



The Journal of Mediation & Applied Conflict Analysis

Personal Transformation in a Mediation and Conflict Intervention Learning Programme

June 2022

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Volume 8: Issue 1

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Personal transformation in a mediation and conflict intervention learning programme

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Abstract

This paper explores personal transformation and the role of reflective practice in a mediation and conflict intervention learning environment. It draws on research carried out as part of a Master's degree in mediation and conflict intervention which posed the question: "Is personal transformation identified in a mediation and conflict intervention learning environment?"

The research adopted a qualitative approach and the findings were an interpretation of students' reflective data.

This paper also discusses the literature, method and research findings concerning the identification and experience of personal transformation and the role of reflective practice in that transformation.

The findings show that personal transformation was identified and found to be a positive experience that changed worldview, altered values and beliefs or changed behaviour. Reflective practice was key to the process. Students found it to be a positive experience with positive benefits on relationships.

The conclusion was that the mediators did experience personal transformation in the learning environment and that reflective practice being a key component.

Keywords: personal transformation, transformative learning, reflective practice, mediator, conflict intervention.

The learning environment

I enrolled in the Edward M Kennedy Institute Maynooth University in 2018. My topic of study was mediation and conflict intervention. As an adult learner returning to education, my goals were to learn new skills and gain knowledge leading me to an alternative area of work.

The Institute was established in 2011 in honour of the late Senator Edward Kennedy, who believed “that learning and scholarship have the power to change lives and transform society”. The overall objective of the institute is to improve society’s capacity to deal with conflict in a constructive way through teaching, theory, practice, and research.

The mediation and conflict intervention curriculum at the Institute provides ongoing opportunities to learn reflectively through role-plays, lecturers, and class reflection, enabling the application of theory to practice. The class sizes were small, enhancing skill development and providing an environment for students to learn collaboratively. Research and assignments provided opportunities to explore topics, helping to develop knowledge about mediation and conflict intervention theory.

My experience of the learning environment

On completion of my studies, I was an accredited mediator. One of my goals was achieved. I had new skills and professional qualifications with the potential for work in mediation and dispute resolution.

I was energised, confident and self-aware. My relationships had positively changed. I wanted to share this experience of personal transformation and make a difference by helping others to successfully address their conflicts.

At the outset I lacked confidence in my academic abilities, and my first assignment was a struggle. Giving a presentation or taking part in a role-play filled me with dread. I considered giving up my studies because the pressure of failure in front of my peers felt debilitating.

I admired students who could discuss topics with conviction. They appeared to have a clear understanding of their beliefs and values. I, on the other hand, wavered due to a lack of self-awareness about my values and a fear of judgment from my peers.

I feared conflict; my approach was either avoidance or taking control. In conflict, I mostly avoided engagement, allowing the other party to have a 'win'. It seemed easier than expressing my needs or understanding theirs. With my teenage children, when they looked for more autonomy I reacted by asserting control and setting strict boundaries so that there was no space for an argument. I now know this approach came from a place of fear and, ironically, it often produced irrational arguments and rebellion.

As my studies progressed, my awareness and understanding of my values deepened. I discovered that some of my values came from my family of origin and others had developed through life experience and my cultural environment. I began to recognise that understanding my values provided a baseline for decisions about and reactions to conflict.

For example, as a child, I learned to value authority. As I became more self-aware, I realised that although I respected authority, I was unwilling to accept decisions if they did not align with my core values of ‘family’, ‘connection’, ‘knowledge’, ‘integrity’ and ‘fairness’. Being aware of these values provided a moral compass when making decisions and a road map to move forward in my professional work and personal life. Understanding the significance of my values helped me understand the significance of values for others too.

My confidence was improving; I was engaging in discussions and debates both at home and in the classroom. My perspective on conflict and my style of communication was changing. I began expressing my opinions with greater honesty and less fear of judgment. I was listening to others with curiosity and a desire for understanding. My response to conflict became more flexible and less predictable as my values became clearer and my self-confidence increased.

My relationships with my family improved. We were collaborating. I was acknowledging my needs and recognising those of my family. I was communicating more clearly and listening to understand. A deeper sense of trust, autonomy and openness developed. The “no because I said so and I am your parent” changed to “let’s talk about it, I want to understand why that is important to you”. The frustration at not being understood became finding ways to communicate so that I was understood.

