



RECLAIMING THE CLASSROOM: A DESCRIPTIVE-QUALITATIVE STUDY ON DISORIENTING DILEMMA, CRITICAL REFLECTION AND RATIONAL DISCOURSE, AND TRANSFORMATIVE OUTCOMES AMONG ADULTS STUDYING BACK TO COLLEGE AFTER MORE THAN A DECADE

Vergie D. Labrigas

Holy Cross of Davao College, Davao City, Philippines

ABSTRACT

Academic culture shock is preventing an adult learner from returning to school. Using a qualitative descriptive research design, the perceptions of adult learners returning to college education after more than a decade were explored. I interviewed six adult learners and analyzed their responses using thematic analysis. I found that adult learners undergo transformative phases, which affirm theory and yield new insights. I advocate for stronger support systems and programs that encourage and sustain adult learners in achieving college success. Future research may examine mediating effects and develop measurement instruments.

KEYWORDS: *Reclaiming the classroom, descriptive qualitative study, disorienting dilemma, critical reflection, rational discourse, transformative outcomes, adult studying back to college.*

INTRODUCTION

The Problem and Its Scope

The misalignment between the prior meaning scheme and the contemporary pedagogical shift is problematic (Puchert et al., 2024). I have learned that technological transition, especially in education, creates an invisible barrier in which decade-old assumptions of competence are exposed as inadequate, yet institutional support remains largely indifferent to this psychological crisis (Rollins, 2025).

Research across North America, Europe, and Asia indicates that learners struggle with academic culture shock, especially those who have been away from schooling for quite some time, where decades of experience are often undervalued in favor of technical proficiency (Kalavar et al., 2021). I was deeply concerned learning that international policies promote lifelong learning, the actual classroom experience frequently ignores the unique critical reflection needs of older students, leading to high attrition and alienation (Muench et al., 2023).

Within the Philippine context, Filipino adult learners, particularly those from the old curriculum, face significant hurdles in navigating Learning Management Systems (LMS) and hybrid modalities that were non-existent during their initial schooling (Abad et al., 2023). Furthermore, the socio-cultural pressure of being an older student in a society that highly values linear educational progression creates a unique form of social stigma. Local literature suggests that many Filipino adult learners feel gitay-an (rusty). However, they are forced to compete with digital natives without adequate bridging programs that facilitate rational discourse or psychological reintegration (De Silva & Reyes, 2024). The failure to address this educational dissonance is severe, as persistent academic misalignment is a primary predictor of psychological burnout and identity foreclosure among non-traditional students (Tan & Morrison, 2024). The potential for burnout among adult learners returning to college has prompted me to conduct this study.

Significance of the study

This study on adult learners returning to college after more than a decade of absence contributes to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal on Quality Education. It aligns with the vision and mission of Holy Cross of Davao College by promoting holistic formation, academic excellence, and social responsibility. Furthermore, it supports SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by creating pathways for non-traditional students to gain credentials that improve employability and economic productivity. Overall, the study highlights how individual transformation through education fosters inclusive and sustainable development, demonstrating the role of higher education in empowering learners and advancing societal and global progress.

Research Questions

In this study, I explored the experiences of adult learners returning to college education after more than a decade. Specifically, I sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are the disorienting dilemmas experienced by the study participants before going back to college education?
2. What are the critical reflections and rational discourses experienced by the study participants as triggered by their disorienting dilemma?
3. What are the beliefs, values, and worldviews reassessed and revised as experienced by the study participants?

Theoretical lens

Transformative Learning Theory, introduced by Mezirow (1991), asserts that learning becomes transformative when individuals encounter a disorienting dilemma that exposes the inadequacy of existing assumptions. Through critical reflection and rational discourse, learners reassess and revise their beliefs, values, and worldviews.



