium of instruction at the HIEME; two out of the three federal institutions had this policy. The dominance of the English language is ongoing and raises issues in terms of the acquisition of skills in a second language. According to Crystal (2012), one in three people (at the time) of the world's population can communicate in English to a 'useful' level. The globalisation of English is increasing and although it brings opportunities, there are also concerns about the effect it can have on local languages and culture (Hopkyns, 2014). English in the education system is embraced in many countries and has become an important means of exclusion or inclusion from further education, employment, or social position (Pennycook, 2001). The mission of equipping all Emirati nationals with English language skills transforms the language competency from mono lingual to bilingualism and biliteracy (Gallagher, 2011). This initiative to equip all nationals with English language skills is powerful and forward thinking (as seen by some), the rationale being that English is the language of business and international communication (Sinclair, 2013). It is argued that promoting English in the UAE allows the country to keep abreast of global developments and be party to them. However, others present the importance of the Arabic language, which was declared the official language of federal establishments in 2008, as important in bolstering cultural and linguistic security (Al Baik, 2008, as cited in Badry, 2011). Student's English language level was found to have a positive impact on academic performance as researched by Harb and El-Shaarawi (2007). The women in my study had lower levels of English competency, which prevented them from entering the bachelor programme. Research shows that students with more advanced English language skills were found to have developed a better learning style, deeper understanding, and clearer self-expression (Peiperl &Trevelyan, 1997), however my findings reveal another reality.

Following on from this, language skills also affect employment prospects, particularly when businesses operate in English. At the HIEME where the study took place, English language competency was an entry requirement for course selection. This challenged my participants, who had registered for bachelor programmes but were unable to start, due to their language levels limiting the course options available to them.

2.8 VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND EMIRATISATION

Vocational education has been and continues to be one of the platforms for Emiratisation in the U.A.E (Gonzalez et al., 2008). Emiratisation is a government initiative to encourage employment of Emiratis in the public and private sector. It is a policy of positive discrimination, aimed at ensuring that the local population are employed. As part of Emiratisation, there is also the drive to ensure that nationals are suitably educated for different roles in the workplace (Sowa & de La Vega, 2008). The Emiratisation programme consists of quotas and incentives for the employment of Emirati men and women (Raven, 2011). It has been argued that these quotas may prove difficult to fulfil, considering the disparity between the population of nationals and non-nationals (Findlow, 2000). The majority of the labour force consists of non-nationals who may lose jobs as a result of Emiratisation (Schiphorst, 2004). Traditionally, Emirati women were keen to find employment in the government sector as it provided women with single sex working environments and higher salaries. However, this sector has been saturated and Emiratis are being encouraged to seek employment in the private sector, with a focus on profit and less emphasis on cultural traditions (Badam, 2018). Research has found that despite formal qualifications and training, many Emiratis were unemployed for extended periods for several reasons e.g., by choice, the inability to secure positions or the mismatch of skills to available positions (Haza, 2017).

2.9 SUMMARY: VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

This section of the literature review has discussed the position of women in the UAE, norms, traditions, and developments in vocational education in the country. Changes in society have been discussed on many levels: the discovery of oil, the new vision for the country including targets in healthcare and education, changes to the infrastructure and more engagement with global partners, evident in foreign policy. The changes have impacted the role of women and their contribution to the new society. Improved educational opportunities and employment possibilities have seemingly led to changes in cultural and traditional norms, however when

analysed closely the reality reveals that the new opportunities presented for women, particularly in employment are restricted. The system of patriarchy in the UAE, which impacted women's lives in the past and continues to influence them today, is a contextual factor which cannot be overlooked.

The expansion of educational opportunities (including vocational education) driven by the requirement of the labour market and the vision for the country has resulted in a more educated population. The benefits of vocational education and higher education have been presented as both being necessary and offering different ways of learning. The (then) new classroom assistant vocational programme, created in response to government legislation, offered new opportunities for women to work in schools. As part of the Emiratisation strategy, Emirati women have been offered educational opportunities to carry out this role. The participants in my study were a part of this initiative. Some were interested in employment opportunities as classroom assistants, while others registered on the course for other reasons. The classroom assistant foundation course, taught in English, raised concerns about learning new skills and content in a second language.

The next section of the literature review will present my chosen theoretical framework transformative learning theory. I used it as an analytical tool to frame my work and guide the analysis of my data.

3 TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

3.1 INTRODUCTION

3.1.1 THE RATIONALE FOR USING TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING THEORY

Transformative learning theory is used in education to explore the process of perspective transformation that occurs for (some) learners. The theory was developed by Mezirow in the context of adult education in the USA in the late 1970's, pertaining to the meaning making process of women returning to community college. Elements of the early research conducted by Mezirow draw parallels with my research. My participants were enrolled at an adult education institution and engaged in a formal programme of study, Mezirow's study was also set at an adult education institution, focusing on changing perspectives of women returning to studies after a long break. Findings from the original study pointed to women's experiences being used to construct new meaning and interpretation (Calleja, 2014).

Transformative learning theory was developed from a psychological perspective; however, I have used the theory from the sociological perspective to frame my work, focusing on the context and expected assumptions within the society and how my participants interacted within these contexts. I considered and read around several theories to underpin my research e.g., constructivism, feminism, experiential learning and transformative learning theory. However, when analysing my data and the changes which took place for my participants, I was prompted to further explore transformative learning theory, resulting in me using it to frame my work. Although the theory, and many subsequent research projects, focus on transformative learning and possible shifts in perspective through formal teaching, this study differs in its approach, my focus being on transformative learning without explicit transformative learning teaching strategies. My research presents learners who: (i) have had paradigm shifts resulting in perspective transformation or changes to points of view and/or (ii) experienced disorienting dilemmas, both inside and/or outside the classroom leading to changes in belief, without explicit teaching leading to these experiences. My findings also show that learners experienced change at different times, and that all learners will not

experience transformative learning i.e., perspective transformation as described by Mezirow (1991, 2000).

I have always believed that education leads to change in diverse ways, for all learners. My study has allowed me to explore this in more depth. I concur with Newman (2012) that educational experiences lead to development and change, but the opportunity to explore life experiences and the different dimensions of learning resulting in change excited me. I became interested in the concept of transformation in learning when I started teaching adults in 2002, as I observed change in some students' beliefs, perspectives, and practices, whilst teaching on the Bachelor of Education. I found myself asking whether adult education could be truly transformative and sustainable? This study will explore the concept of change in students' beliefs (or lack of it), how and when it happens and the result of it.

In recent times, both at my place of work and the wider context, the assessment of learning has focused on measurable academic standards with a focus on grades and/or 'value added' measures of academic progress (Liu, 2011). This emphasis on statistical data has led to less emphasis on personal stories of growth and development and lifelong learning. The focus on academic performance has been collated and used as measures for evaluation and competition among schools, colleges, and universities. The focus on summative assessments and the collection of data as indicators of learning, has taken centre stage (Hillocks, 2002; Fu, 2004). I would argue that statistical data is important to understand pupil performance, but this should not be seen in isolation; learning should not be confined to academic performance only. I believe the danger of focusing on assessment of learning (and not the holistic experience of the learner), fails to grasp the deeper experiences of learners and possibly shifting perspectives. Like Hoggan (2016) I am not drawing on a theory of transformative learning because I believe all learners are transformed in the same way during the learning experience, but because the analytic lens provided by the theory provides valuable illumination on important learning experiences of individuals.

3.1.2 TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING: AN OVERVIEW

My study is an exploration of adult learners' trajectories and experiences on a foundation course; their journeys of change and changing perspectives. Using transformative learning theory to frame my research, my findings revealed themes of questioning assumptions and expectations and finding new meanings for themselves. This is an important tenet of transformative learning theory, as it is of my findings. The concept of change, and the process involved, drew parallels with my findings.

Transformation (in the broader context) refers to change in form or appearance. Transformative learning however, developed by Mezirow, is more specific and he defines it as: 'The process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action.' (Mezirow (1996, p. 162). The process refers to the questioning, critiquing, and revision of beliefs, resulting in newly formed beliefs which are better suited to the individual. Transformative learning is dynamic, subjective, revealing, informative and life changing. It goes beyond the passivity of traditional learning, resulting in a paradigm shift, new mindsets, and new ways of being. It can also be a 'response to marginality' linked to the quest for freedom from coercive situations and emancipation (something welcomed by many learners) (Cranton, 2009). Mezirow, in his earlier work, referred to being 'caught' in our history, in assumptions that 'constrain' (Mezirow, 1981) and 'environmental forces that limit options' (Mezirow, 1991). The theory embodies perspective transformation, affecting points of views and world views. Brookfield (2000) uses strong language, describing transformative learning as 'epiphanic or apocalyptic, a cognitive event with a shift in the tectonic plates of one's assumptive clusters' (p. 139). Merriam et al, (2007) describe it as 'a dramatic, fundamental change' (p. 130). Transformative learning is embedded in change, based on a distinct shift from one form to another.

This description of transformative learning highlights the depth of the process resulting in a new understanding of 'something' for the learner, causing fundamental reorderings of the assumptions held about beliefs (Taylor, 2009). Clark (1993) contends that it shapes people, the transformation in them being recognisable both by themselves and others (Cranton &

Carusetta, 2004). At its heart, transformative learning engages the individual in a subjective, reflective process of learning about themselves from social interactions and contexts, resulting in a new way of being and a new way of seeing the world. The experiences of individuals, including paradigm shifts, changes to points of views and new world views (which will be discussed below) can be collected and documented, but ways of evaluating and measuring them are more challenging, making it difficult to quantify transformative learning. When experiencing transformative learning, learners tell new stories about 'the self', discarding the old and presenting a new perspective (Tennant, 2005). Received and personally constructed knowledge highlights the subjective component of transformative learning, as received knowledge is personalised by the individual (Newman, 2012).

Learning is not instantaneous – there are several factors which impact the process, but learning (as opposed to teaching) is more prone to happen over a period (Griffin, 2005), which therefore requires analysis over a period. Learning can be intentional or unintentional (Ball & Wells, 2008), planned or unplanned, leading to questioning previous learning which results in change. Mezirow, (1991), recognised that the process of transformative learning could be disjointed, individualistic, fluid, and/or recursive. Transformative learning is about freedom and a new way of being. Assumptions from cultural and contextual experiences are deeply ingrained; they are challenged through the process, and from this arises new understandings (Taylor & Cranton, 2012). The quest for liberation and emancipation is prominent in transformative learning. I will return to this point in 3.4.

Transformative learning theory states that the foundation of learning is experience which, in turn, leads to changes in a person's knowledge or behaviour (Mezirow, 1991, 2000). Adult learners have many experiences; they encounter them, reflect on them and construct new knowledge. This process is subjective and multifaceted (Merriam et al., 2007). How the world is seen, is a result of perceptions of personal experiences and the acceptance or questioning of them (Hoggan & Cranton, 2015). It is this examination and questioning of previous learning and knowledge that makes learning dynamic. Learning goes beyond accepting knowledge, norms, and expectations; it is the experience of engaging with previously taken for granted

assumptions, processing and revising understandings which inform subsequent decisions, actions, and world views (Wilcox, 2009). Kegan (2000) draws a distinction in learning, between cognition i.e., what we know, and metacognition i.e., how we know what we know. The learner gains knowledge and an awareness of how they acquired that knowledge, concurrently. Transformative learning sits within both the ontological sphere i.e., how we know what we know, and the epistemological sphere i.e., what knowledge we have. The two spheres intersect in the construction of new knowledge and new views (Lange, 2004, as cited in Taylor, 2007).

3.1.3 LEARNING, CHANGE AND TRANSFORMATION

Education is frequently discussed in terms of change and/or transformation. Some learners experience significant changes on their educational journey e.g., acquiring new knowledge and skills and changes in attitude, whilst others do so to a lesser degree. What distinguishes transformative learning from change, as identified by Mezirow (1991, 2000) is a paradigm shift resulting in a new worldview. This refers to changing broad beliefs that have been unconsciously acquired, resulting in new ways of defining the world. However, the everyday use of the terms transformation and learning have come to have overlapping meanings; learning can be said to have a transformative effect on the learner, in the same way that transformation creates learning and change (Howie & Bagnall, 2013). 'Transformative' (in terms of learning) can be used as an adjective, however, in transformative learning theory it goes beyond the simple concept of change – it results in paradigm shifts.

An ongoing discussion proposes that 'good' learning is synonymous with growth and change (Newman, 2012), and should not be presented as something unusual; development and change are outcomes of education. Howie and Bagnall (2013) suggest that learning which results in a more informed, nuanced, understanding of something such as an idea, an assumption or an educational practice is not sufficient to be described as transformative learning. Mezirow (1990) posits that, although all learning is change, not all change is transformative, advocating that change is inevitable, but transformative learning goes beyond change. Kegan (2000, as cited in Newman, 2012) on the other hand suggests that 'there needs

to be an epistemological narrowing of the way 'transformative' is used, as many use it as a synonym for learning' (p.48). Newman (2012) accepts that changes within the human experience are normal. The belief that people are transformed is a misnomer for him, as there is no evidence of a metamorphosis. He contends that it is not acceptable to assume that people have undergone a change or transformation of any description; because they merely say so, the validity of their subjective experience is called into question. However, paradigm shifts as described by Mezirow (1991, 2000) result in new ways of seeing things, new beliefs, and new ways of being. It alters the individual's way of living and being, it goes beyond expected or minor changes, it is evident in lived reality. I believe that shifts are personal, and can be major or minor, resulting in new points of view in specific areas of life or changes to worldviews on a broader scale. This will be investigated through my research. The complexity of the process is endorsed; learning is not straightforward, linear, or definite. It is chaotic, intricate, and difficult.

In the next section I will introduce transformative learning theory and the key components of it.

3.2 TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING THEORY

Mezirow developed his theory, based on his research in 1978. By engaging in dialogue and debate with other educational theorists, he refined and revised the theory. Since then, it has evolved into 'a complex description of how learners construe, validate and reformulate the meaning of their experience' (Cranton, 1994, p. 8). Mezirow describes the theory in this way:

> '…the process of deep, constructive adult learning, that supports ways in which learners consciously make meaning of their lives. It is a reflective and conscious learning experience which moves learners from unquestioning acceptance to a critical awareness and assessment of their relevance for making an interpretation' (Mezirow, 2000, p. 198).

Transformative learning leads to shifts in thought, feeling, perspective, belief, and behaviour. It is the awareness of tacit assumptions and expectations, assessing the relevance and making shifts that alter the individual's way of being in the world. According to Taylor (2008) there is a drive among humans to make meaning of their lives and their purpose, which can lead to questioning assumptions and changes to perspectives. Mezirow, (2000), states that individuals need to learn 'how to negotiate and act upon … purposes, values, feelings, and meanings rather than those uncritically assimilated from others' (p .8). In transformative learning theory, the individual works towards making informed decisions and developing more reliable beliefs than those inherited and constructing new and revised interpretations of meaning of experience (Taylor & Cranton (2012). In summary, transformative learning is about seeing oneself differently, in relation to the world (Apte, 2009).

3.2.1 TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING AND CONSTRUCTIVISM

Transformative learning is based on constructivist assumptions, which suggest that the way learners interpret and reinterpret their reality is central to making meaning and learning. Meaning is constructed from experiences and perception of those experiences; present and future experiences are seen through the experiences of the past (Fenwick, 2000). Learning, according to the theory, occurs when an alternative perspective calls into question a previously held perspective. Mezirow (1991, 2000) depicts this as a rational experience, but other theorists define it differently; intuitively, imaginatively, individualistic, relationally, related to social change or spiritually; these are but a few ways of understanding experience and the process of learning (Taylor & Cranton 2012). Despite the different interpretations of the theory, the construction of meaning from experience still applies. Meaning does not exist as an absolute truth outside of the individual (Taylor & Cranton, 2012).

Constructivist theory highlights the importance of individuals' experience and subjective interpretation in building knowledge. Knowledge is actively constructed; it is subjective and equated with the individuals' truth (Fosnot & Perry, 1996). While reality exists separate from experience, it is through experiencing reality that personal knowledge is constructed. It runs

counter to the belief that there is only objective knowledge or truth, and only one way of knowing. The acceptance of subjective knowledge and other ways of knowing creates space and voice for those who have been silenced or marginalised, encouraging alternative perspectives. According to constructivists, the world is independent of human minds, but knowledge about the world is a human and social construction (Crotty, 2012). I do not believe that humans are independent from knowledge creation, but are integrally connected to reality in their perception, interpretation, and actions. My participants have their own story, actions, and reactions to the reality they have been presented with at college and beyond. When individuals encounter something new, they reconcile it with previous ideas and experiences and fit it into existing schema.

Rorty (1989, as cited in Eschenbacher, 2019) expands the concept of transformative learning, stressing the freedom humans have to create new ways of looking at the world and of being in the world – he coins the phrase 'vocabularies' and the opportunity individuals have to create new vocabularies. Older, entrenched 'vocabularies' can be played off against new ones, resulting in transformation. The question is whether these new ways of thinking, or new vocabularies, involve individuals taking control of their lives or merely being directed by someone else's agenda? Has the individual exercised independent judgement, or has the shift in vocabularies been guided by 'following' the lead of others uncritically?

Transformative learning provides learners with the opportunity to 'reconsider the ways they make sense of the world, revise understanding and inform subsequent decisions made and actions' (Wilcox 2009, p. 124). Mezirow (1991) describes how habitual expectations and perceptions that individuals hold from a number of sources or experiences e.g., community, culture and the social world, can be accepted unquestionably. These uncritically assimilated perceptions guide life decisions and actions. The theory suggests that when individuals encounter a situation that is not congruent with expectations, they may question or reject the perspective which 'was', and are then open to new possibilities (Mezirow, 1991, 2000; DeCapua et al., 2018). The theory then outlines how individuals move to change their perspectives i.e., their beliefs and attitudes, through critical reflection and discourse.

When transformative learning is used in adult education, debates regarding the role of educators has been the subject of much discussion (Apte, 2009; Yeong, 2012; Taylor, 2009). Mezirow believed that the transformative learning process could be designed into educational experiences. Imel (1998) disagreed on the intentionality of teaching for transformation and highlighted that valuable learning experiences occur spontaneously. Formally planned teaching to foster transformative learning does not always result in the desired outcomes (Heilman & Clarke, 2016). Learning that challenges what students know and use, can occur inside and outside the classroom and is not restricted to a specific discipline; it is more of an approach to teaching and learning (Cranton, 2009). According to Christie et al. (2015), transformative learning whether or not it is planned for, it helps individuals critique their own thought processes, points of view and the fields that shape them e.g., family, friends, media, and educational institutions. I believe this process can take place with or without an educator, as individuals can ask questions of their situation without being directed to do so, but findings confirm this.

Criticisms of the term 'transformative' learning has caused academic dissent e.g., the term, its interpretation and use (Kokkos, 2010). It has been argued that even with definitions and processes presented, the concept is still open to interpretation, making it elusive, and all things to all people. This 'unboundedness' is evident in the multiplicity of outcomes which have been identified as transformative (Howie & Bagnall, 2013). The theory has also been described as weak, as it fails to draw attention to the steps people take to know what they know and tends to focus on the end point (Belenky & Stanton, 2000). Others have criticised the theory as being too narrow, as it is still based on the centrality of rationality in learning (Cranton, 2006; Taylor, 1998), despite efforts being made to recognise and incorporate different ways of learning. Boyd (1998, as cited in Imel, 1998) believed emotional/kinesthetic experiences, rather than rationality, were major catalysts for change.

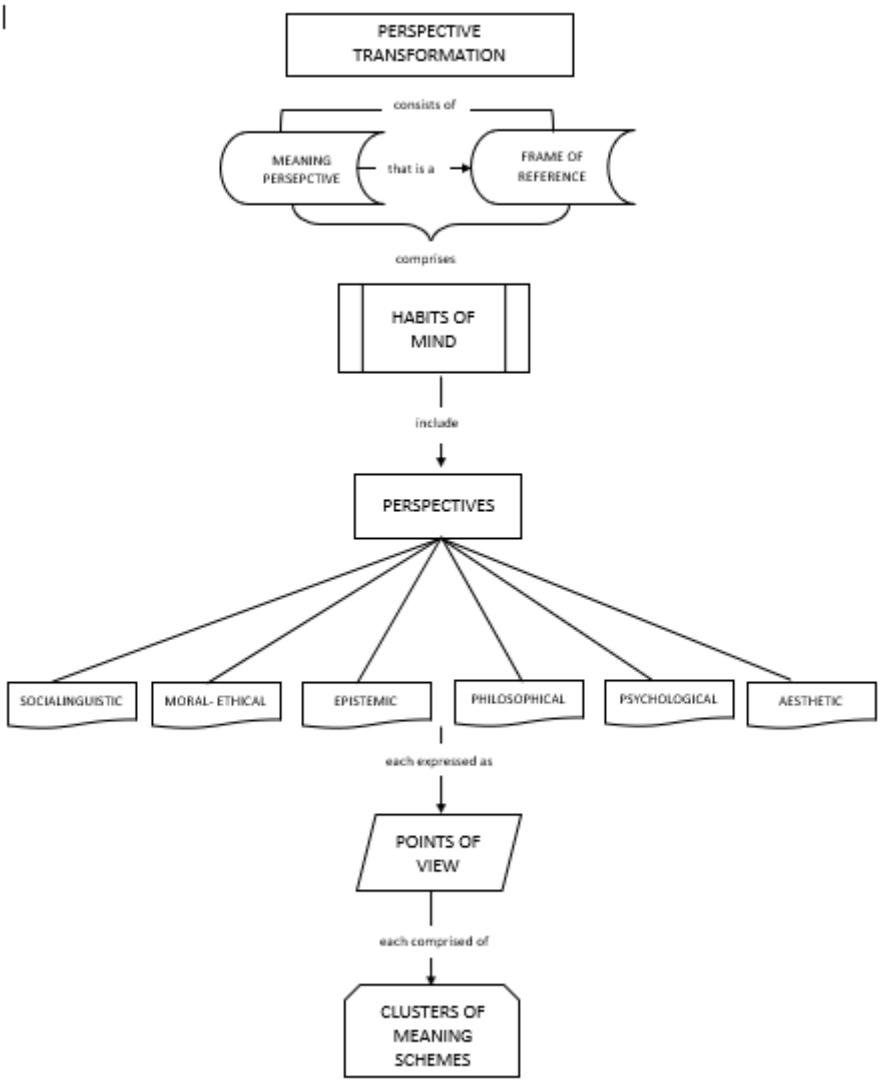
I have come to understand that no theory is perfect. Aspects of the theory may need reworking, there may be gaps and omissions, even possibly aspects which could be omitted, but the value in transformative learning theory is that it is beneficial as a tool to explore the learning experience. The theory highlights both change and transformative, resulting in new beliefs, values and behaviours. This, I believe, is a very important aspect of learning, and is not confined to academic knowledge acquisition. The theory presents aspects of change and transformation. My findings drew some parallels with the original theory, but also highlighted differences which will be discussed in the chapters six and seven. The complexity of perspective transformation, habits of mind and frames of reference help in some respect to understand the construction of values, perception, behaviours, and attitudes, but such detail of the process is not required for my study, as the sociological dimension of learning and change is my focus. The omission of contextual factors which help to position the learning experience will be discussed in chapter eight, and the importance of this in my findings.

In the next section I present the key components, giving an overview of the theory, paying attention to disorienting dilemmas and points of view in more detail, as they relate to my sub research questions and findings.

3.3 KEY CONCEPTS IN TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING THEORY

The terms defined below are the latest in the evolution of the theory**.** The diagram below presents the key features of transformative learning theory and how the concepts relate. As discussed above, the theory is based on a psychological perspective, but I have approached it from a sociological perspective. The theory has many facets; the key components will be explained succinctly, with an emphasis on the frames of reference and habits of mind which incorporate my research questions pertaining to disorienting dilemmas and changing points of view. See figure 2 for the main concepts of the theory.

Figure 2: Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory



Note: From World Education News and Review. (2018, August 10). *Education system profiles: Education in the UAE.* https://wenr.wes.org/2018/08/education-in-the-united-arab-emirates

3.3.1 PERSPECTIVE TRANSFORMATION

A key term in transformative learning is perspective transformation i.e., a change in the individuals meaning perspective or frame of reference. It is the ultimate outcome of the transformative learning process. It is described by Mezirow (1991) as:

> 'The process of becoming critically aware of how and why our presuppositions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; of formulating these assumptions to permit a more inclusive, discriminating, permeable and integrative perspective; and of making decisions or otherwise acting upon these new understandings' (p. 167).

Perspective transformation explains how adults view their meaning structures (Taylor, 1998) and address cultural assumptions critically. It highlights the process where individuals examine and question previous assumptions and make decisions to change them, resulting in a broad change. On the one hand, it can occur painlessly through an accumulation of transformations in meaning schemes or points of view (Mezirow, 1995) or, alternatively, it can be epochal and painful. This involves disorienting dilemmas, which are triggered by a life crisis or major life transition, perspective transformation and shifts to habits of mind do not occur frequently, according to the theory. My research explores both concepts: perspective transformation and on changes to points of view, which is the focus of my work.

3.3.2 FRAMES OF REFERENCE - HABITS OF MIND OF MIND AND POINTS OF VIEW

Frames of reference dictate how individuals see the world and interpret their personal experiences, based on cultural and psychological factors (Mezirow, 1997). It is said that frames of reference have cognitive dimensions referring to the mental process of acquiring knowledge, and affective dimensions referring to feelings, mood, and attitude. Frames of reference selectively filter perceptions. Individual's categorisation and interpretation of experiences, expectations, beliefs, and events involve assumptions and expectations, based on thoughts, feelings, and habits, and are encapsulated in frames of reference (Mezirow, 2009). Frames of reference are powerful and govern daily lives. It is through these assumptions that adults frame their beliefs about themselves and the meaning of life. They are based on deeply embedded and subconscious assumptions (Coryell, 2013). Individual

values and the sense of self are 'anchored' in frames of reference, providing the individual with stability, identity, community, and coherence, whether the frames are positive or negative. According to Mezirow (1991) frames of reference need to be transformed for perspective transformation to take place. This is where change or transformation are evident, according to the theory. Frames of reference have two dimensions: habits of mind and points of view.

Habits of mind are sets of assumptions which are broad generalisations, used as filters for interpreting the meaning of experience. They are habitual ways of thinking, feeling, acting and seeing, which emerge out of meaning perspective (Walker & Manyamba, 2020). Habits of mind build on cultural, social, educational and political codes (Mezirow, 1991). They determine a course of action that individuals adopt and follow, unless they are brought into question through critical reflection (Mezirow, 2000). These habits of mind were expanded (in later adaptations to the theory) to include a range of dimensions: sociolinguistic- related to language and how it is used in social settings; epistemic – related to knowledge and how a person uses knowledge; psychological- related to how people view themselves; aesthetic- related to values, taste, attitude, standards, judgments about beauty and the insight and authenticity of aesthetic expressions; moral-ethical – related to conscience and moral norms and values; and philosophical – related to religious doctrine and philosophy (Mezirow, 2000). Mezirow (2007) further expanded habits of the mind to include: learning styles related to sensory preferences, working alone or together, and focusing on concrete or abstract findings, and religion – related to doctrine, spiritual or transcendental world views; and health - related to ways of interpreting health problems. These distinct aspects combine to make up the whole person. Merriam et al. (2007), describe habits of mind in terms of cultural expectations, ethical values and moral behaviour gained from experiences which contribute to the individuals' self-perception. It is through questioning and critical reflection that habits of mind are accepted or rejected.

Habits of mind are expressed as specific points of view. Points of view are 'sets of immediate specific expectations, beliefs, feelings, attitudes and judgments' (Mezirow, 2000, p. 18), which

accompany and shape interpretations. Points of views affect how individuals behave, judge situations and attribute causality (Mezirow, 2007). The suggestion is, it is easier to change points of views - because they are conscious - through collaboration, feedback and critical reflection on a problem, or the process of problem-solving (Mezirow, 2000). My research will focus on my participants' stories, drawing attention to their points of views i.e., beliefs, feelings, attitudes and judgments, and the process of change.

In earlier developments of the theory, Mezirow (1991) focused on learning occurring through elaborating on existing frames of reference (or meaning perspectives) and learning new frames of reference and transforming habits of mind. However, he acknowledged that learning could also occur by transforming points of view (Mezirow, 2000) and included this in the revised theory. The four ways of learning he identified are as follows:

(i) Elaborating on existing frames (of reference) – i.e., expanding their 'world' view but not changing things fundamentally.

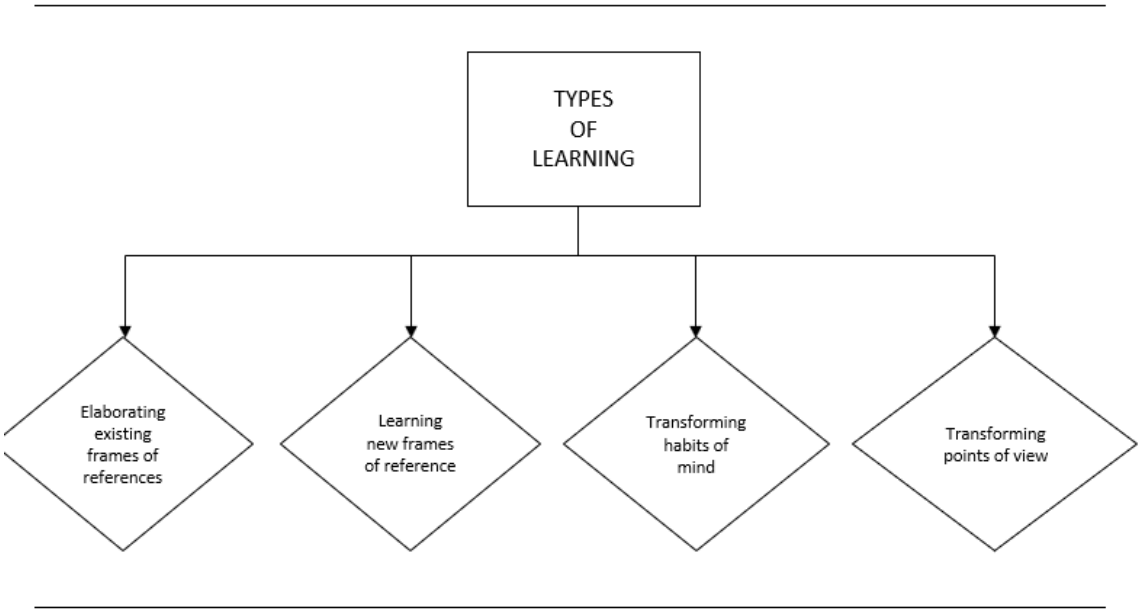
(ii) Learning new frames (of reference) - i.e., questioning existing frames of reference and replacing them with new beliefs and understanding.

(iii) Transforming habits of mind - i.e., changing broad generalisations which are used as filters for interpreting the meaning of experience.

(iv) Transforming points of view – i.e., changing the specific expectations, beliefs, attitudes and judgments.

The four types of learning can be represented in this way, as presented in figure 3.

Figure 3: Mezirow's Four Ways of Learning



Note: From World Education News and Review. (2018, August 10). *Education system profiles: Education in the UAE.* https://wenr.wes.org/2018/08/education-in-the-united-arab-emirates

Points of views are presented flexibly in the theory using the analogy of 'trying on another's point of view' (Mezirow, 2000, p. 21); this is depicted as possible as they are consciously constructed. It is more difficult (if not impossible with a habit of the mind) to try on, or experiment with them, as they are much broader, and awareness can be hidden (Mezirow, 2000). Points of view are intricately linked to meaning structures and meaning schemes. They are the presentation of concepts, beliefs, judgements, and feelings that filter and shape the interpretation of experiences (Mezirow, 2000). Individuals can critique their assumptions of childhood understandings and cultural assumptions, to understand whether what they understood is true. The understanding of past perspectives and the ability to consider and adopt new perspectives (including points of view), are an important aspect of transformative learning theory (Western Governors University, 2020).

Paradoxically, Mezirow's theory discusses in detail changes to habits of mind which are more difficult to change as they are subconscious and operate below the level of awareness, and pays less attention to transforming points of view, which are conscious and with a greater level of awareness. My research focuses on this area of transformative learning; as stated in the theory it is more commonly found, and my data substantiates this. It is another way in which perspective transformation can occur if there are several changing points of view. My findings did not reveal perspective. According to Mezirow's theory (2000), several conscious changes to specific points of view can impact habits of the mind (deeper levels of awareness) e.g., moral, ethical, philosophical, and psychological areas, resulting in changes to world view also.

3.3.3 MEANING PERSPECTIVES AND MEANING SCHEMES

Meaning perspectives (Mezirow, 2000) are the cognitive mechanisms through which learning takes place. They are the taken for granted ways of being in the world (Walker & Manyamba, 2020). Meaning perspectives are sets of habitual expectations, which act as 'perceptual and conceptual codes to form, limit and (can) distort' how individuals think and feel, filtering both perception and comprehension' (Heilman & Clarke, 2016, p.43). These expectations are the framing beliefs that permeate the individuals' overall worldview, influencing the understanding of experience (Nagata, 2006). A transformation in meaning perspectives is said to have occurred when a person has changed their view of the world and themselves (Kitchenham, 2008). World views are broad generalisations of how individuals see the world, and how the individual sees themselves. They are said to be acquired passively during childhood, through cultural assimilation and 'unreflected' interpretations (Heilman & Clarke, 2016). They operate as filters that determine how individuals organise and interpret their life experiences. Meaning perspectives can change and evolve in response to life experiences, especially life-changing events, and personal crises such as death of a loved one, divorce, health crisis, financial upheaval or unexpected job changes. However, others believe this is less likely to happen as perspectives become ingrained into the individual's thinking (Tsao et al., 2006).

Meaning schemes are evident in what the individuals see and how they see it; they are fixed ways of being and seeing, from the individual's meaning perspective (Walker & Manyamba, 2020). They are the collection of 'smaller components' including specific knowledge, concepts, beliefs, judgements, and feelings which shape interpretation (Mezirow, 1995). These concrete signs of habits and expectations shape specific behaviours and thoughts (Taylor, 1998). Meaning schemes refer to detailed beliefs about how something works and/or how to understand it. A few meaning schemes join to make the individuals' meaning perspective or habit of mind. They are based upon experiences that can be deconstructed and acted upon in a rational way (Taylor, 1998), and are produced as non-reflective interpretations (Nagata, 2006), and can change frequently and regularly (Taylor, 1998).

These are the core components of the theory. Other important elements are the phases of transformative learning, as part of the process of perspective transformation. These are presented below, as they incorporate disorienting dilemmas, which is another focus of my research.

