The Hero’s Journey: Stories of women returning to education

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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 paper 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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