Relational knowing as a ‘tool’ in advising for mandated language learning in the workplace

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Some contextual practices of advising for language learning in an organizational setting in Ireland are considered in this paper. The focus is on language support for employees mandated by the Official Languages Act, 2003, to provide public services through Irish. The research participants are adult second-language learners of Irish, a minority language. They are the designated contacts to provide Irish-medium services on a university campus. A Language Support Network, facilitated by the researcher in the role of language advisor, was established to explore the issue of language anxiety arising from legislative obligations as well as individual and group support needs. The conceptual framework merges the theoretical lens of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991) and the Dialogue, Tools and Context Model for advising in language learning (Mynard, 2012). ‘Relational knowing’ (Taylor, 2000) was used as a theoretical ‘tool’ which the language advisor drew on so as to work more productively and creatively with Network members. A Participatory Action Research methodology was chosen to bring about constructive change in learner attitudes and identities. Educational interventions, which included group language advising sessions, are presented in the paper. These facilitated worker-learners, to move from a situation of individual uncertainty to one of group confidence over the course of three action research cycles. A change in focus from legislative compliance to a culture of care and community is revealed in the data. The concepts ‘Cultural Architect’ (Raido, 1986) and ‘Shared Mental Model’ (Mohammed, Klimoski, & Rentsch, 2000) are borrowed from sport and organizational psychology to illuminate what happened. It is argued that an innovative minority language support infrastructure led not only to capacity building in the workplace but to the development of a new social connectedness among learners of Irish and the association of the language with the vibrant social fabric of the organization itself.

Keywords: transformative learning, language anxiety, language advising.