

I Feel Like I'm Being Hit From All Directions: Enduring The Bombardment As A Mature Age Learner Returning To Formal Learning

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Abstract

Feelings of anticipation and hope can underpin the decision of the mature age learner who returns to the formal learning context. However, once part of the new context, exposure to worldviews, social practices and perspectives incongruent or different from their own can trigger feelings of self-doubt and uncertainty, as long held self-perceptions and views of reality are unsettled and challenged. Compounding the challenges associated with the new identity of 'student' are other identities attached to the various life roles the mature age learner fulfils. As each identity jostles for attention, the mature age learner's trajectory of personal change can be erratic and emotion laden. For some, it may feel akin to the novice paintball player, where unless well positioned and attuned to the rules of the combative game, small and large 'hits' can constantly bombard and wear down the defences. In the formal learning context, such 'hits' may be representative of institutional practices and protocols or social interactions with others from different backgrounds and beliefs; they can also be 'hits' in the form of personal challenges that arise from other life role responsibilities. Drawing from the findings of a qualitative study for a doctoral thesis, this paper builds on transformative learning theory as a way to explain the often erratic and contradictory trajectories of personal change made manifest by a small group of mature age learners who engaged in the full-time, thirteen week, face-to-face Enabling program known as STEPS. Findings that point to the emotional toll these trajectories can elicit have serious implications for educators of mature age learners in terms of appropriate curriculum design and the establishment of learning communities that build resiliency, empowering the learner to cope with whatever challenges may confront them.

Introduction

Mature age learners represent a unique sub-set of university students, typified by defining characteristics that the world of work, community engagement, parenting, travel and other life experiences have provided. Such learners generally demonstrate wide diversity in

individual learning approaches and preferences, coping strategies and prior schooling histories. A return to formal study can elicit varying responses. For some learners, it can entail anxiety, stress, disorientation and even fear, yet for others it induces excitement and empowerment. Thus, returning to a formal learning environment in the context of Enabling education can pose as a paradoxical experience for some mature age learners in that they need both change and stability for personal growth, yet to achieve and maintain stability, they must undergo personal change of some nature.

Based on case study findings that document the varied learning experiences of participants in CQUniversity's Skills for Tertiary Education Preparatory Studies (STEPS) program, this paper initially provides a brief contextualisation that situates the research findings within a preparatory program at a regional Australian university. It then presents a brief rationale for such a program, and in light of imminent higher education reforms, suggests the importance of considering an holistic perspective of the mature age learner's experience within the design of Enabling education programs. The theories that underpin this paper are then outlined. Transformative learning theory is presented as a way to explain personal change, while the notion of learning communities is discussed as a way to theorise about the need for supportive learning environments in the Enabling context. Finally, resiliency is portrayed as a means by which educators of mature age learners can promote the capacity of individuals to transform and change, regardless of the perceived or very real risks.

Learners who return to study as mature aged students are called upon to simultaneously manage both a work/life environment and a study environment. This in mind, the paper uses the words of STEPS participants elicited through a series of group and individual semi-structured interviews to highlight some of the factors that conflict on a return to study, encompassing the physical, cognitive and emotional challenges that can ensue. Based on these findings, the paper concludes by contending that careful consideration needs to be paid to curriculum design and the establishment of a learning environment in which mature age learners can build a resiliency that empowers them to cope with the numerous challenges they face whilst studying. The findings in this paper could well inform future pedagogical and curriculum design for Enabling education.

Contextualisation, Rationale & Future Relevance

Preparatory Programs

Characteristically, preparatory programs are designed to support beginning and interrupted learners from non-traditional backgrounds who are at risk of being marginalised from university study. Such programs offer those in sub-groups traditionally under-represented in

the tertiary sector the opportunity to acquire the set of values and qualities that predispose a learner to a university experience. It would be reasonable to predict from the Australian Government's response to the Bradley Review of Australian Higher Education (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009) that the number of mature age learners seeking higher education opportunity in Australia is set to rise. The federal government's initiatives have significant bearing on the future importance of Enabling education given the intention to see proportional increases in the number of students from low socio economic backgrounds, Indigenous students and students from regional and remote areas in possession of higher education qualifications (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009). CQUniversity's STEPS program is among a plethora of preparatory programs that have emerged from Australian universities since the early 1970's as a means of addressing social imbalance in accessing higher education.

