The hero's journey: Stories of women returning to education[1]

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Abstract

This paper draws upon the metaphor of the "hero's journey" to further analyse seven stories of women returning to education. These stories have formed the basis of a recent book publication by the authors (Stone & O'Shea, 2012) and are derived from two complementary but separate research studies (O'Shea, 2007; Stone, 2008). None of the women featured in this article have a parent who went to university and all have a number of competing demands in their lives including families, partners and employment. This paper aims to both frame the richly descriptive nature of these stories within a heroic metaphor and also to indicate how these stories, whilst unique, share common thematic elements and turning points. The paper foregrounds these commonalities capturing a universal narrative and also explores how this mythical framework could be used by both educators and students to conceptualise movements within this environment.

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Introduction

> The challenge of contemporary education is to regain a sense of shared purpose and to recognize, all over again, the power of the learning process in transforming lives. (Brown & Moffett, 1999, p18)

The transformative power of education is not a new concept but as Brown and Moffett (1999) point out, the need to continually remind ourselves, as educators, of the impact education can have on personal lives and identities is vital. Highlighting this transformation in powerful yet innovative ways can be challenging for researchers, a challenge we, the authors of this paper, faced when, in conducting separate pieces of research, we had interviewed women who had decided to come to university after a significant gap in formal learning. The thematic analysis of these interviews and the deeply personal, yet powerfully significant narratives that these conversations produced, necessitated an alternative approach to exploring their experiences.

In reviewing our analysis of these stories, seven of which we collected together for a book on the experiences of women returning to education (Stone & O'Shea, 2012), we were prompted by the words of a colleague to consider these stories from a different perspective. Commenting in an email to us on the often poetic nature of the women's stories, our colleague observed how each of the women "were expressing a mythic experience. Women are rarely considered in the hero myth but these stories spoke to me of the hero's journey. They had each been in a dark place and emerged with new or recovered selves" (J. May, personal communication, December 11, 2012).

We were both struck by this metaphor and the applicability of it to the very powerful stories to which we had been privileged to have access. The collective wisdom of mythic legend and metaphor does indeed provide one way to open up these stories. In exploring the women's individual stories from this perspective, it has become obvious to us that common thematic episodes associated with heroic endeavour and transformation run across the narratives.

This paper will explore the women's stories drawing upon the hero's journey as a metaphorical lens. In doing this, the context for both studies will firstly be outlined and an overview of how metaphor can be applied within narrative inquiry. A detailed explanation of the thematic elements associated with the hero's journey will then provide the background to the analysis of the narrative data derived from research. The concluding discussion will focus on how educators might draw upon this metaphor within the higher education sector.

Background to the research

Separate pieces of research were conducted by each of the authors of this paper during 2006 - 2007 (O'Shea, 2007; Stone, 2008). At the time of undertaking the two studies, both researchers/authors were professionally engaged in university student support positions. These roles brought them into contact with many first year students, enabling the authors to witness the challenges and the celebrations of these first year students. Such exposure provided the impetus to the research outlined in this article. Within the two studies a combined total of 37 students were interviewed about their experiences of being at university. From these 37

individual stories, seven were chosen as illustrations of the experiences of mature age students, and used as case studies for a book entitled *Transformations and self-discovery: Stories of women returning to education* (Stone & O'Shea, 2012). All seven women were enrolled in undergraduate degree programs at a large regional university in Australia and each was asked to reflect on their journey into higher education. None had a parent who had been to university, all but one of them had

research to be doing. A postmodern feminist perspective (Olesen, 2005; Yeatman, 1994) was used to deconstruct the women's stories, revealing "the practices, discourses and implications for control of women's lives" (Olesen, p. 247) that are ever-present when women, particularly those with children and/or male partners, choose to take an independent path such as going to university, which impacts upon their caring responsibilities as wives and mothers.