3.3.4 MEZIROW'S TEN PHASES OF TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

While theories of transformative learning have evolved and progressed over time – the original tenets of the taxonomy still stand (Kitchenham, 2008). The essence of the theory has remained the same. Mezirow (1991) presents ten phases which are part of the transformative learning process, but also acknowledges that the process is not linear. The ten phases are below.

1. Experiencing a disorienting dilemma.

2. Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt or shame.

3. Critical assessment of assumptions.

4. Recognising that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared.

5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships and actions.

6. Planning a course of action.

7. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plan.

8. Provisionally trying out new roles.

9. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships.

10. Reintegrating into one's life based on the new perspective.

Mezirow (2000, p. 22).

The ten phases present the process of transformative learning as finite, with a 'starting' point and a 'finishing' point. Mezirow presents some flexibility in the explanation of the phases, stating that not all the phases needed to be experienced, and that they could be experienced in a different order, making the point that the process is fluid. However, the steps are presented in a sequential manner, which suggests an ordered interpretation of the learning process – a far cry from learning, which is fluid and unpredictable (Newman, 2012).

Phase one states that the transformation begins from the experience of a disorienting dilemma but as (Daloz, 2000) suggests, the change or shift may have been brewing' long before the 'disorienting dilemma'. There may even be several 'dilemmas' that occur before this possible life changing one, cumulating in the shift in perspective. In the second introspective phase, feelings of anger, fear and other emotions resulting from the disorienting dilemmas manifest and are recognised as the individual responds to the challenge. The third phase leads to reflection and the critical assessment of assumptions – this is said to be the essence of transformative learning, where the individual engages in deep, critical reflection of beliefs and assumption, rejecting what was, and coming to a new realisation and belief. Sharing this experience with others is the fourth phase. The fifth phase involves the exploration of options for new roles and actions for formulating a plan i.e., stage six. Phases seven, eight and nine entail acquiring knowledge and skills for the new role or way of being, which leads to the mastery of competence and confidence in the newly acquired roles. The final phase (which is the tenth) refers to the new perspective i.e., way of being, and the 're-integration' into everyday life (Peer, 2017). This phase does not account for the changes to

life which may have happened whilst this 'process' was ongoing. The term 'reintegration' implies an unchanged life that the learner re-enters but, due to the transformation, by definition life would be different, requiring adjustments on another level (Peer, 2017).

There have been adaptations and different applications of the Mezirow's ten phases of transformative learning. Nerstrom (2014) adapted and simplified Mezirow's phases, creating a simple model to guide the change process. This model focuses on four areas: (i) the experiences (including disorienting dilemmas) that form all learning; (ii) assumptions that are created from previous experiences and become values and beliefs; (iii) challenging perspectives based on new experiences (iv) transformative learning - adopting new beliefs and perspectives and acting on them, leading to openness of the process happening again. Nerstrom (2014) asserts that use of this model can begin at anyone of the four points but that the process is sequential, following the next point in the model. See figure 4.

Figure 4: Nerstrom's Transformative Learning Model

Experience. Experience is everything that has occurred in our lifetime. It is the impetus of our learning and belief patterns. Experience stems from our environment and interactions with others, from which learning- such as knowledge, skills, attitudes, and insights- occur.

Assumptions. From experience we form, receive, and construct assumptions that become our values and beliefs. They are the lens through which we view the world.

Challenge Perspectives. New experience, both cognitive and affective, combined with reflection, may lead us to challenge our deeply held assumptions and consider a new perspective.

Transformative Learning. Adopting and acting upon a new perspective, we view ourselves and others through a more encompassing lens. Transformative learning becomes a new experience leading to openness for it to occur again.

Note. From Nerstrom's transformative model, by N. Nerstrom, 2014, Adult Education Research Conference. South Caroline: USA. Retrieved from http://newprairiepress.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3329&context=aerc, p. 328.

This simplified version of Mezirow's ten phases of transformative learning, will be used to discuss my findings in chapters six and seven. Focusing on these components of the original theory, they closely align with: (1) experiencing a dilemma, (2) critical assessment of assumptions, (5) exploration of options for new roles, actions, and relationships and (10) reintegration into life based on the new perspective. The process of having experiences which cause individuals to question assumptions and beliefs and explore new options resulting in new beliefs and new ways of being, is prevalent in both Mezirow's theory and Nerstrom's model.

3.3.5 THE IMPORTANCE OF EXPERIENCE AND PROBLEMS IN RESEARCH

Merriam et al. (2007) categorised the ten phases into four components: (i) experience i.e., events that happen throughout life, which may act as catalysts for addressing taken for granted assumptions; (ii) critical reflection i.e., looking deeply at structures personally and/or through group discussions; (iii) discourse i.e., through debate and a conscious effort to build new understanding and perspectives; (iv) action i.e., acting on the new learning, which may be immediate, delayed, or a possible reaffirmation of an existing pattern of action. The concept of experience as identified by them is important, and my research hinges on it. Within transformative learning theory, learning is understood as the interpretation of experiences using prior knowledge (Mezirow, 2000). It is about recognising discrepancies in beliefs and assumptions and deciding what to do about them. There is an assumption implicit in transformative learning that individuals can make the best choice for themselves, resulting in 'better' outcomes than previously (Baptiste, 2008). Experiences form the basis for creating ideologies, beliefs, and values, creating the lens through which learners interpret and make sense of their world (Mezirow, 1991). Understanding and beliefs based on subjective experiences, according to Mezirow (2000), are more likely to be acceptable than those based on the understanding of others.

From experience individuals form and construct assumptions, becoming the lens through which, the world is viewed (Nerstrom, 2014). Experience has been defined in several ways; it has been simply described as everything that happens to the learner from birth to death, but in sociological terms it entails more than that. Jarvis (2004) defines it as the process of creating an understanding of a situation, involving participation and the accumulation of previous experiences, both conscious and unconscious. MacKeracher (2012) in her definition draws attention to the 'mind' element and sense making of these occurrences. It includes experiences of direct participation and experiences that learners are told about. Fenwick's (2000) comprehensive definition captures all the elements above:

> 'Experience embraces reflective as well as kinesthetic activity, conscious and unconscious dynamic, and all manner of interactions among subjects, texts and contexts' (p. 244-245).

These definitions highlight the conscious and subconscious element of experience, the individual's subjective understanding of it, and different degrees of participation. Cranton and Taylor (2012) summarise the range of experiences in the following ways: Past experiences that shape who we are and our meaning perspectives and habits of mind; cultural experience and/or social/historical experience that may be unarticulated, but still shape the meaning of perspectives; contextual experience, related to organisations, workplace and the nature of a job; discrepant experiences that contradict our past and cultural experiences that lead to reflection. Experience is a broad, personal, and multi-faceted concept, and with it arises challenges in research, which will be explored in the following section.

Transformative learning holds that the individuals' personal experience is of utmost importance. Cranton and Taylor (2012) endorse this:

> 'It is experience, particularly prior experience that is the primary medium of transformation, and it is the revision of the meaning of experience that is the essence of learning' (p. 35).

Transformative learning moves learners from a simple awareness of experiences to an understanding of the 'conditions,' and referring to prior learning, history, and traditions

(Cranton, 2006). Mezirow (2003) states that experience, alongside dialogue with the self and others, and self-reflection is part of examining assumptions, possibly leading to transformative learning. Experience is important in my research as it is these experiences which expectations and assumptions are built on. It is said that learning occurs by connecting new knowledge with knowledge and concepts already known, thereby constructing new meanings based on past experiences (National Research Council, 2000). Hence the importance of experiences.

Transformative learning theorists write about making meaning of experience, which is foundational for the understanding of the theory, but the concept is complex (Cranton & Taylor, 2012). Attempts to interpret the individuals' experiences can be problematic, as the interpretation and meaning attached are not necessarily straightforward. Merriam and Kim (2012) found that individuals can hold multiple and sometimes contradictory perspectives of an experience. Attempts to collect data about experiences can detach the experience from the context; this then detracts from the very understanding of the experience the researcher is attempting to understand (Cranton & Taylor, 2012). Collecting data in a particular way e.g., collecting stories retrospectively and using a qualitative research approach, allows for stories to be 'told', and this telling of the story may alter the meaning of the experiences. Clark and Wilson (1991) found that changes which occurred in society during the time the experiences were collected needed to be identified when interpreting the findings. If the context changes under which the data was collected, e.g., governance, new laws, legislation and so on, this could affect the interpretation of the data. As discussed in chapter two, the political context concerning women and their rights has changed (and continues to), which has impacted the participants' experiences and their stories. Additionally, not only is the context of the experience relevant, but also the personal and historical background of the individual (Cranton &Taylor, 2012). Experiences do not occur in isolation, and neither should they be interpreted in that way. The theory has failed to deal with context and relationships adequately. The context has been disregarded and the interaction minimised in the discussion of experiences. There is a suggestion that if certain features of the theory are undeveloped or incomplete, then applying it as such may lead to inconsistency and flawed conclusions (Taylor, 2007).

I will now turn to transformative learning and the phase of disorienting dilemmas as experience, as this is a focus in my research. This is important in my research, as disorienting dilemmas for some of my participants acted as the trigger to questioning personal situations and taken for granted assumptions.

3.3.6 DISORIENTING DILEMMAS AND THE CHALLENGES

Mezirow (1991, 2000) created the concept of 'disorienting dilemmas' to explain specific experiences that occur for the individual. According to the theory, disorienting dilemmas take place when meaning schemes are inadequate in explaining an experience or a new piece of information. The situation generates anxiety, which leads the individual to critical reflection and discourse, resulting in a shift in frames of reference, known as perspective transformation. Mezirow (1995) stated that disorienting dilemmas are triggered by life crises or major life transitions, which may result in transformations. Herbers and Mullins Nelson (2009) define it as 'any external event that causes a sense of internal imbalance and challenges an existing sense of meaning' (p. 8). It disorients or shakes the individual. The 'dilemma' occurs when reality does not align with expectations or prior meaning perspectives the individual held (Coke et al., 2015). Characteristically, it is perceived as a negative experience, which is the catalyst for positive outcomes. This dilemma can lead to an awareness of:

> 'Inconsistency among thoughts, feelings and actions', or a realisation that previous assumptions and approaches are no longer adequate, leading to feelings of disequilibrium' (Petersen, 2009, p. 102).

The experience illuminates and challenges previously invisible and unquestioned assumptions and impacts how the individual knows themselves and the world around them (Taylor & Elias, 2021). Experiences of this nature lead to questions and changes in how reality is understood.

Disorienting dilemmas, in whatever pretence they occur, are an important part of the change process. Daloz (2000) also proposed that transformative learning can occur without a life

crisis. He goes further and suggests that there may be several disorienting dilemmas which may even be unremembered, and which may have a cumulative effect over time. Smaller challenges are part of life, as are major crises; it is the whole range of learning in and through different experiences that contribute to human development and learning. Disorienting dilemmas as a construct in transformative learning can be problematic, as the definition is broad and encompasses a range of experiences; it is also treated differently by different theorists and researchers (Howie & Bagnall, 2013). The theory fails to trace the many steps of how people know what they know, before and after the disorienting dilemma (Howie & Bagnell, 2013). However, these factors do not render the concept meaningless. Taylor (1998) suggests that disorienting dilemmas can be a catalyst, setting the stage or creating a readiness for transformation. My participants' share experiences of disorienting dilemmas as part of their experiences.

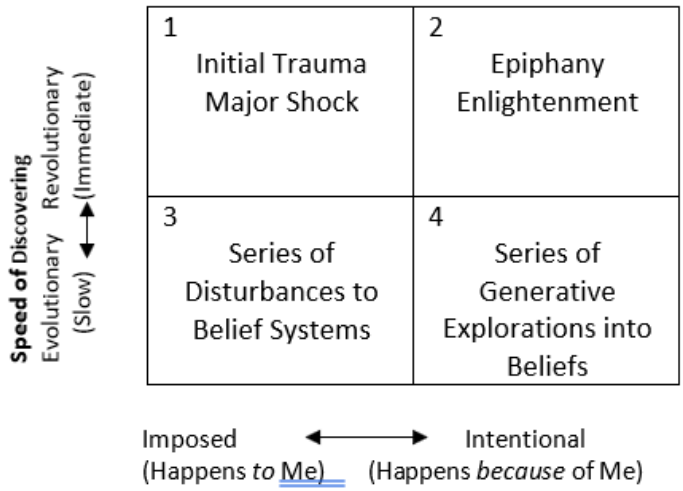
A circular causality resulting in a chicken or egg argument has been discussed as a weakness in the theory, where it is difficult to ascertain which occurrence comes first. Is it the dilemma or the openness/recognition of the dilemma which comes first (Howie & Bagnall, 2013)? They suggest that transformative learning as a deepening understanding of beliefs and self, acts as precursor for transformative learning, which means that transformative learning leads to transformative learning, making the concept tautological. If the individual does not possess or want an understanding of their beliefs or themselves, they will not be engaged in transformative learning.

Clark and Wilson (1991, cited in Herbers & Mullins Nelson, 2009) also recognised the occurrence of disorienting dilemmas, but alongside this they introduce the concept of an 'integrating circumstance'. While the disorienting dilemma is external and can be abrupt and painful, the integrating circumstance is internal, requiring introspection and reflection, as individuals search for and clarify past experiences. These 'integrating circumstances' provide a deeper understanding of the disorienting dilemma, acting as the catalyst for searching and finding 'sought after' pieces of their life. Clark and Wilson (1991) recognise that both the disorienting dilemma and integrating circumstance can be negative and positive, but that the outcome results in the restructuring of meaning and personal transformation (Duncan, 2011).

Brookfield (2000) also described a trigger event, which is confusing and discomforting, as the first phase of the transformational process. A trigger event could act as a prompt to initiate actions in a needed situation. Cranton (2006), like Mezirow, recognises that life events or crises may act as triggers for critical reflection.

Experiences are the bedrock of learning and knowledge creation, as discussed above, but the impact of 'bad' experiences or disorienting dilemmas has been found to be more significant in terms of deeper learning and life changing experiences. Merriam and Clark (1992, as cited in Merriam and Caffarella, 1999) found that learning happens when people are having positive experiences, but transformative learning was more likely to take place during the 'bad' times. In other words, the more challenging the experience is perceived to be for the learner, the more chance there is that the experience will result in learning that changes how the learner see themselves and behaves. My findings have supported this finding, that challenges acted as triggers for change. However, not all changes were triggered by negative experiences. This will be discussed in chapter seven. Kroth and Boverie (2009) build on the original concept of disorienting dilemmas and adapt it to the context of the workplace, presenting experiences from different viewpoints and adding (needed) detail to the occurrences. Like Mezirow (1991, 2000) they identify dilemmas, describing them as 'discoveries'. Kroth and Boverie (2009) create a four-quadrant model based on the impact of 'discoveries' or dilemmas. The 'discoveries' are described in different ways: they can cause initial shock, trauma, and pain, be imposed on the individual or happen to them; be revolutionary and intentional i.e., the individual puts themselves in a position which brings about the discovery; cause an epiphany and/or enlightenment; reveal a set of disturbances that affect beliefs and perspectives; and lead to exploration into beliefs or perspectives. These experiences can move the individual towards the search for meaning and new perspectives. See figure 5.

Figure 5: Kroth & Boverie's Discovery Model



Note. From Using the discovering model to facilitate transformational learning and career development, by M. Kroth & P. Boverie, 2009, Journal of Adult Education, 38(1), p.46.

This adaptation of Mezirow's theory provides more detail about the disorienting dilemma. It highlights two important aspects of why the dilemmas occurred: (i) i.e., they happen to the individual, or (ii) the individual made them happen, which emphasises individual causes to the dilemma. Additionally, this model identifies three actions following the initial shock of the dilemma: enlightment, disturbances to existing beliefs and exploration of these beliefs. This adaptation has been useful in analysing my data, providing a deeper frame for analysis than the original theory.

As identified by Mezirow (1991, 2000), disorienting dilemmas are an important phase of transformative learning. They may cause emotional distress and discomfort, and it is disconcerting to find beliefs and assumptions, which have been held for years, being challenged. This challenge could create resistance and impede learning and change (Mezirow, 2009). The response of an individual who is being challenged by their previous understanding may not be logical and rational, as presented by Mezirow (1991, 2000). When experiencing pain and discomfort (particularly at the time of the experience), individuals may not engage in reflection and discourse immediately; the negative emotional response may render them

incapable of acting. Roberts (2006) found that, in the context of classroom learning, when values, beliefs and assumptions that were held as 'sacred' were challenged, the individual became angry and defensive. This initial response did not elicit learning or a willingness to learn. Disorienting dilemmas, according to Taylor (2000) evoke every conceivable emotion – confusions, humiliation, shame, guilt, frustration and even possibly depression. It can also engender fear in individuals, as evidenced in Mezirow's original research. The act of challenging established perspectives is painful, since it questions deeply held values and could threaten the very sense of self (Mezirow, 1991). The dilemmas can lead to stress i.e., the non-specific physical response of the body to any demand placed on it, and anxiety (Roberts, 2006). This stress can be good and short term, providing the impetus to move forward and achieve goals, or it can be bad stress, known as distress, which can be debilitating, hinder progress and lead to illness. The presumption Mezirow makes is that disorienting dilemmas will cause positive stress and result in positive outcomes (Seyle,1974).

The emotional response, alongside the cognitive dimension of the process of reflection, was recognised and included later in the theory; it can facilitate or hinder the process of transformative learning. Cranton (1997) found that experiences in the learning process which are unexpected and difficult can cause confusion and possible withdrawal from the learning. This 'disconfirmation' identified by Taylor (2000) highlighted the discrepancy between the individuals' expectations and experience. Similarly, Brookfield (2000), describes a 'trigger' event that is perplexing or discomforting as the first of five stages of transformational change. According to transformative learning it is this uncomfortable, unexpected experience, found both in the formal learning context and beyond, which can lead to transformative learning.

Examining previously held beliefs and values requires willingness or motivation to do so; not all individuals will be open to this. Transformative learning says little about this premise, or the part that readiness or the willingness to change, might play in the process (Cranton & Taylor, 2012). It is known that transformative learning is not experienced by all, and that individuals can be exposed to the same dilemmas or experiences and respond differently. If individuals are not motivated to learn about their world in more detail e.g., norms, traditions, structures, systems, they may not engage in the process of questioning or understanding

(Cranton &Taylor, 2012). Individuals need to be open to engage in the process; there is a suggestion that when individuals are ready and open to transformative learning experiences, it will happen. It has been argued that some learners are on the brink of being ready for transformative learning, and the 'disorienting dilemma' 'pulls' them in whilst others are not ready and reject the learning opportunity (Tanaka et al., 2014). Disorienting dilemmas have been associated with cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957). The theory describes how conflicts with established beliefs or values cause disequilibrium between what the individual knows and what they encounter; the individual then seeks to reconcile the dissonance and discomfort (Thibodeau & Aronson, 1992). The discomfort is not the focus; the impetus is to resolve differences and bring about cognitive balance.

To gain further understanding of disorienting dilemmas e.g., why some experiences lead to a perspective transformation and others do not, why events such as death do not lead to perspective transformation, whilst seemingly minor events do, why individuals experiencing the same/similar disorienting dilemma respond differently and/or at different times (Taylor, 2000), further research is required. Attempts have been made to measure disorienting dilemmas and transformative learning experiences, using different instruments: scales, surveys, open-ended questionnaires, and interviews (King, 1998). The learning Activities Survey was originally developed for higher education settings, with a focus on disorienting dilemmas and measuring perspective transformation. However, my research does not focus on quantitative data collection to prove or measure disorienting dilemmas, but on qualitative data collection that uncovers the individuals' experiences of disorienting dilemmas leading to possible transformative learning experiences. It is the individual stories and events in the participants' lives that my study aims to understand and explore, over a period. Stories and the interpretive methodology provide a window into experiences. However, as a researcher I need to be aware of the subjectivity and possible inventiveness involved in the retelling of experiences, good and bad (Letherby et al., 2012). Cranton & Taylor (2012) suggest that different approaches to research would expand and add more to the theory.

Experiences, (including disorienting dilemmas), take place in a context, and this is significant as it situates the findings and frames the meaning. The context is relevant to frame all

experiences, particularly the disorienting dilemmas and changing points of view which I focus on in my work. For example, discussing future careers in a liberalised democracy which promotes freedom of speech, where all voices are heard and equal, would be significantly different from discussing the matter in a patriarchal society and home, where decisions women make are framed by the male perspective. This will be discussed further in chapter eight.

The other three components of the theory - critical reflection, discourse and action are beyond the scope of my research and not the focus of my findings; therefore, I will not discuss them. In the following section I will explore emancipatory learning as it relates to transformative learning theory and my research.

3.4 EMANCIPATION AND LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Transformative learning theory has been rejected by some based on the philosophical standpoint. Criticisms of the theory being too modernist and too emancipationist (Clark & Wilson, 1991), and lacking a well-developed concept of power (Collard & Law, 1989), have been highlighted. However, I believe that the emancipatory component of the theory and the focus on personal liberation and emancipation makes the theory valuable in framing my research. Emancipatory learning is not a new phenomenon. It is a concept associated with how education can assist individuals and groups to overcome educational disadvantage, secure personal freedom and promote social change (Thompson, 2000). Its root lies in developing an understanding of the nature and causes of 'unsatisfactory or unequal' circumstances and changing them. Emancipatory learning is associated with the least 'powerful' in society and working towards gaining more independence and control over their lives. In simple terms, it refers to education which encourages people to act and take control of their lives. In the development of transformative learning, Mezirow (1981) stated that individuals want to be free from forces that limit their options and control their lives; the process of transformative learning would ultimately result in liberation. Historically, marginalized groups have attempted to change their situation through organized programmes, with varying degrees of success (Hamp, 2007). According to Friere (1970), a

proponent of emancipatory education and political change, the purpose of education is to create rational individuals who think and act independently, questioning positions, values, positions of power within society, and society itself. Emancipatory learning hinges on critical reflection of power dynamics and relationships (Brookfield, 2000), leading to action (Holst, 2011). Emancipation can occur on a collective or personal level; the focus being promoting individuals to act and take command of their lives.

Transformative learning is linked with emancipatory learning, as they both have at their roots in conscious thinking and individual awareness regarding action for change (Kitchenham, 2008). There is no need for the individual to resign themselves to the physical or social world as it is because they can consciously act and change their situation (Galloway, 2012). Transformative learning and emancipatory learning both endorse the individual's responsibility to change circumstances if they want to; they have the power to think and act. This view of learning is supported when the learner is acknowledged as having the capability to be critical and reflective, leading to actions to effect change (Grant & Hurd, 2010). Despite the optimism that the oppressed i.e., those struggling for freedom and a different reality, will experience change through the educational experience, there is no consensus as to what it might mean in practice (Galloway, 2012).

In the next section I will explore transformative learning theory and research conducted with women at the fore, as they move towards emancipation and change, which is the focus of my research.

3.5 WOMEN AND TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

Mezirow (1991), in his seminal work focuses on the process of transformative learning without explicit gender consideration (Irving & English, 2011) but, over the years studies have emerged addressing the impact of transformative learning on the lives of women. Research about women's lives is, in many instances, derived from women's oppressive or marginalised

conditions, giving voice to their stories (Taylor & Cranton, 2012). However, it has been found that women as a group and their experiences are multi-faceted and multi-dimensional, which does not fit neatly' into Mezirow's rational and linear theory (Kilgore & Bloom, 2002). The female story needs to be told and women's voices heard (Sands & Tennant, 2010; Morrice, 2012). However, there is not simply one voice to be heard but a wide variety of voices (Nichols-Casebolt & Spakes, 1995). There are times when it is appropriate to research mixed groups of men and women, depending on the focus of the work.

Belenky et al's. (1986) research on female ways of knowing, focused on voice, subjectivity and silence of the women in their study. They were 'gently' critical of Mezirow's way of knowing, and highlighted women's preferred styles of knowing, which they identified as more 'connected' and holistic. Taylor & Cranton (2012) in their work, highlighted features of learning pertaining to the female experience and transformative learning. In the following section I will explore transformative learning research conducted with women, highlighting different aspects of the learning experience. Relationships and opportunities to share experience were found to be important in women's transformative learning experiences. Cooley's (2007) work on transformative learning in women's enclaves, highlighted the importance of relationships that women form with each other. The enclaves offered emotional, spiritual, and cognitive support. The researcher found that these enclaves were sites of deep relationships which initiated a shift in how the participants saw themselves and responded to their situations. Participation in these meetings, according to Cooley (2007) became places for transformative learning and feminist consciousness. Mejuni (2009), when researching women in academia in Nigeria, highlighted collaboration, and support, using the term 'collaborative mentoring'. The significance of relationships was endorsed in different cultural contexts as being an important aspect of the female transformative learning experiences. I will return to this point in my chapter eight, where I will discuss the impact of social interaction and relationships that support the change process or act as a catalyst for change.

Another dimension of the female experience (which may have some relevancy for men, but is more widespread for women), is the physical dimension of women and their bodies. The body, as the site of learning, can act as the impetus for shifts and the exploration of new possibilities. Armacost (2005) explored the menopause and the physical and hormonal changes leading to transformative experiences for some. Mayuzumi (2006) on the other hand, examined healing and transformation for women, through the physical ritual of the tea ceremony and the experiences of emotions linked to the act. These nuances were highlighted and valued as part of the transformative learning experience. Kluge (2007), on the other hand, explored physical activity undertaken as a means of challenging stereotypes of aging. Through exploration of the body, women explored stereotypes, negative self-image, connection, and confidence in their bodies. These and other studies highlight that, through the body and the physical dimension of women's lives, transformative learning can occur. This was not a major finding in my work, but its relevancy for some women should still be recognised.

The emotional aspect of transformative learning, (which again is not exclusive to women) has been highlighted in some research. It has been overlooked in many studies and it is argued that it remains beneath the surface (Taylor & Cranton, 2012). Emotions and emotional responses are experiences to be recognised and included in research. Hamp (2007) identified the drama and extreme emotional distress that can be part of the female learning experience in the context of abuse. The women in this study expressed their emotions and feelings prior to the abuse, during and after their personal experiences. Mezirow (1991) referred to shame and guilt during the self-examination phase of transformative learning, recognising the importance of emotions, but did not elaborate or explore this important aspect of experiences in depth. The emotions of anger, pain and discomfort were identified among black and white women as they discussed race (Muhammad & Dixson, 2005). This area stirred up different emotional responses, depending on the philosophical positions and experiences. Conversely in Mayuzumi's research (2006), transformation to a state of peace and tranquillity following a Japanese tea ceremony was explored. This emotional response conjured up positivity. These studies highlight the importance that emotions play in the female experience. Naming and working with emotions are an important dimension of understanding the experiences of women (Taylor & Cranton, 2012). The women in my study shared their

emotions and emotional responses to their experiences, which are recognised and not negated, as part of their learning.

Another area identified in the female experience of learning and transformation is the role of the arts and creativity (Clover, 2006). Projects have used artistic mediums to help women tell their stories and share their experiences. Armacost (2005) employed photographic research methods to examine women's transformative learning experiences, involving participants in photographic activity. Brooks and Clark (2001) highlighted the role of storytelling, while Qi and Veblen (2016) used music-based activities to 'foster' transformation. These approaches could be part of any pedagogy. Taylor (2009), while referring to them as instructional aids, identifies them as important for women and their learning experiences, possibly facilitating transformative learning. Further research into how these experiences impact the learners' stories could be an area of exploration; however, it was not the focus of this research project.

The lived experiences of women in the context of oppression, race and class have been championed by Crenshaw (2011). She highlighted the challenges faced as a woman and a person of colour, experiences of inequality and the quest for change. Taylor and Cranton (2012) contend that issues of race and gender, despite them being challenging and charged, should not be avoided. Jackson's work (2003) focused on the multiple systems of oppression, race, class, gender and sexual orientation, and how these factors impact learning, while Bailey and Telles (2006) highlighted the role of race and the struggle. The intersectionality of gender (or being a woman) and the nationality of my participants and their personal histories, is a story which is not often told.

3.5.1 THE IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCHING WOMEN IN THE CONTEXT OF TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

The discussion above highlights the gendered dimensions of learning. Research in this area will continue, to enable further understanding of transformative learning theory and the experiences of women. Much of the literature and research on women in adult learning presupposes transformative learning, which is no surprise, according to Hayes and Flannery (2000), as the subject matter is frequently about personal and institutional challenges. Taylor and Cranton (2012) remind us that the aim of giving voice to women is not to further

'essentialise' them or put them under the spotlight as a marginalised group in society, but to foster an understanding of learning for all. Exclusively female projects allow the female experience to be explored in a more focused way in greater depth, paying attention to gendered dimensions of learning as discussed above. Transformative learning and feminism share the concepts of emancipation for the oppressed; the difference is in how this occurs. Despite the plethora of feminist perspectives e.g., radical, second wave and third, feminists share the goal of establishing and achieving political, economic, and personal equality for the sexes (Hawkesworth, 2006). Emancipatory learning, feminism, and transformative learning aim to bring about shifts for the individual (especially women), in terms of consciousness raising and addressing taken for granted assumptions. In this way, a new way of being and behaving will be evident.

3.6 SUMMARY OF TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING THEORY

Transformative learning theory has undergone questioning, debates and critiques over the years and continues to do so. The theory is elaborate and has several dimensions and features which make it cumbersome and unwieldy (Howie & Bagnall, 2013). Layers of terminology and concepts e.g., frames of reference, habits of mind, meaning schemes, perspective transformation and different types of learning based on points of view and habits of mind, to name but a few. The various concepts defined in the theory have been expanded and at times replaced, making it difficult to keep abreast of the changes. As a theory it has been discussed, critiqued, modified, and used by many scholars (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, Taylor, 2000; Hoggan & Cranton, 2015; Howie & Bagnell, 2013; Newman, 2012; Kitchenham, 2008) to name but a few; to conduct and analyse research in adult learning. It has been presented as an 'objective truth' and 'uncritically' accepted by a community of scholars (Kucukaydin & Cranton, 2012). Despite the complexity of the theory, the central focus has remained intact - that experiences and questioning of assumptions can lead to transformative learning for individuals and their beliefs (Mezirow, 2009). The theory has undergone much criticism, Cranton and Taylor (2012) suggest that the theory has 'curled' into itself and failed to evolve due to a lack of ongoing theoretical analysis and development. This stagnation (according to them) is due to an over-reliance on research methodology, the misinterpretation of different

kinds of data and insufficient expansion of the theory. The suggestion that research associated with transformative learning requires more in-depth theoretical analysis with new approaches. In that vein, Taylor (1998) cautioned there might be inadequacies in the theory, leading to flawed conclusions when applied. Howie and Bagnell (2013) posit that transformative learning would better be described as a conceptual metaphor as opposed to a theory. They highlight weaknesses in the theory such as: lack of quantifiability, unpredictability, expansion of terms and concepts (making them less specific) and the lack of critique, which prompt the view that it is more of a metaphor than a theory.

Baptiste (2008) suggests there is an underlying assumption in transformative learning, that voluntary paths taken by individuals are never harmful and outweigh the injuries caused by 'coercive' alternatives. The belief that because individuals choose new paths or ways to be, are positive and never harmful, is simplistic. This may not be the case; a paradigm shift may be uncomfortable as it is new and may not align with cultural norms. Western, and particularly North American value and belief systems, where anyone can achieve anything, with the opportunity for freedom and happiness, contrasts with maintaining tradition and cultural norms in other societies (Arends, 2014). There are different cultural norms in societies e.g., individualism (sometimes associated with developed countries) vs collectivism (sometimes associated with developing countries) (Kagitcibasi, 1997). This plurality of experiences and contexts could also lead to a plurality of phases or processes and outcomes. Transformative learning theory is helpful in shedding light on new insights, purposes, values, beliefs, feelings, dispositions, and judgments, possibly resulting in further tension and questions. Naughton and Schied (2010) suggest the experience and outcome for the individual may lie outside of what is 'right, good and beautiful' (p. 338).

My evidence indicates that despite the critiques, transformative learning theory is valuable in understanding the individual's subjective experiences and changing perspectives, leading to emancipation and a new way of being. No theory is a perfect fit for all situations. I realise that some aspects of the theory are relevant to my study and help me to understand my participants' stories; however, there are other aspects which are not relevant for me at this point. This does not render the theory null and void. The theory, despite its shortcomings, has

led me to focus on the experiences of my participants and explore their trajectories as they question previous ways of doing things and form new beliefs. Experiences, with or without disorienting dilemmas which lead to questioning of assumptions and new personal beliefs, I would argue are important in the quest for emancipation and personal liberation. Transformative learning theory has helped me to identify aspects of liberation, based on personal narratives. Therefore, I am conducting my research with women in the UAE and using transformative learning theory to guide my research. The focus on disorienting dilemmas and points of view will uncover my participants' educational experiences, evidence of change and/or transformative learning.

The next chapter will focus on my research methodology and methods used to explore my participants' learning experiences.

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the research approach and methodology used in my research. It provides definitions of key terminology and an overview of the qualitative research approach.

Aligned with my philosophy – see 4.4.4, I have used narrative inquiry, which provides 'thick descriptions' and uncovers nuances and details of their lives to explore my participants' stories. This qualitative approach to research allows for the richness of human reality to be explored and captured (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). There is no hypothesis to prove or disprove, more importantly the research provides an understanding of the participants' lived reality. My aim in researching social phenomenon is to collect and understand the individuals' stories, as opposed to decontextualized truths (Wang & Geale, 2015). Statistical data and trends provide a different insight into the lives of individuals, and their construction of knowledge. This chapter also includes my role as researcher, my research philosophy and research approach, the selection of my participants, the use of narrative inquiry and research issues.

My main research question, with my sub questions are as follows:

- How can Emirati women's educational experiences be understood though the lens of transformative learning?
- What role do 'disorienting dilemmas' play in the lived experiences of women in the UAE?
- How do women's 'points of view' shift during their educational trajectories, on and after a foundation program in the UAE?

4.2 MY RESEARCHER POSITIONING

My personal philosophy and world view have framed my interest and research approach. I believe in equality for all, but am concerned about equality, or lack of it, for women. I make no apology for this.

It is with this in mind, that I developed the focus of this thesis. As a lecturer on the course, relationships were framed by power dynamics – my position as a lecturer and the participants as students; efforts were made to address this power imbalance in the way I conducted the interviews and recorded the findings – see 4.7.7. I used qualitative research because of the underlying assumption of this approach, namely that reality and truth are constructed and shaped by the individual (Silverman, 2013). I wanted to explore the participants' personal stories of opportunities and possible equality, in the changing society. My research approach focused on the participants' narratives through a humanistic stance (Creswell, 2009), in a setting which I was a part of. As a critical feminist I wanted the female story to be told. I share a joint commitment to the task of rewriting knowledge in an explicitly non-androcentric way (Harding & Norberg, 2005), to highlight gender issues. The research has impacted me specifically, in that allowing women's voices to be heard I have indirectly caused notions of equality and social justice to be presented and allowed women to consciously explore their experiences, reveal their aspirations and verbalise them in a way which may not have been done before.