STEPS as a Preparatory Program

STEPS is a thirteen week full time or twenty-six week part time, internal or external program available to learners who are eighteen years or older, of Australian or New Zealand citizenship or to those who hold a permanent resident or humanitarian visa. It is expected that applicants have completed the equivalent of a Year 10 education, or show a propensity to succeed at the tertiary level. Offered for a period of twenty-three years, STEPS has to date afforded in excess of 4500 learners an entry to undergraduate study at universities throughout Australia. A Centrelink eligible program, STEPS is offered to its participants free of tuition fees and textbook charges. The target audience for STEPS are those learners from equity groups that have been traditionally recognised by the Commonwealth Government as disadvantaged in their access to higher education.

Characteristically, STEPS applicants seek to access higher education but find they lack the essential knowledge and skills to gain successful entry. Many have been hindered by both past and present educational, social or cultural circumstances and most have serious misgivings about their academic ability and capability to succeed. In general however, STEPS students are highly committed and dedicated learners who have a real thirst for knowledge. Determined to succeed, STEPS students show great courage in their quest to achieve what once was considered too far out of reach. Many students face very challenging personal circumstances, yet, in the main, they are successful in conquering the obstacles that would once have located them on the perimeter of higher education. The STEPS program not only provides a pathway into university but aims to instil in its students the confidence and skills necessary to a successful undergraduate study experience. Most

learners view STEPS as a starting point, an educational experience that will facilitate a tertiary entry and thus an enhanced quality of life through an improved educational standing.

STEPS curriculum design

In general, preparatory programs have as crucial to their design a curriculum that addresses the challenges encountered by novice learners at the tertiary level, be they educational, cultural, social, economic or personal (Cullity, 2006). Curriculum design generally centres on the means by which mature age learners may be assisted to gain the knowledge, skills and personal attributes to progress to university studies. However, in order to acquire qualities essential to transit to such studies, it could be argued that there is a demand for a curriculum that offers more than just an opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills (Cantwell, 2004; Cullity, 2006; Flint & Frey, 2003). Thus, the intention of STEPS is to present an holistic curriculum that allows students to not only learn to write an academic essay, and acquire basic mathematics and computer skills, but also to discover the value of an optimistic outlook on life and learning and acquire a higher level of confidence. The curriculum is therefore designed to have learners acquire a more fully developed understanding of self and an acceptance of self as capable, intelligent and capable of embarking on the tertiary experience.

The STEPS curriculum actively encourages the mature age students to reflect on themselves as learners. Pedagogical frameworks and strategies underpinned by adult learning principles (Knowles, 1998; Foley, 2000) and transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 2000; Cranton, 2006) challenge the mature age learners to reformulate perceptions of themselves as learners through critical reflection on long held assumptions about their learning (Mezirow, 2000, p. 19) and the consequences of holding such. When curriculum is structured to provide opportunities to deconstruct assumptions and perceptions of self as learner, there is potential for real personal growth through transformative learning. It is the intention that the STEPS curriculum will cater to the diverse needs of its cultural and social groups and encourage its students to acquire the skills that will foster a resilience to study.

STEPS component courses

STEPS comprises of four core courses. *Language and Learning* aims to have students acquire the reading, thinking and writing skills necessary for academic purposes. *Transition Mathematics 1* is a course in elementary mathematics designed to have students commence work on the foundation concepts, rules and methods of basic mathematics. *Computing for Academic Assignment Writing*, a basic computer literacy course, aims to make students

aware of the fundamental operations of a computer and promotes familiarity and competency with the essentials of word-processing, report writing, PowerPoint presentation; spreadsheets, and the Internet. *Tertiary Preparation Skills* aims to introduce students to the skills necessary for academic studies. As such, students are familiarised with the diversity of university programs, courses and procedures and most develop oral communication techniques as well as organisational strategies and research skills necessary for academic success. In combination, the STEPS courses provide a solid foundation of skills and knowledge that can enhance articulation to university studies, not to mention the significant personal growth that can be experienced through transformative learning.