Conceptual Paradigm

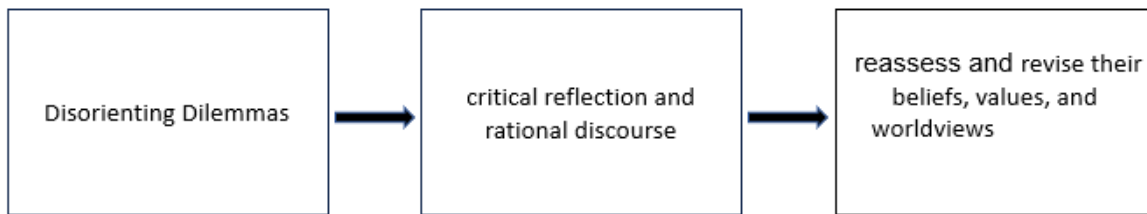


Figure 1. Transformative Learning Theory, as conceptualized by Mezirow (1991),

Assumptions

I assumed that adult learners returning to college after an extended period experience a disorienting dilemma that, through critical reflection and rational dissonance, prompts them to reassess and revise their beliefs, values, and worldviews, resulting in personal and academic transformation. Further, it assumes that other components may emerge from participants' revelations, reshaping the theory's assertions.

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I presented the research design, locale of the study, participants and sampling, data gathering technique, data analysis technique and trustworthiness of the study.

Research Design

In this study, I employed a qualitative descriptive research design. This design seeks to understand a phenomenon in its natural context, allowing the voices and perspectives of participants to guide the findings (Neergaard et al., 2009). This design enabled me to document their experiences, challenges, and strategies in an accessible and authentic manner. This design was most suitable for my study because I focused on perceptions rather than experiences and practices.

Locale of the Study

This study was conducted at a local government-run college located in the municipality of Monkayo. Monkayo is one of the eleven municipalities of Davao de Oro, formerly known as Compostela Valley. The province is one of the five provinces in the Davao Region and is situated in the southeastern part of Mindanao. Monkayo is located approximately 117 kilometers from Davao City and can be reached in about two hours by land transportation.

Sample and Sampling Technique

In this study, I involved six participants: five married women and one single man, aged 35 to 42, all currently enrolled in the 2024–2025 semester. They were enrolled in different courses—five in teacher education and one in business education. Most of the participants come from disadvantaged families, having grown up in households with unstable income and limited opportunities due to circumstances beyond their control.

I selected the participants using the snowball sampling technique. According to Frey (2018), snowball sampling allows

researchers to build a pool of participants by requesting referrals from individuals who share a common research interest with the target demographic

Data Gathering Technique

In gathering the data, I conducted face-to-face in-depth interviews. I used semi-structured interview guide questions. A face-to-face interview is a qualitative data collection method in which the researcher and participant interact directly in the same setting, allowing the researcher to ask questions and obtain detailed responses about the participant's experiences and perspectives. This method is commonly used when a study requires an in-depth understanding of participants' views, particularly on complex or personal topics. It enables the researcher to observe nonverbal cues such as facial expressions and body language, build rapport with participants, and ask follow up questions to clarify responses, resulting in richer and more comprehensive data (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019).

Data Analysis Technique

In my study, I used Colaizzi's method, a systematic phenomenological approach, to explore and describe participants' lived experiences by carefully reading their narratives, extracting significant statements, and interpreting their meanings to identify common themes. These themes were then organized and used to develop a comprehensive description that captured the essence of the phenomenon and its fundamental structure. To ensure accuracy and credibility, the findings were validated by returning them to the participants for confirmation.

Trustworthiness of the Study

I ensured ethical integrity in this study. I informed all my study participants of the study's purpose. Trustworthiness was upheld following the framework of Shank, encompassing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was established through participant validation and prolonged engagement. Transferability was supported by providing rich, detailed descriptions of the research context and participants. Dependability was ensured by maintaining logical, traceable, and well-documented procedures, and confirmability was achieved through an audit trail that recorded decisions and data handling, ensuring the integrity, accountability, and transparency of the findings.