Table 1: *Details of the Participants*							
Name	Age	Attend	Marital Status	Children / Ages	Entry pathway*	Bachelor of	Year
Nicki	33	F/T	Single	One (2 yrs)	HSC / TAFE	Teaching / Arts	1
Mandy	38	P/T	Married	Five (15,13,10,8,6)	AC	Architecture	2
Fiona	35	F/T	Single	One (7)	AC	Social Science	2
Katrina	42	F/T	Widowed	Two (11,7)	AC	Teaching / Arts	2
Nerida	49	F/T	Married	Three (26,23,22)	AC	Grad Dip of Education (Primary)	4
Simone	34	F/T	Married	Four (8,9,3&18)	Enrolled in AC	N/A	Access
Susie	38	F/T	Married	Two (3&6)	AC	Social Science	1

*HSC= Higher School Certificate; TAFE: Technical and Further Education; AC= Access Course

entered university through an access course for mature-age entry and all presented as Anglo-Australian. Table 1 provides further details about each of the women.

A narrative method (Polkinghorne, 1988; Riessman, 1993; Elliott, 2005) was used to interview the students, to analyse the data and to describe the student journeys, based upon each student's individual narrative about their experiences. With mature age students now forming at least 40% of the higher education population and with women outnumbering men by almost two to one in the over-35 age group at university (Centre for the Study of Higher Education, 2008), this seemed like timely

Women and higher education participation

Wakeling and Kyriacou (2010) point out that the gender divide in the numbers of male and female enrolments in higher education has virtually closed in most countries internationally. Indeed in countries such as the UK and Australia, statistics indicate that women are choosing to pursue higher education in greater numbers than men. Reporting on a decade of data, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2010), highlights how the proportion of people aged 15-64 years with a Bachelor degree or above increased by 5.1% for males and by 8.3 % for females. The

number of females with a Bachelor degree or above has continued to increase, reaching 21% for males and 25% for females at May 2009. However, the increasing number of female students does not necessarily mean that this educational landscape is characterised by equality. Rather female educational participation continues to be gender biased, with women continuing to be significantly overrepresented in traditional female caring professions such as health and education (Wakeling & Kyriacou).

Research and literature on female returners also highlights the unique issues faced by both older females when they return to higher education and younger women from working class or low socio-economic backgrounds. Both groups are often restricted in their choice and aspirations relating to higher education (Evans, 2009; Gorard et al., 2006; Walkerdine, Lucey, & Melody 2001). For example, much research has demonstrated that care for others continues to be overwhelmingly seen as women's work. As Gouthro (2006) highlights, the patterns of women's learning are frequently "coordinated around domestic and childrearing responsibilities" (p. 8). This is an echo of Carol Gilligan's much earlier work (1987), which argued that the decisions that women make tend to be defined by an overarching sense of responsibility towards others. As Gilligan explains: "Women not only define themselves in a context of human relationships but also judge themselves in terms of their ability to care" (p. 67). Britton and Baxter (1999) also identified how the women in their study were more inclined to define their academic pursuits in terms of selfishness and guilt rather than self-fulfillment. These authors suggest that if women prioritise their personal needs, this challenges dominant discourses around women's position within the domestic sphere (p. 190). The particular constraints experienced by women returners prompted the focus on female students within this study.

Despite the difficulties faced by women in returning to study, other research has also indicated that going to university or college provides a significant impetus for change in women's lives. The choice to return to education can initiate a sense of empowerment, an increase in confidence and an improvement in employment opportunities. Quinn (2005), for example, highlights how university provided her participants with an "imagined" space, where the dominant discourses shaped by "supermarkets, call centres and lonely train stations" (p. 11) could be resisted and indeed reframed. Instead, the women in our research described university as means to re-imagine and legitimate self in relation to other members of the community—a truly transformative experience. The mythical *hero's journey* supports and highlights the concept of choosing the path of hardship and challenges in order to, ultimately, achieve transformation and growth. It resonates particularly aptly with many of the journeys of mature age women in higher education.

Why the hero's journey? A conceptual framework

> A metaphor or a fiction might open a door that cannot be opened by approaches that are too weighted down by duty to literal truth (Bakan, 1996, p. 7).

The journey metaphor is ubiquitous in narratives whether oral, visual or textual, and the hero's journey has been previously used to consider and understand a range of

educational experiences (Follo, 2002; Goldstein, 2005; Randles, 2012). However, drawing upon the hero's journey to analyse the stories of students returning to education and negotiating their transition to this environment, is largely novel. While Seary and Willans (2004) have applied this construct to stages that students encountered whilst proceeding through a university access program, we have extended the metaphor to assist understanding of the transition into university for students who are older and/or come from backgrounds where attending university deviates from cultural or social norms. The structure of this mythic story can assist in further understanding the journeys that these students take and also, assist in explaining the nuances of this journey on a deeply personal level.