Transformative Learning Theory

Transformative learning theory seeks to explain the cognitive, affective and operative dimensions of adult learning. Often portrayed as a rational, cognitive conception, more recent interpretations now incorporate the affective, emotional and extrarational dimensions of personal change. These interpretations include a constructivist-developmental conception (Daloz, 1999; Taylor, 2000), an extrarational conception (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Scott, 1997; Boyd, 1991; Dirkx, 1997; 1998; 2000; Cranton, 2002; 2006) and an ecological conception (O'Sullivan, 2003). Transformative learning essentially occurs when an individual's taken-for-granted assumptions and expectations supporting beliefs, feelings and judgements are critically assessed and revised. From a developmental point of view, transformative learning occurs when the mature age learner constructs new meaning structures in order to make sense of their changing world (Dirkx, 1997). It calls for the learner to broaden their perspectives and come to see that values and beliefs of others, though different to their own, are equally valid (Taylor, 2000).

However, while some may experience exhilaration as a result of significant personal change, for others the experience can be 'traumatic and overwhelming' (Taylor, 2000, p. 160). Thus, the extra-rational interpretation of transformative learning theory highlights the role emotion, spirit and soul, intuition, and imagination play in the transformative learning process, representative of what Dirkx (1997, p. 84) refers to as 'an attempt to embrace the messiness and disorder that is adult learning'. Playing an important role in the process of transforming long held perspectives is the social group or the learning community of which the mature age learner is part, a description of which now follows.

Learning Communities

Learning communities is a concept that is used in diverse ways, but in this paper, it is its close association to lifelong learning that is of greatest relevance, and more specifically, the creation of a learning environment in which mature age learners experience success. While definitions of learning communities vary from context to context, the definition that best informs the underpinning philosophy of the Enabling program discussed in this paper is that espoused by Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews and Smith (1990, p. 19):

A learning community is any one of a variety of curricular structures that link together several existing courses- or actually restructure the curricular material entirely-so that students have opportunities for deeper understanding of and integration of the material they are learning, and more interaction with one another and their teachers as fellow participants in the learning enterprise.

Structured learning communities typify many contemporary post-compulsory educational contexts. Common to the many conceptions of learning communities are two key characteristics: *shared knowledge* and *shared knowing* (Tinto, 1997, p.4). *Shared knowledge* is promoted through the construction of a coherent educational experience in which 'students come to share, as a community of learners, a body of knowledge that is itself connected'. *Shared knowing* relates to not only how students come to know each other quickly and relatively intimately, but also how they come to share the experience of trying to know or learn. Within the learning community, the utilisation of collaborative and cooperative pedagogies actively encourages students in taking active roles in the construction of new knowledge.

Learning communities generate many important benefits. They provide a supportive 'learning space' (Tinto, 1997, p. 13) that promotes working and learning together; they enhance the students' learning and educational attainment; they reduce attrition; and, they benefit the institution, broadening the 'educational 'repertoire'... and the possibilities for student learning' (Tinto, 1997, p. 13). Kilpatrick, Barrett and Jones (2003, p. 3) believe learning communities can create new knowledge that benefits both the individual and the community. They cite learning communities as places in which a common or shared purpose is a focal objective; where collaboration, partnership and learning are promoted; where diversity is respected; and where potential and outcomes are enhanced. Tinto (1998) attributes learning communities as being instrumental in the development of supportive peer groups to assist students in balancing the struggles they face in the higher education context. Tinto (1998) also claims the learning community influences the students' desire to continue on to further studies. From an inclusive viewpoint, McKegg (2005, p. 294) values the opportunity learning communities provide in terms of embracing different cultural

backgrounds and allowing the student to 'have a voice [and] to feel safe articulating fears and ideas'. Inevitably embroiled in any conception of learning communities and transformative learning is the notion of resiliency, described below.

Resiliency

Many mature age learners are confronted with challenges and obstacles that in one way or another hinder their potential for learning. In seeking a solution, many turn to others for advice or suggestions on how to overcome personal adversity. However, a resilient individual is one who can draw on their own resources to enact effective interventions to find solutions to problematic situations. Although no universal definition of resiliency can be found (Knight, 2007), resilience is generally associated with optimism and is based on the premise that 'we can encounter change and adversity but still find hope' (Knight, 2007, p. 543). Goleman (2002) conceptualises resilience in terms of one's emotional intelligence and its role in facilitating one's ability to cope with change. In a similar light, Greenberg (2006) asserts that the stresses associated with learning can be better tolerated by those learners who take responsibility for their emotional state.