This personal transformation was recognised by my family as well. My children began referring to me as “Mammy with updates” or “Mammy 2.0”.

I welcomed opinions without feeling attacked or needing to retreat into defence mode. I was calmer in conflict, accepting it was an opportunity for learning and change rather than something to avoid.

I felt empowered, with this new knowledge. The learning was invaluable and was something I wanted to develop and share so that other families could experience the benefits. I felt driven to expand my knowledge and competence to help others.

Reflective practice and my transformation

Reflective practice was a key element in my personal transformation, allowing the space and feedback to examine my beliefs, values, learning and practice. My confidence and competence also improved with reflective practice.

According to Farres (2004: 10), reflection “...is at the heart of the learning process. It is a necessary component in learning to regulate one’s thoughts, feelings, and actions. Reflection links experience and knowledge by providing an opportunity to explore areas of concern in a critical way and to make adjustments based on these reflections”.

Dirk (1998) sees reflection and dialogue as key elements of the learning process. However, the learning environment must be “conducive to self-reflection” for transformation to occur. (Wade, 1998:715)

John Dewey, an American Philosopher (1859-1952), defines reflective thought

. . .as an active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and further conclusions to which it tends. (Dewey, 1910: 6)

Dewey argued that we learn from ‘doing’ and when presented with a problem by “thinking it out” we aim to develop a hypothesis which we can apply to the problem and through testing our ideas we can plan forward.

Donald Schön (1983: viii) describes the practitioner’s approach to a problem when it presents, the application of theory, technique and tacit knowledge, “knowing-in-action”. Schön suggests that each problem is unique and therefore will differ from previous experience but by reflection-in-action, that is questioning and evaluating what is happening in the present, the practitioner “becomes a researcher” (p68). No longer bound by the constraints of his or her learnt theory but instead developing a new theory for this unique problem. Reflective practice, therefore, provides a tool to improve practice. Schön sets out two methods by which professionals learn from and through our experiences – **reflection-in-action**, reflecting on behaviour, experience, or practice as it happens, and **reflection on action**, reflecting after the event or practice.

Reflective practice and the curriculum

Reflection is at the heart of the learning process at the Institute. Through reflective practice, we students reached a level where we could apply the theory, technique and tacit knowledge. As students, we were encouraged to see each conflict situation as unique and to avoid assuming they are the same as other similar situations. Through reflection ‘in-action’ and ‘on-action’ during role-plays, we developed the confidence to expand and develop fresh interpretations for each problem. In feedback following experiential exercises, the lecturers used questions to help develop our skills and deepen our knowledge through guided reflection.

To encourage reflection, lectures began and ended with a reflective exercise.

Also, students maintained a reflective journal to examine changing or deeply held assumptions and to record their learning process. In the programme, critical reflection involved examining assumptions and values in order “to involve and lead to some fundamental change in perspective” (Cranton, 1996: 79-80).

Research topic

A requirement of the Master's programme was a research paper. Students were asked to determine a hypothesis, conduct a literature review, design a research methodology, carry out research, identify findings and draw conclusions.

I chose to examine the relationship between personal transformation and the transformative learning environment of the Institute.

My research began with a number of hypothesis

- Students in a mediation and conflict intervention learning environment experience personal transformation that may change their worldview, alter values and beliefs or change behaviour.
- Personal transformation is a positive experience.
- Reflective practice is key to personal transformation.
- Personal transformation will also benefit those around us.

The review of literature led me to the writings of Jack Mezirow, who developed a theory of transformative learning.

Mezirow (1991: 223) defines transformative learning as

learning that transforms problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, reflective, open and emotionally able to change.

Transformation can be “epochal” (sudden) or “incremental” (Mezirow, 2000). A gradual change as in my habits of mind in relation to conflict would be considered incremental.

There was so much in Mezirow’s theory that seemed to match what had occurred for me, experiencing a shift in my frame of reference and my points of view on a cognitive and emotional level. The desire to share my knowledge and experience, to benefit others.