Campbell's (1949) foundational work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* explores the hero's journey as a series of interconnected stages which begin with a state of innocence or unknowing. This state is disrupted and leads to the decision to embark on a journey of adventure where the hero encounters trials and tests; if these are overcome then the hero brings a "gift" to their origins, which may in itself lead to transformation (Brown & Moffett, 1999). The story at its simplest follows the theme of "separation-initiation-return" (Randles, 2012, p. 11) where an individual leaves the current world to travel within a special world and encounters unexpected adventure. The journey has been perceived in terms of light and dark; as the hero travels there is a movement from dark to light, perhaps relative to a new enlightened state. We can all think of many examples of the hero metaphor in literature and film— from Jason and the Argonauts, to Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz and Harry Potter, to name but a few contemporary heroes.

However, the concept of the hero is not without its limitations. Frequently associated with male protagonists often existing in isolation, the hero may not seem an appropriate term to associate with women returning to education. Robbins (2005-2006) recommends a broader interpretation of the word hero, noting that we in the western world tend to be "fed on a steady diet of 'warrior' champions who are traditionally males, and quite often Caucasian" (p. 777). She encourages us instead to view "hero... as a gender-neutral and racially blind word to designate a person who is in the process of individuation... as creators, scholars, pioneers, lovers, caregivers or wise prophets" (p. 777).

Polster (2001) perceives female heroism as essentially different to male heroism, arguing that for women, heroism is "rooted in the particular circumstances and values of women's lives" (p. 13). For Polster (2001), this positionality means that the characteristics of the woman hero are stated in less "adversarial terms" (p. 13) and may be linked to family and community connection:

> Women's heroic choice differs from that of the classic male hero, who has throughout legend physically separated himself from home and family in order to follow his heroic path....Women's quest is to balance her independence with her sensitivity to relationship and connection. (p. 14)

According to Polster (2001), this pull of the family may actually mean that women have greater struggle to contend with initially in their journey but at the culmination of this

journey, she emerges as "an independent person who chooses the way she will be involved and what her contribution will be" (p. 187). This acknowledgement of family also recognises that unlike the typical mythic male hero, solitude is not a necessity and instead this definition of heroism recognises the importance of social and familial networks. Both the need for social networks and the pull of the family are themes that emerged in all the women's stories in this research and will be explored in more detail in the data section of the paper

Using metaphor in narrative inquiry

Using metaphor can assist in opening up narrative accounts and perhaps better assist the reader to "enter empathetically into worlds of experience different from their own" and enable a level of self-analysis and identification whereby "readers become co performers, examining themselves through the evocative power of the narrative text" (Ellis & Bochner, 2002, p. 748). Structurally, narratives can be defined as stories, which move from one "equilibrium" to another, in this way a narrative may commence with a "stable" situation, which is then destabilised by factors or forces (Czarniawska, 2002, p. 735). The resulting state of disequilibrium is then addressed by a differing set of circumstances to create a new equilibrium, this may relate to the initial state but it is not exactly the same (Czarniawska, 2002). Generally, these stories are chronological in that they have a start, some type of plot development and then an ending of sorts. However, the significance of narratives exists beyond the structure; narratives are also situated within a cultural context. While stories told may at one level refer to events within one person's life equally,

these stories also reflect "cultural messages about society" (Muller, 1999, p. 224). When participants are asked to reflect on past events and narrate these, not only are these stories presented in an organisationally coherent way but also, such renditions reveal the significance of these for the narrator. By placing events in a temporal sequence and creating a plot, the narrator is essentially highlighting the significance of some occurrences over others as well as "shaping" these into "meaningful units" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 160). As Polkinghorne highlights: "The humblest narrative is always more than a chronological series of events: it is a gathering together of events into a meaningful story" (p. 131).

Applying the metaphor of the hero's journey to each of women's stories enables insight into the wider cultural implications of these stories. Drawing on an existing literary metaphor can facilitate the generation of ideas, which can then be used to elaborate upon the data; these types of "sensitising concepts" (Blumer, 1954) can assist the researcher in exploring diverse facets of the data. However, to do justice to the material, reading should extend beyond disciplinary boundaries and include sources from a diversity of discipline fields. Literary metaphor should be used in a creative manner to open up narrative accounts and thereby, explore alternative or unusual interpretations of the material. As Noble (1994) argues "the hero is a universal ideal that helps people think about their lives in a more profound and creative way" (p. 8).

