

Reflections on Self

The process of executing my action research project has caused me to reconsider my role as a professional educator. I have long understood the great responsibility we have to ensure that our students have the necessary skills and knowledge they will need in order to meet the challenges that their lives will hand them. I had not considered how important it is to teach the students how to become great learners as well.

Becoming a great learner is something that I had always assumed would naturally transpire as one progressed up the educational ladder and worked with the curriculum along the way. When I reflect upon myself, however, I have to ask if even now I have multiple methods with which to motivate myself, if I understand under which conditions I am able to do my best work, or if I take the time to reflect at the end of a task about what went right or wrong and how I could do it better the next time. Although some of these skills may be acquired organically, my study has made it clear to me that they can also be developed and improved.

The old adage that asks whether it is better to give a person a fish or to teach him or her to fish may apply here. There are some well-known examples of people like Abraham Lincoln and Benjamin Franklin who accomplished great academic work without much formal education, but the list of people who accomplished great things without a college education is actually an exceptionally long one. Many people, like Hans Christian Anderson, Charles Dickens, and Malcom X, did not even finish lower school before going on to do great things. Although the backgrounds and environments of people on this list is diverse, they all shared a motivation to learn, they all found a way to get the information they needed, and were all able to analyze themselves and their work in order to change their focus and methods appropriately when necessary.

As an educator, do I then conclude that since so many have achieved great things once they knew how to learn, that it is more important to instill in students these self-regulated strategies than actually giving them the information itself? I do not think so, rather seems to me that they are two sides of the same coin. It is my job to empower the student to become a learner, and then guide them along the path toward the information they will need and academic success. I could carry them along that path, but it would be more difficult and once they left me they would stop moving altogether because they had not learned how to walk. Or I could teach them how to walk but offer them no guidance about where they should go, in which case they might achieve their goals, (although it would take far more time), but they might never find what they are looking for at all. Instead, I will endeavor to empower the student to take control of their own learning, while at the same time encouraging them to learn from the great people who came before them, striving to create a balance between creativity and mastery.