



THE IMPORTANCE OF “KNOW YOURSELF” IN BECOMING A LIFELONG LEARNER

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Abstract

Becoming a lifelong learner and teaching a student to become one starts with the process of know yourself. In this process of knowing oneself the learner needs to have self-regulation, experience with authentic tasks, be able to make decisions and use critical thinking, and last but not least, to use creativity. A good educator needs first to help their pupil develop self-regulation, without what one cannot even expect a person to function as a lifelong learner. Another requirement in the process of helping students become lifelong learners, is to offer authentic tasks which will present the learner with choices and require decision making. Teachers need to intentionally require the use of critical thinking in problem solving. These are necessary skills because a lifelong learner should be able to think critically and use decision making in problem solving disregard of domain. For this reason, teachers need to purposefully ask targeted questions to promote critical thinking. Lastly, teachers need also to offer authentic tasks which will allow the use and development of creativity. All these will allow the person to experience and know who they are as learners and individuals, while being part of a community of learners.

Keywords: self-knowledge; lifelong learning; teacher-student rapport; critical thinking

There comes a time in each educator’s practice when the effects of role models will fade away and personal style and competencies will take primacy. This turning point is when the teacher had enough practice to know themselves, and not only discover who they are, but also feel comfortable with who they are as a person and as a professional. In the increasing diverse population of students in the classrooms, with technological progress, while students prepare to become

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global citizens, teachers must be culturally responsive and create diverse opportunities to build a community of learners, but this is not possible without knowing their students' background, their prior knowledge, and acknowledging their individual needs (Banks, 2014; Ormrod & Jones, 2018; Wachira & Mburu, 2019; Wighting, 2006), and in the same time teachers need also to teach their pupils to seek and know who they are.

Howard (2016) mentions three important points of knowing that will help a teacher become a diversity sensitive educator: know yourself, know your practice, and know your students. Just as teachers need to know their students, each of us needs to know the "others" we work with or are in a relation with across the activities we perform in life. In order to bring positive and effective results we need to know ourselves, we need to know our practice, and we need to know the others whom and with whom we need to work forward.

Following this line of thinking I would expand this approach to the general "Know yourself" that any person can apply in the process of becoming a lifelong learner, a well-balanced person, and a professional in any career. We need to know ourselves in order to become good lifelong learners. We definitely need to know our practice, trade, job, and the tasks we are required to perform, since we need to have the competencies we claim to have in the tasks we want to perform. We need to take the time and effort to know the others that we develop any relation across life. Knowing oneself will help in the process of becoming lifelong learners which is based on developing self-regulation, have experience with authentic tasks, be able to make decisions and use critical thinking, and last but not least, to use creativity.

The need for creating rapport and self-regulation

The process of educating students to become lifelong learners cannot be achieved unless we teach students also to know themselves, and help them become self-regulated learners. Self-regulation requires motivation of course, but the person needs to know themselves and what are those personal pitfalls, when they would put the urgent before the important, and end up in procrastinating the tasks they need to complete. Through the process of "know yourself" the person will be able to set realistic goals and have the motivation to continue the effort even when the results are distal or uncertain.

In order to help their students become lifelong learners, the teacher needs to develop a good teacher-student rapport. A strong teacher-student rapport

creates a positive relationship that helps also in preventing classroom problem behaviors (Baker, Grant, & Morlock, 2008). The teacher-student rapport based on trust, empathy and nurturance will help especially those students who have difficulties navigating social relationships in the classroom and later in life. This also helps students adjust to changes they encounter in the school and beyond (Banks, 2014; Cushner, McClelland, & Safford, 2013). The importance of teacher-student rapport, good instructional strategies, as well as teacher professionalism was stressed by Lewis (2005), who states that teacher competency was the most important factor in student learning. Classroom teaching and the development of a teacher-student rapport have direct and positive effect on student learning and motivation, and in turn can increase teacher effectiveness (Allen, Gregory, Mikami, Lun, Hamre, & Pianta, 2013; Cushner, McClelland, & Safford, 2013).

