

'One Voice' International Conference and Forum for Educators.
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CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

**Learning to thrive in a political,
competitive and professional
work environment**



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Realities of professional employment

Context:

- Large or small organisations
- Disjunction between undergraduate learning and professional performance
- Awareness (or not) of power shifts and competition
- Personal courage and daring as essential attributes

Professional Education Context

Competitive tensions:

- Competition for students
- Efficient performance in an world of scarce resources
- Collegial, competitive relationships between professions
- Industrial, technological and socio-political change
- Quality standards, benchmarking professional services
- Career expectations of students
- Teacher obligations in preparing graduates for practice

Political context



Health industry:

- Service reforms in response to increased complexity and reduced access to specialists
- Ascendency of proficient generalists
- Multi-occupational teams
- Flexible work reducing traditional professional roles
- Funding geared to quality and efficiency outcomes
- Innovative use of technology to gain market share

The students

Graduate attributes include:

- Capable of striving beyond minimum competence
- Safe performance of professional roles
- Sustainable and socially responsible lifestyles

As well as:

- Comprehensive discipline knowledge and skills
- Understanding of the field in which they will practice
- Awareness of issues and inequities associated with their practice field

The students

Curriculum:

- Based on dated, consensus views of content priorities
- Policies on assessment of student performances

Students:

- Diversity in student motivation, ability and commitment
- Willingness to participate in processes outside core competencies eg. policy formulation

The teachers

Contractual obligation:

- To produce graduates who satisfy minimum standards of competence for professional authorisation

Options:

- Standardising student diversity by reinforcing image stereotypes
- Provoke student critique of orthodoxy
- Teach within the limits of our own personal experiences or industry role specifications

The pedagogy

- To examine the effects of emancipatory learning experiences on senior students in a professional degree
- To equip graduates with skills and insights into socio-political processes impacting on professional roles
- NON-neutral position of teacher / researcher

Critical pedagogy:

... a teaching tactic that acknowledges the constraints of social and bureaucratic structures on individual development but approaches teaching in a way that enhances student perceptions of equity issues and fosters their desire for autonomy within a framework of social responsibility

The teaching approach

- To invigorate personal development and extend critical awareness of values and meanings of professional roles
- To use a simulation environment to develop skills in
 - assertive communication
 - conflict resolution
 - negotiation
 - group work
 - project management
 - public speaking

Implementation processes

- 218 students, final year of professional degree program
- Enrolled in core subject 'community development'
- Assessment regime encouraged them to be brave
- Project groups of 12-18 students responsible for a 'real' community project for the general public
- Reflective journals kept on process and included in marked assessments for the subject:
 - Clarity of thought and expression
 - Level of intellectual operation
 - Depth of insight

Analysis of data

- 215 hand-written journals (30-90 pages)
- Configuring and re-configuring the narratives
- Macro-analysis, mapping student change processes
- Clustering data into major themes re learning experience
- Micro analysis of journals in terms of values and emotions experienced in the simulation
- Teacher / researcher reflective and reflexive contribution

Findings

Journal entries revealed:

- Leadership can be learned, even by 'quiet' people
- Simulation experience validated as closely representing 'real' world range and types of pressures
- Increased understanding of professional level performance builds resilience to personal attacks
- Insights into credible leadership requirements and own leadership abilities
- Judicial allocation of political support to others

Findings

Journal entries revealed:

- Increasing discernment in collegial support for competitors or poor-performing 'leaders'
- Reduction in strength of friendship ties as influences in business decisions

The mapped processes show a movement from emotional to more intellectual student responses to the simulation as well as some of the tracks followed as students worked their way through the simulation.

DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES & STAGES

Student responses to critical education strategy using simulation

At commencement

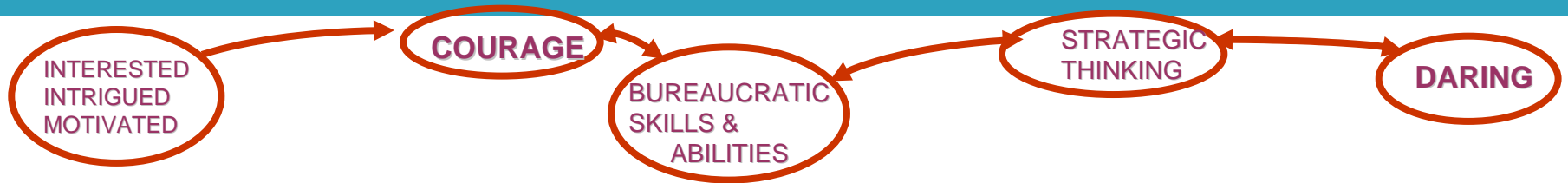
Week 1

**EMOTIONAL
RESPONSE**

At completion

Week 14

**INTELLECTUAL
RESPONSE**



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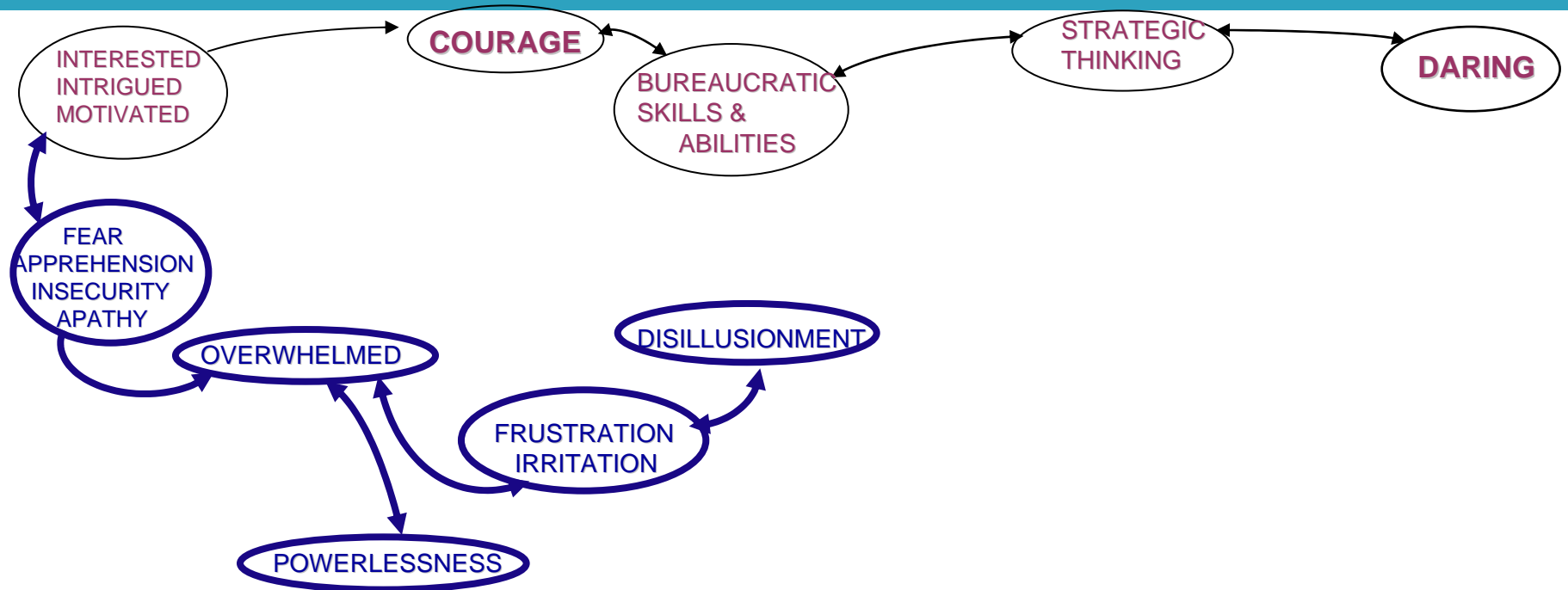
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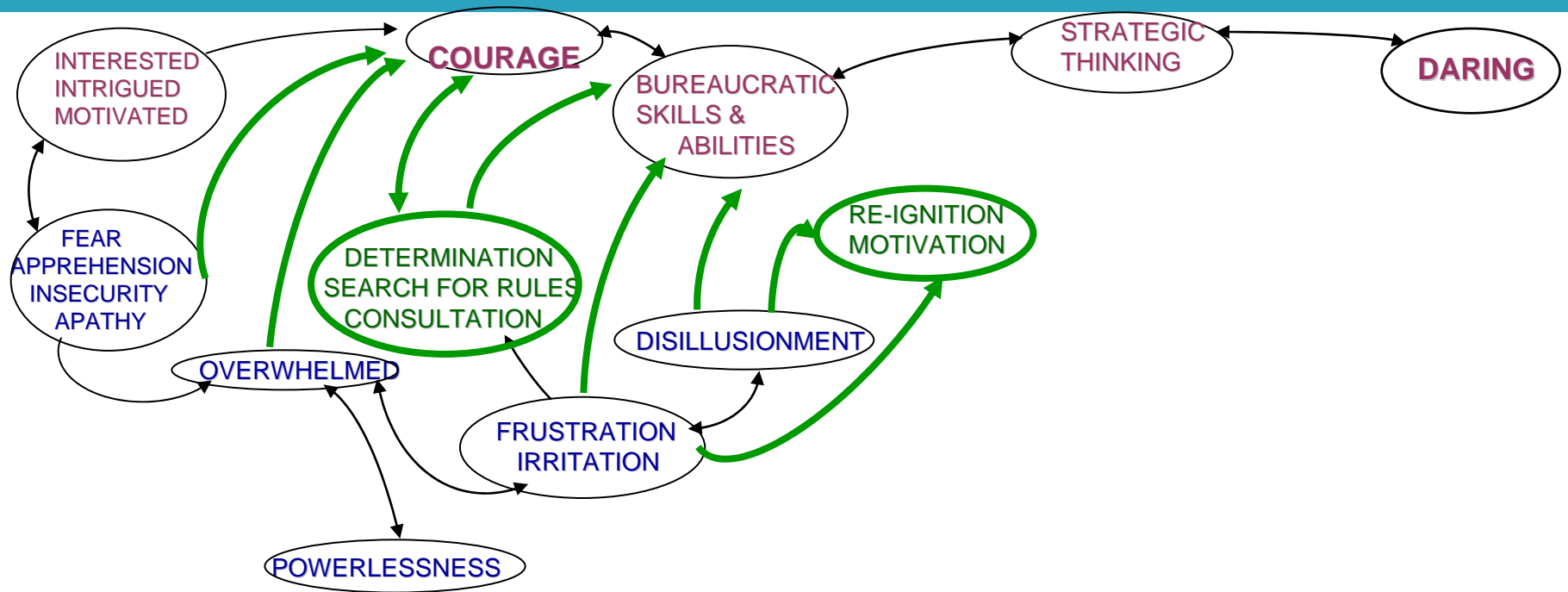