Daloz (1999) views transformative learning as part of adult development. As we move through phases of our life, our experiences and environment change and it may be necessary to construct new ways of seeing the world. I was also in a different phase of life. I was an adult learner in her forties. My family was less dependent on me. I had time to study, to reflect on what I was learning, to explore how this new knowledge and skills integrated into my life and to make choices about a career.

Transformation is described as an “evolutionary process within consciousness whereby one sees the world in a new way”. (Devine & Sparks, 2014: 31). By the completion of my studies, my worldview had changed significantly I had a deeper understanding of human nature and, as a result, I was more open-minded. I reflected on how my new worldview was going to fit in with my life. Discussing this experience with classmates, I realised this was a shared experience.

From a qualitative study of US women resuming their education, Mezirow (1978) developed a 10-phase cognitive process to determine if transformative learning had been identified. In developing the hypothesis for my research project, I used these 10 phases as a lens to reflect on my own experience as discussed at the beginning of this paper (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: Ten Phases of Transformative Learning (Mezirow, 1978)

	Ten Phases of transformative learning	My experience of each phase
1.	A disorienting dilemma A disorienting dilemma is considered the initiation step to transformative learning, where a life changing experience triggers a questioning of assumptions.	At the beginning of my studies I believed conflict was negative and to be avoided at all costs. With new knowledge and skills, I began to face conflict and spend time trying to understand the needs of the other person. I noticed a positive change in my relationships. Conflict wasn't always negative, it was now providing me with an opportunity to form deeper relationships.
2.	A self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame	Using my reflective journal, I was able to take time for self-examination. The journal helped me to peel back the layers on my experiences, emotions, behaviours and beliefs. At times I was struck by guilt and shame, knowing that I had not handled conflicts well and that I could do better.
3.	A critical assessment of epistemic sociocultural, or psychic assumptions	Examining my values, challenging my judgments, beliefs and bias helped me to alter and re-enforce my value system. I began to examine how I interacted with others and became aware that, through my own behaviour, I may have been challenging the values of others. I began to question my assumptions, and try to understand others at a deeper level.
4.	Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change	My experience of personal transformation and the struggle with conflict was echoed in the stories of other students during class discussions.

5.	Exploration of options for new roles, relationships and actions	I was eager to put my new skills to the test. My first training ground was with my own family. I made an effort to listen more deeply, to develop an understanding of what needs and values they held. Where possible, I began to use the principles of mediation in my interactions.
6.	Planning a course of action	With a new understanding of communication and conflict, I began planning how I could use these new skills in my life. My approach to conflict changed. I moved from reaction to curiosity. I began planning how I could bring this knowledge and skill to other parents.
7.	Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plan	My newly developed skills included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing a mediation process • Active listening • Reframing • Summarising and mutualising • Asking types of questions, open, closed, clarifying and elicitive • Exploring the needs and emotions of others • Reflective practice
8.	Provisional trying of new roles	I had the opportunity and was encouraged to try out my knowledge and skills as a mediator in role-play exercises. I prepared and delivered a one-day workshop on conflict.
9.	Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships	My competence increased through role-plays and, as a result of reflective practice, my self-confidence began to grow. I now understood how to learn from my experiences as a mediator. I was more confident in expressing my opinions to my peers.
10.	A re-integration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's perspective	I had a new positive perspective with a greater understanding of differences, of conflict, and of myself. I was calmer around conflict. I no longer felt fear rush to my chest if an argument or disagreement began. With self-confidence and skills, I decided to create a conflict resolution programme for families.

These phases of personal transformation aligned with my experience. It is worth noting that some of my experiences were applicable to several of the phases. Not all phases are necessary for transformation to take place (Mezirow, 1978).

However, Brock (2010) in a study of 256 undergraduate students concluded that the more steps students remembered experiencing the higher incidents of transformative learning reported.

Within these 10 steps, Mezirow proposed four levels of transformative learning:

- Elaboration of existing frames of reference
- Learning new frames of reference
- Transforming points of view
- Transforming habits of mind

Mezirow (1991) also states that there are two major components to transformative learning:

(1) Critical reflection or self-reflection on our assumptions or habits of mind. This applies to the habits of mind which determine how we classify our experiences beliefs and ourselves.

(2) Rational discourse presents an opportunity to discuss these reflections openly to confirm or verify those reflections.

