

Facilitating a Transformative Learning Environment: A Case Study of Its Use in a Graduate-Level Psychology Course

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When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves. ~Victor Frankl (2004)

Abstract

This chapter will describe the principles and practices of transformative learning that have been applied to a graduate-level

course in the psychology of addictions. It will illustrate specific pedagogic and assessment strategies intended to promote transformative learning. In addition, it will detail how students were engaged in a transformative learning environment; how they were challenged to critically evaluate their values and beliefs, to become conscious of their biases, and to acquire ethical reasoning. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of steps involved in facilitating a transformative learning environment and the components that promote transformative learning.

Introduction

The human experience involves change. Navigating one's way in a modern world involves the interpretation and understanding of dramatic, often rapid, change. In addition, negotiating relationships involves interpreting and understanding diversity in values, beliefs, and social norms. When individuals experience change in their lives or are confronted by a dilemma or engage new information that contradicts what they have always believed, they may have to revise their traditional beliefs and norms (Cranton, 1998).

Mezirow (1985, 1991, 2000, 2006), who first introduced the concept of transformative learning in his 1978 paper titled "Perspective Transformation," believed that being confronted with a change that contradicts what one has always believed poses contradictions in meaning for the individual. This contradiction confronts the individual with a disorienting dilemma. In the face of this dilemma, the individual can choose to reject the competing belief or to reflect and to critically question the meaning of this new perspective. To deal effectively with life changes, "rather than merely adapting to changing environments by more diligently applying old ways of knowing," Mezirow theorized that individuals "discover a need to acquire new perspectives in order to gain a more complete understanding of changing events and a higher degree of control over their lives" (Mezirow 1991, p.3). Mezirow applied this belief to adult education and developed a theory of transformative learning

that can explain how adult learners make sense or meaning of their experiences, the nature of the structures that influence the way they construe experience, the dynamics involved in modifying meanings, and the way the structures of meanings themselves undergo changes when learners find them to be dysfunctional (Mezirow 1991, p. xii).

As an educational philosophy, *it* has become a lens to inform the practice of teaching by explaining the way students reinterpret prior learning experiences.

As an outcome of his 1978 research on women returning to college following a significantly long period away from formal education, Mezirow (1991) conceptualized transformative learning as "a constructivist theory of adult learning" (p. 31) that is intended "to be a comprehensive, idealized and universal model consisting of the generic structures, elements and processes of adult learning" (Mezirow, 1994, p. 222). As a constructivist theory of adult learning, knowing is conceptualized as an active process of constructing meaning or making sense of experience. Glaserfield (1995), a proponent of radical constructivism, defines knowledge construction as an adaptive activity requiring interaction with experience. Therefore, knowledge is not passively received but rather developed actively by the individual. Mezirow (1991, 1994) was influenced by Thomas Kuhn's work on "paradigms" (1962), Freire's concept of conscientization (1970), Habermas's emancipatory action domains of learning (1971), and the consciousness raising women's movement in adult education in the 1970s (Ketchenham, 2008).

Mezirow (1990) further defines transformative learning as a process that "involves reflectively transforming the beliefs, attitudes, opinions, and emotional reactions that constitute our meaning schemes or . . . meaning perspectives" (p. 223). This occurs through critical reflection of existing frames of reference in contrast to new knowledge and experience (Brookfield, 1995; Cranton, 2002). It involves a process of becoming conscious of new patterns, deconstructing and reconstructing old schemas, and creating new frames of reference. These new schemas or cognitive frameworks help organize concepts and actions and, in turn, can be revised by new information about the world.

At the core of Mezirow's (1991) theory of transformative learning is the process of making meaning from one's experiences through reflection. Mezirow defines reflection as "the process of critically assessing the content, process, or premise(s) of our efforts to interpret and give meaning to an experience" (p. 104). According to Mezirow when individuals engage in critical self-reflection the outcome will be a deep shift towards a more open, permeable, and congruent way of seeing themselves and the world around them. This questioning or critical self-reflection can then lead to a revision of a value, belief, assumption, or even a broader perspective. If this happens, transformative learning has taken place.

Certain principles and practices of transformative learning can be adopted and applied to a graduate level education. There are also specific pedagogic and assessment strategies intended to promote transformative learning. These principles were applied to a master's level counselling psychology course that included four assessment strategies: (a) a critical reflection journal; (b) a case study which involved a psychosocial substance abuse assessment; (c) a class presentation of an evaluation of a treatment program; and (d) class participation in the form of rational discourse groups. These examples will detail how students were engaged in a transformative learning environment, how they were challenged to critically evaluate their values and beliefs, to become conscious of their biases, and to acquire ethical reasoning.