Risk and protective factors are fundamental concepts associated with resiliency. Risk factors, which can be internal and external, are those issues related to 'disabling, cultural, economic, or medical conditions that deny or minimize opportunities and resources for human development' (Resiliency Initiatives, 2001). Protective factors refer to particular qualities and situations that facilitate the reversal or alteration of expected negative outcomes, and it is through the provision and nurturance of these protective factors that resiliency can be promoted (Resiliency Initiatives, 2001). Thus, for the mature age learner, family networks, peer relationships, relationships with teachers and commitment to learning represent components through which resiliency can be promoted. More specifically, strengths such as self-concept, self-control, cultural sensitivity, empowerment, social sensitivity and empathy provide important internal strengths to the adult resiliency framework (Resiliency Initiatives, 2001).

Enduring the bombardment

Personal change can entail degrees of uncertainty and exposure of self to possible threats of failure or fear of the unknown, for maintaining our assumptions provides us with safety, and to question them is to question our 'assimilated ways of knowing, believing, and feeling' (Cranton, 2006, p. 23). However, in avoiding the process of change, the mature age learner potentially faces stagnation. The constant bombardment of physical, cognitive and emotional demands can significantly challenge the mature age learner as they juggle their multiple life roles. Bombardment can come in the form of financial constraints, job and family

commitments, making sense of institutional practices and protocols, and a lack of family support. In the next section of this paper, the authors present data findings to illustrate demands that conspire to make the mature learner's experience of a return to study akin to being hit from all directions.

The physical

It is well documented that many mature age learners already juggle multiple roles before they take on the additional role of student (Stone, 2008; Cullity, 2006; Darab, 2004). Despite the fact that Enabling education can entail very positive experiences, external factors can negatively affect the best laid plans. Many Enabling students face financial restraints, paid employment pressures, and stress related to juggling multi-roles. For many women in particular, the additional role of student can conflict with the many other life roles they fulfil. Debbenham and May (2004) found that when women take on the additional role of student, they are in general, still largely responsible for family care and the majority of domestic, household chores and child minding responsibilities. The implication of having to juggle so many roles was made manifest by STEPS student Ella, a forty-two year old, married woman with four children:

The pressure of time, from working at night, being a wife and mother with household duties, civic responsibilities and children with sporting commitments, was hard. I found that I stuck to myself a lot and didn't have time to give to the class. At times I even thought about pulling out of STEPS.

Twenty-eight year old STEPS student Tess, a single mother of two children, had similar physical challenges as the program reached its mid-way point:

I'm feeling pretty run down at the moment. I think it has been my son so sick and with nine lots of anti-biotics. Um, with the 'throwaway society' topic I sat last night and I just couldn't get going. I can't do the maths and the language at the same time. I can't concentrate. I haven't been well since the weekend and that hasn't helped and trying to keep everyone happy is so hard.

The tension experienced by both Ella and Tess is not unusual in an Enabling context. Darab (2004) suggests that the volume of women's time commitments have resulted in intolerable workloads, and that the unbounded nature of family work involves significant time costs. Likewise, Stone (2008) found that lack of time, time management skills, balancing the needs of study, home and family and changes in family relationships were challenges facing the female student. Stone (2008, p. 279) also found that female students had to accommodate their study time around other family and domestic responsibilities and ensure their study hours did not 'impinge on family time'. Thus, many women, already fully tasked with

demanding domestic and other routines, such as the case for Ella, do experience difficulties when trying to integrate study requirements into their weekly schedule.

The cognitive

For other mature age learners, cognitive challenges can problematise their return to study. For many, the hiatus from formal schooling has residual distant memories of formal prose and lapses in the need for certain cognitive processes. Trying to comprehend the structure and discourse of academic writing and associated protocols can be anxiety provoking, and the “confusing culture” of higher education, with its rules and regulations, word limits, language, assessment assumptions and other ‘academic’ issues’ (Askham, 2008, p. 90) can give rise to tension. The difficulty of cognitive processing was illustrated by June, a thirty-two year old single STEPS student:

Even though for the essay I know what to say, I just don't know how to say it. I just can't get it out of my head on to the paper! I was yelling in my head, 'You can't do this' but Julie was saying, 'Yes you can'. I am trying to enjoy it but I am finding it so hard.

