

Education: A Manifesto

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Everyone has the right to learn. Everyone is capable of learning. We learn about each other and from each other new skills, history, knowledge, and how to interact with our world. Everyone is intelligent. Their perspective and opinions are valid. They have something to offer and contribute to society. It is our responsibility to cultivate this truth so that we, as a society, raise children to believe in themselves, who they are, what they can be, and their value in the world.

Learning is about process. It is as much what you learn as how you learn it; the in-between of unknowing and knowing. Learning is a process and we learn about process, as there are many different processes to learn. It requires patience, trial and error, and perseverance. Mistakes and failures are just as important, (often more so) than successes. It takes guts to fail and continue with the process of learning, but this is all part of the process. Albert Einstein, one who embodies the word genius in contemporary society, dropped out of high school at the age of 16. He later failed the entrance exam to attend ETH, the Swiss equivalent of MIT.

No one ever stops learning and must be open to new learning in order to adapt to our ever-changing world. Learning doesn't end when the student leaves school either at the end of the day or the end of the school year or the end of high school. Learning is happening from the day each of us is born to the day we die. Comparatively, the hours we spend in school are only a tiny fraction of our lives and many of our most valuable lessons are not learned from books or lectures. At the age of 90, days before he died, world renowned contemporary choreographer Merce Cunningham sat in his New York flat and watched his company perform at Jacob's Pillow via live streaming video on the internet. He also used a software program to create and document his choreography.

Education must be regarded as a life-long endeavor both formal and informal. Learning and education both formal and information has the power to unlock doors to opportunity, innovation, compassion, empathy, understanding, adaptability, creativity, and understanding. This lesson is powerfully understood if we look back into history at outdated beliefs and disproven facts that were once held as truth. Whether it was that the sun revolved around the earth or that some races were inferior to others, it is easy for us to see now how ignorant our ancestors were by today's standards. Education is cumulative and history is always being revised.

Pursuing one's education is about learning how to think critically, develop an identity and continue to evolve one's identity as a result of each new learning experience. Whether a child is in kindergarten, boarding school, inner-city public school, summer camp, karate lessons, football practice, youth orchestra rehearsal or juvenile detention they are learning how to make decisions that affect their lives, how they relate to others and how they see themselves. It is important that we as a society support this process by supporting a wide range of opportunities for kids and continuing throughout life. Positive encouragement, support, mentorship and a social network is essential to developing a healthy identity.

Learning is about being open, patient and inquisitive. Asking questions without expectation of the answer you may find. It is about trying new things even if you think you might not like them, believe them, or adopt them as your own. Learning is about listening. President Obama called the recent meeting between Sgt. Crowley and Prof. Gates a "Teachable Moment." These two men have very different world views, opinions, beliefs and ideas, however as a result of their conflict; they sat at the same table and listened to each other. What came of it is still unfolding, but each says that they learned something from the other and is committed to staying open, asking questions and listening in a continued dialogue about race.

Everyone also has the ability to teach, mentor, facilitate, coach, model, and lead. Even if you are not a teacher by profession, everyone has something to teach from their life experience. Who taught you to tie your shoes? Teachers are not always older than learners too. Certainly you gain more life experience with age and

thus have more to offer, but sometimes the most powerful lessons are sometimes taught by the youngest. Robert Fulghum illustrated this in his well-known book *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*.

Effective teaching is about listening, questioning, structuring and guiding students through an individual process of learning. It is important to impart information, but in this age of information technology it is impossible to know everything and more important to know how to find what you need, where to look, and whether it is a credible source. This requires the kind of teaching that empowers a student to be the adventurer, discoverer, and researcher. Teaching this way also makes learning fun because the process of discovery provides an inherent sense of accomplishment that boosts confidence. The best teachers I've ever had act as though knowledge, answers and process are massive secrets that they have discovered, but I need to uncover for myself. It motivates and challenges me to learn, and is irrelevant as to whether they actually knew the answers to what I was seeking in the first place.

Effective teaching requires flexibility in communication, adapting learning strategies to each individual's learning style, intelligence (Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences), strengths and weaknesses. Richard Gage quotes Barbe and Milone who note: "If you have to tell a child something a thousand times, perhaps it is not the child who is the slow learner." (1995). Everyone is capable of learning and it is the challenge of the teacher to unlock the best mode that inspires the student to learn.

Effective teachers have great respect for their students. They are humble and wise guiding students knowingly through a process of discovery without giving answers. The greatest teachers are ones who believe in their students' success perhaps even more than the students do. This positive encouragement coupled with the belief that each student will aspire to a new level of success.

Education must have greater value in our society so that it is supported politically, financially and socially. Those who choose to be professional educators do so because they are passionate about the importance of education. Everyone has a responsibility to add value to the teaching profession because these teachers are entrusted with the future of our society; that is, educating those who will be making decisions for us when we are old. My freshman English teacher once asked her garbage collector his salary to find out that he made more than she. The mainstream media highlights what our society values most through the highest paying professions. Educators aren't even close. In our capitalist society we put money into what we value. Why isn't it education?

Gage, R. (1995). Excuse Me, You're Cramping My Style: Kinesthetics for the Classroom. *English Journal*. ProQuest Education Journals. Dec. v.84, i.8. p. 52-55.