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I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being currently submitted for any other degrees.

I certify that to the best of my knowledge any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.



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TITLE

A Study of Adult Learning Breakthrough

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ABSTRACT

The thesis is a report of the exploration of eight individual adult learners' perception of their experience of learning breakthrough to answer the question: "What is learning breakthrough?". The question arose after the researcher himself became curious about his own experience of a sudden unexpected event which broke a learning barrier and resulted in an instant new understanding of how to operate a computer. His curiosity grew into this study.

Essentially, the research drew its data from eight learners' self-reporting their experience using an iterative process of individual interviews and discussions, and a group interview. The study describes learning breakthrough through a conceptual framework organised around three aspects: the context in which learning breakthrough occurred, the types of learning involved and how the learners experienced their respective learning breakthroughs.

Three sources of information were used to examine learning breakthrough experience. The first was literature dealing with breakthrough phenomena and adult learning in general. The second was from the researcher himself. The third was eight men and women adult learners from differing backgrounds, and of different ages. This group of learners represents the research participants in the study. Their reports of their learning breakthrough are examined before comparing them with the researcher's experience and the cases from the literature review.

Twenty features of learning breakthrough were identified. They are: 'Anywhere', 'Anyone', 'Intentionality', 'Diversity', 'Barriers', 'Affective Responsiveness', 'Persistence', 'Resignation', 'Diversity of Types', 'Cognitivity', 'Barrier Lifting', 'Instantaneous', 'Unpredictable', 'Positive Experience', 'Cumulative', 'Reinforcement', 'Transformative', 'Developmental', 'Memorable' and 'Effortless'.

The conclusions of the research are that the phenomenon is not a rare occurrence and can potentially happen to anyone, anywhere in any learning area.

Recommendations for teachers, learners and further research are:

- For teachers the process is important not just the outcomes.
- Teachers should design the teaching or learning approach to recognise the cognitive strategies that may trigger learning breakthroughs.
- Teachers should give learners hope and encouragement.
- Teachers should encourage learners to assume an active role in their own learning.
- Learners should let it happen, and teachers should create a supportive climate for that to occur.
- Further research is needed over a wider range of individuals and experiences of learning breakthrough. One group of learners is children.
- Research to explore the possibility of ongoing learning breakthrough experiences may also be productive for identifying other features.