STEPS student Tara, a married mother of five, experienced a similar apprehension:

Writing is still a challenge for me. I'm still trying to get from the thought to the paper in the proper sentence and essay structure. That is what challenges me and I think I am slowly getting here. I listen to others and they tell me that I am not on the track, but I am.

For Bill, a single, twenty-eight year old STEPS student, trying to synthesise the information to compile his academic essay, was clearly problematic:

The research essay was a big challenge for me to start with. I could get conclusions very easily. The introduction was an absolute nightmare for me and I eventually got the introduction okay by looking at my conclusion then I looked at the body of the research assignment and.... It's not there! And I thought, 'Oh no, what's going on here?'

The emotional

Embroided in the physical and cognitive challenges confronting many mature age learners is the construct of emotion. Foremost in the formal learning context is the issue of anxiety and fear as they step into the ‘intellectual unknown’, and place their ‘private and public ‘neck’ on the line’ (Cantwell, 2004, p. 12). Knowles (1998) suggests the mature age student’s learning experience is optimised in a non-threatening, challenging, supportive environment. Yet despite the best intentions of the educator, as the mature age learner comes to terms with new identities, mismatches between home and the formal learning context, confusion and uncertainty in light of new and diverse worldviews, and interaction with individuals from many diverse socio-economic and other backgrounds, emotions can run high. As a STEPS student

and forty-eight year old mother of four, Rita's comment provides insight into the emotion she experienced at one point during the program:

I was upset with the rudeness of some. We had a lot of rudeness and comments that were unfair and people were very demanding. I also had trouble with thinking, well I can't get caught up in their [class members] stress 'cause I've got my own. That was the hardest but I handled it okay, I think.

Despite varying levels of anticipation and excitement experienced as a result of their return to formal learning, lack of self-confidence is experienced by many mature age learners. Cullity's (2005, p. 1) findings substantiate self-doubt as one of the most common causes of anxiety, manifest in a complex interplay of 'attitudinal, academic and social' dimensions that affect the mature age learner as they prepare for undergraduate study. This was clearly the case for Tara who articulated a lack of confidence in her writing ability:

Low self esteem with my writing is still a major thing. It's still there. I just can't get over the line 'cause I don't know if it will be right or not. And I don't want to look silly or anything like that.

Another factor emanating from prior learning failures and negative schooling experiences that can adversely impact the mature age learner's study potential is the perception many have of themselves as learners. Cantwell and Grayson (2002) suggest the impacts of prior experiences of failure for mature age learners can have a negative impact on perception of self as learner, and that different types of learning demanded in the university environment can fuel the notion of personal inadequacy. Cantwell and Mulhearn (1997) note that most of the Enabling women in a study they conducted expressed feelings of alienation from aspects of the learning environment, manifested by their sense of inadequacy and anxiety, as well as fear of possible humiliation. This was illustrated by June, who, despite sharing her many notable travel and work experiences with the class, perceived herself as a less than capable learner, clearly clouded by negative memories of school:

I was hopeless at English at school. I never was a good writer. It has always been a downfall of mine. My spelling is hopeless too.

Bert, a forty-one year old married man with two children was another whose past negative schooling experience clearly impacted on his perception of himself as a learner:

I've never really expressed my view and probably that goes back to grade 4 and the humiliation I felt then... by a teacher who made me stand up on my desk for a long period of time for something I had written. I have never opened up since for fear of disgrace.

Feelings of guilt and regret can be emotional factors that negatively impact the mature age learner on their return to study. Anecdotal evidence suggests that when mothers return to formal study, many can feel their familial roles are compromised. This was evidenced by Tara who lamented the time not spent with her toddler:

My two year old is talking a lot more just with me being away and it has been a bit heart-wrenching. She's about twelve months behind with speech with talking and she's actually putting three and four words together when she's talking. She never did that before. I'm sorry that I'm not there seeing it. A couple of weeks ago she went through a stage where she cried every time I left, which made me feel guilty, thinking 'Should I be doing this? Should I be here?'

Sonia, a thirty-five year old married mother of two, spoke of the emotional labour that being a student entailed for her:

Juggling work, children, sport, husband, time management skills.... The pressure has at times played havoc with my emotions. I don't have the time to spend with the family or do the other things I used to do. I even went downstairs to study last week and didn't even cook tea!