Alongside my participants' journey of transformative learning, I also experienced transformative learning, resulting in changing points of view during the research process. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) suggested that humans are story telling organisms, who have stories to tell, my story is included below.

4.3 SELECTING TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING TO FRAME THE STUDY

Prior to and after collecting my data, I searched for a theory to frame my work. It was a long and arduous search, but the main tenets of transformative learning theory regarding experiences, questioning taken for granted assumptions and change, aligned with my findings. Whilst using transformative learning theory to frame my work, I was not expecting to, but found the experience challenging and faced my own disorienting dilemma. This caused me to question my own taken for granted expectations and assumptions; that my research

would fit seamlessly into the theoretical framework. However, I found this not to be the case; my expectation did not align with what I thought it would be. This led to a new understanding of theoretical frameworks, the need for critical thinking and adaptations where necessary.

My initial reading of transformative learning theory endorsed my belief in the complexity of learning and of the transformations or changes which could occur through educational experiences. According to the theory, transformative learning could occur either through disorienting dilemmas resulting in paradigm shifts or changes in personal beliefs resulting in changing points of view (an accumulation of changing points of view, could result in transformative learning). The more I read and understood the theory, the more I understood the theory did not align with my findings. There was no reference to the cultural context in the theory, which I believed to be of paramount importance in understanding the participants' trajectories. This caused my own disorienting dilemma; I expected the theory to include this important aspect of the learning experience. I considered researching other theories; however, my learning experience revealed that theories have their strengths but also weaknesses or gaps, and that looking for one theory to be a panacea for my findings was not the answer. As per transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991, 2000), my meaning scheme i.e., my understanding and expectation of the theory, did not adequately explain or fit my findings. Petersen (2009), highlighted inconsistency in feelings and disequilibrium, as an emotional response to dilemmas faced. My disorienting dilemma of the mismatch of the theory to my findings was not epochal or a life crisis but was sufficient to cause me a sense of frustration, anxiety, and imbalance, as identified by Herbers and Mullings Nelson (2009). The recognition that the theory failed to adequately discuss the importance of the context, accompanied by the discovery that my findings did not 'fit' into the theory, was an area of concern; disorienting dilemmas did not result in perspective transformations but changing points of view for me. This caused me to question my own taken for granted assumption, that theories help to illuminate social phenomenon adequately, as it did so only to a limited degree. I was experiencing disorienting dilemmas in the same way as my participants - my expectations did not align with the reality of the theory. My research enabled me to see that theories should be used with caution; the identification of gaps and/or inconsistencies does not have to render the theory null and void, but researchers need to use them with caution.

In the following section I present my research methodology, including relations to my ontology and epistemology.

4.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: ONTOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGY

4.4.1 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Crotty (2012) described research methodology as a strategy or a plan of action that the researcher adopts. This reflects the researcher's philosophy of acquiring knowledge i.e., their epistemology, and influences the techniques and process of data gathering. Methods, on the other hand, simply refer to the techniques and procedure for collecting and analysing data (Blaikie, 2007). Both the methodology and the methods will be determined by the ontological and epistemological beliefs. Grix (2002) highlights that, even though the two terms are logically linked, they are different and should not be used interchangeably.

4.4.2 ONTOLOGY: WHAT IS IT?

Blaikie (2007) refers to ontology as the study of 'being' - focusing on claims about what exists: what it looks like, and the interaction of the units concerned. Ontology is the starting point which leads to the theoretical framework or methodology (Mack, 2010). According to Cohen et al. (2013), ontology deals with questions of reality, objectivity, and external factors. Is reality perceived as objective i.e., something which happens to the individual, or subjective i.e., the individual contributes to and constructs it? In short, ontology describes our view on the nature of reality, whether it is an objective i.e., it exists outside of the individual, or subjective i.e., created in the minds of humans (Flowers, 2009).

4.4.3 EPISTEMOLOGY: WHAT IS IT?

Strongly associated with ontology and its consideration of reality is epistemology, which concentrates on the most appropriate way of inquiring into reality and gaining knowledge of it (Easterby-Smith, et. al., 2008). Epistemology focuses on what constitutes knowledge and the sources and limits of it (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Blaike (1993) expands this further

and raises issues about ways in which it is possible to gain knowledge of reality; how what exists might be known, what can be known, and what criteria must be satisfied to be described as knowledge. The scope of knowledge and justified belief underpin epistemology, relating it to similar notions such as truth, belief, and justification (Fenstermacher, 1994). All research depends on implicit or explicit epistemology.

Epistemology is inseparable from ontology - the ontological perspective, coupled with the epistemological belief, will determine the methodology and methods which will be used in the research (Mack, 2010).

4.4.4 MY ONTOLOGICAL AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL BELIEFS

My approach to my research, as discussed above, is based on my ontological and epistemological position. My ontological belief is that there are multiple realities and truths, created by individuals and/or groups. Reality is co-constructed from the perceptions and actions of individuals, which are unique and relevant to them. The individual's 'truths' are their reality, and this knowledge of understanding their reality can be researched. As with ontology, I subscribe to a subjective epistemology as identified by Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008). Like Blaikie (2003), I also believe that objectivity in research is a misnomer, because social research involves choices and the opportunity for researchers' values and preferences to influence the process.

From my ontological position, firstly I identified the content of what I believed could be researched i.e., the participant's reality, and then linked it to the knowledge that I could gather - this was my epistemological position. This informed my research questions, followed by how I could go about acquiring the knowledge. My study design, i.e., focused on the participants' personal stories and experiences and aligned with my ontological position that the individual constructs the personal perspective of reality. This methodological framework places an emphasis on the viewpoint of the 'acting subjects' (Shaw, 2016).

Having described some key terms connected with my research, I will now describe the qualitative approach determined by my epistemological and ontological beliefs used in my study, including qualitative research and the interpretivist and constructivist paradigms.

4.5 THE RESEARCH APPROACH: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Qualitative research has emerged from different traditions and, as a result, there are variations in conducting research from this perspective (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). The definition below describes the common elements of qualitative research that I subscribe to. Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) describe it as research which involves analysing and interpreting text to discover patterns that describe a particular phenomenon. Several different approaches exist within the wider framework of this type of research, but they have the same aim i.e., to understand the social reality of individuals, groups, and cultures. Researchers use qualitative approaches to explore behaviours, perspectives, and experiences of the people they study. There are several issues both positive and negative surrounding qualitative research, however the focus on naturally occurring events in natural settings (Miles & Huberman, 1984), is my rationale for using this approach to understand my participants trajectories. I believe that qualitative research allows for in-depth analysis and understanding of a social phenomenon and interpretation of the data, adding to the body of knowledge about a given phenomenon in a social context (Rahman et al., 2017).

4.5.1 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AND INTERPRETIVISM

The basis of qualitative research lies in the interpretivist approach to social reality (Holloway, 2002). My research is situated in the interpretivist paradigm which holds that people are complex and unique, far more so than things found in the natural world. To understand human behaviour, the researcher is required to focus on subjective qualities that govern behaviour (Crotty, 2012), with the intention of understanding it. The interpretivists perspective is that there is not one objective body of knowledge separate from the

individual's reality, but multiple, subjective, separate realities. These realities are impacted by culture, religion and belief, intentions, experiences, and intellect. From this viewpoint individuals are said to be actively making sense of the world by constructing and reconstructing their realities constantly, on an individual basis. Consciousness creates personal realities that are unique. According to Gelling (2013), adopting a feminist approach to research influences what questions are researched and what knowledge will be produced, it can also impact how the researcher thinks about their data, but it does not usually influence how data is managed or analysed.

Theorists argue that inconsistencies in interpretation, and the inability to measure and quantify the data collected through the interpretivism approach, renders it unscientific. According to Dudovskiy (2014), the subjective nature of the approach – including personal viewpoints and values minimises the contribution of the researcher. It is this subjectivity that make the data collection and the study richer and more meaningful. Interpretivism provides an in-depth exploration of a social phenomenon, as stated by Connole and Smith (1993), patterns and themes may emerge which may be beneficial and used in other contexts. Another criticism of the interpretivist paradigm holds that it 'neglects questions about the origins, causes and results of actors adopting certain interpretations of their actions and social life' (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 95). Many factors affect social reality, and the individuals' interpretation of this reality. However, interpretivism fails to uncover the impact that these factors have on the interpretation of personal situations. Social interactions and culture play an important part in shaping reality. According to Gelling (2013), adopting a feminist approach to research influences what questions are researched and what knowledge will be produced, it can also impact how the researcher thinks about their data, but it does not usually influence how data is managed or analysed.

Despite the criticism of the interpretivist approach, it reveals an understanding of a social phenomenon, narrative inquiry as a research method facilitates this. Narrative inquiry will be described in the following section.

4.6 NARRATIVE INQUIRY: INTRODUCTION

The term narrative inquiry was first introduced into educational research by Connelly and Clandinin (1990). It was defined as the way in which human life is lived and established. This research method brings together 'theoretical ideas about the nature of human life as lived, to bear on educational experience as lived' (p.3). It focuses on combining theories about life and living with educational exploration. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) suggested that humans are storytelling organisms who individually and collectively lead 'story lives'. Stories capture lived experiences with meaning, which need to be considered (Knights & Willmott, 1995). Narrative inquiry aims to capture personal experiences overtime and include individual experiences and cultural contexts (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). They are shaped by individuals in conjunction with others and in broader contexts i.e., inquiry into people in relationship with others, as lives and stories are not isolated (Chataika, 2005; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Lives are intrinsically narrative Dhunpath (2000), and the way the world is experienced is through them; this is how we come to know, understand, and make sense of the world (Somers, 1994).

This process of making meaning of stories incorporating the three major spheres of inquiry: (i) the scientific i.e., the physical domain; (ii) the symbolic i.e., the human experiences with meaning; and (iii) the sacred i.e., the metaphysical sphere of the relationship between mind and matter (Hendry, 2009). Webster and Mertova (2009) assert that we all want to tell stories of the important things in our lives. The notion that this research method can both be 'narrative inquiry or 'inquiry into the narrative' suggests that narrative is both 'phenomena' i.e., the story, and 'method' i.e., the inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Narratives allow researchers to access information that individuals do not consciously know they have themselves. Collating personal stories allows for the collection of 'rich data' to be amassed, giving real insight into the experiences of others, with the acknowledgement that these stories are never 'finished' (Elbaz-Luwisch, 1997). Researchers are therefore engaged in

constructing and reconstructing the personal and social stories of people they work with. Stories allow researchers to understand experiences at a point in time. People's lives matter.

4.6.1 STORYTELLING: KNOWLEDGE CONSTRUCTION, PAST AND PRESENT

The prevalence of historical and current stories reveals the centrality of narratives (Carson et al., 2017). Stories tend to be sequential and temporal, including ruptures or disturbances and unexpected actions that provoke a reaction or adjustment (Riessman, 2008). Stories confirm the importance of narratives as a source of knowledge. They are told and retold as a source of ongoing and evolving information of knowledge construction and sense making (Larkin et al., 2009, as cited in Carson, et al., 2017). Narratives have been acknowledged as a means of recounting and making sense of past events, placing the individual back in that historic time of who they were, who they are at the time of the story telling and who they might become in the future (Cortazzi, 2001; Reissman, 2008). Kerry-Fowler (2010) suggested, if the past is interpreted through the present, then equally the past informs the present. There is a symbiotic relationship between the two. Remembering the past can be therapeutic and help in assessing fragmented, chaotic, or unbearable events in the past. Narrative inquiry is focused on the 'particular' story; however, narratives, time and memory share a complicated relationship, and it is the recounting of past experiences that provide the opportunity for individuals to make sense of the past (Riessman, 2008). Stories shift over time, context, and audience; however, they need to be considered in context as they occurred as part of a historical context of discourses and power relations; they do not occur in isolation (Riessman, 2008).

4.6.2 STORYTELLING AND REPRESENTATION

The way the story is told, in terms of its representation, reveals its meaning for the individual and the researchers. Narrative inquiry involves working with people's consciously told stories, recognising that these rest on deeper stories of which people are often unaware (Bell, 2002). Participants construct stories that support their interpretation of themselves, excluding experiences and events that undermine the selves they currently claim. The stories explain

and contextualise significant key life events (Clandidin & Connelly, 1998). Whether they believe the stories they tell is one side of the matter, as narrative inquiry goes beyond the specific stories to explore the assumptions inherent in the shaping of stories. No matter how fictionalised, they illustrate the story structures a person holds and provide a window into the individual's beliefs and experiences (Clandidin & Connelly, 1998). Storytelling, and the analysis of the stories, involve choices by the storyteller and the researcher – choices about what aspects of the story to tell or omit, emphasise or play down (Carson, et.al., 2017). Storytelling involves not simply the telling of the story by the individual, but also the listening to and the emotions manifest in the process by the researcher (Cortazzi, 1993, as cited in Carson, et al., 2017). In collecting the stories, where the understanding and interpretation of them, is of paramount importance, accuracy of their representation is important. This was done in my work, through verification, asking for clarification and providing opportunities for the points to be elaborated and accurately understood. This ensured that the meaning was clear, and a deeper understanding was achieved of the individual women's experiences. In the transcription stage, copies were sent to the participants to verify and confirm the understanding and interpretation in written form.

4.6.3 ANALYSIS OF THE NARRATIVES

Riessman (2008) identifies three related terms concerning narratives: (i) Storytelling – described as 'the narrative impulse'; something which comes naturally, a universal way of knowing and communication; (ii) Narrative data – the empirical collection of stories as part of the research process and (iii) Narrative analysis – the systematic study of narrative data. These three aspects are evident in my study. Firstly, I endorse the importance of storytelling and the opportunity for my participants to present themselves through their narratives. The stories were told and documented for analysis. Without this stage, my participants would simply be sharing their realities, with limited opportunities for them or myself as researcher to explore and analyse in greater depth. Analysis of the narrative is case- specific, but it can generate categories, or general concepts in its findings. The findings are not generalisable in the same way a large-scale study would be. According to Riessman (2008), in studies of this nature the findings can be generalisable to theoretical propositions, which links the findings to theory,

from which generalisations can be made. This may be an outcome of the research, but not the aim. My research aims are not to make generalisations which can be applied to another context, but to highlight the stories and experiences of this group of women – their stories are specific and subjective.

4.6.4 CRITIQUE OF NARRATIVE INQUIRY

Narrative Inquiry has been described as non-scientific and lacking in rigour, with no reference to statistics, tables, and questionnaires (Somers, 1994). Individual stories and truths are suspect and not regarded as credible in all research circles. It is this lack of objectivity and scientific process which make it relevant and fitting for some research projects, depending on its aim. Some researchers distrust what is valued and sought after in Narrative inquiry i.e., the subjective, personal story of a lived reality (Lawler, 2002), conducted through 'empathetic' interviews. Rolfe (2000, as cited in Kerry-Fowler, 2010) says:

'The truth people produce through such stories are not 'truths' as conventionally understood by positivist social science: nevertheless, they do speak certain truths about people's (socially located) lives and identities' (p.103).

It is this subjectivity which leads to distrust and methodological scepticism by some schools of thought. The issues of subjectivity or trust feature highly in terms of trustworthiness of this research method, questions such as: is the narrator misremembering, misrepresenting, or lying about earlier events and how does this impact the data (Kerry-Fowler, 2010). According to Riessman (2008), what seems like an important point i.e., the misrepresentation of the story, misses the point, as according to her there is no unbiased access to the past. The narrative is not meant to be an exact representation of past events, more of a recognition that the stories are situated in discourses or contexts, which is an important part of the meaning making process. It is the historical context which is important in constructing and reconstructing narratives (Moore, 1994, cited in Kerry-Fowler, 2010), which is lacking in transformative learning theory. The meaning making process found in story telling is worked and reworked over time; it is ongoing, according to Riessman (2008). Issues of misrepresentation, in addition to practical, ethical, and moral issues of narrative Inquiry, are viewed by Atkinson (2007) as a threat.

In recognising the significance of narratives, Polkingthorne (2007) highlighted stories as important and valuable, both the participants and the researcher. The complex process where the researcher's personal story and beliefs may become entwined are a part of the research. Narrative Inquiry recognises and accepts this as part of the research process, as described by Connelly and Clandinin (1990). Decisions about how to tell the story, what to omit and include are decided by the researcher, which were mirrored in my research. These factors all impact the final story and need to be revealed to make the work credible (Goodley, 2000; Bell, 2002). In my analysis of the stories, I aimed not to 'impose' meaning on the lived experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), but to interpret the findings based on the meaning shared by the participants and within the context presented (Clandinin et al., 2007), based on the close collaboration between the participants and myself. This affected both the story that was told and the analysis, as identified by Bell (2002).

Polkington (2007) saw the division for and against narrative inquiry as two separate communities of conventional researchers and reformist researchers, while Denzin and Lincoln (2005) referred to two schools of thought as scientific and humanistic. These categorisations, according to Hendry (2009), are a false dichotomy. Narrative inquiry allows all researchers (if they were to engage with it) to have a deeper understanding of 'epistemological complexity and diversity' which would be beneficial to all research – particularly science.

In the following section I will provide context of the HEIME, the program of study and the methodology for collecting data.

4.7 THE HEIME: PROVIDING CONTEXT

This study draws on data collected through in-depth interviews of students who studied on the classroom assistant course between 2015-2016. The timeline shows the sequence of the process of collecting and analysing the data. See appendix 10.1.

The research was conducted at the HEIME in the central region of the country, at the largest public, applied higher educational institution. The college where the research took place is one of sixteen men's and women's campuses throughout the country. Approximately 23,000 male and female students attend the colleges, female students constitute sixty-three per cent of the student body (Higher Colleges of Technology, 2020) Anonymity of the HEIME, has meant that the rationale for introducing the programme has not been included in the background information. The structure of the course offerings allows students to obtain diploma's, associate degrees, undergraduate degrees and masters degrees (World Education News and Reviews, 2018).

The ethos of the college changed over time; it moved from a community 'type' college, where things were locally managed cohesively and with local communication channels open, to a national centralised style of management, where communication and decision making is based on the top-down model of management (Bush, 2003). Directors who in the past ran their campuses with a level of autonomy and independence, having responsibility for hiring faculty, contract renewals, courses run, budgets and new initiatives, was replaced with a new model of leadership, more centralized, directive, and standardized. At the time of my study directors were implementing policies and procedures from centralised leadership teams, exercising less independence, and appeared to manage campuses, as opposed to leading them. This created a different climate and new ways of working. It impacted staff (myself included) in several ways e.g., feelings of powerlessness, raising stress and anxiety levels and lack of involvement in communication and decision making. The changes resulted in faculty teaching new courses more formally, due to increased class sizes. Due to anonymity, information specific to the campus where the research took place has been omitted. This contextual information gives some insight into the educational environment of the HEIME where the students studied and the research took place.

4.7.1 THE CLASSROOM ASSISTANT DIPLOMA

The new Classroom Assistant Diploma launched and accredited by a Scottish examining board in 2013, was taught at two women's campuses. The mission of the program was:

'To produce graduates with skills to work as entry-level classroom assistants in an educational environment. Graduates will have basic knowledge and skills in classroom teacher support at the primary school level'. (Higher Colleges of Technology, 2016). The two-year program (which was divided into four semesters), provided a range of courses – see 10. 2. The pedagogical approach to teaching was the teacher as facilitator or learning mentor, scaffolding and guiding learning was the approved teaching method. This was in line with the school reform in the UAE at the time, which focused on replacing traditional rote learning with new pedagogies such as learning by doing, experiential learning, problem-based learning, to name a few (Thorne, 2011). From the launch of the classroom assistant program in 2013 – 2016, the (approximate) number of students registered on the diploma was 195 at the HEIME (HCT, 2014; HCT, 2015; HCT, 2016a). Each semester a new cohort registered for the program i.e., a maximum of 25 students, in 2015-2016 the year that the research took place, there were 47 students registered at the HEIME.

4.7.2 CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH

Focusing on the concept of transformation, I felt, required more than one insight into the participants' personal world and, therefore, I would gain a deeper understanding over a period of time as stated by (Cohen et al., 2013). I therefore interviewed my participants in June 2016 and again in June 2020. After I conducted the interviews, I analysed the data, manually in 2016 and using NVivo software in 2020, as I recognised the advantage of using it to interrogate the data. Individual interviews were conducted with five participants. The following section explains the process in more detail.

I conducted the interviews in English, as this was the medium of instruction at the HEIME. I was concerned about the use of English and the fact that, for all the participants, English was their second language. I wanted to facilitate the telling of their stories but did not want

language to be a barrier. I considered asking an Emirati colleague who shared the same mother tongue to join me for one of interviews, to translate questions into Arabic where needed. But I felt that this might interrupt the flow of the discussion and cause issues with the interpretation of what was said. By using Arabic, I would be reliant on my colleague's translation, and it may have resulted in possible misinterpretation of what was asked and said. I decided against using this method. I needed to simplify my language and provide prompts where needed to assist my participants' understanding of the questions.

4.7.3 SAMPLE TYPE USED

I determined my sample based on the nature of my study. My sample was restricted to students on the classroom assistant course, as this was the focus of my research. The sample was purposive, as my research had a specific focus and the participants matched the focus (Etikan et al., 2016). This subjective, nonprobability sampling method was not open to all students at the HEIME, but only to students registered on the course I was researching. Based on my research questions I sought the participants who could provide the information based on their experience and knowledge, as discussed by Bernard (2002, as cited in Etikan, et al., 2016). In addition to knowledge and experience, Bernard (2002) states that the availability and willingness to participate, and the ability to communicate experiences and opinions, is also important. My sample selection did not aim to have a cross section of the population from the course, as in maximum variation sampling, but the participants were different in terms of their commitment to the course at the start of the programme. One participant wanted to be on the course to use it as access to teaching; another did not want to work with learners but wanted a qualification; the course was recommended to another one of the participants and she responded to it; the remaining two participants registered on the course but were unsure of what to expect, but open to the possibilities.

4.7.4 SELECTING THE PARTICIPANTS AND CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS

Data was collected for five participants. Emails were sent to students who were going to graduate in 2015 (both the January and June cohorts) using their college emails. I received

responses from fourteen graduates and selected the first four graduates who responded. Another graduate was recommended to me by my peer, who described the participant as an 'interesting case'. She was known to be ambitious and determined, and had changed over the two years, from being laissez-faire and non-committal to focused and dedicated. I decided to explore her journey in addition to the other four participants. Two of the participants who had originally consented were unable to commit to the interview due to personal circumstances and withdrew voluntarily. I choose another graduate from the list, in the order the responses had come in. That participant asked if her peer could also join the study, as she said she was interested too. Further detailed biographical details about the research participants are found below. The participants' details are included in chapter five.

The course was taught at a women's college. The interviews took place at the college or at the participants' place of work, chosen by the participants for interview one. Interview two was conducted online. Clandinin & Connelly (2000) suggested that storytelling may be shared and facilitated when taking place in natural settings but is not limited to this.

4.7.5 RESEARCH TOOL: NARRATIVE INTERVIEWS

Interviews have been used to collect stories in academia in the personal context. Edwards (1997, as cited in Koven, 2011) discusses the notion that interviews for research purposes are artificial speech events, with less interactions and elicitation, where thoughts are summarised. The role of the interlocutor is key in the interview, in terms of establishing and using interactions. Kvale (2012) highlighted the asymmetrical power relation in interviews generally, in terms of them being a one way, instrumental, dialogue where the interviewer has a monopoly on interpretations. However, qualitative traditions have '…a common epistemological ground: the researcher's determination is to minimize the distance and separateness of researcher-participant relationships,' (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009, p.279). This was confirmed in my use of narrative interviews, where my aim was not to manipulate their narratives, but to allow my participants to share what they were comfortable to, putting my participants in a position of power. Grix (2004) suggested that the research method should be selected according to the research question. Research methods are not free from ontology

or epistemology but placed in a particular paradigm; the researcher's beliefs need to be recognised. My position, as presented above, framed my chosen paradigm and methodology, and the use of narrative inquiry through interviews seemed like the obvious choice for this purpose. If you want to know about people and how they understand their world, talking to them is an effective way to find out (Richards, 2003; Kvale, 1996).

4.7.6 TECHNIQUES FOR COLLECTING NARRATIVES: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

My narratives were collected using narrative, semi-structured in-depth interviews, where the interview was led by the participant but guided by the researcher. The narratives were collected through discussion and informal interview type questions as prompts where needed. My data collection may be described as guided conversations (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Roller and Lavrakas (2015) suggested the possible use of aids to the discussion; I used the course outline as a prompt in the first meeting to discuss the content of the course, as a springboard to talking about educational experiences. Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) recommended asking no more than six very general questions to guide the data collection (I am unsure of the justification for six). I believe that the researcher should prepare a limited number of open questions about the subject, that may or may not be used depending on the participants and the flow of the interview. The focus is on eliciting personal stories and the questions act as a guide or framework for a semi structured interview to help them 'piece their stories together' (see appendix 10.3 & 10.4). My approach was flexible and not restrictive, allowing for conversations and stories which were relevant to my research questions. Riessman (2002) noted that explicit instructions can be provided by the researcher to help the participant structure their narrative. Narrative interviews (like other interviews with a more focused aim) are complex research tools, used with people who are complex, uncovering their complex experiences (Kvale, 1996).

4.7.7 PREPARATION FOR THE RESEARCH

Before conducting the narrative interviews, I contacted each participant in advance by email and asked to meet them face to face to confirm their participation. The participants were

given the opportunity to ask questions and engage in discussion about the study. In this initial conversation, I explained the purpose of the research and clarified that it would be conducted through an individual narrative interview lasting between forty-five minutes and one hour, which would be recorded and transcribed for analysis. I made it clear to the participants that they were not under any obligation to participate and that they were free to withdraw from the project at any time. I also stated that if any questions arose which they were uncomfortable with, they did not need to answer them. They were informed that the study, although conducted by me, was not about me, my teaching or involvement in the course, but about them and their experiences, to understand more about their journeys and their learning experiences whilst on the course and beyond. The participants were told that their identities would be protected by use of pseudonyms and that I would supply each of them with a copy of the narrative interview transcript to ensure that it was accurate and reflective of the interview. I reiterated the information above and supplied each participant with a copy of the University of Durham School of Education Participation sheet – see 10.7 and Consent Form for signing (see appendix 10.8). The participants kept one copy, whilst I retained the other. After this was done, we began the interview process. At that first meeting I also conducted a 'pilot' interview using some of my prepared questions from appendix 10.3, in order to assess their relevancy and suitability. The interview questions were based around their experiences of the course.

Following these initial conversations, I subsequently arranged to meet with each participant at a time and place of their choice to conduct the 'official' narrative interviews. This was to help the participants feel more comfortable and relaxed; it also changed the power dynamics, allowing them to exercise control and choose where to conduct the first interview. The interviews were conducted by me, one to one and face to face, and were audio-recorded and transcribed. Before they were analysed, I allowed each participant to check the accuracy. Kvale (1996) discussed the challenges in transcribing, noting differences between oral and written discourse. I dealt with this challenge during the narrative interviews by occasionally repeating what my participant said, to check my understanding where I was unsure about the participants' answers or responses. I also transcribed the interviews immediately after they

took place. Having worked in a second language learning environment for several years, I understood the grammatical nuances and errors.

4.7.8 NARRATIVE INTERVIEWS IN MY RESEARCH

The narrative interviews, which were conducted as informal conversations, allowed for open questions and open responses (Longhurst, 2003). I allowed the interviews to develop, and in this way, I was able to capture what was significant (Legard et al., 2003, as cited in Spencer et al., 2003). I was able to use various interview techniques such as 'tell me more about….' 'you said …does that mean…', 'could you give an example of…' to elicit more information. I attempted to engage and keep the flow of the narrative interview by acknowledging the participants' contributions by saying 'yes, mmm' or nodding in agreement (Kvale, 1999). As the researcher, I was conscious of my role in co-constructing my participants' narrative; I recognised the need to be reflexive and consider how this was being done. This will be discussed in the reflexive section later.

4.8 INTRODUCTION TO THEMATIC ANALYSIS

The collection of data through the interview process is one stage of the research process, analysing and presenting it is also important. Riessman (2002) suggested that qualitative researchers often highlight the experiences of others, but 'act as if representation is not a problem'. Representational decisions cannot be avoided and are evident at numerous points in the research process. It is not possible to be neutral, objective and to merely represent data – interpretation and representation are part of the process (Smith, 1983). Qualitative data needs to be analysed and can be done in different ways, either by providing a detailed account of one theme, or by revealing dominate themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis, unlike other methods e.g., narrative analysis or discourse analysis, does not require theoretical approaches of knowledge, and is said to offer a more accessible form of analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which was my reason for using it. I used themes from transformative learning theory as a framework when analysing my data. I did not start coding from the themes in the theory, but where appropriate used the themes at different stages of the

process. In this way I used thematic analysis to analyse my data. It provided insight into my participants' stories and was flexible yet systematic, providing a trail of trustworthiness (Nowell et al., 2017).

Thematic analysis required a lot of time and careful reading and rereading of the data sets, moving back and forth to identify themes. I adhered to the process identified by Braun and Clarke (2006) in the first phase interviews following the seven stages defined below. This was done manually. I coded data as per the guidelines provided by Braun and Clarke, (2006); they are not rules, and can be used flexibly. Neither is the analysis process a linear process one - it is more recursive, requiring moving back and forth as needed throughout the phases.

4.8.1 THE STEPS OF THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Here are the steps outlined by (Braun & Clarke, 2006) which I used as my guideline:

(i) Familiarising myself with the data

After the interview I listened actively to the recordings i.e., asking questions about what the participant was saying, in preparation for the subsequent coding which was to follow. In my initial listening to the recordings, I made notes of ideas, questions and patterns emerging from the data.

(ii) Transcribing the data

I transcribed the narrative. This was long winded and time consuming, but a good way to listen carefully again to the content of each interview, and familiarise myself with the data (Riessman, 2002). Hammersley (2010) explained that transcribing involves technical skills, in addition to interpretation. It was through the transcribing stage that ideas for the initial coding started to be uncovered.

(iii) Generating initial codes

Boyatzis (1998) described coding as 'the most basic segment or element of the raw data that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon' (p. 63). Coding refers to the

meaning making stage of analysing the data. Many potentially interesting ideas or themes were drawn out and identified. I coded or gave a theme to each answer from the interview question. This initial coding helped me identify information which would feed into the broad themes. I did this manually by using highlighters and writing on the scripts The initial coding was a move towards identifying themes and the interpretative analysis of the data. When analysing my data, particularly with the initial and secondary coding, I moved between the two phases checking the codes, seeing if they fitted with the findings, changing the codes at times, creating new ones and so forth. Williams and Moser (2019) describe three levels of coding; open, axial and selective, where the many segments of text are initially categorised, resulting in many categories. These categories are further coded, which reduces the number of codes, then repeated further, reducing the codes to a manageable number. After collecting the data, the analysis took place; it was time consuming; I worked on it, left it and returned to it at several points.

A number of codes were found in the data initially which were then recoded and streamlined. When coding the data without using transformative learning as the theoretical framework, the initial codes were: schooling, family structure, failing the foundation course, inability to get the required English level, limited diploma options to choose from, choosing the course/the influence of family and friends (including independent choices), course content and its usefulness, teachers that helped with course materials, teachers that helped with jobs, teachers in schools and misunderstandings, future plans, husbands – current and future acceptance of working as a classroom assistant, professional challenges, future aspirations, personal challenges and changing perspectives. See 10.14.

With regards to research questions one and two, using transformative learning as the theoretical framework the initial codes collated were: model students, attitude to learning, career decision, challenges, changes that occurred, choosing the course, decision to do further studies, delayed start to the course, determination, empathy, encouraging peers, family influences, God given chance, influence of teachers, influence to taking the course, learning content and skills and the link between being a classroom assistant and teaching.

4.8.2 INDUCTIVE VS DEDUCTIVE CODING

Initially I identified themes as they appeared from the data, using the inductive or bottom-up approach (Frith & Gleeson, 2004). This method focused on the themes identified being linked to the data based on the participants' answers, with less emphasis on the questions or my theoretical knowledge or interest (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This analysis was data driven; I was not trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding framework. However, as discussed earlier, the researcher cannot free themselves from their epistemological and ontological beliefs; therefore, data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the second stage of coding, when I categorised the codes across the data set for the research questions, I referred to themes from my reading where they fitted. This is known as deductive analysis, which is driven by the researcher's theoretical or analytical interest and is more explicitly analyst-driven (Braun & Clarke, 2006). By using both inductive and deductive coding, I uncovered both the detail from the rich data and conducted an analysis of the data specific to my research question. Joeffe and Yardley (2004) discuss the use of both methods in interrogating data, to uncover themes and answer research questions.

4.8.3 SEMANTIC VS LATENT CODING

Boyatzis (1998, cited in Braun & Clarke, 2006) also discussed the level at which themes are identified: at a semantic or explicit level, or an interpretative level. The semantic approach considers coding by focusing on the explicit or surface meaning of the data. The participants words (in spoken or written form) are important in and of themselves. The analytical process of their narrative focuses on a description of the content, with the coding highlighting patterns in semantic content. This is then summarized and interpreted to theorise the patterns and their broader meaning and implications, in relation to literature (Patton, 2002). This is how I conducted my coding, by focusing on the literal meaning of what my participants said e.g., Shahd said she chose the course because her mother suggested it. I interpreted this literally without focusing on underlying issues of why her mother wanted her to join the course. In contrast, analysis at the latent level goes beyond the semantic level and identifies and examines the underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualisations that shape or inform the semantic content of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis of this nature

overlaps with thematic discourse analysis. This was not the approach that I used; my interpretation of the data came later when discussing the findings.

(iv) Searching for themes

This stage involved ordering the codes into broader potential themes and collating all the relevant coded data into themes and sub themes. I did this by using post it notes in interview one and writing out the themes and evidence for each participant and arranging it on large sheets of paper – see 10.12. In interview two I used NVivo as I saw the advantage of using software with more data – see 10.13. Some codes were identified as main themes and others as subthemes, while some codes were discarded altogether if there was only one occurrence of the theme, see 4.8.1 – 4.8.3. It was at this stage that themes from transformative learning theory were used to focus on sub research questions one and two. This stage took a lot of mapping and moving data around into themes and sub themes. All the data and codes were organised and kept for the next stage of the analysis.

