

One Mature Student Success Story among Many

Written by Marcela Ganea

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MARCELA GANEA, MAY 4 2016

Taking up education at older ages is routine in many countries. It is only a matter of time management, sacrifice one's personal life and fight with one's own inertia and stereotypes. I shall only emphasize, for all those who are nervous about resuming formal education later in life: Do not hesitate! It can be fun, and rather than a burden you'll be an asset for your college, because you bring your practical experience.

I have taught an exceptional case, Rabih. He lives in Kuwait, he is enrolled as undergraduate student in Lebanon and gets regular academic help from Romania. At the beginning, he was tormented. Although a top professional already, with 20 year-experience he needed a piece of paper saying *Journalism BA Degree*. Life has forced Rabih, aged 47, to take up Journalism studies because he had studied Marketing, not Journalism, and bureaucratic procedures forced him to go back to college despite being a top international journalist with AlRai, one of the biggest newspapers in the Gulf countries.

It took him a while to find a university because not all higher education institutions in the Middle East encourage older students. Eventually, he chose a private university in Tripoli, Lebanon, because of the distance-learning facilities this University provides for older students. And *Audentes Fortuna Iuvat*, said the Latin (Providence helps those who dare). Life gave Rabih an aid to cope with difficulties when overwhelmed in his huge effort. 3,000 kilometres away, on Skype, he has Maria, a journalist friend who also works as an academic and teaches in higher education in Romania. Knowing very well the Higher Education system across the world, the requirements and how it works, Maria strongly encouraged Rabih, sending him photos with 2 of her students, one aged 57 and another one aged 67, both company managers who needed their bachelor degrees and enrolled in her university, and she never mentioned words with negative connotation such as "effort", "difficulty", or "tiring".

Rabih travels twice a semester from Kuwait City to Tripoli, Lebanon – a 1 hour flight and then 80 km drive, to go to college to take his assignments, to attend the tutorial classes, talk to teachers, to secretaries, to colleagues. As soon as he returns back to Kuwait, he starts writing his assignments. On Skype, Maria explains him everything in detail. The 1st semester was difficult – he found himself in a totally new world. The work on the 1st assignment was exhausting. He had to learn academic writing formalities and appreciate the difference between news writing and academic writing. He had been used to reading quickly, he could easily understand the books. But, despite his 20-year experience in writing journalism, he wasn't able to create a structure for an academic essay simply because he was used to writing news, not to writing about *writing the news*. When the 1st assignment was over, edited and language-proofed, and sent to the teacher in Lebanon, Rabih realized the future looked clearer and happier for him. He started understanding the academic requirements, the efforts involved, the time management.

Rabih is now looking forward to exams and new assignments, and making plans to celebrate graduation next year. He now understands why Maria has told him several times: "This school will grow you a second head on your shoulders!"

To frame this case in wider points:

- The more experienced an adult is and the better he/she is at their job, the more frustrated they will be to start formal education

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- An adult cannot pursue formal studies unless additional help is provided by family, friends and educators
- It is easier for an adult to understand concepts but may more difficult to express ideas in new forms so it takes some time to learn new formats of expression
- Adults feel frustrated because of age and tend to overlook their own experience which can be an asset in providing practical examples and case studies
- Adults have more practical expertise and they tend to get stuck when it comes to theory, becoming unable to express themselves or to express ideas that may very familiar to them
- The adjustment stage may take 2-3 months but typically no more than that. After a tough beginning, excitement appears as soon as first results are good, there is good cooperation from teachers and peers and supportive atmosphere at home and in college.

To all those who have fears to go back into education, I have 2 words: *Be Rabih!*

About the author:

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