Siegel (2012) on the other hand, draws attention to the importance of teacher-students and student-student rapport especially in group work, when students are involved in classroom problem-solving tasks. Teacher-student rapport can alleviate tensions by assigning roles in groups, which in turn will help students to discover and know their own and their peers' skills in a positive way (Siegel, 2012). Especially in classroom activities that require students to work together, an effective team collaboration is based on students' ability to know themselves, be empathetic and able to create a rapport with others, and use them to alleviate the "intellectual distances" that can arise between higher-level and lower-level students who work in the same group (Song & Grabowski, 2006). The relation between teacher and students and the quality of rapport established was stressed as being a very important factor for both social and academic performance (Portilla, Ballard, Adler, Boyce, & Obradović, 2014). Similarly, the opposite is also true, that negative teacher-student rapport has a detrimental impact for behavior and school achievement, resulting in lower engagement, less cooperative participation in the classroom, less self-regulated behavior, and an increase in school avoidance. The quality of teacher-student rapport has an effect on students' self-regulation, with implications on students' misbehavior and also in how the student is seen by others. However, in turn, better student self-regulation results in positive teacher-student rapport (Schunk, 2016). To offer opportunities to know themselves and know others, and develop realistic self-regulation competencies, teachers should create authentic tasks for their students.

The need for authentic tasks to promote critical thinking

This process of knowing yourself requires also authentic tasks, because only these will give the person a realistic experience about their strengths and needs for improvement. Lifelong learning activities may not always end in material results, at times the result is a positive emotional status (such as a hobby activity), but they may also result in struggles and disappointments (such as endeavors that result in initial failures). Experience with authentic tasks will allow the person to know who they are and how they react facing struggles and failures. One person can take a failure as an end of course, while another will consider it as an opportunity to try again harder, and try different. Many educational theories stress the role of critical thinking in developing a lifelong learner. The difference in reactions depends on the person's self-regulation and cognitive processing. Knowing who we are gives the person opportunity for autonomous thinking, which is very important in the process of decision making. As individuals in many situations of problem solving across life we need to make decisions. Decision making requires critical thinking and metacognition (knowing how we think, and thinking about our own thinking). To develop critical thinking in our students we need to present them with those authentic tasks that will help them learn about how they make decisions in real world. Instead of asking factual and content knowledge, we must ask thinking questions (*i.e.*, How? Why? How do you know this? How is your point of view different from another point of view, or opposite of others?). We must ask students to solve problems and encourage them to persist even if they fail, since not all problems might end in a win-win situation, or have a correct and finite response, we need to help students think critically and chose the best option while solving a piece in the puzzle of a larger problem. Self-regulation while it involves critical thinking and metacognition, it also requires motivation, self-management, time and task management, and goal setting.

Kim and Axelrod (2005) argue that direct instruction is effective in developing students' higher-order cognitive skills, and conceptual thinking. In their argument Kim and Axelrod (2005) state that teachers who develop a positive rapport with their students can encourage students and find effective ways to support them to meet their students' needs. A positive teacher-student and student-student rapport will give students the opportunity to make important

cognitive decisions, increase motivation, and develop critical thinking in the learning process.

An increased use of cognitive decisions and critical thinking has a positive effect on students' self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and will increase their efficiency to solve problems, and better function in groups. Decision-making and critical thinking skills are also determined by prior knowledge, which is an important factor in self-regulation across the lifelong learning process. Flowerday and Schraw (2000) stress that the perception of choice and self-determined decision-making is related to an increase in motivation to learn by creating a sense of ownership over the learning process. Critical thinking and decision making are essential in the process of becoming a lifelong learner, but only if the individual's thinking is flexible enough to consider all opportunities for learning, in other words, there is a need for a little bit of creativity also.

The need for creativity

While authentic tasks will use or mimic real-life situations, many students will get lost in the magnitude of an authentic task and not know how to divide a problem in smaller steps, set tangible and proximal goals, which they can complete. They might not know that one needs to keep on going even if it gets difficult, and that they need to come up with alternative approaches. This last one requires creativity (thinking about new ways to approach an old or failed task, coming up with new methods and uses for common and available means). Teachers who offer choices to their students in the process of teaching and learning, increase students' decision making and critical thinking competencies (Flowerday & Schraw, 2000; Kaymakamoglu, 2017; Ormrod & Jones, 2018). However, younger students may be "overwhelmed" if too many choices are presented because they have not yet developed the "maturity and decision-making skills" (Flowerday & Schraw, 2000; Perry, 1998). This in turn takes us back to the importance of teacher-student rapport, and the need for teacher and also for the student to know themselves. This knowledge will use critical thinking and metacognition, in the process of decision making, that allows one to choose among the many options that brainstorming and creativity allowed to bring to awareness.

Conclusion

In conclusion, to become a lifelong learner we need first a good rapport with our teachers, mentors, and those with whom we work. We need to develop good self-regulation, and take part in authentic task experiences, which will allow the use of critical thinking and decision making. In the process of learning we also need to be flexible and use creativity when tasks get too difficult or frustrating, we need to choose alternative options and keep on going lifelong in this process of learning to become who we are.

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