(v) Reviewing themes

Once the potential themes had been identified, they were refined. The aim was that each theme would form a meaningful coherent pattern and that there would be distinctions between each. An important feature at this point was to ensure that the themes accurately reflected the meanings in the entire data set, not merely individual participants. This was done in two stages; the first step was analysing each theme and the coded data which created the theme; the second step was checking how each participant's data fitted into this. Where this did not occur, I had to go back and rework both the themes and the code to see if they might fit elsewhere or whether I required new themes. This process was very involving and required a considerable amount of work. The same process was applied to the entire data set – making sure that the validity of the themes and the individual participant's data reflected the meanings evident in the whole data set. According to Braun and Clarke, (2006) the need for re-coding from the data is to be expected, as coding is an 'ongoing organic process'.

(vi) Defining and naming themes

The next step involved identifying 'the essence' of each theme. This was done by going back to the data extracts collated for each theme and organising them. As Braun and Clarke (2006)

suggested, identifying the story that each theme tells is important in considering how it fits into the broader overall story. At this stage it is recommended that the themes are examined independently and then how they fit together, in relation to each other. Sub themes and their mapping under the main theme were also revisited and verified, to ensure that there was coherence and structure.

After categorising and making links between the codes and reducing codes which were less commonly found, the prevalent codes were identified. The dominant themes when coding without using transformative learning as the theoretical framework were, decision making linked to educational choices and beyond, the experiences of the course – including course content and educational aspirations and future plans – which will be discussed in chapter five. The dominant themes using transformative learning as the framework to address the research questions were disorienting dilemmas and changing points of view, which will be discussed in chapters six and seven respectively. I used Nerstrom's (2014) transformative model to frame the themes and sub themes in the data collected in 2016 and 2020. The model as described in chapter three is an adaptation of Mezirow's phases of transformative learning, leading to perspective transformation; however, this model refers to changes resulting in new perspectives as transformative learning. This model is accessible and easier to use, and helped to guide the interpretation of my data, as discussed in chapter three.

(vii) Producing the Chapter

With all the themes identified and the accompanying data, I then set about writing about the findings in a coherent, concise, logical way, telling the story of the data in terms of the themes identified. The thematic analysis maps onto my data by guiding the analysis of the data through the presentation of themes. I wanted to ensure that the themes and accompanying data extracts provided evidence of the story and that my analytic narrative provided not merely a description of the data, but key findings in relation to my research questions.

For the second narrative interviews in 2020, a similar process was followed, this time using the software NVivo for ease and convenience. Again, I initially needed to listen to the

interviews and transcribe them manually. They were then uploaded to NVivo, where I coded them using the software and followed the process above, using the software throughout - see 10.13. The benefit of using software for coding is that it saves time, freeing the researcher from the manual task, increasing flexibility, and allowing for coding to be completed and changed with relative ease (Johnson, 2004). Concern arises over deterministic and rigid processes used on packages, the time taken to learn the software and then increased pressure on the researcher to focus on volume, rather than depth (Johnson, 2005). Basit (2003) concluded that the choice of whether to code manually or use software will be dependent on the size of the project, the funds and time available, and the expertise or wishes of the researcher.

In summary, thematic analysis involves searching across data sets to find repeated patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The form and product of it varies, as indicated above. There are several considerations when using it, which require planning and thinking through. There are no hard and fast rules, the approach I used is highlighted above, making the process of the analysis unequivocal. The process of my data collection required; selecting the participants, using narrative interviews, transcribing, and immersing myself in the content of each interview, identifying themes and sub-themes through coding with the use of a transformative learning framework and, finally, producing evidence that helps to answer my research questions.

4.8.4 CRITIQUE OF THEMATIC ANALYSIS

The disadvantages of thematic analysis become more apparent when considered in relation to other qualitative research methods. It has been said that thematic analysis fails to analyse data at all (Nowell et al., 2017). I did not find this to be the case, as the process outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006) was intuitive and easy to follow, in terms of analysing my data. While thematic analysis is flexible, this flexibility can lead to inconsistencies and a lack of coherence when developing themes derived from the research data (Holloway & Todres, 2003). I did not find this flexibility to be a problem; the approach was within boundaries allowing for consistency and is not an 'anything goes' approach to research. Consistency and cohesion can

be promoted by applying and making explicit an epistemological position that can coherently underpin the study's empirical claims (Holloway & Todres, 2003).

Javadi and Zarea, (2016) highlighted further pitfalls of thematic analysis, suggesting it could be seen as: (i) merely a collection of data extracts strung together without analysis; (ii) themes based on interview questions with no analysis; (iii) themes for analysis are often weak or overlapping, rendering the analysis as 'unconvincing'' (vi) mismatch between the data and the analytical claims, resulting in claims being made about the data which are unfounded; (v) mismatch between theory and analytic claims, or between the research questions and thematic analysis; (vi) failure to spell out theoretical assumptions or clarify how the research was undertaken, which highlights a gap in the research methodology. However, from my discussion above, the evidence demonstrates that the analysis is detailed, rigorous and convincing, the connections between the findings and the analysis are closely linked and the theoretical assumptions/framework is presented. It is important to present the narratives as 'whole', as opposed to cross cutting and presenting the data in pieces.

Despite the disadvantages identified, the advantages of thematic analysis far outweigh them. Hence, it was used to analyse my data.

4.9 RESEARCH ISSUES

4.9.1 TRUSTWORTHINESS

As discussed, the importance of sharing the participants' experiences or 'truths', was emphasised at the beginning of each interview. Merriam (1998) states that research needs to be conducted in a way that instils confidence in the results of the study. The research must be shown to have been conducted in an ethical manner and to be trustworthy. The issue of quality in qualitative research has been, and continues to be, highly contested (Spencer et al., 2003). Smith (1984)'s research found that some theorists rejected any criteria devised to measure quality in qualitative research, whilst others propose criteria which could be applied

to both qualitative and quantitative research (Le Compte & Goetz, 1982, as cited in Spencer et al., 2003). From a positivist paradigm this refers to the reliability and validity of the research. However, interpretivist qualitative research is based on different ontological and epistemological assumptions about the nature of reality and knowledge creation, making these criteria inappropriate. Guba (1981) proposed an alternative criterion for assessing trustworthiness in interpretive research, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Spencer et al. (2003), suggested that the nature of qualitative research i.e., fluidity and flexibility, requires an assurance to endorse professionality. In this study, I have conducted the research in an honest, professional, and flexible way with a focus on quality and transparency. I rejected the positivist criteria and have chosen to use criteria more appropriate to qualitative research; reflexivity, ethics, confidentiality, and trustworthiness – all of which will be discussed in the next section.

4.9.2 REFLEXIVITY IN RESEARCH

Reflexivity refers to the awareness and acceptance that researchers are unified and unable to escape the world that they are researching (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, cited in Cohen et al., 2013). As discussed earlier recognising and acknowledging that the researcher has their own narrative or positionality, is another aspect of the narrative, as discussed by Connelly and Clandinin (1990). I was cognisant that my beliefs about women and their potential should not dominate the process but would be the line of inquiry. Brooks (2007, as cited in Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2013) highlights the importance in sharing and documenting the female story which, unless researched, may be forgotten; the invisibility of women's culture, history and experience was prevalent. Feminist research has grown since the 1960's as a result of consciousness-raising efforts, inside and outside academia, emphasising omission and deletion of the female story, in multiple arenas. Feminist epistemology, as discussed by Brooks and Hesse-Bibir (2013), is a unique from of knowledge building which challenges individuals to see the world through the experience of oppressed women and aim for social change. The concept of social activism leading to change is one dimension of change, but as per transformative learning theory, change can occur on a personal level, changing future experiences. The narrative interviews were conducted with a focus on the participants' story

and their perspectives, and I ensured this through focused questions and following the participants' leads.

4.9.3 ETHICS

Ethics, as coined by Hammersley and Traianou (2012), refers to five main principles which should be adhered to when conducting research: minimising harm, respecting autonomy, protecting privacy, offering reciprocity, and treating people equitably. The list is not exhaustive, but these areas have been identified as important. Ethical outlines were adhered to, according to the University of Durham's standards as discussed above. Prior to the data collection, I completed and submitted the necessary ethical form required for the university's approval to conduct the research – see 10 5. This was followed by gaining approval from the HEIME, where the data collection would take place. Subsequently, and prior to the commencement of the interviews, I met the participants and discussed the research face to face before asking them to sign the consent form, as discussed above.

I ensured that my research did not cause stress or discomfort to my participants by preparing questions for the interview that were researched and piloted. The participants were advised that they could withdraw from the study at any time. The issue of moral conduct in narrative inquiry is important, because the researcher requires the participants to be as open and honest as discussed previously - otherwise the data could be distorted and lacking in credibility (Weiler & Middleton, 1990). This was explained to my participants, by stressing the importance of sharing what was important for them, and not sharing what they thought I wanted to hear. If sensitive information was shared which could have threatened lives, I would have had a moral obligation to act to inform personnel to take action; fortunately, this situation did not arise. Ethical review of the process was overseen; it is mandatory for all research with human participants to ensure that the participant's wellbeing is not jeopardised (Weiler & Middleton, 1990).

My ‘insider’ knowledge of working in the institution was both an advantage and disadvantage. I understood the context and the course, but I needed to be reflective and vigilant, to ensure that the voices of the participants were heard and not my own. The issue of power differentials and our relationship as teacher and student was prevalent; the participants adhering to expected norms and conduct. The participants may have felt that they needed to respond to what they thought I wanted as a researcher and because of the power dynamic in play, as opposed to asking further questions or even challenging the questions. However, I stressed that their stories and experiences were personal, belonging to them and they were free to answer in any way. Gelling (2013) suggested that the researchers balance the benefits of insider knowledge with understanding (reflexivity) against the need to ensure ‘analytical objectivity. My own voice and self-narrative that were a part of the process that I consciously tried to minimise, and not be the teacher directing learning. As a researcher it is important that these views are identified (Flowers, 2009). Reflexivity allowed for my positionality and representation to be brought to the fore. Additionally, because of my insider position, I was aware of cultural taboos e.g., gender roles and expectations and their feeling about these matters. This led me to ‘skirt’ around these matters and not explore them in depth, as this could be seen as offensive and inappropriate. This impacted the data collection.

4.9.4 CONFIDENTIALITY

The data collected was used with the participants’ consent. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained. Confidentiality is important in all research, regardless of approach and tools used. It is a basic human right and impacts all spheres of life. As part of ethical practices, confidentiality was maintained throughout my research by ensuring anonymity, and that information gathered was protected and controlled in terms of dissemination (Josselson, 1996). When dealing with informal, conversational interviews I was aware that the participants may have revealed emotional and sensitive information that they did not want to be shared with others (Cowles, 1988). I reaffirmed that I would only disclose information shared with their consent. This was accepted. The raw, uncut data shared between the participant and me was not made available to other individuals at any stage. The verified version of the data, with the participants’ permission, was made available for academic

purposes later. The data was also held in a secure place on my computer, password protected to maintain security and confidentiality. I wanted to ensure that I preserved the dignity of my participants and protected them. Biographical information or other personal information which may have identified individual participants was omitted, again to protect their identity. However, I had to ensure that this omission did not distort or contaminate the meaning of the data in the narrative accounts.

4.10 SUMMARY OF MY RESEARCH AND RESEARCH ISSUES

My interest in the stories of the women in my study is framed by my philosophical position. My interest in educational opportunities, employment, personal change, and emancipation stem from my feminist belief that women have rights, and that their experiences are as valuable as men's. While the stories of men over the centuries have been documented and recorded, the female stories have been less so, and possibly even forgotten (Broos, 2007, as cited in Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007). My research and methodology serve to facilitate the telling of my participants' stories. The HEIME, with its focus on degree offerings, provided an alternative academic pathway for a smaller, marginalised group of the population. The concept of marginalisation can be used in different ways; it begs the question of what it means, and what are women marginalised from (Montgomery & Fernández-Cárdenas (2018). I used it to refer to my female participants, who were part of the group of diploma students separated or excluded from mainstream bachelor opportunities, and the assumptions of academic fragility underlying such positioning.

My epistemology, ontology and methodology have framed my research, my study may not be defined as feminist research i.e., my goal is not to challenge the methodologies defined by men (Payne & Payne, 2004), or to analyse gender oppression in order to transform society (McHugh, 2014, cited in Hesse-Bibir & Leavy, 2010), but to understand the stories of women. Embedded in my research are many elements of feminist research as identified: power analysis, reflexivity, and indirect advocacy. Change continues to take place in Emirati society. The impact of the changes, and how they affect the women in my study, is explored through

their personal stories. I have stated my position and belief in issues concerning women, aiming to minimise my personal beliefs in the research findings. I have consciously adopted a reflexive approach to avoid unwittingly drowning out the voices of participants and outlined ethical considerations and quality criterion, to ensure that my participants were heard and represented accurately. My story or experiences of the process whilst researching my participants' story is presented. Qualitative research has been presented as a valued paradigm of inquiry, requiring rigour to create useful results (Nowell et al., 2017). My two sets of interviews for the participants, at four-year intervals, uncovered their experiences at different points of their journey.

The next chapter will present my findings, using vignettes from the participants, personal stories will be uncovered and discussed in the context of the change in Emirati society.

5 THE PARTICIPANT'S STORIES

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Reismann (1993) stated that collecting and studying narratives reveal information about socio-cultural life, in that society, and culture speaks through the individual's story. The depth of experiences and understanding embedded in narrative I would argue, is of paramount importance in the research process. Disclosure of personal information could be overshadowed by the researchers' interpretations (DePoy & Gitlin, 2010), researchers need to be mindful that participants may be inhibited and strive to allow the participants' stories to be presented, in my work I have endeavoured to do this – see 4.7.7 I believe that narratives have the potential to investigate agency, rather than presenting individuals as passive recipients; narratives are politicised, structured, culturised and socialised.

In this chapter I presented my participants' experiences, providing an understanding of their histories, identities, families, and friends, which provides context to their narratives. Their many experiences make them who they are (Jarvis, 2004; Fenwick, 2000). The contextual information presented provides background information and an overview of my participants experiences prior to, and whilst they were on the course. Smith and Sparkes (2008) suggested, narratives based on experiences, may be the best hope of capturing structures that continue to shape, divide, and separate human beings.

On the following page is a table of the participants' interview dates. The abbreviations for their names and the interview dates and codes which will be used in my discussion.

Interview schedule 2016-2020

Name of Participant	**Interview Date** **June 2016**	**Interview Date** **June 2020**
Marwa – Mar	Int 1	
Halima – Hal	Int 1	
Nabila – Nab	Int 1	Int 2
Oma – Oma	Int 1	Int 2
Shahd – Sha	Int 1	Int 2

5.2 MY PARTICIPANTS STORIES PRIOR TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Data was collected from my five participants and analysed using thematic analysis, as presented by Braun and Clarke (2006) – see 4.8.1. An overview of each participant is included in the table which contains names, ages, academic history, background information and when the interviews took place. Further biographical detail is presented for each participant below the table. Pseudonyms have been used to provide anonymity and confidentiality.

History of the participants

Name of Participant	**Age**	**Academic history**	**Interview Date 5-9th June 2016**	**Interview Date June 2020**
Marwa	23	Completed high school. Completed one semester pre- foundation (six months) course at another HEIME.	Interview 1	
Halima (recommended by teacher)	23	Completed high school. Completed one-year pre-foundational course at the HEIME.	Interview 1	
Nabila	33	Completed high school. Completed two years of pre medicine. Study break of eight years. Completed one-year pre-foundational course at the HEIME.	Interview 1	Interview 2
Oma (Recommended by friend)	21	Completed high school. Completed one-year pre- foundational course at HEIME.	Interview 1	Interview 2
Shahd	20	Completed high school. Applied to another HEIME. in a different town – withdrew application. Completed 1-year English course at the HEIME.	Interview 1	Interview 2

5.2.1 MARWA'S BACKGROUND

Marwa was 23 years old and had transferred from another government university. She was from Abu Dhabi and lived on the outskirts of the city. She was the second oldest of six children; she had an older sister. She talked about her brother being happy with her decision to register on the course and work in an all-female environment (and many Emirati men wanting this too). She had registered on their bridge/foundation programme at a government university and said she was not enjoying it, hence she transferred to the HEIME. She completed her secondary education in the UAE in a state school and covered the range of academic subjects required for a general secondary certificate e.g., English, Arabic, Islamic studies, maths, science and so forth. Marwa said she decided to come to college because job opportunities were more readily available to people who had degrees, than school leavers with only certificates. Marwa had spoken to friends about the classroom assistant programme, and she liked the idea that there were no exams, it sounded 'easier' than other courses she said. She successfully completed the course and was applying for employment opportunities at the time of the interview and had started to research how she might complete her bachelor's degree, part-time in the future.

5.2.2 HALIMA'S BACKGROUND

Halima was from a quiet village in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, approximately 45 minutes from Abu Dhabi city. She lived at home with her mother and father, and her five siblings. She attended the local high school and graduated with her high school certificate with a focus on the arts, she studied Arabic, Islamic, geography, history, physics, English, maths and so forth. She stated that when she was in high school, she had not thought about becoming a teacher or working in the education sector. Halima shared that before she applied to the HEIME she had no definite plans for her future in terms of careers or what she might like to do – she simply thought that college was the right thing to do, so she pursued the opportunity. She left school and registered on the foundation course to improve her English and maths. Due to her inability at the time to achieve the required English level on the foundation programme, she was unable to register on the bachelor's degree of her choice. She registered on the classroom assistant programme as there were limited options available at that point. She stated when

other options became available, she did not consider transferring to other courses available, as she was not interested in business or IT, so remained on the classroom assistant programme and graduated. At the time of the interview, she was employed in a government kindergarten, working directly with a student with learning challenges.

5.2.3 NABILA'S BACKGROUND

Nabila introduced herself as a thirty-three-year-old married woman. Prior to being on the Classroom Assistant Diploma she had completed two years on a pre-medical course in a residential setting, in another part of the country. Her father became unwell at the time, and she made the decision to adjourn her studies and look after her father for an eight-year period. During that time, she got engaged. Her husband to be, had a doctoral degree and her future sister-in law had a master's degree; she stated that this inspired her to complete her studies. She was aware that things had changed in the educational spectrum in the country, at all levels since her last educational experience. Despite being afraid and worried, she decided to return to full-time education. She registered on the foundation programme to improve her maths and English levels, when she came to choose her major, she consulted her husband and they decided on education as her major. She shared that she had health issues before registering on the classroom assistant course, and after surgery believed that God had given her a second chance, she was going to make the most of the opportunity. She was diagnosed with dyslexia during the course, but committed to the programme with additional support, and successfully completed the diploma. She was pursuing her bachelor's degree in education at the time of the second interview.

5.2.4 OMA'S BACKGROUND

Oma was from a village outside Abu Dhabi city, where she lived with her mother and father and four siblings. Oma was the second girl of three, she also had a younger brother. She attended school in her local neighbourhood and graduated from the local secondary school with her high school certificate. Her father was a medical doctor and wanted her to become a doctor. She presented that she wanted to teach and was going to be the first person in her

family to enter the teaching profession. Her two sisters had attended college – one graduated in relationship management and her younger sister was also on the Classroom Assistant Diploma. She shared stories about friends undermining her decision to be a teacher and the negativity that she endured; however, she did not allow this to prevent her from pursuing her ambition. She was certain that she wanted to be a teacher and used the classroom assistant programme as a steppingstone to pursue her ambition. She successfully completed the diploma programme and articulated to the degree, where she was working to gain the necessary qualification to become a teacher. Despite the changes in teacher recruitment in the UAE and the challenges she faced, she qualified and gained employment as a teacher, successfully achieving her ambition.

5.2.5 SHAHD'S BACKGROUND

Shahd like Oma, lived outside the city of Abu Dhabi, and attended the local high school. After school she applied to a residential university on the other side of the country for a foundation course. However, she declined this opportunity as she decided she did not want to live away from her family, and hence applied to the HEIME for their foundation programme. She registered on the programme and attained the required English level to register on the bachelor programme of her choice. She shared that her mother wanted her to be a teacher or work in education, so she registered on the classroom assistant programme to please her. She successfully completed the diploma but was unable to apply for a position as a classroom assistant in the state sector, due to her dual nationality. She registered for the Bachelor of Education but withdrew from the programme in the first semester, as she was unhappy. Following this she registered for the bachelor degree in social work, but in semester five was withdrawn from the course, due to her academic performance. She gained work experience from being employed in different roles (some related to education and others not), and eventually returned to the classroom as a classroom assistant. She described herself as wanting to have new experiences and open to trying different things.

5.3 FINDINGS AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS

The following section is based on the participant's narratives and findings, specifically about their journey of coming onto the course, their experiences of the course, and their plans after completion of it. The narratives have been analysed using thematic analysis. The coding of themes came out of the data, using the inductive approach (Frith & Gleeson, 2006) as discussed in 4.8.2, they were not driven by the research question at this point. Braun and Clarke (2006) state that data are not coded in epistemological vacuums, researchers epistemological and ontological beliefs impact the themes identified and the data analysis; my philosophy and belief about women are embedded in my interpretation of the data. The three main themes from the data are listed below:

(i) Decision making - the impact of family and friends regarding decisions linked to educational choices and beyond. Themes of decision making, and independence are further presented in 6.2.1 - 6.2.35 and 7.2.1 – 7.2.4 pertaining to the research questions.

(ii) Programme content - likes and dislikes. This theme does not relate directly to either research question but provides an insight of the educational experiences and content of the course by the participants, including how the content was used in educational settings and beyond.

(iii) Ambitions and inspirations - the goals of the participants prior to the course and at the end of the course.

After both sets of narrative interviews, the raw data was collected, analysed and interpreted and discussed in 4.8.1. Data from the participants is presented in bold font, indented and in speech marks for easy reference, they are in the exact words of the participants. This reveals the participants' English language level, but the emphasis is on communicative interaction, collating personal stories and not on accuracy. I have added additional words or the correct grammar in square brackets [ ] where needed, to enhance the meaning. When the quoted text is part of a longer sentence, I use … to show this, or that the sentence is incomplete. I have also used square brackets to contextualise the quote, again to enhance meaning. My aim was not to tamper or change the meaning of the text, but to aid understanding as it is

interpreted. Additionally, I have used the first three letters of the participant's name and the abbreviation 'Int' for interview 1 or 2 in brackets, to indicate when the interview took place and for ease of contextualisation of who and when, they were speaking. Discussions of the themes and findings are presented below.

5.3.1 DECISION MAKING: INDEPENDENCE VERSUS FAMILY AND FRIENDS

A theme which was prevalent for all the participants was the impact of others regarding their decision to register on the classroom assistant programme, and other decisions following. There were identified changes in the impact of family and friends between 2016 and 2020 for some participants, which will be discussed in this section also.

In a patriarchal society where men make decisions both in the public and private sphere (Hunnicutt, 2009) – see 2.2.5, Oma's narrative shares the impact her father had in her decision making. The belief that the role of the classroom assistant was an appropriate role for women in the UAE at the time of the interview, as discussed by Rutledge, et al., (2014), was not the case for Oma's father. He wanted Oma to be in the medical profession and not in education – see 5.1.3. Oma's narrative described how an experience in school impacted her decision to join the teaching profession. She said:

> **'When I was in primary school, I have [had] one teacher. I like [liked] her so much. She was like my mother. When I was in the school, I didn't get [go] into the class. I sit [sat] outside and she [would] come outside…and draw a flower in [on] my hand. … she said, when you're comfortable [to] come inside the class, [come]. That's why [when] I start [decided that I] I want [wanted] to be a teacher'. (Oma, Int 1**)

Oma confronts her father's ambition for her to be a doctor and explicitly shares her desire to become a teacher. In a society where men traditionally govern both within the public and private domain (Al Obeidli, 2020; Lerner, 1986), Oma presents her career choice and negotiates and convinces her father (and family). In her second interview Oma discussed the impact her cousin had when she was looking for work, and the part she played in securing employment. She shared that she informed her of a vacancy at a nearby school and

encouraged her to pursue the opportunity. Oma appeared focused in her resolve to teach, from convincing her family about her career choice, to struggling to gain employment – see 6.1.3, but she secured employment and became a class teacher as planned from a young age.

In contrast Shahd's decision to join the course was impacted both by a friend and her mother. She said:

> **'…my friend, and I ask [asked] her about the major. That's why…shes [she] encourage[d] me to went(go) to the education major'.**
>
> **'…the major, how my friends talked about it was easy and nice'. (Sha, Int 1)**

Shahd's friend was an existing student on the course, she shared that they spent time together outside of their lessons engaging in conversations and discussions prior to Shahd making her decision. This impact of friends was endorsed in Alzeer's (2019) work where the bond of 'togetherness,' i.e., women choosing to be together in physical spaces also provided social and moral support for the women, impacting decision making. Shahd's relationship and bond with her friend, led to support with decision making. She also discussed the part her mother played in her decision-making process. She said:

> **'My mother ...she ask [asked] me nicely like, what about to be a teacher?' (Sha, Int 2)**

Shahd goes on to say that she listened to her mother and wanted a new experience, which led her to make her decision; she then registered on the classroom assistant course. She spoke of a close relationship with her mother and wanting to please her. Her decision to register on the course was impacted by her mother's encouragement and the advice of a friend. However, in 2020 Shahd spoke about making her own decisions, independently of others, about the new course options and possible employment opportunities. She abandoned the previous decision made in conjunction with her mother's encouragement as discussed in 6.2.3, to pursue a career in teaching, and decided that it was not for her. She decided to pursue a career in social work. Her narrative emphasized the decision she made for herself, with no reference to her mother or friends. She moved from a position of being encouraged and supported by others, to making decisions for herself. There is a change in her

outlook, possibly impacted by the challenges of finding employment and being dismissed from the social work course. This may have helped her to reflect on what she wanted for herself, in terms of possibilities for the future.

In addition to this, Shahd's presented independent decisions about employment after the course, in both a paid and voluntary capacity. She said:

> **'Zayd house humanity they open a section for autism students, only autism students and I very interesting when I hear that, and I go to volunteer with them'. (Sha, Int 2)**

> **'… I was working there. I give [gave] them my CV and I work [worked] there for nine months. It was very, very, very challenging time, you know. I challenge myself it was last of 2018 in December… I was very happy there'. (Sha, Int 2)**

Shahd appeared to be making decisions for herself at this point of her journey. In a culture where decisions are often influenced by others and made jointly with family members (Howe-Walsh et al., 2020), Shahd does not refer to the family but presents decisions as her own. This change in her approach to decision making demonstrated a move towards independence in this area of her life.

Nabila shared the role of her husband in her decision to register on the course. She was unsure of what to study at college. She had started a pre-medical course but withdrew for personal reasons. When she considered returning to education, her husband suggested that working with children was a 'good' career choice for her. She presents the guidance and encouragement her husband provided, at that juncture in her life. Throughout her journey she shared her husband's support and encouragement at different junctures in her life. However, change is evidenced later in Nabila's trajectory, a move towards independent decision making whilst on the course – see 7.2.3. She suggested initially needing and wanting support and direction in making decisions, however she stated sometime after, that she could make decisions for herself. This does not negate her husband's previous contribution to the process.

Marwa's narrative about her course choice, like Shahd's suggested the impact of friends, was significant in her decision making. She said:

> **'…. I listened to the diploma, [to what was said about the diploma, that] it's easier than the bachelor…no exams only projects and…active [learning]. And I listen [listened] also [about] education and about children…I like [liked] it'. (Mar, Int 1)**

She made her decision to register on the course through information gathering, from her peers, when she highlighted that 'they' said it was easier than the bachelor course. Marwa's explicit narrative points to fewer direct conversations with others, when deciding to join the course, she simply said she registered on the diploma course as it was available.

> **'…when I graduate [graduated from school] I went to college, I start [started] with the foundation for bachelor. Err, and when I was in level four, after I didn't get my err IELTS so they told us that we can enter the diploma. (Mar, Int 1)**

Marwa's narrative suggested a level of independence when making decisions about the course choice. Others may have been involved in the process as is customary in some families e.g., as shared by Oma and Shahd, but she did not to refer to them, which suggested how she saw herself in the decision-making process.

Later in the interview she referred to men wanting their wives to be educated and being accepting of this, affirming that women should help their husbands and share financial responsibility. Again, she discussed this with reference to her personal belief and her desire to work to contribute to the marital home. It is likely that Marwa's beliefs and values had been impacted by society, culture and family, interestingly Marwa does not refer to this, but presents her beliefs as her own. In the patriarchal society she is a part of, she presented her story, beliefs, and actions in this way.

Halima's narrative like Marwa's suggested a level of independent thinking from the beginning of the course. She expressed her experience and disappointment in not meeting the course

requirement for the bachelor programme, and decided on the diploma programme, as being the right thing to do – see 7.2.2. She did not refer to discussions with her family or friends regarding her decision (like Marwa) but said:

> **'…when I was in the higher, the high school, I wasn't think [thinking] about anything. Like what I want to be, what I should to do. I only go to, to the college like this, and I don't [didn't] know what to do. I felt like it's my life. It's the right thing to do'. (Mar, Int 1)**

She presented her choice to register on the programme, as a decision without explicit advice or direction from others. She continued the discussion and said that with the limited course options available she registered on the classroom diploma, but when other options became available, they were not a fit for her; she recognised that this course was a good match for her. From a place of non-commitment to the course or the profession, Halima endorsed that her decision to join the course was positive, leading to employment in the field and the consideration of further studies in a related field.

The second theme that emerged was the course content, including courses which were useful and enjoyable and courses which were less so. Despite not directly connected with the research questions, these findings give insight into the experiences of the course and the relevance of the content from the participants' perspective. They provide contextual information about each participant on their trajectory and their response to the course content.

5.3.2 COURSE CONTENT: LIKES AND DISLIKES

The five participants were invited to share their experience of the course content. See 10.2, which outlines the courses taught and when they were taught i.e., the numbers represent the semesters in which they were taught (the duration of the course was two years, divided into four semesters. When discussing the content of the course, the participants said little about the medium of instruction, which was English. This initiative was based on the government's

directive to equip the populous with the language of business – see section 2.7, English was also taught as a separate subject.

Halima referred to the teaching of English in this way, she said:

> **'…it's a different subject but it's all English, so it's helped me with my English… a lot.**
>
> **And I used to write all my projects (in English), so, it's [it] helped me in a lot'. (Hal, Int 1)**

She referred to direct English teaching and the medium of instruction, suggesting that both helped her improve her English. She also indicated that whilst on the classroom diploma course she had reached the required English level and no longer needed to attend the English classes. Oma on the other hand, simply referred to the English courses required, and their contribution in developing her reading and writing skills. Both participants reached the required English level during the course, demonstrating that they were proficient English users. They also referred to other content courses too.

Halima shared that the lifespan development course was beneficial, and how she applied her knowledge when she was working with a student with special educational needs. She said she was able to identify underdeveloped motor skills and create activities to help her student. She also referred to using content from the creating and managing resources course, which she said she used when working directly with her learner. This application of skills is the focus of vocational education (Majumdar, 2011; Billett, 2013). Halima demonstrated that she had the competency and the confidence to use her skills in the workplace, and assist the learner, as expected in her role.

Oma, Nabila, and Marwa spoke about the special needs course and the learning that had taken place for then personally. Nabila said this about the special needs course:

> **'And how the learning outcome fit [fits] this student, because they have different learning outcome [abilities] than [from] the other student [students]'. (Nab, Int 1)**

She highlighted specific skills that she acquired from the course and practically applied in the school context. Nabila said that without the course she would not have been able to work with students in such a focused way, she acknowledged the skills and knowledge she had gained which equipped her for the classroom context. She demonstrated her ability to apply her knowledge and skills for the benefit of the learner.

Marwa also endorsed this by referring to her time in school and the knowledge gained from the course at the HEIME. She said:

> **'I learned in [the] all semesters and do [did] many project [projects] about [the] special needs'. (Mar, Int 1)**
>
> **'Most time I sit with the boys who can't concentrate and talk with he (him)…and the teacher said learn about the Maths. He sit with me and talk., also he answer some question I set for him'. (Mar, Int 1)**

Here she demonstrated that with the knowledge gained, she developed the confidence to work with learners, interacting and supporting learning. She was able to apply her knowledge in a practical way in the school setting. Oma referred to learning to work with students with learning challenges in groups and/or individually to meet their needs and being able to work alongside and be directed by the teacher, to meet specific learning needs

Another course which Shahd, and Oma discussed was Guiding Children's Behaviour. Shahd and Oma (who lived in the same village) shared that some of the strategies they learned from the course, were used at home with siblings. Oma described her younger sister's behaviour as bad, saying she would not listen or follow instructions. Oma devised rewards to manage her behaviour and implemented them, which she said made a difference in her sibling's behaviour. She also referred to using her computer skills developed on the course to help her sister, as a way of managing her behaviour, and helping her sister with her studies.

Shahd shared how she devised rewards for her niece both to manage inappropriate behaviour and also to encourage commitment to her academic development. She said:

> **'I think [thought] what [does] she's [she] like and I let [allowed] her to see the gift, and like I let her to know, this [is] your point [to] listen to me to have this gift. And shes [she] see [saw[the gift every day. And she thinks [thought] oh, I have to listen to her to get this. This [is] what I learned. It's very good. In my life I use it and shes [she] listen [listened] to me and I'm relaxing now'. (Sha, Int 1)**

Shahd like Oma used the reward system to manage behaviour outside the classroom. Both Oma and Shahd developed the knowledge and confidence to guide and manage behaviour. They recognized that the skills and knowledge they had acquired were transferable.

The courses referred to above, describe the learning that took place but more importantly the participants' ability to apply the knowledge and skills both within the educational context and beyond. The participants provided the rationale for why they liked the course and how they implemented the learning in different contexts.

5.3.3 AMBITIONS AND ASPIRATIONS

The participants talked about their future aspirations, both career plans and personal goals.

At the time of the interview Halima was the only person employed. She had successfully graduated from the classroom assistant course and spoke about securing a job as a classroom assistant. She shared her experiences of working with a learner with special needs, and the training she was offered by the school to consolidate previous learning and facilitate her role. She reflected on the experience on the diploma course and her academic success which 'pushed her' towards the thought of completing a bachelor's degree. She stated that prior to this success she had not thought about academic study or personal goals, beyond the diploma. During the two-year course there were identifiable signs of change for Halima. Despite the belief by Newman (2012) that good learning is synonymous with growth and change, and change should not be hailed as something unusual, the evidence shows that

Halima's mindset and her new desire to work towards a degree, was a significant change. She could have acquired the skills needed for her role as a classroom assistant and been content to work in this field long term. However, the findings showed that she had moved from a place of no verbalised ambition beyond getting a certificate, to a place of a focused future goal. She said her family were very happy with her working as a classroom assistant, and her father wanted her to work towards being a school principal. Halima however, rejected this idea and said she wanted to be a psychiatrist, focusing on working with behaviour transformation. She planned to study this discipline, she verbalised her personal aspirations and began to research places to study. The experiences of the classroom assistant course and working in school, helped her develop a sense of direction in formulating her future aspirations. Halima said:

> **'I want to specialise in this. err…how to make the bad personality, to become a good personality'. (Hal, Int 1)**

Her new found ambition demonstrated the confidence she had at that point of her trajectory, in contrast to the beginning of the course.