I secured ethical approval from the Society of Moral Integrity and Legal Ethics (SMILE) — the official ethics review body of HCDC, confirming that the study meets established ethical standards for responsible social research.

RESULTS

In this chapter I presented the results of my study. I narrated the summary of my findings together with the modified paradigm. In Figure 2 below, I illustrated the modified paradigm on adult learners returning to college after more than a decade.

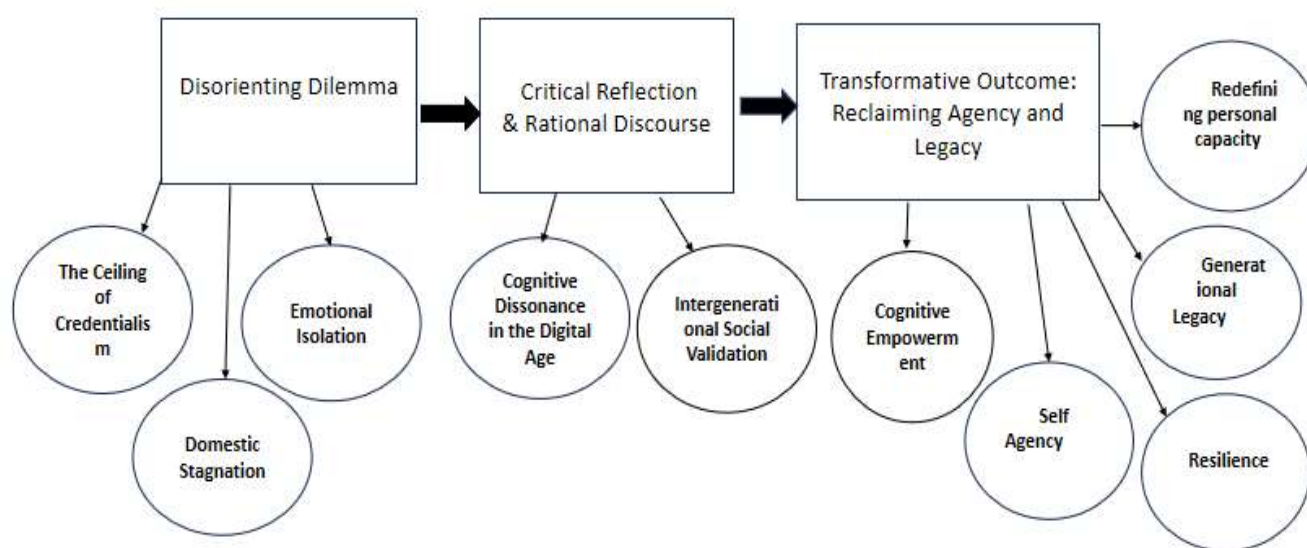


Figure 2: Modified paradigm

Disorienting dilemma of adult learners returning to college after more than a decade

As I listened to them, I found myself almost becoming one of them. I felt as though I, too, was an aging learner—sitting there, listening, and silently wrestling with the same fear: Would I still go back to school, or would I choose not to anymore?

Some of them bowed their heads. A few were on the verge of tears. Others gently shook their heads, their foreheads creasing as they spoke to me. In those moments, I did not merely document their stories; I felt myself entering their world—sharing, even if only briefly, in their vulnerability and hesitation. After our conversation, I found myself carefully sifting through their responses and reflecting deeply on what I had heard. As I made sense of their narratives, I was able to gather their thoughts, which I found were about the Ceiling of Credentialism, domestic stagnation, and emotional isolation.

On the Ceiling of Credentialism. I sensed their anxiety about the present time—how the standards required by society to secure employment have become so high that they feared they might no longer measure up. As I listened, I could feel the weight of that pressure with them. One of my participants said that.