Transformative Learning Theory

It is a common experience that students come to learning with their own frame of reference based on assumptions about themselves and their world and grounded in earlier life experiences. One's frame of reference is comprised of sets of beliefs, values, and assumptions that provide a definition of oneself and a sense of meaning to one's experiences and worldview. It is equally as common for educators to want students to question the presuppositions of their lived experience by considering the alternative perspectives of peers, by critically examining the literature in the field of study, and by challenging the frame of reference presented

by the educator. There is a consensus that it is important that university students, especially those engaged in graduate level studies, develop the ability to engage critically with the course content presented to them and to translate that material into real-world contexts (Bruce & Candy, 2000; Spronken-Smith, 2005).

Mezirow (1991) believes that transformative learning "occurs when individuals realize how and why assumptions have constrained the way they understand the world and begin to consciously use other strategies to rethink issues and define their worlds differently" (Tower & Walker, 2007, p. 305-306). O'Sullivan, Morrell and O'Connor (2002) further define transformative learning as a process that

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

Transformative learning changes the way adult students understand themselves and their perception of the world. It provides an explanation of how their expectations, framed within cultural assumptions and previous life experience, directly influence the meaning they derive from their experiences. It explains the learning process of constructing and appropriating new and revised interpretations of the meaning of an experience in the world (Taylor, 2008). The practice of transformative learning focuses on changing the ways in which students learn by engaging them in a conscious process of discovering the meaning of knowledge to their worldview rather than just the acquisition of knowledge. The goal is to create more critically reflective and autonomous thinkers. Students are challenged to evaluate the concepts and

premises of their learning and not accept knowledge as a fact or truth without critical self-reflection on how what is being learned is meaningful for them.

Transformative learning theory posits the premise that the majority of individuals are not conscious of the origin of the meaningful structures that make up their worldview (Mezirow, 1997). Mezirow observed that individuals learn what they seek to learn by transforming their frames of reference, that is, challenging assumptions and one's taken-for-granted beliefs about reality. In transformative learning, individuals "reinterpret an old experience (or a new one) from a set of expectations, thus giving a new meaning and perspective to an old experience" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 11). These sets of expectations are unconsciously embedded in what Mezirow (1990) initially termed *meaning perspective*. Replacing the term meaning perspective with the term *frame of reference* (Mezirow, 1997; 2000), Mezirow (1997) defines "frames of reference" as the "structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences" (p.5). They selectively shape and delimit expectations, perceptions, cognition, and feelings. They set "our line of action" (p. 5). Taylor (2008) reiterates the definition that frames of reference:

are structures of assumptions and expectations that frame an individual's tacit points of view and influence their thinking, beliefs, and actions. It is the revision of a frame of reference in concert with reflection on experience that is addressed by the theory of perspective transformation—a paradigmatic shift. (p.5)

Mezirow (2000) views learning as " the process of using prior interpretation to construe new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience as a guide to future action" (p. 5). He outlines three steps in transformative learning:

1. Becoming critically aware of assumptions and limitations.
2. Changing habits of mind to be more inclusive.
3. Acting upon these new understandings.

Mezirow's (1991, 2000) theory of transformative learning involves a process in which the student goes through stages of cognitive restructuring that include the integration of experience, action, and reflection. He initially (Mezirow, 1978) identified ten phases of meaning in the process of transformative learning, but added an eleventh phase in 1991, which emphasized the importance of altering present relationships and forging new relationships (Mezirow 2000). He asserts that "transformations often follow [when] some variation of the following phases of meaning becoming clarified" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 22). The following table lists Mezirow's phases of meaning.

Table 1

Mezirow's Phases of Meaning in Transformational Learning

Phases

1. A disorienting dilemma.
2. Self-examination with feelings of shame, fear, guilt, or anger.
3. A critical assessment of assumptions.
4. Recognizing 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. Provisional trying new roles.
9. Building self-confidence and competence in new roles and relationships.
10. Re-integrating into one's life on the bases of conditions dictated by one's new perspective.
11. Altering present relationships and forging new relationships.

Mezirow (1991) suggests that as the student moves through the series of stages the change in perspective can be gradual

or immediate and is contingent upon the student experiencing cognitive restructuring and a reorganization of experience and action. The transformative learning experience begins with a disorientating experience that causes students to become critically aware of their assumptions and how these assumptions constrain the way they perceive, understand, and feel about the world. Transformative learning evolves as the student changes the

taken for granted frame of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective, so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. (Mezirow & Associates, 2000, pp. 8-9)

The transformation is seen as complete when students make choices or act upon the new understanding (Mezirow, 1991). Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner (2007) emphasize that transformation is the result of critical thinking, reflective discourse, and ultimately an action or change of some sort.