Halima continued her narrative with the possible challenges she might face and her philosophical outlook; she stated clearly that she was focused on achieving more and would not be deterred. She said:

> **'I try. Even if, even if I have problems I will try. I will do my best. [If] There is [are] difficult things, but there is no things [nothing] you cannot do ever. You can try, you will find your way. (Hal, Int 1)**

Her ambition was to work towards her goals and not to give up, she demonstrated her new focused and determined mindset, to achieve the goal she has set for herself.

Similarly, Marwa expressed her personal ambitions at the end of the course. She said how much she was looking forward to working as a classroom assistant, despite initially not wanting to work with children. She expressed her feelings of accomplishment, in spite of her

personal health challenges, at the time of the interview she was in the process of looking for work as a classroom assistant. She also shared that she wanted to go on to complete her bachelor degree and had started the process of researching possible options. She said:

> **'I think [am thinking about] when I work I will complete the bachelor'.**
>
> **…when I went to the university, [they] said bring the diploma and they will see all the courses…and I will complete some, and not start at the beginning (of the bachelor's)…maybe it might take one and half years, maybe two years to get my bachelor'. (Mar, Int 1)**

Marwa stated that she wanted to accomplish more, beyond being a qualified classroom assistant. She revealed that she was thinking about her future. Like Halima she moved from a place of indecision and uncertainty regarding her future goals, she stated that when she started the course she did not want to work with learners, but by the end of the course not only was she looking for employment as a classroom assistant, but she was also researching a degree programme in education. The duration of the course had impacted her journey of discovery and facilitated changing her outlook about her life and developing personal goals. She articulated her goals and aspirations, not determined by family or friends, this is Marwa's story.

Nabila and Oma on the other hand, both focused on becoming schoolteachers. Oma knew that she wanted to teach and planned to use the diploma course as an alternative pathway for entering the teaching profession. She clearly stated that:

> **'I want to be a teacher and to teach children, young children not adults. I love that because I will be the first teacher in my family'. (Oma, Int 1)**

She articulated onto the Bachelor of Education and completed the degree as planned. Oma's aspiration was known and stated at the beginning of the course, she had a clear plan and was working towards it. However, during that time the requirement to enter the teaching profession changed, making it difficult for her to start the profession and teach in English as originally planned. However, she secured work teaching one to one, a child with special needs before the pandemic. At the time of the interview, she was offered a teaching position in a

local school, which was due to start in the coming academic year. She achieved her goal despite some challenges. Unlike her peers, Oma had a clear goal and she demonstrated her commitment to her goal. The quiet strength she had, seemed to develop through her trajectory, she revealed disappointment but strength in her quest to teach, at a number of points – see 6.2.1. The experiences both positive and negative on her educational journey appear to have made her more determined to achieve her goal.

In contrast, Nabila discovered that she wanted to teach whilst on the diploma course, and then articulated onto the bachelor course. Her experiences and her return to full-time education demonstrated her ambition and aspirations to achieve for herself. She shared the point of realisation whilst on the diploma and working in school as part of the apprenticeship course after having taught a class, to become a teacher. She said:

> **'Oh my God, I can do it! I have ability to do it, God give me a chance…this is my time, I have to do it!!! If other teachers, do it, you can do it. Even you have a struggle with your illness it's not an excuse, just do it'. (Nab, Int 2)**

She aspired for more that the diploma course – teaching became her ambition. The classroom assistant course experience was instrumental in helping her realise her ambition, her first-hand experience of working with learners in an educational setting facilitated the journey of discovery. Despite the required English level needed to get onto the final year of the bachelor degree and changes of the required English level to enter the profession, this did not change her aspiration. At the time of the second interview, Nabila was working towards completing the final year of her degree and working towards the required English level. She was due to resume full-time study in the following semester. She said:

> **'I need to get my IELTS band 6 to complete the bachelor's so I am studying for the IELTS every day I have to study IELTS'. (Nab, Int 2)**

Nabila's narrative revealed that she was determined and was working towards her new future goal, acquiring a degree, and joining the teaching profession; she wanted to achieve for herself. She also explained that the master's degree that she was planning to do, would be for her husband, as he encouraged her on this stage of her journey.

Shahd on the other hand came to the realisation that she did not want to teach and registered on the social work degree after careful consideration. She verbalised her future aspiration, she said:

> **'…they opened the social worker [work course] in the college and I go [went] for it, I [would] love to be a social worker. I complete(completed) two years'. (Sha, Int 2)**

She shared that she was withdrawn from this course due to not meeting the academic standard. She continued her narrative, revealing stories about the voluntary work she did i.e., working in a special needs school and then working in a paid capacity in a theme park. She described herself as wanting to learn and wanting to try new things.

> **'I try things and make good experience [experiences] and challenge in my life. It's really make [makes] me change my ways, [it] make [makes] me change my thinking, …I trust [myself] more myself'. (Sha, Int 2)**

Shahd's narrative differed from the other participants in terms of less focus on a career and more of a focus on new experiences and personal growth. She was open to new experiences and took advantage, she found opportunities that seemed to promote her personal growth whilst possibly considering future career options. At the time of the second interview, she was working in school and shared her aspiration of working with the children, giving them the best possible educational experiences, she could.

5.4 SUMMARY OF BACKGROUND FINDINGS

The aim of this chapter has been to provide a broad picture of the participants and their narratives, offering an overview of their recent experiences. Stories do not occur in a vacuum, the past impacts the present (Kerry-Fowler, 2010), therefore I felt that it was necessary to provide contextual information. The narratives shared are a source of knowledge (Larkin et al., 2009, as cited in Carson, et al., 2017), they are a means of making sense of past events. The stories shared, place individuals back in time, highlighting who they were then, with who they might be in the future (Cortazzi, 2001; Reissman, 2008). My participants recounted their

stories, which were analysed using thematic analysis. At this point I did not use transformative learning and its themes, as the framework for analysis, I wanted to explore and understand my participants' narratives in general terms. I encouraged my participants to be as open and honest as discussed previously – hearing their stories was key (Weiler & Middleton, 1990). Their narratives revealed their journeys of change and development, which are prevalent themes in my research.

The next chapter will present my findings in relation to the research questions, using vignettes from the participants. Narrative inquiry will be used to uncover the experiences of my participants specifically in relation to disorienting dilemmas and changing points of view, using transformative learning as the theoretical framework.

6 SUB RESEARCH QUESTION 1: WHAT ROLE DO 'DISORIENTING DILEMMAS' PLAY IN THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN IN THE UAE?

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The exploration of my participants on their educational journeys provides a deeper understanding of their lived experiences, possibly resulting in transformative learning, through perspective transformation or changing points of view. As discussed in chapter three, the process of change refers to addressing taken for granted assumptions and altering them, possibly resulting in a paradigm change and a new world view. However, the possibility of perspective transformation occurring, as outlined by Mezirow (1991, 2000), is low. This does not negate other learning experiences or shifts which might take pace. Educational experiences resulting in any change, I believe, are worthy of exploration in order to deepen our understanding of the process. It is my intention to discover the experiences of the women in my study at two different points on their trajectories - during and after the course they undertook. I have done this by generating initial codes, which were streamlined though the process of searching for themes within and across the data. Using transformative learning and the theoretical categories to develop my analysis a stage further, the findings focused on the participants lived experiences of disorienting dilemmas.

In this chapter I present my findings, focusing on my fist sub research question. I have presented my findings as two distinct areas for greater readability, acknowledging that the themes do not appear in isolation but are interwoven and interconnected. The themes will be discussed separately initially, and holistically in the following chapter. I do not refer to every participant in both sections; the stories of those participants who are relevant to each sub research questions are included in each findings chapter.

6.1.1 RESEARCH QUESTION 1: DISORIENTING DILEMMAS

This chapter will aim to present my findings with reference to my main research question:

- How can Emirati women's educational experiences be understood though the lens of transformative learning?

Focusing on my sub question:

- What role do 'disorienting dilemmas' play in the lived experiences of women in the UAE?

In this discussion, I highlight and discuss disorienting dilemmas experienced by the participants in my study and the subsequent responses (if any). As discussed in chapter three, a disorienting dilemma, as defined by Mezirow (1991, 2000), occurs when meaning schemes are inadequate to explain experiences or new information, resulting in tensions where previous knowledge and experiences do not align with current experiences. These experiences can be a catalyst for transformative learning. Disorienting dilemmas can be common in the experience of learners and can vary from being epochal and dramatic to smaller and nondescript. These experiences or crises can cause a sense of imbalance and anxiety. Herbers and Mullins Nelson (2009) define disorienting dilemma's as 'any external event that causes a sense of internal imbalance and challenges an existing sense of meaning' (p.8), leading to questions and changes in how reality is understood. Dilemmas can lead to awareness of 'inconsistency among thoughts, feelings, and actions' (Petersen, 2009, p.102), the possible outcome being a shift in perspective. Perspective transformation, triggered by a disorienting dilemma, occurs when meaning schemes (i.e., rules that govern how the world operates) are transformed, and meaning perspectives (i.e., higher order principles) that propose how abstract relationships function, result in paradigm shifts (Mezirow, 1991, 2000). The shift in perspective, according to Mezirow (1991, 2000), could lead to perspective transformation, resulting in a change to how individuals see the world, but it may lead to smaller changes which impact how individuals see and operate in their own world i.e., changing points of views, which will be discussed in the following chapter. According to King (1998), the search is for new answers and new perspectives.

My study explores the disorienting dilemmas of my participants, identifying similarities and differences between their experiences and aims to uncover resulting actions or inactions. Three out of the five participants in the study experienced disorienting dilemmas as described in transformative learning theory, shared in interview one and two, Oma, Nabila and Shahd's narratives are explored in this finding chapter.

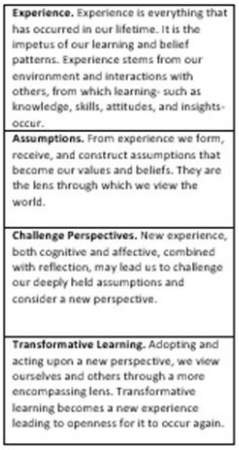
To analyse the data, I have used a modified version of Mezirow's ten phases of transformative learning, which is adapted in Nerstrom's transformative model (2014), to guide my inquiry, as discussed in 3.3.4. Nerstrom (2014) asserts that use of this model can begin at anyone of the four points, but that the process is sequential, following the next point in the model. My use of the model begins with new experiences (i.e., disorienting dilemmas) which can lead to challenging previous assumptions, dilemmas that encourage questioning taken for granted assumptions, possibly resulting in new perspectives and actions. These experiences then become new learning, knowledge, and attitudes, from which new assumptions are formed, which include beliefs and values. I also used Kroth and Boverie's (2009)'s integrated discovery model (which was adapted for the workplace), to explore the discovery/dilemma in more detail. In the following section I discuss my findings, focusing on the experiences of each of my participants in turn. The table below itemises the research question, presents Nerstrom's transformative learning model and corresponding stages from Mezirow's ten phases of transformative learning. It presents the range of reactions to the dilemmas identified, as shared in the narratives. Nerstrom's model, like most theories and frameworks, is useful for my analysis, but is used tentatively and requires adaptations (mainly minor) when used in my discussion. I do not focus on 'reflection', which is included in Nerstrom's model (and also Mezirow's theory) but recognise that it may be a contributing factor to the change process and new perspective. I use the model with caution, focusing on challenging assumptions and the changes for the individual and how they see themselves, as opposed to how they see others. See the table below.

Analysing disorienting dilemmas

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">What role do 'disorienting dilemmas' play in the lived experiences of women in the UAE?</td></tr>
<tr><td>Disorienting Dilemmas - the process identified

Things that happen to the individual.
Things that the individual makes happen.



Source: Nerstrom (2014), p.328.
I have used four of the original phases from Mezirow's transformative learning theory (1991, 2000) for my analysis:

(1) Experiencing a dilemma
(2) Critical assessment of assumptions
(5) Exploration of options for new roles, actions and relationships
(10) Reintegration into life based on new perspectives.</td><td>Reactions to Dilemmas

• No immediate action.
• No action in the future.
• Immediate response.
• Future response.
• Changes to points of views.</td></tr>
</table>

6.2 DISORIENTING DILEMMA: CHANGING POINTS OF VIEW AND NEW PERSPECTIVES

Three of my participants experienced disorienting dilemmas, as defined by Mezirow (1991, 2000). My focus in this chapter is on the responses to the dilemmas - inaction, immediate

actions, or actions within a short time frame. I have presented the findings separately, according to each participants' narrative, but make links between their experiences where appropriate. My findings highlight changes to personal beliefs, referred to in the theory as changing points of view. Points of view will be discussed in the following chapter in more detail, as it pertains to sub research question two; however, it is a result of some disorienting dilemmas and is also discussed in this chapter. As presented in 10.1, data was collected on two occasions over a four-year period, and the three participants that experienced disorienting dilemma in the 2016 are the same three participants who I was able to locate and interview again in 2020 - Oma, Shahd and Nabila. The evidence could suggest a correlation between disorienting dilemmas, the characteristics of those who experience them and their openness to other changes, as discussed by Mezirow (1991, 2000) and Nerstrom (2014).

6.2.1 OMA'S DISORIENTING DILEMMAS: CHANGING POINTS OF VIEW AND NEW PERSPECTIVES

Oma recalled several disorienting dilemmas, which I have highlighted. They shed light on her experiences, but more importantly on her journey of change, which manifested itself in changing points of view and personal beliefs.

She shared her story about the experience of her father and the expectation that he had of her joining the medical profession, as mentioned in 5.3.1. This discussion provides a deeper insight into the experience of decision making. As per Nerstrom's (2014) model of transformative learning, Oma shared the prior experiences and learning she gained. She spoke of the tension between her father's expectation of her joining the medical profession and her conflicting ambition to join the teaching profession. The importance of family in Emirati culture and paternal influence will be discussed in the following section in more detail. Oma shared her early experiences (which she recalled with clarity) of a teacher who took the time to understand and encourage her when she was reluctant to join the class. She elaborated, and later referred to the impact this teacher's action had on her future aspiration to become a teacher. Her father may have been unaware of this experience and wanted Oma to become a doctor like himself. He had assumptions which were different from Oma's, but

she constructed her beliefs and values about teaching based on this experience, seeing the world and her future ambition through this lens. However, Oma's father's future career plans led to feelings of anxiety and discomfort between them. It was a disorienting dilemma, where the meaning schemes in operation through that experience conflicted with Oma's beliefs about teaching and her aspirations, generating anxiety, as discussed by Mezirow (1991); Herbers and Mullins Nelson (2009). This external event or situation presented by her father, causes a sense of internal balance, challenging Oma's existing sense of meaning.

She shared her reaction when her father says he wants her to be a doctor:

> **'…my father said I want you to be a doctor like me. But I don't know where it start [started] but in [at] some point, I hate to see blood. Like I want [wanted] to throw up if I saw it.' (Oma, Int 1)**

This disorienting dilemma led to the first step of questioning and rejecting the taken for granted assumption regarding what was expected by her father. Oma shared her experiences and reaction that the sight of blood repulsed her and that she did not want to work in this field. Following this, she challenged the assumption that she would join the medical profession, as per Nerstrom's stage of 'challenging perspectives', and rejected the expectation. This response is in the context of a patriarchal society and home where the role of the male is central. Oma presented her perspective to her father and entered negotiations about the career of her choice. She described what she wanted for herself and discussed it with her father and her siblings. She spoke out against the expected norm, confronting expectations that she would do what was expected, and strove to present her own ambition. She goes further and says:

> '**First, when I tell to [told] my father [that] I don't [didn't] want to be a doctor he said what major do you have in the college. I talk with him, I said I think education will be best for me … we think that education will be okay for us.' [Referring to her sister and cousin enrolling in the Classroom Assistant Diploma with her]. (Oma, Int 1)**

Oma's previous experiences were important in constructing her norms and beliefs (Mezirow, 1991, 2000; Nerstrom, 2014), which were challenged by the assumption that she would join

the medical profession. The experience above led Oma to challenge existing assumptions and adopt a new perspective, evidenced in new beliefs and actions which she pursued. The disorienting dilemma and conflict of interests led her to address these taken for granted assumptions and expectations, resulting in a reordering of assumptions she held (Taylor, 2009). Clark (1993) discusses how transformative learning shapes people, resulting in transformations that are recognisable both by themselves and others. Oma's rejection of assimilated assumptions regarding career choices highlight her being caught in personal histories and experiences that constrain her (Mezirow, 1981). The taken for granted assumptions emphasise the deeply ingrained cultural expectations which are challenged through the process of questioning assumptions; from this arises new understandings (Taylor & Cranton, 2012). Cultural beliefs and assumptions which are taught through interactions and environment become a major part of the individual (Nestrom, 2014). Oma faced cultural expectations and rejected the taken for granted assumption that she would join the medical profession. Her seemingly new perspective (which she appears to have had from an early age), was verbalised, and acted on, leading to both a new lens for seeing herself and those around her.

This uncomfortable disorienting dilemma, for Oma resulted in movement, and a shift from what was expected, to a new visible perspective of what she wanted for herself. Oma responded to the situation through discussion (and possibly reflection), resulting in her enrolling in the course of her choice, in pursuit of her ambition. Implicit in these steps of change are possible experiences of reflection and introspection (which are included in the theory but beyond the scope of my work). The outcome of Oma's reaction to the disorienting dilemma was a change in her belief or her point of view that she could become a teacher. Using Kroth and Boverie's (2009) model of transformative learning, Oma may have been thinking that things were happening 'because of me' based on her decision not to accept the taken for granted assumptions. However, the result was positive in terms of her getting the opportunity to purse her dreams. Oma's response to the dilemma showed her ability to verbalise her thinking, challenge perspectives and consciously change her situation. Galloway and Jones (2012), describe this as an act of liberation, where she abandoned and rejected what was, resulting in a changing situation which is liberating. Oma demonstrated personal

emancipation, questioning taken for granted assumptions about what career path she would follow, highlighting her perspective and commitment to the teaching profession. After the events above, Oma registered on the classroom assistant course and successfully completed it. After completing the classroom assistant course, as planned, she registered for the Bachelor of Education. As discussed above, she wanted to pursue a career in teaching, and this pathway allowed her to gain the qualification required for entry requirement into the profession.

Oma shared another disorienting dilemma which occurred whilst enrolled on the Bachelor of Education programme; the employment authority announced a new entry requirement for teaching, with immediate effect. For Oma this information failed to align with her previous experiences and assumptions; her beliefs about how she saw the world was brought under scrutiny, challenging perspectives, as per Nerstrom's (2014) model. Her beliefs and values, based on previous experience, suggested that she did not expect changes to recruitment to be conducted in this way. She was unable to make sense of this new ruling or accept this piece of information, and the situation generated anxiety.

She said:

> **'The Ministry [i.e., the Ministry of Education] say if you have the band 7 (i.e., IELTS English language competency exam), you will teach the English subjects, but if you have less than 7 you will teach the Arabic subjects.' (Oma, Int 2)**
>
> **'It is not fair, because we don't get to teach the English subjects, we don't know about the Arabic [we don't know about teaching in Arabic]. Like if we want to teach the Arabic subjects there are some colleges that teach the subject, but we want [to] English subjects, but now - I don't even remember the Arabic alphabet order [the order of the Arabic alphabet].' (Oma, Int 2)**

This directive challenged Oma's perspective, causing her to question assumptions and arrive at a new perspective. Oma revealed that she was unhappy with the new entry requirement; she said that if she wanted to teach in Arabic, she would have gone to another institution to prepare for this role. Using Kroth and Bovie's (2009) model, this experience was happening

to her; it had been imposed, revealing a set of disturbances that affected beliefs and perspectives. She stated that she joined the HEIME so she could teach in English and expected to do so. However, the change to the entry requirement meant her current level of English would not permit her to teach in English. She also revealed that her Arabic skills had deteriorated, due to lack of use. There was a disconnect between what she believed i.e., the assumption that she would qualify and teach in English, and the new directive; taken for granted assumptions were questioned, the assumption that completing the course would lead to employment was being challenged. This raised multiple issues, causing Oma to question the new directive, assumptions, and outcomes.

Taylor (2000) describes this 'discon-firmation' or disorientation (which is an awareness of a discrepancy between the individuals' expectations and experience) as uncomfortable and challenging for the individual. Oma questioned her belief about the employment authority and the assumption she made about gaining employment. She expressed her feelings and discontentment; her belief had changed, she no longer expected to be employed as a teacher by the education authority. The disorienting dilemma concerning changes to the entry requirement to teaching impacted Oma's future decisions. At the time of the interview, she took no visible action in response to the situation. There may have been a number of reasons for this e.g., she was enrolled on the course and decided to complete it regardless. She shared that she chose not to work towards the higher entry requirement, suggesting she now had a lack of desire to work as an English class teacher in the state sector. Oma's behaviour demonstrated her questioning of previous assumptions and belief, arriving at a new interpretation of the world around her and a changing point of view, she did not commit to teaching in the government sector. Her response to this situation differed from her peers. It highlighted the personal and subjective features of transformative learning, and how individuals respond differently to the same situation. Individuals' histories, experiences and stories are unique to each individual, affecting responses and points of view individually. This is continued in the discussion below.

6.2.2 NABILA'S DISORIENTING DILEMMA: CHANGING POINTS OF VIEW AND NEW PERSPECTIVES

Nabila's experiences and responses differed from Oma's. She says:

> **'…even [though] there is some of the government [policies] (for the) it has really changed. Which is like something bad maybe, or good things [thing] for us, for example we hear that we have to take 6.5 for the IELTS [International English Language Testing System]. (Nab, Int 2)**

> '…**it doesn't put something to stop us [they haven't put something to stop us], actually they put something that is going to qualify us as a teachers.'(Nab, Int 2)**

Nabila did not seem perturbed by this new requirement; it appeared to be a 'small' disorienting dilemma for her. This new experience led Nabila to challenge her assumptions about her employment prospects and the Education authority, as per Nerstrom's model (2014). Her response to this predicament was that it would not stop her from qualifying as a teacher. She explained that this requirement would be beneficial' both for the students in schools and the teachers. Her outlook was not to shy away from change or challenge, but to face it and work towards overcoming it; unlike Oma, she viewed this directive positively. The imposed directive may have shocked her initially, but her outlook about the benefit both to herself and the learner was stated. Rorty (1989, as cited in Eschenbacher, 2019) presents the freedom humans have and their ability to create new ways of looking at and being in the world, defining perspectives as vocabularies. These vocabularies i.e., the old and new, can be played off against each other. The evidence suggested that this is happening; the old understanding is played off against the new requirement and the change in policy is accepted as something necessary. Nabila initially referred to this new directive as something 'bad maybe', but then said it was something good and beneficial for both parties. The old vocabulary i.e., a lower entry requirement to the profession, which existed before, was being replaced by a new requirement. In response, Nabila created a new vocabulary or a new way of looking at the situation. Her belief about the government's new directive was seen positively. In this situation Nabila (like Oma) had no alternative way to seek entry into teaching in the government education, other than seeking employment in the private sector or working in another area. Her new belief was that it would be beneficial both for her and

the learners if the English standard were raised. She believed that this new standard was achievable.

Further research is required to understand how and why individuals respond differently to the same circumstances (Taylor, 2000). Nabila, unlike Oma, saw the change positively and changed her point of view. This endorses constructivist theories of the way individuals interpret and reinterpret reality. They are both constructing knowledge, but have their individual perspectives and beliefs, which underpin this. Meaning and personal truth are constructed from individual experiences and subjective interpretation (Fosnot & Perry, 1996). Oma and Nabila's truths differ and result in different responses to the dilemma presented. The new entry requirement did not align with previous meanings or assumptions; Nabila's thinking and belief about the new directive show that she accepted the new information, whilst Oma struggled with the it, resulting in non-acceptance impacting her point of view about teaching. She wanted to teach but would not do so under this new directive.

Nabila was unsure of what to study at college. She had started a pre-medical course previously but withdrew for personal reasons. When she considered returning to education, her husband suggested that working with children was a 'good' career choice. She was tentative about returning to education and revealed her fear and trepidation. She shared:

> **'At the beginning I was so scared because everything it change [had changed], everything is [was] in English. Before that we don't [didn't] have a lot of English, we have [had] Arabic and English… (Nab, Int 1)**

This disorienting dilemma was unsettling for Nabila, and she was confronted with a new educational reality. As identified by Mezirow (1991, 2000), her meaning scheme (referring to her expectation of this context), was inadequate in explaining this new learning environment. Being exposed to the new educational context and vision, including teaching in English, a new curriculum and expatriate teachers, caused a sense of imbalance and anxiety for Nabila. Herbers and Mullins Nelson (2009) refer to the external event or setting causing a sense of internal imbalance, challenging meaning perspectives of how reality is understood. Nabila's

thoughts and feelings were expressed; she was uncomfortable and challenged by this new context. From this disorienting dilemma and challenging beginning, Nabila decided that the course was right for her, and arrived at a new perspective. She said:

> **'When I started at semester one, I love (loved) it, I enjoy (enjoyed) it.' (Nab, Int 1)**

> **'…after one month, two months I started to like it, I say why not, I have (had) to complete it because it is really good thing, it is going to give me opportunity to go to the school and see the children and how they study also.' (Nab, Int 2)**

The experience allowed her to learn in the new context, adapt to the changes and assess the classroom assistant course. She arrived at a new perspective, as identified in Nerstrom's model (2014), where the cognitive and affective experiences, possibly combined with reflection, resulted in her challenging her previous assumption and expectation that education was delivered in a particular way. She accepted the new delivery methods and was no longer scared or anxious, as identified by Kroth and Boverie (2009). Her changing point of view was she could learn in this new environment.

In her continued narrative, Nabila shared how her new knowledge (see 5.2.3) and beliefs gained from the course, were exhibited in her community. She revealed that, prior to the course, she had little understanding or knowledge of learners with special educational needs and felt pity for them. Having learned about special educational needs on the course, she developed an understanding of the issues and demonstrated this knowledge in her local community. She highlighted an occasion when she confronted a member of the community in public, who showed a lack of understanding or awareness for a child with special educational needs. She said:

> **'…I didn't know she (the child) had autism. I feel [felt] so sad about [for] her, because one of the man [men] see [saw] her, that she was like throwing, playing at the room for the children room, and he was screaming on her [screamed at her]. I told him, don't do that, because she has a problem, and she is a blessing, and she has autism'. (Nab, Int 1)**

Nabila's belief and understanding of children with special needs had changed, based on her newly acquired knowledge and belief. She revealed her new belief, she no longer pitied children with special needs, but saw them as a blessing. Assumptions about learners with special educational needs had been challenged, resulting in a new belief that she wanted to share. In this context Nabila did not question her belief about learners with special educational needs (this has already been done), but the behaviour displayed by the member of the public. Changes to Nabila's beliefs, displayed through her actions, endorsed that she was thinking differently and now had a new point of view. Inherited assumptions or prior beliefs about special needs have been questioned, clearing the way for an alternative set of beliefs.

Nabila shared another disorienting dilemma that occurred during the diploma course, when she herself was diagnosed as having special educational needs. She shared her journey of learning challenges and her feelings when she was diagnosed. She said:

> **'When I was in primary since the high school [From primary school to high school] I was really struggling, I didn't know what I have in that time.' (Nab, Int 2)**

> **'I knew I have [had a] problem, but dyslexia, no. I was like convince [convinced] myself I don't [didn't] have anything.' (Nab, Int 2)**

> **'I was in semester four [at the end of the diploma], when I realised that I have [had] dyslexia I was in a shock at the time, I told myself I already have [had] a heart disease and now it's a dyslexia.' (Nab, Int 2)**

Nabila expressed surprise when she was diagnosed with dyslexia. This diagnosis, alongside major heart surgery, came as the latest in a succession of shocking life events. As identified by Taylor (2000), dilemmas can evoke a range of emotions, such as humiliation, shame, guilt, frustration, fear and even possibly depression. Nabila appeared to be concerned, and possibly fearful, of what the diagnosis might mean for her. Challenging established perspectives about her ability or the impact of the diagnosis could be an issue, threatening her very sense of self (Mezirow, 1991). She appeared stressed about the diagnosis. Roberts (2006) discussed the impact of stress and its negative affect. However, short-term stress has been identified as

providing the impetus to make progress, unlike distress, which can be debilitating and hinder progress. The presumption Mezirow (1991, 2000) makes is that disorienting dilemmas will cause positive or short-term stress and result in positive outcomes (Selye, 1974), which is not always the case. For Nabila this was the case; the disorienting dilemma led to a change in her perspective, the situation causing her to look both at herself and her beliefs. She challenged her thinking, changed her perspective and, with the support of her husband, moved forward in her new belief that she could succeed, despite her diagnosis. Nabila's behaviour suggests that she may have been engaging in critical self-reflection, questioning beliefs she has about herself based on previous experiences. The dilemma triggered her to challenge beliefs about her capability and considered a new perspective, as discussed in Nerstrom's model (2014). She presented a new self- belief that she could study and achieve her academic goals. She rejected thoughts that may have hindered or constrained her, replacing them with a new belief.

Nabila shared what she described as a 'life crisis' by Cranton (2006), when she was scheduled to have heart surgery. She shared the ongoing challenges of her health, being offered surgery prior to starting the course and the disorienting dilemma she faced. She described her emotional state before she had her surgery:

> **'I put it in my mind, maybe I was not going to come back with [to] my family. I was that time thinking [at that time I was thinking] I'm going to die because [at] that time I was so sick, so sick even I couldn't breathe without my oxygen.' (Nab, Int 2)**

Her initial health challenge, coupled with surgery, revealed confusion, doubt, anxiety and fear, as suggested by Taylor (2000), and possibly stress too (Roberts, 2006). The situation is happening to her (Kroth & Boverie, 2009). Things were happening to Nabila which were beyond her control. Before the operation, she shared how ill she was; she had breathing difficulties, and the fear of death and not seeing her loved ones again was expressed. She was introspective, thinking about possible outcomes, including death. She engaged in conversation with her uncle before the surgery, discussing life opportunities, and chances to use her unique gifts and skills. She recounts the conversation with her uncle:

'Before I did [had] my surgery, when I was in hospital in Germany, my uncle told me to not give up – you have things that nobody has, which means God love [loves] you, you are special. God choose you because He give [has given] you a chance.' (Nab, Int 2)

She also added her own thoughts on the matter, saying:

'…he (referring to her god) will give me a chance and then he [will] give me a [the] chance not to not give up again.' (Nab, Int2)

This affective experience and conversation with her uncle appeared to result in a shift, a change in Nabila's thinking and belief. Nabila seemed to be challenging her own previous assumption of illness and death and considering a new one, as highlighted by Nerstrom (2014). This focus on questioning one's own assumptions and meaning perspectives (Dirkx et al., 2006), and less so on the problem or the assumption of others, helped Nabila. Dix (2016) discussed the importance of critical self-reflection and whether transformative learning could take place in its absence; it was a part of her learning experience and changing perspective. After the conversations with her uncle, there was evidence of a shift; Nabila's new perspective or point of view was about living and making the most of her life. She was not challenging other people's assumptions about her health and capabilities, but her own assumptions and beliefs, as discussed by Dirkx et al. (2006). This questioning appeared to result in rejection of what she previously believed; she did not want to believe that she would die. The fear, trauma and pain experienced through the disorienting dilemma was ground-breaking and caused action, evidenced in a new way of being. There was the possibility that Nabila was on the brink of challenging her beliefs and ready for change, and the disorienting dilemma pulled her in, Tanaka et al. (2014) discussed this notion. Nabila's new perspective resulted in personal emancipation from limiting thoughts. She was open to new opportunities presented and approached them with a new mind set. Nabila presents a new way of being, her personal experiences and subjective construction of knowledge resulting in actions which were liberating. Assumptions from deeply ingrained contextual experiences challenged through the process of transformative learning, can produce new understanding (Taylor & Cranton, 2012), which is evidenced here.

6.2.3 SHAHD'S DISORIENTING DILEMMAS: CHANGING POINTS OF VIEW AND NEW PERSPECTIVES

As discussed in 3.1.3, learning is subjective, involving building on or rejecting previous learning, resulting in individual truths. In this way Shahd's experiences and responses revealed her story, which differed from her peers. Shahd described herself as determined and wanting to do things for herself, without listening to others. This personal philosophy was reflected in her narrative. She shared many experiences, in contrast to her peers. Shahd shared her experience during her school placement on the classroom assistant course (which is akin to teaching practice); she revealed the challenges of working with her class teacher during her placement. Her dilemma (as expressed by her) was based on the expectation that the teacher would be interested in her development and training. She found this not to be the case. She revealed that her teacher gave her the job of cutting paper and organising files, giving her few opportunities to work directly with learners. Shahd's assumptions and expectations did not match the experience (Mezirow, 1991, 2000). She stated that the teacher did not understand her role as a classroom assistant and invested little time in getting to know what the course requirement was. She was unhappy about the situation. She said:

> **'Some teacher [s] they didn't know exactly what our job [some teachers did not understand the job of a classroom assistant]. They think we can for to her only cut papers and organise the files [they think our job is only to cut paper and organise files]. She didn't [understand our role] …never mind to read our notebook.' (Sha, Int 2)**

Shahd's experiences indicated that she was unhappy with the situation. Her expectations and assumptions were being challenged; they were based on previous experiences of teachers offering assistance regarding learning and were inadequate in explaining her current experience. According to Petersen (2009) dilemmas affect thoughts, feelings and actions. Shahd said:

> **'…but the big challenge; we have to know what she like to deal with her [we have to know how to deal with the teacher]. This teacher because she was very difficult to contact with me and give me some information [this teacher was difficult to communicate with me and give me information].' (Sha, Int 2)**

Shahd expressed the challenges of working with the teacher in both interviews. According to Shahd, her teacher demonstrated lack of understanding of her role, lack of knowledge of the course requirement, limited communication, and little interest in the development of teaching skills. Roberts (2006) found when values, beliefs and assumptions that were held as 'sacred' were challenged, individuals became angry and defensive. Shahd believed that the class teacher should be interested in her development and progress and help to provide opportunities for this. Her initial response to the dilemma was not a place of learning or willingness to learn, as Roberts (2006) found. She was frustrated and angry, struggling to find a solution to the situation. This disorienting dilemma highlighted assumptions and expectations, which Shahd recognised and questioned, she endeavoured to find a way of addressing the situation, seeking a new outlook. Shahd presented a new perspective; she said:

'I want to challenge myself to deal with this person…' (Sha, Int 2)

Shahd's narrative demonstrated a shift in her mindset and belief, as per Nerstrom's model (2014), and her perspective was challenged. This may have been brought about through reflection; the outcome was a new approach and relationship with her teacher. Shahd's willingness to understand her teacher suggested a change in her perspective. What started as a difficult situation, causing trauma and pain, imposed by her teaching, resulted in an change for both Shahd and her class teacher.