Findings

There are many variations of the hero's journey narrative and whilst each shares common elements, the particular nuances

of plot lines do diverge. For the purposes of this paper, we have drawn upon Follo's (2002) work, which uses the hero's journey metaphor to describe the process by which young women enter and succeed in a traditionally male educational setting. Follo (2002) highlights how "the myth gives a coherent frame for the... crucial elements of the female students' stories" (p. 296). Follo lists these crucial elements as being: travelling in a foreign country; meeting with many trials but also some helpers; and becoming stronger, wiser and more self-confident than they had been before they started the journey (p. 296). Focussing on the myth of the hero's journey, and borrowing these three crucial elements from Follo, we can represent the journeys of the female mature aged students featured in our research, in the following terms.

Travelling in a foreign country

Being the first amongst one's families and friends to enter university can indeed be likened to being "a stranger in a foreign land" (Mann, 2001, p. 11). None of the women who participated in our studies had a parent who had been to university. Most did not have any other family member, or even any friends who had been to university. Entering university was, for each of them, much like travelling in a foreign country, where a new language, new customs and new expectations had to be learnt, with no one to teach them. The anxiety associated with this is clearly expressed in their stories; when reflecting on her first year of study, Katrina highlighted the fears associated with making the decision to "travel":

> The first six weeks were a nightmare... very overwhelming... I had worked for a long time as an admin assistant, and admin work is nothing like academic studies, so I found it all very frightening for the first six weeks and was close to giving it all away. (Katrina)

The women also all responded to some type of call to awakening which initiated this journey. For some this was a result of a major development or crisis in their existing life, for others it was a long held dream that seemed out of reach before but then became a possibility. Once the women had decided to embark on the journey, the almost alien nature of the university was described; again this was reminiscent of a foreign land:

> It's hard to work out exactly what the lecturers want and that's a very steep learning curve. (Barbara)

> Nothing can prepare you for an academic essay - it was like trying to learn a foreign language. (Nerida)

This lack of understanding about institutional expectations was not solely limited to the level or type of work required. Many of the participants revealed a lack of clarity or knowledge about quite fundamental institutional processes; for example, enrolment procedures, financial requirements, timetabling. Overall, in the first year of study there seemed to be an assumption of knowledge on the part of the institution, leading to Susie describing her arrival as a "culture shock". For Mandy, these initial struggles were clearly related to her first in family status as she keenly felt the disadvantage of not having a significant other who could be relied upon for advice:

> None of my family has ever studied and they don't understand what it is about. (Mandy)

Despite encountering initial difficulties, the seven women all continued their journey beyond these initial stages, each obtaining support and assistance from a variety of sources.

Meeting trials but also helpers

There are both allies and enemies on this journey and each of the women reflected upon significant trials, which they had to overcome, particularly in the early days of their studies. These included the academic trials of learning how to meet the academic requirements such as essay writing, studying for exams, time management and so on. However, the trials that were most challenging were the personal ones—how to successfully combine their studies with their family responsibilities, including caring for children, partners, ageing parents—as well as with paid work to help support the family financially. For many women, the gendered role of "carer" can still be inescapable, resulting in a great deal of internal conflict and constant juggling. The women in this study also struggled to achieve their academic goals without neglecting their family responsibilities.

> I was either at work or had the kids pressuring me for time with them. I just wanted them to leave me alone and let me do what I needed to do. (Simone)

> Often I have to miss tutorials because of other commitments, with the children and so on. (Katrina)

> I've got a lot of guilt with having Michael in day-care five days, and it's really hard, especially in the morning when he bawls. (Barbara)

> I had a big breakdown during the first semester, because the children were all sick, and we had lots of financial problems. (Mandy)

For a number of these participants, the home or community were not the "safe spaces" as described by the female academics interviewed by Alfred (2001), which provided the support and strength needed to operate in the higher education environment. Instead, the home was often perceived as constraining both the women's desires and success. To succeed in the first year of university required some of the women to keep family and university life quite separate, such as Katrina who explained how *"…as soon as my children are in bed I'm in front of the computer or I'm reading uni books and articles"*. However, such separation was not necessarily viewed negatively, Mandy rejoiced in *"having something"* just for herself explaining "… *for the first time in 15 years I can just get in the car and drive up and get lost in books and research …independence. And it's something of mine. I don't have to necessarily share it with Mike* [husband] *and the children"*.

