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The Patient as Mentor: Transformative Experience in an Occupational Therapy Course

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Abstract:

“The Lived Experience of Disability” course matches first year occupational therapy students with mentors, individuals with health challenges, for a series of community visits. This learning relationship facilitates students’ understanding of disability and client-centred practice. Mentors share expertise of their lived experience; students consider personal attitudes, assumptions and knowledge of disability and their future client-therapist relationships. Findings of a qualitative research study using a case study approach reveal that students engaged in interactive course components that comprised reflective practice, mentor visits, and critical involvement in a community of practice. These experiential and collaborative interactions provided pedagogical conditions for building relational knowing and critical reflection, which contributed to new and meaningful transformative learning experiences.

Key Words:

Transformative learning; Relational knowing; Mentorship; Graduate Teaching and Learning.

Introduction

This paper explores an exemplary case of transformative learning within the academy. The purpose of this research is to investigate graduate students’ and instructor experiences of curricula that were designed and intended to support and foster transformative learning. The Lived Experience of Disability course is offered at Queen’s University in Ontario, Canada. This case study offers insight into the value of transformative pedagogy: It underscores relational knowing and the powerful potential it holds for changing the ways in which we teach and learn.

Principles of Transformative Learning

Basic principles of transformative learning have been widely theorized in the fields of adult development and adult learning. Most of the research on transformative learning practices has taken place in higher education settings (Mezirow, 2009; Taylor & Snyder, 2012; Hoggan, 2017). Despite this fact, the published writing and research on transformative learning has rarely offered insights into practical classroom applications (Cranton, 2006; Fisher-Yoshida, Geller, & Schapiro, 2009; Moore, 2005) or presented perspectives in clearly articulated pedagogical frameworks for practitioner use (Wang & Cranton, 2013). With its focus on adult teaching and learning, transformative learning as a reconstructive theory offers “a general, abstract, and idealized model that explains the general structure, dimensions, and dynamics of the learning process” (Mezirow, 2009, p. 21). This model attempts to provide constructs, language, categories, and dynamics of transformative learning to enable application in a variety of contexts, including various cultural settings (Mezirow, 2000, 2009).

A central feature of transformative learning is that it requires an understanding of the change involved in *how* we know, rather than *what* we know (Baumgartner, 2001). Instead of a mere unloading of information on students, transformative learning demands that students revise their underlying assumptions, adopt new paradigms of understanding, and apply these new paradigms (Cranton, 2002; McGonigal, 2005; Hoggan, Malkki, & Finnegan, 2017). Such paradigm shifts require the consideration of multiple viewpoints rather than just one’s own (Mezirow, 2000). Greene (1988) extends this idea with her assertion that “imagining how things could be otherwise” (p. 3) is central to initiating transformation. King (2009) defines transformative learning as experiences that adult learners have as they make sense of ideas and opinions they had not previously considered. The process involved in transformative learning is not linear but may be considered spiral-like in its progression, as learners experience disruption in the balance and measures of their lives (Cranton, 2002).

Transformative learning attempts to capture “what the learner does, feels, [and] experiences” (Fisher-Yoshida et al., 2009, p. 7) in a variety of settings and educational contexts, including “life experiences, formal and informal education, human resources and training, faculty development programs, distance education, co-operative extension, workplace, professional development, and community settings” (Mezirow, 2009, p. 4). In the classroom and beyond, learners have numerous experiences that can synergistically lead to transformative learning (King, 2009), providing students with opportunities to explore new answers and perspectives. Ultimately, transformative learning is about changing students’ fundamental perspectives: “Transformative learning shapes people. They are different afterward, in ways both they and others recognize” (Clark, 1993, p. 47).

Pedagogical Conditions for Transformative Learning

A critical dimension of transformative learning pedagogy focuses on relational ways of knowing. Relationality can be understood as a complex web of interconnections, made in the classroom, that transcend cognitive tasks involved in transformative learning (Gardner & Kelly, 2008; Taylor, 1998). Holistic, whole-person transformation can be initiated by building empathic connections, as dispositions and attitudes shift in shared, subtle human interactions (Pink, 2006). Gardner and Kelly (2008) and Pink

(2006) argue that these relationships are primarily developed and nurtured in our daily social practices, wherein we connect our ideas in dialogic-relational ways. A significant implication of these theoretical perspectives is the need to support a transformation-focused experience by incorporating opportunities for students to interact through dialogue and activity (Cranton, 2002; Moore, 2005).