Lack of family support can be another negative factor in the success of the mature age learner returning to study. Abbott-Chapman, Braithwaite and Godfrey's (2004) have found that changes in family circumstances and the level of family support can have a serious impact on the student's motivation and academic progress. The authors suggest that strong family support is one of the most important factors outside the university in ensuring persistence and success in higher education studies. Likewise, Cantwell and Mulhearn (1997) have found that lack of family support can impact negatively on the ability of some mature age women to cope. It was clear that Gina, twenty-five year old STEPS student had reflected on the lack of family support she experienced:

The family and friends that I thought would support me and be happy for me were a little bit jealous and envious and wanted to see me fall flat on my face ... I found out who was for me and who was who was against me.

Lack of support from family can also be manifest in the low aspirations that some family members have for their parent, partner or sibling-turned-student. Cullity (2006) perceives this attitude can actually discourage some mature aged students from attending university, for to do so can risk being ostracised by family and friends who send 'ambivalent messages' (Spreadbury, 2007, p. 77). This was clearly the case for Bill who spoke of the family tension surrounding his decision to study:

I told my father what I was doing and why I was doing it and I thought he understood at the start of it, but I got a phone from him last week telling me about a job being a priority. I told him 'This is a priority!' He will come to understand it as time goes by.

Minimal aspirations due to low socio economic backgrounds and low status employment can be a negative factor for some mature age learners. The transition away from low socio economic background status through education can entail a fragile balance between the mature age learner's realisation of their potential and 'maintaining a sense of an authentic self' (Reay, 2002, p. 404). Reay (2002) argues such learners can feel like impostors in the higher education context and thoughts of educational failure and associated shame are never far away. As a twenty-seven year old single STEPS student, Andy's sense of ambivalence was clear when he speculated about what he might do post STEPS:

Well I came into STEPS to do teaching but then all the ideas that have come into my head and I might not be a teacher. I might just be something else like a health and safety officer.

Tess's sense of unworthiness was manifest when she compared her past career with that of her new student status:

When I started STEPS, feelings of doubt filled my head...I wondered, would anyone notice that I was just a lowly shopkeeper trying to masquerade as a higher more intelligent being? I kept waiting for someone to say 'You can't do this'.

Implications

Reflections from the participants in this paper indicate that the return to study can be physically, cognitively and emotionally challenging as old identities clash with new and create tension between multiple life roles and the new role of 'student'. To this end, the following recommendations are made in relation to the nature of preparatory programs. First is the creation and maintenance of a stimulating, responsive, intellectual learning community wherein the mature age learner, regardless of previous schooling experiences or socio-economic background, is empowered to engage in collaborative relationships with peers and educators. It is also crucial that educators establish opportunities that foster social connections and promote transformative learning as a way for the mature age learner to deconstruct long held negative perceptions of self as learner and conceptualise new perspectives. Additionally, educators need to acknowledge the diversity of life role challenges that confront the mature age learner and take such into consideration when designing and implementing curriculum.

Of vital importance is the educator's acknowledgment that learning is comprised of physical, cognitive and emotional dimensions and that each can significantly impact the success of the mature age learner. In the enhancement of a successful educational experience, Enabling educators should strive to promote resiliency in their mature age learners as a way to address the challenges they confront as they take up the role of student, and through an

open door policy, ensure support from the learning community is readily available. Of equal importance is the development of an holistic curriculum that encapsulates frameworks and self-management strategies that successfully develop self-regulated and engaged learners, alongside the gradual acquisition of skills, knowledge and confidence that will prepare them for their future undergraduate studies.

Conclusion

Preparatory programs across the higher education sector provide a much needed pathway for those underrepresented at the tertiary level; however, to be truly effective, such programs should aim to foster more than just skill acquisition. To address the needs of the cohort targeted for participation, Enabling education should look to the whole person and the myriad of factors that have bearing on the success of the learner. Over the duration of the STEPS program, most mature age learners acquire the knowledge and skills deemed essential for success at the tertiary level. More importantly, STEPS provides them with the opportunity to develop a sense of their own power to confront the many obstacles that may stand in the way of success. Many gain the confidence to endure as they are 'hit from all directions' in a new learning experience that is accompanied by a degree of chaos, confusion and uncertainty. The process of enduring the struggle and successfully overcoming the obstacles that have previously blocked the learner's progress, results not only in academic progress and the development of resilience, but can result in personal transformation for those who persist.

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