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A Springboard to Learning

DIANA PERCY

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Introduction

My daughter was three when I returned to study. I was a single parent, in the throes of a stormy divorce and living on a Social Security benefit.

My major motivation for returning to study was anger. I was angry at the mess my life was in, the dead-end and exploitative job that I had just left, and at having to struggle with inadequate finances. I was enraged by my soon-to-be ex-husband, and depressed by being stuck in such an all-round unenviable position.

Study was a way out. It satisfied a need for direction, gave my life structure and introduced hope of security and fair employment in the future. And it meant a change of lifestyle.

I spent the next three years in full-time study, and the fourth and a later post-graduate year as a part-time and external student.

Intellectually, emotionally and physically it was taxing. I considered dropping out many times. Only with the encouragement and support of friends and college staff did I manage to hang on. I had a burning desire to show the world that this was something I could do, and felt furious at those who didn't think I could.

It changed my life.

Later, I spent eight years counselling adult students in tertiary education and now train adults to be volunteer telephone counsellors.

My experiences as a student, a counsellor and a trainer/teacher have led me to believe that adult learning is dramatically different from, and more exciting than, our earlier learning experiences. I find that teaching adults is a challenging and stimulating process that's two-way: I'm continually learning, too.

The process of learning continues throughout life and I've found it a vital, enriching and dynamic experience. The formal learning required for assessment is only an aspect of the learning process. Much of what you learn will occur incidentally.

The complex personal development that often accompanies formal learning for adults is marked by increased feelings of self-worth and fulfilment. Mostly, this happens on its own. However, by sharpening your awareness, I hope you'll increase your understanding of yourself and maximise your development as a returning student.

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