Certain principles and practices of transformative learning can be adopted and applied to a graduate level education. There are also specific pedagogic and assessment strategies intended to promote transformative learning. These principles were applied to a master's level counselling psychology course that included four assessment strategies: (a) a critical reflection journal; (b) a case study which involved a psychosocial substance abuse assessment; (c) a class presentation of an evaluation of a treatment program; and (d) class participation in the form of rational discourse groups. These examples detail how students were engaged in a transformative learning environment, how they were challenged to critically evaluate their values and beliefs, to become conscious of their biases, and to acquire ethical reasoning.

An example of how the students in the course described in this chapter experienced being engaged critically with the course content and how they translated the material into real-world contexts is highlighted by a reflective journal entry of one of the students:

Prior to registering in the addictions course the thought of working with people with addictions made me nervous, angry and hopeless. Much has changed for me. I believed addicts were making a conscious choice to participate in risky activities. I had a sense that addicts were in some way rebels choosing to participate in illegal activities. For me, that way of thinking lent itself to the belief that people who do illegal drugs are selfish, not concerned about potentially harming others through their actions and truly not willing to change. When I imagined working with addicted clients, I imagined that many would REFUSE to change. Even the thought of working with addicted clients angered me. I had a sense that efforts to facilitate change in these types of situations would be hopeless. There were times I did not believe I would be capable of helping addicted clients.

The classroom lectures, readings, journals and student participation component of the class helped flip my perspective about addictions. I see how easy it is to believe and continue the social stigma attached to people who are addicted to illegal substances. The biggest influence this course had on me personally was to help me develop a sense of empathy toward people who are addicted. Professionally I moved from being opposed to working with addicted clients to feeling a sense of urgency to help them.

I am grateful for the drastic change in my perspective. I can honestly say that this course has changed my beliefs about addictions and addictions treatment which will positively influence my interactions with future clients. As a psychologist I will be more understanding about my client's experience with addictions, I will be more patient, less critical and less angry toward my client for their behaviour.

This student's entry not only demonstrates critical reflection of the course content, but also details how the course challenged prior personal beliefs and ultimately led to the development of a new view of those struggling with addictions along with antici-

pated changes in behaviour as a result of the shift. Cranton (2002) would describe this student's experience as transformative learning since it involved a fundamental change in perspective as a result of the student changing something about how he or she constructed meaning about the world.

Critical Reflection, Rationale Discourse, and Action

Reliance on adult learning theory and Habermas's (1984) communicative theory, experience, critical reflection, and rational discourse are central themes in Mezirow's transformative learning (Boyd, 1991; Cranton, 1994; Kegan, 1994). Mezirow (1990) described the process of critical reflection on one's own experience and engaging in rational discourse as:

From this vantage point, adult education becomes the process of assisting those who are fulfilling adult roles to understand the meaning of their experience by participating more fully and freely in rational discourse to validate expressed ideas and to take action upon the resulting insights...Rational thought and action are the cardinal goals of adult education. (p. 354)

Critical reflection is a central process in Mezirow's (2000) conceptualization of transformative learning (Cranton and Corusetta, 2004). Critical reflection, according to Brookfield (1995), focuses on three interrelated processes:

1. The process by which adults question and then replace or reframe an assumption that up to that point has been uncritically accepted as representing commonsense wisdom.
2. The process through which adults take alternative perspectives on previously taken-for-granted ideas, actions, forms of reasoning and ideologies.
3. The process by which adults come to recognize the hegemonic aspects of dominant cultural values. (p. 2)

Mezirow (1991) defines reflection as "the process of critically assessing the content, process, or premise(s) of our efforts to interpret and give meaning to an experience" (p. 104). He divided critical reflection into two components, non-reflective action and reflective action. The process of non-reflective action includes two types of action, habitual action and thoughtful action. Habitual action results from previous learning related to psychomotor tasks and can be performed while one's attention is focused somewhere else. Habitual action is often considered to be the product of rote learning. Thoughtful action, on the other hand, depends on higher-order cognitive processes that guide individuals in tasks that involve things like analyzing, discussing, or evaluating. Similar to habitual action, thoughtful action also depends on prior learning and remains within preexisting meaning schemes and perspectives.