According to Ellsworth (2006), our relationship with the outer world is mutually transforming. It is through relationships that we can create and innovate. Relational thinking is fundamental to our embodied existence; that is, “to inhabit a body is to be continuously and radically in relation with the world, with others, and with what we make of them” (Ellsworth, 2006, p. 4). Collaboration is one type of relationality. When we collaborate, we are making something in relation to others. Mezirow (2000) describes the importance of collaborative inquiry in the process of transformation. He states:

They [adult educators] make every effort to transfer their authority over the learning group to the group itself as soon as this is feasible, and they become collaborative learners. They model and share their commitment and act on their convictions by encouraging and assisting learners to critically assess the validity of norms from alternative perspectives, arrive at best tentative judgments through discourse, and effectively act on them. (p. 31)

Relationality is part of a connected approach to transformative learning, wherein learning is situated in and amongst the building of relationships with others (Cranton, 2006). In a relational pedagogy, our relationships can be described as experiential and experimentalist as we explore the learning self in a series of significant, affective ties that teach and transform (Ellsworth, 2006); teaching and learning events that put students in relation take place in a complex, dynamic web and often compel students to transition towards integrative and holistic ways of seeing the world (Davis et al., 2008). Building constructive, healthy human relationships requires empathic listening, caring, and nurturing on the part of each individual within a group (Cranton, 2006). In a shared classroom practice, the opportunity to engage diverse perspectives in a democratic fashion holistically honours the learner’s voice and strengthens the relationships that enable us to create in mutually transforming ways (Thayer-Bacon, 2004; Ellsworth, 2006).

Davis et al. (2008) affirm that “teaching and learning are not about convergence onto a pre-existent truth, but about divergence about broadening what is knowable, doable, and beable” (p. 184). It is this act of broadening that provides an environment of challenge for students and teachers alike. A classroom dynamic that expands the space of what is possible presupposes that, in the process of helping students transform, the teacher develops an authentic practice and a willingness to transform (Cranton, 2006; Davis et al., 2008; Taylor, 2006). Cranton (2006) suggests that providing a safe, inclusive, and open learning environment is fundamental to fostering transformative learning. Moreover, an ideal transformative classroom is built on the notion of reciprocity (Taylor, 2006). In the teacher’s role, reciprocity involves modelling critical reflection and challenging oneself. As a result of this modelling, students themselves are likely to demonstrate a willingness to “evoke the interdependency that makes the process of transformation and teaching transparent and synergistic” (Taylor, 2006, p. 94).

Methodology

OT825: Course Context

The Lived Experience of Disability course matches occupational therapy students with mentors—individuals living with health challenges—for a series of community visits. First introduced in 1999 as an experiential learning activity, it developed into a master's level course, and is now a compulsory first-year requirement for students enrolled in the Occupational Therapy Program at the School of Rehabilitation Therapy at a post-secondary institution in Ontario, Canada. According to the course coordinator, instructor, and developer: The primary course outcome from this learning relationship is the facilitation of students' understanding of issues relevant to disability and the philosophy of client-centered practice. Mentors share expertise of their lived experience, while students consider personal attitudes, assumptions, and knowledge of disability and their future client-therapist relationships. A subsequent course provides the students with historical and current theories of disability and incorporates themes generated from student learning and discussion about mentor visits and relationships.

In 2012, the course components included mentor visits, tutorials, first-person resources, and reflective journals, with curricular decisions overseen by an advisory committee of mentors and instructors. The course divided the larger group of 75 students into small-group tutorial sections. This case study examined one such tutorial group, comprised of 12 graduate students (all of whom consented to participate in the study), the educator, who is also the coordinator, of the course, and four of the mentors who were paired with students from the tutorial group. There were two male and 10 female student participants. A quarter of the students identified their origin as Asian or Pacific Islander, while the remaining students identified as Caucasian. Most of the students had entered directly into this program upon graduating from a diverse range of bachelor degrees in the arts and sciences. The ages of the students ranged from 21–39 years. Pseudonyms were used for the twelve student participants and the four mentors interviewed.

Data collection

To respond to the research questions, data were collected using four methods: (a) classroom observations, (b) individual interviews, (c) a Learning Activities Survey, and (d) reflective journals. Data collection took place over six weeks from September 18, 2012 until October 16, 2012.

