



# **A Will to Learn: Being a Student in an Age of Uncertainty (Society for Research Into Higher Education)**

*Ronald Barnett*

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There is an extraordinary but largely unnoticed phenomenon in higher education: by and large, students persevere and complete their studies. How should we interpret this tendency? Students are living in uncertain times and often experience anxiety, and yet they continue to press forward with their studies. The argument here is that we should understand this propensity on the part of students to persist through a will to learn. This book examines the structure of what it is to have a will to learn. In the explorations here, a language of being, becoming, authenticity, dispositions, voice, air, spirit, inspiration, passion and care is drawn on. As such, this book offers an idea of student development that challenges the dominant views of our age, of curricula understood in terms of skills and even of knowledge and pedagogy understood as bringing off pre-specified 'outcomes'. The will to learn, though, can be fragile. This is of crucial importance, for if the will to learn dissolves, the student's commitment may falter. Accordingly, more than encouraging an interest in the student's subject or in the acquiring of skills, the primary responsibility of teachers in higher education is to sustain and develop the student's will to learn. This is a radical thesis, for it implies a transformation in how we understand the nature of teaching in higher education.

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