Reflective action is the outcome of insights that were gained from the process of reflecting. Reflective action is considered to be mindful and purposeful as opposed to the repetitive prescriptive behaviour of non-reflective action. Mezirow (1991) considers reflective action or mindfulness as transformational because it is associated with "greater accuracy of perception of the unfamiliar and deviant, avoidance of premature cognitive commitments, better self-concept, greater job productivity and satisfaction, flexibility, innovation, and leadership ability" (p. 117).

Reflective learning strategies. Both the critical reflective journal and the rational discourse groups in this course were considered reflective learning strategies. The two other assignments, the case study and the evaluation of a treatment agency, were considered action-learning strategies and are described in a subsequent section.

Mezirow (1998) posited that adult learning occurs in four ways:

1. Elaborating existing frames of reference.
2. Learning frames of references.
3. Transforming points of view.
4. Transforming habits of mind.

He applies critical reflection as a component of all four and argued that the overall purpose of adult development is to realize one's agency through increasingly expanding awareness and critical reflection.

One of the major dilemmas often experienced by students entering the helping professions is that their lived experience and frames of reference are challenged by the theories of practice. These theories are also seen as describing competing principles and premises which can lead to a sense of confusion as to what is right. Sometimes students may gravitate towards a theory that fits their frame of reference and adopt the premises of that theory because the knowledge is comfortably familiar, that is, the philosophical underpinning of the theory supports their presuppositions, their world view, and their lived experience. They adopt the theory as a truth without critical evaluation. Critical reflection challenges students to explore their biases and assumptions and to contrast these with the premises and principles that support the theory in order to examine how the theory relates to professional practice rather than personal preference.

One student's reflection at the end of the course highlights a personal transformation in relation to a bias she held about individuals struggling with addiction.

I have gotten over the notion that most addicts (a) will never permanently change, and (b) it is a rather hopeless endeavour to attempt to help them. I held this belief because I think that in the work I have done to date with this population, I saw very little response or recovery that was maintained for a long period of time (months, years). This was especially true for the hard core drugs. Addicts were disappointing to me as clients because most of them did not want to change, were forced to come to treatment, or just wanted to get it over with and be back to their use. This is not the truth.

For this student to develop into a critically reflective professional, she would need to continue to evolve this capacity for critical inquiry and self-reflection (Larrivee, 2000; Schon, 1987).

Course assignments emphasized the process of critical inquiry, which involved the conscious consideration of the moral and ethical implications and consequences of practice with clients. Each assignment incorporated two components. Students began with self-reflection of personal assumptions, values, and beliefs, and their current frame of reference. This was followed by critical inquiry, which contrasted and compared their personal and professional belief systems. As one student's reflective journal entry highlighted:

I am now open to the range of approaches in addiction treatment. I know now that tailoring treatment to suit the client will realize the best results. My role is to advocate for the client so that they have access to the best support available, including treatment centres, medication, or other therapeutic interventions. It matters not whether I align myself with the disease, biopsychosocial or the harm-reduction model; what matters is what is best for the client.

Reflective journal assignment. Reflection is a primary component of transformative learning. The development of critical thinking requires what Dewey (1910) described as the willingness to suspend "judgement: and the essence of this suspense is inquiry" (p. 74). The intent of the reflective journals was to provide the students with a vehicle to contemplate their personal thoughts and feelings based on their current frame of reference. Journals served the purpose of assisting students in articulating and clarifying their thoughts, emotions and beliefs about issues raised in class dialogue and course readings. The expected outcome of the journaling experience was to promote insight into self and issues, the discovery of connections in theory and practice, and the generation of new knowledge through critical inquiry of existing knowledge.

The critical reflective journal became the foundation for class dialogue and interaction. Students completed their journal entries in two stages: (a) upon completion of assigned reading; and (b) following the completion of class dialogue. The journal tasks were structured to promote the development of critical reflection of self,

critical reflection of others, and development of self as a professional. Journal entries, although private between the student and the educator, were intended to provide content for class group dialogue. Students chose to what degree they would disclose personal thoughts and beliefs contained in their journal. To promote reflexivity and reflection, the journal assignment was designed based on research by Stamper (1996) and Gustafson and Bennett (1999) who investigated the barriers that inhibit deep reflective journaling. Their four recommendations were incorporated into the development of the course reflective journal assignment. Their recommendations included:

1. Designing appropriate learning experiences enabled students to develop reflective skills. Each journal assignment was based on the assigned course reading for the class and the class dialogue and posed questions that required the students to provide reasons for their thoughts and ideas, taking into account the broader historical, social, and political contexts highlighted in the course content.
2. The ability to reflect on a specific topic is directly proportional to how much one already knows. To assist the student to become more conscious of his/her existing frames of reference, each journal entry began with a reflection on the student's own perspective prior to his/her critical inquiry of course content.
3. Both internal and external sources of motivation affect the quality of reflection. In the reflective journal assignment, internal motivation was fuelled by the acquisition of insight into the meaning of one's values and beliefs. Although dialogue was not specifically recommended by Gustafson and Bennett (1999), it was incorporated into the journal assignment as a method of encouraging external motivation. Bandura (1977), who developed social learning theory, believed that environments that promote interpersonal interaction result in greater reflection.
4. Confidence in the professionalism and integrity of the educator enhances the quantity and quality of reflection. Trust in this educator was enhanced by the emphasis on con-

fidentiality of journal entries. Each student was assigned a secure electronic posting log. Confidence in the professionalism and integrity of the educator was also enhanced by providing positive feedback that acknowledged the work the student had done, by adding additional information to reinforce his/her understanding of the concepts, and by encouraging deeper self-reflection on the meaning of what was being learned to his/her frame of reference.

The process of reflective journaling. Cranton (1996, 2006) emphasized three levels of reflection that she viewed as especially effective at promoting critical self-reflection and self-knowledge. These, as originally distinguished by Mezirow (1991), are content reflection, process reflection, and premise reflection. Content reflection occurs when an individual reflects on the content or description of the problem (Cranton 1996). Process reflection involves thinking about the strategies used to solve the problem rather than the content of the problem itself and is considered to be rational rather than intuitive. Premise reflection is the process that leads one to question the relevance of the problem itself in the context of one's assumptions, beliefs, or values (Cranton, 1996). The goal of including these types of reflection into the reflective journaling process is to establish "an environment where people can figure things out for themselves." (Cranton, 1996, p.138).

The critical reflective journal assignment for this course was developed to incorporate the three levels of reflection recommended by Cranton (1996). The first task of each journal assignment introduced content reflection. Based on the assigned reading and the subsequent class dialogue, students incorporated the process of focus-free writing, which is nonstop writing on a specific subject and is intended to help them crystallize their ideas and feelings. They were coached in the process of allowing their thoughts and feelings to surface for a minimum of ten minutes as they began to record their understanding and interpretation of the class dialogue and course reading. Content reflection "serve(s) to raise learner awareness of assumptions and beliefs" (Cranton, 1996, p. 139). Content reflection relates to knowledge and the way it is obtained.

The second task of each journal assignment required students to engage in process reflection. Students were asked to contemplate the following questions:

Question one: This is what I know that was confirmed in class or in the course reading. How was this confirmed for you?

Question two: This is what I did not know. Discuss what was unclear or confusing.

Question three: This is what surprised me.

Process reflection “address(es) how a person has come to hold a certain perspective” (Cranton, 199, p. 140). These questions were intended to assist learners to reflect on the source of their assumptions and beliefs. In addition, these questions were intended to prompt learners to critically reflect on their current frame of reference and to critically evaluate their values and beliefs in light of new knowledge.

The last journal task was to answer the following premise reflection question: This is what I found myself thinking differently about _____. Premise reflection “get(s) at the very core of belief systems.” (Cranton, 1996, p. 141). It raises questions about the most foundational aspects of thinking and belief.

One student’s reflective journal entry summarizes a change in perspective:

I was surprised to see myself typing the idea that some people are more prone than others (to addiction) because of a “weak will.” This is basically the weak moral argument and it is an age old one. I didn’t know I held this belief quite as strongly as I did when I started this class. I see the pros and cons of the argument that the environment and genetic loading really can make some people more susceptible to substance use. I had this thought lurking around at the beginning of this class that it’s got to be decently easy to quit smoking or drinking if you really wanted to, right? I think I fell on my own face here, because I did not realize that the same bias I held before, about addicts being “weak willed” was flipped on its side by the “strong willed” person who can quit without hesitation.

Rational Discourse. According to transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991), rational discourse is a means for testing the validity of one’s construction of meaning. It is considered to be the catalyst through which transformation is promoted and developed. Rational discourse requires adequate time to accommodate extended and repeated conversations that evolve with time. The time invested into rationale discourse helps to foster a culture of respectful listening and openness to new perspectives. The goal is not a shared understanding in the sense of consensus but rather a conscious understanding of one’s own biases as well as how others in the learning group construct their frames of reference. The dialogue involves the purposeful weighing of current knowledge, the examination alternative perspectives, and the critical inquiry of assumptions.