The women's stories also clearly indicated that without helpers along the way, the trials might have proved too much for them. All had learnt to rely on help from others in a number of different ways. Brown and Moffett (1999) highlight how initiation is a core to any hero's journey: This relates to being "tried and tested" (p. 16) by individuals or a being that seems to be more powerful than the individual competing the journey. To overcome these powerful forces, the use of "amulets" is proposed and like the mythic heroes, our student participants also had to recourse to more tangible amulets often in the form of the available support systems and social groups. Key helpers included supportive lecturers, university support services, other friendly and supportive campus staff

and, above all, friends, both on and off campus.

> If I need help with my studies and so on, first off I go to my friends. If we don't understand something we talk among ourselves. (Fiona)

> When I got to the point that I wanted to give it up I spoke to student support... and I had some counselling and ... that was excellent, releasing fear and anxiety. (Katrina)

> When you get to uni and you get friends, that makes it a bit better. (Susie)

> The lecturers and tutors are better than good – they're approachable, you feel confident with them. (Nerida)

Randles (2012) also draws upon the hero's journey to explore the acquisition of a teacher identity for apprentice music teachers. The author suggests that the hero's journey can be used to demystify this process, and that a series of tests are applied to the individual to strengthen their character and make them "stronger in person" (p. 15). For the women in this study, it was often the assignments that literally provided these "tests" of character – good grades on assignments provided a concrete basis for belongingness and their ability to complete the journey. Nicki explained how her initial confusion turned to elation after she received the results for her first set of assignments:

> I actually got a bit upset 'cause for my first assignments I got two D's, and I said to Mum, "Ohhh, I got two D's!". And then a girlfriend explained, that's a Distinction, and I went "Ohhh! That's all right!" Yeah that took a bit of getting used to...

Returning stronger, wiser and more self-confident

As in Follo's study (2002), the women in this study all indicated that they are feeling stronger, wiser and more self-confident than they did before they began the journey. The space offered by university provided the means for growth and change and for a sense of "empowerment" and control in their personal lives. Mezirow (2003) has written extensively on the transformative possibilities of learning, arguing that educators can provide opportunities for adults to develop skills to be "critically reflective" (p. 62) and thereby open up possibilities for personal change or transformation. For the learners in this study, this transformation was both emotional and intuitive, reflecting "a shift of consciousness that dramatically and irreversibly alters our way of being in the world" (O'Sullivan, 2003, p. 203). When the stories of these women are examined in terms of a hero's journey, the impact of this decision on their lives and the significance of this on so many levels becomes apparent. For some of the women, the changes were manifested in terms of self-confidence or self-belief but for others like Nicki, a sole parent with a very young child, the changes were far more fundamental. At the end of her first year at university, Nicki described how she:

> ...feel[s] like a different person. I feel like a better person, and I feel like I could be a better mum to Michael [son], and I feel like I am happy, and that is a really good feeling... it is giving me back my sense of self-prowess, it's definitely not just an educational experience. It's like a life learning experience too.

As Polster (2001) points out, the women heroes in these stories largely remained

within the family unit but often their new student status resulted in different relationships with family members. For example Nerida outlined the differences in how her children perceive her. At the beginning of her studies she explained how: "*...people were a bit patronising – pat mum on the head, she'll be right*" whereas towards the end of the degree, the children *"started to see me not just as a mother, but more of a person"*. Equally, changes in relationships with partners and husbands were recorded, as Simone so eloquently described: *"He has come to realise that I am a person, I do have a direction I want to go in. I don't want to spend the rest of my life doing something I don't want to do. I want to be happy..."*.

Discussion and recommendations

In our collective heroic journey in education, facing chaos and complexity involves supreme truth telling. It requires that we recognise, without flinching, the dragons at our gates and the serpents in our gardens. (Brown & Moffett, 1999, p. 16)

The hero's journey provides a metaphor for understanding the quest for knowledge and learning and provides a framework for understanding how these women moved through this educational environment, particularly as they made the adjustment to their first year at university.