Nasinati nako nga dili bisan pa ug ok naa kay trabaho... murag walay growth ba... magbase man sila sa credentials nimo. Kung wala kay ikapakita dili man gyud... mao tung sege mubalik ko og eskwela

[I realized that even if you have a job, there is no growth; they strictly base advancement on credentials. If you

have nothing [no degree] to show, you won't progress... that's why I decided to return to school.] (P1 Lines 25-2)

Another one stressed that...

Lahi ra jud og degree holder ka kay sa pagpangita og trabaho... bisan muingon sila nga biskan high school graduate dili gihapon... degree holder maglisud man gani og sulod.

[It is really different when you are a degree holder when looking for work... even if they say high school graduates [can apply], it's not enough; even degree holders find it difficult to get in.] (P2 Lines 8-9)

Based on the results, the participants reveal a shared realization that employment alone does not guarantee professional growth, as advancement opportunities are largely determined by formal credentials rather than experience or performance. These data highlight the carrying weight of adult learners that credentialism not only restricts access to economic and professional mobility but also reinforces domestic immobility, positioning the household as a space where aspirations are deferred rather than realized. Adult learners seek to break through credential-based ceilings while simultaneously challenging the socio structural conditions that have confined them to prolonged domestic stagnation.

On domestic stagnation. I perceived in their stories a painful awareness that they seemed to have paused in adapting to life's changes, believing they had been left behind while others moved forward. In that moment, I could almost share in their disorientation, as if I, too, were trying to catch up with a world that had advanced without me. Hearing her words moved me in a way that's hard to



put into words. I could feel the weight she carried as she spoke of her experience of postpartum depression, as she was adjusting not only to motherhood but also to the loss of her usual routine and identity as a working individual. Wanting to get out into the world again reflected her desire to regain a sense of self, feel productive, and reconnect with life beyond the walls of my home. One of my participants said that.

Naka experience ko og postpartum depression kay naanad ko nga kanang mag tarbaho... niya na stuck ko sa balay... Murag ana ba! Gusto ko mugawas napod og balik ana ba.

[I experienced post-partum depression because I was used to working... then I got stuck at home. It was like that! I just wanted to get out [into the world] again.] (P1 Lines 10 -11)

Based on the discussions above, the participants described experiencing postpartum depression as a result of a sudden shift from being actively engaged in work to being confined to the home. Accustomed to productivity, social interaction, and a sense of purpose through employment, they struggled with feelings of being stuck during the post-partum period. This abrupt transition led to emotional distress, isolation, and a loss of personal identity beyond domestic roles. The strong desire to get out into the world again reflects their longing to regain autonomy, social connection, and self-fulfillment, highlighting how prolonged domestic confinement contributed to their feeling of isolation.

On emotional isolation. I came to understand their deep sense of boredom, how their days felt empty and unproductive because they had nothing meaningful to do. As they spoke of this daily stillness, I felt the heaviness of that emptiness. I realized that these were not merely accounts of circumstance but lived tensions that I, as a listener and researcher, momentarily carried within myself. One of my participant's said that...

Boring kaayu tibuok adlaw ka nga naa sa balay... niana ko what if mu skwela nalang pod ko no... sayang ang mga adlaw.

[It was so boring being home all day... I thought, what if I just go back to school? The days are just being wasted.] (P3 Lines 11-12)

Based on the discussions above, through which it was mentioned that they commonly experienced feeling bored, causing them to decide to return to college. The domestic sphere is reframed as a site of stagnation. The participants' accounts reveal that the return to school is an attempt to resolve the psychological conflict between their roles as mother/housewife and their evolving need for an independent identity. These disorienting dilemmas, the way I listened to the bits and pieces of their sharing, led to their critical reflection and rational discourse about going back to school.