Shahd revealed another occurrence where she called into question the teacher's role, in terms of conduct and management of student behaviour. As discussed previously, she had assumptions and beliefs of her teacher, based on her previous experiences. Transformative learning theory suggests individuals have ways of seeing the world, based on a set of assumptions derived from upbringing, life experiences, culture and education. These assumptions are ingrained (Christie et al., 2015). She had expectations of how children should be taught and how their behaviour should be managed, specifically boys. These expectations were challenged when she observed a situation in the classroom. She said:

'You know boys how they have a lot of energy, and they fighting [fight], they do a lot of things in the class…' (Sha, Int 2)

'…she [the class teacher] don't care about how to deal with him [didn't think about how best to deal with his behaviour], she [was] afraid, afraid to deal with him.' (Sha, Int 2)

Shahd was uncomfortable with the way in which the boys' behaviour was managed. She expressed the view that she expected them to be treated in a particular way. She said:

'…the way I want the teacher [to] treat him, I want my son also treat like that [is the way I would want my son to be treated].' (Sha, Int 2)

Shahd wanted the teacher to treat the boys the way she would want her own son to be treated and made her expectations clear. This dilemma did not align with her belief; she was asking questions about taken for granted assumptions that children should be treated in a certain way. She rejected the teacher's assumptions and behaviour, adopting her own perspective, which was demonstrated in her action when working with the learners. She shared an occasion when she acted out her belief, she said:

'And one time when I feel [felt] angry from [about] the teacher, I teach [taught] them out of the class, because I want them to be improving [improve].' (Sha, Int 2)

Shahd's narrative suggested that there may have been several incidences pertaining to this area of concern, as discussed by Daloz (2000). The questioning and rejection of her teacher's belief of how to manage behaviour in the classroom was superseded by her own belief, which she verbalised. Shahd was intentional, which was demonstrated in her teaching the student outside the classroom, confirming her belief about teaching. She demonstrated her belief through actions. Shahd's experience led her to articulate her own belief and perspective and take action.

Shahd shared another dilemma, which she experienced after graduating from the Classroom Assistant Diploma, regarding her experience of looking for employment at the end of the diploma course. She highlighted how she felt when her peers were contacted by the employment authority, offered interviews and positions, but she was not i.e., this was her disorienting dilemma. The experience which Nerstrom (2014) refers to as, triggering a possible change to her belief. She says:

'I [was] shocked that all the student [students], all my friend [friends] they have[got] a message if they accept or they refuse [and chose to accept or refuse the invitation for an interview], but I didn't accept [get] any message from them. And I go [went] to them to ask, what's happened why you don't [didn't you] send me anything, and they told me actually if you [are] half Emirati we cannot accepted [you] in this job. It's very shocked [shocking], I am [was] very shocked at that time, and like[asked] how [could] my study it gone like that [end like that], why you don't tell me about in the first beginning [why didn't you tell me about this in the beginning].' (Sha, Int 2)

The dilemma occurred when the terms of the recruitment policy for employment as a classroom assistant failed to match Shahd's assumption. Coke et al. (2015) discuss the tension when reality fails to align with expectations or prior meaning perspectives, the individual held. Shahd's expectation that she would apply for a position as a classroom assistant at the end of the course, that her application would be processed and she would be offered an interview like her peers, did not materialise. This experience challenged previously unquestioned assumptions regarding, employment, professional conduct, and ethnicity. The expectation Shahd had based on the government's policy of Emiratisation (discussed in 2.8), caused her turmoil. She had registered on a course for Emirati women and had nearly completed it successfully, as far as she was concerned; she had met the requirements to be considered for employment. However, her ethnicity presented a problem; in terms of employment, she was not considered to be Emirati, as one of her parents was not a national. According to transformative learning theory, experiences of this nature lead to questions and changes in how reality is understood (Mezirow, 1991, 2000). Shahd expressed a range of emotions: she was sad to receive the news, she was shocked and confused, but innovative in her next steps and her changing point of view. Disorienting dilemmas may cause emotional distress and discomfort, and it is disconcerting to find that beliefs and assumptions, which have been held for years, are being challenged (Mezirow, 1991). Shahd was upset about what was happening to her. Roberts (2006) asserted that when experiencing pain and discomfort individuals may not be introspective or reflective, or able to learn at this point. Shahd said:

'I was upset but when I think deeply with myself [I took the time to think deeply], I think that I can use it in my way [I thought I can use my qualification in a way that benefits me].' (Sha, Int 2)

Shahd adopted a new belief and perspective after this disorienting dilemma, deciding that she could use her qualification and skills in other ways – see 5.3.3. This disorienting dilemma challenged her point of view and positioned her for the next stage of her life. Her openness to considering employment outside the educational context was a result of this. She adopted a new perspective that she could work in other sectors, and not be confined to education or the public sector.

Shahd shared another dilemma, where she was interviewed and offered employment as a classroom assistant in the private sector. The opportunity arose through a friend whose father owned the institution. However, she expressed concern with how the position was presented and the assumption she believed they had of her. She said:

'When I go [went] there, they told me you will be take students in the bus and after that you will teach students, after that you will be with them all the time like three job [jobs] in one.' (Sha, Int 2)

Shahd suggested that the presentation of the role, and the job offer, was indicative of how potential employers saw her, and would treat her. She said:

'…they make my job very small and they thinking [how they think] about me, I don't like it. Any place they make you small [belittle your role] you will not give them a chance, because they from the beginning [they have] the first thought about you [the initial thought which will continue].' (Sha, Int 2)

Shahd's interpretation of 'small' suggested that she saw the position as not being valued. She associated this with how the prospective employer's expectations; she saw this potential opportunity in negative terms. The dilemma caused her to question the assumptions, and it is the questioning and reflection of the dilemma which can lead to transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000). This dilemma, in conjunction with her previous experience, seemed to challenge Shahd's belief about recruitment processes and people in authority. Her previous

experience of being denied employment may have impacted her perspective. As discussed previously – learning is built on previous experience, creating new knowledge, leading to new beliefs, understandings, behaviours, values, and attitudes (Gross, 2015). Shahd's previous experience regarding her employment prospects (as discussed earlier), caused a shift in her belief about the education authority, impacting her response to this new situation. Cranton (2006) like Mezirow, suggested that being confronted with knowledge from a respected authority which contradicts accepted knowledge, is a possible starting point for reflection and questioning assumptions. Her new perspective and belief in her own worth was demonstrated in the rejection of the position. Shahd was exercising her personal freedom; freedom from thinking and structures that constrain (Mezirow, 1981). Brookfield (2000) refers to the consideration of how power dynamics and relationships result in action and change, and that is demonstrated here. Shahd did not resign herself to the physical or social world as it was nor the assumption of others in her role and merit, but consciously acted to change her situation by rejecting previous assumptions, as discussed by Galloway (2012).

In her second interview regarding registering on the Bachelor of Education after the classroom assistant course, Shahd shared the turmoil it caused her. The classroom assistant course allowed for automatic transfer (with the required grades) to the Bachelor of Education. Shahd registered on the degree programme (after failing to secure a position as a classroom assistant). She revealed in the phase one interview that her mother wanted her to be a teacher, which was why she joined the foundation course. The expectation and uncritically assimilated assumption of her mother - that she should work in education - became Shahd's reality. She registered on the Bachelor of Education, with the prospect of becoming a teacher, again in line with her mother's expectation. She recalled the experience of registering on the diploma course. She said:

> **'In the beginning I don't [didn't] want to be a teacher, but my mother dreams to be a teacher [dreamt of me becoming a teacher]. I do [did the] diploma for my mother.' (Sha, Int 1)**

Shahd chose the course for her mother; it was her mother's aspiration. She did not seem to question this expectation or assumption but registered on the Classroom Assistant Diploma

and successfully completed it. When the opportunity arose to register on the Bachelor of Education programme, she promptly applied. However, this time her experience was different. She said:

> **'I feel it's not me you know… I don't like to teach all the students, I love to focus with something I love, and I told you [at] that time I cannot complete. I wake up in the morning and I don't have a positive feeling every time I go to the college.' (Sha, Int 2)**

Shahd expressed her distress regarding the course, and the angst it caused her. This new cognitive and affective experience affected her; she seemed to question her mother's assumption, career choice and possibly cultural norms. Shahd was in a position that she did not want to be in and did not want to accept previously taken for granted assumptions or beliefs. The dilemma triggered reactions to the situation. She responded by looking outside the teaching profession for an alternative course. She constructed a new belief after this dilemma. Not wanting to be on the course, she withdrew, transferring to another major. She said about the Bachelor of Education:

> **'It's [a] very nice major but it's not nice for me because I want to sleep comfortably at home…without think about this girls [the students].' (Sha, Int 2)**

Shahd made it clear that the issue was not the course, but her perception and lack of commitment to the profession. This dilemma motivated her to seek alternative options for courses and career choices for herself. In a culture where decisions are made by or in consultation with the family, Shahd withdrew from the course and her mother's chosen profession for her and decided on an alternative career. Shahd demonstrated her new belief, she was able to think and make decisions for herself, questioning the taken for granted assumption that she would become a teacher based on her mother's aspiration. Brookfield (2000) refers to emancipatory learning hinging on critical reflection of power dynamics and relationships. This was demonstrated by Shahd on a personal level, where her mother's decision-making position was challenged and overturned, Shahd was freed from decisions that constrained her, and made her own decision in this instance.

6.3 SUMMARY OF SUB RESEARCH QUESTION 1

This discussion provides evidence of different disorienting dilemmas that my participants experienced at various points of their trajectories. Experiences that caused discomfort and disequilibrium, as stated by Mezirow (1991, 2000), and which acted as triggers to change situations, perspectives, and beliefs, which can also be referred to as changing points of view. Transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991, 2000) outlines the process of perspective transformation, and Nerstrom's (2014) model of transformative learning also provides further detail to the process of changing perspectives. According to transformative learning theory, disorienting dilemmas can result in perspective transformation, but changes in beliefs or points of view and beliefs (which will be discussed in the next chapter) can also be part of the process, as my findings showed. Shifts or change, no matter how small or large, involving (or not involving) disorienting dilemmas are significant in understanding the process of transformative learning, I would argue. Taylor (2001) highlights transformative learning as a process which can operate on an implicit level. It does not have to be rational or comply with stated processes. He states that it is also possible for new norms to be accepted, without obvious reflection. My participants' narratives, at times, implied that reflection may have taken place, but there was also evidence to suggest that changing points of view had occurred almost instantly, with little or no reflection. The disorienting dilemmas in my research triggered a response which led to shifts in beliefs, behaviours or attitudes about specific areas in the participants' lives.

Differences in how participants responded to the same disorienting dilemma were also evident in my findings, which highlight the complexity of learning and the subjectivity of the experience. The significance of disorienting dilemmas was highlighted in my study and the resulting actions, which tended to be on a personal level and of an emancipatory nature. This is significant in the context of the UAE. The journeys of my participants and their personal experiences of change run parallel to changes in wider society. My findings highlight changes (sometimes triggered by disorienting dilemmas) for the women involved, as they question taken for granted assumption and construct new knowledge about themselves and their beliefs in a new and emerging society. Nerstrom (2014), Howie and Bagnall (2013) suggest

that openness and experiences of transformative learning leads to further transformative learning, which can exclude those who did not have the initial experience. In line with Mezirow's theory (1991, 2000) and Nerstrom's (2014) model, personal experiences of this nature result in new perspectives (whether perspective transformations in line with transformative learning theory, or new perspectives (known as changing points of view) in line with Nerstrom's model), leading to further change. The findings in interview two demonstrate that change continued to occur.

Changes to points of view and beliefs (i.e., the interpretation of the world which immediately surrounds the individual on a personal level) were commonly found in my findings, which will be discussed in the next chapter. The other participants, Marwa and Halima, who did not identify as having experienced disorienting dilemmas, share experiences resulting in personal change and changing points of view. The next section will explore these changes to points of view considering research question two, separate from disorienting dilemmas.

7 SUB RESEARCH QUESTION 2: HOW DO WOMEN'S 'POINTS OF VIEW' SHIFT DURING THEIR EDUCATIONAL TRAJECTORIES, DURING AND AFTER A FOUNDATION PROGRAMME IN THE UAE?

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses sub research question two: changing points of view. It follows on from the previous chapter, where experiences of disorienting dilemmas and sub research question one were discussed. Both chapters explore the concept of change with different emphasis; chapter six focuses on disorienting dilemmas and chapter seven on changing points of view. As in chapter six, the same process was followed where initial codes were generated, which were streamlined though the process of searching for themes within and across the data. Using transformative learning and the theoretical categories to develop my analysis a stage further, revealed experiences of changing points of view for four of the five participants. In this findings chapter I discuss Marwa, Halima's, Nabila and Shahd's narratives, which are relevant to changing points of view, without disorienting dilemmas. There is some overlap with the narratives, as Nabila and Shahd experienced changing points of views both with and without disorienting dilemmas. For this reason, I have chosen to discuss their narratives after Marwa's and Halima's as they experienced changing points of view without disorienting dilemmas.

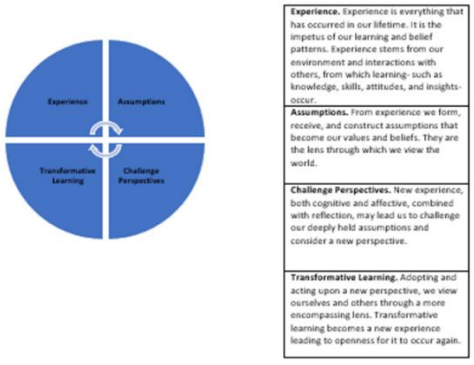
Points of view, as discussed in 3.3.2 are 'sets of immediate specific expectations, beliefs, feelings, attitudes and judgments' (Mezirow, 2000, p. 18). They affect how individuals behave, judge and make sense of situations (Mezirow, 2007). Individuals can analyse and change their points of view based on experiences which do not align with previous beliefs or experiences. They refer to explicit beliefs, behaviours, and attitudes about specific circumstances in the individual's life, which can be reconstructed and changed relatively easily by the individuals involved. This act of questioning previous beliefs and assumptions can result in new beliefs, evident in new ways of doing things. My findings point to the

questioning and reformulation of previous beliefs, in a direct manner (as opposed to the ten phases of transformative learning).

7.1.1 RESEARCH QUESTION

Below is a table illustrating the research question, with themes from the thematic analysis. As in chapter six, I have used an abbreviated version of Mezirow's ten phases of transformative learning which is highlighted in Nerstrom's transformative model (2014). This model guides my analysis, focusing on four areas, as per chapter six. This chapter presents the participants' narratives of changing points of view without disorienting dilemmas. See the table below.

Analysing changing points of view

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">RQ2 How do women's 'points of view' shift during their educational trajectories on and after a foundation programme in the UAE?</th></tr>
<tr><th>Themes</th><th>Discussion points</th></tr>
<tr><td>Points of view.
Beliefs and values.
Beliefs about specific areas.
 

The model is used to guide the analysis
Source: Nerstrom, (2014), p.328.</td><td>• Prior experiences and beliefs.
• Current experiences.
• Challenges to existing points of view.
• Changing points of view
• New understandings or beliefs about specific issues.
• Personal philosophy.</td></tr>
</table>

I have used 4 of the original phases from Mezirow's transformative learning theory (1991, 2000) for my analysis: (1) Experiencing a dilemma (2) Critical assessment of assumptions (5) Exploration of options for new roles, actions, and relationships (10) reintegration into life based on the new perspective.	

I used Nerstrom's, (2014) model as a framework to analyse my data for both research questions. I explored my findings and identified changes to points of view. My analysis highlighted prior learning and existing points of view, challenges to existing points of view as they were inadequate or inappropriate, and then changes to points of view, resulting new points of view and beliefs. Transformative learning theory suggests that changes to points of view are more likely to occur than shifts in perspective, caused by disorienting dilemmas. They are deliberate and directly address beliefs. All five of my participants experienced changing points of view, both in 2016 and 2020, some triggered by disorienting dilemmas i.e., Nabila, Oma and Shahd, and others without dilemmas i.e., Marwa and Halima. There was overlap of both experiences i.e., disorienting dilemmas which caused changing points of view for some participants i.e., Nabila and Shahd. This chapter discusses changing points of view not triggered by disorienting dilemmas as defined by Mezirow (1991, 20000).

7.2 CHANGING POINTS OF VIEW WITHOUT DISORIENTING DILEMMAS

The concept of disorienting dilemmas as defined by Mezirow (1991, 2000) and discussed in 3.3.6, can be problematic on closer analysis. As discussed, disorienting dilemmas can lead to the realisation that previous assumptions and approaches are inadequate, leading to feelings of disequilibrium (Petersen, 2009). They are generally described as negative experiences. As discussed in chapter three, Daloz (2000) suggests that previous experiences

impacting the change may have a cumulative affect and may even possibly be unremembered, making it difficult to verbalise or discuss. Experiences big and small can impact the process of change, but they are generally recognised as being negative. However, Clark and Wilson (1991) also identify the occurrence of disorienting dilemmas (which are external) but, alongside this, they introduce the concept of an integrating circumstance (which is internal and reflective). Positive dilemmas do not feature in the original theory but have been found in my research and experienced by one participant i.e., Halima, resulting in changes to her points of view. I discuss this positive dilemma or experience, separate from disorienting dilemmas as defined by Mezirow (1991, 2000), but recognise them as experiences which lead to changes to points of view and new beliefs or perspectives, as identified by Nerstrom (2014).

My participants stories demonstrate that changes to points of view occur in the context of experiences. This complicates the use of transformative learning theory, as the theory focuses on perspective transformation, triggered by disorienting dilemmas. However, Nerstrom's transformative model (2014) focuses on experiences which lead to change in perspectives or points of view. In light of this, I discuss changes to points of view as described by Mezirow (1991, 2000) and new perspectives as transformative learning, as identified by Nerstrom (2014), based on the experiences of each participant.

7.2.1 MARWA'S CHANGING POINTS OF VIEW

Marwa shared her point of view at the beginning of the course, saying she had no desire to work with children but wanted a qualification. By the end of the course this had changed. She said:

> **'Before I said it's impossible to do this, before I said no way I cannot study education. I didn't like [want] to be [a] teacher because I saw my teachers in the school. They have [had] to work hard. And [the] girls didn't listen to the teachers (laughing).' (Mar, Int 1)**

Here Marwa talked about her previous experience of the school environment and her observations, discussing the demanding role of working in school, and the learners' behaviour. Her learning (about school) was understood as her interpretation of her

experiences (Mezirow, 2000). Based on her prior experience, Marwa made the decision that working directly with learners in the classroom was not for her. However, during the programme, whilst building on and reinterpreting experiences, change occurred to her point of view; she gained a new understanding and belief about the role of educators and the process of teaching and learning and her assumptions were challenged, as per Nerstroms's model (2014). The evidence confirmed that she had changed her point of view, from not wanting to work as a classroom assistant to now looking forward to the opportunity to work in this role, based on her experiences – see 5.3.3. Marwa did not refer to a specific event being the trigger for the change, or a disorienting dilemma that caused anxiety. Her experiences whilst on the course, may have led to the change. She said:

'…but now when I go to the KG…I saw [that] it's okay and nice.' (Mar, Int 1)

'I remember [remembered] what I study [studied] and I saw the teachers …how to [they] learn [teach] the children….and how to [they] talk with the children.' (Mar, Int 1)

'…When I went to semester two, I went to a school for two weeks and I learnt how to help, …I learned more.' (Mar, Int 1)

She focused now, not on students being inattentive and teachers working hard, but on being a part of the teaching process and learning from the teachers. Her beliefs, judgement and feelings which shape interpretation had changed (Mezirow, 1995). Her view of working in this environment was challenged, as per Nerstrom's model. The change to her point of view was evident. Daloz (2000) discusses that shifts may have been long in coming, affected by a myriad of circumstances leading up to that point. Marwa was open to seeing things differently; she could have adhered to her original point of view based on previous experience, or possibly processed the new experience but not integrated it as a new point of view, but here she changed her point of view. Her experiences and understanding of the learning environment led her to re consider her point of view and change it.

This change in Marwa's point of view regarding working in school, could be a natural progression, occurring after registering on a course that prepared her for this role. However, I would argue that her experiences and decisions did not have to result in this

decision. She could have rejected the option of employment in the field and retained her original point of view. Newman (2012) states that change within the human experience is part of the learning process and that expressing change as 'transformative' is a misnomer. Learning which results in a more informed understanding of an idea or assumption is part of the process and is not to be hailed as something unusual. However, I believe that any measurement of change is valuable and should be examined to reveal more about the learning experience and process. Marwa's understanding of the role of the classroom assistant, and her desire to be employed in the field, may not be transformative as described by Mezirow (1991, 2000), but her change in belief is evident. Her new point of view was demonstrated by her commitment to working in the field. This change was orchestrated by her and was not linked to a disorienting dilemma or a problem that needed to be solved. It was a shift in her thinking which she had made about this personal aspect of her life pertaining to work and her future. Her ability to make changes to her point of view and decisions about her life could be seen as liberating. Friere (1970) describes thinking and acting independently as a component of emancipatory education. In the cultural context, Marwa did not refer to the views or opinions of others or needing the endorsement of others to change her point of view; she made the change independently. With this new belief she stated that she was happy to be a classroom assistant and to work in this sector:

'I am happy because, I am will [will] be a teacher [teaching] assistant...inshallah.' (Mar, Int 1)

7.2.2 HALIMA'S CHANGING POINTS OF VIEW

Halima, on the other hand, told the story of her academic progress during the course. She contextualised her experience from her previous course and stated how disappointed she was when she did not meet the requirements of the English course, preventing her from registering on the bachelor degree of her choice. She said:

'When I get 4.5 [the English grade] and I want [registered for] a diploma, I felt like I don't have to do anything.' (Hal, Int 1). See 10.9

She expressed her feelings of disappointment and the discouraging effect of not being able to enrol on a degree of her choice. She registered on the diploma programme and resigned

herself to 'not having to do anything', referring to work and effort. She continued her narrative and explained how a change in her academic performance acted as an incentive and inspired her to pursue success. Like disorienting dilemmas, this event caused her to question previous assumptions. She said:

> **'When I start the diploma, and …when I saw myself, how I did when I get my first, err, my first grade, I felt like I can do, I can do more. I have [got] a good grade, like a A, B, B+, A+. I felt power, that I have power, but I want to do, yahni [you know] I know that I can do more. I can do more and harder than this subject.'**
>
> **'…yes and so I trust myself.' (Hal, Int 1)**

Halima described her academic accomplishments and how her grades became an encouragement in helping her to move forward. Her academic accomplishment provided a challenge to her assumptions about her academic ability. This was based on her previous experience of not getting the required grades, leading her to challenge her own perspective.

She described her determination, in terms of 'power' and being able to achieve greater things for herself. Her point of view had changed, from not believing she was able to achieve academically, to believing that she was capable, based on her current academic experience. She talked about 'trusting' herself i.e., having confidence in her own ability to achieve academically. This changing point of view was based on her experience, which may not conform to the definition of a disorienting dilemma, it was a positive experience which, like a disorienting dilemma, triggered questioning of her previous assumption, causing her to change her point of view regarding her ability. She rejected the notion of failure and self-doubt previously held and adopted a new point of view and belief in herself. She addressed previous beliefs that she held about herself (i.e., her own narrative based on previous experience); college (i.e., organisational challenges based on the course entry requirements and procedures); and her feelings and dispositions (i.e., therapeutic response and her emotional reaction to the circumstances) as developed by Mezirow (1998). Her experience regarding improved grades bought into focus what was happening at that point. In their work, Cranton and Carusetta, (2004) discuss this process of experiences bringing about new understandings.

Halima continued her narrative and talked about her experience of the diploma programme and the effect it had on her future decisions. She said:

> **'This diploma pushed me to complete my bachelor, 'cause [because] I don't want to stop here. I don't want to [get] stuck in diploma only. I want to complete [my studies] and I want to have a higher certificate.' (Hal, Int 1)**

She presented the situation in terms of the diploma 'pushing her', which could be interpreted as her good grades propelling her towards further study. At the beginning of the course Halima did not articulate academic goals, she seemed unfocused regarding the course, and expressed no short or long-term aspirations. However, a shift occurred, leading to Halima's commitment to purse academic success, as discussed in 5.3.3. This focus on personal achievement has been questioned in terms of liberation or emancipation, as it does not affect social change on a broader scale (Thompson, 2000). However, I would argue that this change in her point of view about ability allowed Halima to see herself positively, which could then be the basis for change on a wider level, impacting her community or society. At this stage of Halima's journey, she demonstrated that she could think independently, question her position and values, and make changes which benefit her. Mezirow (1981) refers to individuals being caught in histories and assumptions that 'constrain' and inhibit them – Halima demonstrated that she was moving away from this to a place of independence, which is an important facet of emancipatory education. The marginalising of her initial position, where she was unable to meet the course requirement, and offered limited options to continue her studies, had changed due to her achievement and attitude. Halima's changing point of view, new belief, attitude, and behaviour, point to her improving her academic life, both at that point and in the future. Emancipation on a personal level is evidenced, and Halima demonstrated that change had occurred. There is no need for the individual to resign themselves to the physical or social world as it, is because they can consciously act and change their situation (Galloway, 2012). Transformative learning and emancipatory learning both endorse the individual's responsibility to change circumstances if they want to, as they have the power to think and act. This view of learning is supported when the learner is acknowledged as having the capability to be critical and reflective, leading to actions that effect change (Grant & Hurd, 2010).

7.2.3 NABILA'S CHANGING POINTS OF VIEW

Nabila shared how an employment opportunity in the department confirmed her decision and commitment to her career choice. She was offered the opportunity to apply for an administrative role in the Education department but rejected the prospect of immediate employment in order to pursue further study to become a teacher. She expressed her thinking about being asked to apply for the position, and the questions she asked herself. She said about the job opportunity:

> **'…do you want to complete your degree as bachelor, or [do] you want to work with me as a supervisor assistant? I was thinking oh my god!! It was a minute or second when I give you my answer like this, quickly. I told her [you] no, I want to complete my degrees.' (Nab, Int 1).**

Again, Nabila revealed her decision to join the teaching profession, and her new point of view. This drove her ambition and was at the forefront of her actions. She saw herself as an aspiring teacher and focused on this goal, as discussed in 5.3.3. She adopted a new perspective based on her experiences and challenging her own assumptions about teaching, resulting in a new perspective, as per Nerstrom's (2014) transformative learning stage, and acted on her changing point of view and new perspective.

Nabila shared another experience that evidenced a change to her point of view. During the interview, she discussed her husband's role in decisions that needed to be made in her life, and her narrative showed his contribution to her decision making. She continued her narrative and shared her changing point of view, saying that she can now make decisions independently and without her husband's assistance. She said:

> **'…because before that, my husband take [took] my decision, but now I feel like umm, yeah, I can do it on my own, on [by] myself, without anybody.' (Nab, Int 1)**

This is a personal change for Nabila, demonstrating that she believes that she can make her own decisions without the assistance of her husband – see 5.2.1. She came to question and challenge previous assumptions and beliefs based on prior experiences and learning and considered a new point of view about her capabilities, as identified in Nerstrom's (2014) model. Her life experiences, based on socialisation, culture, education and experiences (Mezirow, 1991, 2000), have contributed to her decision making, on a personal level. Cultural norms and values through the process of socialisation (linked to the individual's

worldview and points of view), affect beliefs and perceptions (Pounder & Gallant, 2008). In Nabila's narrative, she initially appeared to be accepting of her husband's support. However, she shared her questioning of her own perception, referring to her inability of not knowing what she wanted or what was good for her. Davis-Manigaulte et al. (2006) suggested that assistance and encouragement when addressing the chaos of everyday life can be beneficial, but can also constrain the individual, presenting self-limiting beliefs. However, Nabila saw beyond the assistance offered, seeing her own potential and capability. She recognised that she could make the changes that she wanted. Galloway (2012) contends that the individual can act and change their situation if they want to. It is this action that will bring about transformation and emancipation (Brookfield, 2000).

The process of transformative learning, according to Mezirow (1991, 2000), involves critical reflection of assumptions and, although this is not discussed, it could be inferred that a deeper level of reflection may have taken place. Nabila appeared to question taken for granted assumptions of patriarchy in the family, of men leading and making decisions, guiding female members of the family in their lives. She recognised the pattern in her life experiences which she articulated about her husband assisting her in decision making and, through questioning the assumption that she needed her husband's assistance, she concluded that she was able to make decisions by herself and for herself. She said she could make decisions independently of him. This process is outlined in Nerstrom's (2014) model; based on her experiences, she believed assumptions about her relationship and came to a place where she challenged her own belief and formed a new belief about her own capabilities, this is a changing point of view. Christie et al. (2015), state that critiquing thought processes, belief or points of view and influences that shape individuals, are part of the process required when arriving at new ways of being, believing and living. Nabila stated that now that she could make decisions for herself. This represented a shift in her point of view, pertaining to this specific part of her world, but could possibly continue to her world view.

7.2.4 SHAHD'S CHANGING POINTS OF VIEW

At the time of the second interview, Shahd had left full-time study and had had a range of

employment experiences. She discussed a position she had at a local theme park and how it impacted her. She shared her experiences and her outlook on new opportunities and the experience at the theme park. She said:

> **'I like to try things and make good experience [experiences] and challenge in my life. It's [It] really make [makes] me change my ways. [It] make [makes] me change my thinking…like I trust more myself [myself more]. I can talk more easily from [than] before, because in nine months I deal [dealt with] a lot of different people, they came from outside [the UAE]'. (Sha, Int 2) See 10.11.**

For Shahd, this new experience of working with people from other cultures and countries allowed her to confront previous assumptions and beliefs. She said the experience challenged her way of thinking, suggesting reflection and critiquing of previous beliefs, taken for granted assumptions and expectations of other culture. Heilman and Clarke (2016) discuss how beliefs are often based on unreflective interpretations, and reflection can bring about new understandings. Critiquing previous points of view, and influences that shape them, is important in producing new ways of being and behaving (Christie et al., 2015). The process of socialisation and the assimilation of cultural beliefs and values are being questioned, as recognised by Mezirow (1991, 2000). Shahd appeared to be questioning previously held beliefs and expectations and possibly addressing the uncritically accepted assumptions of others as per transformative learning theory. She questioned whether she could teach or do other things, adopting a new perspective showing that she could. She actioned her new perspective and sought employment in a local theme park. She discussed being able to trust herself with reference to how she communicates and understands people from other cultures. Her new perspective and experience allowed her to gain new knowledge about people and cultural norms. As per transformative learning theory, Shahd's point of view had changed, and she adopted new beliefs, attitudes and judgements about people from different cultures. According to Mezirow (2009), the most significant transformations involve 'a critique of premises regarding the world and oneself' (p. 23).

7.3 SUMMARY OF SUB RESEARCH QUESTION 2

This discussion highlights changes to points of view concerning specific areas in the participants' lives. Transformative learning theory suggests that beliefs, judgements, feelings and attitudes can be changed consciously by individuals; they have the capability to do this. When individuals encounter a situation that is not congruent with expectations, they may question or reject the perspective and make changes on a personal level, changing their point of view (Mezirow, 1991, 2000; DeCapua et al., 2018). This leads to differences in how the individual operates, demonstrating their beliefs, which may be noticeable and recognisable by others. Newman (2012) contends that it is not acceptable to assume that people have undergone a change or transformation (as per the theory), without lived out evidence. However, I would argue that if the individual refers to change, this is the starting point for exploration. Changes or paradigm shifts which result in new ways of seeing things and new ways of being should be manifest in the individual's life.

Changes to points of view without a specified disorienting dilemma are evident in my findings. Transformative learning theory does not discuss disorienting dilemmas resulting in changes to points of view in detail, nor changes to points of view triggered by positive experiences, which are evident in my findings. Changes to points of view affect specific areas in the individual's life. They are of a personal nature but can also impact the individual's wider world view in terms of a perspective transformation. However, my findings point to changes to personal beliefs on a personal level, as opposed to changes to broader world views. I would argue that transformative learning is not as simple as originally presented by Mezirow (1991, 2000). The separate categorisation of points of view and perspective transformation do not sufficiently explain changes to points of view, which can lead to transformative learning, as identified in my findings. The theory focuses mainly on perspective transformation; it does identify changes to points of view but does not elaborate on this process. Learning does not neatly conform to theories, frameworks, and separate categorisation. In fact, there are overlaps between the two concepts I have explored i.e., disorienting dilemmas and points of view; the connections, however, give insight into the complexity of learning and the processes involved. In his theory, Mezirow

(1991, 2000) states that several changes to points of view could result in perspective transformation, affecting world views. I believe that more time and consideration needs to be paid to understand these shifts, which occur more frequently and give further insight into the process of transformative learning.

Both perspective transformation and changes to points of view resulted in new ways of seeing the world and new ways of being, as they alter the individual's reality on either a personal level or broader level. As discussed, changing points of view can lead to personal emancipation and liberation. Transformative learning links to emancipatory learning, as they both have, at their roots, purposeful thinking, and individual awareness about action for change (Kitchenham, 2008). Thompson (2000) describes the purpose of emancipatory learning as developing knowledge about the causes of unsatisfactory circumstances, with the focus of changing them. It is the individuals' initial questioning of the situation, or taken for granted assumptions, which result in change.

In the following chapter I discuss underlying themes which are relevant to both questions. I also discuss changes to points of view and disorienting dilemmas alongside each other, highlighting commonalities and differences pertaining to the concept of change. They have been presented separately in this chapter for exploration of the themes for the two sub research questions. As discussed in this chapter, the two concepts overlap at times; disorienting dilemmas can lead to changing points of view.

8 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

8.1 INTRODUCTION

My research presents the context of my participants' stories as the most important factor on their journeys of change. Change has been occurring concurrently on two levels: societal and personal. As discussed in chapter two, the context of change in the UAE is evident in all sectors of society, at national and local levels – see 2.1.1. The society is undergoing change which is physical and palpable, including changes to values and beliefs. I believe that the context of change has impacted the experiences of the women in my study.