At the beginning of every class, students entered into different groups of three. The groups were given the task of sharing their experience of critically reflecting on the previous class content, class dialogue, and assigned course reading. Students were encouraged to refer to their previous reflective journal entry to contribute to the group dialogue. Group members assumed the role of either facilitator, recorder, or moderator. Each role had specific assigned duties. The facilitator’s role was to evoke critical dialogue grounded in the three journal questions and focus the group on weighing supporting evidence from class reading and lectures. The recorder’s role was to capture what was clear, what was unclear, and what was surprising to learn as well as to record the group’s experience of examining alternative perspectives. The moderator assumed the role of group conscience, keeping the group on task and focusing the dialogue on critically assessing assumptions. The last component of the group dialogue exercise was for each group to present its response to the class group to the final journal question, “This is what we found ourselves thinking differently about _____.”

Similar to the journal tasks, the group dialogue was structured to incorporate the three levels of reflection described by Cranton (1996). This structure provided the students with what Yip (2006) has described as “flexibility of content and more importantly a multiplicity of thinking” (p. 253). Yip describes the process stu-

dents' experience in reflection and rational dialogue as being "on the one hand involved in intervention and action and on the other being aware of their personal feelings and thinking in action" (p. 253).

As a foundation exercise for each class the journal/group dialogue exercise was intended to help students to develop their skills for critical reflection by acknowledging the importance of meaningful dialogue. The combination of internal individual reflection and dialogue in a shared group experience was intended to provide a bridge of understanding among students and, also, between students and the course content. It also served the purpose of empowering the students by recognizing and validating their experience, promoting a safe starting point for identifying the dilemma they are being confronted with, and for engaging in critical reflection.

The overall intent of rational discourse is to validate meaning by comparing and contrasting differing perspectives. In this course it involved the critical evaluation of research and theory, the examination of alternative perspectives on treatment, and the critical assessment of practice assumptions. Through the connection between the reflective journal and the class dialogue, students reported that they were able to find their voice in constructive dialogue with others.

Action. *Praxis* is a Greek word that means moving back and forth in a critical way between reflecting and acting on the world. It is the process of learning through the reconstruction of experience. Praxis involves taking time to deepen one's understanding of the implications and longer-term impact before taking action. Because reflection alone does not produce change, Freire (1970) advocated for the necessity of action based on reflection. When action and reflection are integrated, actions should be considered not in light of the how do we do this, but rather what do we believe taking this action will do; why are we choosing this action; and what alternatives are there that we have yet to consider. According to Cranton (1992), action is the litmus test of transformative learning; it is evidence of changed perspectives.

In addition to the reflective journal assignment and the in-class rational discourse, the course incorporated two additional assign-

ments. Students are required to use a case study to complete a psychosocial substance abuse assessment and also present their evaluation of a substance abuse treatment program. These two assignments focus learning on the production of action, that is, putting their theoretical understanding into practice. They also serve the purpose of providing a transition for students to move from critical reflection on theory to critical reflection on practice.

Based on their work in their reflective journals and in group dialogue sessions, students were asked to declare the theory that they believe provides them with the clearest conceptual understanding of substance abuse. Given that the course content focused on the Disease model, the Biopsychosocial model and the Harm Reduction model, students aligned with the theory they believed was the closest fit to their world view of substance abuse/addictions. Students were then asked to identify the theory that they believed was the most challenging to their current beliefs. Students were given four case study examples to choose from. Their task was to formulate a psychosocial substance abuse assessment congruent with the theory that they identified as most challenging to their current beliefs. The purpose of the assignment was to introduce a disorienting dilemma to the students. The dilemma that confronted students was, Is there a right way to conceptualize, assess, and treat substance abuse? One student commented on the experience of completing the psychosocial substance abuse assessment in their reflective journal with the following comment:

Although I have taken many courses in addictions, I had not evaluated the different approaches each model would take when presented with a specific case. Personally, I like the idea that depending on the stage of change, different approaches would be appropriate. I am more comfortable in knowing where to start when someone presents with substance abuse. I can identify whether they fall into use, abuse or addiction.

The second action strategy assignment continued the focus on action as an outcome of learning. Students presented their evaluation of a substance abuse treatment agency. In addition to

identifying the mandate, mission, and agency's theory of treatment, students provided a critical evaluation of the agency's statements of effectiveness. The purpose of the assignment was to engage students in the critical evaluation of practice. As one student reflected on the experience of evaluating a community treatment agency:

I have learned that the barriers to successful addictions treatment are numerous while supports are limited. Subsequently, as professionals, we have an ethical responsibility to challenge negative social responses, advocate for support and lobby for changes to access to treatment. Finally I found it helpful to evaluate the community resources. In the future we may relay our criticism to improve services in the community.