Critical Reflection and Rational Discourse of adult learners returning to college after more than a decade

As I interviewed my participants, I could see the worry and anxiety in their eyes. Because of the challenges they are facing now, they were really thinking about how to cope and

adjust to the new way things are done in school. One of their biggest concerns was using new technologies, which they had never encountered before. They found it difficult to use and were truly overwhelmed by it. I felt a deep sense of compassion because I could see in my parents' experiences how hard it was for them to learn new technology, so I could only imagine how much more challenging it must be when applied in the school setting. I was amazed by their strength to sustain this transition, and that was rooted in a familial and relational motivation. This source of motivation enables them to tolerate the challenges of cognitive dissonance and to engage meaningfully in rational dialogue with younger peers. As I made sense of their narratives, I was able to gather their thoughts, which I found were about cognitive dissonance and Intergenerational Social Validation.

On cognitive dissonance. In my conversation with the participants, I felt that they truly struggled to adjust because they had stopped schooling for a long period of time and believed that their minds had already become dull or left behind. As I listened to them, I also found myself reflecting that even younger students sometimes have difficulty coping in class, so how much more challenging it must be for those who have been away from school for so long and have been deeply occupied with family life and other responsibilities. My participants said that

Dugay na kaayo tong akong high school—murag gitay-an na. Lahi na ang curriculum karon, mao nga kinahanglan ko mu-adjust.

[My high school was a long time ago—it feels like I've grown "rusty." The curriculum is different now, so I have to adjust.] (P1 Lines 6-7)

Likewise, one of them shared their experience with modern technology, describing it as entirely unfamiliar and challenging. They expressed struggling with the use of gadgets, highlighting the frustration and hesitation that came with navigating these tools for the first time. However, the participant also emphasized the support they received from classmates, who patiently guided them through each step, offering instructions like, Sister, do it like this; click here. This interaction revealed the importance of peer support in facilitating adjustment, illustrating how collaborative learning and patient guidance can help adult learners overcome technological barriers and gradually build confidence in new digital skills. One of my participants said that...

Lahi na biya ang modern technology... sa mga gadgets mam maglisud jud ko... pero akong mga klasmet... matinabangun... tudloan jud ko nila naa jud silay pasensya mam nga 'ing ania te, ing ania dere ka mukuan.

[Modern technology is so different; I really struggle with gadgets, but my classmates are helpful... they really teach me with patience, saying, "Sister, do it like this; click here."] (P5 Lines 36-37)

Based on the discussion above, participants expressed that returning to school after a long absence brought feelings of being rusty, as many of them had completed high school years ago and needed to adjust to a curriculum that was markedly different from what they previously experienced. They also faced



challenges with modern technology, struggling to navigate new gadgets and digital tools. Despite these difficulties, they highlighted the crucial role of peer support, noting that classmates patiently guided them through tasks, providing step-by-step instructions and encouragement. This combination of personal adjustment and collaborative learning helped the participants gradually regain confidence and adapt to the demands of their current educational environment. Also, this mutual recognition between generations helps create a supportive learning environment where both younger and older students appreciate each other's strengths. As a result, adult learners feel a stronger sense of belonging and intergenerational social validation.

On Intergenerational Social Validation. It is truly true what the saying goes: if you respect others, they will respect you in return. I have realized that when you interact well with people, it is easier to gain their attention, and that, in itself, brings a sense of happiness. The participant shared that the source of joy comes from seeing others recognize their efforts in learning something. I could relate when my participants shared that at first, a task felt extremely difficult, but once they dedicated themselves to learning it, they began to notice improvement in their own efforts. As I listened, I saw myself in them—whenever I face challenges in learning, there is a deep sense of satisfaction and fulfillment when I finally succeed. One of my participants said that...

Na happy ko nga na meet nako ni sila... kabalo man sad gud ko mu kuan sabay sa mga batan on... or tingali nag binata ra pod ko hehehe basta go lang ko.

[I was happy to meet them... I found I know how to get along and keep pace with the youth... or maybe I'm just acting young too, but I just keep going.] (P4 Lines 32-33)

Another one sustained that...