I believe that if my participants were in a different context, with fewer changes taking place at societal level, their educational experiences and the nuances of change would be different. As discussed in 5.1.1 -5.1.5, my participants registered on the course for different reasons, many being impacted by family and friends, however, this tendency to look to others to make decisions, changed over time. My participants' narratives showed less dependency on others, changing perspectives and varying levels of personal emancipation demonstrated in their aspirations and plans for the future. I believe that my participants' experiences of change are not only embedded in the context of the HEIME but are also due to the changing context of the UAE. The current context of wealth accumulation through the discovery of oil, and the changes which it has brought about, are important contextual factors in my participants' stories. New norms and taken for granted assumptions (which differed from those of the past) have been questioned and explored, resulting in changing points of view for the individuals in my study. I believe that the changes in the UAE have impacted the experiences of my participants and brought about personal change and nuances of personal emancipation.

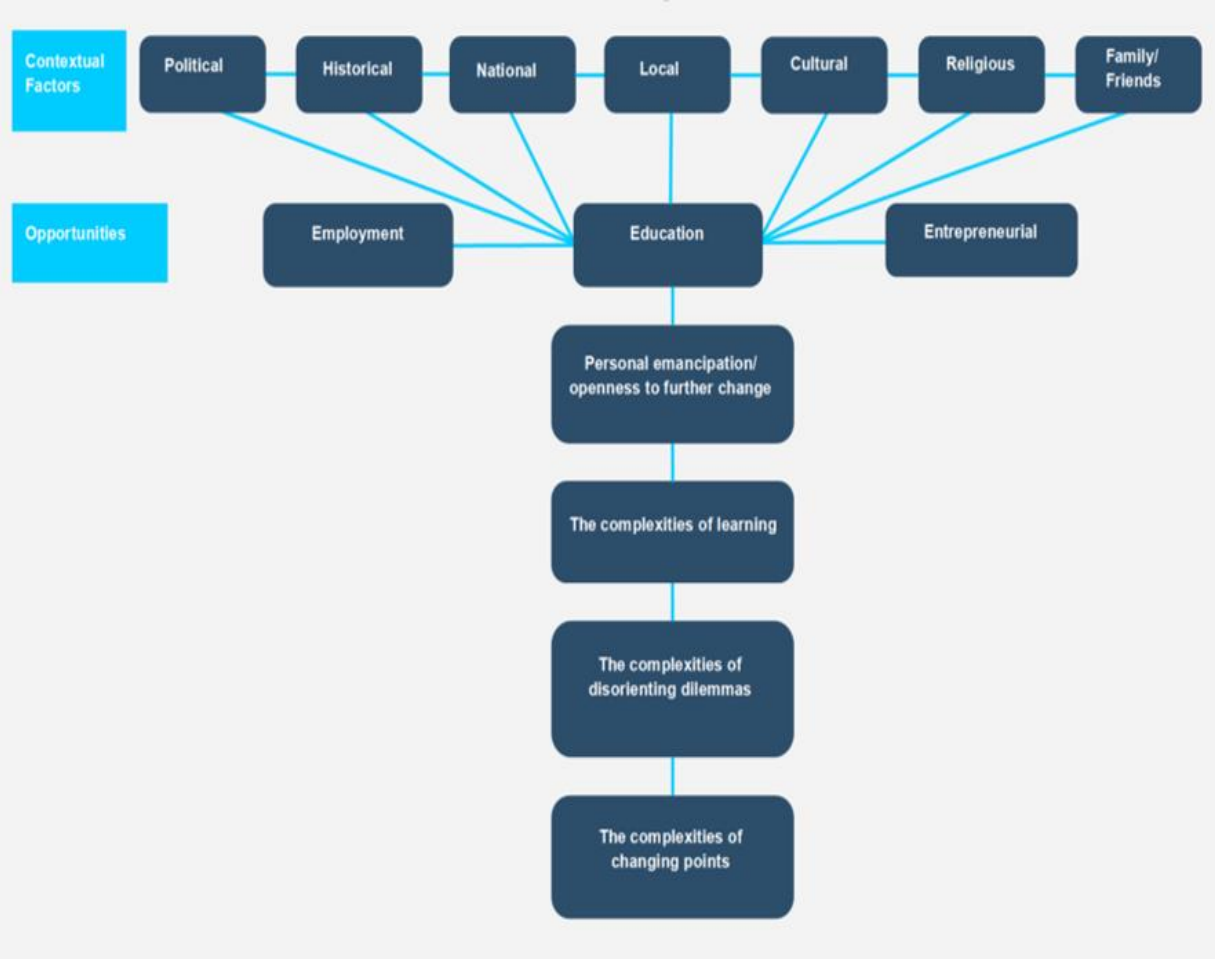
This chapter provides a broad discussion of the findings across the findings chapters and makes links between them, with reference to literature where relevant. The discussion is presented in a holistic manner, and in order of importance from the themes of my findings.

In the first section I highlighted an important finding (which is also a recommendation) regarding contextual information and the importance of it. I present the context as an important aspect of the research, as it places the research in time and place (Croskerry, 2009), helping to better understand the occurrences and perspectives. The narratives reveal new personal beliefs and new ways of being, which I argue are substantial findings. In a society which is changing outwardly, traditions and cultural norms are changing at a slower rate. My participants, in this context of change have demonstrated that they are questioning norms and traditions in light of their current experiences and making changes to their personal beliefs, resulting in personal emancipation. The new educational opportunities for women, which appear to be positive and straightforward, hide the complexities of education and the process of learning. What is learnt is not always expected (Mezirow, 1991, 2000) – I refer to this as the complexity of learning. I then highlighted the experiences of change as described by my participants' - direct change triggered by disorienting dilemmas, and more nuanced change demonstrated through changing points of view.

I have created a model to show how the contextual factors, the opportunities available to women in the UAE discussed in 2.2 and the personal experiences of change while on the foundation course. It shows how the contextual factors, link with the new opportunities available for women, with the focus on educational opportunities. The educational experiences bring about emancipatory education which are complex and intricate.

See figure 6.

Figure 6: Model of Experiences-Main Themes found Amongst Emirati Participants



I will begin the discussion by presenting the main finding of the importance of context, followed by personal emancipation and liberation bought about through learning experience i.e., disorienting dilemmas and changing points of view.

8.2 CONTEXT

8.2.1 THE UAE CONTEXT: DEVELOPMENTS AND CHANGE – THE ROLE OF WOMEN

The context of the study presented in earlier chapters, describes the UAE as a 'rentier' economy based on new oil wealth, which has led to new opportunities for its citizens in what was, and still is, a traditional, conservative society (Davidson, 2009). New initiatives

have been introduced, including the employment of UAE citizens in new and diverse areas e.g., science, tourism, and education (Forstenlechner, 2008). New opportunities have been created for women, such as increased educational openings, employment in the workplace (as opposed to at home), political roles and beyond (Samier, 2015; Augsburg et al., 2009). The government's creation of a climate of change, through innovative opportunities for women, e.g., pilot training programmes, scientific research, entrepreneurship, and managers to name but a few, has impacted some sectors of the female population. These new opportunities for women to participate in higher education have impacted some sectors of society more than others and played a positive role in overturning some of the constraints of religious, political, and cultural conservatism (Findlow, 2007). This changing context in the UAE, I believe, has influenced my participants beliefs and attitudes towards change, both as a concept and on a personal level. One participant expressed changes in the delivery of education which was a shock to her; accepted the change and engaged with it. There is evidence which suggests the context of change nationally has fuelled the impetus to accept change and make personal changes in matters they deem important. I purport that the wider context of change has impacted the individuals' beliefs and actions regarding change on a personal level.

It is apparent that my participants are not only experiencing change around them i.e., the changing context including the systems and structures of UAE society, but they are also experiencing and making changes on a personal level, impacting issues that affect them directly, such as career choices and confronting the beliefs and assumptions of others (either caused by disorienting dilemmas leading to changes to points of view, or less dramatic changes to points of view, without disorienting dilemmas). My participants are engaged in questioning and rejecting taken for granted assumptions, confronting expectations of their norms and traditions, and creating new beliefs demonstrated in their behaviour. How they construct their learning and new knowledge is discussed below, focusing on learning in a social context.

8.2.2 THE FINDINGS IN CONTEXT

Developments in adult education at a national level have impacted the lives of women in the UAE (Abdulla & Ridge, 2011, as cited in, Saqr et al., 2014). The changes are set amidst cultural traditions and customs, leading to tensions between the traditional role of women as mothers and carers for the family, and new, emerging philosophies of educated, working women (Gallant & Pounder, 2008). Women in the new UAE are presented with educational opportunities that may lead to future employment but, more importantly I would argue, produce thinking women who question beliefs and norms (both old and new), rejecting taken for granted assumptions and formulating new beliefs and attitudes, known as changing points of view. Points of views shape the interpretation of the world (Mezirow, 1991, 2000) and cannot be separated from the context in which they occur. The context of the experience is important and relevant, and as such should be highlighted in the research (Cranton & Taylor, 2012).

However, presenting the new opportunities available for women of the UAE holistically, distorts the changes which are currently taking place, as there are diverse groups of women and diverse experiences. The general picture of progress of women in the UAE fails to capture the many experiences prevalent. The portrayal of different women's stories was told through my research; stories of everyday, ordinary 'multidimensional' women. Sharing the stories of successes and challenges of my participants highlights a different reality based on their experiences. The 'other' female stories involving challenges, such as not being able to access programmes of their choice, or limited educational opportunities based on English competency, has not been widely presented. As suggested by Crenshaw (1989) presenting the 'single-axis' analysis of 'some' women's experiences limits the understanding of the female experience on a broader scale. All women do not have the same stories to tell, and portraying women as a homogenous group distorts the variety and complexity of life experiences. The need to address these imbalances and recognise and understand the experiences of different groups in society is an area which should not be overlooked (Crenshaw, 2017).

8.2.3 TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING AND LACK OF CONTEXT

As discussed in 4.3, I used transformative learning theory to frame my research. Despite the focus on perspective transformation, change is presented in other ways e.g., changes to points of view. Changes to points of view are more commonly found than perspective transformations, as evidenced by my findings; however, the theory concentrates on the process of perspective transformation. My findings highlight the experiences of my participants and changes to their points of view. Transformative learning theory is valuable for organising and analysing qualitative data regarding change. However, omissions in addressing cultural and contextual factors and minimal attention to changing points of view will be discussed as part of my findings. I purport that the relevance of context in all research is important and of great significance in the UAE, where change is occurring, and has been since the discovery of oil, including the norms and values of society.

Transformative learning occurs in context, this is an important factor of all learning experiences. The theory has had a global reach and has been used both in similar and different contexts. Considering this, it would be remiss of me not to contextualise my research, recognising the impact of political, cultural, and social factors in the UAE. Context is everything, I argue; it is complex, dynamic, and multi-dimensional (Michailova, 2011). It is also geographical, historical, and cultural. Buchanan and Bryman (2007) discuss all research as situated in historical, political, ethical, evidential, and personal conditions, highlighting the relevance of context. In describing the context, the background information gives shape and meaning to the research findings (Croskerry, 2009). The contextual information about the UAE is needed to understand my participants' stories. I would further argue that lack of context in transformative learning theory prevents a deeper understanding of the research and the participants' complete story. Hence, I suggest that there is a need to use the theoretical framework cautiously, and where appropriate with modifications.

8.3 PERSONAL EMANCIPATION

In the Middle East, where notions of equality for women are on the political agenda (Kemp, et al., 2013) with less discussion of freedom (Shirazi & Mishra, 2010), I have found that personal liberation and emancipation can be accomplished through transformative learning. As in El-Halawany's (2009) work, where higher education experiences were linked to self-autonomy and independence, my research has endorsed similar finding in the UAE. Morgan et.al., (2002) also found that women who had higher education experiences, were able to make decisions more readily than their counterparts who had not had a higher education. My findings evidence changes on a personal level through the questioning of assumptions, evaluation of their own abilities to set goals and new aspirations, resulting in new found freedoms. My work has some similarities with the research above, my findings reveals that the experiences whilst on the course were instrumental in helping my participants to see things differently, resulting in changing points of view. I interpret changing points of view as an expression of freedom, expressed and demonstrated in new beliefs, actions and ways of being.

Emancipation is a key finding in my research. As discussed in 3.4, transformative learning and emancipatory learning both have their roots in individual awareness for action and change (Kitchenham, 2008). The concept of being able to consciously change situations and abandon what is, is an act of liberation (Galloway, 2012). My participants' beliefs and actions resulted in personal emancipation, stemming from questioning taken for granted assumptions, formulating new beliefs, and negotiating new norms for themselves. The women in my research I would argue, arrived at new beliefs and understanding of themselves which were emancipatory, in that they allowed them to move forward in their lives with beliefs formulated by them. Mezirow (1996) refers to individuals being caught in histories and assumptions that 'constrain' (Mezirow, 1981) and environmental situations that limit options (Mezirow, 1991, 2000).

Nabila demonstrated that she was moving away from assumptions and factors that limited her and moving to a new understanding of herself. In the context of the UAE patriarchal

society, this change in her belief or point of view is significant. Living in a society where male authority is embedded in structures and norms, Nabila questioned this on a personal level and arrived at the conclusion that she could achieve and work towards her personal goals and do things for herself. In another context this might have a different meaning; in this context, during a time of change in the wider UAE society, the questioning of assumptions by women about norms, values and beliefs is meaningful. Cultural traditions, norms, expectations, and assumptions are being questioned and redefined. In a similar way, Shahd came to a new understanding about her career choice and her ability to make decisions for herself. In a culture where career decisions are negotiated with families (Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2016), Shahd changed her point of view and decided what she really wanted to do, in a different way from Oma who negotiated her chosen career path with her family. Assumptions from cultural and contextual experiences are deeply ingrained and are challenged through the process of questioning. From this arises new understandings (Taylor & Cranton, 2012). My findings provide evidence of personal emancipation, as individuals explore options beyond the given parameters, leading to new beliefs and new ways of being, which I define as personal emancipation.

8.4 THE COMPLEXITY OF LEARNING

Learning is a complex concept, and has been defined in many ways, encompassing understanding, knowledge, behaviour, skills and intellect (Holt et al., 2012). Learning goes beyond accepting norms and expectations, to revising expectations, actions and world views (Wilcox, 2009). My findings endorse the complexity and unpredictability of learning, highlighting that learning is more than the acquisition of knowledge and skills, see 10.2. Learning involves conscious and unconscious processing of information, experiences and understanding, as discussed by Merriam et al. (2007). The course objective of preparing students to be classroom assistants was superseded by their experiences whilst on the course, with different resulting actions for each participant. My findings revealed the experience of change which occurs when individuals question taken for granted assumptions and beliefs.

Learning is not only complex but is also a continuous process. It is not always immediate; it can happen over a longer period and is sometimes referred to as a 'slow burner,' as it is an ongoing process (Shin et al. 2010). This can make it difficult to attribute change to single events at a single time. My findings revealed that both learning and change occurred at different times for my participants. For Oma, change seemed to happen over a period, when she entered discussion with her father and the family about her chosen career choice. For Nabila, in contrast, the realisation that she could make decisions about not pursuing employment opportunities, seemed to happen instantly. However, this simple dichotomy of change occurring immediately or over a period hides the complexity of the occurrences or dilemmas leading to the change.

8.4.1 THE COMPLEXITY OF DISORIENTING DILEMMAS

In my research, several dilemmas that challenged learning were identified as they related to the participants at the time Some experiences were uncomfortable and shocking for them, as identified in transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991, 2000). These experiences acted as triggers for change in some instances, but there was little evidence of perspective transformation at the time, or four years later when the second interviews were conducted. The individual's experiences of the dilemmas tended to lead to changes to points of view in the short term. Perspective transformations as per the theory were rare and, in my research, non-existent over the period of study. This does not mean that perspective transformation will not occur, but at the time of the research it had not taken place.

My findings revealed that three out of my five participants had experienced disorienting dilemmas which changed their points of view (some participants experienced a number of them), an outcome not discussed in transformative learning theory. These dilemmas acted as triggers for shifts. However, shifts relating to world view or points of view may be visible and evident at different stages of the individual's trajectory, which can make it difficult to track if further research is not conducted. The complexity of the same or similar disorienting experiences occurring for different participants, resulting in different reactions, beliefs, and attitudes, highlight the difficulty of understanding them. My findings

endorsed this in the narrative when changes were made in the requirement for employment which impacted two of my participants; they responded differently. They were both on their personal journeys, but differed in terms of readiness for change, I would argue, as presented by Taylor (1998). Disorienting dilemmas have been presented as experiences which do not align with previous experiences or beliefs; they are normally negative, but Halima had a shocking but positive experience which led her to question previous assumptions and change her beliefs about her own ability. Presenting disorienting dilemmas only as negative experiences fails to include the different experiences leading to changing points of view. Daloz (2000) also presents the argument that dilemmas or experiences that shock, which appear to act as a catalyst for questioning assumptions, leading to changes, may be one of several experiences or dilemmas leading up to the point of action. This was evident in Oma's narrative and the influences of her teacher, thus endorsing the complexities of disorienting dilemmas.

8.4.2 CHANGES TO POINTS OF VIEW TRIGGERED BY DISORIENTING DILEMMAS

I believe that change of any description, regardless of the size, particularly in the educational context, would benefit from further exploration. Newman (2012) suggests that change associated with learning is a normal part of the process. I concur, as I believe learning should always result in change at some level e.g., acquisition of new knowledge, or new understanding of existing knowledge. However, the question for further exploration arises regarding, the process of the change – how does it occur, what is its magnitude and how does it impact the individual? Changes to points of view for some of my participants, occurred for my participants after their experience of disorienting dilemmas. The disorienting dilemmas identified acted as triggers to begin the process of perspective transformation and/or change according to transformative learning, but the outcome is not always immediate (as discussed in the context of learning). Analysing ingrained assumptions requires time to explore, understand; revised beliefs and perspective transformation may be slow and evolutionary. However, the process of change can be immediate or occur over a period when points of view or beliefs are consciously questioned and addressed. The personal experiences shared: Oma's experience when examining her career choices and reacting to the government's entry requirement, Shahd's experience

and coming to the realisation of not wanting to teach and Nabila's experience after her medical procedure and her diagnosis of dyslexia – they all triggered responses to problematic situations. Brookfield (2000) identified dilemmas as experiences leading to deeper introspective processes, examining uncritically held beliefs and highlighting problems which require solutions. My findings confirm that disorienting dilemmas did not lead to perspective transformations, neither immediately nor over the period of my study, but to changing points of view relatively soon after the initial period of shock. The disorienting dilemmas acted as a catalyst for questioning taken for granted assumptions and rejecting beliefs and norms which did not align with personal beliefs and constructing new beliefs.

8.4.3 THE COMPLEXITY OF CHANGING POINTS OF VIEW

Underpinning the learning experiences evident in my study is the concept of beliefs and attitudes, referred to in transformative learning theory as points of view. Through the process of learning, beliefs evolve, are challenged, and reformulated (Merriam et al., 2007). Learning and the process of formulating beliefs are fluid; there is no specific sequence and no finite end, which is in contrast with the ten phases of transformative learning described in the theory, suggesting a possible end to the process, which could then start again. Beliefs and knowledge, both within the educational setting and beyond, are modified by individuals (Murphy & Mason, 2006). This concept of changing beliefs, determined by context and circumstances, is an important part of the learning experience. My findings point to a number of changing beliefs for all my participants e.g., Shahd and her new belief and understanding about people from other cultures, Marwa's changing belief about teaching in the school context, Oma's belief about the education authority, Halima's belief about her own ability and Nabila's belief in herself, to name but a few. My findings demonstrate the frequency of changing points of view, referring to changing beliefs, attitudes, and judgements. Changes in points of view can occur with and without disorienting dilemmas, which complicates the original theory and changing points of view, which were not associated with disorienting dilemmas.

8.4.4 CHANGES TO POINTS OF VIEWS WITHOUT DISORIENTING DILEMMAS

My findings revealed that changes to points of view occurred without disorienting dilemmas, in addition to changes to points of view with disorienting dilemmas. Nabila's point of view changed when she decided she could make decisions independently of her husband; this happened without a disorienting dilemma. She presented this change, from decision making with her husband's support to recognising that she can make decisions independently. The change to her point of view was personal, the new reality was constructed by her. Nabila did not present a broader world view, that all women can make decisions independently of their husbands, but presented her personal viewpoint, specific to her and this context. She came to a new realisation and a new belief. Although she verbalised this new belief, she did not evidence this immediately; this could have been due to many factors e.g., the situation not arising or needing time and courage to implement this. However, I would argue that this delayed action did not negate her new belief, as verbalising the changing belief is the first step of the change. In the same way Marwa shifted from being uninterested in working directly with learners, to looking forward to working as a classroom assistant, this represents a change in her point of view, without a disorienting dilemma. She expressed freedom to look for work and earn an income, bringing her a degree of independence. Shahd also articulated a new point of view when sharing her understanding of new cultures in the workplace. These and other situations demonstrate how beliefs about specific situations can shift to new beliefs and changing points of view. My participants' experiences, and shifts in their beliefs, attitudes and behaviour were applicable to specific situations, and the changes were conscious and verbalised, as identified by Mezirow (1991, 2000). My research did not reveal that changing points of view followed the same steps of perspective transformation, i.e., the ten phases of transformative learning, identified by Mezirow (1991, 2000). In chapter eight I make recommendations about the need to study the process of changing points of view.

8.5 SUMMARY OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

The disorienting dilemmas identified in my research were negative experiences, causing a sense of internal balance when challenging predetermined meaning (Herbers & Mullins

Nelson, 2009). Additionally, there were other shocking experiences of a positive nature which resulted in changing points of views. These dilemmas, triggered by life transitions, caused my participants to question their realities. My participants, as per the theory, experienced situations which did not align with their expectations or prior meaning perspectives (Coke et al., 2015), causing them angst and to question taken for granted assumptions. However, my participants' experiences demonstrated a change in points of view, specific to certain situations. Unlike transformative learning theory, disorienting dilemmas did not lead to changes to meaning schemes, or meaning perspectives resulting in perspective transformation, but to changes to meaning schemes and meaning perspectives resulting in changing points of views. In some cases, changes to points of views were triggered by disorienting dilemmas, whereas in other cases, points of views were changed without dilemmas. Changes to points of view impacted learning and knowledge construction on a personal level, leading to personal emancipation or freedom for the individual. The concept of freedom from assumptions or beliefs that constrained my participants resulted in new beliefs and new ways of being, constructed by them.

Changes to my participant's' points of view uncovered stories about past and present realities and new interpretations for the future. My findings revealed that existing beliefs or taken for granted assumptions were questioned, which led to new understandings and new ways of being. My research unearthed shifts or changes about personal matters that took place. There is also the possibility that 'shifts' resulting in perspective transformation may still occur but are not yet evident, as the process can evolve over time. The evidence pointed to more immediate change (with or without disorienting dilemmas), based on specific areas of my participants' lives, resulting in changes to points of view. The evidence presented showed that my participants' interpretation of the world was challenged and questioned. Questioning taken for granted assumptions resulted in the construction of new knowledge, new beliefs and new ways of understanding and living in the world. Mezirow (1991, 2000), stated that it is not sufficient for individuals to merely say that they have changed or have new beliefs, he contends that change or shifts should be evident and visible for others to see, which my participants demonstrated.

Although my research is underpinned by transformative learning theory; as demonstrated, it is not 'a perfect fit' to explain the learning experiences of my participants; however, it aids understanding. My findings confirmed that learning experiences do not adhere to, or fit perfectly into prescribed processes, rules, or theories; learning is fluid, complex and unpredictable. Issues of critical reflection and discourse as part of my findings are not greatly in evidence, even though there are some suggestions of this. The theory helps in understanding the experiences of learners and the process of learning; however, no one theory is the panacea for understanding and interpreting all learning. My belief is that many theories of adult learning contribute in some way to understanding the complexity of the process of learning. For ease of understanding and focus, I have limited the number of theories used. In my research, transformative learning theory has framed my analysis but embedded in the findings are links to experiential learning, non-formal education, and emancipatory learning theory. The background and journey of my participants explored in chapter five, contextualised the personal experiences, without the use of the theoretical framework. Transformative learning (like all learning) occurs in context. The theory of transformative learning has been discussed, debated, and used in different contexts globally (Mejuni, 2009; Mayuzumi, 2006; Muhammad & Dixson, 2005; Armacost, 2005). Using the theory in different situations requires contextualisation and an understanding of significant factors relating to the target group. I would argue that the failure of the theory to address or include the context i.e., societal norms, traditions and the political background is a weakness; an understanding of the context is needed to frame the findings, adding the needed detail to comprehend them (Clark & Wilson, 1991; Cranton & Taylor, 2012; Kitchenham, 2008).

My participants, like the infrastructure of the UAE, are undergoing changes. The women in my study are living in an emerging modern-day society with its roots set in patriarchal traditions and are exposed to new experiences which have impacted their lives. The changes for my participants, whether big or small, have led to varying degrees of personal emancipation and liberation, impacting their beliefs and behaviour in a constantly changing society. The educational trajectories of my participants have resulted in more than personal growth as defined by Newman (2012), they have led to personal change and emancipation.

9 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study has been to explore the experiences of female students in the UAE on a diploma course; to explore by digging beneath the surface of their experiences to uncover learning experiences and changes which extend beyond content acquisition. The study has allowed for a deeper understanding of the whole learning experience from registering on the course, through to graduation and employment, with a focus on revealing and understanding life experiences. The concept of personal change and emancipation has been identified resulting in new perspectives. As outlined in 6.1.1 and 7.1.1, I used components of Mezirow's (1991, 2000) ten phases of transformative learning, and Nerstrom's (2014) transformation model, to analyse my findings and uncover and understand the learning experiences. In this chapter I draw conclusions, state my original findings and contribution to research, and make recommendations for policy and research.

9.1.1 MY SUBSTANTIVE CONTRIBUTION TO RESEARCH

Research has been conducted and is ongoing about women and their experiences in higher education in the Middle East. Whilst Abdullah & Ridge's work (2011) explores the academic performance of males and females, and Mahani's (2018) work explores approaches to teaching, my research in contrast aims to reveal the nuances of learning which are sometimes overlooked, in terms of deeper, personalised learning experiences pertaining to women. The link between education and employment has often been made (Alibeli, 2015; Gallant & Pounder, 2008; Thompson-Whiteside, et.al., 2020), I would argue that whilst this is important, my study makes links with the participants' aspirations and ambitions, however this is tangential in my research. Issues regarding the rationale for the government's focus on educational and employment opportunities for women, provide the context from one perspective (Caravelho Pinto, 2019); but fails to uncover the deeper individual stories of success, failure and/or development. Findlow (2013) has written about higher education and consciousness to gain power and shape society i.e., making changes on a macro level, my study has similarities in addressing power dynamics through revealing

taken for granted assumptions resulting in change, but on a micro level. Gains of self-autonomy and gender equality as explored by El-Halawany (2009) in Egypt, has similarities with my work conducted in the UAE, in terms of decision making and change. My original contribution to research is the undocumented stories of personal change during the participant's trajectories in higher education, at a time of change in the UAE.

My research makes a substantive contribution to research of women's experiences in the UAE. The increased educational opportunities for women have led to improvements in literacy rates for women in the UAE (and other areas e.g., employment), giving rise to new aspirations. My findings reveal that this development is not simply about academic achievements and qualifications; embedded in these educational experiences are journeys of personal change, which are not always included in the rhetoric of advancements for women. The complexity of education and the lack of depth to capture these difficult, intricate, unpredictable personal experiences can hinder understanding of the underlying experiences of change. The focus on the formality of teaching, learning and statistical advancements fails to provide an in-depth understanding of the 'real' experiences of women's educational trajectories. This is the gap in the current research which I identified and explored.

My findings substantiate the concept that learning is multi-faceted and multi-dimensional, leading to change and possibly transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991, 2000). Changes that occurred at different points and in different places during my participants' educational experiences, and in different areas of their lives - some minor i.e., wanting to work in education on completion of their course, and some considerable, such as not needing a man to help make decisions - were evident in my findings. My findings revealed that changes were occurring beneath the surface, highlighting other dimensions of learning. Through my research, I discovered that the process of change was evident in different ways, through epochal experiences of disorienting dilemmas (which was commonly found), to more nuanced changes to points of view over time. The questioning of taken for granted assumptions, as discussed in transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991, 2000) and

new points of views i.e., beliefs and perspectives, by all my participants, was evident in my findings. New perspectives which were identified demonstrated emancipation on a personal level for my participants. The women in my study were living in a context of change, and concurrently have experienced personal change through their educational experiences, leading to changing points of view. My findings reveal that the women started the course from different points of their educational trajectory and the explicit learning that took place along the journey, but importantly my work provides insight to the unexplored, undocumented, unspoken experiences which occurred beyond the curriculum stated objectives. The study uncovers the participants' experiences prior to the course, whilst on the course, their future aspirations and ambitions, and changes in beliefs and actions. The questioning of assumptions by the participants, led them to new personal freedoms. Long may this continue.

The following section will contextualise the setting of my study, before moving on to the recommendations and conclusions.

9.1.2 THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

My research is based in the UAE during a time of change, and it is within this context of change that the journeys of the women in my study are set. Change is occurring in three spheres: internationally, nationally, and personally. In a society where women were traditionally home makers, responsible for children and looking after the family, the recent changes have opened new opportunities and experiences. Opportunities provided at a national level, for higher levels of education, employment outside the home and entrepreneurial opportunities have given women new prospects. These new openings also have political goals e.g., raising the profile of the UAE as an advancing Arab country. This context of change – the shift of a small, developing nation into a thriving economy stepping onto the international stage - is the background for my study. It is in this context that my participants lived and studied, and my interest was piqued about their educational experiences. The main research question I addressed was:

• How can Emirati women's educational experiences be understood though the lens of transformative learning?

My findings show that the educational experiences of my participants have resulted in change, pertaining to changing points of view. Transformative learning theory provided a framework for exploring and analysing women on the classroom assistant's course, and their educational trajectories. Mezirow's theory (1991, 2000) frames the process of learning and the experiences of learners, recognising perspective transformations and changing points of view as significant in the journey of change. The theory acknowledges the importance of prior experience and how this frames the individual's perspective, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours, relating to new experiences. The acknowledgment that current experiences can cause individuals to question previous experiences and assumptions has been endorsed in my findings. Kuhn (1959, as cited in Riegler, 2012) refers to divergent thinking, where experiences do not fit existing structures, and individuals may be challenged to explore and change previous beliefs. Nerstrom's model of transformative learning (2014), which synthesises Mezirow's original theory, provided additional help in understanding and framing my participants' experiences. However, omissions within the theory were highlighted which will be discussed in the recommendations.

The sub research questions helped to answer the main question through exploration of specific experiences:

- What role do 'disorienting dilemmas' play in the lived experiences of women in the UAE?

My substantive findings are that disorienting dilemmas were part of the participant's experience i.e., an event such as a life crisis or life transition, leading to changing points of view, which I interpret as personal emancipation. My findings reveal that women in the UAE, living in a context of change, have experienced events that have caused them shock and distress; however, the outcome has resulted in new beliefs which could be described as emancipatory. As discussed in 3.3.6, disorienting dilemmas occur when meaning

schemes are inadequate in explaining an experience or a new piece of information (Mezirow, 1991, 2000). The situation can result in perspective transformation as described in the theory, but my findings pointed to changing points of view (which are also included in the theory). The evidence shows that disorienting dilemmas took place for some, but not all the participants, resulting in a range of responses, but all participants experienced changing points of view. My participants changed their points of view i.e., their beliefs, thinking and behaviours about specific areas in their lives and demonstrated these new beliefs immediately. Others did not action the new beliefs immediately - the responses were varied, personal and subjective. However, the consistent finding was changing points of view for all the participants in my research.

Sub research question two guided my main research question also. It was:

- How do women's 'points of view' shift during their educational trajectories, on and after a foundation programme in the UAE?

My substantiative contribution here, is that the women in my study changed their points of view as a result of their experiences, without experiencing disorienting dilemmas. These evolutionary, quiet, reflective experiences (in contrast to disorienting dilemmas) led to changes in points of view regarding specific areas in my participants' lives. The experiences resulted in new beliefs about specific areas in their lives, which I described and interpreted in emancipatory terms. Changing points of view refer to changing 'sets of immediate specific expectations, beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and judgments' (Mezirow, 2000, p. 18), which accompany and shape interpretations of the world. They affect how individuals behave, judge situations and attribute causality (Mezirow, 2007). The evidence revealed that questioning previous assumptions and expectations occurred whilst the participants were on the course and after, resulting in changes to points of view and new ways of being and operating.

Based on the findings of my research, I have made recommendations and divided them into recommendations for policy (for the national or federal leaders to consider) and research matters that would also feed indirectly into government policies.

9.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

9.2.1 RECOMMENDATION ONE

My recommendation is that further research be conducted to explore the importance and relevance of context as part of the exploration of personal emancipation and change - this is a recommendation for research which also impacts policy. The substantive finding of personal emancipation through changing points of view is the most important finding of my study. However, the understanding of the context frames the findings, giving deeper understanding to the emancipatory journeys of my participants. The context is important and needs to be included as an important aspect of the research. I recommend a theoretical reconsideration of the role of context in the field of transformative learning. The concept of changing perspectives based on experiences has been recognised in different contexts and for different groups of women - as discussed in 3.5. However, the context of the research has not been emphasised, and my research has shown that it is an important aspect of the study, placing the experiences and the outcome in a specific time and place, which impacts the participants. Transformative learning theory as developed by Mezirow (1991) fails to include the importance of the context or provide guidance of how to analyse the findings in light of the given context. This recommendation could be undertaken in different ways e.g., conducting the same research with a similar cohort of participants in different contexts and exploring their emancipatory trajectories. My research has pointed to the behaviours of a specific group of women, in a specific context. The recommendation would go beyond this.

My recommendation for research is that further research be conducted with an inclusion of contextual factors, allowing for possible links to be made in between the findings and the context. As discussed in 4.3, using transformative learning theory to frame my work has

had its challenges. Although the theory helped in framing my work, it also raised other questions, specifically the lack of contextual information required to position the research. The theory provides limited information on the importance of the context and setting of the research. As discussed in 2.1.1, the political, cultural, and social context positions my research and findings in a broader context, aiding the understanding of the factors which may have impacted the change process. My research was conducted in the Middle East, in a patriarchal society where religion, culture and traditions shape the society and the assumptions of individuals. These factors contributed in shaping the individual's realities and affected their lived experiences and changes. My understanding of the context, and the timing of my research, suggest that my participants were questioning taken for granted assumptions about structures within society e.g., norms and cultural traditions e.g., the role of men and women, and new opportunities. In a different context, with different norms and traditions, the participants would possibly be questioning assumptions that were taken for granted in that particular context. I describe the importance of context and recommend that further research be conducted to explore it.