The researcher acted as a participant-observer and made detailed observations of one full-class lecture and five small group tutorials offered in OT 825. In the context of classroom activities, conversations, and interactions, teaching and learning interactions was characterized through participant activity captured via field notes, student work, and instructor's lesson materials. A document analysis of these teaching and learning materials was conducted. Students' journals were also part of the required coursework and were used to reveal the personal and professional insights that had been made by each of the participants. In addition to the journals, descriptive teaching notes, course syllabi, and course readings provided further detail about the course design and pedagogical intent.

The Learning Activities Survey (LAS) developed by King (2009) was utilized to capture broad descriptions of students' experiences and to identify participants for in-depth interviews. Every consenting graduate student in each of the observed classes was asked to complete the Learning Activities Survey at the final class. For the purposes of this study, modifications were made to King's (2009) instrument to reflect the following learning activities: reflective journals; learning dyads; and visits between students and their mentors.

The purpose of the interviews was to gain an understanding of students' and instructor's teaching and learning experience in greater depth and to provide an opportunity for participants to elaborate on and confirm their perceptions of experienced empathy in their OT825 coursework. Each interview was approximately one hour in length.

Data Analysis

Once the data was collected, a systematic, iterative process of content analysis was carried out of the observation field notes, course documents, and interview transcripts. Text files were imported into ATLAS.ti (v6.2, 2011) and thematic codes derived to increase clarity and focus prior to beginning the analytic work. Survey data were used to corroborate the primary data sources for the study and to illuminate experiences of empathy within the Lived Experience of Disability course. Analysis involved an examination of the significant relationships and frequency of patterns within and across instructor and student responses. Additionally, the researcher noted any negative or discrepant data at both the individual and aggregate item level.

Results

Reflective Journals

Reflective journals were "much more than diaries" and provided students with freedom to express the deep, sophisticated complexities of their learning experiences. The learning journals facilitated ideation and critical reflection by offering students a central way of representing and processing events that elicited a deeper consideration and reconsideration of events and issues. Students became aware of their transforming perspectives and developed empathy as they revisited earlier entries, noting the taken-for-granted details of their previous encounters and consciously building on their new understandings.

On the Learning Activities Survey, students reported the process of journaling as an activity that led to transformation. Half of the students named "personal reflection" and "journaling" as influential to initiating a significant change in perspective. Student and instructor responses indicated that the teaching and learning "developed [their] ability to self-reflect" and "value[d] the individuality and uniqueness of each person." The reflective practice of journaling assisted students in mapping out the following deepened outcomes: "(a) consideration of the process of their own learning; (b) critical review of an aspect(s) of their experiences, actions, or events; and (c) decision making or resolving uncertainty, particularly in the case where an ill-structured matter required resolution" (Moon, 1999, p. 23).

Journaling provided students with an opportunity to consider the process of their own learning. Several students spoke about the building of relational knowing and how journaling assisted them in tying their ideas together conceptually. One student spoke specifically to his process: “I feel like I was more confused in my writing at first, all over the map. Now there is more of a connection between topics and a flow.” Another participant alluded to a process that included elaboration: “I’ll type the stuff I’m thinking and it’s rough and raw and then I’ll go back and categorize it and add things in.” Adding layered and nuanced detail to the journals was a common theme among participants. One student detailed the nature of this process, explaining, “Through writing I realized things, and became more aware, and I would pick out these aspects of the story and say ‘now I want to expand on this.’”

For many of the students, a heightened level of awareness became important in the journaling process. This increasing attunement became integral to their learning process, as it required students to critically question and self-reflect. A participant revealed how these elements of the learning process were integrated into action: “I ask myself a lot of questions in the middle of my writing. So I’ll write something and I’m asking a question directly of myself.” She added:

Actually knowing that you’re going to have to write about [the experiences] makes you hyper aware of what you’re feeling in those situations. If I wasn’t asked to journal about it, and I wasn’t anticipating needing to articulate how I felt, then I wouldn’t have caught my reactions.

Another student’s account extends the theme of raising consciousness: “Journaling helped me to crystallize...the things that I was thinking and to explore poetically from where that was going.”

Students were encouraged to connect and extend their ideas throughout the journaling process using the ORID framework, which scaffolds the critical reflection process with the following levels: observation; reaction; interpretation; decision (Stanfield, 2000). The application of the ORID framework helped prepare students for the demands of their profession. Many students found their reflective practice to be relevant to them as aspiring professionals; the journal became a concrete representation of their internal processing and their conceptualization of experience. The course instructor reinforced the value of mastering the art of reflection in professional practice:

In occupational therapy, reflective practice and decision-making are integral parts of competency that we must master. We have to do that otherwise clinical reasoning doesn’t exist in the same degree and depth if you’re working with people. So reflective practice is an important skill, competency, and this is the way they start using it. (AOR, OT825, I)

As revealed in the interviews and the journals themselves, many students found that the act of journaling shaped and transformed their learning experience in this course. By mapping their changing perspectives, students were able to make meaning from their experiences conducting fieldwork with their mentor and from the theory generated through conversation in tutorials. In doing so, they discovered their personal style and authentic voice, and captured these moments in their learning journals.

