

Reflections on Learning

Much of the western educational system has copied what Paulo Freire would call “The Banking Model of Education.” This is a system where the teacher fills a static vessel, the student, with knowledge deemed relevant by the teacher. It is an oppressive structure, in which students must be controlled and managed in order to train them to respond appropriately and pigeonhole facts in endorsed ways. When my project began, I did not necessarily ascribe to this way of teaching and always understood that students bring unique perspectives to the classroom and will assimilate knowledge in their own particular way. However, I do not believe that I understood how much authentic learning is actually a creative endeavor that blossoms from a partnership between the teacher and the student. Not only are the students each coming with their own experiences and perspectives, the times, the environment, the available tools for research, and especially all of the variables pertaining to the teacher combine to make every learning moment a unique dialogue of exploration between teacher and student.

I now believe that integral to empowering a student with the ability to “engage in the experience of assuming themselves as social, historical, thinking, communicating, transformative, creative persons,” (Freire 1998,) is teaching the student how to take control of their own education and become self-regulated learners. To help students understand that they can decide how much importance to place on knowledge that they receive, and that they can change their focus to those topics which they deem important, is to give them the freedom to choose their views in a critical, deliberate way, ultimately empowering them democratically and socially. Encouraging students to understand themselves and how they are motivated by circumstances and feelings differently from others around them, is to give them understanding about their actions, providing them with creative choice and power to act. Teaching students the value of analyzing results and asking themselves if the outcome was desired encourages the student to learn from history, and suggests that repeating history is not inevitable.

Students can learn to memorize without really analyzing the information they have received, follow only the method of study prescribed by the teacher, and do the work simply because they are too afraid of the consequences of failure, yet still have academic success in what is still mainly a “Banking Model of Education” in this country. However, they will not develop into learners who are able to make a positive impact on our society, but only students who can eventually fill a predetermined role like parts in a machine that was created long ago. I appreciate what Linda Nilson said in her 2013 book “Creating Self-Regulated Learners.” “Learning is about one’s relationship with oneself and one’s ability to exert the effort, self-control, and critical self-assessment necessary to achieve the best possible results-and about overcoming risk aversion, failure, distractions, and sheer laziness in pursuit of real achievement.” I believe it is this type of learning that we should be encouraging, and this type of learning that will produce healthy students and a strong democratic society.