Na thankful ko kay kuan gyud sila [classmates] masinabtanun, matinabangun sa amoang mga mama.

[I am thankful because they are very understanding and helpful toward us mothers.] (P5)

Based on the discussion above, two of them expressed a sense of happiness and relief in being able to connect and interact with their younger classmates. They shared that, despite the age difference, they were able to keep pace with the youth, sometimes even feeling as if they were acting young themselves, which helped them maintain confidence and motivation. They also expressed gratitude for the understanding and support they received, noting that their peers were patient and helpful, particularly toward them as mothers. This combination of peer support and personal adaptability allowed the participants to feel included, capable, and encouraged in their academic journey. By successfully keeping up socially, the learners reassess their fear of the age gap, making it a transformative outcome, regaining a sense of control over their lives.

Transformative Outcome: Reclaiming Agency and Legacy

Among the six participants, I observed that they experienced moments of worry and doubt about whether to continue their studies. Yet, they realized that the difficulties they encountered while learning actually brought them a sense of joy. I could see in their eyes a new perspective

emerging. I, too, felt fear when I started school and doubted my ability to succeed.

Based on their experiences, I learned a lot, seeing that despite the challenges, they persevered. This final stage of the journey marks the structural change in the participants' worldviews, resulting in a permanent shift in how they perceive their own value and future. This is the culmination of the reclaiming process, where the initial vulnerability is replaced by a sense of hard-won authority and intellectual renewal. After our conversations, I gradually reflected on their responses and organized them into five key areas. Value as Cognitive Empowerment, Value as Self-Agency, Value as Generational Legacy, Value as Resilience, Redefining Personal Capacity

On Value as Cognitive Empowerment. My participant detailed that her

confidence is no longer the same as before, as she shared that her thinking has become more enhanced. I felt a deep sense of admiration as she spoke about how she had conquered the academic setting. Their updated worldviews shift from feelings of inadequacy to a profound sense of intellectual confidence and improved problem-solving abilities. She said that...

Karon kay makaingon ko nga akong confidence ba lahi ra jud sya... na enhance akong utok bitaw mam di lang ingon nga mag focus ko sa usa lang ka butang kay dapat sa amoa man gud lain lain nga strategy among e apply.

[Now I can say my confidence is entirely different; my mind has been enhanced—I no longer focus on just one thing because we have to apply various strategies to solve problems.] (P1 Lines 58-59)

On Value as Self-Agency. Another participant reveals that her confidence has been restored. I can see her face lit up with pride, and she often smiled as she recalled those moments. She spoke with gentle conviction, her hands occasionally resting over her heart, showing how much it meant to her. This newfound intellectual confidence leads to a complete restoration of self-worth, effectively erasing the feelings of being down or inferior that had previously plagued the participants. One of my participants said that.

Dako jud ang kalainan... sa wala pa nag skwela kay murag down kaayu ko... karon... proud na kaayu ka sa imong kaogalingon.

[There is a huge difference... before I went back, I felt so down [low self-esteem] ... but now, you feel so proud of yourself.] (P2 Lines 28-29)

These accounts signify building competence and self-confidence in new roles. The transformation is evidenced by the shift from a singular, restricted focus to a multifaceted, strategic way of thinking. Participant 1's reference to enhanced brain function shows that she no longer views herself as rusty, but as cognitively superior to her former self. This is a classic perspective transformation, where the learner reclaims their agency as a thinking, capable individual.

On Value as Generational Legacy. As a researcher, I was deeply moved as the participant recalled times when they reflected the belief that even as a person grows older or faces many challenges, these conditions do not prevent them from



improving themselves or achieving their goals. Instead, Age can bring experience and maturity, while difficulties can strengthen perseverance and determination. In the context of adult learners, this statement shows a shift in mindset—from seeing Age and hardship as limitations to recognizing them as parts of the journey that can be overcome through effort, resilience, and commitment.

