

## TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

### *Juggling Knives While Wearing Body Armor*

Assistant Professor of Communication Arts Jennifer Brannock Cox (Salisbury University) wrote recently (2013) about her self-examination of convincer strategies for the return on investment of a college degree. Faced with hard-working, high-achieving, self-responsible students trying to manage the demands of college and working to put themselves through school, she recounts her experience with one such student whose family didn't believe the sacrifice was worth it.

Or that the cost of a college education itself was worth it.

Dr. Cox's thoughts about the intrinsic value of a college education — the thing that makes it worth the exhaustion that this student faced every day to meet the demands of college while also working to pay the financial price — include discipline knowledge gained (of course) and the fact that good-paying jobs require such knowledge (of course), but at the heart of her convincer strategy is “juggling knives while wearing body armor.”

The purpose served by juggling sharp instruments from within a protective cocoon is the transformative realization that the studying, the learning, the in-class and out-of-class work, the tutelage under the guidance and encouragement of instructors — all of it is producing the *belief* that “I will be able to handle the things I *don't* know when I get into my first job”:

My journalism degree did not prepare me for every eventuality I would come across in my reporting career. What it did is give me the basic skills and knowledge I needed to secure the job and the ability to learn something new every day. I owe my success to brilliant professors who gave me the footing I needed to succeed and taught me to absorb education not just in the classroom but also throughout my life.

A fool without my background would have taken one look at her new job and run. This fool stayed, knowing I had the tools I needed to learn and grow. And I never looked back.

The opportunities for growth that came my way stemmed largely from professors who knew my abilities and pushed me to flourish. Yes, I learned the ins and outs of writing news stories while sitting in a classroom, but the real takeaway was the belief that I had the ability to fly above a Category 5 hurricane, knock on accused murderers' doors, and grill disgraced politicians — all of which I did as a young reporter. When it got scary or it felt like too much, I remembered the lessons I learned at my alma mater, and, occasionally, I even contacted my professors for help, and I managed to carry on.

While in college, I was given the fantastic opportunity to fail. I botched articles, mixed up facts, missed deadlines, and, more than likely, offended sources more than once. Had I done any one of those things in my professional career, I likely would have been looking for another job. As it turns out, my college education was like juggling knives while wearing body armor, allowing me to fail without total destruction. (Cox, 2013)

As UCO faculty, we work to help students experience the transformation in thinking produced by their realization that they are acquiring “the tools [they need] to learn and grow.” That takeaway transcends disciplines. It is built, by necessity, both inside and outside the classroom.

That takeaway is Transformative Learning.

Cox, J. B. (2013, July 16). Arguing our value. *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved July 17, 2013, from <http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2013/07/16/how-do-we-persuade-students-and-parents-college-worth-it-essay>