The 10 steps, four levels and two components necessary for transformative learning were all present during my personal experience.

Research design

The research I carried out relied on a qualitative analysis, using anonymised secondary student data provided by the Institute. Nine reflective journals and 56 essays submitted by students as part of their academic requirements were studied to understand and assess the students' perspectives.

In addition, a focus group of previous Institute students was also employed to review initial findings. Participants were volunteers across three academic programmes co-ordinated by the Institute for the period 2018-2020. The members of the group were presented with the research findings and responded to specific questions about their individual experience in relation to the findings.

Findings

From a theoretical perspective, the 10 phases of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1978) were used as a lens to aid in coding and interpreting the data. The objective was to determine whether there was a relationship or connection between the phases of transformative learning and the students' experiences.

Relationship between my findings and Mezirow's 10 phases of transformative learning (see Table 2 below)

Table 2 My findings and Mezirow's 10 phases of transformative learning

10 phases of transformative learning	Student experiences as per secondary data
1. A disorienting dilemma	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fear of conflict• Avoidance• Prior life experience• New learning environment• Reflection

2. A self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of one's values • Challenging judgments and values • Values and conflict • Reflection
3. A critical assessment of epistemic sociocultural, or psychic assumptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexibility and creativity • Understanding • Change in perspective • Self-awareness • Reflective practice
4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group discussions • Growth • Understanding values • Change in how I saw the world
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth • Flexibility • Change in approach to conflict • Being restorative • Personal development
6. Planning a course of action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change in approach to conflict • Reflective Practice • Positive change in attitude
7. Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict intervention skills • Changing approach to conflict • Open-minded • Creativity • Reflective Practice • Toolkit
8. Provisional trying of new roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role-plays • Workplace • Home, with family
9. Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role-plays • Taking on new roles • Connections • Reflective practice
10. A re-integration into one's life on the basis of Conditions dictated by one's perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflective practice • Self-confidence • Change in roles and taking on new roles • Positive change in relationships • Social benefits

Disorienting dilemma

Many of the students in their reflective writings described a fear of conflict which they often dealt with by avoidance. The realisation and reflection on an alternative way for dealing with conflict led the students to question their assumptions and begin to experiment with a different approach.

Daloz (2000:103) argues that “although a single event may catalyse a shift or a particular story might dramatize a transformation, closer examination reveals that change or shift was long coming”. Many of the students described an ongoing struggle with conflict and a long-held desire for a better approach substantiating Daloz’s view.

A self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame

The focus group recognised this. During their discussions one participant described it as a painful experience “facing up to things from your past that make you what you are” but overall the group found the outcome from self-examination was “good and healthy”.

Values as a topic triggered students to examine their own values, challenging their judgments, beliefs and biases, hence forming an understanding of what values they held and the importance of respecting other value belief systems. Students either reinforced their values or altered their value system as a result of self-examination.

A critical assessment of epistemic sociocultural, or psychic assumptions

Students not only questioned themselves but challenged their perceptions through interactions with family members, friends and co-workers. The result was an altered approach to conflict and relationships, along with a growing self-awareness and discovery. Students experienced a shift in perception resulting in a more flexible and open-minded approach to relationships both at work and home, in some cases leading to a transforming of habits of mind.

Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change

Group discussions were a daily occurrence in the classroom. Students acknowledge a feeling of connection and support by sharing both their positive and negative experiences with lecturers and their peers. There was a consensus that they all carried emotional baggage but they were in an environment that was both supported and safe, a climate of "critical acceptance" which is considered by Fook (2015) as a necessity when reflecting.

Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions

Students tried out their new skills and frameworks both at work and at home by changing their approach to conflict being more empathetic, listening to understand while being flexible and understanding in relationships. Students with careers in teaching discussed implementing the concept of restorative practice in the classroom. Other students used the principles and frameworks of mediation in their professional and home environment when dealing with conflict.

Planning a course of action

Students expressed enthusiasm in their writings when discussing their intentions to implement their new knowledge and skills into their daily lives. For some it was bringing restorative practice into the workplace, while others discussed going on to further education so they could broaden their knowledge in the area. The feedback from the focus group was animated around this topic, they spoke about the desire to make a social change “as burning inside you”.

Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plan

Students acquired academic and skills-based knowledge. Using role-plays as a tool, they developed and gained competence and confidence in the mediation process. Reading and producing academic assignments, although reflected as a challenge, were also experienced as providing an upward moving learning curve with one student experiencing a changed outlook having studied an article on “shame”.

Provisional trying of new roles

Students reflected on putting their new skills into action. Some took on the role of mediator in family disputes, while others implemented restorative systems within their work environment. Trying new roles is part of the learning process in the institute and is encouraged through role-play exercises. The Master’s programme has a ‘Knowledge to Practice’ module where students take part in real-life mediations under the guidance of a mentor.

Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships

Confidence and competence in roles and relationships were shown to be linked in the data. As students' skills and competence increased through role-plays, and as they gained new knowledge through readings and lectures, they expressed an increase in self-confidence. Another important element in the development of competence and confidence was the support network of fellow students within the classroom environment. Moreover, classroom discussions helped to increase their confidence.

A re-integration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's perspective

All students conveyed a new positive perspective with a greater understanding of differences and disagreements, of conflict, and of themselves. Students expressed an intention of using their skills on a daily basis to improve relationships both personal and professional. Some students declared an intention of implementing a plan for social good within their communities.

The role of reflective practice in transformative learning for students

In 79 coded segments across 44 documents, as well as in the focus group, students specifically mentioned reflective practice as a discipline they found helpful throughout their academic programme. Given that the secondary data (journals) was of a reflective nature, this is an obvious finding. What is nevertheless notable is the impact of reflective practice in developing students' self-awareness, competence, understanding and self-confidence.

In their reflections on each learning module, students discussed the role of reflective practice in understanding mediation and conflict. Critically self-reflecting on their practice and skills, and developing a practice of reflecting in-action and on-action, helped improve their competence in mediation and conflict intervention.

Reflective practice was shown to have a positive effect on students' performance and resulted in self-discovery and awareness. Students experienced 'light bulb' or 'eureka moments' in their learning and self-awareness. Self-reflection played an important role in developing skills and competence in practice and theory.

Improved competence was linked to improved self-confidence. Also, as a result of reflective practice, students experienced self-discovery and self-awareness which led to a change in their approach to personal and professional relationships. For some students this led to a change in their worldviews.

Overview of the overall and individual experience of reflective practice in the learning environment

Table 3 Overall and Individual Experiences of Reflective Practice

Reflecting in- and on-action Students used reflection on their performance to improve their practice.	<i>"reflecting-in-action and reflecting-on-action, challenged my normal modus operandi" (Student B 00520)</i> <i>"I was able to be more self-critical and analyse what aspects of my performance I could improve on" (Student K62620)</i>
Self-reflection leading personal and professional growth Personal and professional growth experienced as result of self-reflection.	<i>"has undoubtedly altered my social and professional interactions and consequently my way of dealing with conflict. This self-realisation, compelled me to self-reflect, to grow as a human being, and has combined to contribute to who I am both personally and professionally" (Student I 00520)</i>
Reflection leading to open-mindedness and creativity	<i>"has undoubtedly altered my social and professional interactions and consequently my</i>

Self-reflection was described by students as a 'gift' that with time resulted in curiosity, creativity and open-mindedness	<i>way of dealing with conflict. This self-realisation, compelled me to self-reflect, to grow as a human being, and has combined to contribute to who I am both personally and professionally" (Student I 00520)</i>
Reflection and worldview Students developed an understanding of perspective and how it effects our worldview.	<i>"I learned "we don't see things as they are we see things as we are" Anais Nin. I feel this was me at the beginning of this course, you believe you know much more than you actually do. My beliefs negative and positive were coming from my world view and how it was formed. When one realises this is not the case, and everyone has his or her own worldview, it is very freeing." "the discussions, debate and reflections from these presentations were so informative and helped broaden my worldview"(Student E00520)</i>
Reflective practice Reflection for students was found to have become a daily practice.	<i>"The reflective practice has also been a big positive and although I have not had the opportunity to use it as a mediator (yet) I use it now in day to day life. If I have a positive or negative encounters I find myself thinking back on how it could have been handled better. Before I would have just been self-critical which is not constructive." (Student P00519)</i>
Awareness of personal values through reflection. Students became aware of their own value system through self-reflection.	<i>"Upon reflection, my values are based around listening and empathy and respect. I know I may not always honour these values, I may snap or jump to conclusions or be less than kind in my approach or response to situations of conflict, but when I understand my core values I can bring myself back to them." (Student F 62620)</i>
Reflection: Building confidence in skills Participation in role-plays, and reflection were found to increase confidence in skills.	<i>"The group work in class and role plays has given me confidence in my own skills." (Student K 00519)</i>
Reflection to challenge judgments and values Findings show that students were able to examine their interactions and improve relationships by challenging their own and respecting the values of others	<i>"Learning about our personal values and needs and how conflict occurs when people perceive their values and/or needs as being compromised was a real lightbulb moment for me. I began to realise that this was a root cause for the recent conflicts I seemed to have found myself in. I began to reflect on my interactions and reactions and they may have been blocking others' needs and challenging their values. I started on a gentle path of change by challenging my judgments of certain colleagues and by dropping my</i>

