Chapter 10

Transformative Learning: A Possible By-Product of Immigrant Learner Participation in Recognition of Acquired Competencies (RAC)

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ABSTRACT

Transformative learning is not the goal or learning objective of a recognition of acquired competencies (RAC) process. The authors of this chapter suggest transformative learning is a possible by-product of this process which is an exercise in critical self-reflection and demonstration of competencies. Although unintentional, the RAC process is somewhat aligned with Mezirow’s phases of transformative learning. A challenge is that it is empirically difficult to measure the phases or the outcome of transformative learning. However, by examining the narratives of female immigrant learners in a RAC process, this chapter explores the potential of transformative learning as a by-product of their respective experiences in the recognition of their prior learning.

RECOGNITION OF ACQUIRED COMPETENCIES (RAC)

Recognition of Acquired Competencies (RAC) is similar in principle to Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) in that a person’s prior learning is assessed and recognized toward formal accreditation. According to the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) Prior Learning Assessment is defined as “the process of earning college credit for college-level learning acquired from other sources, such as work experience, professional training, military training, or open source learning from the web” (CAEL, n.d.). Recognition of Acquired Competencies (RAC) provides “a process to receive academic credit for skills and knowledge gained through training, life or workplace experience. The RAC process provides… the
opportunity to demonstrate…skills and competencies through varied evaluations, such as interviews, portfolios, projects, workplace demonstrations, etc” (Champlain College Saint-Lambert, n.d.).

Recognition of Acquired Competencies (RAC) is offered as a service through educational institutions in the Province of Quebec, Canada to adult learners in vocational education in school boards and the General and Vocational College system of the Province which is commonly referred to by the French acronym CEGEP (Collège d’enseignement général et professionnel).

The purpose of this study is to share narrative excerpts of interviews with immigrant learners who enrolled in the RAC service at Champlain College Saint-Lambert and, using a constructivist approach, assess if their responses indicate that transformative learning was a by-product of their experience in the process of recognizing their prior learning.

THE CONTEXT

The RAC service at Champlain College is offered in the following areas of vocational study: Early Childhood Education, Information Technology Client Support, Cisco Certified Network Associate (CCNA), Cisco Certified Network Professional (CCNP), Special Care Counselling, IT Network Management, Office Management and Transportation and Logistics. The education system in Quebec from K to college is competency-based and therefore the assessment of prior learning is as well. The RAC service offered by Champlain College begins with an orientation session open to the general public in order to explain the concept and provide potential candidates with an understanding of the expectations of this service. If a candidate wishes to pursue RAC there is an individual meeting with a RAC advisor to ensure they are a good candidate for the service – meaning they possess extensive experiential learning and competencies in their chosen field that can be assessed and recognized toward the academic elements of the program of study. The RAC process begins with a self-evaluation in which the candidate indicates on a grid, competency-by-competency, if they are able to demonstrate their full proficiency of this competency, if they need more information related to the competency or if they know they are not proficient in the competency. Once this is complete, the candidate and a content expert meet for what is called the validation interview. This meeting is an opportunity for the candidate and the context expert to interact and discuss the self-evaluation grid as colleagues. It is also during this meeting that an action plan is developed for the candidate to demonstrate the competencies the candidate has self-identified as having mastered. The second part of the action plan is a prescription of competency areas where the candidate may need partial or full training (gap filling). The ultimate goal for most learners is to achieve an attestation in their respective program.

THE LITERATURE

A search for literature and research which combine the concept of transformative learning and vocational education resulted in very few items found. There are even fewer examples to cite on the topic of transformative learning in vocational education as it relates to recognition of acquired competencies or prior learning assessment. One of the few examples of literature which examines transformative learning and prior learning assessment is Brown’s (2017) article entitled Exploring the transformative potential of recognition of prior informal learning for learners: A case study in Scotland. The article examines