The normalisation of the stages of this journey is required in the higher education sector, particularly as more and more people from diverse backgrounds enter the university sector. By recognising the various stages of university study as a series of critical stages in a hero's journey, the process of adjustment is negotiated as an ongoing facet of this experience rather than something that occurs in the initial weeks or months of study. These critical moments are not limited to the first year of study but rather are more obvious at this stage. Students do not experience transition as a time-bounded phase but instead the year is characterised as a series of highs and lows, distinguished by a period of building up, often accompanied by some sort of emotional high, a possible low and then the whole process repeats itself. This undulating landscape resembles a hero's journey which may include initial arrival, adjustment to learning, acculturating to a new social environment, forming a student identity, navigating assignment due dates, recommencing the new semester or academic year, participating in exams and so forth. There may be some consistency across student cohorts and institutions but ultimately the level of importance and emotions attributed to these various facets of the journey will differ according to the individual and the program choice. However, making the repetitive and ongoing nature of these moments explicit to students is necessary so that individuals are better prepared for the somewhat volatile and changing nature of the university experience. With such knowledge and understanding, students may become better equipped to persist in this environment.

Whilst universities cannot predict or control the external circumstances of students' lives, the increasing numbers and diversity of university populations does require a rethink about taken for granted aspects of this learning environment. Despite institutional rhetoric, there remains a lack of commitment to accommodating the needs of diverse students at the most fundamental level. For example, the most recent report of University *Student Finances* (Bexley,

Daroesman, Arkoudis & James, 2013) indicates a continued reliance "on a traditional model of a higher education student as a 'middle-class school leaver living at home' an anomaly which contributes significant "dysfunction" to the sector (Thomas, 2013, para 19). As educators and professional personnel working in university environments, one change we can all make is to reconceptualise the challenges that mature age students face through the lens of the hero's journey. This alternative perspective can assist us to focus on the strength and wisdom of these students. Viewing their transition into the first year of university and their journey beyond as a heroic endeavour, inevitably brings about a shift in perception. Requests for assignment extensions, for example, are much more likely to elicit empathy than irritation when such students are perceived as embarking upon a hero's journey. Ultimately, the student will experience the university environment as supportive and the educators within it as friends and allies, rather than foes along their journey, if the heroic nature of their journey is understood as such. Robbins (2005-2006), in encouraging lawyers to better understand the heroic nature of the journeys of many of their clients, points out that "heroic journeys provide one possibility for conceptualising the client's story" (p. 801) and that "casting the client as the hero is the option, then, that allows the client to have flaws" (p. 780). Similarly, in casting the mature age student as the hero, we give her "permission to be imperfect" (p. 776).

Lawson (2005), in talking about the use of the hero's journey metaphor in counselling clients for a range of personal difficulties and life stresses, provides us with another example of the potential for self-growth that this metaphor can facilitate. "Using the structure of the hero's journey as a conceptual metaphor for the process of development can make these struggles seem more manageable for clients and can help the counsellor lead them through a journey of personal growth" (p. 144). Similarly, educators have a significant role to play in leading students through a journey of transformation. Brown and Moffett (1999) refer to the "heroic educator" (p. 156) who recognises the transformative power of education and seeks to "respond to the needs of an increasingly diverse student population" (p. 161). In so doing, the rewards for both student and teacher are immense and tangible, as Brown and Moffett explain: "Good teaching and good leading are heroic journeys to self-knowledge" (p. 158).

Conclusion

As the above discussion has illustrated, the hero's journey metaphor provides an alternative story by which to view and understand the student role. This alternative story opens up the possibility for mature age students in particular to reconceptualise themselves as successful travellers rather than as individuals pummelled by forces beyond their control. Making the nature of this journey explicit to first year students may assist them to continue travelling rather than abandoning this journey. Stories and metaphors offer the opportunity to "help us understand and interpret our 'past and present worlds' so that we can speculate about the future" (Randles, 2012, p. 17). It is certainly the case that the women's stories illustrate the challenges, the trials, the losses, the gains, the joys and the triumphs, which so many mature age women experience through their educational journey, particularly those who are also first in family to enter higher education. Drawing upon such stories and metaphors in teaching settings

can also assist those contemplating or commencing higher education. For those who persist and succeed, and in so doing experience self-discovery and transformation, this can truly be described as a heroic journey.

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