On Value as Resilience. I observed the resilience of my participants as they shared that they were able to teach others everything they had learned so that these lessons could also be applied in their own lives. It is evident in their willingness to return to education despite fears of failure, age-related insecurities, technological challenges, and competing responsibilities such as family and work. My participants said that...

Dili jud babag ang edad, dili babag ang kalisud... matudlo nko pod sa ilaha [children]... para pod jud sa akoang mga anak makatabang ko.

[Age is not a barrier, and hardship is not an obstacle... I can teach this [resilience] to my children... this is really for them, so I can help them.] (P2 Lines 36-37)

My participants strongly believed that neither Age nor hardship should be seen as barriers to learning and personal growth. They highlighted the importance of resilience, not only as a personal trait but also as a value they could model and teach to their children. By returning to school and persevering through challenges, they saw their efforts as a way to guide and support the next generation, emphasizing that their learning journey was meaningful not only to them but also to their families. This perspective illustrates how adult learners transform personal struggles into opportunities for generational impact and inspiration.

On Redefining Personal Capacity. There are so many definitions of success, but I was really amazed by what one participant said—that going back to school is like owning an expensive gadget—something extremely costly yet deeply

Maka ingon siguro ko ug unsa ka mahalon nga gadget nga grabe ka mahal ug grabe ka precious... wala juy short cut sa success.

[I could compare it to an expensive gadget—something extremely valuable and precious... there are truly no shortcuts to success.] (P6 Lines 2-3)

In listening to my participants' narratives, I observed how returning to college became a meaningful and transformative experience for them. Through their journey, they described how learning empowered them intellectually, allowing them to think more critically and gain confidence in their abilities. They also expressed a renewed sense of control over their lives, emphasizing that pursuing education was their way of reclaiming personal agency and making decisions for their future. Many of them highlighted their desire to create a better path for their children, seeing their educational pursuit as a legacy that could inspire the next generation. Despite the challenges of balancing family, work, and academic responsibilities, their stories reflected remarkable resilience and determination. Most importantly, their experiences led them to rediscover and redefine their own capacities, realizing that they were still capable of growth,

learning, and achievement even after many years away from school.

Summary of Findings

After going through all the processes in doing this research I was able to realized that adult learners truly undergo phases of disorienting dilemma, critical reflection and rational dissonance, and reassessment and revision of their beliefs, values, and worldview about returning to college – affirming my assumptions on learners undergoing transformative learning process. What transpired which I did not assumed was my ability to generate meanings of the phases of the transformative process as defined in the theory.

DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I presented the discussions of my study's results on the adult learners' experiences of studying back in college after more 5 than a

Ultimately, there are two very important things that are captured: adult learners undergo transformative learning processes; every phase described in the process of transformative theory has its specific definition.

Finding 1: the adult learners returning to college after more than a decade underwent the process of disorienting dilemma, critical thinking and rational dissonance, and transformative outcome as asserted in the Transformative learning theory; thus, TLT applies to the condition of adult learners.

My finding that adult learners undergo transformative learning processes affirms Tan (2025), who asserted that adult learners returning to graduate education experience transformative learning that challenges their identities, promotes reflection, and leads to meaningful changes in outlook and behavior.

Also, my study supports Zhang (2024), who stated that returning adult learners must navigate cognitive dissonance and rational reflection as they reconcile prior beliefs with new academic and life experiences. However, the finding of my study contradicts Hoggan & Finnegan (2023), who suggested that not all adult learners undergo the full transformative process described by Mezirow, and that some may experience learning in incremental, non-transformative ways rather than through deep, critical reflection and perspective shifts. The study of Hoggan and Finnegan is secondary and does not involve participants, whereas my research is a primary study with six participants.