9.2.2 RECOMMENDATION TWO

Following on from recommendation one, my second recommendation is for research to be conducted which broadens the range of participants in the exploration of emancipatory experiences (this will also be discussed in my limitations section below). As discussed in 6.2.1 – 6.2.3 and 7.2.1 -7.2.4, changes to points of view for my participants was a common finding. My participants had been purposively selected - they were all women, registered on the course. The criteria outside of that selection was arbitrary, based on the first participants who volunteered to be a part of the study. Cohen et al. (2013) note that with this kind of sampling, researchers handpick the cases in their sample in terms of 'typicality'. On reflection I believe I could have used it to present both typical participants e.g., those who wanted to be a classroom assistant, and atypical participants e.g., a participant who did not want to be a classroom assistant (which worked out in my sample by chance). Purposive sampling of a different nature e.g., participants from rural or urban communities, or from the same age range, conservative families and more liberated families, participants from different economic positions with different previous experiences could be explored,

revealing more about the learning experiences (possibly of emancipation) of different groups. An extension of diverse groups and backgrounds could be conducted, with participants studying at different levels, from undergraduate or post graduate courses, to understand their experiences. My recommendation of the exploration into different target groups, as outlined above, would offer insight into different lived experiences and personal realities, revealing more about the journeys of personal emancipation.

9.2.3 RECOMMENDATION THREE

I recommend the classroom assistant course as a foundation course, as an introduction to opportunities in education, but not restricted to it. This recommendation is for the HEIME's policy regarding marketing course offerings. The participants in my study (apart from Oma) did not join the course with the intention of becoming teachers. However, Nabila had a change in belief and ambition and Shahd and Halima both decided against a career in teaching, but in a related field, which they had been exposed to as part of the course. The experience of the Classroom Assistant Diploma provided insight into the teaching profession and other related occupations, allowing the participants to gain knowledge about other possibilities. Some of my participants rejected assumptions and expectation that they would be employed in the field of education and, based on their new beliefs, considered other opportunities for themselves. The belief that they did not have to be restricted to employment in this field was evident and explored possibilities for them. My recommendation is that the classroom assistant course be presented as an educational experience which uncovers new and varied experiences to learners, helping in their decision making (impacted by new beliefs for and about themselves). In this way the course would include knowledge and skill acquisition for immediate employment (if decided on), while enabling learners to explore and develop interests in educational related fields and beyond, but more importantly provide the opportunity to challenge existing beliefs and assumption, leading to new beliefs and ways of being, consciously formulated by them.

9.2.4 RECOMMENDATION FOUR

My fourth recommendation is for further research to be conducted on changing points of view. I would recommend continued research focusing more on learning and changing points of view, with an emphasis on the details of these occurrences. Areas for research could include, but not be restricted to: what happens prior to changing point of view, were there triggers beyond disorienting dilemmas that were linked to the change, and is there a process that changing points of view follows e.g., like Mezirow's (2000) ten phases of transformative learning? In contrast, the theory describes in detail the process of perspective transformation which it claims is less commonly found (as confirmed in my research). Therefore, my recommendation to better understand the process of changing points of view would facilitate this. As discussed, a weakness in the original theory is the lack of attention paid to changing points of view. Researching and gaining a deeper understanding of the process of changing points of view would add to the extant knowledge of the learning process and the nuances embedded within it. I recommend further research to provide more detail on the process of changing points of view (if it exists).

9.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study provides insight into the lives and experiences of women at an HEIME, providing a deeper understanding of their expected and unexpected educational experiences, providing greater understanding of transformative learning theory when used as a theoretical framework. However, I recognise that my research has its limitations. I have identified three limitations based on: my role as a researcher, the size of the sample and the data collection tools.

Reflection of my data collection, and interrogation of it, has revealed that my insider position influenced my data collection more than I had intended or had been aware of. This is a key limitation of this study. I discussed in 4.2 that working in the department was an advantage, but I failed to explore the deeper cultural issues in shaping personal narrative.

I confined myself to 'safer' issues about course content, experiences in college and school and knowledge gained. I also failed to interrogate in-depth issues of culture and influences from the participant's perspective in the UAE. By living in this context, awareness of issues and topics which could be controversial were avoided. There are certain topics that are not 'open' to discussion and this knowledge led me to 'self-censorship'. Hudson (2013) found expatriate teachers in higher education in the UAE were dominated by a 'discourse of fear' related to issues of power, religion, gender and money. This was a part of my experience, which made me judicious in my undertakings. On reflection, this knowledge inhibited my inquiry and prevented me from digging deeper and exploring in more detail other dimensions of the lives of my participants.

Another limitation of this study is that it included a relatively small number of participants. My decision to collect data from a smaller number of students was for both practical and academic reasons, as the research was designed to focus on an in-depth understanding of the stories presented. I had planned to collect stories from between five to eight students, but due to participants dropping out and the numbers that came forward, I decided that five participants was sufficient for the purpose of my study. My aim was to focus on exploring their experiences while on the course, and a smaller number of participants enabled me to do this. My research was specific to these students; however, I am able to contribute to substantive knowledge in the research field. I recognise (as in recommendation 2), that there are wider stories to tell. Qualitative research allows for in-depth analysis, understanding of a social phenomenon and interpretation of the data to add to the body of knowledge about a given phenomenon in a social context (Rahman, 2017). As described in 4.6.3, the aim of the study is not to conduct research and then generalise the findings (Adams & Thompson, 2011), but to explore the experiences of this specific group of women and their trajectories, giving voice to their stories of change.

My data collection method of narrative interviews allowed me to listen to and collect the stories of my participants. It is possible that a wider variety of data may have elicited and enriched the data. However, narrative interviews aim to explore and catch glimpses of the

participants' reality and interpret them (Holliday, 2005). I recognise that, as the researcher and interlocutor, I played a role in the communication and the narratives shared. Despite sharing the academic aims of my research with the participants, i.e., the research being of personal interest and not related directly to my teaching responsibilities, the power basis of our relationship was still firmly in place, with myself as the researcher and the participants as the subjects. Kvale (2012) highlights the asymmetrical power relationship in interviews where the researcher has a monopoly on interpretations, which of course is based on the stories shared by the participants. The researcher and the participants are both important in the data collection process. However, in the context of using narrative interviews, the focus allowed my participants to be in control of their stories, sharing without manipulation their experiences on their educational trajectories. Awareness of the power dynamics and my position as researcher ensured that I monitored by position and conduct.

Despite these limitations, I believe the study has been worthwhile for a few reasons - the most important being that it has offered insight into the stories and experiences of young Emirati women on their educational trajectories, questioning assumptions, changing points of view, and experiencing personal emancipation. Their journeys of emancipation have been heard and documented - my substantiative contribution to research has enabled their stories to be told. My research has also identified possible ways forward for Emirati education and employment in the field of education and beyond. My research is not conclusive but offers opportunities for further research and exploration into change and emancipation in the context of the HEIME.

9.4 CONCLUSION

In the context of transformative learning as identified by Mezirow (1991, 2000) and Nerstrom (2014) the concept of changing perspectives or changing points of view are areas for further research. As discussed, transformative learning theory advocates that changes to points of view can lead to new perspectives and an openness to new possibilities

(Mezirow, 1991, 2000; DeCapua et al., 2018). My research makes links between the changes within the society - its economic standing and changes for my participants. However, it should be noted that because a country becomes wealthier, this does not automatically result in benefits to all sectors of the population, in particular the marginalised (Atkinson, 2016). My findings highlight that wealth and new opportunities have benefited the women in the study generally, but there are variations in how societal changes have impacted women as a group, as discussed in chapter two. Different changes have been identified on an individual basis, in the context of personal circumstances and situations. A critique of the theory is that transformative learning i.e., the questioning of taken for granted assumptions and deeper understanding of beliefs and self, act as a precursor for transformative learning, which means that transformative learning leads to transformative learning, a chicken an egg argument (Howie & Bagnall, 2013). This suggests that those who do experience transformative learning are open to experiencing further change. However, those who have not experienced transformative learning are less likely to be involved in the experience of changing points of view or perspective transformation in the future. This is another possible area for further research.

My own journey of research and academic study has led me to recognise the complexities of learning, learning experiences and the concept of change. I have learned that educational experiences can bring about change which is subjective and personal, unpredictable, and emancipatory. Whether the learning experiences of individuals fit into theoretical frameworks (or not), does not negate the learning that has taken place. Theoretical frameworks may guide research but, even with modifications to the theory, the findings may still not 'fit' the theory, or vice versa. This was evidenced in my findings, where my data pointed to repeated changes to points of view, which are discussed in little detail in the theory. However, unlike transformative learning theory, these changes did not reveal changes to world views (at that point), but it is possible as discussed in the theory that this could occur with additional changes to points of view. Transformative learning theory has been effective in framing my research; it endorses the complexities and intricacies of learning. The recognition that people are social beings, complex and multi-dimensional,

and that learning is not linear, predictable, or one-dimensional, adds to the challenge of developing a theory which encompasses all these elements.

Transformative learning is not the end result of the learning process; my belief is that changes are ongoing and are found at different stages of the learning experience. Different elements of the theory have been useful in framing my work e.g., questioning assumptions, rejecting them, forming new beliefs and expectations, but omissions such as not recognising the importance of the context, and the different occurrences of change, require further discussion and inclusion in the theory. As a researcher, using transformative learning theory has highlighted the challenges involved in using theories in research. My initial belief was that theories which have been developed by academics, modified over a period which appear to be comprehensive, do not always frame findings sufficiently. My research has highlighted that the use of theories as an analytical framework may guide the process but does not stand as a definitive answer to the data collected. This has resulted in my own disorienting dilemma, as my assumption was that the theory selected would frame the research sufficiently well, with only minor modifications needed. However, I found it more useful to work with an adapted model of transformative learning theory in order to analyse and understand my data and the findings i.e., Nerstrom's (2014) model of transformative learning. The process I have been engaged in as a researcher has changed my own point of view about using theories. I have rejected my own taken for granted assumption about the use of theories and formulated new beliefs and expectations about their use. I have emerged with a deeper understanding of research, recognising that theories are not perfect, not always well developed and are sometimes flawed in content regarding inclusions and exclusions. The disclaimer that the theory cannot 'fit' and explain every learning experience, needs to be acknowledged.

Howie and Bagnall (2013) suggest that Mezirow's work would stand up better as a metaphor for learning, as an illustration of change because there are omissions and deletions, and it lacks a substantial conclusion. Whether presented as a theory or metaphor, I would argue that transformative learning theory contributes to understanding

the complex process of learning, it endorses that learning is experienced in diverse ways. It has provided an insight into the journey of a small group of women in the UAE. May their stories continue be told and analysed, highlighting change, emancipation, and alternative perspectives for the future.

9.4.1 FINAL COMMENTS

Change in the UAE is ongoing; the pace of infrastructure development, changing norms and traditions may slow down, but the society is evolving, as are the people. Change for my participants in the context of a changing society as evidenced, may also continue as my research over the four-year period revealed. I hope that positive, emancipatory change will continue for my participants, both in the near and distant future. I have gained a new understanding of my participants' trajectories based on their narratives. I am inspired by their stories, the identifiable changes in their lives, new points of view and openness to further changes or transformations – long may this new tradition continue for the women of the UAE!

10 APPENDICES

10.1 DATA COLLECTION TIMELINE

10.2 COURSE OUTLINE– CLASSROOM ASSISTANT DIPLOMA

Lifespan Development 1

Computer Skills

Lifespan Development II

Creating, Managing and Organising Resources

Effective Classroom Displays

Guiding Children's Behaviour

Understanding Learning Challenges

English I

English II

English III

Personal and Professional Development I

Personal and Professional Development II

Personal and Professional Development III

Personal and Professional Development IV

Apprenticeship 1: Introduction to Observation

Apprenticeship 2: Role of Classroom assistant

Apprenticeship 3: Whole School and Classroom Climate

Apprenticeship 4: Professionalism

10.3 NARRATIVE INTERVIEW PROMPTS 2016

Questions about the individual

- Tell me about you, your family background and where you are from.
- Tell me about your schooling and early educational experiences.
- Tell me about your life after high school and starting the course.
- What do you like to do in your free time?

Experiences of the course

- Tell me about your experience of the diploma program please?
- Tell me about the courses you took and the learning that took place? Both content and any other learning experiences e.g., about people, yourself, time in school, colleges and so forth?
- Are there things that you learned or happened while you were on the course, that you have used in your life?
- Were there any memorable experiences you had on the programme? Please tell me about them.
- What you are doing now and what are your future plans (if you have any)?
- Where did the idea to do that come from? Was the family involved in the idea, did the course play a part?
- How do you see yourself now? How did you see yourself before the course?

10.4 NARRATIVE INTERVIEW PROMPTS JUNE 2020

- What have you been doing since the first interview in 2016?
- Let's go back and revisit your past experiences. Tell me your story about how you came to be on the CA course and your experiences of the course?
- Did you plan to work as a classroom assistant?
- What was happening in your life at the time of choosing to do the diploma?
- Once you started the course, were there any specific moment(s) or challenges when you started to think about the course, your future or other things?
- What were these moments? Tell me about them.
- How did you decide on your future after the diploma? What did you apply to do? Tell me about your journey. Did you apply for anything else? Did you face any challenges? How did you deal with them?

- What are you doing now? How and when did you decide that you wanted to do……..? Did your experiences prior to the course, or whilst you were on the course impact that decision in any way?
- Tell me more about your current experiences?
- Have there been any challenges recently, at this stage of your journey? Tell me about them.
- Have there been any specific moment(s) which have prompted you to think about what you are doing now? Does it relate to your past experiences in any way?
- How do you see experiences? Do you think they have a part in shaping your life? If so, how?
- Is there anything else you want to share about this chapter of your life?

10.5 DURHAM UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS AND DATA FORM

Durham University

School of Education

Research Ethics and Data Protection Monitoring Form

Research involving humans by all academic and related Staff and Students in the Department is subject to the standards set out in the Department Code of Practice on Research Ethics. The Sub-Committee will assess the research against the British Educational Research Association's *Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* (2011).

It is a requirement that prior to the commencement of all research this form be completed and submitted to the Department's Research Ethics and Data Protection Sub-Committee. The Committee will be responsible for issuing certification that the research meets ethical standards and will, if necessary, require changes to the research methodology or reporting strategy.

The application should contain:

1) this completed (and signed) application form
2) a copy of the research proposal which should be no longer than one A4 page that details: (a) objectives of the study, (b) description of the target cohort / sample (c) methods and procedure of data collection, (d) data management and (f) reporting strategies.
3) depending on the methodology you plan to employ, outline of the interview schedule / survey / questionnaire / or other assessment methods
4) the participant information sheet, and
5) the consent form

Templates for the participant information sheet and the consent form are provided at the end of the form.

Notes:

- As all applications should be submitted electronically, electronic (scanned) signatures should be used.
- You will be informed of the outcome of your application within two weeks of submission. If a specific application deadline has been notified, and this is missed, then the turnaround time will be 4 weeks from date of submission.
- No research should be conducted until ethical approval is obtained.
- Incomplete applications will be returned without consideration.

- **Please send all documents to the Research Office in the School of Education (Sheena Smith, School of Education, tel. (0191) 334 8403, e-mail: Sheena.Smith@Durham.ac.uk).**

10.6 APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL

Name	Grace Faure-Bryan
Email address	g.a.faure-bryan@durham.ac.uk
Title of research project	- How can Emirati women's educational experiences be understood though the lens of transformative learning? - What role do 'disorienting dilemmas' play in the lived experiences of women in the UAE? - How do women's 'points of view' shift during their educational trajectories, during and after a foundation programme in the UAE?
Date of start of research project	September 2015

	Please tick one
PGR Student	✓
PGT Student	
UG Student	
Staff	
Other	

For PGR, PGT and UG students

Programme	Ed.D
Supervisor	Dr. David Stevens

For staff

Is the research funded	Y N
Funder	
List any Co-Is in the research	

Other

Please give further details	

(1) Does the proposed research project involve data from human participants? This includes secondary data. If the research project is concerned with the analyses of secondary data (e.g. pre-existing data or information records) please continue with Q6-9	(1) Y N
(2) Will you provide your informants – prior to their participation – with a participant information sheet containing information about	

(2a) the purpose of your research (2b) the voluntary nature of their participation (2c) their right to withdraw from the study at any time (2d) what their participation entails (2e) how anonymity is achieved (2f) how confidentiality is secured (2g) whom to contact in case of questions or concerns Please attach a copy of the information sheet or provide details of alternative approach.	(2a) Y N (2b) Y N (2c) Y N (2d) Y N (2e) Y N (2f) Y N (2g) Y N
(3) Will you ask your informants to sign an informed consent form? (please attach a copy of the consent form or provide details of alternative approach)	(3) Y N
(4) Does your research involve covert surveillance? (4a) If yes, will you seek signed consent post hoc?	(4) Y N (4a) Y N
(5) Will your data collection involve the use of recording devices? (5a) If yes, will you seek signed consent?	(5) Y N (5a) Y N
(6) Will your research report be available to informants and the general public without restrictions placed by sponsoring authorities?	(6) Y N

(7) **How will you guarantee confidentiality and anonymity?**

No names will be used in transcribing the interview. The researcher will ensure that she is are not under any obligation to disclose any information with anyone else -this will be checked under contractual obligations.
-Confidentiality of the researcher will be communicated to the students.
- Data will be kept on the researcher's computer in a secure file which will be password protected. Only the researcher will have access to this file.
- Only the researcher will have the right to grant permission to others, for access. e.g., If the research committee at my place of work would like to see or discuss the findings – the researcher would be the only one able to do this.
-Volunteers will be sought for the research – this will minimize the researcher bias or pre-conceived ideas of participants
- No names will be used at any time in the write up.

(8) **What are the implications of your research for your informants?**

- The participants will have a deeper understanding of their own experiences and journey. They will have opportunities for self-reflection.
- The time invested may be expedient and informative for their future plans. Whether moving sideways or upwards in their career path this information will be beneficial for their own personal and professional development.
- The data could be used for course development for the HEIME.

(9) **Are there any other ethical issues arising from your research?**

- The participants will not be coerced or forced in any way to partake in the research study - it will be totally voluntary.
- There will be a small number of participants between three - eight in the case study.
- The students will be unidentifiable - information about their specific course or cohorts will be available but only the general context. It will not be possible to trace them - therefore their identity will be protected.
- Anonymity will be preserved.
- Permission will be requested in advance from the participants to share the findings in an anonymous way i.e., without the use of names.

Further details

- Issues of trust - the data from the interview will be collected by myself. An explanation of the rationale for the study will be presented through the data collection stage, to ensure that the responses are 'genuine' and reflective of their experiences. The power differential will be minimised through this process!
-The data will be recorded and presented as delivered by the participants: making it objective and not subjective.
- Trust will be built through informal narrative interview with the interviewer and the students' previous knowledge of her.
- At the initial interview there will be scripted questions prepared by the researcher. The interviewer will be able to use follow-up questions (some will be provided) that are more open to expand on the deeper meaning if needed.

Declaration

I have read the Department's Code of Practice on Research Ethics and believe that my research complies fully with its precepts.
I will not deviate from the methodology or reporting strategy without further permission from the Department's Research Ethics Committee.
I am aware that it is my responsibility to seek and gain ethics approval from the organisation in which data collection takes place (e.g., school) prior to commencing data collection.

Applicant signature  Date:…15th Sept 2015

Proposal discussed and agreed by supervisor

Supervisor signature Date

To enable electronic submission of applications, electronic (scanned) signatures will be accepted.

10.7 PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Durham University
School of Education

15th Sept 2015

You are invited to take part in a research study of:

The purpose of this study is to explore student experiences of the Classroom Assistant Diploma and their future aspirations.

Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

The study is conducted by Grace Faure-Bryan as part of her PG studies at Durham University. This research project is supervised by Dr. David Stevens, david.stevens@durham.ac.uk from the School of Education at Durham University.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to be part of a survey, individual interviews and focus group discussions. Your experiences and expectations will be collated in form on interviews and stories. Your participation in this study will take approximately 45-50 minutes – during class time.

You are free to decide whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without any negative consequences for you. All responses you give, or other data collected will be kept confidential. The records of this study will be kept secure and private. All files containing any information you give are password protected. In any research report that may be published, no information will be included that will make it possible to identify you individually. There will be no way to connect your name to your responses at any time during or after the study.

If you have any questions, requests or concerns regarding this research, please contact me via email at Grace Faure-Bryan, g.a.faure-bryan@durham.ac.uk or by telephone at 00971 55 1022149

This study has been reviewed and approved by the School of Education Ethics Sub-Committee at Durham University (date of approval: 12th June 2016).

Grace Faure-Bryan 

Student Name: Signature:

10.8 DECLARATION OF INFORMED CONSENT

I agree to participate in this study, the purpose of which is to explore student experiences of the Classroom Assistant Diploma and their future aspirations.

- I have read the participant information sheet and understand the information provided.

- I have been informed that I may decline to answer any questions or withdraw from the study without penalty of any kind.

- I have been informed that all of my responses will be kept confidential and secure, and that I will not be identified in any report or other publication resulting from this research.

- I have been informed that the investigator will answer any questions regarding the study and its procedures. Grace Faure-Bryan School of Education, Durham University can be contacted via email: g.a.faure-bryan@durham.ac.ukor telephone: 00971 55 1022149.

- I will be provided with a copy of this form for my records.

Any concerns about this study should be addressed to the Ethics Sub-Committee of the School of Education, Durham University via email (Sheena Smith, School of Education, tel. (0191) 334 8403, e-mail: Sheena.Smith@durham.ac.uk).

Date	Participant Name (please print)	Participant Signature

I certify that I have presented the above information to the participant and secured his or her consent.

Date Signature of Investigator

10.9 HALIMA'S INTERVIEW 2016

Here is an excerpt from an interview in June 2016 i.e., interview.1

It shows the conversation based on the first-hand experience whilst on the course and the impact of Halima receiving unexpected grades in her assessments.

G: So what happened with that first grade, tell me a little bit more.

Halima: I have a good grade, like a A, B, B+, A+. I graduate with 4.5 maybe.

G: Congratulations.

Halima: Thank you.

G: So, you said at the beginning of the diploma, you got a good grade for a piece of coursework. Tell me more about this and what happened after you got that grade?

Halima: I felt powerful, that I have power, but I want to do, y7ahni I know that I can do more. I can do more and harder than this subject.

G: And then what happened after that in terms of your academic work?

Halima: In the diploma?

G: Yes.

Halima: Continue, so that I told you I got 3.5 when I graduate from the Foundation course and when I get this G.P.A. I get more power, I know myself I can do more. When I was in the foundation I get all my grades like B, C, sometimes I get D. Because you know I was level two, and they were so full, I felt that it's a long long way to the bachelor, and when I get to level four, I try maybe five times to get the IELTS and I felt so sad that I cannot get it. And I felt like khalas I don't want this, I don't want to do it, but when I get to diploma and started to get good grades all the time , it's increase my self… what's it called self-esteem?

G: Self-esteem.

Halima: And so I trust myself.

10.10 NABILA'S INTERVIEW 2020

This is an excerpt from the interview in 2020 (interview 2), where Nabila shares the specific point that she recalls when she decided that she wanted to join the teaching profession.

This is a positive experience, unlike a disorienting dilemma as described in transformative learning theory, which leads to a change in her point of view. The shift occurs from her wanting to be a classroom assistant to wanting to be a teacher and basing her decision for the future on this experience.

G: Whilst you were on the course, when you were on the diploma was there a time, or things that happened that made you start thinking about the future?

Nabila : Yes, I remember that moment when I was in a TP. I was in second TP actually in my first year of diploma, when I teacher she was absent and there's no available, another teacher who can be attending the class, so the one of the Principal asked me can you just attend the classes even if the teacher is not here, I know it's not a good for you because the courses does not require you to be at the class when there is nobody there, but can you please, because she request me to be there and teach the students, even then it was KG , and they would be naughty, sometimes they listen more than the teacher.

At that time, it is only I have 10 minutes to think quickly what I have to do with all the students and make them to hear me at the same task. So started to my thinking, I am good in the science more than the maths, so what do—what about I do something that can make them to learn something about the science.

Then when I start to teach them I was in shock to myself because I didn't believe myself I was teaching students, at the same time they were listen to, and they started to…er question me, 'teacher how like that will be, how it will be', I was soo happy, because I

remember that student who ask more question that they are open mind and they have, they need to learn more.

This moment I think really, I told myself no, I need complete my degree to be a professional English teacher, not the assistant teachers. At that time, I told to my husband, yes, I am going to complete my bachelor now, more than before.

10.11 SHAHD'S INTERVIEW 2020

This is an excerpt from the interview 2 with Shahd in June 2020.

She shares her experiences after the course, working in the tourism industry. She reveals the learning which took place and her personal focus on change and personal development. The shift from the educational context has permitted new experiences resulting in changing points of view.

Shahd: First, first time I come to Waterworld they told us about the different way of the people and the different ere r body language to talk with the people, like if you have a Chinese or Asian people they come to you, you cannot staring to their eyes, and ask them about what's happened, they will feel not comfortable because their culture they are not have eyes contact you know.

G: Ahh right.

Shahd: You have to talk with her and little bit er make your eyes down, you know. And anything happen the guest is right, that make a very, very challenge for me you know, you work in a place er you have to make a guest happy, like a guest when it's come to your home you have to accept them and make them go from your house or went from your house happy. Because the future he will talk about you, when I went to Shahd house or G house I was have a bad experience, you know. But you have to be patient, you have to be positive, smiling, leave your any situation, family situation you have in your own house and go to work with a big smile.

G: Yes

Shahd: and you know some—I have remember one situation.

G: Tell me, tell me and you're laughing it must be good.

Shahd: Its funny (laughing). One of the local guests he want to buy a watermelon, and he came to me and he was very sad and angry and shouting, 'what this watermelon 10 dirham, I can buy 3 dirham in Carrefour', like this one (laughing). 'You have very, very expensive watermelon here and everything here expensive', and he keep shouting and actually ah they say that it is not our problem in guest services, but if someone come and talk to us we cannot tell them it is not our problem. And I keep listening to him ah, and when he finished I told them, first of all it's a park for our country improve, we have to give them a middle price for everyone, like this price watermelon in their country it is a less price from ours, and I told him after you eat you come to talk to me, why not from the beginning, I will give you coupon maybe or something, and he told me 'how did you know that I eat, how did you know', I told him, 'look your t-shirt there is watermelon', and he keep laughing and he shy from the situation.

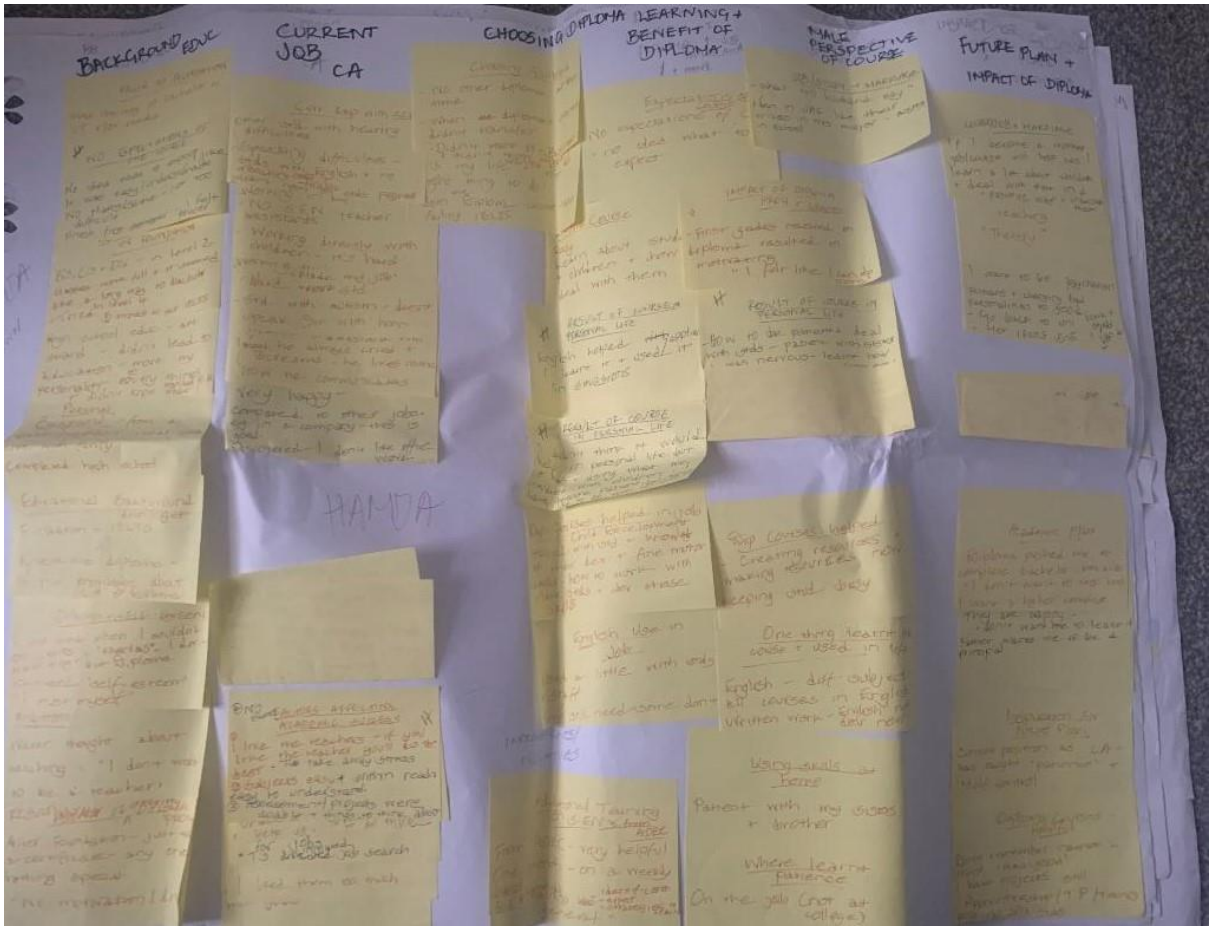
G: So you used your people skills here.

Shahd: Yeah, I improve myself to know this person how to talk with him you know, how can I deal with the problem with every each person.

G: Lovely, was this, was this something new that you learnt or was this something new, but that now you were putting into action, tell me a little bit more?

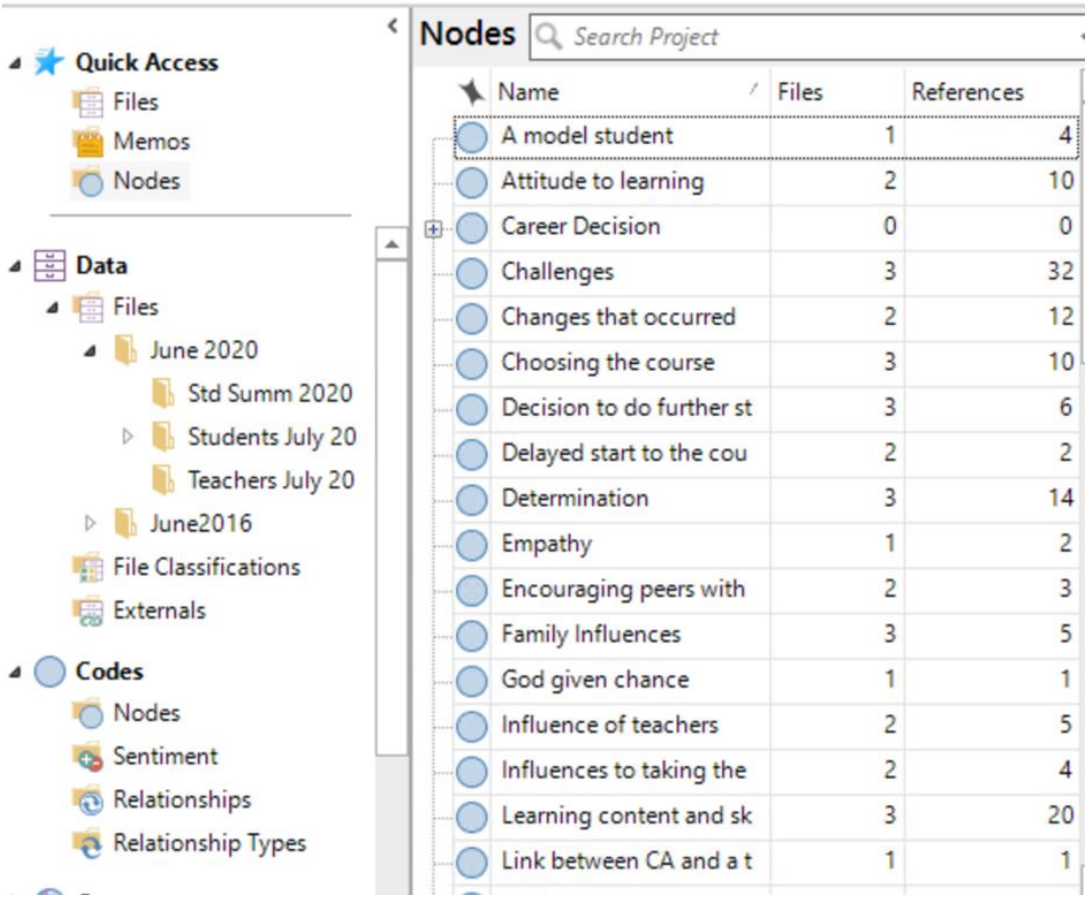
Shahd: Actually a lot of things I feel that I improve myself because I focus of myself, if you focus what you have to improve with it, you work with it more.

10.12 CODING MANUALLY: HALIMA 2016



10.13 INITIAL CODING USING NVIVO

Initial codes.



Name	Files	References
A model student	1	4
Attitude to learning	2	10
Career Decision	0	0
Challenges	3	32
Changes that occurred	2	12
Choosing the course	3	10
Decision to do further st	3	6
Delayed start to the cou	2	2
Determination	3	14
Empathy	1	2
Encouraging peers with	2	3
Family Influences	3	5
God given chance	1	1
Influence of teachers	2	5
Influences to taking the	2	4
Learning content and sk	3	20
Link between CA and a t	1	1

These codes were found initailly and used in the second stage of coding, where codes were combined and themes started to evolve.

Second stage of Coding

No foundation course p	1	1
Personal challenges	2	5
Reaction of peers	1	1
Reaction to taking the c	2	5
TP experience	3	6
Trusting children	1	1
Work Experience after t	2	13

;

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