Collaborative Inquiry

At the outset of The Lived Experience of Disability course, time and space were set aside to get to know one another with refreshments and informal conversation, with the aim of creating a safe and respectful atmosphere. Whilst seated in a circular formation around the table, the instructor pointed out that “what we bring to the table is equal” which underscored the team atmosphere. Students were given an opportunity to formally introduce themselves, providing details of their hometown, undergraduate degree, hopes for this course, previous clinical experience, and goals for the next five years. Several students pointed out the varied range of experiences that the students brought to the table. One student captured the essence of learning vicariously from the plethora of adult experience: “Tutorials where we got to speak about our personal experiences and learn from others was [sic] influential. I learned from my peers as everyone brought with them insight based on their personal experiences, varied volunteer work, and undergraduate degree.” The sharing of personal stories and food during the late afternoon tutorials put everyone at ease and revealed the diverse backgrounds and broad spectrum of lived experience that would inform and enrich the team’s discussions. Students regarded tutorials as a “great way of bringing everything we have learned and will learn together.” Tutorials functioned as a medium through which students could synthesize ideas and learn from others’ varied personal life experiences. They helped students to critically connect the dots, by exposing them to a range of life experiences of disability. One student explained:

It felt like I was learning about everything during our tutorials, which was interesting because clearly there would be no way for all of us to meet each of the mentors on such personal terms. Sharing the [tutorial] experience with each other allowed you to think about all of the issues involved with the various types of disabilities.

Students continually searched for a deeper understanding of the complex, multi-faceted issues that formed the basis for tutorial discussions. Tutorials provided a rich format in which students put together the different pieces of the puzzle as they gained greater contextual detail, and synthesized disparate pieces as they explored additional first-person resources to make sense of the cohesive whole. In the telling and retelling of stories and the sharing of repertoire (e.g., tools, ways of doing things, approaches, ideas) students interacted in a collaborative manner (Wenger, 2006).

Using a scenario shared from a mentor visit, students worked collaboratively in a sense-making act that involved challenging preconceived notions and assumptions about disability. The students who were matched with the Smith family travelled in their wheelchair accessible van to the public library for their second visit. Aiden, who had cerebral palsy and ambulates in a power wheelchair, used his chin to manipulate the keyboard on his computer for communication. While reading and playing with the family in the library setting, the two students noticed stares and hushed whispers from others in the library. One student explored the experience in further detail:

The one big thing I noticed while we were out was how much people stared. It was apparent that whenever Aiden would make a noise people would look over and stare in a very obvious way. I understand that people fear things that they

don't understand and aren't comfortable with disability but still the amount of staring was noticeable. It was a different experience to be on the other side of the stares when at an earlier time in my life it could have been myself staring and wondering what was wrong with a kid like Aiden.

The instructor probed further about the children staring at Aiden in the library. She extended these critical questions to the group: "How can that experience be interpreted? How can that be used to their advantage?" Discussion amongst the students elicited ideas about the importance of building an awareness of disability through education and exposure. One student referred to the course resources, namely the children's book *Zoom* by Robert Munsch, which conceives of disability as an opportunity rather than as a deficit. Many students remarked on their personal experiences of ignorance or their lack of experience with disability when they were younger, noting that they had not previously framed disability with any positive connotations.

Students worked together to develop a new outlook on disability; through transformative dialogue, they framed their perspectives in a manner that was more open and inclusive than it had been previously. The interactions were collaborative in nature, as students engaged in knowledge and consensus building. One of the students pointed out, "It's important to develop a comfort level [with disability]." Another added, "Opening up communication is essential. Kids don't tend to judge, they just need a lived experience of disability to relate to." A third student expressed an alternative to the norm in response to the public reaction to Aiden in the library. She suggested: "We often say 'look away' and perhaps we'd be better to encourage curiosity, observing, and questioning about disability to bring about an understanding." The instructor reminded students that, in many cases, they would be required to reframe their perspective(s) as they considered how their mentors framed their own lived experience. She explained her position based on professional experience: "I always documented what the person's strengths were [when I was working as an occupational therapist]. Some of those strengths came out of having a disability." With the occasional subtle nudge from the instructor, students tied ideological threads together in a meaningful web, and concerted effort, to understand the client perspective. In their collaborative inquiry, students accessed their informed understanding and empathy to make important judgment calls about how to represent the mentor's experience with integrity. The instructor's creative professionalization, in tandem with the students' storied insights, enabled students to see things differently than they had before.