Finding 2: Every phase described in the process of transformative theory has its specific definition. Consequently, I captured that disorienting dilemma is a life experience where ongoing challenges disrupt a person's assumptions about themselves and their life direction; I characterized that critical thinking and rational dissonance involve questioning and reassessing one's beliefs when faced with conflicting ideas, often influenced by digital environments and diverse social interactions. I labeled the transformative outcome of reclaiming agency and legacy as the process of gaining empowerment, overcoming challenges, redefining one's abilities, and making



meaningful contributions for future generations.

Implications for Practice

Through these findings, I see the need for stronger support systems for adult learners returning to college. Educational leaders may initiate programs that highlight the importance of returning to college for adult learners, while guidance personnel of schools may develop initiatives to sustain the interest of the adult learners. Additionally, local governments may create opportunities for successful adult learners to share their success stories to ignite others who are still in the disorienting phase.

Future Direction of My Study

Future research may include moderating analysis research design subjecting critical reflection and rational discourse as mediator variable on the correlation between disorienting dilemma and transformative outcome; and exploratory factor analysis to develop instruments for disorienting dilemma, critical reflection and rational discourse, and transformative outcome which are reclaiming agency and legacy.

REFERENCES

1. Abad, R., Santos, M. L., & Garcia, J. (2023). Digital transition hurdles: The lived experience of non-traditional learners in the post-pandemic Philippine higher education. *Journal of Philippine Educational Research*, 15(2), 45–62.
2. DeJonckheere, M., & Vaughn, L. M. (2019). Semistructured interviewing in primary care research: A balance of relationship and rigour. *Family Medicine and Community Health*, 7(2), e000057. <https://doi.org/10.1136/fmch-2018-000057>
3. De Silva, K. J., & Reyes, P. (2024). Navigating the "Gitay-an" syndrome: Psychosocial barriers for returning adult learners in provincial HEIs. *Philippine Journal of Higher Education Perspectives*, 9(1), 112–130.
4. Frey, B. (2018). *The SAGE encyclopedia of educational research, measurement, and evaluation* (Vols. 1-4). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. doi: 10.4135/9781506326139
5. Hoggan, C., & Finnegan, F. (2023). Transformative learning theory: Where we are after 45 years. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 2023(177), 5–11. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.20474>
6. Kalavar, J. M., Rollins, L., & Hyde, B. (2021). Academic culture shock: The struggle of returning students in a digital-first era. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 40(4), 315–329.
7. Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
8. Mezirow, J. (1996). Contemporary paradigms of learning. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 46(3), 158–172.
9. Mezirow, J., & Taylor, E. W. (Eds.). (2009). *Transformative learning in practice: Insights from community, workplace, and higher education*. Jossey-Bass.
10. Muench, K., Steiner, H., & Braun, T. (2023). Inclusion or alienation? The Structural Design of Modern Universities and Its Impact on Non-Traditional Students. *Global Education Review*, 12(3), 201–218.
11. Puchert, J., Hoffman, D., & Wagner, S. (2024). Dissonance and dilemma: The cognitive load of returning to university after a decade. *High Impact Journal of Adult Pedagogy*, 18(2), 154–172.
12. Rollins, E. R. (2025). Re-imagining institutional support for the returning professional: A qualitative analysis. *Educational Leadership Quarterly*, 33(1), 40–55.
13. Tan, H., & Morrison, L. (2024). Identity foreclosure and burnout among non-traditional students: A predictive study. *The Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice*, 22(4), 90–108.
14. Tan, J. (2025). One program, two pathways: The transformative learning journeys of 2 adult learners in graduate school. In *The Asian Conference on Education 2024: Official Conference Proceedings* (pp. 291–296). <https://doi.org/10.22492/issn.2186-5892.2025.26>
15. Zhang, Z. (2024). Revolutionizing education: The transformative power of educational technology in online learning. In *Proceedings of the 2024 3rd International Conference on Humanities, Wisdom Education and Service Management (HWESM 2024)* (pp. 523–529).