	<i>preconceived notions of them and I simply started to listen more.” (Student A 00520)</i> <i>“The role of our individual values, alongside cultural based values, has been incredibly eye opening for me from a professional prospective.” (Student L MC 626 20)</i>
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Reflective practice was the featured topic of in-depth discussions from the focus group, with students’ acknowledging that it was essential. It was described as “a way of being” as something that elicits a change in how “you react to situations and how you think.” It was considered important in helping to “take off the layers” before meeting parties in order to be neutral.

The open discussions following role-plays in which reflective practice was used was helpful in providing feedback for participants, assisting them to reflect on how to improve their practice. Focus group members agreed that this process provided “fertile ground for healthy conversations and relationships”. One participant commented that practicing self-reflection can be painful “facing up to things from your past that make you what you are,” but the consensus was that it was “good and healthy.”

On a general point, the participants suggested that more role-plays, especially in the Masters programmes, were needed to allow students to reflect and improve on their performance. Students who took part in the Knowledge-Practice module found the mentorship and reflective journal invaluable for learning and competence

The focus group participants appreciated that each learning day either started or finished with a reflective practice.

the discussions and debate from these presentations were so informative and helped broaden my worldview” Student E00520

The repetition of opening and closing circles at all classes was an excellent way of learning how to use reflective circles.” Student E 62620

Reflective practice is considered a critical component of transformative learning; firstly, through critical reflection or self-reflection on assumptions or habits of mind and, secondly, through discourse on the outcome of these reflections (Mezirow, 1991). Wade (1998:715) underlines the importance of learning environments being “conducive of self-reflection”.

Role-play exercises, followed by reflection with their peers and lecturers, provided opportunities for students to try out their skills. Feedback sessions were opportunities for students to “reflect on-action” and to consider why they executed mediation in a particular way, what emotions were they experiencing, what interventions were helpful and which were not. As a result, they considered how they could improve their practices. Schön (1983), and subsequently Lang and Taylor (2000), recognise the importance of connecting theory to practice in moving towards tacit knowledge. Focus group members pointed to the ‘Knowledge to Practice’ module as a chance to move in that direction.

For me this clinical element of the Master’s degree was the opportunity to understand how the theory that we had covered in other modules linked to actually working with the disputants in the consulting room. Student M 62820

Some students experienced emotional reactions during or at the end of role-plays. Students were often surprised by these reactions and, on reflection, often found

their emotions arose in connection to unconscious assumptions, perceptions or past experiences. Through reflection, students were able to bring a rationale or understanding to their emotions, hence bringing them to a level of consciousness (Campbell, 1971). According to Semetsky, et al (2012: 74), it is this integration of the conscious and the unconscious that begins a “process of self-education”.

Conclusion

Transformative learning is “learning that transforms problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, reflective, open and emotionally able to change” (Mezirow, 1991:223). Thus, a person who goes through the process of transformative learning, experiences personal transformation. The study’s finding illustrated that the experiences of the participants, as representing students in the Institute programmes, aligned with Mezirow’s 10 phases. Reflective practice was found to be integrated into the curriculum and the learning environment. Therefore, I conclude that students in the Institute programmes experienced personal transformation and reflective practice was a key component to this transformation.

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