



## Wise Up: The Challenge of Lifelong Learning.

Claxton, Guy. New York: NY, Bloomsbury, 1999.

### Book Digest

**Relevance:** For military professionals, resilience is not just needed in response to stress and operational trauma. Guy Claxton argues it is instrumental to the learning process. His characterization of learning and its component parts is informative and potentially transformative to how institutions of learning shape curricula and pedagogical approaches to respond to the uncertain, complex world awaiting their students.

**Discussion:** According to Claxton, “learning ... is what you do when you don’t know what to do” (11). To those of us with western orientations, constructs of learning align more comfortably with content and skill mastery. In Claxton’s view, however, learning is conceived as a process, in which we engage daily as we encounter the “new” in our lives. As a process not an outcome, learning is something people can get better at. “Learning to learn ... is getting better at knowing when, how and what to do when you don’t know what to do” (11). To be a successful learner (Claxton is adamant that does not equate to a successful student), people need to be resilient, resourceful, and reflective. His later works include ‘reciprocal’ as well to account for openness to alternative perspectives, empathy, and collaboration.\* For Claxton, resilience is “perhaps the most important quality of the good learner” (50). He continues, “Learning is impossible without resilience: the ability to tolerate a degree of strangeness. Without the willingness to stay engaged with things that are not currently within our sphere of confident comprehension and control, we tend to revert prematurely into a defensive mode: a way of operating that maintains our security but does not increase our mastery” (331-332).

In the military context, linking resilience to professional military education (PME) is somewhat foreign. Usually, one hears of resilience when discussing the ability to bounce back from operational trauma or in response to other adversity or stressors. In its 2012 work on resilience, CAOCL conducted research on stress and resilience to broaden the discussion beyond the biological and psychological constructs of resilience to include sociocultural dynamics, such as value orientations and concepts. The researchers’ findings on the organization’s role in developing resilient Marines align with Claxton’s thinking about learning – it’s a cultural thing. The CAOCL researchers assert the best way for the Marine Corps to support resilience in their Marines, when they face stressors, is to “refin[e] its culture”\*\* in varied ways to cultivate within Marines the strategies (Claxton’s resourcefulness) and judgment (Claxton’s reflection) necessary for resilience. Responding to a rhetorical question about the prime conditions for learning, Claxton states, “The short answer is that teaching for learning power is much more about the creation of a culture than about the design of a training program ... [It] starts not with the cultivation of its skills and qualities, but with the preparation of the ground” (17, 20). And Claxton’s chapter “Learning Goes to Work: The Business World” offers insights into how organizations can evolve thinking and practices to shape a cultural environment that enables learning.

For PME institutions, his chapter, “Higher Education: The College beyond Knowledge,” provides institutions different pedagogical approaches that work to cultivate resilient, resourceful, and reflective learners that differ from those that endorse the primacy of knowledge acquisition. One approach discussed in the text is heard frequently in the halls of Marine Corps University – the Socratic method. Reading his characterization of the method is instructive and could add depth and nuance to how faculty employ this method. He explains, “The Socratic method takes learners from unreflective certainty through floundering doubt to the admission of ignorance and on into passionate, open-minded curiosity” (301). It is an art of deconstructing the certain truths students hold, “irritat[ing] the learner and provoke[ing] a fruitful discombobulation” and “helping the learner to give birth to their own new understanding” (301). This discussion and that surrounding the other methods may be useful when evolving curricula and seeking to expand pedagogical resources.

\* See, for example, Claxton, Guy. *Expanding the Capacity to Learn: A new end for education?* Keynote address, British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, Warwick University, 6 September 2006.

\*\* Tortorello, Frank et al. *CAOCL-TECOM Resilience Project*. Final Report of MCCDC.2012.0005 TECOM Resilience Project, 21 August 2013, 12.

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