Mentor-Student Relationships

The mentoring that developed through community visits was the single most important aspect of building empathy in *The Lived Experience of Disability* course. In their individual interviews, interactions in tutorial sessions, and journaling entries, students reported that mentoring was transformative in nature. Whether they met for an in-home visit, a stroll through the park, a tour of a local theatre building, or a visit to a grocery store, the public library, time spent with mentors provided students with a heightened understanding of the realities of living with a disability as well as the challenges and successes experienced by individuals in their everyday activities and environments. Visits with mentors led students on a storied journey, which called upon

their life histories, their everyday routines, and their hopes for the future in their search for meaning.

In the course, students were matched in dyads with mentors in the Kingston community. An effort was made to vary the nature of the disability for students who had previous experience in specific fields. A minimum of six hours of face-to-face contact with mentors was a course requirement. There was a diverse range of congenital and acquired disabilities represented, along including mental health and physical disabilities. During a series of visits, students developed learning relationships that enhanced their conceptions of disability and challenged their associated perceptions, assumptions, and stereotypes. In the process of getting to know one another, students became more attuned to the lives of their mentors and in doing so, were better able to think creatively to glean the most from these deeply significant learning opportunities.

The relationships between mentors and students were emergent in structure rather than prescriptive. The developing nature of the interactions heightened students' awareness of the complexities that surrounded building relations. Several student participants indicated in their teaching and learning survey that they were "required to take a broad focus on the topics they were taught." The instructor spoke to the inherent course challenges that prompted students to recognize individual intricacies within a broader context of health care:

I think the students come into the program with very altruistic goals in mind; that they're in it to work with people and to make a difference in people's lives. But I don't think they necessarily come in with an understanding of what the problems are. And so through the course and the mentors and the readings, they start to realize how complicated and complex health care is. And it's not just a series of diagnoses and a textbook that says okay this is present therefore you must do this. They start to realize that they can't rely on assessments and equipment and prescriptive kinds of interactions with people. It is about people, and the relationship is part of the therapeutic medium and if you don't have that, I don't think you're going to have optimal results. "So I think it makes students aware of how many challenges people might face...the...support they [may] have in family and friends, and it just snowballs..."

The nature, content, and level of personal investment in the sessions were mutually determined on the basis of the relationship that developed between the mentor and mentee. Students commented that they "engaged in a variety of ways" with "opportunities for self-determined discovery" in the tutorials. The instructor pointed out the differentiated and relational nature of the learning experience with mentors and its potential to generate impactful interaction:

The students were surprised at how frank people are as mentors. One mentor in particular discussed personal issues and prefaced "I don't always share this with students, but I'm sharing this with you because we've developed a relationship and a level of trust." So I think that was, for the students, a huge compliment and something they will value forever. It also helps them to realize that what you learn from a future client very much depends on the relationship that you have with them.

One of the mentors confirmed this sentiment by stating, “I can be really forthcoming with information, but it depends on the relationship.”

Several students regarded the mentoring sessions as a process of relational sense-making. One student depicted the relationship building process as offering flexibility and an opportunity to explore intuitively:

We were told to go in and feel our way through that relationship that you have with your mentor. We weren't verbally instructed to go in with a certain occupational therapy frame of reference. It was more, “go in, see how it feels, ask questions, and get to know them.” I think that was certainly driven by intuition.

Another student's experience of mentoring allowed her to strike a fine balance between a personal and professional dynamic: “It's exciting for me to be able to ask about topics outside of the theoretical; to focus on the patient as an occupational being. I feel more like a potential friend and confidant than a clinician.” She went on to note, “I can be more casual, while still maintaining professional communication.” The mentoring relationships, in many cases, left lasting impressions on the students. One student said, “My mentor has put a real face to the word “dementia” that I can take with me.” This theme of lived lessons was evident in many student accounts, as they oriented their attention to the unique and transformative nature of these relationships. One student remarked:

It surprised me how sick some of them actually were, one of the mentors actually passed away. It surprised me that many of the mentors are really along a broad spectrum of illness right to very, very severely ill, which I guess, is real life. They are not textbook cases, perfect cookie cut-outs. It's real life.

