

## Introduction

“To every man his chance... to every man, regardless of his birth, his shining, golden opportunity... to every man the right to life, to work, to be himself, and to become whatever thing his manhood and his vision can combine to make him.” *Thomas Wolfe*

Self-realization, according to Thomas Wolfe, is a basic right belonging to all individuals. The attainment of potential is always reliant upon learning ability and education. Education is nothing more than the condition of possibilities for learning. Without the correct learning conditions it is less likely that individuals will reach their “shining, golden opportunity,” or potential.

It is a commonly held belief that compulsory education prepares us for a successful, integrated life within the society in which we live. College is then viewed as the final stage of formal learning that insures its participants the preparedness for success essential for “personal happiness,” which should not be confused with the self-realization of reaching potential.

“The total effect of my college training was to produce in me a state of utter unpreparedness.” These are the words that author Thomas Wolfe used to describe his education. Wolf’s critique of his college training uses the exact same words I could use to describe my entire formal education.

We, as individuals, surrender our individuality as we become a collective in a formal mass education system that uses set standards to achieve a preferred collective product most suitable for the productive needs of the sponsoring society. Success is measured by how well one productively fits into the established systems of the society.

In education, we are asked many questions, but never the right ones - never the ones that really matter, such as: Who are you? How do you learn? Or the most important question of all, asked by author Ken Robinson, in his book *Finding Your Element*: “How are you intelligent?” These are not questions asked of a collective; they are questions that define who individuals are, as well as what their learning needs and priorities are.

When these questions are not asked by the educational system or by individuals themselves, our perception of who we are is determined by default through the methodology of the set standards of the learning institution. Unfortunately, most individuals measure themselves by how they are perceived by others and how well they conform to established standards. Individuals who do not respond to standardized learning methods or achieve set standards can easily lose sight of their own identity and experience a diminished confidence in their ability and desire to learn.

The question I ask of my own formal education is whether the educational system was incapable of teaching or I was incapable of learning. The question cannot be answered without first knowing who I am and how I learn. I am a dyslexic bi-polar with the cognitive spatial intelligence that has a preference for the visual symbol system over the mathematical and linguistic symbol systems. Failing to diagnose and to understand who I was and how I learned, the educational system’s standard teaching methods were ineffective and I was unable to rise above my own particularities to learn effectively from the system’s instructional methods. Both the educational institution and I are responsible for my formal education failure.

Despite my learning failure in formal education, I am indeed educated, intelligent, and productive, and still actively learning and striving for an unknown potential. This Socratic dialectic requires us to define education by its relationship to learning. It is a question that cannot be answered collectively and certainly not by a biased system favoring and structuring learning opportunities for one or two types of intelligences over others. Educational systems lack awareness of and respect for multiple intelligences and therefore cannot effectively educate or provide adequate learning opportunities suitable for all cognitive learning intelligence profiles. For individuals outside of a learning institution's narrow focus, education amounts to little more than basic literacy in the language symbol system.

The pluralism lacking in educational methods places the responsibility of educations on individuals. Those individuals not profiled by the educational system must create their own condition of possibilities, becoming both educator and learner, to be able to reach their potential – a potential that is genetically predetermined by an intelligence suited for a specific discipline.

If the educational system does not or cannot provide for the learning needs of an individual, then is the education offered anything more than a hoax? Is it even an education at all? If learning and preparedness for life is achievable outside of formal education, then what is the purpose of formal education? A mass system engaged in a monologue is incapable of having the necessary dialogue to address individual learning needs, making the universal claim of education suspect for many individuals.

In the reality of the diversity that exists among individuals, the collectivist idea of a universal education having a successful outcome can never be realized. Individual must be aware that they themselves are not unique and that there are others like them, just as there are others who are unlike them. For example, there are many common characteristics and specific learning intelligences that are shared by many artists. The artist is a type of person different from other types of people. Artists cognitively operate with spatial intelligence and their preference is working within the visual symbol system. The visual artist will have different learning needs than those who operate primarily with the mathematical/logical intelligence.

There were many famous artists who knew from the beginning that they were artists; however, there are many student artists who are uncertain of who they are and whether or not they are artists. Their uncertainty emanates from not knowing the traits characteristically belonging to the artist and from being in a neutral or hostile environment unsupportive of the learning needs necessary for an artist. In the following chapters, I describe some common characteristic traits and temperaments attributed to artists defined by cognitive scientists and psychologists and by set examples by artists. I also attempt to define art, which is only a subjective definition based upon my unique learning experiences. The book, in part, is meant to be informative and supportive of the art student's uncertain query into self-identity.

The philosopher Frederic Nietzsche suggests that formal education often consists of the acquisition of useless knowledge, which cannot be classified as learning. Knowledge must be meaningful and purposeful to an individual in order for it to be considered learning. What one learns is what defines them and is essential for the self-realization that Wolfe describes in the opening quote.

Learning, for many, takes place outside the confines of learning institutions. In order to create the condition of possibilities that leads to one's potential, one must first submit to the self-examination most attributed to Socrates: know thyself.

In her book, *An Unquiet Mind*, Kay Redfield Jameson reveals her career choice of being a clinical psychologist specializing in manic depressive illness as a means to better understand herself and control her own manic depressive illness. By reading the works of cognitive scientists, psychologists, and art theorists, I learn who I am, how I learn, how to stimulate the creative process, and how to communicate knowledge and productive practices to others. These readings became the core of my learning experience and education and, ultimately, the means to knowing myself.

In this book I demonstrate how my learning choices translated into a teaching philosophy and how my self-interest, learning-based education is reflected in my teaching practice. Learning in the context of teaching is the subject and title of the book: *We Learn by Teaching*. The implication is that self-instruction is learning, and is guided by self-interest. The writing is not scholarly, nor is it meant to be. It is meant to be a learning journal and a reflection of my learning journey that has informed me how to be a practicing artist and teacher. It is a discussion about what constitutes professional development and how it should be assessed. The book was written as a learning model for student artists and as a dialectical for art teachers and school administrators to determine what the curriculum and role of an art program should be in a scholastic institution.

“With desperate resolve he sat down grimly now to shape these grand designs into the stern and toilsome masonry of words.” *Thomas Wolfe from his novel You Can't Go Home Again*