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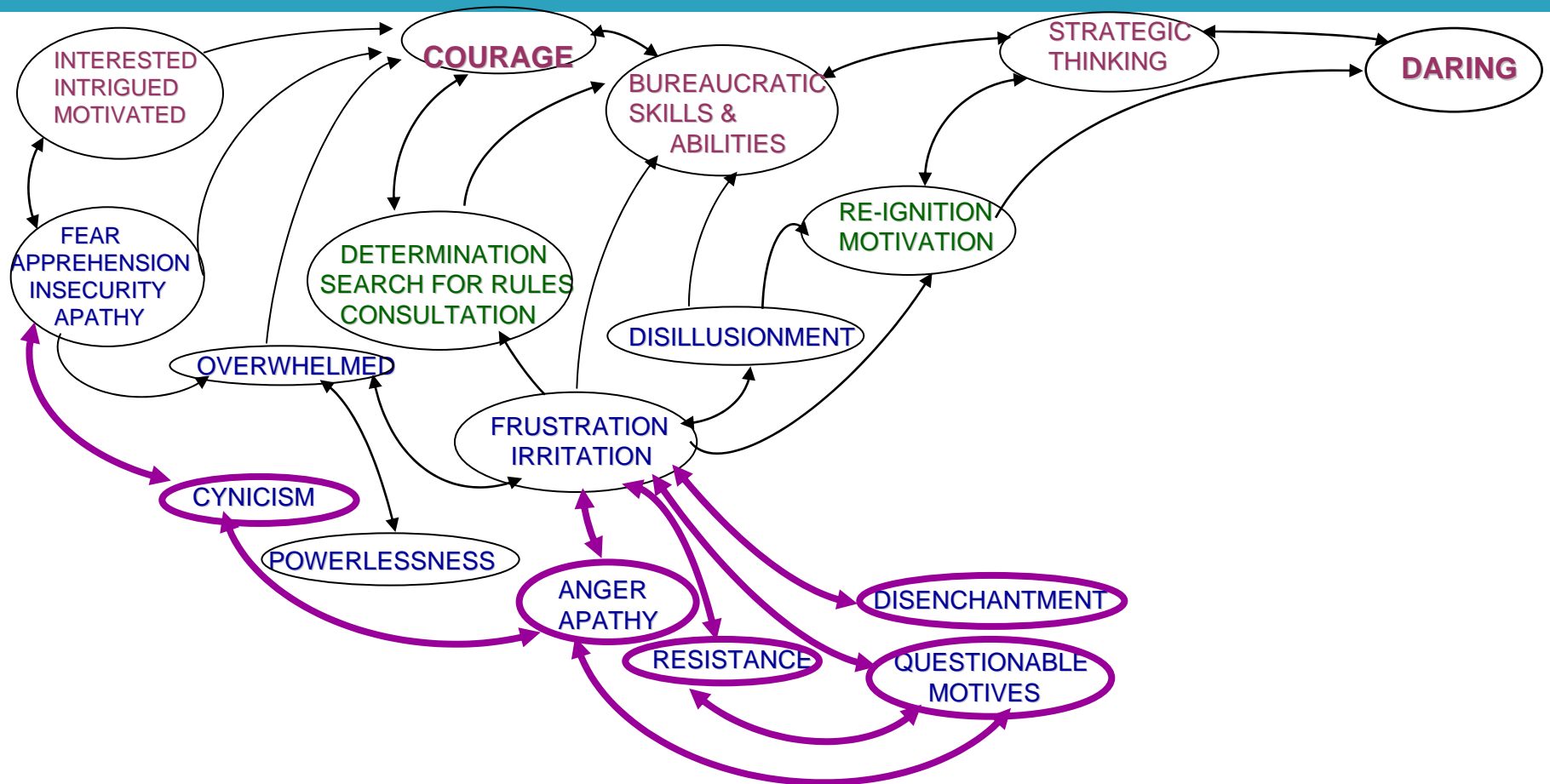
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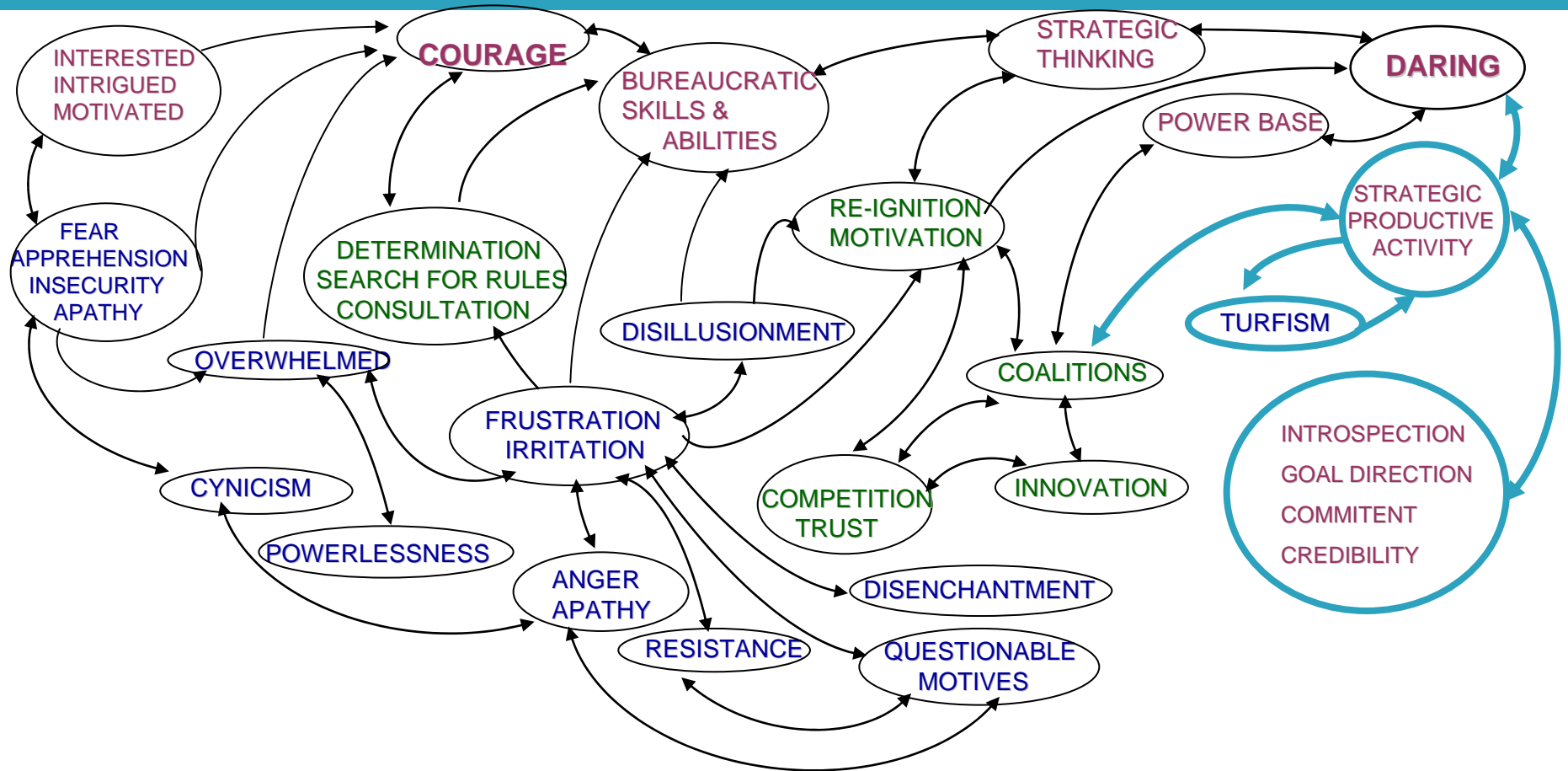
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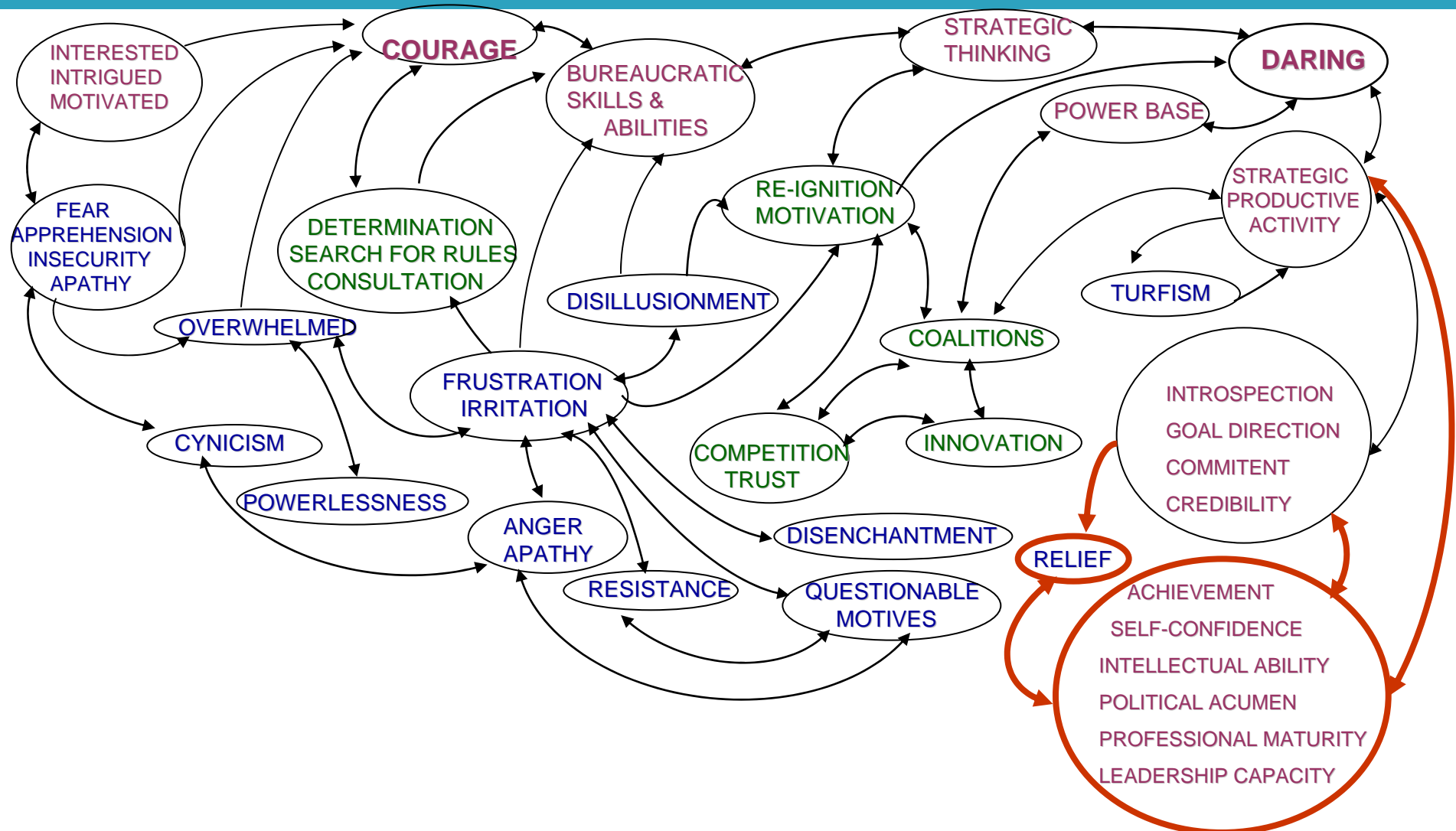
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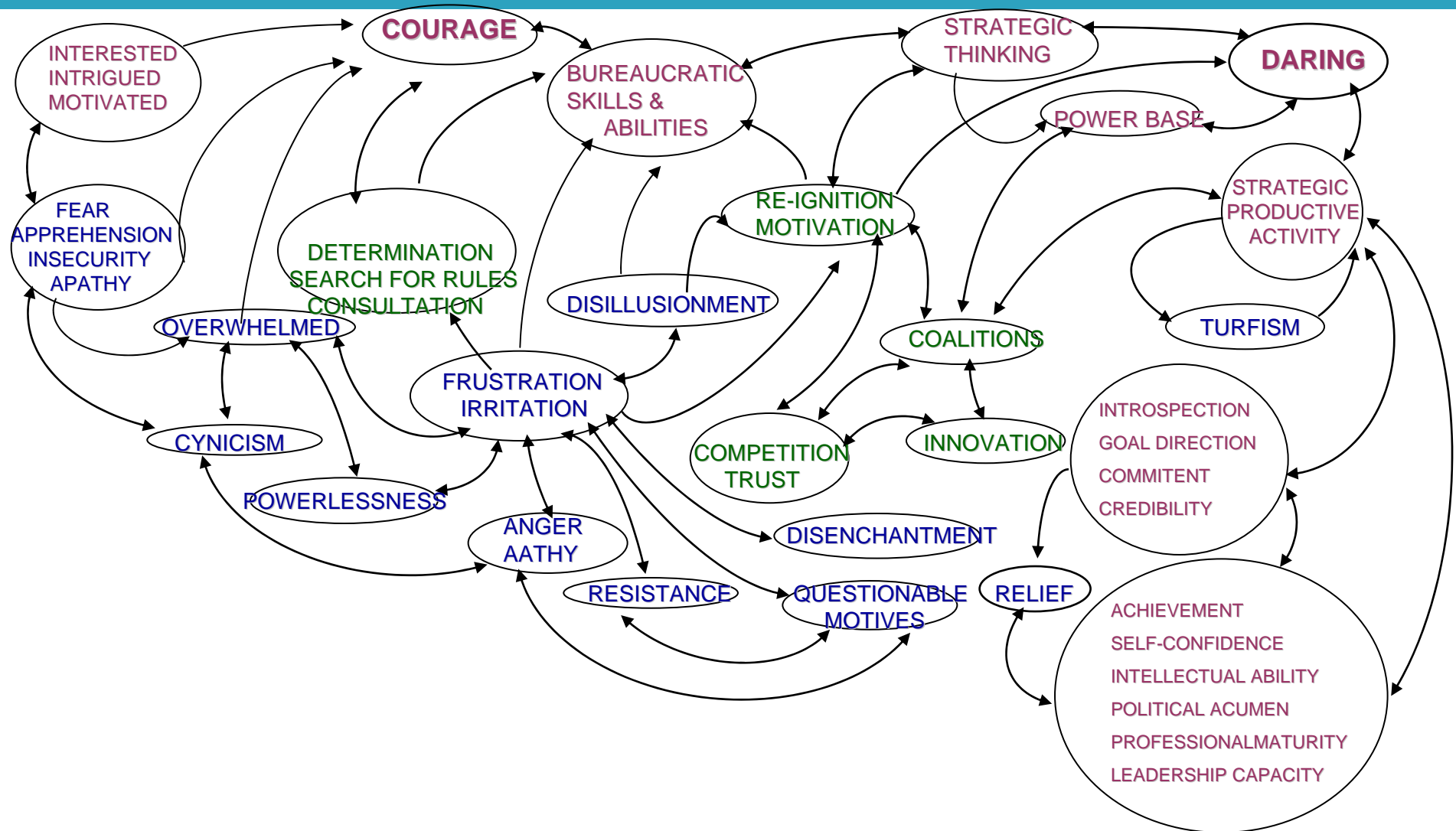
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Results

Students developed skills and abilities in

- Critical analysis of professional situations as a prelude to strategic action
- Finding the courage to change and build capacity for leadership responsibility
- Understanding what is required of leaders and showing tolerance of diversity in management / leadership styles
- Team building and operating in ways that reinforce an image of a capable team
- Managing colleagues and leaders to achieve team goals

Implications of this research

Was this critical pedagogy?

- The simulation was grounded in practice and mimicked pressures and forces operating in the professional environment
- It highlighted the effects of pre-determined rules and processes on conformity and socialization
- Engaging with less comfortable aspects of personal development required courage and daring
- Students acquired an appreciation of equity and a desire for autonomy
- Students learned to transact their own pathways through the imposed constraints and defined themselves and their roles

But mostly ...

Implications of this research

- The principles of critical pedagogy were applied to a learning situation to promote the development of skills and attitudes in critique that can equip graduates to alter the balance of power in the health industry, if that is what they choose.
- Delineations between critical, radical and professional pedagogies have been dismantled or diffused
- This project proves that critical pedagogy can be implemented on more than a piecemeal basis, and with positive results

The debates around critical pedagogy must now move from theory to practice – and I encourage teachers in professional disciplines to take control of it and apply it to their instructional practice

Thank you



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