The constructivist orientation underpinning transformative learning argues that knowledge is not an entity waiting to be discovered and consumed by the learner but rather is created by the learner through interpretation and reinterpretation of experience. As Mezirow (1991) states, "... it is not so much what happens to people but how they interpret and explain what happens to them that determine their actions, their hopes, their commitment and emotional well being, and their performance" (p.xiii). Action then is the foundation for transformation. Acting upon knowledge is the way that new experiences, and particularly significant disorienting experiences, are dealt with, and it is critical to the process of transformation. As Mezirow (1990) states, simply reflecting on or even changing ones meaning perspective is not sufficient for transformative learning to have taken place. Action is also required, in the sense of the enactment of the altered perspective in the social world. The evolution from reflection to dialogue to action was reflected in another student's final journal entry:

Before entering the program I was baffled by why people would choose to destroy their body, mind and soul with toxic substances. In addition, my personal experiences and the social stigma associated with addicts accounted for most of my negative attitudes and beliefs towards addicts. However,

the knowledge that I attained from the lectures, discussions, case study assessment and the agency presentation has made me realize that addictions are much more complicated than I thought. On a professional level I have grown to appreciate the addictions field. This is surprising insight as I never had an interest to work with addicts prior to the course. Thanks to this course I feel that I am more prepared to face this challenge.

Facilitating Transformative Learning

Facilitating transformative learning as a teaching practice is "predicated on the idea that students are seriously challenged to assess their value system and worldview and are subsequently changed by that experience" (Quinnan, 1997, p. 42). Mezirow (1997) describes a transformative learning environment as one in which those participating have full information, are free from coercion, have equal opportunity to assume various roles, can become critically reflective of assumptions, are empathetic and good listeners, and are willing to search for common ground or a synthesis of different points of view. He sees the role the educator plays as crucial in the process of facilitating transformative learning. According to Mezirow, the role of the educator is to assist learners in assessing their previously unexamined frame of reference and critically evaluating the way in which the resulting beliefs, feelings, and actions have shaped their lives. The educator then fosters transformative learning by assisting students to explore alternative ideas and to test their validity in reflective dialogue with their peers (Mezirow, 1991).

Taylor (1998; 2000), in his review of the research on transformative learning theory, identified a number of strategies that educators can employ that foster transformative learning, including (a) individual experience; (b) critical reflection; (c) dialogue; (d) holistic orientation; (e) awareness of context; and (f) authentic relationships. For these strategies to begin to foster transformative learning in the classroom environment, Cranton (2002) identified a number of conditions and processes

she believed are required to support a revision of underlying assumptions, the adoption of a new paradigm and the application of the new paradigm. They are (a) an activating event that exposes the limitations of a student's current knowledge/approach; (b) opportunities for the student to identify and articulate the underlying assumptions in the student's current knowledge/approach; (c) critical self-reflection as the student considers where these underlying assumptions came from, how these assumptions influenced or limited understanding; (d) critical discourse with other students and the instructor as the group examines alternative ideas and approaches; and, (e) opportunities to test and apply new perspectives.

Taylor (2008) describes the teaching practice of transformative learning as not simply incorporating additional instructional strategies into the course curriculum. He views transformative learning as "first and foremost about educating from a particular worldview, a particular educational philosophy" (p. 13). According to Taylor (1998), ideal learning conditions that facilitate a transformative learning environment promote (a) a sense of safety, openness, and trust; (b) effective instructional methods that support a learner-centered approach; (c) student autonomy, participation, and collaboration; (d) activities that encourage the exploration of alternative personal perspectives, problem-posing, and critical reflection. His research also highlighted several attributes of the educator and the teaching philosophy that helps to foster a quality learning experience congruent with transformational learning. Some of the attributes that he identified as significant include being "trusting, empathetic, caring, authentic, sincere, and demonstrating a high degree of integrity" (Taylor, 1998, p. 54). In addition, Taylor (1998) emphasized that effective educators who practice transformative learning should (a) encourage students to reflect on and share their feelings and thoughts in class; (b) be holistically oriented, aware of body, mind, and spirit in the learning process; (c) become transcendent of their own beliefs and accepting of others' beliefs; (d) cultivate awareness of alternate ways of learning; (e) establish an environment characterized by trust and care; (f) facilitate sensitive relationships among the participants; (g) demonstrate ability to serve as an experienced mentor reflect-

ing on their own journey; and (h) help students question reality in ways that promote shifts in their worldview.

