

Creating Effective Schools For All Learners

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When considering education, it is incredibly important the students are considered first. Education can be an extremely impactful element of a learner's life. However, if education is not presented in a way that is effective for all learners, then education has little, to no impact on learners' lives. In her book, *A Prison Called School: Creating Effective Schools for all Learners* Dr. Maure Ann Metzger challenges readers to consider the educational system today and how it may not be as effective in reaching all learners. Dr. Metzger and both her former students Charlie and Andrew inspired me to consider looking beyond the educational system in order to fully impact the lives of my future students. All three events of Dr. Metzger's sessions of *A Prison Called School* that I attended challenged me as a pre-service teacher to think about how I can place my students at the center of the learning in my future classroom.

The first event of *A Prison Called School* opened my eyes to the many potential obstacles students face not only in the educational system but before students even attend school. Prior to students entering school, Dr. Metzger notes that youth in the United States are undervalued (personal communication, January 25, 2018). This is incredibly sad and terrifying to think about. Because the youth's potential in this country is under appreciated, it can have a devastating impact on the future of these children. It is also important to note that one of the multiple barriers students may face in an educational system is attending a school that is strongly oriented with the system and neglects the students (M. Metzger, personal communication, January 25, 2018). If a school is established by a manufactured type of learning, this is a school that is not conducive to all learners' needs. However, a school that has been built upon the foundational idea that all students are an integral part of the learning, is a school that can easily adapt the learning environment and instruction around what the learners need. This is a school environment that students can thrive in.

When considering how students can thrive in the educational system today, it is important to consider the empowerment of students in the classroom, which was the topic of the second event I attended. Student empowerment is recognizing students' voice, choice, and action in the classroom (M. Metzger, personal communication, January 26, 2018). It is imperative educators are cognizant of their position in the classroom as they consider their students' voice, choice, and action. In order to empower students, it is important teachers are the guide and facilitator of the learning that takes place (M. Metzger, personal communication, January 26, 2018). Teachers should act as the quiet whisper in the class, while the students are the ones with the strong voice that moves the learning along continuums that they are most passionate about and interested in. As Dr. Metzger notes, this can be a challenging role for teachers to play; however, she also explains it is one of the most rewarding roles teachers could ever experience (personal communication, January 26, 2018). By empowering students, this can have a direct effect on students' engagement in the classroom.

The last event in the series *A Prison Called School* focused on students' engagement within the classroom. It is important to note the reason for some extremely high disengagement within the class before considering the importance of students' engagement. One of the main reasons for such high disengagement is the failure of the educator and educational system to adapt the system's culture to the culture of the all learners (M. Metzger, January 26, 2018). It can be extremely challenging to be engaged in a classroom learning experience that the learner cannot relate to in any way. One of the most important things that educators can do to cultivate an excitement for learning is to be passionate about the course content they teach. By being passionate about the course content, students want to learn the material because students view this content as important (A. Dvorak, personal communication, January 26, 2018). A teacher's

passion is powerful. This passion can have a massive impact on the student's learning. Another important factor that can positively impact a students' engagement is providing students with multiple opportunities to use their strengths in different real-world experiences (C. Lindsey, personal communication, January 26, 2018). This requires the teacher to build positive relationships with the students so the teacher can learn all they need to about the students. The educator should learn about all learners' strengths, weaknesses, interests, and skills. Students' engagement is a natural motivation for learning.

As I reflect on the series of events that I attended headed by Dr. Metzger, three important things I can take away from these events are Dr. Metzger's desire to place her students at the center of all learning, her commitment to authentic assessment through real-world experiences, and her desire to think of teaching as an extension of oneself. Dr. Metzger tailors the learning experiences in the classroom around the students' and their diverse backgrounds. Gay (2000) explains the importance of this by saying, "Culturally responsive teaching is using: the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students to make learning more appropriate and effective for them..." I believe Dr. Metzger truly applies this to her teaching every day, and she has inspired me to do the same. As a preservice teacher and a future educator, it is my desire that I can continue to grow in my education as a teacher by learning from my students. The beautiful thing about teaching is the learning of the teacher is never ending because the students in the classroom are unique and diverse.

The diversity and uniqueness of students should be a large indicator of the need for authentic assessment. However, instead of these authentic assessments the educational system enforces standardized testing. Granted, standardized testing has a place in certain areas of education. Some of this testing has become toxic in schools today. It places "intense pressure on

teachers and schools to produce better test results” (Nieto, 2013, 1). Dr. Metzger recognizes the fact that these assessments are not capable of assessing students through open-ended, real-world experiences. Yet, these real-world experiences can certainly activate students’ high order thinking and help students’ find their strengths and abilities. This is why Dr. Metzger provided multiple learning opportunities for her students that assessed students’ abilities and skills in real-world experiences. It is my desire as an educator to provide real-life experiences to my students that help them see their strengths and knowledge in a new light rather than through standardized testing.

Teaching is far beyond something that is standardized. Effective teaching is an extension of oneself. Teaching is dynamic and complex. It is something that is not one-dimensional. Dr. Metzger empowered me begin to truly understand this. Her passions and desires truly empowered her to be the kind of educator she was and continues to be to so many individuals. Palmer (2012) reflects on this reality by explaining “...my ability to connect with my students...depends less on the methods I use than on the degree to which I know and trust my selfhood...” (3). As a future educator, I am beginning to understand who I am as an individual in regards to what drives me. This will have great impact on my future students because I will teach from my heart.

References

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