This student's comment encompassed the notion that mentoring “is participating in the transformation of what is” (Davis, 2004, p. 184). She acknowledged the value of self in relation to other (her mentor) and broadened to touch the personal and interpersonal with the planetary (Davis, 2004). She noted:

I realize now that my mentor really wanted to share his story with someone and just have people to talk to. He wanted us to take his story and be inspired to help him and others with dementia. He expects the younger generation to do something about the loneliness and uncertainty that dementia carries. There is no cure, but maybe by spreading his message, we'll be able to find our way to one, or at least be aware.

Mentoring, as a critical course activity, “supported [students'] natural curiosity and striving for knowledge” and demonstrated a valuing of “the uniqueness [of] each person.” For the students, the basis for these mentoring relations was a deep regard for the individual, and in a broader context, humanity as a whole.

Discussion

Transformative learning resonates with the contemporary ideas proposed by O'Sullivan (2012), who wrote, “we need to re-engage whole areas of learning to honour holism and to honour ourselves as whole persons in relation to a cosmos and a

biosphere” (p. 174). Towards the end of the coursework, a connectedness to making change at a global level developed and served as a meaningful passageway into future life and practice for the occupational therapy students. For example, students voiced a commitment to advocacy issues and equity issues for people with disabilities. Many students spoke in their interviews about their action items both in the classroom, in other courses in the program, and beyond the classroom in their professional practice. The relationships developed throughout the course inspired them to make change through social action.

Reflective practice was evident in discourse and journaling, two learning activities that enabled relational knowing and critical reflection. Students engaged in a process of reflection that involved realizing their unstated assumptions, critically assessing their taken-for-granted points of view, and challenging norms and stereotypes in their rationalization of new perspectives, and ultimately, in their changed courses of action. Undertaking these new ways of knowing required students to approach knowledge building by asking various types of questions—that is, open-ended, probing, reflective, as well as questions for more information (Cranton, 2006), with their mentors and in their tutorial sessions. As students developed new approaches and styles to enhance their understanding of disability and other related issues, they redefined and restructured problems and synthesized disparate parts to make sense of the whole.

The empathic relationship between mentor and student was a crucial course component for encouraging deepened learning. Empathy held potential for transformative learning experiences as it required “a self-authorizing capacity to be warm, inclusive, emotionally available” along with a cultivated capacity to “hold conflicting viewpoints with appreciation and respect” (Taylor & Elias, 2012, p. 157). Students acknowledged that, by the end of the course, they were able to empathize with their mentors. Listening to the stories of how they initially interacted with their mentors and sharing relational developments with their classmates in tutorials was a significant pedagogical thread in direct and vicarious ways. The course instructor and the students made time and space for pedagogical emergence in the tutorials, which aligned with relational aspects of building empathy and compassion in the course. As Taylor and Cranton (2012) write, “it is the shared experience of teaching and learning, wherein both teachers and learners, in concert with each other, learn to develop greater awareness of and understanding about themselves and others” (p. 570). The multiple relationships observed in student, mentor, and instructor interactions presented elements of empathy, agency and reciprocity.

Summary

The Lived Experience of Disability course embodied elements of relational knowing that fostered transformative learning experiences. For many students, transformation was realized as they became more inclusive, open, and discriminating as a result of their interactions with mentors, classmates, and instructor. With an individual and collective willingness to move beyond the status quo, students developed a greater sense of empathy and a broader perspective through the interdisciplinary lens of lived experience. In their practice of journaling and group discussion, students had opportunities to heighten their awareness of self and other, and developed new frames

of reference about disability and client-centered practice. Overall, the participant experience depicted transformations in both thought and action in the context of the following activities: (a) reflective journaling, (b) collaborative inquiry, and (c) mentored relationships.

This case study revealed that students in the Occupational Therapy course began to apply their knowledge in unorthodox ways within a higher education context. The authentic interactions from the field component paired with journaling and collaborative inquiry—all of which are foundational to the professional practice—offered students unique insight into the real challenges and opportunities encountered by occupational therapists.

Transformative learning was an intentional curricular thread at both the program and the course level in this case study. The integration of transformative pedagogy, too, was evident through both the design and facilitation of the course. The inner workings of this case reveal the profound teaching and learning value experienced by students, instructor, and mentors alike. Ultimately, this case serves to highlight the necessity to make time and space in higher education curricula for learning experiences that hold significant potential to ultimately shape and transform the minds and hearts of our future health care professionals in nuanced, impactful ways.

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