Teaching from a transformative perspective is aimed at helping students "gain a crucial sense of agency" over themselves and their world (Mezirow and Associates 2000: p. 20). Freire (1997) emphasizes the importance of cooperation between teachers and students as a critical factor in evaluating the world in a reflexive manner. He believed that the educator's own philosophy and teaching approach can facilitate reflective thinking and meaningful change by reducing the polarity between the roles of the student and the educator. Cranton (2006) reiterates that "fostering transformative learning in the classroom depends to a large extent on establishing meaningful, genuine relationships with students" (p. 5). She recommends that the educator move from being an expert and manager to an advocate, co-learner, provocateur, challenger, and facilitator.

The journey of adapting and adopting transformative learning theory as a teaching practice involves a number of challenges as articulated by Taylor (2008). Specifically he identifies two inherent challenges for the educator who is intrigued by the potential benefits of the transformative learning process for his/her students. His first challenge emphasized that to incorporate transformative learning into teaching one needs to integrate transformative theory into practice, and this involves adopting a particular worldview and a specific educational philosophy. This challenge involves moving away from a classroom environment that was grounded in instrumental learning—which Habermas (1971) describes as learning to control the environment—to a classroom environment that promoted reflection, dialogue, and action. That is, fostering a learning environment that encouraged exploration by students as to why they think in a certain way, critical evaluation of theory and research, and critical reflection that evolved to deeper and deeper understanding of one's values and beliefs.

Taylor (2008) identified the second challenge as accepting a belief and position that the facilitation of transformative learning is treated as a commitment to the development of each individual student. This means abandoning the belief that there are good students and there are poor students and that not every student

is in class to learn. Challenging this frame of reference means a commitment to acknowledge each student's passion for learning and to validate each student's progress in acquiring knowledge.

Facilitating an environment where the student feels validated involves engaging every student in a more authentic relationship. To develop an authentic relationship with students, classroom relationships are defined by the expectation of mutual respect and developed by demonstrating a sense of care for learners and an ethic of care in the classroom. Goodfellow and Sumsion (2000) identify a number relational qualities that promote a culture of care that in turn promotes transformative learning. They cite these qualities as (a) reciprocity, or an exchange within which there are shared understandings; (b) responsiveness, or concern for and commitment to the other, and a shift in focus from self to the other; (c) respectfulness, or high regard for the other; (d) empathy or conscious effort to convey to the other an understanding of what the other is thinking and feeling; (e) attunedness, or an awareness of the climate within the context, and an ability to act in harmony within that context; and, (f) a consciousness of self and of self in relation to others.

Incorporating the relational qualities recommended by Goodfellow and Sumsion (2000) into interactions with students results in relinquishing the position of authority figure and gaining a position of trust where the relationship with the adult learners in this course becomes a journey of collaborative and cooperative learning. The role becomes, as Cranton (1996) recommended, one of advocate, co-learner, provocateur, challenger, and facilitator.

Conclusion

"Every adult educator has the responsibility for fostering critical self-reflection and helping learners plan to take action" (Mezirow, 1990, p. 357). In learning about themselves and others, students are challenged to think independently, to observe, to experience, to reflect, to learn, and to dialogue. Students are encouraged to think beyond their taken-for-granted frames of reference and consider how things might be different (Brookfield, 2000; Mezirow, 1990).

This journey into transformative learning theory involves what Brookfield (1995) describes as the most difficult challenge of becoming a reflective educator, stepping outside oneself. He writes that to become a critically reflective educator one must examine his/her teaching through the following critical reflective lenses: (a) autobiographies as learners and educators; (b) students' eyes; (c) colleagues' experiences; and (d) theoretical literature. Critical self-reflection of teaching practice and adoption of transformative learning theory reinforces that adult learners bring to the classroom a passion for learning, a wealth of lived experience, and a willingness to challenge their world view.

Critically reflective educators must become congruent with the process of transformational learning. This involves a commitment to questioning assumptions, beliefs, and values and being critically reflective of one's teaching philosophy.

Transformative learning theory offers a framework for practice that confirms that learning has the potential to transform one's world view. It is a reflective process that results in a change in the frames of reference through critically reflecting on assumptions and beliefs and by consciously making and implementing plans that bring about new ways of defining the practice of teaching. It is an educational philosophy that has provided a lens to inform the practice of teaching by explaining the way students reinterpret prior learning experiences. Apte (2009) captures the essence of the educators' experience in transformative learning in her comment, "we are not only an audience for participant's current frames of reference. We are the audience for emerging knowledge and capability" (p. 186).

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